

# For The Sweet – how sweet it is

By CAMERON CROWE  
Rolling Stone

MUNICH — Here in Germany, as well as the rest of the continent, Brian Connolly, Steve Priest, Mick Tucker and Andy Scott — The Sweet — are demigods.

Their concerts are synonymous with riots and their five-year-long string of European hits has yet to be broken. No other group has threatened The Sweet stronghold. Not even the Bay City Rollers.

"Those Rollers," snickers Brian Connolly during a break from the band's sessions at Munich's Musicland Studios. "Just look at them with their funny clothes and nervous determination to become the biggest band in the world."

His thoughts crystallized with help from the syrup-like German beer. "The Sweet just don't care. Everyone tells us we have to scheme on an American audience, if we really want to hit it big. Ha! When we get there, we'll play what we want to play. And if we don't go over well, we'll do concerts here. This is a rock and roll band, not an army."

Already, The Sweet has fared better with an American following than such overseas favorites as Suzi Quatro, Gary Glitter, Alvin Stardust or the Sensational Alex Harvey Band. Perhaps significantly, its recent Top Five U.S. hit, "Ballroom Blitz," was not exploited

with a garish publicity campaign. This band is above that.

"We're huge-in-Europe-now-it's-your-turn type," says bassist Steve Priest. "I'm not surprised those other groups failed. They're average bands. Not outstanding at all. Look at Slade. They're just an English football band that had a few hits, aren't they? On the other hand, we're not just some artificial singles band."

It's taken The Sweet seven years to make that claim.

When the group was first formed in 1969 by Connolly and drummer Mick Tucker (both of Wainwright's Gentlemen, the band that later gave Ian Gillan and Roger Glover to Deep Purple), its main objective was hit singles. After the first four attempts failed to shake up the charts, a meeting was arranged with Britain's Bacharach and David of punk-rock — Nicky Chinn and Mike Chapman.

The result, "Funny Funny," was The Sweet's first smash.

Some 12 more Chinn and Chapman-penned hits followed, racking up a worldwide sales mark of 20 million units. The only four singles released in the United States ("Little Willy," "Blockbuster," "Wig-Wag Barn," and "Hell Raiser") sold well, but a quickly assembled compilation album on Bell Records didn't.

Purposely, they say, the band ignored offers for an American tour.



The Sweet — Steve Priest, Brian Connolly, Mick Tucker and Andy Scott.

"We thought that the only reason 'Little Willy' was a hit in the States was because people thought it was a black record," remembers Connolly. "Besides, at the time we were wearing makeup and dressing up like four Christmas trees. It was a single for us."

"People like Bowie were taking it really seriously, and we were just a bunch of tarts having a good time. If we'd gone to the States two years ago, when the glitter rat race was on, we would have been misunderstood. It would have killed us. We did the right thing by staying away. No question."

The turning point came in early

1974 when, in the course of a London pub brawl, Connolly's throat was kicked in. In the months he (and the group) was out of commission, The Sweet reassessed its direction. "We had been getting Number Ones just like that," Steve Priest says and snaps his fingers nonchalantly. "We were on top of it all. But we weren't getting off at all. All those early hits ... they were crap."

The Sweet informed Chinn and Chapman that their services would no longer be needed. The first totally band-written and produced single, "Fox on the Run" — just released in the States — was a major European success earlier

this year.

"There's no bad feelings between Nicky and Mike and us," says guitarist Andy Scott. "I don't think they're capable of writing the right kind of material for us anymore. I mean, they can pick up unknown groups and come up with the commercial goods, but what we're talking about is our own music."

The Sweet's American following, however, is still on time delay, due to a switch in labels. It left Bell when its contract expired in June, and recently released the first Capitol album, "Desolation Boulevard." It's another compilation record 5 of the 10 tracks are Chinn-Chapman compositions.

"Capitol picked the songs for the album," admits Priest. "If we'd had our say, we'd have had all our own tracks on it, obviously. Which is not to say it's a bum album. We didn't do too badly, considering some of the ludicrous stuff they wanted to put in there ... we had a real fight on our hands. We're way beyond most of that stuff now. 'Ballroom Blitz' is two years old, for example. Let's not forget that. We wouldn't have put that out."

After playing one experimental gig at the sold-out Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, The Sweet has gone ahead and booked an extensive American tour to begin in January. Coinciding with the tour will be the worldwide release of a new, current Sweet album.

"We're trying not to compromise on this one; this is the step we've always wanted to take," proclaims drummer Mick Tucker. "and if we don't make it, I guess that's it. Just another 15-hit wonder."

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