



**Are THE BIG
DISH a cross
between Peter
Skellern and
the JAMC?**

No, of course they're not. But they are a bunch of real rhyming, strumming tunesters and they want to do something about the

pap in the top 40

Story: **Eleanor Levy**



The **rm office** is often a battleground of verbal fisticuffs between rival musical encampments. In the red corner stand the 'hip' dudes whose arguments are peppered with names like Farley 'Jackmaster' Funk or Cameo, and remarks of the "Well, it's awfully big in the clubs, darling" kind.

In the blue corner stand those of us to whom little things like good tunes, 'human' instruments rather than some farting electronic beatbox and lyrics worth sticking on the inner sleeve still mean something.¹ *Listening* music against *dancing* music.

Each has its place, of course, its wheat and its chaff, but if the increasingly dance orientated charts are anything to go by, the 'Let's shake our butts, pull a 'chick' and spend the whole night sloshing' mentality is winning the race hands down.

Of course, there's nothing actually wrong with that, but would 'Gone With The Wind' have been the same if Clark and Viv had got down to it accompanied by the Beastie Boys?

Last summer the Big Dish seemed destined to prove one of the exceptions to this increasingly depressing rule. Their debut single 'Big New Beginning' was a magical swirl of guitar chords and smooth, passionate vocals about starting life over again in a new town.

The group hails from Glasgow, but as singer and songwriter Steve Lindsay is at pains to point out, they have no affinity with the 'Young Americans' influenced school of Glasgow pop-soul of the likes of Hipsway or Love And Money.

The Big Dish come via more diverse influences. Steve quotes *Wire* and *Magazine*. Imagine 'Shot By Both Sides' sung by Donovan and you have some idea of the band's epic, sprawling, "moving" sound.

Steve and new guitarist Bryan McPhie are well aware of the mass musical market's increasing susceptibility to mega-produced, short-life fixes of sounds aimed at the radio or the dance floor, rather than at quiet contemplation in your bedroom.

"You always seem to be looking at the charts these days and saying, 'God, that must be the worst chart I've ever seen'" says Steve. "I suppose everybody's done that at various times, but I looked at it a couple of weeks ago and I was convinced — it was the worst chart I'd ever seen. It's so dance orientated now. It means it doesn't have any appeal to be *in* the charts. It's getting more like the Eurovision Song Contest every week."

"Sinitta!" exclaims Bryan. "And with all that hip hop stuff as well. I don't understand that music at all. It means nothing to me."

"The Real Roxanne!" murmurs Steve. "God, I suppose it should make you think, 'Well, I believe in our music and I should be in the charts because it's better than that'. Only..."

It was one of 1985's cruellest jokes that neither the Big Dish's debut, nor the equally impressive follow-up 'Prospect Street', dented the commercially important end of the charts. Now the group is back, with a new line-up and

Steve says their record company **Virgin** views them as "thinking man's music". No doubt they wouldn't object to a few thinking women coming along too. Both he and Bryan share weighty ideals about the music they make — but are obviously scared of appearing too uncool about it.

"The music's crafted, as well as the lyrics, to be pretty moving," explains Steve, laughing self-consciously before adding, "without being too pretentious."

"A lump in your throat sort of reaction," adds Bryan. "It's something you don't often get from music nowadays, which tends to be such a thumping, harsh thing."

"The songs that stick out in my mind are really 'heart-rending' songs like Eric Carmen's 'All By Myself' or Roberta Flack's 'Killing Me Softly With His Song'," Steve continues. "These were records my older sister had, but they must have had some major effect on me because every time I hear them I just get..." (waving finger in a whirly direction around his stomach) "...in here."

"I'm the same with Peter Skellern's 'You're A Lady,'" says Bryan, grinning unashamedly. "It's brilliant! Everybody's got a low cred thing, but they don't like to admit it."

The Big Dish's first album is unlikely to rate on anyone's low cred scale, because 'Swimmer' is a beautiful collection of tunes and stories, held together by some intriguing vocals and guitar. But isn't 'Swimmer' a bit of a strange name?

"I decided years ago when I was at art school," explains Steve. "I had this concept in mind of 'Swimmer'. It was going to be the title of an LP, a song and a kind of backdrop. Just one of the strange things that you come up with. But I always stuck with it. So," turning to his partner, "the album was destined, Brian, to be called 'Swimmer'."

One danger the Big Dish face is in being lumped with a) other Glasgow bands (a very silly thing to do), or b) as 'just another guitar group'. Understandably, Steve denies any such connection.

"If you listen to the album, it is quite dynamic, but it's not as acoustic or strummy as the first two singles. I think if anyone does pigeonhole us, they'll be wrong. We've obviously got to think it's a bit special because we did it. Without being too precious, we'd like people to take it for what it is."

"It's been done in a very natural way," continues Bryan. "It's not been contrived. Categorising is just a cop out anyway."

"All the time we were doing the album," adds Steve, explaining how the record was redone three times, changing producer until they got one to fit the mood they wanted exactly, "I wasn't as musically competent as I am now, or as Bryan is."

"Not being a great player of music, you can create a certain charm. Now we *can* play, we try and have a cross between the two. So now, it's like a cross between sophistication — and punk!"

"Yeah," agrees Bryan, "a cross between