

Alan Parsons is a professional polite person. As he says himself, "There's a whole lot of bluff in producing — you give them a technical reason for not doing something when it's really a creative reason, even if the guy is singing totally flat." Equally, I guess, you chat politely about pyramids and Pink Floyd, even if you'd rather be back home making another record.

Parsons was in Auckland last month to promote the latest in a series of albums which bear his name. The churlish have suggested that calling *Pyramid* an Alan Parsons project is a little extreme, bearing in mind that he does not perform on it at all, and his compositional credits stem largely from what he calls, "constructing like a jigsaw" the elements provided by the performers and fellow-writer Eric Woolfson. Still, a conversation with Parsons leaves one with the impression that he is very much in charge in the studio, and never more so than when working on a Project album.

His increasing reputation as a producer of others' work, and now as a recording personality strong enough to warrant top billing on three top-selling albums, put him in the forefront of those who could be said to be instituting a new era of the producer-star. "Obviously," he says, "the producer is becoming more recognised now. Phil Spector in the old days was ridiculous: there was so



much of him in his records, it was like the Ronettes and the Righteous Brothers were nobodies. I think it is wrong, and I always have considered it wrong for a producer to try to extract a group's credibility or talent

and overshadow them. Even if Nick Lowe is the strength behind the people he produces, it's wrong that he should get more credit than he is actually due." He obviously doesn't feel, however, that the producer is only there to get down on tape whatever the artist actually presents in the studio. "At the end of the day, in the event of a dispute, it should really be the producer who has the final decision."

In the light of that, it is interesting to hear his opinion of Geoff Emerick, the producer of Split Enz's *Dizrythmia*. Where Split Enz apparently found him a little too powerful for their taste, Parsons obviously admires him as someone who can walk into a studio and set everything up as he wants it within minutes. That kind of control of the technology is one of the strongest feelings one gets from Parsons' work — especially on the Project records — but it is often tempered with an apparent shortage of spontaneity and humanity.

That also shows up in the reluctance that Parsons has to put the Project on stage. He puts it down to a risk of undermining the imagery built up by the album. "A band playing on stage takes the abstract out of the kind of music that I do." It is as though the appearance of flesh-and-blood musicians producing those sounds would bring home to an audience that Parsons' music often has little

to do with the conventions of rock and roll, and perhaps also that his own role is so much a non-performing one, that there is no place for him in the performance of his work.

He does concede that his new-found reputation might put a strain on relationships with performers who are new to him, but still maintains that he is much more interested in producing a new act than in working with established acts, and that is borne out by his obvious affection for artists like Pilot, Ambrosia and John Miles — none of whom could be classed as major league acts — rather than those who made his name; Wings, Cockney Rebel and Al Stewart.

Perhaps it is the lack of the ego-stroking received by public performers, or simply the essential diplomat in him, but Alan Parsons shows few of the less pleasant characteristics one would expect from a man who has had three platinum albums in the United States. He sat calm and affable through an hour-long press conference, then an impromptu Maori concert, apparently equally at home describing how to keep the Sunday roast fresh in a cardboard pyramid, or why he prefers Abbey Road studios to any others.

Whatever it is, he sits and smiles and chats, the professional nice chap, making his living the way he always has done, by being polite, and getting what he wants in the end. **Francis Stark**



What I Like in Your Wardrobe". Gabriel shared a mike with Phil Collins and was seen to bang a tambourine, mostly in time according to all reports ... after a meeting at a benefit concert at CBGB's in New York, there were reports that Deborah Harry of Blondie and Robert Fripp had agreed to appear on each other's albums. But, with both records now finished, Fripp appears on one track of

Blondie's LP, *Parallel Lines*, and Debbie is totally absent from Fripp's *Last of the Great New York Heartthrobs*. Apparently, some corporate executives heard of the intended collaboration and put a stop to it, claiming that Debbie Harry's voice is so identifiable that it should be used for Blondie only ...

Frank Zappa has reportedly completed a new film, his first since *200 Motels*. The film's called *Baby Snakes* and, according to the man himself, there are, "a bunch of really famous people in it. You have these baby snakes, see, and you have the universe and they relate to each other." Uh, yeah, I think I see ... and on a less cosmic plane Frank reports that he has three albums ready for release. They are: *Studio Tan*, *Hot Rats 3* and *Orchestral Favourites* ... Aerosmith are often accused of being little better than Rolling Stones' imitators, and the they're copying their betters once again. This time they're playing gigs under an assumed name in order to "get closer to their fans" and also to lay down material for their live album, *Bootleg*. The inconspicuous name that Aerosmith chose was Dr J. Jones and the In-

terns ... The Rumour have recently completed a tour behind American singer Carlene Carter who is Johnny Cash's step-daughter. Bob Andrews and Brinsley Schwarz produced Carlene's album (titled *Carlene Carter*) which features tracks written by Carlene, Rodney Crowell and Graham Parker ... The Rumour have now quit the Mercury label and will now record for Stiff Records ... the new Joe Cocker album, *A Luxury You Can Afford* is produced by Allen Toussaint and features a "Whiter Shade of Pale", together with Cocker's version of Dylan's "Watching the River Flow". Among the musos on the session were Cornell Dupree, Dr John, Donnie Hathaway and Bernard Purdie ... Olivia Newton-John who has been trying to get out of her MCA recording contract has encountered a setback, as the American courts have issued an injunction which prevents her from recording with any other company ... and her *Grease* sequel to be titled *Summer School* ... and news on some forthcoming albums ... the next Steely Dan album will be a *Best Of* compilation from ABC Records ... the next

Ramones LP will be a live double. It's produced by ex-Ramone Tommy (now Tommy Erdelyi) who reports that "It's the whole show from beginning to end." ... the new Chicago album is to be titled *Hot Streets* and will not have a roman numeral in the title. For a further change Phil Ramone has co-produced the album, providing, according to drummer Danny Seraphine, "a breath of fresh air" ... Lol Creme and Kevin Godley's second solo enterprise since splitting with 10cc is a single album titled *L* ... the next Cheap Trick LP after the shortly-to-be-released *Heaven Tonight* will be a live album ... the three Nick Drake records which, since the singer's death have become very rare, are to be repackaged in a boxed set, together with a fourth album comprised of unreleased material ... Rick Danko of The Band is working on a second solo album ... and finally Status Quo have had their hair cut! Have they become members of the Hare Krishna movement or are they just cashing in on the New wave? For the answers to this and other important questions of the day, tune in to *Rip It Up* next month ...

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