

# Mike Chunn Interview Part 2

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Although the press and publicity they'd gathered had been on the whole fairly small, the reaction from other artists had been good. Boz Scaggs had told Phil Judd he liked the album, while members of the Tubes and Darryl Hall of Hall and Oates had gone to the trouble of letting Split Enz know how much they had enjoyed their shows.

In March, Michael Chunn flew back to Auckland to spend some time with his wife, Paula and son, Nicholas and also to recruit a new guitarist. Alistair Riddell was the band's first choice. "Everybody was hoping he'd join so they delayed advertising in England until he'd made up his mind. Alistair took 10 days to decide and then gave us a no. So they rushed off an ad into Melody Maker in Britain.

"I arrived after they'd had 60 phone calls and the whole thing looked pretty dull and chaotic. Half the group had nowhere to live and Mushroom had tightened up on the money."

But it wasn't the chaos that brought on Michael's decision to leave. "I was going to leave early in 1978 but when I arrived in England the place was in such a mess and just so disorganised. So I suggested that they might as well get Neil Finn, Tim's brother, over to replace Phil. Everyone was verging on the idea of doing it, so I just kicked them in the arse and they did it.

"There was about 5 days until Neil came when nothing could be done so I thought: this is it. I wouldn't have quit if there hadn't been someone to move into my place but Malcolm had a friend who'd been playing in a band called Carmen. Malcolm gave him a call and the next day he was practising with them. So I had no guilt feelings that I'd upset the whole works, whereas later on it would have meant yet another session of them teaching someone the songs. Now they could teach two people at once.

"I don't think anyone was really very surprised. All the others in the band being single has a lot to do with it. As someone once said to us, a band is only as happy as the girls in the band and with children it just doesn't work.

"I had decided to leave because of what I was talking about with Phil before: the fact that we had no control at all over what we were doing. It's a very ordered existence. While some in the band like it that way and enjoy having everything done for them, to the ex-

**"A financial breakdown could kill them . . . but audience interest will never die."**

tent of someone washing their underwear, I like to be quite independent. I found that my brain was doing very little. My fingers were plunking away O.K. but we were playing "Stanger Than Fiction" and I'd been playing that since '73 and I was extremely sick of it. And there's just no room to move inside the pace the group's going."

The geographical problem also lies at the heart of the problem that faces an NZ band in England. "Phil Manzanera has an ideal set-up in that he's based in London and he can live at home. He's got a nice house, nothing fancy, with his wife and he can just go into town to do the concert and then come home. But we had to live together for economic reasons and that's not easy, especially when you've been living with the same people since early '75. You just get to know them too well. There was no privacy and no control over what you're doing.

"Your whole future's a big blank



until someone says 'Right, next month we've organised such and such', and they have to do that because the band's very much in debt.

"I was very sick of the whole thing. I'd really had a stomach full because I'm not the sort of person who likes to have everything done for him and I wanted to be with Paula and Nicholas but financially it was disastrous to do that because of air-fares. The group's so mobile it was totally impractical.

"And really it wasn't my life; it wasn't the thing I had to do: to play music in the bid to be famous. I like playing music and I always will. I don't mind playing in the toilet if necessary. I don't mind the conditions under which I play even though I agree that the standards Split Enz set were one of the main reasons it was so successful.

"But I'd just had enough of the pace of the whole thing and living away from the family. I wanted a change of style of music too, I just couldn't stand playing "Stanger Than Fiction" again on stage. Basically I'd just had enough of that band.

"I'd had two ambitions in the group and until I achieved those I felt I wouldn't be happy. I wanted to play on an English stage and to go to America and now I'd done those. And suddenly I didn't have any urge anymore to do anything. I didn't even want to do the next album and I don't think that's a temporary thing. Admittedly, if they became very successful I'd be envious but then I'm envious of anyone who does that and I know to become successful like that, I'd have had to go through all the crap of living in hotel rooms and interviews and the same old things over and over. For regardless of how big you are you still have to do these things.

"I have no qualms about anything I've done. I'm sure I'll always be saying I did the right thing at the right time. After all I've been playing with them for 5 years, so I don't think anyone can complain."

When Phil Judd left after the American tour, Split Enz not only lost a guitarist and occasional vocalist, but also their major songwriter and perhaps the person most responsible for their distinctive style. Hadn't that been a serious worry to the band?

