



## News Agent: Huey Lewis

Huey Lewis is laughing over the phone; it's mirth from the gut, a gritty guffaw straight from the dirty joke in the boys' room. Like his music, it lets you know he enjoys life:

"We try not to take ourselves too seriously and have a good time and real love also has humour and confusion. But we take the music seriously. There's a certain stigma nowadays that you've got to walk around with a chip on your shoulder in order to be a serious songwriter. And critically one tends to think 'well, he's a secluded asshole, he must be a genius.' I don't think these two things necessarily follow."



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Lewis is 34, which means he's too long in the tooth, too tempered by the ways of the West to create new frontiers. Too old for this game?

"Sure I am, but what am I gonna do, quit?" But it must get harder to carry on?

"Not really, I'm a better singer than I ever was. I don't think anyone ever gets into rock 'n' roll for girls or money. They get in because they love the music. We're getting better so I'm not over the hill yet."

### Old News

Lewis grew up through the 60s and the hippie era in San Francisco. Imagining he was Paul Butterfield he taught himself harmonica while travelling around Europe, then returned home and joined Clover, the band (minus Lewis) that did Costello's *My Aim Is True*. From there it was most news was good news and he formed his current lineup from out-of-work musicians in the Bay Area.

Although there's not a lot to get excited about in Lewis's predictable rock 'n' roll, his music has some redeeming features:

"I'd hope it's original in some way, and honest. We're a real band, we're all friends, not a collection of professionals, and if we have anything to offer it's the personality of the six of us. We insist on producing our own records, conceiving our own videos and album covers and literally and figuratively staying out of Hollywood. That attitude has lent us a little originality."

Is authenticity a prime concern?

"No, I love a blend of old and new. I love the new

tones, synthesisers are wonderful, but you've got to be careful that you play them and they don't play you. Rock 'n' roll is all about the song and I think songs are a gift and it's our job to be true to that song and it sets the standards for production, sound and the way it should be sung."

The band sounds human, bereft of technology. "Yeah, we try to make our music breathe as much as possible. Nowadays it takes more balls to leave a mistake than it does to fix one. Technology has enabled us to make perfect records. All of these big English groups would never have been big if it weren't for drum machines 'cos they simply don't have the drummers."

"Y'know Wang Chung's 'Dancehall Days', well you can count on one hand the drummers that can physically play that groove. It's a hard-assed second line New Orleans kind of a groove. But now everybody has the same drummer as Quincy Jones, the Linn Drum, the great equaliser."

"So the emphasis is now on perfection and that's not necessarily a rock 'n' roll quality, but that's the way it goes."

### Sensational News: If You Read Nothing Else This Month Read This ...

Last month Ray Parker Jr collected a Grammy for the soundtrack to *Ghostbusters*. Guilt wasn't one of his stronger emotions that night. Maybe it should have been — Huey Lewis and the News are suing Columbia Pictures because they ripped off 'I Wanna New Drug' for 'Ghostbusters'. Read on:

"The suit is still in litigation. My beef isn't with Ray Parker or with the music-is-sacred bit, but with Columbia Pictures."

"The movie people asked us to write some music for the song 'Ghostbusters' and they wanted something like 'I Wanna New Drug'. We didn't have the time plus we didn't like the words so we didn't do it. Anyway, they used the 12" mix of 'I Wanna New Drug' over a work print of the movie and they showed this to at least five songwriters that I know of in LA and they said 'Can you write us a song like this?' And they wrote a song but it didn't sound enough like 'I Wanna New Drug'."

"Now Ray Parker admits to having seen a work print of the film with 'I Wanna New Drug' across it and then going home and coming up with 'Ghostbusters' 48 hours later."

"I know for a fact Columbia Pictures went after our song. It's one thing when someone unintentionally steals a lick, but it's another thing when a corporation goes after your song and finds somebody to copy it for them."

"That's an example of what's going on here in America. The music industry is leading the movie business by its nose and the movie people are really trying to cash in on that. Everybody's got

a soundtrack. And these people don't care about the music, they don't care about anything except money. That's not right, they shouldn't be allowed to do that."

"If someone writes a song like 'Caribbean Queen' and it sounds like 'Billie Jean' then that's no big deal. The bass part to 'I Wanna New Drug' is not sacred but I know there was intent there to swipe our song and that's what pisses me off. Ray Parker is just the guy that did it."

Adding insult to injury I mention that when I first heard 'The Heart Of Rock 'n' Roll' I thought it was Ray Parker:

"You're kiddin' (Double laughs). That's the first time I've heard that, that's funny."

### Sports' News

The art of milking albums for singles hasn't escaped Huey Lewis and the Good News Bears. Four American top-toppers have been trained by *Sports* (the band's third album) alone:

"At the time we weren't aware of its potential. We produced it ourselves in our local studio, but we did think it was the best album we'd done and we attribute its success to the fact that we've become better studio musicians."

The only non-original hit from the album was Chinn-Chapman's 'Heart and Soul':

"We first heard that song on a demo tape and although it was a simple song I felt it was right up our alley. It was obviously commercial and although it wasn't as big as 'I Want A New Drug' or 'The Heart of Rock 'n' Roll', I don't think they would have had a chance on AM radio if they hadn't followed 'Heart and Soul', which went to number six. It was still part of the infiltration stage. There's quite a diversity on *Sports* and we'll adhere to that."

The American public seem to be slow to accept but once they do you get a life ticket to Beverly Hills:

"I'm not so sure. America can be fickle. It takes a lot of time to gain recognition here but once you do the public seems to over-recognise you and they can burn you to death."

The answer is easy — get out and tour New Zealand.

"I would love to tour New Zealand, I really mean that. I know Manfred Mann's Chris Thompson, who's from your country. But we haven't made it this year because quite frankly I don't think our records have done all that well in New Zealand. Plus we've been so busy playing the States, because when you've got a hit record here you're as hot as a pistol."

"You play not so much to sell records, but to convert those fans of your records into being fans of the band so that hopefully you will last longer. At best we're a really good live band."

And that's what it's all about, man.

George Kay

# Hello Sailor

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30 – HAMILTON Hillcrest

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7 – GISBORNE DB Gisborne  
8 – MT MAUNGANUI DB Mt Maunganui  
9 – WHANGAREI  
10 – AUCKLAND Auckland City  
11 – HAMILTON Metropole  
12 – PAKAPAKA The Forge