



The splendour of Felt: (clockwise, from above) Lawrence plays the 1981 Futurama festival in Stafford after Deebank leaves over a disagreement about a denim waistcoat; debut 7-inch Index; the first line-up; the first two albums; (bottom) indie chart Number 1 Primitive Painters.

◀ stay largely underground, achieving cult acclaim among a burrowing cognoscenti. “I don’t believe there were all these A&R men there, anyway,” shrugs Lawrence. “I think Island and London came, but just as Alan’s pals. If we’d done a normal Felt gig they wouldn’t have been beating the dressing room door down with a contract. I want to perpetuate the story, but that gig wasn’t a big deal to us. The next day we were laughing about it.”

In Felt, laughing at fate was an essential skill.

KEYBOARD PLAYER MARTIN DUFFY was also on-stage at Bay 63, and rolls his eyes at the memory. “I’ve got such a fondness for Felt,” says the man who’s now served 23 years in Primal Scream. “Actually it goes beyond fondness – I’ve got such a *love* for Felt. But I’ve never analysed it, ’cos I was young and it was a bit of a blur... and it was like its own world.”

Duffy’s in London for the launch of the lavish Felt photo-book. Later this evening of February 3, he’ll join Lawrence and ex-bassist Phil King for a short Q&A session and signing at Brick Lane record spot Rough Trade East. The chat is preceded by a clip from Paul Kelly’s film portrait *Lawrence Of Belgravia*, which can be enthusiastically likened to the Mayles brothers’ *Grey Gardens*, *Dandy Warhols doc Dig!* and a present day version of *The Naked Civil Servant*.

Meeting his public among Lana Del Rey and Radiohead product, Lawrence looks healthier than in recent years, cutting an eccentric dash in multicoloured, spotted bomber jacket and avant-garde baseball cap with a blue Perspex peak. Also present is equable Felt drummer Gary Ainge. Days earlier MOJO had received word that Maurice Deebank, the wildly talented guitarist of Felt’s early years, would not be available for interview.

A week later we meet at Lawrence’s kettle-free Clerkenwell flat. Before-hand, we stop off for takeaway tea at nearby coffee boutique Fix, where Lawrence airily mentions there’s a toilet for patrons’ use, as his lav is broken (later he uses it). Seated in his spartan front room, he seems disappointed at Deebank’s silence. He’d always wanted Felt to be a proper group; his reputation for control freakery was, he says, forced upon him by his bandmates’ leisurely, pub-inclined attitudes. But then, self-reliance was always his fate.

Growing up in the village of Water Orton eight miles outside Birmingham, he was a “high street kid” who liked Radio 2 and glam rock until the ’76 virus transformed his life. Regular attendance at Brum punk nexus Barbarella’s from 1977 to 1979 clarified and hardened his attitudes as he plotted a future endeavour into which he would pour his life: a group that would make 10 singles and 10 albums in 10 years, and then split.

“It was a great scene,” says Lawrence. “That club was really rundown and so dark. It stank of piss, beer, sweat, fags, and rancid hamburgers – a beautiful punk smell that was totally right. I fell totally into that thing Vic Godard said – ‘We oppose all rock’n’roll’, ‘Avoid all these clichés’. I didn’t have to change who I was, because that *is* who I was.”

Yet two instincts warred in his breast: the urge to achieve pop fame, and the magnetic pull of the art-underground. He would try to reconcile these opposing urges through Felt, named for how Tom Verlaine pronounces the word in the song *Venus off Television’s Marquee Moon LP*. The first Felt release would be the 500-copy 45 *Index*, bedroom-recorded and DIY-released by Lawrence in 1979. Four murky minutes of strumming and murmuring, it was later admiringly described by *Stereolab’s* Tim Gane as “intense but stunted... the only beat seems to be an onanistic one.” Listening in south London, future member Phil King was spooked. “It was like

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