THE BRITISH INVASION:

I get knocked down, but I get up again.

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Chumbawamba singing at a capella TFF Rudolstadt 2012. The event happened on July 8, 2012.

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Hello again, it's another edition of British Invasion, the column that explores British music history. Today, we're looking at the anarcho-punk band Chumbawamba, from their working-class beginnings to their tubthumping peak and folksy end.

In the distant past (1982) two boys, Allan "Boff" Whalley and Danbert Nobacon, formed their own band with two other mates in Burnley, Lancashire. Those two mates eventually dropped out and the band added Lou Watts, Alice Nutter, Dunstan Bruce, Harry Hamer and Mavis Dillon to their lineup. Over time, the band swelled to eight members, as people dropped out and others came into the fold, such as Jude Abbott and Neil Ferguson, two other long-time members of the band.

Early Chumbawamba sounded like your ideal anarcho-punk band. All the members squatted in an abandoned house in Leeds; they wrote about causes such as animal rights and the anti-war movement, organizing benefit concerts for those movements; and in true punk fashion, none of the members really knew how to play their instruments. What's not to love?

A major turning point in their politics came with the 1984 British Miner's Strike, which forced them to re-examine their stances as they transitioned from their previous anarchist beliefs into emphasizing collective action against a common opponent — Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Whalley described this period as "a process of unlearning some of the insular and anti-social ideas we'd picked up from an insular and anti-social movement" in an interview with the Jacobin.

Throughout the 1980s, Chumbawamba released a slew of albums under their own label, where the lyrics were politically minded yet musically unique, as the band released a folk record, "English Rebel Songs 1381-1914," and they began incorporating electronic music in the early 90s after experiencing a few raves. Their 1986 debut, "Starving Children Sell Records" was a criticism of Bob Geldof and his organization Live Aid.

After 10 odd years in the business, Chumbawamba signed with an indie label and experienced their most successful album to date with 1994's "Anarchy," which reached the top 30 in the UK. Unfortunately, their next record, "Swingin' with Raymond," didn't reach the same heights, which brought the band back to the drawing board, who came back with material that their label rejected for not being punk enough.

In a cruel twist of fate, EMI Records liked what they had and were willing to give them six figures for it. Chumbawamba must have been astonished that EMI was willing to sign them, given their previous history of criticizing the label for its ties with a weapons manufacturer and apartheid South Africa, but appreciated the opportunity to reach a larger audience with their songs.

Even if hardcore fans admonished the band for the major label move, the band became more outspoken in response to this move. Their major label debut, 1997's "Tubthumper," featured a more pop sound but still sneaked in working-class anthems, such as the lead anthem "Tubthumping," or took aim at those who preach values they don't practice, like in "The Good Ship Lifestyle."

Chumbawamba got plenty of attention in the papers too: after Nobacon poured a jug of water over John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, at the 1998 BRIT awards, or after Virgin Megastore took "Tubthumper" off the shelves after Nutter wrote on the band's website telling fans they can shoplift from the big chain stores if they didn't have enough money to buy the album. General Motors paid the band $70,000 to use a song of theirs in an ad — which got redirected back to anti-corporate activists CorpWatch and IndyMedia, who began information and environmental campaigns about GM.

If their antics weren't enough to get them dropped from EMI, they surely got the boot after their follow up "WYSISYG" selling less than 1% of the three million records "Tubthumper" cleared.

After EMI dropped them, Chumbawamba eventually became a full-on folk band and they cut down to an acoustic only lineup in 2005, when Nobacon, Nutter, Hamer and Bruce left the band. The remaining members recorded and toured a few more folk records, before splitting up in 2012, as everyone went off to do their own thing.

Even if Chumbawamba disbanded in 2012, they weren't done just yet. On April 8, 2013, they sent out the EP "In Memoriam: Margaret Thatcher" to commemorate the former prime minister's passing the same day. The EP was available for pre-orders back in 2009, ready to be mailed out when the time came.

It was a fitting cap to the legacy of Chumbawamba, who bowed out by celebrating the passing of one of the most polarizing politicians in Britain. In a statement on their website, and reported on by punknews.org, the band described the occasion as "a cause to celebrate, to party, to stamp the dirt down... If we must show a little reverence and decorum at this time, then so be it. Our deepest sympathies go out to the families of all Margaret Thatcher's victims."

