

'MARK SEYMOUR INTERVIEW'
FROM PAGE 16

"But it doesn't really bother me that much because what we're doing now is so much closely related to the way we live and the way we communicate verbally with each other anyway. So it's far more enjoyable the way it is, even though we haven't got the popularity we used to have."

The words and the way they were used on *The Jaws Of Life* seemed to have a very basic Australian quality to them.

"Yeah, I like making puns and word plays and things like that. I sort of used to want to do that but because there was a certain amount of friction between me and Greg it got to the point where I didn't want to make a fool of myself. There was real rivalry and I didn't want to do the wrong thing or be unfashionable or anything."

"Whereas when we made that record it was 'we've got nothing to lose and I can do what I like. I can write lyrics the way I want to'. And so I went full tilt in that direction — whereas before it had been there in lyrics but I was really cryptic."

In several songs, 'Holding Down a D' for example, it's not always clear whether you're celebrating Australian popular culture or questioning it.

"Well, in terms of that song, you sort of have to question a really basic physical thing like that. Whether you get dragged into that whole drinking thing or embrace it wholeheartedly, you always have to question it the morning after. And I thought it was just such a simple physical phenomenon, making yourself that sick — what did that suggest about the way you live? With a lot of things on that record I just decided to take simple events that you constantly do out of habit and look at what they suggest. I'm not trying to say 'drinking's fucked', I'm not making a moral statement at all, there aren't any moral statements on that record, I'm just drawing attention to it."

Those kind of themes seem a lot closer to the mark than the whole urban tribe thing you used to have. Do you regret that early image?

"I don't regret it, I just think it's a bit silly. Because as far as the way I personally see music

it never had much to do with me. What was happening was that we were being interpreted as an ensemble and because we were such a big band no one stood out except for Greg and the only reason he did was because he went through that neanderthal image. No one else in the band did it. We were interested in playing that sort of funky, rhythm-orientated stuff, which we still play. But we were never that image conscious, so the one thing that stood out was that one image, so that was what everyone latched onto. Whereas now we virtually don't have an image."

You sell considerably more records per capita in this country than you do in Australia — which is ironic considering the overall Australian character of *Jaws Of Life*. Why do you think that's the case?

"The thing is the whole New Zealand musical environment is far more healthy than it is in Australia, because there's a lot more overseas money in our country, the technology's changed really rapidly over the last few years. We're a lot more into video and stuff now. The new technology is filtering more slowly into this country so people tend to be a lot more discriminating musically, because they're not being swept along by things."

"So I think people have embraced us here because it's different, it doesn't sound like it's American or English. And we've also been around for four years in Australia, so we're treated like a bit of an institution. The Reels have broken up now but they were in a very similar position to us, because of the fact that they ended up touring all the time. And even though they wrote some really good songs and they were a real pleasure to go and see, they just ended up being taken for granted."

"The other thing about the Australian music industry is it's controlled by Molly Meldrum (presenter of perennial TV pop show *Countdown*). The maximum level you can get to is controlled by him. So all but a few bands divert their creative energies towards that as a goal. Whereas here you haven't got that kind of hierarchy. People just buy records and don't want so much TV. The accent in Australia is so orientated towards video

and TV that someone like Molly can really control things."

I take it you get no favours from him.

"No. We used to once. I can remember hearing from our manager about two years ago that in his words he'd 'lost the vibe' on us."

There was a backlash in other quarters too, after your period of super-hipness. Did you find that difficult to cope with?

"Yeah, I still find it difficult sometimes. At some gigs I get a real 'me and them' complex towards audiences. Especially industry gigs. I tend to really scorn industry gigs. You can always tell them — you don't quite get that commitment from the audience that you do in the suburbs. So I sort of wanted to cross right over to the suburbs, get right out of there."

"See, the funny thing is, in the the inner-city areas of Melbourne and Sydney you still get a really strong cult interest in what we're doing, but intermingled with that is the real careerist attitude that every individual critic has got. So you always have trouble generating that kind of commitment. Cold Chisel generated that and they were *scorned*. I would like to be able to have that real commitment from audiences all the time."

"But in a cultural sense we're very isolated because I don't have any dialogue with other people who write music or write poetry or read trendy novels and magazines — I just don't talk to anyone about why I do the things I do. All the ideas we get, we get amongst ourselves. I talk to Doug and John occasionally, or our mixer Robin. So that's four people who are generating all these ideas. And they're filtering out when we release records and play live but in a way we're still quite isolated. In a sense it doesn't bother me that much because it means we've got control, which is what we've always wanted."

The impression I've been getting from performances on this tour is one of a real rock 'n' roll band. Is that what you're aiming for?

"Well after Greg and Martin had left we were really lacking in confidence about image, because we've never been able to do that well, know how to move and dress. So we just basically decided we'd play music we'd been listening to over the past 10-15 years. Instead of looking at what was happening around us we decided we'd play music that reflected what we used to be like and what we've always been like. And we looked at incredibly un-chic bands like the Stones. We used to really like the Stones — we'd always leap around suburban lounge rooms listening to the Stones. So we started playing rhythms that had that feel. We started hamming it up a bit and it was a bit of a giggle that we were playing music like that and then we realised that it worked and we managed to write a whole lot of stuff for *The Jaws Of Life* in about six weeks."

