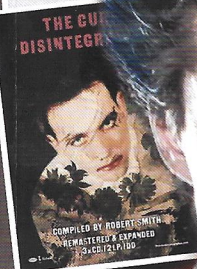


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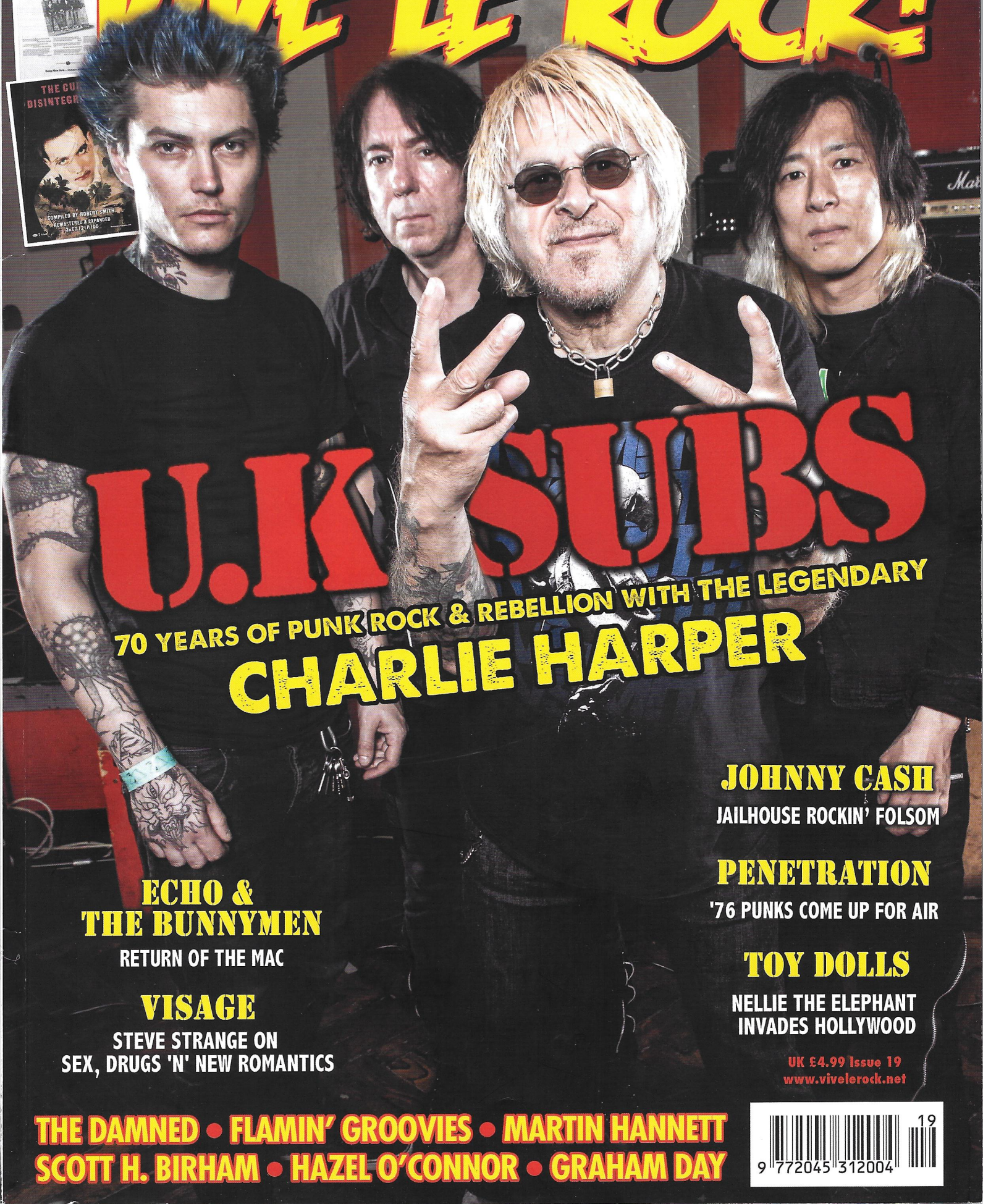
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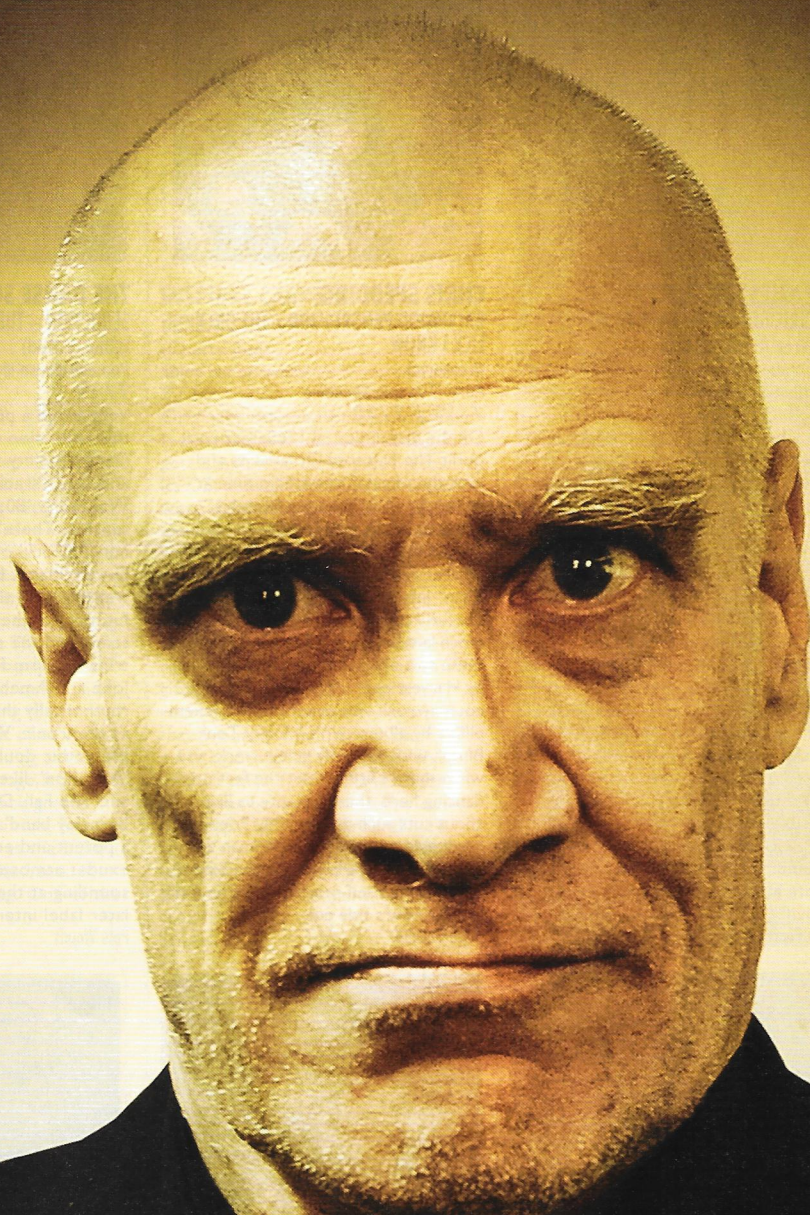
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9/10