"Yeah, that initially was a worry but I have confidence that the other group members can pull out songs of a pretty good standard. Maybe they won't be as interesting as Phil's, especially in the lyrics where Phil was particularly gifted, but then the melodies of the songs were usually Tim's and that's what often gave them their sparkle. Overall, I don't think people will miss Phil's lyrics. It's a thing people like when it's there but if it's not, they won't worry. They won't dislike the songs. I heard four of the songs before I left and I think things will be O.K."

But on the next tour of NZ, it seems we're likely to notice differences greater than just two new members. The new material too, will be different. "The new songs are written by Tim and Eddie and they're much more simple than Phil's songs. They're not like his songs, things like "Late Last Night" or "Sweet Dreams". They're not like that."

With Phil Judd now earning his living as a songwriter will Split Enz take any of his new material? Mike seems uncertain. "They'll probably use some of his old ones but at the moment they're keen on doing their own and that's what they'll concentrate on.

"The choice to do simpler songs is I think partly due to . . . well, I don't know how capable they are of writing things like "Stanger than Fiction" or "Nightmare Stampede". Also, after America Tim especially felt the need to get back to some simpler music because people there found the music pretty difficult to pick up on.

"I think the next album will be very interesting especially with Neil Finn on

guitar. It'll be quite a different sound I think. They needed another good singer because Tim's voice is too dominant. The review of the album in *Rolling Stone* was right when they said that Tim's got a sprightly poppish voice whereas Neil's got a stonger more mellow voice. So I think there'll be a good balance.

"Also's Tim's got very good at handling an audience. On the US tour he developed very well as a frontman and I think you'll notice the change when they play here in September."

And what of the future for Split Enz? They've just finished recording their new album. The producer replacing Phil Manzanera is triple Grammy award winning engineer, Geoff Emerick. He's worked on all the Beatles albums from *Rubber Soul* onwards and lately has worked with Supertramp, Robin Trower and more particularly Paul McCartney.

"He's the new one mainly because Phil Manzanera was touring with Bryan Ferry, and also the band felt they wanted someone with more experience at producing and Geoff's done a hell of a lot. He's been going since the early '60's. He heard the tapes and was quite keen and the album will be a co-production job with the band probably."

Mike himself is unsure of the band's future. All he'll guess is, "Anything's possible. The greatest danger for them, I think, is that the record company or management could decide that it's not worth pumping more money into the band. A financial breakdown like that could kill them but I don't think audience interest will ever die."



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## ROCK TV

## Rock Follies

It was a surprise to us all when it first appeared on the Box (at a suitably late hour of course — the Channels like to screen their 'adult' viewing after ten) . . . those naughty words, that knowing argot, those facts of modern life that just are not discussed in tellie-land here. From the jazzy credits to the crisp style (one or two degress off realism — expressionistic even) it was something strikingly individual on the old down-under wavelengths.

Perhaps someone had made a mistake in the planning department? Or were there winds of change sweeping the corridors of electronic power?

Whatever the cause, we're always grateful for small mercies. We liked the way Howard Schuman had put this whole thing together. It was disjointed of course; but that was a relief after all those hours of carefully-crafted Drama from the mother-country. And the Little Ladies themselves — neatly contrasted in terms of sexiness and social milieu — they could all act, and Julie Covington can even sing.

The only trouble was, the series was

over almost before it had begun. It had ended on an up-beat too. The moment of exhilaration when a new rock-form was born (Austerity Rock — it took psychological insight to realise that the English might still be made to feel nostalgic about the good old days of deprivation); the denouement in The Blitz Club, with patrons being served their 'rations' and the aftermath of the bomb explosion still hanging like an enigma in the air, so to speak . . .

Meanwhile, back in London, there were those that frankly hated it! New *Musical Express* rechristened the series the Schlock Jollies, as they grilled Schumann and Roxy's 'sax object' Andy McKay. And Suzi Quatro, in a huffy piece in *New Musical Express* confided that it didn't take her long to realise that she was watching 'yet another cut-em-off castration of "Girls in Rock"'. She said it wasn't realistic — that it gave Rock a bad name. That looked to me like missing the point. Satire is not meant to be realistic. And anyway, an affectionate element is often there in that kind of humour.

Dear Auntie Broadcasting: if you want to give us a present, please give us another chunk of 'Rock Follies'. We know it wasn't perfect . . . it was naughty . . . and a little bit silly. But we loved it! Honest we did!

**Bonar Weatherall**