

SWEET AND SOUR

"People either laughed at us or simply walked away . . . I don't think any of us realised how big a monster we were creating for ourselves."

The bitter-SWEET recollections of '70s Glam Gods ANDY SCOTT and MICK TUCKER, as recorded by HOWARD JOHNSON

DO WE UP HERE at the mighty *K!* have a sixth sense or what?

I mean, here we are at *Kerrang!* mansions patting ourselves on the back at the stroke of genius that we've pulled in putting together our Glam rock special, when bugger me if the 'phone doesn't ring, and there's Virgin Video on the line telling us that they're releasing a Glam Rock compilation featuring all their favourite stars of the Glitter era.

Now that's what I call providence!

And there's more! Andy Scott and Mick Tucker, guitarist and drummer respectively with those ballroom blitzin' blockbusters of yore the Sweet, are in town and ready to talk!

Well, what could a poor boy do, but dust off the old silver platforms and head out West

(W10 that is) to check out the whys and the wherefores.

THE GUY WHO put this video together actually got in touch with me to help him find some old Sweet footage," explains a decidedly dapper and non-Glam Scott when we finally make our rendezvous. "Because too often in the past people have dug up some appalling clip for, say, 'Blockbuster', that was only ever designed to be shown in the Outer Hebrides or some such place.

"You can't release a Glam Rock video without the Sweet, so I thought I might as well find something worthwhile to put on it.

"Although to our minds the band's Glam period was a very short span of time, maybe about a year between '72 and '73, it is still a part of what we went through and I guess it did influence a lot of people."

Sorry to disappoint all you people who worshipped Brian Connolly and the boys for their outrageous make-up and string of pop/rock hits such as 'Blockbuster' and 'Wig Wam Bam', but Scott seems more than anxious to dispel the notion that there was nothing more to his band than a period of one year and four hit singles.

"I'm not denying or decrying that period in the band's career at all," he says, "but people should know that there was an awful lot more to us than that. Although the stage clothes that we had at the time continued until about '75, the make-up was gone after a year!

"I find it frustrating that people in the UK have us stuck in one period of time, when in actual fact there were many different facets to what the Sweet did. A lot of people won't know that really before we had any success to speak of we were doing sets that included a medley of Who songs, a medley of Tamla Motown stuff, some weird West Coast covers, some

of our own stuff and songs by Sabbath and Zeppelin."

