

'CHILLS' FROM PAGE 18

ing well but I had to make the decision. It's not pleasant. And on the other hand, musically, since we've been trying to leave it up to the rest of the band to do things for themselves, it hasn't really gone as well. So I'm sort of torn between the two things — taking full responsibility or not."

You seem to have a real sense of purpose now with regard to the music — has that always been there?

"Yeah, I think it has. For a long time I didn't know whether we were good or not. It was good when we started getting some overseas interest, because it really does prove, yes, there is something going. Since then, I've decided, well, we've got nothing to lose really, we'll just go for it, all the signs are good."

Do you know what success means to you personally?

"Ultimately, I'd like to be able to live off it fairly comfortably anyway. I think I probably could — I mean, if it came to it I could take up a job writing jingles. I think I could actually live off music, but to do it and feel good about it, I think I have to believe in what I'm doing."

You're reaching a stage where the industry, the money people, are interested in you. How do you feel about that?

"I think it's quite funny actually. I just think 'ha ha'. I just hope it's a sign of things to come, for other bands as well. I mean, I'm naive enough to think we're on a wave of something that could really change music overseas. New Zealand music and what's happening is that important that it could be like the Mersey Sound was to Briatin in the '60s. I just don't think they could keep it all quiet — the Verlaines, Sneaky Feelings, Chills, Tall Dwarfs ... the list goes on."

What do you think characterises that New Zealand music? There's obviously something ...

"I think one of the most basic things is that we've done away with so much bullshit. The extent that people have to go to just to put on a live show is getting ridiculous. Not even the huge, big band, who you sort of expect that from. I suppose if you've got 30,000 people watching you they've all got to see something. But the level that you're meant to go to to put on what's supposed to be an average show is unfair ... unfair to the music, unfair to people's integrity."

With Flying Nun you've had the huge advantage of working with people who are in it because they love the music and that's been the major consideration. Do you think they can change within that to accomodate any boom — get more professional?

"They are getting more professional all the time. They're sort of growing with us really. Yeah, big demands have come in from overseas. They'll just have to grow. They'll obviously have to think



Martin Phillipps, Chills.

about it an awful lot, but everyone's still right into it. They can get new people in. It should be okay — we've had no problems so far."

The Go-Betweens are one band who found they loathed the business side of things when they landed in England. Are you concerned about that?

"With the Go-Betweens, they didn't have somebody like the Go-Betweens telling them. So we've been warned — the same with Hunters and Collectors, they gave us a bit of advice. So we're not naive. It will be unknown territory but hopefully we won't make any dumb mistakes. Also, the Go-Betweens went there to stay and got stuck — we're not going to do that."

Do you think there's a danger of getting too "big" for comfort?

"Yeah, there could be. Parts of it are uncomfortable now. It's just a matter of adaptation, and I think we'll all have to forcibly carve out our own lives from it all. Make rules about privacy and that sort of thing."

By the time you go you'll be leaving a lot of expectations behind. Does that make you feel somewhat under pressure?

"It does. If we really crapped out over there, I don't know what I'd do. I just can't really see it happening that much."

What do you hope to achieve from this visit?

"Well, we don't really know what's over there. I'd like to meet lots of interesting people and make some good contacts ... I'm hoping maybe the Cramps or someone will be playing there ..."

'Doledrums' was the single that won you a lot of new listeners, but it was also the one which alienated other people — were you conscious of that?

"Yeah, I was. But I knew it would happen even before we put it out, too. I hope those people who really did get put off us came and saw the band live and realised there was nothing wrong — it was just a good pop single. But a lot of people were looking for another 'Pink Frost' and those sort of people I couldn't care less about because they don't understand what we're trying to do."

You're getting different crowds, a much wider variety of people, along to gigs now. Are gigs much different than they used to be?