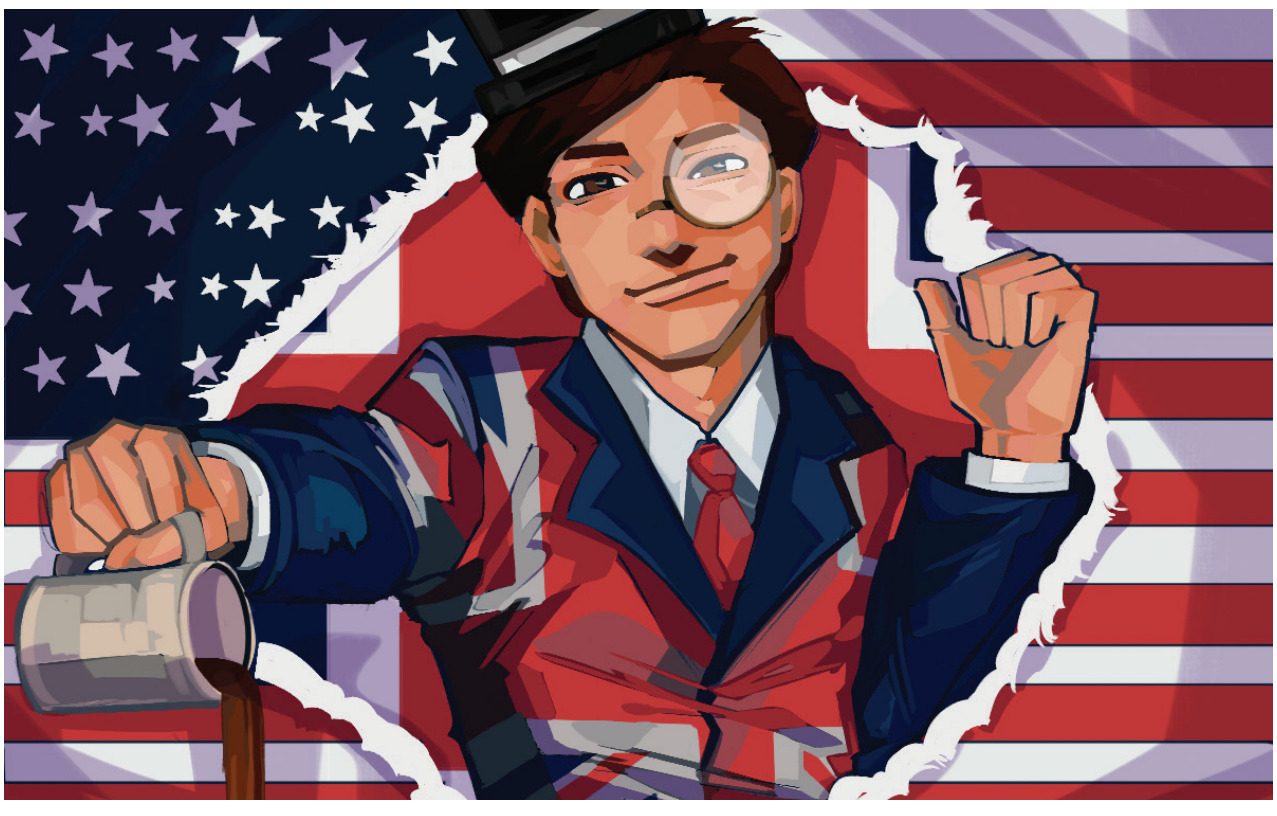
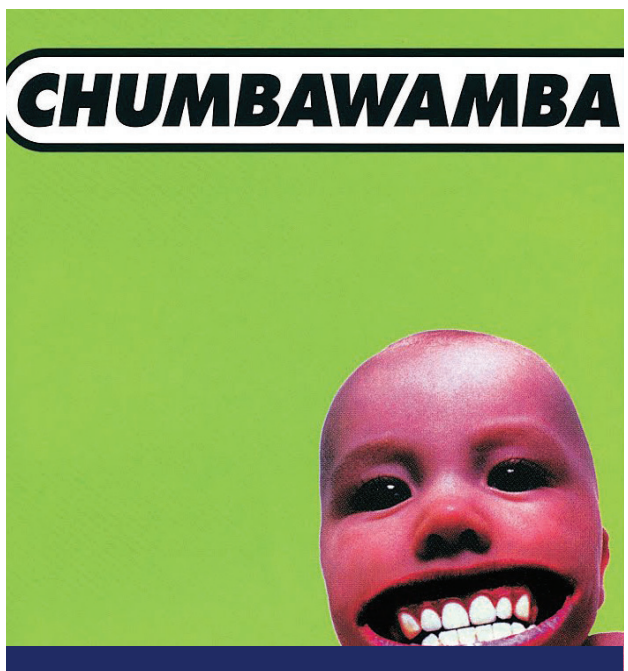


ILLUSTRATION BY ESHITHA RAO



Cover art of Outsider by Chumbawamba for their single, "Tubthumping." The single was nominated for the Best British Single at the Brit Awards 1998.

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