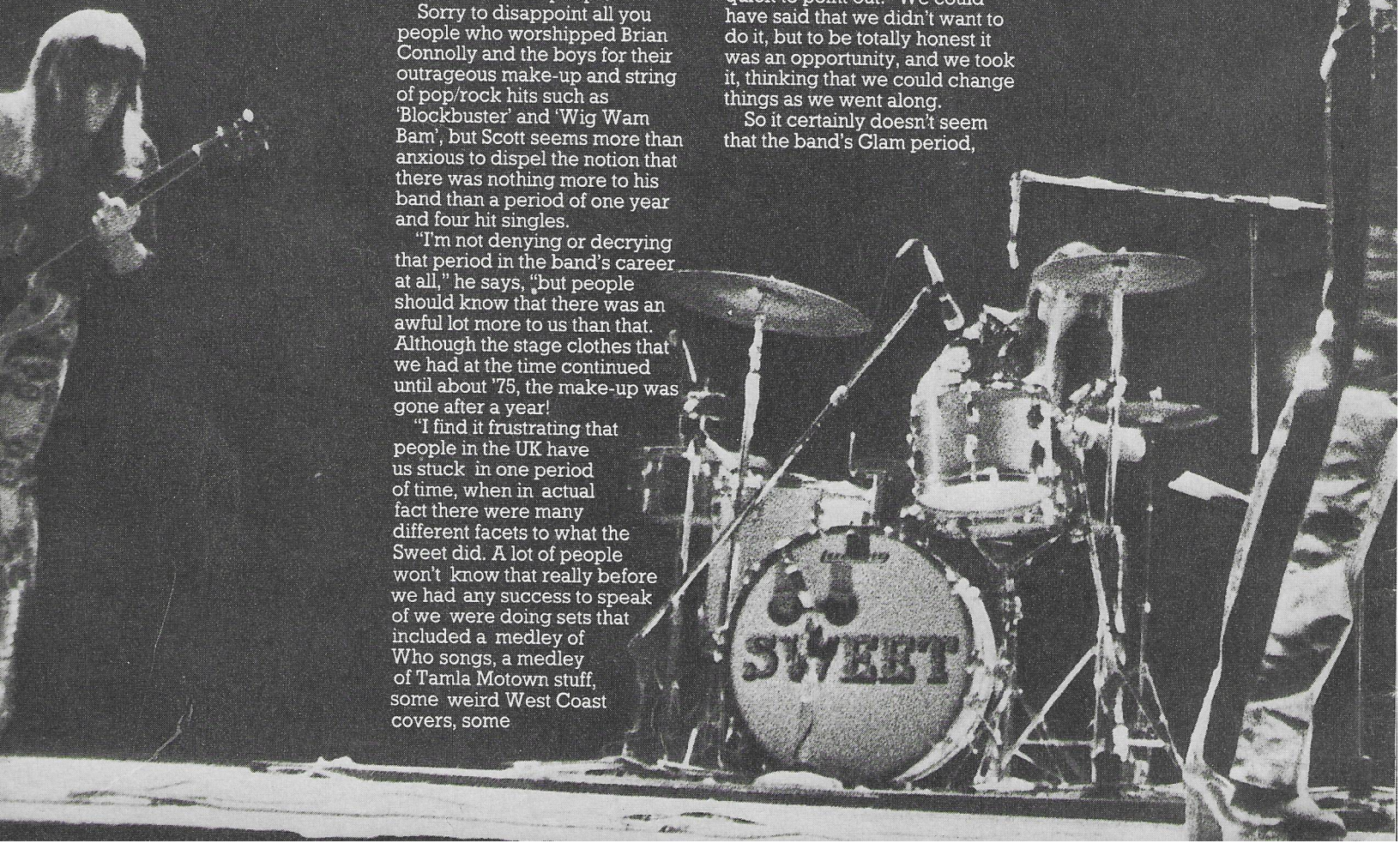
IN FACT, THE whole time span of the band's Glam Rock period came about entirely by accident.