"Yeah, they are actually. We get a cross-section of people and it's changing all the time. I'm quite enjoying seeing a lot of people who haven't been out to gigs for a long time starting to come along. There's such a big turnover of people that it seems we're proving ourselves at every gig. That's quite exhausting. In the old days, if I was tired, I could let a song go a bit, just sort of sit back and sing. But now I've got to put everything into it every time; think about the lyrics, line by line, think about what I was thinking about when I wrote it. And that's just really exhausting, just to get across to these people who haven't seen the band."

So touring was tiring?

"It was, for that reason. It's the worst it's ever been. Because of the way the band's playing really well, I no longer have to worry about that and I can just go for it, give a really solid performance. And I've realised now that it's actually quite unhealthy for me to do it that much on a tour. So that's a problem — unless I get stronger."

There's been some comment recently regarding production values and their relationship to overseas acceptance — what do you think about the need for an "international" production — and what constitutes a good production?

"Well, we're getting better every time, as we can afford it. But I'm glad we started from a four-track and worked up because it means we're aware of the recording process more than a lot of bands are, who maybe have it paid for by their companies. We've paid for all our own recording lately, so I think we're aware of time and so on. I think it's one of the strengths of the band; it means we could go into any studio and still sound like the Chills. Not let it overcome us."

Do you think you'll do your album here?

"I want to do it here, just so we can go overseas with good New Zealand product. We don't need any more than we've got here — I mean, as it is we don't use the full effects of the studio."

You once made an interesting analogy on your approach to music, comparing it to the visual arts. Where Monet, who is a painter of

light, might mean a lot to some, but less so to those who are interested in content ...

"And I'm heading more towards light, yeah. But I'm extremely aware of content — especially in our own stuff."

Would you say you're becoming more conscious of content?

"Yeah, but I still write the odd crap pop song — I enjoy fooling around with words. I sort of miss now writing things like 'Rolling Moon', with very colourful words. But once some people started laughing at that sort of thing it made me think. I haven't written any really colourful lyrics since. But I'm writing a different sort of lyrics — a lot more open."

Is there a desire to approach things differently, even within pop?

"Oh yeah. We've only been able to tap the top layer at any time, which is just the rock songs. There's a lot more that we can do, more experimental songs. There's heaps of things on tape that need the sort of instruments that we can't afford to get or lug around. We'll probably do a book ... I'd like to do some really good film clips. I might be working on a soundtrack later this year — that could be fun."

Can you see yourself stepping outside the band musically when things get established?

"Yeah, definitely. There's a lot of music that doesn't work with a band, so I'll do solo things. I expect Terry will do the same."

Is there much material lying round unutilised at the moment?

"Yeah. I reckon if I didn't write another song we could probably get by for another two and a half years."

Are you writing at the moment?

"Yeah, I had a bash the other day. I'm just having trouble with words. Finding enough things that I feel enough about to sing about. It gets really tricky."

Is songwriting still a means of escape, being able to shut yourself away in your room and come up with things?

"Not as much."

Is there a difference in the way you come up with things now — coming up with things to be made in to songs for the band, rather than just for the joy of it?

"Yeah, that's quite true actually. I have had to have that in mind all the time unfortunately. But we should be having a break for the last two or three months of this year, so I'll try and get a lot of totally different stuff written."

Doing it this way with the band would seem to be quite a lot to do with discipline ...

"Yeah, there's a lot of hard work in it. I mean, God, just living here without transport, it's an hour's walk each way to practice every night, that or a six buck taxi ride."

Frustrations ...

"When you're in a situation where you've got two and half weeks to come up with a new set ... we've only got two songs so far. Just things like that ..."

Rip It Up T-Shirts



The T-Shirt of the motion picture, of the video, of the soundtrack of the magazine is available by mail — a designer T-Shirt for only \$15. Post free.

Send payment to Rip It Up T-Shirt, PO Box 5689, Auckland 1.

