

# Darkness and Sunshine The Doublehappys



Wayne Elsey in *Stones* days, Cook, Dunedin.

Over the weekend of June 20-23, the Doublehappys came to Auckland to play, to mix their new EP and to enjoy themselves. They did all three. They'd already played Wellington and Hamilton on the course of what was a pretty casual "tour".

They were on their way to play Christchurch when they said their goodbyes and boarded the train south on the night of the 26th. The next morning saw a kind of stunned, inarticulate gloom spread amongst those who knew — Wayne Elsey had been killed overnight on the train; skylarking and leaning out on the carriage steps, he was apparently struck by part of a bridge which jutted out.

A musician tends to have friends from one end of the country to another, Wayne probably more than most — it

was always good to have the Doublehappys in town, their touring atmosphere was about as earthy as it comes. Personally, having seen Wayne for much of the previous week, the sheer violence and suddenness with which he was snatched out of existence made it almost impossible to accept at the time. Wayne's death drew tears from those who saw him perhaps two or three times a year — the impact on the close Dunedin community must have been hard. But eventually, when people think of Wayne, they'll smile.

The band had played the Shadows Bar at the university on the Thursday night; a rough 'n' ready affair with a small vocal PA only, it was in some ways the best of the weekend's performances. The next night at the Windsor was classically confrontational Doublehappys, offensive or highly entertaining, depending on your viewpoint. Shayne Carter carried the mood on into the night, managing to alienate roughly half the people at a party afterwards. I didn't see them play the Saturday night but all three turned up in varying states of disrepair to hear and join in the funny/loud/indulgent jam that had developed out of Birds Nest Roys' set at the party to say goodbye to an old Auckland building. Wayne later had the good fortune to meet a couple of genuine Friendly Policemen who gave him a lift after he'd unwisely set out to stroll home from Parnell to Mt Eden. Sunday saw the completion of mixing of the new EP — it's a rollicking good four songs and four sounds, recorded almost live with Rex Visible at the controls. Wayne rubbed a tired head, grinning as he talked about how much he liked going on tour.

What with the EP and all, it was time to do an interview, so we did, on Monday night. We took our time, we had all night, and the interview began just around midnight. I didn't see Wayne after that. Listening back to the tape made me smile, remember a messy, spirited, sometimes hysterically funny (at the time) chat. And there's no reason to pretend it was otherwise ...

Okay, why not begin with track one, side one of this new record thing, Shayne. 'Needles and Plastic' is a fairly obvious barb at the night-club thang in Auckland. Based on personal experience?

"Sort of, sort of ..."

The line, "I don't think that I'm right, I know that I am" is, um, interesting ...

"That's just more a reflection of arrogance rather than the lyric of the song. The lyric says a pretty personal statement and then the arrogance is reflected in the fact that it's followed up by that ... but it's not that serious."

Would you say arrogance is a trait of many of your songs?

"Nah. I reckon that if you get up and you make a personal statement in front of 300 people or whatever, there's arrogance in doing that itself. So, nah, I don't consider it real arrogance in human terms."

But the Doublehappys are probably regarded as more arrogant than most.

"Yeah. But don't you reckon that's only because we actually talk between songs and try and get people involved in it — which involves sort of yelling at them. And that's the only way, quite often, that you're going to get people involved, the way audiences usually are."

So why confrontation as a means?

"Usually by that stage we're so desperate for some type of reaction we resort to the last one, which is insulting them. It usually works!"

Wayne: "I don't think it does. I

reckon it usually fails. I think that that sort of attitude started off when we first started playing. We were only playing to a few friends and that sort of thing. The first few times we played it was to people we knew, so we could get very drunk and yell at people. But when you try and transport that and deposit it in another city, it doesn't work quite so well."

Shayne: "It's true!" (And the laughter begins.)

Wayne: "For us to get very pissed and yell at our friends and say 'Yer all a bunch of fuckwits!' works quite well, but as soon as you start yelling at people you don't know, they take offence."

Shayne: "Yeah, and they don't bother listening to us any more ... but it's still fun doing it!"

John: "Yeah ..."

Shayne: "But you don't do it!"

