

AMMONITES

(Reproduced from the original Bright Times fanzine)

Catch a beat, catch a sound - catch the Ammonites!

The Ammonites are a six piece band who have a sound undeniably influenced by early Trojan rocksteady. When they formed in March their set was largely cover songs from that period, but gradually they began to use more and more of their own material. Now they are still using three of four unoriginals, but it seems they too will eventually be phased out. I, for one, would be sorry to see 'Tighten Up' go from their set. (Did Lee Perry do it better?)

I watched their rehearsal down at the dog stadium and then followed them down to their gig at the Alhambra, supporting Eye to Eye. Going on first is always difficult, especially as it was the first time they'd played together after a month's holiday. However, the Ammonites were just what Eye to Eye needed to warm everyone up, the latter playing a much heavier, rootsy type of reggae.

They came on with 'Move Ya Mule' and although the audience took a bit of waking up the urgency of 'Secret Lives' soon got everyone twitching and you'd have to be deaf to keep still to their version of 'Everything Crash'. The climax of the set was the excellent 'Dressed to Kill' - stirring and dangerous, with the most exciting sax playing I've heard for ages. They finished all too soon with 'Dog Tired'. Not even an encore.

The Ammonites are: Stef on vocals and tambourine, Nick and Mike on rhythm guitar, Dave on drums, Steve on saxophone and the beautiful Colin (Smivvy) on bass. All are Brightonians except Steve who comes from Lancing. Most of them have played in bands before - Dave and Nick with Duncan from Second Nature in the B.K. Band, Dave and Stef in Red House, and Steve used to play with Idrens.

Onstage their music is taken seriously and Stef wastes little time with small talk. Each instrument comes over powerfully, Dave's slick drumming gives the band its tightness, but it is the sax which really completes the sound as their own. Although much of their music has a distinctive rocksteady feel about it and so comes over as fast, but light, the content of some of their songs shows their more

serious side. 'Secret Lives' is about how social suppression forces people to do secretly what they can't do openly - "we're hiding, we're living underground, we're hiding, where we can't be found" 'Dressed to Kill' is about police (no more needs to be said, listen to the lyrics). 'Indian Tiger' is about British Imperialism. 'Dog Tired' is simply enough about lack of achievement - "I think about the things I said today, everything I said's been said before, no one listens to a word I say...." The songs are worked out collectively with the inspiration coming from Mike, Nick and Colin.

Onstage they seem detached from their audience, apart from Stef's infectious energy. Dave concentrates desperately out of the window and Smivvy stares elusively at the floor. Mike is always hidden behind Steve. Only three of them ever look at the crowd. This is not meant as a criticism in so far as they are primarily a dance band and a sodality with their audience is not really necessary. However, I think they could play on their individual charismas with great success.

They don't make much money gigging at the moment (about £15 if they support or £25 when the mainline) performing and rehearsing takes up much of their time, so why do they do it? Is it for eventual fame, prestige? But they don't really seem to mind if they are not the next to follow the Piranhas on to Top of the Pops (although they assured me they would, given the opportunity!) Initially, the band got together to fill in boring Sunday afternoons, but now there's obviously much more to it - something that only those who are, or who have been in bands can really understand. It all seems to have had no adverse effects on them so far except that Colin's eye twitches like it never used to do....!

Their biggest gig so far has been supporting the Vandells, but when the Beat were last down they were unfortunate enough to be playing on the same night as the Ammonites and no doubt noticed the unsold tickets!

So if you enjoy a speedy, tight sound that makes it impossible to keep still the band can be found at the Alhambra on Saturday November 8th, and then for the following six Fridays.

