

# spare Rib

There's a lot more to be had  
than just the ribs  
A year

We will walk without their  
KEMPTON PARK

Mass London  
November 1971



For Today talking  
Sheffield Special

Children - sharing other people's opinions

It used to be that you had to be involved **BYE BYE**

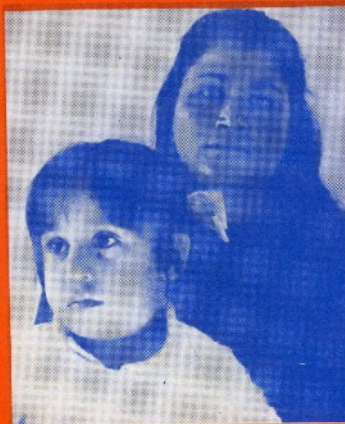
## COVER

Photograph by Angela Phillips IFL  
Reclaiming the Night, London,  
November 12th.

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Addressing the Israeli Parliament in November  
Egyptian president Sadat said that "the question of  
the Palestinians is the crux of the entire problem".  
He also reiterated that one of the conditions for a  
lasting peace is that Palestinians be given their own  
state on territory now held by Israel.

About 85,000 Palestinians live in camps in the  
Lebanon. On p42 Rosemary Sayigh talks about how  
the women cope with camp life.

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The rule is, Jam tomorrow  
and Jam yesterday—  
but never Jam today.

From *Through the Looking Glass*



# Jam Today

a feminist band, have been playing together for two years. They've now reached a turning point with four of their members about to leave. *Barbara Charles* talked to them about how they've developed and what problems they've faced.

**Barbara:** How did you get together originally?

**Frankie:** First Alison and Terry answered my ad in the London Women's Liberation newsletter in February '76. Alison said she wouldn't have responded if I'd said 'women wanted to form band', I just said 'women to make music with'.

**Alison:** I hadn't played my guitar for six years—I ended up learning the bass as we needed one.

**Terry:** Then it all snowballed from there with Angele, Corine, Josie and Deirdre joining us. We started playing loosely together and after a while feminism and the political potential of a band became more appealing.

**Barbara:** How did that potential develop?

**Terry:** We went through stages, we were all different musically and politically, but wanted to make music with women. We were an open group but had to become more closed as it became obvious some had more commitment than others. We came to realise we had to choose—and be chosen by—people we'd get on with musically and politically.

**Deirdre:** We did have a full band without being selective. It's just that when we didn't have a singer we thought why not get a good one.

**Frankie:** We felt strange about that and talked a hell of a lot about it—the whole thing about standards and on what basis

do we choose. There was a good singer who disagreed with us over abortion, so we couldn't work together.

**Terry:** At that point none of us had discussed abortion but had taken it that we all agreed with it.

**Alison:** We realised we had political as well as musical criteria.

**Barbara:** What were the musical criteria?

**Terry:** It's to do with different attitudes to music—some of us wanted to go over things getting them right and were committed to regular practices.

**Deirdre:** We mustn't be apologetic about the fact that we feel women casually jamming together isn't always enough for some.

**Angele:** If we did what people wanted it would be boring for us. We're just as involved in the musical side as the political—the music's got to be challenging for us as well.

**Frankie:** We have been criticised for being too professional . . .

**Alison:** Yes, it's absurd when women are taking something seriously. This criticism is directed at the arts more than mechanical things. Why are all male professional standards supposed to be completely thrown out for music yet not for, say, plumbing?

**Frankie:** It's really to do with questioning male commercial standards.

**Barbara:** Did you talk a lot about your musical and political differences?

**Terry:** We didn't make a conscious decision to have all the discussions we do. It started because we all liked each other, at first what would happen was that people



PHOTOS: CARO WEBB







*I don't want no reassurances of Jam tomorrow,  
There was no Jam yesterday and too much sorrow.  
In this wonderland of dreams never coming true,  
Women are wanting freedom now,  
What can we do?  
Be it housing, be it love, music, equal pay—  
No more false promises: Jam Today!*

Jam Today's lyrics

didn't want to leave after practices, we'd go into the kitchen and talk, then the talking became more structured and instead of having conversations we ended up having meetings.