John: "Yeah ... I first realised it when I went to see the Johnnys and someone said to me that they were like the Doublehappys and I thought that was because of all the bullshit going on. And I thought they were wankers because of it ..."

Ah, but they were pretty rehearsed — you guys ad-lib.

Shayne: "Well, yeah ..."

Do you save up good lines?

"Oh shit no! That's why we usually fail. Ad-libbing is a pretty hard skill to acquire, isn't it?"

Wayne: "I have to be pretty pissed before I want to do it though. I can't do it straight, straight I just clam up and get really self-conscious."

Shayne: "But percentage-wise you come out with more good ones than I do. You come out with the good ones, whereas I just tend to rave."

And you're the one who gets truly abusive ...

"I don't know, Wayne can be pretty cutting ... what about the quote at Hunters and Collectors?"

Wayne: "I can't even remember it — what was it?"

Shayne: "You went 'This is our last song' and everyone went 'yay' and I went 'Well, get fucked' and you said 'You'll get fucked if you're lucky ...'"

Wayne: "... but you won't, you'll

end up vomiting through your nose in the toilets!"

Shayne: "And everyone else went 'yay!' See, that was one place where our insults worked. But then again, how important is this talking between songs? It's just trying to provoke a reaction towards the songs. That's maybe what makes us a wee bit different from some bands, but I reckon our music is what makes us different from a lot of bands. And that's what it all boils down to isn't it? Can your music back up your statements? For most of the Doublehappys' duration, no. But it's getting to the stage where, yes, it does now."

John: "I don't know, I thought it always did."

Wayne: "Yeah, I thought it always did. Even on the Looney Tour — that was us pretty sort of crude as compared to now, but there were things happening."

Shayne: "Yeah, that Looney Tours thing, it was good for the band in some ways, but it may have pushed the Doublehappys into the limelight too early. Because Wayne and I had been playing together five months, which was nothing, John had joined a few weeks before we did it and then a month after we basically formed, we were in Auckland at the end of a national tour, making a single. That's why the single's so rough. It also shows how things have changed, because in the old days bands just couldn't do that. Making singles was an impossibility, but here was a band that wasn't that good, with 12 songs to choose from, a month after they've formed, making a single. But the reaction to that single has been really surprising, because I didn't really think it was that good."

The songs were what made it.

Wayne: "Yeah, I think the songs definitely stand up. The lyrics on my side really embarrass me now, but that's not the point really."

Shayne: "So that makes me feel a lot better about the EP, because if people liked that the EP's going to be a lot better n that."

There seems to be a lot more attention to the way each song sounds on this one.

"Yeah. Because the last one we went in with the old studio thing of recording the drums and then recording the guitar on top of that ... and when you do that and record things separately, you lose the whole feel of a band playing together and what makes a band work, the interaction between people. Also, the sounds we get — there's a point when the two guitars meet live sometimes, all these funny harmonics and sounds fly out. And they don't really come from either guitar, they come from the sound of the two guitars meeting. That's what we tried to get, so this record was recorded really live, the guitars recorded in the same room as each other, turned up really loud and all of us playing together — the band actually played live on each song. So there's a couple of mistakes in there, which were purely through desperation and lack of time. But it still sounds really live and good."

Okay, cutesy question — how can a band called the Doublehappys sometimes seem so doubly miserable in their songs?

"Wayne can answer that one."

Wayne: "Who writes the most miserable songs? I haven't written a miserable song yet."

How 'bout the ol' "self pity and suicide" in 'Anyone Else Would'?

Shayne: "Anyone Else Would" is more sort of a ... instead of going *urrrghh*, it's more sort of *euuhhh*, y'know. More of a sigh ..."

Wayne: "It's more of a sort of 'What is this shit? Let's forget about it.'"

Shayne: "I don't think our songs are miserable ... cynical. Not cynical, but, y'know ..."

Wayne: "Cynical. I definitely get cynical at times."

(Bystander): "Cynicism is a form of humour ..."

Wayne: "Yeah, cynicism is a form of humour — there are black comedies. The songs don't necessarily say 'HEY WONDERFUL! Let's get up and dance and earn money and buy flash clothes!' They say 'Jesus, there's all these people all over the world about to drop large atomic

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