



UNDER THE INFLUENCE

TINDERSTICKS' FRONTMAN **STUART STAPLES** TALKS US THROUGH SOME OF THE INFLUENCES THAT SHAPE HIS LIFE AND WORK

WORDS: **JOOLS STONE**

BEING ON THE MOVE

"All my musical ideas seem to begin with some kind of motion or travel. I never write sitting still and I very rarely write in my studio. Wandering gives my mind a certain blankness, which allows other things to happen. For me, songs are always connected to the moments and places where they arose. I seem to be able to recall where each of my songs was written, whether it's Thessaloniki, Barcelona, or in a launderette in Kilburn. I've always had a really good memory, so I don't tend to put ideas down on paper, I just knock songs around in my head."

CHANCE

"We're always under the influence of chance, and when you're working in a band with five people, all with their own lives and moods going on, nothing is ever constant in that environment. Everybody arrives with a different feeling. Anything can change the direction of a song, it could just be one person influencing that.

"The distillation of that is when you're trying to capture a song in the studio, you're all waiting for this moment when a certain light little shines and it's all about how you react to each other in that moment.

"Songs go through various stages: you have an idea, you feel it, you develop an understanding of it. It doesn't say what it is. It's the thing that's waiting to be satisfied. I was very aware of this when we made our last album 'The Waiting Room'. I ended up singing, playing guitar and engineering, which I'd never do again, but it was important to keep this intimacy between the five of us in this room."

ESCAPING YOUR UPBRINGING

"Even in my 50s, I'm still struck by how you can never escape your upbringing. I've felt this so strongly working on 'Minute Bodies', my film about F. Percy Smith. He was born in the late 1800s, from a very ordinary background, yet he was somehow able to make these extraordinary films using homemade devices in a shed in his garden. He never considered what he was doing was artistic in any way, which somehow makes it feel more important to me.

"When I was 15, art and creativity was not really part of the conversation in my life. We were never brought up to have our minds open to these possibilities. The comprehensive school I went to was next door to a colliery and half the boys in my class when straight there after they left school.

"The classic working class escape was either music or football, so things like 'Top of the Pops' became important because that was the medium that gave you your dreams and imagination. It's a peak into this other world, you're drawn to something that is beyond what is around you. I can remember watching Bryan Ferry signing 'Let's Stick Together', his face filling the screen and thinking, 'Wow, what's going on here?' because I'd never seen an image like that before. It's those moments that change you in some way."

A CONSTANT LINE OF DISCOVERY

"People who create things can change the way you feel about your own approach in a powerful way. You accumulate hundreds of these moments throughout your life. At one time, the Velvet Underground affected my work, I can hear their influence all over our first record, but now it's so well absorbed that it just becomes part of you. It's a constant line of discovery, things come and find you and have this transformative effect.

"I used to lock myself away with a song until I understood everything it was about and introduce it to the band fully formed, but I've learnt I can make something much better if I keep my ideas as loose and open as possible. Now I prefer to present songs in a freer, more open way, even if that means just singing and clapping it. I'd rather get the feeling across and see what others throw back at me."

FRENCH FILM DIRECTOR CLAIRE DENIS

"I think the fact that we're still playing music together has a lot to do with what Claire has asked from us. If we'd followed our own path we might've ground to a halt by now, but our career has been punctuated by seven Claire Denis scores. Each one takes us to a new place, to a more extreme part of our music, which we probably wouldn't have visited under our own steam.

It all comes from her planting these seeds about the ideas behind the film, and not necessarily the story itself. With the score for 'Bastards' in 2013 we had a conversation with her about this idea of sailors feeling adrift when back on dry land. This dictated the way we approached the music, leading us to make an electronic score, putting us in a place that was outside of our natural habitat."

Tindersticks' soundtrack to the Stuart Staples-directed film 'Minute Bodies: The Intimate World Of F Percy Smith' is out now on City Slang