

Waves
Surface with electric licks



Rex Carter, Dave Marshall, Mike Mason, Kevan Wildman and Graham Gash.

Waves in a pumphouse, earthen brick, bodies thickly wrapped huddled warm on the floor, cold cutting night on a lakeside.

Scattered up front, just as many electric instruments as wooden, an upright boogie piano in the corner.

Exactly a week later I have Kevan Wildman and Dave Marshall cornered in their loft in a downtown building where the band unceasingly practised, surrounded by heaped, empty freight crates. We are slouched around the piano.

Appropriate opener in this cosy Pumphouse, North Shore's intimate locality of the arts, is up-and-coming Malcolm McCallum — a buddy of Waves. He deals out his originals with compelling personification of real life; perceptive feelings from the stomach; clever compact playing with strong convincing vocals.

Even with phlegm clogged sinuses the smell of burning hay wafts about the old time building and wine bottle swigging is in order. On stage they amble, seating themselves on high school chairs, Graham Gash in factory overalls and slippers with Wildman being introduced as the band's sex symbol, Marshall immediately hangs his straggly blonde head over the frets of his Ovation and lets his fingers fly. The band — with its new fractions, bass player Michael Mason and drummer Rex Carter — now loosely shuffle us into their evening of fresh offerings, with a somewhat more electric edge.

Publicly surfacing with strong urges to circulate more, the three year old band have a surplus of ripe new-fledged songs. "We'll have to do another album shortly . . . our songs will become stale . . . for they will lose their immediacy . . . in fact we have too many. After the album we will tour the country," says Wildman. The group is humming and herring about pub work, considering the pressures it would put on their elaborate arrangements. Marshall resolves: "People want to hear what they know, our songs take a few hearings for you to get into them. It gets very disheartening when you are

singing your own stuff, and for people it is background music."

With all-out electric songs such as "Vegas" and their augmented punchy rhythm section, Waves could just be the 'pick me up' that the musically bland, pub-piss-jug-drool, needs.

Plucking bass with bite and more electric guitar lines being overlaid on their acoustic themes, Wildman now always with a bottle slide on his finger, wailing subtle frills all through the night. With their ripe batch of compositions, electric and acoustic instruments are being picked up and put down constantly.

"We want to retain the acoustic thing but are exploring electric playing, we have got it blended in some songs and not quite there in others," explains Marshall. "We are trying for a sort of mixture, develop the song so that it builds. Playing acoustic and electric are two different things," Wildman adds.

Their first album was characterised by applying an electric technique to an acoustic guitar. They reveal that it is easy to become messy using both electric and acoustic sounds.

The previous bassist worked around a laid back style; they developed through that with him. The new bassman is described as "thinking in a more jazzy, dynamic way, and is into progressive bass playing. He feels that bass is one of the most neglected areas in music, he is trying to do something about it."

They want to make their music more accessible and maintain a higher energy level as well as admitting that they need to get more consistency in performing live and feeling out an audience. "I would like to start an evening with an electric number. Walk on stage, wham hard with super charged energy, the best you can give, then go right down with an acoustic passage. The recent concerts have been an easy, comfortable build up. Getting onstage is showmanship, its like being Muldoon," Wildman declares.

Marshall maintains: "The average New Zealander's taste doesn't go into very adventurous stuff. When you have

a limited population you can't live off doing concerts. Earning a buck is the compromise and sacrifice."

The songs are corner glimpses of life, metaphoric imagery, sketches around neuroses, the guy along the road who is spooked because he thinks he has demons in his house, "Ocean Neon", "Schooners", (traits of their seaweed image), "Party Pooper", "Second Honeymoon for Mr X" and one of their ripping swayers — "Harry Rock Star Meets his Match". Musically dexterous and co-ordinated, their glowing clear vocal harmonies rap you in goosepimpled feelings. Doing their classic — "Arrow" — written by Wildman, he forgets a couple of lines: "while playing it, I thought 'what the hell am I playing this for, I get lost in it,

done it untold times, we enjoy doing it though."

The flavourings and extensions are evolving, with Marshall playing harp, Wildman always sliding on his guitars and Gash often venturing over to the upright piano in the corner. There is also talk of gongs and triangles. These diversifying ingredients are not causing Waves to waver and waffle from their wooden roots which they love. As always there are three acoustics serenading and picking, now it is pumped along with funk bass and a full kit of drums.

All in the early half of their twenties, there is nothing fancy about their presence, just undressed friendliness. "We seem to be able to write songs," says Dave, "we might as well play them, if people don't mind listening. We are not expecting everyone to like the different areas we are moving into. We are not playing up to the public, and 'hoping for the best.'" Echoes Kevin: "What we are is pure self indulgence," he goes on to say: "It's like going out on the sidewalk with some chalk and drawing an expressive picture and everyone comes around saying, 'shit look at that', it's the same thing, you've got to have the guts to go out and do it."

Most of their sound still touches you in a delightfully playful way, just as the joker who is sitting next to me remarks: "You float with it."

Just when their lengthy concert wanes, with seat restlessness setting in and you are trailing behind in their more elongated and hollowed pieces, the lift you seek comes from their new fired rhythm.

Tailing off the rocking peak the concert is coming to, McCallum joins his mates and leads them through two of his swing numbers.

Exciting out into the night chill, it is with a well fed feeling.

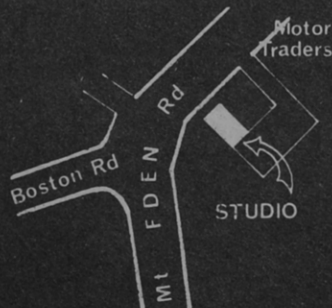
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