

Britain's biggest-selling quality daily

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In a ground-breaking audio-visual project of global dimensions called *1 Giant Leap*, Jamie Catto, formerly of Faithless, has united talents as diverse as Robbie Williams, Kurt Vonnegut and Baaba Maal

## Leap into the future



Neil McCormick on Pop

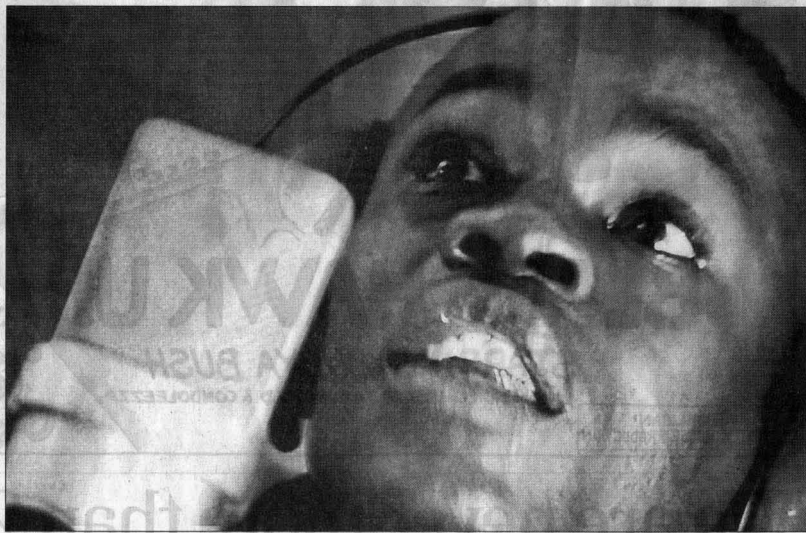
I should probably start with a friendly warning: prolonged exposure to Jamie Catto could blow your mind. Well, he blew mine, anyway. Although I was aware of his work as a founding member of dance supergroup Faithless, I met him for the first time recently for an interview about his new project, *1 Giant Leap*. Our midday encounter at record and film company Palm Pictures was scheduled to last an hour but I ended up staggering home from his north London flat at three the next morning, babbling about having seen the future of music.

I have had time to calm down since then but, actually, I still think *1 Giant Leap* represents a genuinely groundbreaking audio-visual project of global dimensions.

What could possibly connect pop superstars Robbie Williams, Senegalese singer Baaba Maal, American author Kurt Vonnegut, Body Shop founder Anita Roddick, REM vocalist Michael Stipe, spiritual guru Ram Dass, movie star Dennis Hopper, ambient boffin Brian Eno, reggae legend Horace Andy and Indian mandolin prodigy Srinivas? Nothing obvious probably springs to mind, yet, inspired by Catto and his musical partner Duncan Bridgeman, this eclectic bunch (among many others) have all contributed to a project that is part sonic adventure (an album fusing club grooves with diverse musical styles recorded on location around the world is released next month) and part philosophical quest (a film, mixing the music with fascinating interviews and striking footage constructed around grand themes of morality and spirituality will be released on DVD in March).

Making a multitude of inspired connections between disparate sources, *1 Giant Leap* is crammed with good ideas. To be honest, I find it exhausting just thinking about it. So I am going spiritually Catto try and explain it himself.

"The original plan was to



In time: Senegalese singer Baaba Maal is among the many contributors to *1 Giant Leap* with its myriad connections between disparate cultural sources

make an album and involve people who inspired us," he says. "We wanted it to be an expression of all the things that have turned us on. The best music connects you to that part of yourself that isn't alone. That's why it crosses so many divides. World music is an overused phrase, but we wanted to make music that really came from all around the world."

"But it is not only music that connects us but opinions and intelligent expression. So Duncan and I came up with some big subjects, such as God, time, death, sex, and thought if we could get people we admired to talk about them from different perspectives, we would be able to show the unity in all this diversity and at the same time celebrate the incredible diversity that came out of the unity."

Catto is a passionate, good-hearted, multi-talented, lateral-thinking 35-year-old cyber-hippie who can be inspiring and infuriating in equal measure. In conversation, he is likely to branch off at any moment into a discussion of Mesopotamian mythical archetypes or the problem of "elder male validation issues" among Jewish Lon-



Eclectic warriors: Jamie Catto, left, and Duncan Bridgeman

doners of his generation (a syndrome I suspect he actually made up himself).

Although not well known to the general public, Catto has a reputation in the British music business as a creative wizard. He wrote songs (including the classic *Don't Leave*) and played various instruments with Faithless over the course of their first two albums; he worked as art director for their label Cheeky; he has directed a number of acclaimed videos (including Skinny's *Failure* and Faithless's *God is a DJ*), composed film scores with Bridgeman, worked with a company creating interactive computer concepts and has edited several books (mainly spiritual self-help manuals, such as the works of British acupuncture guru the Barefoot Doctor).

He has also (and this is the infuriating bit) made a great

deal of excellent music (including a solo album and a legendary, all-star, improvised chill-out album known as *The Happening*) that has been widely circulated but never officially released. Because, Catto says, he hasn't got the time.

He amicably left Faithless two years ago when the *1 Giant Leap* project started to come together. Palm Pictures, a company set up by Island records founder Chris Blackwell, suggested the duo expand their concept to include a film for which they would travel the world recording on location. The tools involved were simple: a digital camera, a laptop computer and a 12-volt battery-operated mixing desk.

"It meant we could set up a 36-track digital studio in the desert. In Uganda, we recorded and filmed a giant

xylophone, which took eight people to play it. In a pit in their village. And rather than just gathering samples and coming back and chopping it all together, the players could hear what some drummers in Ghana had already done and add their bit, so it was a genuine collaboration."

He was fearless in approaching his heroes for their contributions. "I've always been a big believer that if there's someone you really like, get in touch with them. Because the likelihood is that they're probably not busy that afternoon and would be quite flattered, and if you're sincere they'd probably get a lot out of meeting you."

They spoke to scientists, philosophers, comedians, political activists, authors, film stars and musicians. Actor Harry Dean Stanton was a rare refusal. "He said 'F\*\* off and hang up. I think I might have woken him.'"

Remarkably, money was not an issue during their travels. "We didn't have a budget. Palm Pictures just said, call us when you need more. There was a lot of bribery going on. To get our gear across certain borders we had to 'bush the cash.' In the event, the project cost £130,000, which, Catto points out, is "about the cost of the average rock video". And he insists that everyone was properly paid. "These people are used to being

exploited, but we're musicians, not record company executives, we didn't care how much we spent. So we decided to pay everybody London session rates, whether they were in India or whether it was Michael Stipe in L.A. Money is not what it's about. I hope it does well enough so the big machine lets us do something else, that's the only important thing. So we can carry on working."

What Catto might be working on next is anybody's guess. He is constantly firing off ideas, from the sublime to the ridiculous. He wants to start a campaign to get sign language taught on the national curriculum ("You can communicate across a crowded room, it brings deaf people into the community and it would unify Europe, 'cause signs are the same in any language") and thinks London Underground should get artists to paint the carriages of their trains. "You would go to work on a piece of art. And then when all the trains came off the line they could be hung up in Tate Modern."

The strange thing is that, after a while, you are likely to start agreeing with him. At least, until you wake up in the morning and consider what life would be like if you had to go to work on a Tracey Emin. I think that was when I realised how dangerous talking to Catto could be. Don't say I didn't warn you.