**Frankie:** Finally we had a meeting once a week because we were spending so much practice time discussing.

**Barbara:** What issues did you make decisions about and did you all end up agreeing over them?

**Deirdre:** The politics of the band have always been the result of the attitude of everyone in it. We've had to compromise to work together, but also we've all changed.

**Terry:** Initially there was a lot of conflict about whether to do mixed gigs (*for both men and women*), but we felt by doing them we'd make more impact and reach more women, who didn't already know about the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM).

**Deirdre:** We really needed to branch out more, not remain in a close knit community.

**Frankie:** My attitude to women's culture has changed—while it's an important development it has to spread. I began to feel urgent about going outwards and playing for women everywhere, who might not otherwise see non-sexist, non-commercial women musicians. I started off reluctant to play mixed gigs because I only wanted to play for women—that hasn't changed—but it became obvious there was no other way to play to as many women as possible.

**Barbara:** What have your experiences been like at mixed gigs?

**Angele:** There's a lot more tension. A lot of the men feel threatened by their 'girl-friends' liking us. The women would come to the front and listen and tell their 'boy-friends' . . . well, not to claim them for a certain time.

**Frankie:** There've been great atmospheres at women only events, but some of our most valuable times have been at mixed gigs—there's been hostility and we've had to be strong together. There's been confrontation and violence, which isn't enjoyable but real because antagonisms have been exposed.

**Barbara:** What has wanting to play to a wide range of women meant in terms of your music?

**Alison:** Though we discussed playing to many women, like in prisons, borstals, youth clubs etc, it did become clear that the music we were playing limited our audience—it wouldn't appeal to all women. It wasn't possible to reach that huge vast range of women who don't share the same musical taste.

**Frankie:** But we've still widened our audience. We did a girls' youth club bop, that was a very positive experience—having a workshop with the girls where they had a go at all the instruments. We've also done several Women's Aid benefits.

**Barbara:** You've played a lot for women within the WLM, has that affected the kind of music you've done?

**Deirdre:** Our most supportive audiences are from the WLM, and they like dancing and want dance music.

**Terry:** We should explain that our dance music so far has involved a wide variety of music—rock, reggae, blues and funk, and some slightly jazzy material. But we've been labelled a rock band.

**Deirdre:** With most groups their audiences go to see them for their music, but a lot of our audiences come because of our politics and who we are—women. If we develop our music, supposing it became more jazzy, would some women stop coming because they didn't enjoy it so much?

**Terry:** That could sound patronising. Music is another area which involves learning and development, from which women have been actively discouraged. Also there's another point—in a heterosexual environment women are very conscious of the way people expect them to be, in a women only situation they can let themselves go more and that's why they like to dance.

**Alison:** Also people might listen to us more than we think.

**Diana:** At the Women's Aid party a lot of the women did sit and listen—we were playing dance music to a listening audience.

