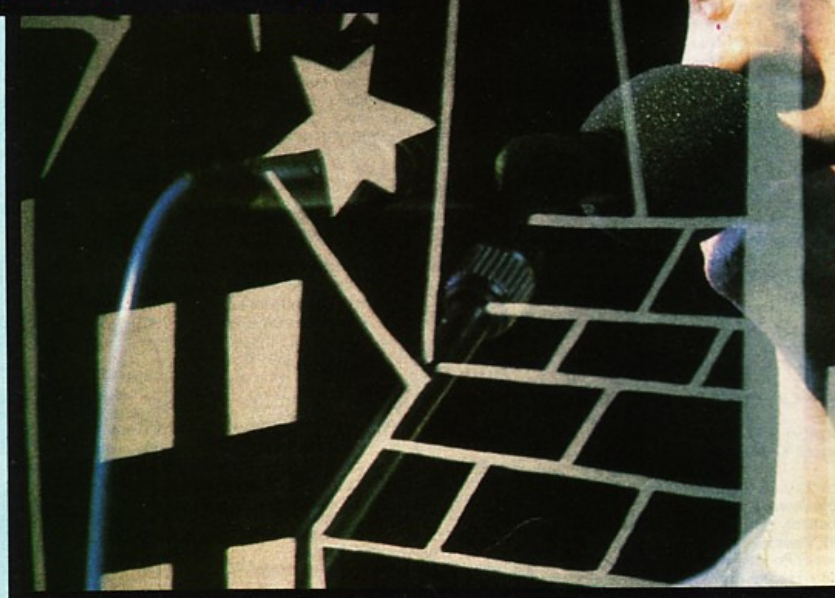


# LIVE



Photos by Patrick Quigly

▲ **FRANK CHICKENS, HANK WANGFORD BAND, BILLY BRAGG, APOLLO, MANCHESTER**  
Japanese Martians have short legs, big heads and inhabit nude restaurants. Frank Chickens claim to be two such creatures. Frank Chickens are prerecorded electrojaps, music and dance with frequent simple costume changes.

If they were English, Frank Chickens would be passed off as amateurs from the school of pretence, but as they're Japanese let's just say they are intended only for an enlightened minority.

The Hank Wangford Band ambled on stage to the 'High Noon' soundtrack, 'Do not forsake me, oh my darlin' — Hank, Bobby Valentino, Cissy Footwear, the Yodellers from French Lick, Indiana (think about it) and Big Mac the skinbasher. It's a veritable musical menagerie.

Hank addressed us warmly: "Friends, we are going to take you on a journey through the highways and byways of country music." And they did with honky-tonk numbers like 'Cowboys Stay Out Longer' and 'I Ain't Married, But The Wife Is'. There's even a commercial break to advertise their merchandise, Sincere Products, with a jingle called 'We're sincere', or 'Your Bucks Stop Here'.

Bobby Valentino, fiddle and mandolin player, was described as the best friend a song ever had. Fresh from Nepal where country music is king; who's top band? The Sacred Cowboys. 'Cow Cow Boogie' was dedicated to Maggie '...who is as sincere as she is lovely', quipped Hank.

'Never Wear Mascara If You Love A Married Man' and 'The Two-Time Polka' ended the set to enthusiastic applause. Eloquently humorous, and do I detect the faint odour of honest talent?

Bill-topper Billy Bragg, the Labour Party's secret weapon, broke a string during the first number, 'Busy Girl Buys Beauty'. The rest of the set list read like a Billy Bragg Greatest Hits album. I liked 'New England', 'Love Gets Darkest' and 'Milkman Of Human Kindness'.

I don't like politicopop. After about half an hour a lot of people had walked out. Maybe they were cold or just tired of it all, each song a diatribe aimed at some part of some establishment somewhere.

There were frequent plugs for the Red Wedge gig later this month and lots of fist-waving. To cap it all, the Apollo was freezing and I was glad to get away. As Mr Bragg said, "There are so many raincoats in here, I thought I'd walked in on an Echo And The Bunnymen gig."

■ John Slater