Rewind to 2011, and it wouldn't have been unreasonable to assume the salty saga of booze, blues and bust-ups for both Dr Feelgood and Wilko Johnson had been comprehensively chronicled and bookended by Zoe Howe's excellent biography 'Looking Back At Me' and Julien Temple's explosive documentary 'Oil City Confidential'. Wilko, who had been readying for retirement, suddenly found himself riding an unexpected upswing generated by his rock 'n' raconteur performance in Temple's biopic. As he once told me, "the film went really well. Doing that got me going and a lot more work. I thought 'I can't quit now I've got all this bloody work!'"

But in December 2012, a dark and cancerous coda was diagnosed. Rather than slow down or be silenced by this terminal condition, Wilko was fired into a seemingly final fury of activity, marching on, face front, with a new appreciation of life and heightened sense of destiny. Blazing his way through festivals, farewell tours,

and reunions with a selection of heroes and idols; Wayne Kramer (see this issue's Mutants feature for the full story), and more recently topping the charts with the Roger/Wilko, Dr/Who 'Going Back Home' album.

This double disc edition collects both previous 'Best Of' volumes into one bundle, covering Wilko's reclaimed 'Oil City' originals, mixed with a batch of solo-era compositions and fan favourites. For all the Feelgood's ruck 'n' roll ram-raiding, you get just as much bounce-to-the-ounce with the tight-but-loose trinity of Wilko, Norman Watt-Roy and Dylan Howe. The grooves are more intuitive and the energy levels and interactions increased as every beat, bar and bass line count when riding without the safety net of a fourth player. Norm's fluid fingers pulse and pump with funk inflexions, while Dylan switches from rock-solid, to subtle as silk within a beat. Out front, Wilko drives the band with his unique techniques of staccato chops and clattering attack to round out the sound, replicating horn stabs, harmonica fills and percussive lead lines, all captured as intimately as a ring-side concert seat.

With the news of Wilko's recent operation and his recovery underway, the future is unwritten for Britain's premier guitar hero. The only certainty is that Wilko will carry on in the tradition of all the great blues masters, weathering any adversities or setbacks, absorbing himself unrelentingly in music, and maintaining the mantra growled in 'Going Back Home' - "I wanna live the way I like".

Dave Collins

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