

LOU'S STILL ALIVE

And There's Nothing You Can Do About It

Just what do you ask Lou Reed when you're given the chance? The press kits don't give any clues — Reed was laughing when he read through one later: "characterised by urban malice . . . ah, malaise. Jesus, I wish they'd told me". And, after all, this was a third tour and there'd been press receptions before and Lou's pretty much Lou all the time, depending on which drug he's on.

And yet about 30 people turned up at the press reception in Auckland. There weren't to be any individual interviews. Instead everyone was to form into something like a firing squad. But who was the target? Reed was going to videotape the interview — one of the band would operate the video.

The questions began well enough, someone asking him about the poetry prize he had received. He had been one of five poets to be presented an award by Senator McCarthy.

And then, an obvious question, too obvious.

"Will you be playing any new songs at the concert?"

"Of course not."

"Why not?"

"You might enjoy it . . . I'm just going to do exactly what I did last time. And that's the same answer I gave to that question last time too. Jesus . . ." Mumble, mumble.

Somebody asks about the video.

"Are you filming this for a particular reason?"

"This is for a BBC biography of the death wish."

"Your death wish?"

"No. Yours."

Laughter.

Reed's next album is titled *Street Hassle* and has been recorded in binaural sound (he calls it "a new German technique"), rather than stereo. The technique really isn't new — it preceded stereo and was first demonstrated at the Chicago world's fair of 1933-34. To explain it simply, binaural sound can be thought of as the sound recorded by a pair of microphones placed at exactly the same distance apart as the human ears. The result is far more realistic than stereo where the sounds are recorded with the microphones a far greater distance apart. When someone speaks into the left microphone in a binaural recording it sounds as though they're speaking into your left ear.

Until recently binaural sound has only been effective when played back through headphones; when played back through loudspeakers it sounded just like a single-channel recording. Now a special processor makes the binaural effect possible through a pair of loudspeakers connected to an ordinary stereo system.

"You'll want to have my new album just to hear the glorious sound . . . you close your eyes and you're there."

"People . . ."

"I'm serious."

"People have been saying that about stereo for years."

"Well I'm saying that about this. I mean . . . you know me, I'm not kidding. That's true. You do know me and I don't kid like that. It's really true. Close your eyes, you're there. 360° sound. There's no left and there's no right."

"But it's played from a regular system?"

"Yeah, yeah. It's amazing. Absolutely the most amazing thing I've ever heard in my life. Just amazing."

"Are you the first person to do this . . . out of Germany?"

"Ah . . . there've been some small unknown groups who've taken a crack at it but the records haven't got outside Germany . . ."

"Since you've taken it back to the States have you managed to enthuse anybody else about it?"

"No. I'm proud to say that I've been fought on every level . . . because there's a lot of money invested in stereo. But I think everything's going to be binaural soon."

"Whereabouts did you cut the album?"

"At my mother's place with a fork about that big."

Silence. A run-down of what's on the new album.

"Do you figure the record company will put any of the tracks out as singles . . . ?"



"I think it's choc-full of singles. Choc-full!"

Mumble, mumble. He lowers his voice: "My God! I never thought we'd hear Lou Reed say 'choc-full'. He's as pure as Griffin's snow. It's amazing. How can we have been so mistaken about him before?"

Silence. A cough.

"Are you using the same musicians on *Street Hassle* that you're touring with?"

"Yep . . . yep."

"And they're your regular band now?"

"Yep . . . as they have been. The unheralded few."

"How long have you been with these people?"

"It's going on three years now. It's just 'cos nobody's told them yet."

Laughter.

"So why did you come to New Zealand?"

"Money."

"Is that why most people come to New Zealand?"

"Well after looking around here I'd have to say 'yes'."

Silence.

"Lou . . . on your previous visits here you've been very reluctant to hold press conferences. I wondered why there'd been a change — obviously a major change — of attitude now?"

"How do you figure that? I didn't say I was happy to have this."

"Who decided that you would have it?"

"Don't I have one every year during the summer solstice?"

The point is missed.

"What? Here? Or overseas?"

"Overseas is America."

And missed again.

"You have an annual press conference overseas do you?"

"No. That just went full circle to nowhere. I'll let you start again."

"The question originally was . . ."

"Whose question?"

"My question . . . originally was . . ."

"Since it's yours you can start from scratch as though there was no original question. Why don't you just ask me whatever your question is?"

"The question is: on previous visits to New Zealand you've been reluctant to have a press conference . . ."

"That's not true."

"Isn't it?"

"No."

"You've actually held them?"

"Certainly."

"Here? In Auckland?"

"Absolutely."

"Never in Auckland."

"Yes I did."

"Where? Here?"

"Yeah."

"What . . . what year?"

"Seventy . . . five."

"Was that on your first visit?"