



DANCEHALL SWEETHEARTS: From left, Eamon Carr, Barry Devlin, Charles O'Connor, Jim Lockhart and Johnny Fean in the 1970s

Hot? The Horslips gig should be smokin'

THE news that Horslips are re-forming for two concerts in December is the best I have heard all year. If this seems excessive, it can only be because you weren't there when the Dancehall Sweethearts trod the boards and changed the lives of those who saw them.

Horslips wrought a revolution in the way pundits claim the PDs did – except that people actually liked them. When live rock'n'roll was still illegal outside the capital, they played in every barn in Ireland, bringing to the furthest corners of the land a music-with-attitude that, like all great rock'n'roll, caused you to look up and say,

'Did I hear that?' They were original and loud and stylish and smart and exotic and mysterious. They were cool in a cold climate, where greyness ruled and the nearest thing to music was karaoke versions of Queen songs.

Horslips allowed my generation – the first not to leave Ireland in 130 years – to understand the nature of its desires, giving us a glimpse of what was possible.

We were not fans but a tribe. I heard bassist Barry Devlin say on the radio the other day that they appealed mainly to males but this isn't quite right. They appealed also, and enabled us to appeal in a different sense, to the

kind of female we were normally too terrified to talk to – the kind with stars on their brows and patches on their jeans. For once you could honestly say: 'Isn't the band mighty?'

The girls went for Charles O'Connor, the black-haired wizard of fiddle and mandolin, but we lads could not take our eyes off Johnny Fean, the coolest axeman the world has ever seen. It is essential that the Government sanction a special relaxation of the smoking ban for the band's O2 concert on December 5. I don't know if he still smokes but the idea of Fean without a fag in his mouth is like the idea of Devlin without his shamrock-shaped bass.