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"There was a lot of energy in some of the sessions," he said. "Actually, it was the bands with the most experience who were the most boring to record. They didn't try as hard."

He said most of the bands on the record were part of a loose community that grew up around the Venue.

"They all know each other, they help each other out, they're friendly in a competitive way. They'd get talking backstage, even exchange members."

Financial problems have forced the Venue to go under, nine months after it opened in the old SPAM premises in Symonds St on Feb 11. Le Roq said lower than expected audience numbers caused initial problems in covering overheads and when the Venue had to close down for two weeks in August because of violence from outsiders dealt finances a death blow, leaving him facing bankruptcy court — not a pleasant experience.

The problem had been with teenagers coming up from Aotea Square because of increased police pressure and coming to the Venue less for the music than to bother the existing patrons, he said: "It would be easy to become a racist running the Venue. Which would be odd, seeing as I'm part Maori myself."

But the Venue had its good

times too, highlighted perhaps by the final of its Liberty Stage band battle, which saw 560 people cram in on a Saturday night.

Russ Le Roq wouldn't be Russ Le Roq if he didn't have another scheme or two underway. And he has. He wants to get back into performing himself ("I still want to be a pop star — this has just been like a year off from that.") and has put together a band to tour in the summer, one composed of younger musicians rather than the experienced players he has used previously. He also has three tracks of his own, recorded at Mandrill Studios which will be released when he has the reads to do it.

He won't be leaving his role as motivator behind, however. He's helping Wentworth, Brewster and Co. with a recording project and is considering an offer from the Waitemata Junior County Council to run an underage venue in Henderson.

All Dressed Up features Chinese Eyes, Stick No Bills, Broken Edge, Plastic Pegs, Autobahn, The In Crowd, Standing Joke, Third Wave, the Wait, Splitting Image and the Bellboys. So what will happen to all those bands now?

"I don't know, they'll probably all break up," he sighs. "But at least they'll have done it and found out it's possible — they won't be in awe of it any more."

Russell Brown

"The Axemen, or the new Beatles, as we call them." (D. Kilgour)

Take a cheap, plastic Japanese transistor radio. Assume it has a soul (it has, after all, a serial number). Take it to the top of a tall building. Turn it on. Drop it off the edge. Your control over it is gone. About halfway down the radio begins to realise it has no future. Nothing to gain by remaining under human bondage. From it bursts a joyful wail that is the noise not

of any radio station, of any programming, but of the radio itself. The sound of plastic and printed circuits and batteries. That is the sound of the Axemen. Maybe.

The Axemen: Steve "McCabe" (guitars), Bob "Brannigan" (guitars), Stu Page (drums) and sundry part-time accomplices like saxophonist Arthur Sheep.

History: Steve (17) has his roots in Christchurch's Gorillas, who revolutionised cassette releases by putting the tapes inside an LP-size cover, meaning they got noticed

and not just stuck on the wall or under the counter and ignored. He met Dunedinite Bob (similar age), they began playing together and, as 1982 was on the wane, Stu joined the band. Stu does all the great graphics. The Axemen have released five cassette albums of varying quality, all recorded either live or at "Peterborough Studios" (home).

Scene: (As pictured) Steve, Stu and your reporter gathered around table trying to get to the nub of the matter. Also present are Hyphen-Smythe (caught by the paparazzi at last) and various flatmates. Two people in the room are drunk. Guess.

Are the Axemen a rock 'n' roll band?

Steve: "At times. All the elements of rock 'n' roll are there."

Stu: "But it's also a jazz band, a soul band ..."

There are some glorious rock 'n' roll clichés on the Axemen tapes, done Axemen style. But the thing about the Axemen is they're capable of upsetting people — like rock 'n' roll used to. So they're a rock 'n' roll band. Sort of. It's not that they try to upset people. Quite the opposite.

"We just want to get those songs out," explains Steve. "You waste

too much time trying to sound horrible."

Live: Maybe what upsets people about the Axemen is that they don't sound the way anyone might expect. The last time I saw them they ran the guitars into a cassette player and from there through a graphic equaliser, which was used as an instrument in its own right. The result was a sound that wavered between muddy and tremendously assertive. The Axemen will use old stereos, borrowed speakers and so forth as the mood and opportunity arises. They don't actually own proper amplifiers. That means they sound different all the time. Bad one night, good the next. People won't always agree on what constitutes a good night, either.

Songs: Steve and Bob write the songs. They get together and jam, make up riffs and then put words on top. Their approach to lyrics seems similar to that of their music; they play around with language, use familiar words in unfamiliar ways, have fun. Lots of chaos, too. There is a high turnover of songs — don't expect to hear the same song more than once. But you might. They also have done "cover versions" of songs by Donna

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