

U2 INTERVIEW PART 1 LIVING IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

BY DUNCAN CAMPBELL

There's nothing like the sight of a rock group to bring out the inherent snobbery in hotels, though in fairness to Auckland's plush Sheraton, it's the other guests, not the staff, who cast sideways glances at the members of U2. The younger staffers, who are in the know, are all smiles. The word is around that these are not only stars, these are nice guys.

U2 are small town boys made good. This comes through not only in their unpretentious dress and manner, but in

their natural warmth. They are also self-conscious and shy, not wishing to be photographed while doing interviews.

The overriding feeling, though, is one of apprehension. The band has only just finished recording a new album and apart from three days' rehearsal, has not played live for more than six months. The opening dates of a world tour can be real killers.

"These performances will be very interesting," says Bono, "it'll be like coming along to a rehearsal. That is exciting for us, hopefully it'll be the same for the people.

"You know, there's a lot said about the music in general terms, but when we're on stage, things start to fit into place. We really are just four jerks making forward steps in our music. We're as much fans of the music as anybody and we're as interested in how it's made as anybody. That's probably why we do interviews, to find out how it's done (laughter)."

"We're actually starting this tour earlier than we intended to," says the Edge, "but the reason we agreed to play here was because we hadn't done so before, and the emphasis on new material wasn't quite so important. People had never seen us play the old material, so no matter

what we did, it was still going to be new and there was going to be interest in what we were doing. We didn't feel embarrassed about not coming out with a totally new set of live material. I don't know what these performances are going to be like, but they will be totally committed."

Commitment is a word which looms large on U2's horizon. It was that desire to give the best which led to their pulling out of Sweetwaters, a major disappointment. But Bono says the disappointment would have been bigger, had they played.

"We've never walked onto a stage without wanting to. We didn't want to do Sweetwaters because we knew we were empty and we had no energy. You take flak for that, but now we want to tour again, even though I don't know what the hell is going to happen."

"The one thing, though, is that we never go through the motions," adds the Edge. "I think an audience can sense that. It may not ultimately take away from their sense of enjoyment, but if a band is committed to doing something, there's another level of appreciation that comes in. We've had concerts where it's almost as if the band and the audience have combined to create something that's even bigger than both the halves, where the full excitement and atmosphere of that concert is just so uplifting and incredible. I think that's down to just going out there and giving everything."

The new album, *Unforgettable Fire*, was produced by Brian Eno and should be out in time for next month's *RIU*, where it will be discussed in more detail.

What sets U2 apart is their sense of tradition, coupled with truly Celtic romanticism and a gritty determination to succeed. The Dublin boys are quick to acknowledge the influence of their environment.

The Edge: "Music, when it's really working, has that ability to draw the listener in, it invites the listener inside the artist's emotions and heart. Coming from Dublin, from a community that is a tenth the size of New York or London, I think we are far more in touch with those basic human relations. What happens when you're in one of these huge cities is that you become very conscious of yourself and how small you are, and your ability to communicate becomes less. You tend to know lots of people not very well, rather than say, for instance, us; we know a limited circle of friends extremely well. I've noticed that other bands which come from outlying areas, like Simple Minds, from Scotland, there's a quality to them which bands from the larger cities don't have. I think it's the ability to communicate emotionally."

"The bands which come from London and New York, it's all very conceptual, it's all kind of flat and intellectual. Don't attempt to try and get anything personal from the artist, because the artist is so steeped in his own self-image and the kind of concept he's trying to present, that he's almost lost."

New Zealanders, being landed refugees, are greatly envious of those who can draw on centuries of indigenous heritage, such as the Irish. Bono, having grown up with it, is more matter-of-fact, but readily admits its importance.

"It think it's an unconscious heritage, with the group. My familiarity with Joyce and Yeats is quite a recent one, and yet the way in which I approach the microphone to sing is, in hindsight, quite in keeping with that Irish tradition, the stream of consciousness, the inside resolving all the conflicts, rather than just your head. Also in the playing, in the notes chosen, there is again the lyrical music rather than just the voice. I don't know why it's there, it's just there."

Despite the youthful exuberance of their music, these men have old heads on their shoulders, although only in their mid-20s. Bono and the Edge are both married, the latter also being the very proud father of a six-week-old girl, Holly. That sort of stability is unusual in musicians so young, and to the Edge, it's another source of strength:

"Dublin, the family, our circle of friends, they give us something we can rely on. What happens to a lot of groups is they create something



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