

C L O S E U P

ON

Bob Geldof

David Shannon

At an early stage in his career with the Boomtown Rats, Bob Geldof explained to the world the full extent of his musical ambitions. While other pop stars attempted to improve society by painting their hair green, ramming pins through their cheeks and bad-mouthing the Queen, Bob had different things on his mind. 'I'm in rock 'n' roll,' he said, 'because I want to get rich and famous and get laid.'

Now elevated to pop sainthood, the miracle worker who turned vinyl into food was recently invited to reconsider his earlier remarks. 'I think all those things are perfectly valid aspirations,' he told *77me Out* magazine. 'Working in a factory or going to the pub or a football match - that wasn't part of me. I had to get known.'

Geldof did indeed get rich, famous, laid and known. In many respects he was and still is a typical rock star whose career and behaviour follow a typical rock star pattern. But while others turn to anti-heroin campaigns, Hare Krishna or damaging the hulls of their £1m racing yachts when the thrill of being famous begins to pall, Geldof turned to Africa. Seeing Ethiopians starve on BBC tv, he 'sat there feeling horrified, ashamed and disgusted. What could I do personally? Doing something with music seemed the logical area.' The logical area has so far raised well over £50m in famine relief - rather more than he would have earned had he watched ITV instead and continued trying to become a richer Rat.

Geldof is 33, happily not married to TV personality Paula Yates and father to Fifi Trixiebelles - fortunately, she is still too young to know she sounds more like a poodle than a person. Together they live in Davington Priory (founded by Benedictine

nuns in 1153) in Kent. Geldof himself was born into a middle class Dublin family, the son of a carpet salesman. His mother died when he was seven and, with his father away so much on business, an older sister took responsibility for bringing him up. He attended Black Rock College, a fee-paying Catholic school since likened by him to 'a giant toilet' where he excelled at not passing exams, being beaten and being a rebel. Leaving school, he neglected either to settle down or to go completely off the rails. He worked as a driver, a busker and in a pea-canning factory, went to Spain and taught English, went to Canada and became a music journalist and arrived with his fellow Rats in London in 1977.

Songs about the miseries of living on a council estate (*Rat Trap*) and a murderous American teenager (*I Don't Like Mondays*) helped establish them as a band with brains as well as brashness. Thanks to the shape of his lips, Geldof was hailed as a second Jagger, described by *The Sun* as 'rock's newest sex symbol' and - he was young then - even agreed to tell them about his first sexual experience. Wild-looking but sometimes articulate, he became the media's favourite pop loudmouth - surly, sincere and recklessly un-self-serving in his attacks on the British rock press, American radio and everything to do with punk. He has come a long, and a short, way since then.

Now more Ghosttown than Boomtown, the Rats last had a top 10 single in 1981 with *Banana Republic*. Geldof, meanwhile, has moved from scourging the *New Musical Express* to scourging national governments, with no noticeable change of style. He continues to 'fuss, bluster, fume and rage like a pop star,' and, like many pop stars, finds this no obstacle to getting his own way. 6ft 3in, 10.5stone and looking in



need of extra helpings of maize porridge himself, he is the man who asked the president of Burkina Faso if he tortured people, the president of the Republic of Chad if he dyed his hair for official photographs and the royal correspondent of the *Daily Mirror* if he was 'still busy looking up Princess Di's skirt.'

Keen to keep Live Aid out of party politics, he is neither a Tory nor a 'socialist as per the Labour party', regards 'so-called freedom fighters' as 'nothing but murdering fascists' and insists 'I don't have any constituency other than myself.' 'Bob Dylan said that to live outside the law you have to be honest,' he says, 'but I've always felt that, to live outside the law, you have to be rich.' A lawbreaker in the world of international diplomacy, he has over f 50m in his wallet and nobody has arrested him yet.

While unqualified praise is as stupid as unqualified hatred, it is also true that many of the criticisms of Live Aid can seem paltry and self-serving before the enormity of its achievements. It is regrettable, as one *Marxism Today* reader has already stated, 'that it requires a 15 hour ego-trip by the West's pop millionaires to squeeze money out of the relatively rich in order to stop the absolutely poor starving to death;' it is regrettable that Geldof resorted so freely to moral blackmail in order to get his performers to perform (Tears for Fears, who didn't, were blamed for the deaths of half a million

Africans); and it is regrettable that we are so inured to overseas suffering that we wait for people to die on tv before we notice they are in trouble. But for all that, without Geldof, how many more would be dead? When you're drowning, receiving a lifebelt is much more important than examining the moral pedigree of the person throwing it to you. Geldof's talk of the 'moral imperative' of 'mobilising the world against famine' is nothing new: what is new is that he's also getting people to listen.

Geldof's next major task, of course, is to work out a suitable follow-up. Already reckoned by some to deserve both a Nobel prize and a knighthood, already in receipt of the Order of the Two Niles (Second Class), an MA from the University of Kent and a handsome silver beer tankard from Dublin for his services to humanity, returning to a more mundane level of celebrity may prove difficult for him - although he insists it won't. Nobel prize recommendations will soon give way to brickbats as others look to the saint to fall from grace. By his own standards he has 'very, very little money' - a situation not helped by the continuing outmodedness of the Boomtown Rats and the fact that the last film he starred in - *Number One* - was a flop. 'Haloes get very heavy,' he says, 'and rust very quickly.' Getting known is no longer a priority for him, getting rich again still is. To do that and keep his halo clean really will take a miracle.