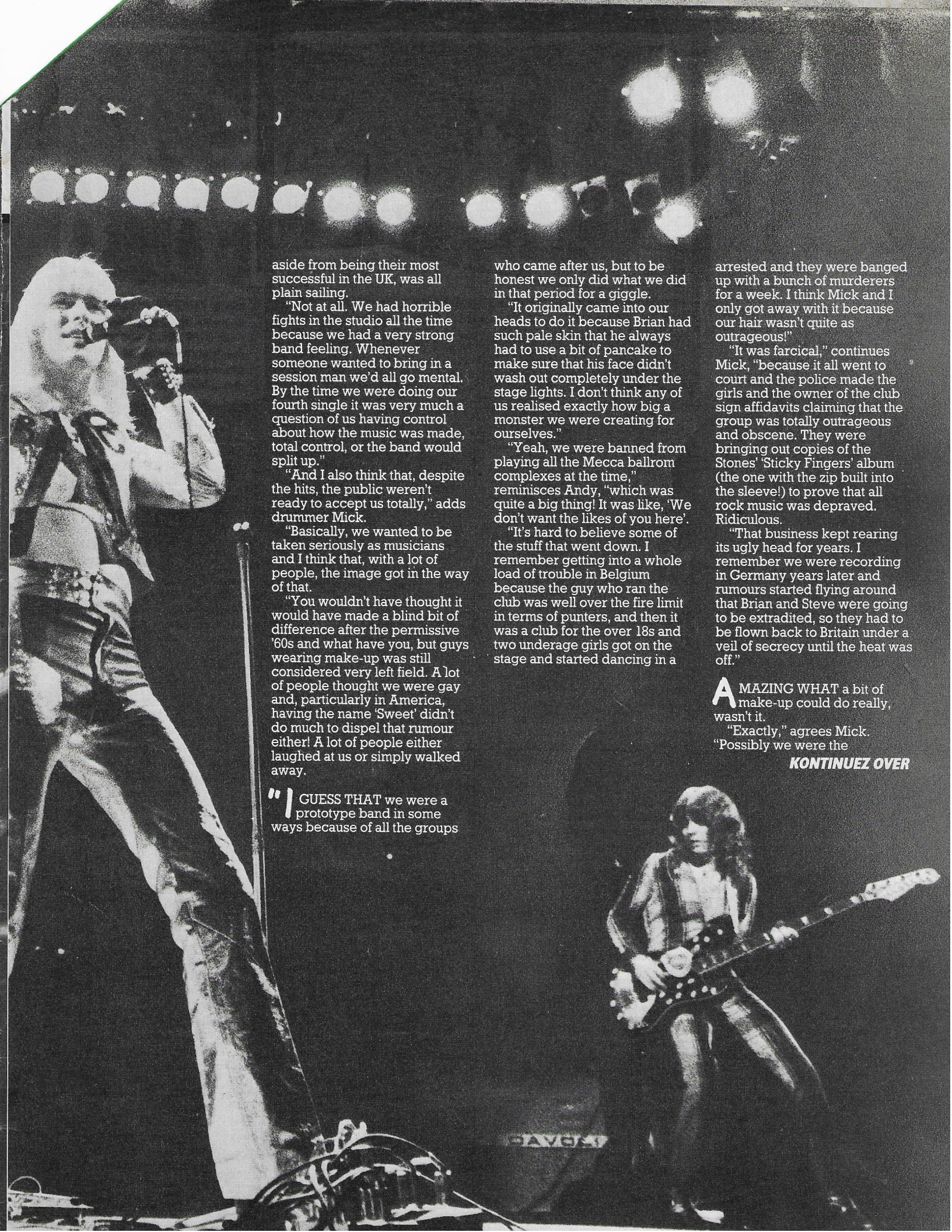
"It was just an experiment really," confirms Andy. "As a band, we'd been given a lot of artistic credit, but artistic credit alone doesn't pay the bills. We originally got in contact with Nicky Chinn and Mike Chapman when they asked us to sing on some demos that they had.

"You see, all four of us (the line-up being completed by bassist Steve Priest) were in effect lead singers, because we'd always wanted that tight harmony sound. Anyway, everybody really liked the stuff that we did and we got offered a deal."

OK, so it wasn't exactly their own stuff, but as Andy was quick to point out: "We could have said that we didn't want to do it, but to be totally honest it was an opportunity, and we took it, thinking that we could change things as we went along.

So it certainly doesn't seem that the band's Glam period,





aside from being their most successful in the UK, was all plain sailing.

"Not at all. We had horrible fights in the studio all the time because we had a very strong band feeling. Whenever someone wanted to bring in a session man we'd all go mental. By the time we were doing our fourth single it was very much a question of us having control about how the music was made, total control, or the band would split up."

"And I also think that, despite the hits, the public weren't ready to accept us totally," adds drummer Mick.

"Basically, we wanted to be taken seriously as musicians and I think that, with a lot of people, the image got in the way of that."

"You wouldn't have thought it would have made a blind bit of difference after the permissive '60s and what have you, but guys wearing make-up was still considered very left field. A lot of people thought we were gay and, particularly in America, having the name 'Sweet' didn't do much to dispel that rumour either! A lot of people either laughed at us or simply walked away."

"I GUESS THAT we were a prototype band in some ways because of all the groups

who came after us, but to be honest we only did what we did in that period for a giggle.

"It originally came into our heads to do it because Brian had such pale skin that he always had to use a bit of pancake to make sure that his face didn't wash out completely under the stage lights. I don't think any of us realised exactly how big a monster we were creating for ourselves."

"Yeah, we were banned from playing all the Mecca ballroom complexes at the time," reminisces Andy, "which was quite a big thing! It was like, 'We don't want the likes of you here'."

