



PHOTO: ALAN SNOODGRASS

COCK SPARRER

INTERVIEW WITH VOCALIST COLIN MCFALL BY JOHN GENTILE

"A lot of people try to wear the coat, but without having done the work, if you follow me," Cock Sparrer vocalist Colin McFall says.

The singer is pondering one of the most important focal points of the band's new album, *Forever*, their first in 10 years, released April 21 via Pirates Press. Of all things to consider when recording an album—the engineer, the studio, the budget, the time, the rehearsals—McFall wants to make sure that the band's return represents who they are as people and not some put-on affectation. "All of our songs are based on facts, either about us directly or on people we know," he continues. "If you look at the song 'Working,' I've been working all day for me mate—that's what we were doing. That's what we are, and that's what we represent."

Formed in 1972—before the concept of punk was born—Cock Sparrer have made it their mission to represent the everyman who toils at the nine to five, because, as McFall is quick to point out, they *are* the everyman.

Born in the East End of London, McFall's parents came from the daily grind. His father was a truck driver who would often cover 200 miles across a span of 10 hours in a bumpy, jumpy, busted-out truck just make a few pounds. Meanwhile, his mother worked as a cleaner in the local nursing home, cleaning the kind of things most people don't want to be cleaning.

Similarly, the band's cofounders, guitarist Mick Beaufoy, bassist Steve Burgess, and drummer Steve Bruce—all of whom are still in the band—came from nearly identical backgrounds. McFall is quick to point out that the band's manager and McFall's best friend, Will Murray, has also been with the Cock Sparrer since their inception. It seems inevitable that they would form a band while in secondary school in the early '70s—"mainly as a way to get girls," McFall adds.

Heavily influenced by Small Faces—especially since guitarist Steve Marriott lived down the street—the

earliest incarnation of Cock Sparrer featured the band doing their favorite pub rock and R&B covers. But, when the group stumbled across the energy and power of the earliest punk rockers, they modified their approach. Keeping the melody and soul of the pub scene, they added the speed and raw power of the bands causing the British media to fly into a tizzy.

However, in stark contrast to the "I hate everyone and want to destroy everything" themes heard from their contemporaries, Cock Sparrer made it a point to stress working class unity, not division. It's easy to connect the dots from Cock Sparrer's invention to the creation of Oi! itself, but McFall is quick to dismiss the claim that he is an architect of both punk and Oi! through a series of sheepish "nah, nah, nah"s. Despite his modesty, it's clear that McFall feels a duty to maintain the integrity of the Cock Sparrer name. "For the new album, we wanted something properly recorded," he says. "We wanted something that sounded instantly like Cock Sparrer."

The album's debut single, "One By One," serves to summarize this frame of mind. Over a soaring riff that can only be described as Cock Sparrer-esque, McFall calls out in his East London burr, "With mates like these, we'll take 'em all!" As with their earliest releases, the band stress cooperation, not conflict.

"We want you to hear it and recognize that it's Cock Sparrer right away," the singer says. "But that's why we were having trouble with a title. We needed something to summarize the band as a whole. Some ideas were dismissed right away. We were on tour, sitting in an airport in Canada, and Ricky from our label, Pirates Press, said, 'Just call it *Forever*, because Cock Sparrer will go on forever—even when you stop playing, you'll still go on forever.' Somebody said, 'Yeah, but it's already been done by the Spice Girls and Batman.' Then, we all looked at each other and said, 'That's not bad company to be keeping!'"