

Taylor Made Talkin' to the Producer

'IAN TAYLOR' FROM PAGE 16
Studios, where among the fledgling producers was a chap called Steve Lillywhite:

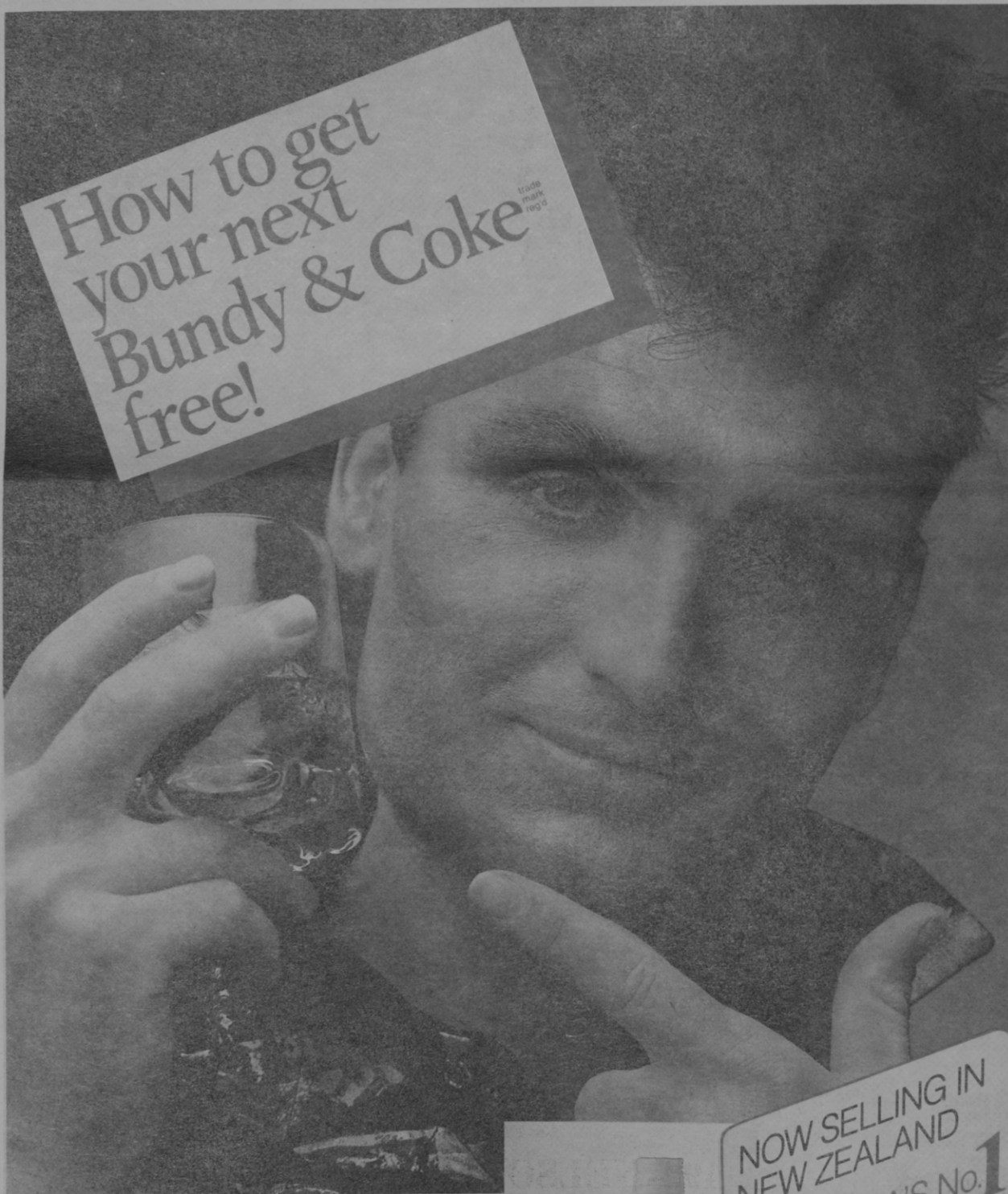
"He was just starting to produce things. He got in this band called Ultravox to do some weekend sessions and then took the tapes to Island Records who said 'Ooh, this is really good.' Another guy there at the time was Steve Brown, who went on to do Wham and various other people.

"I did a lot of work with Jimmy Pursey (of Sham 69) — his own stuff and the stuff he started to produce there, like the Angelic Upstarts. It was great fun at the time, absolutely great fun."

