



Letters

Post to 'RIU' Letters,
PO Box 5689, Auckland 1.

All Things Considered ...

Due to *RIU*'s increasing clickyphobia and compulsory drug-induced formula, I've been hesitant in getting my copy of late. So after a three or four month break it was good to see you lads are getting out a bit. After five (or was it six?) days on the road with Hunters and Collectors, I can't think of another writer who could have done a better job of telling the world about it than Russell Brown. Entertaining, active and a pleasure to read. I'm looking forward to April.

Taranaki Sol Gisborne

Concerning the Russell Brown article 'Six Days On the Road' ... perhaps it should have been titled 'Six Days On the Road With Russell Brown' — by Russell Brown. What a load of pretentious bile! I thought I was going to read

about Hunters and Collectors. Instead I got a story (and I use the term loosely) about Russell Brown's voodoo doll, Russell Brown's alcohol problem, Russell Brown's leather jacket and, above all, how Russell Brown felt. I, the "humble reader" don't want to know how sick you were, R Brown, but how good (or bad) that Hunters and Collectors were. Yes, I know "rock writing" is all purely subjective, blah blah, and setting up a mood in an article can be important, but mentioning H&C's in the first column and then not again until the article's fourth column is ridiculous. You're really exceeded your masturbatory musings this time R Brown. When are you going to start doing your job properly again?

Chris Rowe Auckland

It's not often I feel tempted to write to *RIU* with words of praise, but after reading Russell Brown's entertaining account of life on the road with Hunters and Collectors, I was moved to drop you a line. The article had what great rock writing is made of — plenty of wit, vivid imagery and action. Great stuff Russell — but don't get stuck in the vacuum.

Roslyn Grundy Auckland

For Crying Out Loud!

In response to Clifton Fuller's review of three Wellington bands at the Pulse bar in the Feb *RIU*, our name is For Crying Out Loud and we use a clarinet, not an oboe.

Jeff Paris (F.C.O.L.) Wellington

PHOTO BY FIONA PARDINGTON



Peking Man: (L-R) Neville Hall, Margaret Ulrich, J.F. Bala, John Fearon, Perry Marshall, Pat Ulrich.

Perils of Peking

Peking Man began playing live in 1983 and have continued to do so ever since. The *NME/Smash Hits* concept of predestination will argue against the possibility that doing so could conceivably lead to improvement, that a band could possibly work in its weaknesses and emerge better songwriters and performers. Oddly, Peking Man have, and live performance has grafted wings onto an ugly duckling.

"We were a bit lazy before ..." begins Tim, the bassist, and his line of thought is picked up by another member. "I think we used to play too much on stage like we were in the studio, we were too careful musically."

Tim smiles: "We know where to play and where *not* to play." I ask where and there is a dry murmur in the room.

"Well ... Pukekohe's a good one to avoid ..."

What are you doing in a band? Why do you play live?

"The only thing we've really aimed at is communication, I suppose, or accessibility, between the band and the audience."

Neil, the saxophonist, continues: "By playing live we've picked out the best of the best."

And what keeps you going for two years? Everyone replies in unison "the music!" and Neville laughs, adding "We have a really good time on stage — we wouldn't put up with all this shit if we didn't!"

Two years is a long time, but I'm

talking to six or seven people and that's a lot of musicians to get to know each other and work within the same musical vehicle. Change is inevitable with so many people involved; I begin to prod at the pitfalls of numbers.

Neville: "Once a song is written, in the early stages it's a matter of subtraction from then on so that it becomes something that a mass of people can relate to."

And what happens in the studio? "We have to take even more out." Too much?

Tim: "No (general murmurs of agreement). You can't ever really take too much out. We've found the limitations of 24-track — we've found we need even more space. Tracks are like money; no matter how many you've got you'll always spend your weekly income."

Is there a problem with too many people and too many tracks and a lot of subsequent "company decisions"?

John (drums): "In the end it has to come down to one person making a strong decision ..." Pat interrupts.

"But it's not always the same person ..."

So Peking Man work as a band on stage, all the talk results in a band that flows continuously and energetically. Do they play the same way in a studio? Pat begins with "That's what we're trying to capture ..." and there is a rush of conversation.

Tim complains that it is the mechanics of that move that are the hardest. Perry, the guitarist, notes that it needs someone who really knows what they're doing "to get from one medium to another. They eagerly cite Lillywhite ("You go in there and play live and I'll make you sound just like that.") and we discuss the problems of accurate reproduction, of having to play twice as hard to sound half as good and the growth of a luddite streak within the band, born not so much of what technology can't do, but what people can't do with technology. Tim asks me a question:

"What do you think?"

I think you're better live.

"Yeah ..." He looks resigned.

There are other obstacles, the obstacles that block native bands again and again. The fact that record companies are distribution points for a finished product, *not* a foster home for talent with the capacity to nurture and encourage a young band. John remains philosophical: "All that we can do is concentrate on doing *our* job really well, writing better music. But whether they get behind us as a result of that ..."

Population drawbacks encourage the band to look overseas and that observation leads to more practical aims, such as an interest in aiming at the audience that is at present occupying nightclubs, the foreign niche of bands that can compete with a turntable for up-tempo attention. I point out that a lot of people who started nightclubbing very early on are now sick of it and are going to pubs or live bands or anywhere they can find that's different.

"Nightclubs don't have live bands generally because they're just not hot enough," Pat continues, noting that in a pub situation, the quirkier the band the better it goes down, "... so you get cover bands which people somehow relate to. How, I don't know."

I muse as to how a cover band can stand it. Jay grins: "Five hundred bucks a weekend."

What about the future?

"We thought you'd never ask!" smiles Margaret, speaking for the first time in an hour. Already, they contemplate dropping the strong style that has developed.

"We're known as a funk band," explains Pat. "And the first album (which they hope to record soon, against all odds) will be primarily funk. I think essentially Peking Man is a soul band, but whether that comes out as funk or rock ..."

Tim outlines a change, to what he "wouldn't call rock music but something that does rock, something with a bit of a kick."

Less quirky?

John: "The New Zealand audiences are into the quirky stuff, rather than if you sound like a ..."

A real band.

"Yeah ..."

Chad Taylor

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