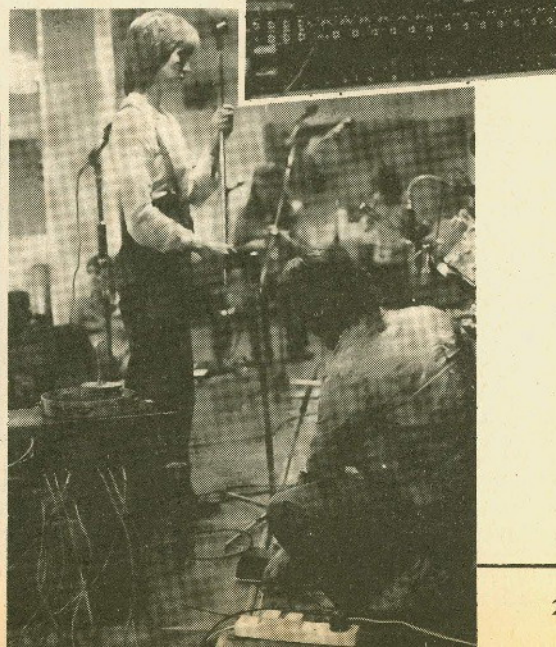
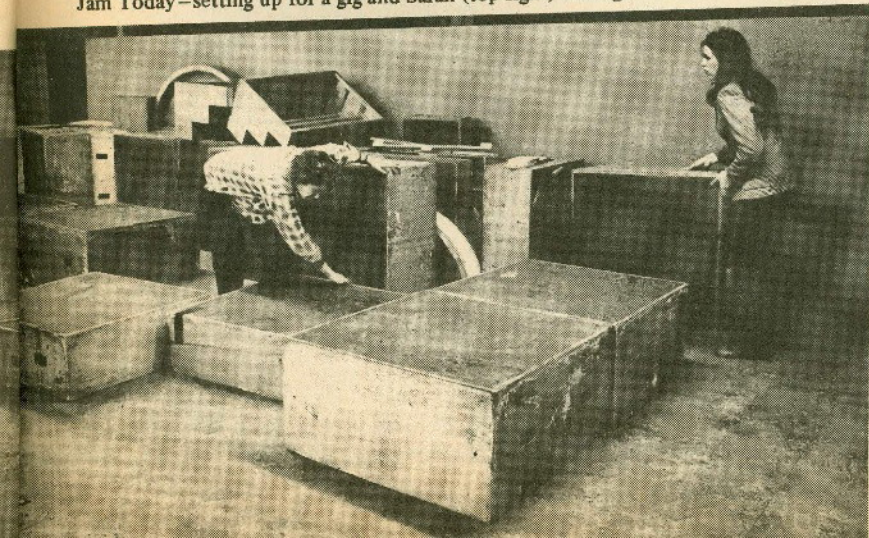
**Fran:** And at a Women's Aid benefit one of the women asked Diana if she'd sing the words to one of the songs on her own, 'cos she couldn't hear them.

**Diana:** That used to be a problem, but now we've been criticised for alienating the audience with our new PA system, which is ridiculous as it's there to enable us to communicate more clearly with them. Women have to work with technology in the field of music. Our means of existing as a rock band depends on resources that've been invented by men.

**Frankie:** And it's provided a context for Sarah to be a sound engineer in a



Jam Today—setting up for a gig and Sarah (top right) mixing





women's band. Some criticisms have been valuable but ultimately we've had to make our own decisions. Some people didn't like hearing the same things and others have said 'oh what's all this new stuff, play something we know'.

**Deirdre:** If there'd been more bands we could have shared more and done more new things. It's important to get more women playing.

**Angele:** That would ease the pressure on us—then we wouldn't be considered as the main feminist dance band.

**Terry:** That's not so easy—how can older women, for example, in an ageist society just start playing music?

**Frankie:** We can only be part of the process of more women growing dissatisfied with what they're supposed to be.

**Terry:** Anyway there were disagreements within the band, some members didn't want to work on lots of new material.

**Frankie:** There were other reasons—we just didn't have the time, there were always arrangements to make and practices for gigs.

**Barbara:** Has that been a problem . . . ?

**Frankie:** People seeing us playing see the tip of an iceberg. The administration—organising gigs, constantly ringing round, getting equipment mended, the van mended and never having enough money to do things easily, takes up a lot of energy. It's difficult to share things out equally among ourselves—we've had lots of rotas and rows.

**Barbara:** What's your financial situation been like?

**Terry:** Because we had to practice so much, we had to support ourselves, people gave up jobs. We've all paid to be in the band.

