In the middle of their European tour, Wet Wet Wet have managed to wangle three or four days at home in their beloved Glasgow. The lads gather at a table in the poolside restaurant of the Holiday Inn, and although they don't advertise the fact they are famous pop stars, they somehow dominate the hotel, looking out of place amongst the grey-suited business people.

After a brief "Hello", guitarist Graeme Clark and keyboard player Neil Mitchell are shunted off to do some regional phone interviews. Drummer Tom Cunningham and singer Marti Pellow are waiting in room 219, eager to answer whatever questions are thrown at them as quickly as possible so they can get back to Clydebank and see their mates, their girlfriends and their families.

Wet Wet Wet's first recorded album, 'The Memphis Sessions', was originally rejected by their record company Phonogram, in favour of something more commercial. The result was the rather ambiguously titled 'Popped In Souled Out'. Perhaps because it was not the album they initially wanted to release, Wet Wet Wet included the follwing legend on the inner sleeve: *'We are first and foremost a soul band — not only in influence and direction; but more importantly in attitude and ambition. We feel the need to get as much of ourselves onto every piece of vinyl. A little piece of our hearts.'*

The early singles, 'Wishing I Was Lucky' and 'Sweet Little Mystery', hit the Top 10 and established the band, and Marti in particular, as favourites with teenage girls. Subsequent singles and their second album 'Holding Back The River', released late last year, were less poppy. But still many people are more likely to class Wet Wet Wet with the SAW teeny product bands than with even a white soul band like Simply Red. With an r&b single, 'Hold Back The River', about to be unleashed, mention of teeny pop and SAW makes Marti a wee bit angry.

"What makes us so different is that we produced our own album," he argues. "We write our own music, we direct our own videos, and have our own f***ing record company."

"When we started we *were* considered to be the new teeny pop band," adds Tom. "But slowly we've crossed over and we can manage to appeal to a lot more than just the kids."

So do they mind being stuck between pop and soul?

Marti: "It's the best world to have both audiences. Let's just face it, I bet you f***ing Mick Hucknall would give his right arm for it."

After spending years on the dole, struggling to make something of their band, Wet Wet Wet feel passionately about their music.

"It's great to have success. You can go and do all these things, see these countries, but the most important thing for us is to come back here. You can be a lot richer staying here than you can be travelling the world"

Tom: "I think you've got to be passionate about it because this business is full of so much rubbish. But we're passionate about other things as well, like Glasgow, Cultural City 1990."

While some bands appear rootless, Glasgow is at the very heart of Wet Wet Wet. Its people give life to most of their songs. Do Marti and Tom think the prestige of being European City Of Culture 1990 will revitalise Glasgow and bring the pride back to the Clyde?

Marti: "In an ideal world I hope it does something for the community, if it only brings work and makes people just a little bit more aware of what Glasgow's about, aye.

"But if you want to see Cab Calloway, for instance, in some small bar, then you can find him quite easily playing in Sauchiehall Street, because we have our own jazz festival now. The arts are coming to Glasgow because there's a hunger and a passion within the people, an anger, a striving, because they do want to make some money, they do want to put things back into the community, once proud for its shipbuilding. What is it proud for at the moment?"

If you needed proof that Wet Wet Wet really do care about Glasgow, and their fellow Glaswegians, you only have to look to the free concert they staged last year on Glasgow Green for 75,000 fans. This gave the City Of Culture celebrations a good start, and also helped Childline, the charity which had already benefitted to the tune of £½ million from the sales of their only number one hit, 'With A Little Help From My Friends'.

Wet Wet Wet have had to struggle to remain the same people, with the same friends, living in Glasgow, rather than moving to London. They keep their musical independence by having their own record company, the Precious Organisation, and simply having a licensing deal with Phonogram. But being famous does bring privileges not shared by their friends, as well as commitments which keep them away from home.

While their first single, 'Wishing I Was Lucky', was about a hunger for success, two songs in particular on the new album look at the downside. 'I Wish' is about wishing they could find time for the people and places they love, and 'Can't Stand The Night' explores the pros and cons of moving from the second floor to the penthouse suite, and trying to justify it.

Marti: "For instance, you're making x amount of money, and your dad's out doing a 40-hour week for some f***ing building contractor, and he's making 150 quid. You've got to come to grips with that. You're sittin' in your bed at night thinking 'Man, what's happening to me here?'."

Many songs are about their own experiences, but others are inspired by Glasgow life. Like other unemployment blackspots, Glasgow has a reputation for alcoholism, and the new single 'Hold Back The River' is about that socially-accepted drug.

Marti: "There's a wee pub called the Saracen's Head, the Sarry Head, or the Sorry Head. It's outside The Barrowlands gig. There's a drink in there called the White Tornado, which is like a cheap, nasty sherry. One day me and Graeme were in there havin' a few bevvies and we were talking to this guy. He was saying he used to go into The Barrowlands when it was a dance hall. He used to be a ballroom dancer in the Fifties, and he's an alcoholic now. He was telling us about alcoholism and then he just lifted up the White Tornado, turned to me, said 'There's no holding back this river,' and threw it back. I though 'Nice line man, I'll have that'. That's what the song's about, being blitzed and losing your youth to alcoholism and how much he regretted it. That inspired me to write the song. He's an old-time dancer, and as the lyric says, old-time dancers shouldn't die that way."

In person, Wet Wet Wet are strongly political. Marti repeatedly states his determination not to pay the poll tax. But many of their songs come across as love songs, with only an obliquely political message. Why don't they use their music to express their forthright views?

Marti: "Let's leave that to the Peter Gabriels and Stings of the world, who do it very well. There are innuendos within our lyrics which are very subtle, because we always think a whisper travels more than a scream will ever do."

Wet Wet Wet do lark about and seem to enjoy being pop stars. But their seriousness about the things they care about is persuasive. They believe in their music and they aren't afraid of saying so. Marti believes in it when he says, "We're a bloody good band who have great songs and a great singer." And there's only a little bravado in his voice when he says of their cover of 'Maggie May', "Rod Stewart treated her like a fat slag, Wet Wet Wet treated her like a lady".

And just in case anyone still thinks Wet Wet Wet are a throwaway pop band, Marti slams the message home.

"There's millions of albums to come out of this band. I want this band to go on to do great things. I want to be a rock dinosaur. I want to be a f***ing Elton John."

PRIDE OF THE CLYDE



Are WET WET WET another sell-out pop band, or are they really serious and caring people? Catriona O'Shaughnessy popped up to the jewel of the Clyde to find out