



JAMMIN' AGAIN

More than two decades after their split, two-thirds of the legendary punk/mod band The Jam are touring, against all the odds. Bassist Bruce Foxton tells Joel McIver about unfeasible stage moves, saving The Who's bacon and Fender Precision basses heavier than lead boots...

If you need telling about the influence The Jam had on popular music, you're either under 12 or you've been sleeping under a rock for three decades. Emerging from the mean streets of Woking as the punk wars raged in 1976, the band – singer/guitarist Paul Weller, bassist Bruce Foxton and drummer Rick Buckler – stood out a mile on the music scene of the day. Bringing the snarly attitude and stripped-down songwriting of punk to old-school aesthetics nicked from modern Kinks and Small Faces, the band looked sharp and sounded crisp at a time when living in the UK was a pretty grey experience.

Over their six studio albums and a phenomenal 18 Top 40 hits, The Jam's sound – led by Weller's nifty, souped-up guitar and staccato, somewhat Cock-er-nee vocals – was driven by the rock-solid rhythm section of Foxton and Buckler. After the band split in 1982, Weller's solo career

went stratospheric; Buckler left the business, only returning with a band called The Gift in 2005; and Foxton played for many years in Still Little Fingers and lately Casbah Club. He and Buckler are now touring again, having reformed 66% of the band without Weller (who has, however, an open invitation to participate). On the eve of a UK tour, Foxton is obviously delighted to be going overground...

I hear the tour sold out rapidly?

Yes, it's unbelievable. Obviously they're small venues, because we didn't want to take anything for granted – there would have been no point booking Wembley Arena before we knew if anybody was going to turn up! I'm amazed at the ticket response – almost every date was sold out within four days.



"5- AND 6-STRING BASSES? NO, I'VE NEVER DONE IT. I CAN FIND ENOUGH NOTES WITH FOUR."

Why is The Jam's music still popular after all this time, do you think?

Obviously it's down to the quality of the songs and music, and Paul's songwriting. It's phenomenal that it still seems to be as popular now as it was 25 or 30 years ago. Touch wood, I've had a fairly successful career, but it's had its lows as well, and you do learn over a period of time not to take anything for granted.

Can you still do the big jump that you did in the famous picture taken by Pennie Smith?

You're the first person to ask me that.

I bet I won't be the last.

That's so deceiving, that picture. It was taken at Hammersmith Odeon. I leaped off Rick's drum riser, which was about three feet high in the first place – and Pennie was in the orchestra pit, a good 10 or 12 feet below me. So the picture looks like I've jumped off a trampoline! Anyway, I'm a bit older now – I'd need a winch and a harness to do it now. Also we're playing small venues with low ceilings this time around, so I've got a legitimate excuse not to do it... It's a great shot, anyway – nothing's choreographed. It never was, and it isn't now.

Obviously the Rickenbacker you're playing in that picture can't have been that heavy.

It was pretty light, yeah. The Fender Precisions I went on to play in the *All Mod Cons* period – it would have been trying to jump with deep-sea diver's boots on.



"I USE A BRIGHTON 64, MADE BY WATERSTONE GUITARS, IT GIVES ME THE RIGHT SOUND FOR THE SONG 'START!'"





Are you still using the fat, overdriven sound you pioneered in The Jam?

Yeah, as close as possible: obviously there's some studio trickery in there. Some of the tracks have distortion on them, for example. But I don't use pedals live – it's just another thing that can go wrong! Then your stage hands – or technicians, as they're called nowadays – have to run on and sort it out, and if you've got loads of pedals, working out where to start is like looking for a needle in a haystack. But I do like to get as close to that old bass sound as possible. Thankfully our sound guy has done his homework and listened to the Jam's records, so he's quite up to speed on my sound.

Was your bass style any different in Stiff Little Fingers to the way it had been in The Jam?

Yes – in SLF I was involved in the songwriting, whereas in The Jam I'm not credited on all the songs. That was just naivety at the time – a lot of the Jam material stemmed from a bassline or a drum part – but we had this unwritten rule that whoever came along with the initial idea got the credit.

Even on a song like 'Town Called Malice', which has a very distinctive bass part?

Yes, exactly. The only song that was really a fair split was 'Funeral Pyre', which stemmed

more melodic parts, given the opportunity?

Possibly. In The Jam and SLF the songs were pretty fast, so there was only so much you could do. If I'd tried to be more melodic, it would have got too busy. But I got a little bit frustrated with the chugging, although it would have got messy if I'd tried to do something a bit more melodic or a bit more me. For any song you want what's best for the track, and it does find its own level. I messed about in the studio trying to find something a bit more Foxton, but invariably we went back to the chugging because it was much better.

