

DAYZ IN LIFE OF NZ ROCK BAND PART 1 ROUGH JUSTICE

Peter Boyd, Peter Kennedy
and Mike Gubb at Last
Resort Cafe, Xmas '78.

John Dix (RIU) and Rick, Pakuranga.

At Gluepot. Left to right: Dennis
Mason, Rick Bryant, Nick Bollinger
and Tony Backhouse

Tony Backhouse &
Martin Highland, Pakuranga

THE GLUEPOT, THURSDAY 1.00 PM

"Hey you crazy guitarists! Can you shut up for a minute please?" Peter Kennedy and Tony Backhouse exchange glances, slightly peeved. Us? Crazy? They've just been doodling away waiting for the rest of the band to get their shit together. They reluctantly comply with Malcolm Prenderville's request.

"Hit your bass drum, Martin." Martin Highland does as asked. Boom. "Again." Boom. "What's the problem, Mal?" Boom. "Bit of harmonic hum." "Oh that," says Martin as if what-the-hell that's f**k all, "a bit of tape might cure that."

"I've got the tape here," Rick Bryant says while securing a broken mike-stand. Rough Justice, that ever-growing bunch of Wellingtonians, are setting up their gear. No easy task, ask any muso that's played The Gluepot. Those damn stairs. Lugging instruments, amps, speakers, monitors and boxes of bloody wires and shit. Thank Christ the heavy work is over. The Roughs have been here three hours and the sound check proper is just about ready to get under way.

The day started pleasantly enough. Nothing like a court summons to start the day. Rick's gonna have to find his way down to Christchurch to answer a charge of having no hubdometer on the bus. A silly charge seeing as you can't get the damn things anyway. 10am found all eight members of the band plus roady/soundman Malcolm struggling up the steps with the gear. This is the band's third gig

Around five o'clock Rick finally gets home (his lady's house that is) after more phone calls, a couple of personal visits, more phone calls and more phone calls. For all intents and purposes, Rick is Rough Justice's manager, and he knows full well the implications involved in a manager-in-the-band scene. "You can never sell someone in the first person as well as someone else can in the third," he says. Well why not get a manager? "The best person to get is so smart he's in some other type of business."

HISTORY

It's not easy running a band like Rough Justice. Now an eight-piece (plus roady/soundman), other bands, below the Roughs status and income, can earn more money per member simply because there are only half as many people to pay. Consequently, Rough Justice, after two years continual touring are still scratching. Although they've laid down two tracks for Radio Windy's forthcoming "Homegrown" album, are due to feature in 22M's "Band Of The Month", and have appeared on *Ready To Roll* and *Radio With Pictures*, they have yet to generate enough interest to pull in a recording contract. The recent addition of such an accomplished composer as Tony Backhouse has already boosted their original material dramatically but as they now stand Rough Justice's major claim is The Most Experienced Road Band In NZ, a title they win hands down.

The original Rough Justice were together for a mere six months in 76-77 before disbanding amid musical and personality clashes. Some of Wellington's finest passed through that original unit: Patrick Bleakley, Mike Farrell, Fane Flaws, Steve Garden and John Tee. After the split Rick took three months off to assess the/his situation. Rick is one of NZ Rock's Elder Statesmen, a former English lecturer at Victoria University who has literally given it all away for rock 'n' roll. He's fronted such bands as Gutbucket, Windy City Strugglers and Blerta, all heavyweights in their day.

In mid-77 a new Rough Justice appeared. Rick lured old friend Peter Kennedy out of

retirement then contacted Nick Bollinger, a teenage bassist whom he'd seen several years previous playing in a high school. Nick in turn suggested friends Martin Highland, Peter Boyd, Steve Jessop and Simon Ward. The last two eventually left and Mike Gubb was enlisted. From the beginning, although run along autonomous lines, the band has belonged to Rick — lots of r&b dominates the material (Stones, Wilson Pickett, etc). With the likes of Chicago and Blood Sweat & Tears long out of fashion, the future of Rough Justice looked dim at the beginning. But there's a certain level of excitement in a saxophone section and the band's mixture of experience and raw energy saw a following develop.

Virtually foregoing hometown Wellington (even now the city has only two rock venues) the band hit the road in their trusty bus and toured the provincial pub circuit. Basing themselves briefly in Auckland last year ("We blew it," admits Rick. "The Gluepot and Windsor, the two main gigs, were abysmal. We were lousy.") the band have since remained housed in Wellington, when not on the road.

