

THE COMIC BOOK CHIEF

Christian Riou confesses to possessing a loft full of ancient 2000ADs and Red Indian paraphernalia.

Liz Evans talks Angels and Indians with Claytown Troupe's Christian Riou

Since they were spotted and signed by Island Records last year, Claytown Troupe have toured with The Cult, released a wicked debut album, 'Through The Veil', and attracted a hardcore following. They are not, however, your usual pouting, posing bunch of mean-men rock'n'mother**king rollers. Instead of pouring forth the age old cliches of love

guns, long legged mommas and lost whisky drenched nights, Clayton prefer to expound matters of a somewhat deeper nature, and much of this stems from vocalist Christian Riou's personal interests. Since he could read he's been collecting comics, and has also built up a mammoth hoard of Red Indian 'things' over the years.

So, let's start with the comics fixation. What's a nice boy like Christian doing reading 2000AD then – and when did all this begin?

"I've been collecting 2000AD ever since the first issue in 1977. Originally I started on The Beano and Dandy and I had a few English comics from the thirties. I remember one in particular, it was all about joining the air force and going off to India, but I can't remember what it was called. I haven't seen them for ten years, but it was something like Boy's Trousers, I must have been almost seven when I picked those up. In about 1974 The Observer ran a piece on old English comics and I remember reading it and thinking – Oh, I've got some of these!"

Along with Judge Dredd and 30's air-marauders, he's got American Indian artifacts all over the place as well.

"I collect anything. I hoard. I've got loads of stuff, cuddly toys included, I've always collected things and 2000AD was something I could collect in my teens, rather than spots. It's not so much the fact that they're worth something, as just having something from the past. I like old things – old houses, old music, old everything."

What about superheroes then, how much relevance do they hold in the light of Halo Jones, Heartbreak Soup and Alan Moore's latest baby, Big Numbers? Or have interpretations such as Frank Miller's Dark Knight reformed the stereotypical vision of the sub-human warlord?

"I like a main character like Judge Dredd who's invincible but at the same time human and therefore destructive. I've never been able to relate to the Spiderman and Batman. When you're a kid you wander around the streets dressed in a Spiderman outfit – well we all have in the hand for some reason! – but it's all to do with doing whatever you like without getting damaged. The society dream is to be able to do what you want and no one can stop you, and you want to do it for good reasons as well. I always wanted to be good but occasionally a wicked sod too!"

"I don't really analyse comics too much though. I just float along with them and get into the characters. I just enjoy the stories for what they are".

With Claytown Troupe's latest single, 'Real Life' sporting a sleeve inked by none other than Dredd artist Will Simpson, it's not difficult to detect the comics connection with Christian's work, although he doesn't play on it too hard. He still buys 2000AD every week, "with a vengeance", so it looks as if his next purchase might have to be a warehouse for storage purposes!

His mother's house probably won't hold much more, not to mention his own living space. It does go deeper than the mere owning of a few thousand objects though, and recently the singer lent his voice to the cause.

"I sang on a record with some Cheyenne Indians and it went out on video by satellite to about 150 countries, that was a bit weird! It was an anti-polluting the world type record which meant it was good for me. On the one hand people say – Oh that's a bit hippy, a bit feed the world, but it's like, what shall we sing about then, sex and drugs and rock'n'roll? You don't sing about those things, you do those things. And it's like the world political angle, you don't sit around talking about it, you go and do something about it. I'm a singer, so that's what I did, if it's something relevant, I'll do it. I've been offered to be taken to a Cheyenne reservation when we go to America by the manager of the guy I did the record with, so that'll be great; I've only been to New York before."

Christian identifies with the Red Indian issue strongly because he sees parallels with his own Celtic origins buried within the belief system. Both cultures have a special bond with the earth, the sun and the moon, and the idea of freedom in time and space figures prominently also. That is why, thinks Christian, people are so fascinated with the vision of the Indian.

"Everyone would like to be free. It's the dream of the happy hunting ground. The original Indian philosophies were very close to ours when we were cavemen, with sun gods and the earth goddess. I studied the Celtic thing for some time, my dad speaks loads of Celtic languages and my uncle's a university lecturer in Welsh, so my family are steeped in it".

Although Christian doesn't see the band becoming politically active in any great way, Indian emblems have sneaked their way into the Troupe's camp, as has the comics theme. Their backdrop is a sun design and their t-shirts feature a dancing Indian which was taken from a Cheyenne design in a book. As Christian says, Claytown are more concerned with the spiritual side of life rather than what's in their trousers.

"The American Indian belief is a nature thing, it's in your bones. It affects people and this is what my lyrics are about. I find it very important not to sing about cliches but about those sort of things".