Were The Jam a punk band or a mod band?

People do want to pigeonhole things, don't they? I've been guilty of that myself. The answer is, we had feet in all those camps – punk, mod, new wave. We were part of all that.

"EVEN THOUGH IT'S NOT THE STYLE I PLAY, SCHOOL DAYS BY STANLEY CLARKE [WAS AN INFLUENCE]."

What basses will you be playing on this tour?

A few years ago Fender put out a vintage reissue model, and I bought one of those. It's reasonably light, which is great because the ones I had before weighed a ton. They're in the loft at home. Occasionally I go up there to get the Christmas tree or whatever and pick one up – and I think bloody hell, how did I play a whole gig with one of these? And so energetically, too!

Any other instruments apart from the Precision?

There's an American company called Waterstone Musical Instruments – not the book shops! – who make a model called a Lula, which I've been trying out. I'll have one of those as a backup, plus one of their acoustic basses.

What amps do you use?

I've been using Ampeg since the Stiff Little Fingers days – an SVT 2 with a graphic equaliser and an 8x10" cabinet. I like it, but the road crew hate them because they're so bloody heavy. Are they reliable? Well... I remember when my other band Casbah Club supported The Who last year. Pino Palladino also uses Ampeg and his amps overheated, to the point where they asked to borrow mine, which was a bit worrying because mine is prone to doing that. They have a bit of a problem – I've had fans built into them. One of them's got a fan – a normal domestic fan like you'd have in an office – strapped to the back! So I think Ampeg need to look into the issue of keeping them a bit cooler.

Ever thought about jumping ship to another manufacturer?

Well, possibly Marshall. I was very happy with them in the old days, but I haven't looked at Marshalls for so long, because I've found an amp setup that works... or hopefully works.

from Rick's drumming and we all contributed to it. We did that for about 70% of the songs. Anyway, it's water under the bridge – we were so young and naïve that it didn't matter, we were so excited to be playing that we didn't realise how lucrative it could be. But I've got no complaints.

Anyway, about my bass playing in SLF – I think it suffered a bit because I was coming into a band that had a lot of material, I was emulating what Ali McMordie played. There was a lot of what I would term 'chugging' on one note through a lot of the songs.

So you would have played





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TOUR DATES

From The Jam featuring Bruce Foxton and Rick Buckler start their 20-date UK tour on May 2nd at the Oxford Zodiac.

For further tour info:
www.brucefoxton.com
www.thejamfan.net

Who were your influences on bass?

Entwistle and McCartney. Also, even though it's not the style I play, School Days by Stanley Clarke. And then there was the guy out of Level 42, Mark King – he was amazing. I dabbled in the slap style on the Jam song, 'Precious', and there's a little bit on 'Funeral Pyre'. But it's not me – if I tried to do it live I'd get my finger stuck behind the strings or something. Everybody's got their limitations!

Do you play fretless?

I did on a track called 'Ghosts', but that was with the aid of chalk marks on the neck to tell me where to stop! I was always pleased when that song was finished in the set. The way I got into fretless was funny. I had an old Precision which I smashed up on stage...

Out of pure punk fury?

No, out of frustration. Something wasn't right. Anyway, I snapped the neck off, and after I got a replacement I told them to put a fretless neck on the old one. But I never really trusted it. I was always worried that I'd slide up too far and it would be sharp – and that I'd turn round and see Paul glaring at me!

Ever done five and six strings?

No, I've never done it. I can find enough notes with four.

I have to ask this. Was Weller invited to take part in this tour and make it a full reunion?

Well, I've kept in touch with Rick for years: he's always been there if I needed him, and vice versa. Paul – when he split the band up, that was one thing; but he kind of split the friendship up too, which was strange. And in doing so we lost track of where he lived and his phone numbers and so on, and obviously now it's virtually impossible to get hold of a phone number. But our PR company, and Billboard, tried to get in touch with Paul to ask him for a comment, and he was out of the country and his office didn't say anything. You know, we've said in our press release – and this was the best we could do, actually, at the time – that the door was always open and it would be a pleasure if Paul wanted to come and join us. But, hand on heart, we all know – and you must know – that his thoughts on reforming The Jam have always been well documented. People do change, and mellow, and think again: from Rick's and my point of view, it would be fantastic to play with Paul again – but realistically, don't hold your breath!

Then again, who would have predicted that The Police would reform?

Exactly. Times do change and people move on. If Paul is interested, then could he please hurry up and say so, because we're all getting on a bit! If he decides to reform The Jam when I'm 65 or something, it could be a bit frustrating...

Joel McIver

