

Dancin' the Light Fantastic

Exponents in Videos, Expectations & more...



By Vicky Bogle

Dance Exponents: Chris, Jordan, Dave, Brian.

Great whooshes of sound are coming from the practice room Auckland's Progressive Studios. Ah, if these waves of tune are anything to go by then the new Dance Exponents album should certainly attract attention on a much wider scale. There's plenty of enthusiasm in the Dance Exponents too — four hours pass before I can coax them away from their instruments for a coffee or beer break.

Dance Exponents have been busy all round of late. Having just completed two video clips with Australian film director (and Manuel of *Fawlty Towers* lookalike), Salik Silverstein, they are now in the studio practising with stand-in drummer Eddie Olsen for next month's national concert tour.

Expectations is the name of the

new album and 'My Love For You' will be the first single from it in New Zealand. Australia has gone for 'Greater Hopes'. Hence the need for two videos. But both clips will be screened on television here, and having spent some time studying the production of the two I can guarantee they will be among the most exciting videos to be made in this country.

Salik escaped back to Australia before I had a chance to talk to him. What's his background?

"He did the 'Sex and Agriculture' clip as well," says guitarist Chris Sheehan, chewing away on his string of black beads. "Mushroom introduced us to him in Australia. We interviewed all these people to do videos for us, all these freelance video directors..."

"He was the best table tennis player," interjects bassist Dave Gent.

"What happened was we thought of an idea for the clip and then in-

terviewed all these different sorts of people who wanted to do it," Chris continues. "And they all came along and said exactly the same thing that we'd imagined — with the house and the bloody fields of hay. And then Salik came along and said what everybody else had said, but then said that he had changed his mind that morning and decided to do something completely different."

"And he had the picture board of what he wanted to do all written out..." continues singer Jordan Luck. "He was a good talker, basically," Dave concludes.

Do you know anything about the film Salik made to do with rape?

"Groping... it's good," nods Dave. You saw it? I thought it was banned.

Brian: "It was, because some women thought it was encouraging or glorifying rape. There were women who actually went out and protested about it."

Chris: "It's stupid when you think

of Salik, because he's the last person in the world who would do a sexist sort of movie."

"But it's not," adds Brian. "It's sort of sick in that it's so real."

"What, like 'The Boiler' is lyrical-ly?", asks Jordan, who hasn't seen the film. ('The Boiler' is a terrifying song about rape as told by Rhoda Dakar of the Special AKA.)

Brian: "Yeah, but even more so because it's really gory and horrible because you're seeing it on film. It's really weird."

Dave: "And it's so surreal as well that it may look as if he could be trying to exploit it."

Salik's a fairly surreal bloke isn't he?

"That's his favourite word, really," says Jordan.

Of the two videos, the one for 'Greater Hopes' was shot at night, outdoors, while 'My Love For You' was done in the studio. The band members say they're happy with the finished products and are adamant that the two are as good as each other.

"Both clips suit the songs," ventures Brian.

"And they're both completely different," concludes Dave.

And it took two weeks to do two videos?

Chris: "Yeah, but it's not the time that matters, it's the money. We were lucky that Salik could get two done for not much more than the price of one."

It's interesting to note that the Dance Exponents do come up with most of the ideas you see in the videos, although Jordan says that Salik "pretty much does the lot." He also says: "It's either someone who is really adamant that they do it all or someone who is really flexible. And that's a good thing, because when we were working with early clip makers like TV New Zealand and that, we didn't have that opportunity. It was basically very much them."

Dave: "You just don't do your own clip."

"Yeah," Jordan continues. "And they also made you feel as if (puts on a sleazy sort of voice) 'Jeez you're lucky to be able to do this,' as if you're very fortunate people to have a clip made for you. Whereas Salik is jammed full of ideas so that if you don't like one, he'll just bring another one up."

Brian: "We make music and he makes film clips and we trust his ability to make our film clip because we've seen his work and we know what he's aiming for and his ideas suit what we're doing."

Dave: "And even if it's not as good

as what you may have thought it would be, it's worth it for not just trying to have a glossy clip or a stupid story-line clip like everyone else. I mean the chances are you might do something a bit different and then even if it doesn't work it's still useful."

Today is drummer Eddie's first practice with the band and while the interview continues he bashes away on the other side of the wall.

"The reason we're playing with Eddie is because he's such a good drummer that we know he can walk in and do what's necessary," Brian explains.

"And we don't have to think about that he's playing, you just have to think about what you're doing yourself," adds Dave.

Back to the clips — were you conscious of putting across a particular image in either video?

"Just us, hopefully," Dave ventures.

"Just what we want to look like," Chris adds. "Everyone just wears what they wear anyway."

Dave: "Yeah, we were wearing different clothes every night, depending on what was going on. It was at the stage where as soon as

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Taylor Made

Talkin' to the Producer

by Russell Brown

Late last year it didn't look like the Dance Exponents would be able to do another album. A suitable producer hadn't been found, the people at Mushroom Records Australia were less than encouraging, it was going to cost a lot of money and prospects were fairly bleak.