But one day there was a half page ad in *Melody Maker*, calling for "a brilliant engineer". The man behind it was Roy Thomas Baker, the man who had first made his name with the over-the-top sound of the early Queen records. Taylor became Baker's right hand man for several years (once even accompanying him to this country for the Harlequin School of Engineering in 1980). His engineering skills have clearly stayed sharp since he has struck out on his own — Mandrill man Tim Field was heard to echo those words "brilliant engineer" more than once in the course of the recording.



Guest drummer Vince Ely, Brian Jones, Ian Taylor.



This is the scene.

You're down at the local, checking out a couple of bands and having a few drinks with a few friends.

Now you know how the conversation always goes . . . albums, videos, groups, that sort of thing. Casually you ask someone, "What's your favourite group?" It's a sure thing that they'll ask you, "What's yours?"

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There's a lot of talk these days about the role of the producer in modern music becoming too great — understandably, Taylor doesn't subscribe to that view ...

"I don't think it can get *too* great. All these things come and go ... one day people will want produced-sounding records, in a period later maybe people will get bored with the sounds and it'll go back to something else. I think we've already seen that in the whole punk thing. Records were getting to be very technical before that. But I don't think you can have too much of things — a talented producer is just as entitled to make a record as a talented musician.

"For me, people like Trevor Horn are pushing the boundaries of modern recording technology, which is something that has to keep expanding. It's no good saying 'you shouldn't be using Fairlights and all those keyboards and let's get back to making really earthy records,' because making earthy records or whatever you're not breaking any boundaries as far as the actual recording of things goes. And there's an awful lot happening technically, with the digital recording process. There's a whole new process of making records with the Fairlight Computer."

In what respect is it different?

"Because it's *less* people all playing together. You can shape the sound to be *exactly* what you want. You're getting a quality that you've never heard before.

"For instance, most songs will have sections in them that repeat themselves, most songs are fairly symmetrical. And it's possible for you to do sections once and repeat them, or if the band didn't play one section so well you can move whole sections of the songs around. So the whole song itself becomes very fluid, as opposed to having to sit there and play it onto a tape in a 'correct' sort of form."

But how much is it becoming a matter of cost?

"That's very true, yeah. I think in all recording, if you make a record on an eight-track, you'll get an eight-track-sounding record, whereas if you go to the best 24-track there is, providing you have pretty competent people working with you you're going to make a professional-sounding record. And it's the same thing with Fairlights. You're just getting the best keyboards and it's just another studio tool that allows you to have better sounding records."

Does it matter if bands can't reproduce their records live?

"No, not at all. It is sometimes, in that seeing a band with tapes can be a bit boring, but I'd much rather see a band that have tapes backing them up and sound good than a band who don't have tapes backing them up and sound out of tune and crap and not half as good as the records. But I suppose it's only the records being so well put together that makes the situation arise in the first place."

What's it take for a band to make a successful record? Are there certain ingredients?

"No, nothing that you could put your finger on. I think there's too many important things to list or put in order of priority or anything. You just know it when you hear it."

So you had no specific things to apply to the Dance Exponents' record?

"Not really, it was just more parts of songs that let down the song as a whole — that's how I tend to think about things. You wonder how much the band have thought about a weaker section of a song and whether it's possible to maybe think about it a little further and try and develop something that's better. But you want to retain as much of the quality of the band as possible — you don't want to walk in and turn it into something else because all you end up with is nothing. You have to somehow maintain the magic qualities of the band that excited you in the first place but pull up some of the weaker parts."

Tim Field commented that a lot of the things you did in the studio went almost right against what he'd been taught was the right way. Do you work differently from most overseas engineers or is it just us in New Zealand?

"I don't know really. I just fiddle around with it till it sounds good. I'm not really too conscious of it because it seems so long ago since I was taught anything that I can't really remember what I was taught. And I don't think I was taught that there was particularly a right way and a wrong way to do certain things. I think what you listen to, the balances you have, what EQs you use and how much echo you use, I don't think there are rules for that. There *can't* be rules for that — there's rules for things like 'this is how you make this work' and 'this is how you plug this piece of equipment in' and these are the boundaries within which this piece of equipment works well."

Well, the album has now been completed, mixed, cut and pressed. The month of its making seems to have been a successful and enjoyable one for all concerned. It's now down to Ian Taylor to offer a word on the album's chances overseas ...

"It's very difficult to tell, quite honestly. I think the chances are very good for this album but the problem is always whether anybody will ever get to hear it. If the band becomes more internationally visible ... which may entail going to America. A bunch of New Zealand guys in America is already sort of 'Well, they've come this far ...' and they'll create interest when they play. They're a good band and I know that if people hear them they'll like the music. The secret is actually going to these places — 'I'm Jordan Luck, I'm an interesting guy, listen to me.' That's what it's all about."