

By now, you'll probably have heard Netherworld Dancing Toys' 'For Today'. It's one of those local singles that gets looked upon favourably by TV (*RWP*, *RTR*) and, more significantly, radio. No surprise really, it's got a nice melody and a classic singalongsurburbia chorus, friendly enough for all the family

... But don't take it as indicative of the rest of the the Netherworlds' debut album, *Painted Years*. The band's first really good record, the LP gels the rock-soul influences that have fluttered about the music for the last three and a half years; convincing but thankfully clear of the dreaded *littlefeatus tedium* that can settle on white boys who go in to the studio with guitars, horns and a penchant for soul.

Painted Years was recorded over about two and a half months at Wellington's Marmalade Studios. It was produced by Pelicans soundman/producer Nigel Stone and rounded out with contributions from some of the country's top session players and singers. But it's no technical masterpiece — its merits lie in a certain sense of urgency and the songs of Malcolm Black and Nick Sampson. Probably the way it should be ...

The idea's probably poisonous to some of you, but there's a certain classicism about divvying up a big packet of hot fish 'n' chips and settling down to ease its passage down the gullet with a little cold lager. Netherworld Dancing Toys are the right kind of people to do it with too; friendly and unaffected.

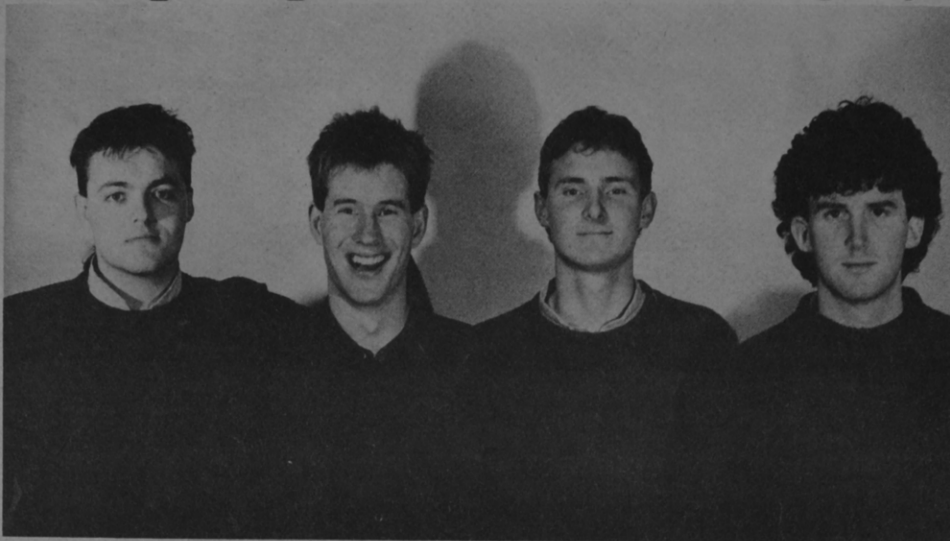
Licking the salt off their fingers are three of the four who make up the Netherworlds' nucleus, guitarists/singers Malcolm and Nick and bass player Graham Cockcroft. Drummer Brent Alexander has retired to bed with a debilitating case of This Winter's Flu.

The paper is screwed up and everyone settles back with Grease Belly for The Interview: the new record is the first time Netherworld Dancing Toys have really got it together on record, agreed? Malcom does, "wholeheartedly."

"It's because we had so long," Nick continues. "And also, all the records we've done up to this stage have been part of the learning process. We haven't been happy with records in the past but they've all got better. 'The Real You' was the first one we were actually happy with and now in retrospect we can see that this one's better than that."

Graham: "I think with the maturity in record-

Getting It Right Netherworld Dancing Toys



Netherworld Dancing Toys: Nick Sampson, Malcolm Black, Brent Alexander, Graham Cockcroft.

ing, it really started with Don (McGlashan) inspiring us to take a new outlook on things. With 'The Real You' we started working with Don in July of last year and didn't actually finish the recording until September-October. Prior to 'The Real You' we really went into the studio and reproduced the songs live. But Don said no, don't do that, take it back to its bare bones and build it from there. On 'The Real You' I think we did that, but not as well, because we didn't have as much time and money and so on as we did this time and it really has been a result of that change."

The length of recording time available to the band was thanks to Virgin Records NZ, which has come good on its promise to invest in some local talent. Counting time spent recording demos, the whole project spanned about four months. And yet the feel is live rather than laborious ... "That was one of the things Nigel liked doing," Graham explains. "All the rhythm tracks were done live, with bass and drums recorded at the same time and the vocals and guitar going too. We had a crack at it the other way and it just didn't have the same feel. It was amazing — I was never aware of that sort of difference."