**Alison:** Very little income we get goes to us as individuals. For example if we get say £75 for a mixed gig, £10 is for expenses getting there, £10 for van insurance and about £5 for each of us—there are nine in the band. But this is misleading because now we are probably going to pay £500 to repair the van and we owe £1000 on the new PA so we can't take any money for ourselves. What we used to take didn't even cover expenses of getting to practices three times a week.

**Frankie:** There's the whole discussion that if women are paid that creates an elitist division between performers/non-performers. But the ideology of a situation can completely ignore our financial reality.

**Terry:** Sometimes we've had to argue with women about being paid.

**Frankie:** The idea is women should bring whatever they have to contribute to an event—with some people it's dancing and with others it's five hours work.

**Barbara:** What has your role in the band been, Fran?

**Fran:** I got involved through Alison—she's my sister. I helped with the equipment and operated the old PA amplifier at the first gigs, my role has gradually extended. But before we got the new PA I felt the band could manage without me, I didn't feel equal to the others who were musicians. Since the new PA my role's become more important—I've learnt a lot about electronics generally. I feel people don't realise what I do, because most of my work is done before and after the gig or in between. I set up the PA with Sarah and check all the equipment. It's important that I'm there during the playing in case there's an emergency like Frankie's drum pedal



From left to right: Terry, Frankie, Alison, Deirdre and Diana, at a Jubilee Party in Islington, London

falling off or a lead needing soldering.

**Barbara:** Sarah, how did you come to join the band?

**Sarah:** After two years as Henry Cow's sound engineer, where I learnt a lot but had always been at a disadvantage as a woman, the next logical step I thought naively, was to become a recording engineer. It soon became clear nobody was going to give me a chance. I approached all the big commercial studios and ended up in a back room at Pye Studios copying tapes of Max Bygraves. I left to work at Tom Newman's studio where he taught me for two years. I met Jam Today through the WL Music Project, we talked about an album and began recording at Tom's studio—my first independent project. My relationships with some of the men I had to work with reached breaking point, largely due to this. I was doing something alone and was happier and confident this way. I left and joined the band when they got the new PA and mixer.

**Barbara:** How have you changed, Deirdre, since joining the band—you'd played in commercial bands before?

**Deirdre:** When I first joined I'd never come into contact with feminism, only with how the press portrayed it. When you play with men it's everyone for themselves, there's a lot of competition and that rubbed off on me, in the sense that I looked out for myself and didn't rely on others in the band. With Jam Today what really impressed me and made me stay was how people were really concerned about each other and were interested in what you wanted to do. It was because of that that I started becoming interested in what

feminism was really about.

**Barbara:** Could you tell me more about the policies you've had?

**Alison:** We don't encourage men to come onto the stage because if they talked to us about the equipment it might discourage women who don't have the confidence to say something like 'I'd love to learn the drums, how can I go about it?' They'd think it was trivial after overhearing a man say 'How did you make that sound, with a blah, blah . . . ?'

**Deirdre:** Another principle was that no men should handle the equipment, it was important to show that we not only played the instruments but loaded the van, took care of the equipment and so on.

**Terry:** I've noticed a difference now in the attitude of the men who do come up, it's not 'do you want any help girls?', they know we can do it, they don't believe we need them anymore.

**Barbara:** What dissatisfactions have you felt within the band?

**Diana:** In some ways I've really progressed with the band, especially with the music we've done recently. I was previously working with another band, which caused problems, I felt I was splitting my life in two—I couldn't devote enough time to Jam Today to feel I was part of it. Another thing is that it's difficult working collectively and successfully, it depends on the balance of personalities in the group and when the balance is tipped the group can go wrong. I'd never worked with women before joining Jam Today and as a singer—not a musician!—I had to compromise in various ways. I'm leaving now to form another



Turn on the radio, then turn it off

every song that I hear is about love

loving and losing

no idea of choosing

gets to the point where it isn't enough

Our needs are wider than we ever dreamed

Love isn't enough

(Love isn't enough)

Here's your lunch

Run the bus wont wait

Ten to nine

Kids dropped at school

Will I make work in time

make work in time

(one pair of hands)

It's not self obsession to be caring for yourself

It's not because I'm smug I drink to my health

When the phone stops ringing you know there's no one else.

