

S P K

J U N K

F U N K

"I'm Graeme Revell — I'm the New Zealander," the SPK interview begins.

Did you know that? And did you know SPK play the Gluepot on December 14 and 15? True facts!

SPK is Revell and his Chinese-born wife Sinan. Their story is an interesting one. Revell formed the band in Sydney in 1979, while working as a psychiatric nurse. The original second member (Sinan was yet to join) was a former patient of his, who died before SPK made the shift to England.

Once in England, SPK released a single on Industrial Records (Throbbing Gristle's label) and then more records on their own label, Side Effect. Through a world-wide informal network of letter-writing and word of mouth (similar to Psychic TV's Psychik Contacts) they found themselves able to sell 10 to 20,000 of each record, without the



SPK: Graham Revell, Sinan.

benefit of press or record company support.

The way Revell tells it, they were the virtual originators of the industrial-metal thing, which saw names like Einstürzende Neubauten and Test Department (who

filched SPK's ideas, says Revell) creep into the music press last year, becoming visible to the point where even wimpy old Depeche Mode got the requisite tools together and jumped on the bandwagon.

In a move presaged in interviews last year, SPK decided that enough of living underground was enough and signed a contract with WEA Records, with the stated aim of seeking fame and fortune.

"We felt that we had to move on really quickly, so it wouldn't look like we were copying Depeche Mode or something," Revell explains.

The first WEA album, *Machine Age Voodoo* is the first SPK record to reach Revell's home shores (it contains the earlier single, 'Metal Dance'). It may prove a shock to those few familiar with the Side Effect records — filled as it is with polite, dance-orientated songs — it requires considerably less chewing than similar recent Cabaret Voltaire releases. There will be those who cry "sellout?"

"Oh very much so. But I think the answer to that really is that why

should a band do the same thing for 10 years or whatever? That's not what we're on about, we're on about changing every time we come out. I mean the earlier stuff isn't all the same either, the first album is quite different from the second.

"And if people say we're selling out ... well you can do anything you like really in the indie field, the real experiment comes when you try and do something out of the ordinary in the major field, that's when the censorship comes down on you. We felt as if we'd done as much as we could in the indie field and that was the end of the experiment, really.

"This is like trying to get a much wider audience involved and then we'll go back to something harder again next time. I mean, Brian Eno did it didn't he? He started off in Roxy Music and then he started to do all his experimental stuff and a lot of people went with him."

Nevertheless, there don't seem to be many unconventional instruments on the album.

"Yeah, everything's been sort of cleaned up a bit. There's some stuff like diving tanks for percussion ... But in a way it's a shame that things that happen over here reach Australia and New Zealand so much later. For instance, it's a pity we couldn't have come to New Zealand last year, because the show was really over the top, violent, manic sort of thing. This year it's more high-tech. But I still think there's something in that, it's quite interesting. There can't be many bands that bring Fairlights there can there?"

Indeed, the Fairlight computer SPK bring in will be the first to enter this country. It and associated sequencers and other gadgets are mixed through 24 tracks by the band's engineer, along with noise from gas tanks, oil drums, angle grinders, welding torches and other metallic devices from the stage. Additional musicians are also brought in on conventional instruments like actual keyboards.

The first gig on SPK's current UK tour ended in a riot after the band walked off in protest at stringent fire

regulations which all but obscured the audience's view of the stage. The story at other venues has been similar and Revell again expresses disgust at the state of things in merry England.

"It's getting to the stage where we decide to just come on like a really boring pop band like everybody else or we leave England. The situation's getting quite boring in England anyway, the music scene's in a pathetic state. About half a dozen middle-aged producers run the entire cultural output for the nation. People like John Peel, who's the one hope over here — he's been cut back to three hours a week and on BBC TV you can't get any slightly hard videos shown, all they want is Wham. One producer wouldn't play our new single 'Junk Funk' because he thought the title was something to do with heroin! It's laughable but it stops you from doing anything."

Nevertheless, Revell says the live show can get quite carried away at times: "People can start cutting themselves up on the metal and that sort of thing. In England, anyway, I'm not sure whether New Zealanders get into that, do they? They didn't in the past — I remember being part of really reserved audiences. You don't get too excited, do you?"

There are occasions ...

"Oh yeah, I remember, after about 13 jugs of DB ..."

No, things are different now. Everyone drinks Steinlager.

"Oh yeah, Steinlager ..."

SPK songs are getting played in dance clubs on both sides of the Atlantic at present, a fact at which Revell is obviously quite chuffed. He has hopes for the second single from the album, 'Flesh and Steel'.

"To get what is basically an FM love song through in the American scene, if it hits it'll be quite a coup really. It's almost as if they haven't listened to the lyrics or they haven't understood them."

SPK will probably shift to the USA next year and Grace Jones' manager is already interested in handling them (at present they still do all their own management, production and press). Revell's taking

things as they come, with more of a sense of humour these days ("I've been too serious for too long"). There's a possible deal with Paramount pictures doing film soundtracks, Sinan would like to do some more acting and he also writes (he has just finished an interview and a chapter for a book on J.G. Ballard). "We'd like to try and get a hit in America, I think. And to gradually go back to something harder musically. But you've got to do things more slowly in the mainstream scene — what we're trying to do is speed up the possibilities of change and still maintain our integrity."

There's nothing dishonourable in Revell's desire to make some money out of his career, (anyone who believes in their art should demand the right to make a living from it) but *Machine Age Voodoo* is, at best, a mistake, an aberration. It's a story of horribly standard use of standard white technofunk instruments behind quite unremarkable singing from Sinan. The lyrics are full of half-baked metal age concepts, made all the more incongruous by their musical setting. It's not even a good pop record; its pretensions make it empty and stupid. Sorry, but it's true. *Now please* let the live show be great.

Russell Brown

'45s' FROM PAGE 6

vocals. Let me say here it's let down by a wretched mix which throws the cheap drum machine into the foreground and which must be forgiven. 'Stuff Of Dreams' is a personal declaration of independence, delivered with twisted, slightly familiar phrasing. The re-arrangement of 'Tears Of a Clown' displays real insight — someone could actually make this version a big hit. 'Trouble Sleeping' is an old My Three Sons song, I think, wherein lies lots of funky bass, a clever, wordy lyric, a chorus that reminds me of the Axemen for some reason and the best production.

Patsy Riggir

Laying It On the Line (CBS)

Perennial Patsy, who really does sing this MOR ballad to perfection. I assume it will be a favourite on the *Tonight Show*.

Russell Brown

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