Nick: "Nigel was great in the sense that we'd do something and then he'd say 'come up to my place,' he lives two or three miles from the studio, and we'd spend an hour sitting round drinking his gin, which we probably never repaid him for, listening to what we'd done on his good stereo in a different environment and we'd decide what

worked and what to keep and go back to the studio."

"Also, at Marmalade we were quite lucky in that on some nights when things just weren't happening we'd be able to say 'Okay, it's not happening, let's go home,' " adds Graham. "And we could, there was no pressure to finish it that night or by the end of the week or whatever. That arrived with the mixdown."

But even with that time, you've left in a few rough edges ...

"Yeah," says Graham. "That was something we had a bit of a battle about within the band — how smooth we wanted it to sound."

Nick: "As Huey Lewis said — and Malcolm and I talked about this a lot — it's often braver to leave in a mistake than to take it out."

"That was something we were really conscious of," Malcolm agrees. "Because we could have gone over the top and made a really heavily-produced record, but we wanted to make it sound as raw and honest as possible."

When the Netherworlds play live now, they bring in the Newton Hoons (Chris Green, sax, and Mike Russell, trumpet) and backing singers Anne Crummer and Kim Willoughby. Those four were present for the recording, as were a number of other guest musicians — all extremely proficient with their instruments. So what was it like working with musicians of that character?

"Very humbling," says Nick. "Especially when, say, you've got a guide vocal down and it sounds

very *guidish*, and someone like Rob Winch comes in to do a little bit of stuff for you and he's a guy who really knows how to sing ... It really made us think about performance I think. When we're back into playing live again, I think it will strengthen the band, because everyone's going to be listening a lot better."

Graham: "We weren't aware of musicians that competent in this country at all. You think there isn't anyone like that in New Zealand — and all of a sudden there's a room full of them in Wellington."

"Wellington's a great place like that ..." affirms Malcolm.

Nick: "It's really good for a young bunch of upstarts like us ..."

"At the same time I think we were really good for them as well," adds Malcolm. "It's just ideas and a different way of looking at things. Like they'd say 'What beat of the bar's the accent on?' and we'd say 'I don't know, just play that, so it feels good.'"

Nick: "I spent about two hours after we finished one night discussing with a couple of them the Dunedin sound and Hunters and Collectors, things like that, and they couldn't understand why it was so good, because they were saying the musicianship wasn't very good. And I put across a different point of view and in the end they could see what I was driving at. So it was good for them and good for us."

Were you worried about a soundalike danger, being swamped by the playing of others?

"I think our basic incompetent style always comes through, so it's okay," Nick smiles. "That's why we play the soul songs we've always played, why they've got that particular NDT flavour — we can't play them as well as these people and we're very enthusiastic, so they come out like that. And I think that the flavour of the band has always managed to come through."

Graham: "We're still in control. As far as decisions that have to be made, on a very basic level you could say we're employing these people. We're hiring them for their skills and for what we want to do. So we give them a little brief on what we want them to do, they have a crack at it and we say 'Well, modify it a bit like this.'"

Nick: "I was there for all of the horn stuff and the arguments we had with the horns some nights ... it was 'No, it's got to be played like this,' 'But that's not how we want it played, we want it played like this,' 'But that's boring!' But we were drastically wrong on several occasions."

Graham: "Yeah, and they'd say that, 'That's stupid, the timing's all wrong,' and we'd say 'Well, we don't really care whether the timing's right or wrong, what we want is this.' Which is good in a way, because we're hopefully introducing some new ideas to them and they're teaching us how

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LUTHER VANDROSS

LUTHER VANDROSS: 'Til My Baby Comes Home (Epic)

The drive and strength of Vandross' music has no peer in today's black pop. Because just as this sound is a deep, deep slab of customised power, so it still swings, still shifts with grace and without effort from verse to hook and back again. It would be easy to finger Luther as the successor to Marvin, but his voice is far smoother, much lighter in texture, a perfect mixer for the back-ups when they all strike into "I'm alright 'til my baby comes home." A brilliant taster for the forthcoming 'Night I Fell In Love.'

Richard Cook
New Musical Express
9th March 1985



'The Night I Fell In Love'

AVAILABLE ON ALBUM & CASSETTE

includes hit single 'Til My Baby Comes Home'
also 'It's Over Now', 'Creepin'.