There's again something very Australian about the way you play the music. It's like physically fit music in a way.

"I think there's this thing called the Great Aussie Tug, which Doug always talks about, that some bands have. It's a kind of an R&B laziness, because you've got a real straight square beat,

but it's got this walking tempo — it's very traditional in a lot of ways, but the way Australian bands play R&Bs, they always have that kind of taut but lurching a little bit feel. AC/DC are a classic example, Rose Tattoo, X, the Birthday Party had it."

"When we were working with Conny Plank in Germany he listened to the mixes for the last album and said there was a kind of folk element in our music. He said our rock music is like our folk music, because we adopted rock 'n' roll at a relatively early stage in our culture, compared to say when America or England did. So it's far less self-conscious in a lot of ways. It has this really strong rhythmical element in it that we're maybe not as conscious of as people from other countries are."

"In a way it's a bit like the way those Dunedin bands use that guitar, they're very strongly guitar-orientated bands and they don't sound like swamp bands — guitar music from America and England at that moment, it's all swampy. Whereas they're into that sort of chiming. Byrds sound that you don't hear many bands from Australia using at all. And who knows, there could be a really complex series of reasons why that's happened and not anywhere else in the world."

"But the thing about the English scene is that there's nothing spontaneous about it any more. Everyone thinks in terms of covers and relating what they're doing in the context of a whole series of standards and formats that has already been established in their country over the last 15 years."

"So you read trendy art magazines from New York who say 'we are living in the age of the cover version and that's what contemporary culture's all about now. But it isn't at all for places like Australia and New Zealand. It's as though we're going through a cultural period that they went through 25 or 30 years ago, where those sort of values don't have any relevance. Where people still do things according to how they feel, in a spontaneous way. Mind you, there aren't many of them — they're a very small minority of people but they're still there. You see bands in Melbourne and Sydney who do have that element."

Of course the only problem is that it's Europe and America that hold the money which allows you to do what you want. Is there a way round that?

"Well, if the West remains stable for another 10 or 20 years, what I think will happen is that the bulk of original and creative ideas in the arts are going to come out of the South anyway. Eventually it's going to have an effect — just as avant-garde thinkers in late 19th Century Paris eventually had an effect on a broad cross-section of the world. The thing is, at the time they were doing things, they weren't doing them for economic considerations. So even though the power lies in England and America the message always filters through from other places if it's more interesting and more original."

"But I don't know, that's just my optimism ..."
Russell Brown

Korrespondence Continues
Dear WEA,

So pleased to hear my thoroughly discredited view of Nik Kershaw has not hurt his record sales, which are, after all, what quality music is all about. By the way, after several days of despair listening to the record, I place the cover on the turntable and played that instead. It sounded better.
Duncan Campbell

gued, with reference to a wide range of supporting material and facts. I would therefore appreciate any feedback or opinion from any people or organisations with an interest in this matter and they may be sent to me at the address below.
David Major
23 Franklin Rd,
Ponsonby,
Auckland.

'LETTERS' FROM PAGE 4
government policy will be the question of a proposed local music quota on commercial radio stations. A figure of 25 per cent has been suggested. The conservative view has regrettably prevailed when this topic has been discussed in recent years and if the remit is to survive the Auckland and national Labour Party conferences it will need to be well

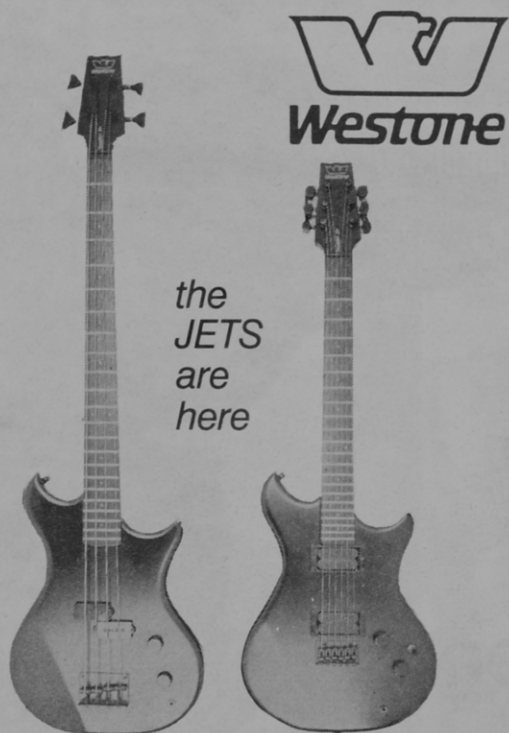
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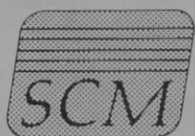
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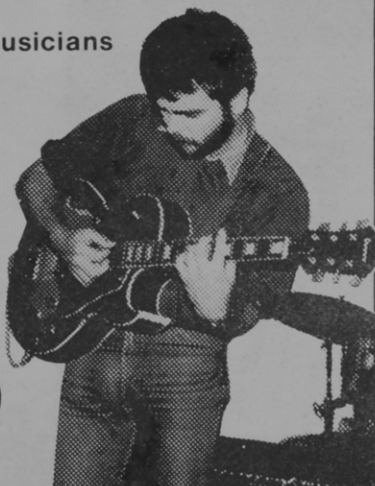
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