GLUEPOT, THURSDAY, 10.00 PM

"Good album, good album," says Tony Backhouse. We're talking about NZ bands. Street Talk at the moment. "Toy Love are supposed to be good, aren't they?" asks Rick. Being on the road most of the time the Roughs don't catch many of the up-and-coming bands. "The only NZ band I've been impressed with lately is Spats," says Boyd, faithful to Wellington to the end.

Rough Justice have just finished for the night. About 200 people turned up and gave the band a good reception, even gave them an encore. Peter Kennedy joins the table. "I've just overheard a couple of guys talking," he says. "One of them said 'What do you think of the band?' and the other guy said 'Not bad, a bit laid back.' And I guess that's it, isn't it? Twelve months ago we were considered to be ragers. Now we're laid back. That's Punk Rock, I suppose. But what can we do? None of us are into New Wave."

TI RAKAU PARK, PAKURANGA. SUNDAY 3.30 PM

The Rough Justice bus is parked alongside the stage for Radio Hauraki's final summer concert. Inside the bus the band look — how shall I put it? Pissed off. Yes, pissed off. Two minutes into their set the hired p.a. (BSP) packed in. The band continued regardless until someone pulled out the plug. The ignominy! They managed to get it on again and make the best of a bad job and now seated in the bus it's no consolation that Larry Morris and Shotgun are going through even worse hassles. "We're at the mercy of the p.a. team on gigs like this," Rick complains. "Jeez, it was bad."

Malcolm enters. "How did it sound Mal?" "Pretty bad." "What about our playing?" "Aw that wasn't bad under the circumstances." "Well I was bloody awful," Nick says. Murray Cammick, *Rip It Up's* fearless photographer comes in. "G'day Murray. How did it sound to you?" Rick asks. "Ah ..." shuffling of feet here. "Well I didn't get here until the last chord. My life seems to run an hour and a half behind time. I can't seem to catch up."

Something prompted me to jot down Murray's profound aphorism. It seemed relevant at the time. Can't think why the f**k it was though. And really it doesn't actually matter. But as I watched the band pack away their gear, expertly manoeuvred by Malcolm, I thought You poor bastards. It's a hard life on the road. Tomorrow it's the long haul down to Wellington. Then after two weeks it's off on their annual South Island tour. Back to batching, living on the bus, the occasional motel. Back to printing posters, pasting them up, distributing them. Back to hassling newspapers and radio stations for a column or two here, a minute or two there. And for what? Maybe \$100 each a week. So remember that next time you catch the band. For here's a band that works hard, damn hard, for very little, too little thanks. Me, I'll catch them every time they pass through. I acknowledge their efforts and what's more, well, I guess I just like their music.

John Dix



PHOTOS BY MURRAY CAMMICK

Top: Rick, Martin, Nick etc. Bottom: Martin. Outside after Gluepot gig.

since arriving in Auckland two weeks ago — Island of Real, the Windsor and after their term at the Gluepot ends on Saturday they've got one final concert for Radio Hauraki on Sunday. Then it's back to the Windy City.

Rick is back down at the pay-phone hassling again. Peter Boyd and Dennis Mason are fixing their sax mouthpieces. Nick Bollinger plays a run on his bass. Mike Gubb lets rip an arpeggio. Everyone's fidgeting, anxious to get out into the sun. They decide to run through a couple of numbers without Rick. They're half-way through Tony's "Elastic Spumante" when Rick returns. "Hey listen everybody," he shouts above the music, "we've just been offered a gig on Tuesday night. We're playing on Wednesday night in Wellington but we may just be able to do it."

It's apparent from the boys' faces that enthusiasm is low. "How much does it pay?" Martin asks. "250."

250? Assuming the figure relates to dollars, that means, let's see ... 250 divided by nine equals, hrm ... about \$27.77. Not exactly worth waiting around for two days is it dear reader?

"We'll be too flat out on Wednesday," Tony complains. "Yeah", Nick agrees, "I'd prefer to get back to Wellington on Monday." Rick returns to the pay phone, the rest of the band return to "Elastic Spumante."

When Rick returns Tony steps down. Tony, late of Spats, has only been gigging with the band for a few weeks and at the moment plays on only half the band's repertoire. "There's no point in getting up there to make extraneous noises to justify my existence," he says. "I might just as well f**k off and listen to the music."

At three o'clock, sound check and rehearsal over, the band packs up as Gluepot personnel wipe and rearrange tables. Rick remains to talk with the Gluepot's lightman about the lighting. Rick would prefer to have his own lightman (an Auckland friend), someone familiar with the band's repertoire. However, that's not possible so Rick has to go briefly over what he would like tonight.

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