"It's hard to believe some of the stuff that went down. I remember getting into a whole load of trouble in Belgium because the guy who ran the club was well over the fire limit in terms of punters, and then it was a club for the over 18s and two underage girls got on the stage and started dancing in a

arrested and they were banged up with a bunch of murderers for a week. I think Mick and I only got away with it because our hair wasn't quite as outrageous!"

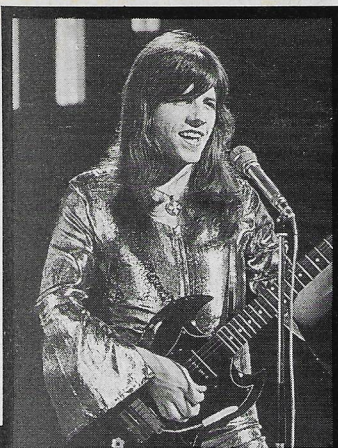
"It was farcical," continues Mick, "because it all went to court and the police made the girls and the owner of the club sign affidavits claiming that the group was totally outrageous and obscene. They were bringing out copies of the Stones' 'Sticky Fingers' album (the one with the zip built into the sleeve!) to prove that all rock music was depraved. Ridiculous."

"That business kept rearing its ugly head for years. I remember we were recording in Germany years later and rumours started flying around that Brian and Steve were going to be extradited, so they had to be flown back to Britain under a veil of secrecy until the heat was off."

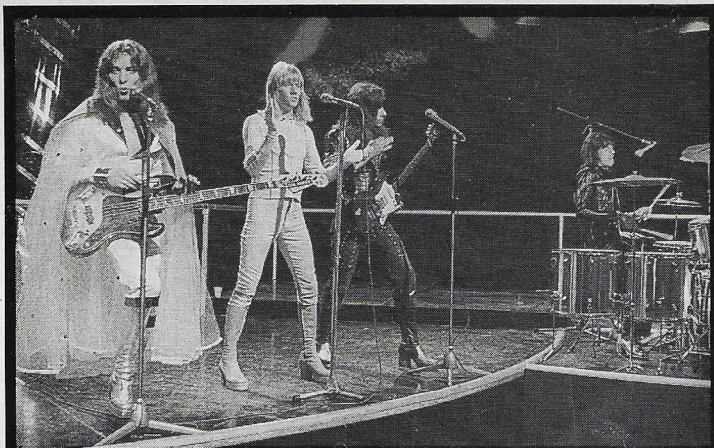
AMAZING WHAT a bit of make-up could do really, wasn't it.

"Exactly," agrees Mick. "Possibly we were the

KONTINUEZ OVER



ANDY SCOTT: "To our minds, Sweet's Glam period was a very short space of time, maybe about a year between '72 and '73"



THE SWEET: Mike Chapman has recently been back in contact with the band, and a reformation could be on the cards



MICK TUCKER: "The bottom line was that we never really took it all that seriously. I don't think many of the other Glam bands around at the time did, either"

SOUP

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instruments of our own downfall, because we did construct some of our singles around the image, and then we got stuck with it. What galls us in spite of everything is that we were successful on our own terms everywhere else in the world except for the UK.

"After all, let's face it, Chinn and Chapman wanted us to stay as this crazy Glam/pop band, but we really felt in our hearts that we wanted to be recognised as a serious, professional Hard Rock band.

"We had had 16 Top 20 hits with Chinn and Chapman and, to be brutal, we could have easily had 16 more, but we just wanted to break away from all that."

In fact, the more I try to delve into the Glam period of the band, the more Andy and Mick seem to reveal a total dissatisfaction with the era and what it brought afterwards.

This might even stretch as far as bitterness, in Andy's case. He claims that people dragging up that one phase in the band's history all the time "doesn't phase me any more", but I'm not so sure that this is entirely true.

"If you'd asked me about it in '78 I would have given you really short shrift, because we fought it for years trying to show that there was more to us than met the eye."

