

# tales of ordinary madness

Led by Lawrence – the self-styled “weirdest man in pop” – Felt were the ultimate ‘80s art project, recording 10 albums and 10 singles in 10 years. As a new film and photo-book illuminates their legacy, their strange saga can now be told. Words: Ian Harrison. Portrait: Tom Sheehan.

**W**HADN'T TAKEN ACID ON-STAGE BEFORE," SIGHs Felt main-man Lawrence of the night of August 6, 1986 at Ladbroke Grove's Bay 63 club. "I was always so worried about getting everything 100 per cent perfect, I thought it would make me relax a bit. Afterwards, I said, I ain't doing *that* again."

Expectations were high that night. Felt's beauteous, folk-informed masterpiece *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word* was imminent, and Alan McGee, head of their label, Creation, had marshalled six rival A&R hit squads from Island, WEA, London and beyond, all there to sign Birmingham's most enigmatic group. After six years of frustration and strain, this margin-dwelling band seemed poised to move towards the centre ground and the pop success that Lawrence had longed for with such pathological intensity.

Instead, the night's show melted down into a three-and-a-bit-song debacle that's still bewildering to band and onlookers a quarter of a century on. "Finally he's going to get his moment," recalls Felt's former driver and soundman Dave Harper, "but it soon became clear that something was hitting him, quite hard. He suddenly said, 'Stop, stop, stop, stop...' which the band did,

shambolically, and then he says, 'It's very bright up here, can you turn the lights down? And can everyone stop looking at me?'"

"I will never, ever forget it," says bassist Marco Thomas. "I'm standing to the right of him, and all of a sudden he's putting his hand over my fretboard to stop me playing. Then he says, 'Get your money back,' and called the whole gig off. It was at that point I thought, Forget it, it's never going to happen. This is a man who absolutely craves pop stardom? Well, you've gone the wrong way about it, Lawrence."

"I was trying to fight it," reflects Lawrence in soft Brum tones, "but then I thought, Oh God, it's coming on really fast and strong. The wall collapsed at the back of the hall, melting into different mad colours, and people were looking really funny... so I started panicking and went to pieces, really. We were playing *Fortune*, which was like a suicide song..."

That night, this languid, portentously titled piece would stay uncompleted. Throughout Felt's existence, *Fortune's* wheel would spin erratically, goading them with glimpses of worldly riches and glory that would remain out of reach, more tormenting than any £3 bad-trip vision. Instead, their glittering achievements would >