Then word came through that an international producer, Ian Taylor, had picked out the Dance Exponents from a bunch of demos sent to him by Mushroom — and wanted to produce their next album. The band recall the Aussie record company people being considerably friendlier after that ...

"It just stuck out a mile for me," Taylor says, explaining why he picked up on the Exponents' demo. "Mainly because Jordan had good-sounding words and the music was ... not weird, because I didn't think it was weird, I just thought it sounded interesting to me."

"I thought 'I don't know where this is coming from' or how they'd arrived at that. Because lots of music you can listen to and think 'Well, yes, I've heard that before, no surprises, nice sound and so on ...' And the two guitar players — I thought 'Well, they're not going to sound like anyone else I've heard before.' Maybe bits of it do but tons of it doesn't."

So Taylor spent something over a month in Mandrill Studios with the band — often working through until 6am during the last two weeks. The result was *Expectations*, probably the most expensive album to be recorded in this country and the big punt for Dance Exponents and Mushroom NZ.

A well-spoken 27-year-old Londoner, Taylor has produced groups ranging from Ministry to Sham 69 to Romeo Void. Working as engineer to US supremo Roy Thomas Baker he was part of albums by biggies like the Cars. He also mixed the last Bob Dylan studio LP, *Infidels*. His most recent production work before the Exponents album was with Ministry and, before that, Rick Ocasek. He told the Exponents one of the attractions of their tape was that it "sounded like a band playing" and admits he was looking for a break from the recording-as-electronic-construction method of doing things in the studio.

"With Ministry it was just one guy, myself and Vince (Ely, the former Psychedelic Furs drummer who also stood in on the Exponents' album), in a control room with a load of synthesisers and a drum kit and so on. And apart from four songs which we'd recorded earlier, we more or less made the whole thing in the studio. I ended up getting a songwriting credit, which is sort of unusual for a non-musician. But I can sit with a tape machine and construct a song. Instead of having to actually sit down and play it, if the notes are there on the tape but they're in the wrong order or something, you can sit there with a tape machine and help somebody write a song."

"So I did Ministry and that took quite a long time and prior to that I'd just done some work with Rick Ocasek's album, which was a similar sort of thing except he had the songs, but it was just one guy sitting in a studio fiddling with synths and stuff. The Ministry record I really enjoyed, Rick's record I quite enjoyed, but it took so long that I got to know it really well and by the time it was finished, listening to the record you

didn't get that thrill of hearing the finished product.

"So I just felt the process of doing that was becoming a bit dull and I decided I'd like to do some work again with people who were actually playing together and creating something that wasn't just a polished sound, creating a feel. You can create a feel in writing and have synthesisers and drum machines and still in the vocal create a feel — but you can create a lot more if it's actually four people playing off each other."

Taylor actually began his engineering career a long way from synthesiser technology, and even from guitars, at the twin studio owned by the publishing firm Chappell Music in London — a studio which recorded more MOR acts than anything else.

"I wrote hundreds of letters away when I was at school and started out as an assistant making tea. I didn't actually do any tape operating for about two months — I just made good tea. But if you make good tea and you get on with the people you work with, you eventually get to do some assisting. I started that when I was 16 or 17."

"Chappell had a 24-track studio and a 16-track. The 24-track was a big studio with big rooms and everything and we'd record stuff like Shirley Bassey and Bing Crosby. With a lot of those you'd have the whole band of 40 musicians in the studio at one time and the solo singer standing in a booth. We used to do that sort of thing just about every day. Then in the 16-track we'd do bands, mostly demos for the publishing company and then if they turned out alright maybe actually doing some tracks for a record."

Unlike some producers, Taylor didn't get involved in studio craft through being a musician.

"I just liked playing around with mixing consoles. What actually made me start was being a mad record collector and going to gigs and seeing the guy at the sound desk sitting there and thinking 'Wow, look at that, he doesn't have to pay to get in, he probably gets paid for doing that — what fun!'"

Those early gigs were in pre-punk days and he had been working for about three years when punk turned the British music scene upside down.

"That was a really good time, because I'd just started engineering really. And without being a brilliant engineer I just sort of got involved in the music."

"It was quite a funny old time ... I was doing some demos with a friend, because in London studios you can usually get the studio to work in over the weekend if there's no one there. This friend was a guitar player and we got in a bass player and a drummer and recorded the whole song with a melody on and the guitar player sang it and it was awful, because he was such a bad singer. And that night we went to a party in South London and there was a guy there who was going on about how brilliant the Sex Pistols were. He said 'I've just seen this band play at the 100 Club, they're fuckin' marvellous! You've gotta see them.'"

"And we just got talking to him about being in the studio and how the singing we had was crap and he said 'I could fuckin' sing it.' So I asked him if he'd ever done any singing before and he said 'Yeah, 'course I have' and I said 'In the studio?' and he said 'No, no ...'"

"He was actually lying about having sung, but the next day he came in and sang this song and that was Richard Butler of the Psychedelic Furs. That was the first time he'd ever sung — it was good though."

So did he have the style and mannerisms we're familiar with back then?

"He didn't quite have the style — but nearly, nearly. He was into a lot of bondage gear then — this was pretty early days."

Soon after that Taylor moved onto Phonogram

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