"The whole thing was just very weird," states Mick. "You can't really explain it in words, but doing gigs and having girls screaming at us while their boyfriends are trying to spit on us and kick us is definitely weird. Having girls trying to jump through the windows of the limo while their boyfriends try to throw a brick through them

"I think that we felt a lot of the pressure at the time because, as I said before, we had put this make-up on for a laugh but it had a profound effect on people.

"People were intimidated by us. We used to go into the pubs next door to a drink before gigs and all the fans who were there wouldn't even ask us for an autograph."

MAYBE THAT kind of pressure, the feeling of living life in a bubble, could have been made easier had the Glam scene really developed into some kind of movement where all the bands involved felt some kind of close ties, but as Noddy Holder from Slade also confirms in this issue, it never really felt that way to the groups involved.

Mick: "No, it didn't feel as if we were creating or being a part of a movement. It didn't have the same kind of vibe as the '60s did, with the whole Flower Power thing.

"When I look back on those times now I suppose there was a lot of originality, but all I felt that we were doing was interpreting the bands of the '60s, bands that we grew up with such as Cream and Led Zeppelin, in our own way.

"The bottom line was that we never really took it all that seriously, I don't think that many of the bands did.

"As far as I can remember, the only person who really seemed to be taking it all as some kind of art form rather than just a giggle was David Bowie. I remember seeing him doing 'Starman' on 'Top Of The Pops', because we were on the same show, and he was very seriously into what he was doing."

It seems that the Sweet's own interpretation of what they considered an art form revolved around being regarded as a straight down the line Hard Rock act, something which the British public was never prepared to accept.

introduce the harder rock elements of that they did with numerous self-penned numbers kicking out the jams on the B-sides of the Chinni-Chap singles, but it was all to no available here in Blighty.

There seems to have always been the dichotomy for the band of craving the success that they had achieved with 'Ballroom Blitz' et al, but wanting to achieve it with their own, harder material.

And, as is often the case, the timing was all-important.

"I remember that a while before, Mike Chapman had suggested that we should use the twin ideas of horror and rock as a basis for live performance," recalls Andy. "And we could never really get a grasp on what it was he meant, but then we ended up seeing Alice Cooper and Kiss in the States and it all fell into place.

"By the time all this rock theatre had come in and was being received, we had all moved on to new things."

AND TRY AS they might, the band could never quite capture the public's imagination in the same way as they had before.

"We fell into the trap of spending too long on recording our material and not enough time actually going out and working it," explains Scott. "We'd be spending six months every year making a record, and that was too long.

"After all, the giggling aspect is the life blood of every rock band and the beauty of the hits that we had was that they had an energy and a feel that were there precisely because they were recorded in a single day.

"And then we also had the problems that we got saddled with an American company who didn't feel that they had a responsibility to support one of their acts that was out on the road in a financial way. We were also all living in the UK under a Labour government that was trying to get the hit

paying tax of 98p in the pound, so in effect I used what should have turned out to be my life savings to keep the band out on the road and working."

Which may explain why I keep detecting this undercurrent of bitterness pervading the atmosphere.

"Sure, at the time we regretted having created the image, but it's a part of history now," claims Scott. "There certainly aren't that many bands from as long ago as that who can honestly claim that they still have their records played all the time."

"And that's the best testimony to the band that there is," adds Mick. "When I listen back to the stuff that we did then I still think that it stands up, in terms of both musicianship and playing.

"Everyone was fighting for his own artistic freedom on those records, and that really came through in the grooves - that's what helped to make the records special.

"Although we all have regrets about things that we wish we'd done and that we wish had happened, at the end of the day the Sweet was still an internationally successful band and you really can't do any better than that."

IVE BLOCKED out all negative thoughts," claims Andy, though I'm not convinced as to the truth of the statement, "otherwise I'd forever be walking around with a cloud hanging over my head!"

I think the man still feels he has something to prove with the Sweet, and with Mike Chapman back in contact with the band a reformation looks more than on the cards. And then maybe Andy Scott can give the public more to think about than a pair of silver platform boots.

And if that happened, then I know his mind would finally be