(Autonomy)

Josey and Angele recording

band because at this point I want to play standard jazz material. I suppose it gives me more space as a selfish vocalist to improvise, which I haven't been able to do because a lot of our arrangements are very tight—I've often felt they could have a freer form. It's very difficult to voice political statements through music without one being sacrificed to the other. Now I regard myself as a musician and when I work in mixed situations I won't accept any role which is expected of me and I do think I'll find it difficult working with men again.

**Deirdre:** I'm leaving for similar reasons. There isn't enough space in the way the songs are arranged for me to expand. I felt the role I had was using only part of what I could do. If I'd said I wanted to have solos that would have meant that somewhere somebody would have had to play less—there was quite a good balance between what each instrument did, but it just wasn't enough for me. It's not a decision I took quickly, I felt frustrated but didn't want to take space from others.

**Sarah:** Maybe your attitude to the role of the guitar has something to do with it—it's conventionally been used as a lead instrument requiring almost a backing band.

**Deirdre:** But there are basic differences between instruments, the guitar's been brought out as a lead instrument partly because of its qualities—you can't play chords on a sax, for example, but can on a guitar.

**Terry:** No, it's the hierarchical roles instruments have been given. The bass for example is a new instrument, it's only

starting to develop its potential. The instruments are equal, the inequalities are made by the people who play them.

**Frankie:** About dissatisfactions... I would've liked us to be more controversial and stimulating. I often hate it when I see men enjoying the music, as far as I'm concerned it's not for them and if we're acceptable within the status quo then I feel we've failed. I'm leaving partly because of the work load. It's a large group and keeping it going can be draining. I don't want to sustain that kind of energy or the life-style that's necessary. I feel that my life is lacking in other kinds of things. You have to think about the band all the time... I didn't want to go on doing that anymore.

**Alison:** Perhaps we could make it clear that the band isn't splitting up, though four people are going—that's including Josie who's already left in fact. Five of us are staying and feel a very strong commitment. It's a bit early to say exactly what the new band will be like—definitely things will change... it'll be a different line up and hopefully all original material. I'm excited about what we may do. From December we won't do any gigs until March, because we want to spend time working things out. We want the new people to be part of deciding the direction of the band. People may think it's those leaving that have all the dissatisfactions, that's certainly not true and we want the new band to incorporate the things we want.

**Fran:** I feel excited about the changes. Although there've been principles worked out in the past, there's come a

point I think when the direction of the band should be completely re-thought.

**Deirdre:** The band I'm joining isn't feminist, though it consists of women. But I don't feel I've gone through my feminist period and now I'm going back to being a musician—the songs I'll be doing won't have sexist lyrics, though they won't have the messages in them that the Jam Today songs had. Other women's bands can affect women by just being women's bands. Look at the impact Fanny had though they weren't feminists—they reached thousands of women, which Jam Today can't, by being commercial and getting publicity.

**Terry:** How have Fanny reached more women—by saying 'you too can be a superstar'? Most women who started playing an instrument as a result of seeing Fanny will have ended up being exploited and demoralised by the commercial music business. Some may have 'made it' but in any case that's not what we're about—supporting the exploitative music industry.

**Angele:** But Fanny actually showed the record buying public, who'd only seen male bands before, that there were women who could 'do it'—by going commercial. Jam Today, by not doing so, runs the risk of providing an 'in-service' for feminists and the converted left.

**Alison:** But you can't be part of the commercial music business without being exploitative. Most of us in the band are totally opposed to that and the way it exploits women and we'll continue to be so no matter how we develop as musicians. □