

FOREWORD

When you first get into music, quite often it's all about the energy – maybe the melodies and rhythm too. We definitely felt that way. But the first band Richard and I really got into were Pet Shop Boys, and journalists always made specific reference to Neil Tennant's lyrics (normally describing them as sardonic or tongue-in-cheek, but to us they seemed powerfully heartfelt) and I started to pay more attention to what their songs were saying about people, society, the world. Radio 1 had a competition where listeners had to decipher the lyrics of R.E.M.'s 'The Sidewinder Sleeps Tonite'. U2 grabbed phrases from films and the art world for their *Achtung Baby* album and flashed up lyrics and topical buzzwords on their *Zoo TV* tour. Words, ideas, stories became a much bigger part of our musical life. We became obsessed with Radiohead's mournful, thrilling *OK Computer* and tried to learn from Thom Yorke's blending of grand emotional landscapes with hyper-mundane details. Paul Simon's poetic, painstakingly crafted solo work gave us something to aspire to and Nick Drake's aching verse taught us the beauty of a more delicate touch. Most of all, The Smiths' amazing knack for pairing deeply emotional lyrics with wildly catchy melodies made a huge impression.

Inevitably we wrote a lot of bad and mediocre songs over many years. We were playing in pubs around London trying to capture, and hold, people's attention – and on stage we learned what our strengths were (and weren't). Looking back, I think that, like so many bands of that era, we had been trying to channel Radiohead's edgy energy or Oasis' psychedelic swagger to frame whatever we had to say about ourselves and the world we saw around us; and there came a point where we realised that tone didn't come naturally to us. It felt a little forced. What did come naturally was a more openly emotional approach against a background of everyday life in small towns; little snapshots of life that, like the music of The Smiths or Nick Drake, held their emotional power within apparently quite mundane settings. We felt that all of life's drama was contained within even the most 'normal' lives and the most apparently unassuming streets and people. We seemed to be better at writing about moments of our own lives in a true and not very glamorous way – and, maybe because the lyrics were flecked with details that rang true, the songs started to connect with people.

Around 2001 we hit a seam of writing that felt 'right' and some good songs started to fall into place. The first one I remember feeling was a step up for us, and also had a distinctive style of our own, was 'To the End of the Earth'. It contained a lot of themes and images that we've returned to extensively over the years.



London, c. 2003
Photo: Paul Rodwell

EVERYBODY'S CHANGING

You say you wander your own land
But when I think about it I don't see how you can
You're aching, you're breaking
And I can see the pain in your eyes
Says everybody's changing
And I don't know why

So little time
Try to understand that I'm
Trying to make a move just to stay in the game
I try to stay awake and remember my name
But everybody's changing
And I don't feel the same

You're gone from here
Soon you will disappear
Fading into beautiful light
Because everybody's changing
And I don't feel right

