



PHOTOS BY MURRAY CAMMICK

Don't get Lee Brilleaux wrong. "I mean, I've nothing against being a millionaire. In fact, I think it'd be a lot of fun." But lean, lanky Lee knows deep down in his pub-rocker's heart that it won't happen. Not unless mass taste embraces wholeheartedly the good-timing public house rhythm and blues of Dr Feelgood.

Lee Brilleaux is an archetypal pub-rocker in an archetypal pub-rock band. He leans back in the car taking him from the airport to his hotel, angular body pulled tight against the frigid Auckland night. He's tired and unshaven after a flight from Australia where the night before the Feelgoods played to an enthusiastic audience of some 600 ("about the right number," he asserts, pausing to assess the news that the band will be playing to about 1800 in Auckland and Wellington).

By coincidence Dr Feelgood arrive at Mangere as Gladys Knight and the Pips and their entourage fly in. The contrast is stark. These are the Americans, not a thread out of place, organised like clockwork, slick, and here come the boys from Essex, opportunity shop jackets, real short ones from the mid-sixties ("bum freezers", me mum calls 'em), threadbare patched jeans. They look a little bewildered. And they've lost their manager, Chris Fenwick, somewhere between the plane and Customs.

"Great grub on Air New Zealand," Brilleaux enthuses. "My favourite plane, the DC-10 — so long as the motor don't drop off."

As promoters, record company people and assorted go-fers shuffle around looking for the

missing Fenwick ("he's a big bloke, fawn jersey"), Brilleaux talks about the band's new album, *Live as It Happens*, which contains live versions of material from *Private Practice* and its predecessor, *Be Seeing You*, as well as a few previously unrecorded songs. Carl Perkins' "Matchbox" is one of them, but try as they might none of the band can recall the others. Oh, they've found Fenwick ("the Whale", as the others call him). We're off.

Lee Brilleaux is nobody's idea of the pop star. He seems happy to keep it that way. He's an articulate man with a pretty clear grasp of the music business and a wry sense of humour.

His attitude towards everything in general seems best summed up by his opening remark at the airport when a record company man commented on the Feelgoods' lack of luggage. "You've got to keep it simple; otherwise, it gets messy." That's Dr Feelgood.

"Nick Lowe once called us the most famous local band in the world," says Brilleaux, and "that's what we are. I mean, success hasn't come to us overnight. I was talking a few weeks ago to Pick Withers, the drummer for Dire Straits. We were playing a festival in Germany. They were top of the bill and we were about fourth on the bill. In six months they've gone from nothing to international stars, America, the lot. I'm glad we haven't had that kind of success. I mean, I'll never be a star. Not unless public taste changes. Of course, the rock and roll business is the most unpredictable business there is so who knows what will happen."

"People talk about Bruce Springsteen being another Bob Dylan, but there's no way. There won't be another Beatles, Stones, even Led Zeppelin. It's so fragmented now, and will remain so in the near future."

"People won't be buying just one record or one sort of music. They'll be buying lots of different things."

For the Feelgoods the trip down under is "an exploratory expedition" to play a few gigs and test the water. It all seems a little disorganised. They were meant to have played Japan before coming down here, but didn't. Brilleaux isn't sure how long they'll be in Australia or whether they will play Japan or just when they'll be back in England, although it has to be by early August when they start work on a new studio album.

He concedes that the band has only slowly come to grips with the recording studio. "When we started out we were very naive about studios. Some groups get off on being in the studio and making records. But we're a live band. You go crazy if you're in the studio too long. *Private Practice* was recorded in two weeks."

Brilleaux is concerned about getting the urgency of a live performance on record, and of their studio albums, only *Private Practice* seems to approach the manic vigour of their performances. He feels the Feelgoods' audience regards their records as secondary to their live performance and he sees the new live album as "a parallel" to *Stupidity*, their big-selling live set which represented the group as it was before the acrimonious split with guitarist Wilko Johnson.

In some ways the new live album will portray the band at the end of a period. "Gypie Mayo has been with us two years and this will show us as we are since he has been with the group. On our next album we may develop a few things which showed up on *Private Practice*." Brilleaux mentions using acoustic guitars, but is vague about the direction of the new record,

half of which is already written. He is adamant that it will continue in the Feelgood vein of rocking rhythm and blues.

The new album will be produced by Mike Vernon, a key figure in the British blues boom of the sixties. Vernon produced such seminal records as *John Mayall's Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton*, before setting up his own Blue Horizon label.

The Feelgoods have been hanging out with Vernon. They respect him professionally and like him as a person. Liking the people they work with is important. "We're very tight, the four of us and Chris (the manager)," says Lee. "When Gypie came in we spent a couple of days jamming — and weighing him up as a person. He was a hot player but we had to get along together as well. I can't stand those bands that are always scrapping."


Speaking of scrapping, dare we ask about the gone but not forgotten Wilko Johnson? "I saw Wilko a couple of weeks ago. He has a band called the Solid Senders now. He was playing the Hammersmith Odeon with the J. Geils Band. He's between record contracts at the moment. I think he's recording his own album."

"I mean, we're not daggers drawn or anything, but I won't deny we've had our ups and downs."

But it's the past. Lee Brilleaux is far more interested in getting out the next night and playing. "I mean, you can do all this publicity, interviews, TV, but it's not until you're up there in front of people playing that you can prove you can cut the mustard."

Cut the mustard the Feelgoods can. On stage they're a mixture of the heroic and the shabby. Their music explodes with a manic

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