Tick the size that fits: XOS ☐ OS ☐ M ☐ SM ☐

Name

Address

..... enclosed \$

Terry

In case you didn't notice, Chills' bassist Terry Moore took the cover shot for this issue. He also took the sleeve photo for the 'Pink Frost' single and has snapped the shutter for Rip It Up a number of times.

He agrees that being a photographer has made him more aware of the visual side to the Chills, "or of the lack of it. It's not an area we've been very concerned with so far — obviously the music has taken priority. But you do reach a point where you have to become more visual — especially when you're playing big stages, like we have doing supports."

Terry was in the Chills which recorded 'Pink Frost' before disbanding after the death of drummer Martyn Bull, and rejoined this year after the departure of Martin Keane from the band. In the meantime he became a competent soundman — and still keeps his hand in by mixing for the likes of the Verlaines when he's in the same city.

"It's made me a lot more aware of the relationship between front-of-house and the stage when I'm playing," he says.

He doesn't consider he's had as much success working in the studio — "it's been very rushed," but he has produced the Doublehappys' 'Double B-Side' and the forthcoming debut EP from Look Blue Go Purple.

"With the Chills it's not really a matter of producing — you're just part of four peoples' ideas," he says. But he does go into the studio with a very definite idea of what he wants his part to sound like: "Of course, you never get it quite right."

The interesting thing about the

English trip is that, with sort-of manager Doug Hood and mixer Andrew Frengley, the party will have three experienced soundmen: "I think that'll work out really well actually — we'll be able to make suggestions, point out any problems."

For Terry the trip will be a return home — he came to this country in 1974. After 11 years he's not really sure what to expect, "but I think in a lot of ways it's not going to be that different from playing here."

Saving the money for the trip has meant fairly intensive playing: "Which can be really good for you in that repeated playing helps you work out exactly what works in a song. But on the other hand, songs can reach a pinnacle and then slide as you keep playing them."

Touring has been a strain, "but it depends on the way you play. I can imagine some groups touring all the time and not really playing hard finding it pretty easy."

He agrees that things within the band and his playing relationship with Martin are beginning to gel: "It's taken quite a while to get things going — there was a lot of bad feeling and animosity after Martyn's death. But it's coming together now. I really respect Martin's ability as a songwriter."

The position in which the Chills are finding themselves with this trip is as that of a flagship for New Zealand music — but that's not something Terry dislikes.

"I think it's really good — I like the idea of going over and representing Flying Nun and other New Zealand bands. The way Flying Nun has been built up, there has been a lot of respect among everyone for the other bands involved."

And pressure to achieve?

"I don't feel under any pressure to 'be something' — we'll just continue to be ourselves. I'm always confident that what we're doing and what other New Zealand bands are doing is good enough."

Peter

Keyboardist Peter Allison isn't particularly animated on stage — in fact he tends to look more concerned than expansive. You'd never guess he's worked as actor.

After drama experience at university he worked at Dunedin's Fortune Theatre last year, but there's been no desire to incorporate the two disciplines: "I suppose you could ... you could really stage it up if you wanted to, but I'd like to keep them separate at the moment."

And a return to acting sometime? "I don't know if I'd like to be an actor full time. I think it's a hard way to make a living. But then, so's this."

The Chills' playing and practising schedule has made them all pretty much full time musicians: "I look upon it the same away as going on stage and doing the same show for three weeks in a row. After a while, sometimes you can't put everything into it, it just kind of runs off. It's hard to make every night a really good night."

Like everyone else, Peter doesn't know quite what to expect from England: "I can only go on what I've heard from people who've been there recently and they say there's not really much happening there. I think we've probably got to clean up our stage act a little, cut down the gaps between songs and also find ways of covering if anything goes wrong. At the moment ..."

In the past, Martin has taken responsibility for much of the musical direction of the Chills, working on arrangements and so on. Peter says things are changing, but "he still does most of the writing as such. I guess we collaborate a bit in the practise side of things. The rest of us haven't had a good go at writing."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40