

Life In The City of Destruction Kiwi Animal

The Kiwi Animal — Brent and Julie. And now, Patrick. And now, a new album, *Mercy*. And now, an interview.

Brent Hayward and Julie Cooper have been working together as The Kiwi Animal for something over three years. They're played live, released an EP (*Wartime*) and two albums (*Music Media* and *Mercy*) and, part by accident, part by design, have tended to feel and be separate from Auckland's music scene. They were joined last year by Patrick Waller, who plays cello and other instruments on *Mercy*. They're in some ways about contradictions: Brent, the former Smelly Feet, the adventurous ingenue, sometimes apparently all but alienated by the wider world; Julie, the former journalist, more educated, self-conscious, yet softer and less jarring than Brent on record. The music, often simple acoustic tunes (the label is *Massage Records*), but punctuated by cut-up techniques, word permutations, jar-

ring images. The pair, sometimes hopelessly uptight; the music, sometimes perfectly soothing. The ability to communicate incisively rests alongside a propensity to be tightly obscure. Musical but unmusical. They make music for *everyone*; but are often publicly perceived as "weird".

Well, the first thought that comes to mind about *Mercy* is that it's "more sophisticated". Brent: "That's a good thing to think. I think it is too. We've tried a lot — that's obvious in the sound." Julie: "I just think there's more of a theme with this one. The last one was an album of songs and they were all completely different. That's what we concentrated on this time. It's live recordings and they're all a particular theme, especially the lyrics." What's the theme? B: "I'd say it was disaster of a sort. Of a place ... that are cities as well, but the cities are shells. There's nothing really whole. And I think it's

individual expression in the wrecked society. I don't know, some people will probably find it difficult. But it's about a disaster and through that disaster .. there's a race of men and women and the only way they can cope is for there to be no factions or groups, they have to live together. They have to be in harmony together — it's about balance of the sexes as well." As echoed in 'Man and Woman Have Balance'. On that track, as well using a keyboard and drum machine for the first time, you've

sort of thing. The artists or whatever are the people who have new ways of doing old things. Trying to break through and go forward ... say things better. I'd also like to stress that a lot of older people in society think these new ways of going about writing are great — but they don't really look at anybody's work, they kind of try and see the people as personalities. They try and think 'Oh, he did that or she did that — she's really interesting. They don't see it as the work itself. There's a lot of people that read but I don't think they really understand that what they're trying to get away from is themselves, the writers, they're try-

against the English language. But it's not *against* it, it's just ... revealing more truths. Basically, it's a way to come through with the message, without the adornment. And it does work." Were there specific musical things you wanted to try with *Mercy*? B: "Yeah, there were. With 'Fag Piece' and 'Conversation Piece' (which both use tapes, the former utilising a William Burroughs monologue) we definitely did want to. The music had been around for a couple of years and it was only last year, just before we started organising the Serious Acoustic Tour, that we thought it would be good to start changing our direction as far as the music went. And those pieces came to the foreground." J: "There was that whole area we had to explore, being more spacious with sound. Letting silence come in. Building soundtracks from silence." B: "And not hurrying things we do — sometimes I think we've done that. We just wanted to take out time and still do."

ment, it's a love-hate relationship. I don't think anywhere else in the country would be good for us." J: "It's too far away, that's the only trouble. This is the best place to be, but then again it's the worst place. The way the City Council is working ... I've got personal biases ... the homeless and the way everything's going and they're pushing everyone out to Otara or wherever." I know what you mean — Chase Corporation knocks down the 80-odd year-old building I'm living in in a couple of weeks. B: "Yeah, the one Julie's just had to move out of is just over a hundred years old — the second oldest commercial building in Auckland." J: "It's all kauri. But they're going to have trouble building a car park on it — it's built on the original scoria, from the volcano." How much a part of this city's music scene do you feel? J: "Not at all, not one bit. (This stance was later softened to one of obviously being part of the city's music, but not of the scene.) Except that one thing that one thing I find a bit strange dealing with all the time is the constant impression that people think of you as some kind of weirdos or something. In the paper the other day there was a review of the record, which was fine, it was a real sweet sort of a review, but the fact was he made out that if you're into something different or whatever then it's alright. If you're into something unpredictable then it's great, highly recommended, but personally I find that a bit silly because I see them as songs, good songs." B: "Getting onto the subject of people thinking you're weird ... it does kind of surprise me that a lot of people think it's alright to be really kind of scratching ..."



Kiwi Animal: Brent Hayward, Julie Cooper, Patrick Waller.

built it out of word permutations of the title. How did that come about? J: "Well, word permutations were introduced by a man called Brion Gysin (Brent: "Mr Brion Gysin."), who was a poet and painter in the late 50s. And it just seemed to fall into place with the Casiotone. I guess it's the most light-hearted track on the album and the recording situation is different, but it was introduced because it did go with it. I like it because it says different things each time even though it's saying the same thing, there's 58 lines and each one touches on a different thing." B: "Although Mr Gysin introduced it I don't think he wanted people to just copy what he was doing. We used it, but we did it in a different way. I don't see us as copying anybody. I see us as trying to make breakthroughs in writing and that

ing to express something about the world." J: "I'd just like to point out that although it might seem like an experimental approach in a way, it's also just lyric writing. They're just lyrics." B: "Yeah, we also do straight writing. And the cut-up does work on things we write, it wouldn't work for everybody. And we're not academically trained people. I dropped out of school quite early. But I've been reading books by the people we've been talking about since I was quite young." A lot of people would automatically call anyone who uses cut-ups and reads those books "intellectual". B: "Julie knows some pretty academic people who are really against it, cut-up ..."

J: "Violently against it. They think it's Is Auckland a good place to work? B: "It's easy and it's hard, we've thought about it a lot ..." J: "We despise what's happening to Auckland though ..." B: "Sure, sure ... we've talked a lot about whether we like this environ-

ment, it's a love-hate relationship. I don't think anywhere else in the country would be good for us." J: "It's too far away, that's the only trouble. This is the best place to be, but then again it's the worst place. The way the City Council is working ... I've got personal biases ... the homeless and the way everything's going and they're pushing everyone out to Otara or wherever." I know what you mean — Chase Corporation knocks down the 80-odd year-old building I'm living in in a couple of weeks. B: "Yeah, the one Julie's just had to move out of is just over a hundred years old — the second oldest commercial building in Auckland." J: "It's all kauri. But they're going to have trouble building a car park on it — it's built on the original scoria, from the volcano." How much a part of this city's music scene do you feel? J: "Not at all, not one bit. (This stance was later softened to one of obviously being part of the city's music, but not of the scene.) Except that one thing that one thing I find a bit strange dealing with all the time is the constant impression that people think of you as some kind of weirdos or something. In the paper the other day there was a review of the record, which was fine, it was a real sweet sort of a review, but the fact was he made out that if you're into something different or whatever then it's alright. If you're into something unpredictable then it's great, highly recommended, but personally I find that a bit silly because I see them as songs, good songs." B: "Getting onto the subject of people thinking you're weird ... it does kind of surprise me that a lot of people think it's alright to be really kind of scratching ..."

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