

'MENTALS' FROM PAGE 16
Fundamental's been going pretty well so there's not much point in putting out competition for it. By the time we get around to it we'll have enough for two albums. We've just released 'Date With Destiny', our third single from *Fundamental*, and so that must mean we've done 17 or 18 singles by now. We've got too many songs, that's a big problem."

Let's Eat

Life on the road is tough, man, so tough that most bands need a release through things like beer and even wine. The Mentals live in the fast lane, they're into FOOD:

"Greedy started it. He actually earned that name, he ate 17 pieces of Kentucky Fried Chicken in one sitting about seven years ago. The name stuck and we never let him forget about it.

"But we're all very big eaters, that's one of the joys of life. We eat copious amounts. The last couple of weeks on the road we've been out in the country and there's not a lot to do so we stop for big two to three course pub lunches everywhere. And then we'd be playing RSL and football clubs and we eat huge meals there too. So after about a week we've collectively put on four or five stone. We get huge guts, but we don't get fat anywhere else."

How do you get rid of the extra weight?

"By making ourselves sick by having too much of everything. About two years ago Reg and Greedy were real gluttons for a while. They felt guilty about it so they got sick together. I think it was a little agreement they had. They

were really sick for about 10 days, every morning they were just vomiting up bile and when we pulled them out of bed they'd be pale and shaky and we'd stick them on stage. We played every night and they insisted on going on with it. In fact I don't think we've missed any shows because of sickness in eight years."

The Mentals and Their Music

The reason for all this gluttony and idiocy lies in the music. The Mentals are nothing if not a great singles band. *Monumental*

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bears that out. The four songwriters (that's everyone bar drummer Ray De Lisle) have a John Sebastian knack of blending perceptive whimsy with an exhilarating little tune. 'Live It Up' is only the most recent in a long line of mental tit-bits but as albums go the band seemed to hit a slump after *Cats and Dogs*:

"Yeah, from where you are it probably appeared that way. We went on a long tour of America and then last year it took a long time to find a producer as our original choice of Gary Langham fell through and the months went rolling by until we found Richard

Gotthrer.

"We tend to have a successful album and then one that's not so popular, so if you had a graph it would be up-down-up-down-up. Like the first album was popular and then *Expresso Bongo* was a bit hasty and we did it in six days under the influence of all sorts of terrible things. It's one of my favourites and it's the weirdest album we've done but it could've been played a lot better and done a lot cleaner.

"*Cats and Dogs* was successful but *Creatures Of Leisure* was too esoteric or strange or something. *Fundamental* is popular so the next one we do we'll make sure it's a real dud, just to keep the graph nice and neat."

How come the arrangement with Gary Langham fell through?

"He took on too much at the time and he got zonked out at all the stress and he pulled out something like five days before he was meant to be on the plane. A shame because he worked with the Art Of Noise and he wanted to make a wild album which we were pretty excited about, but things worked out well in the long run because Gotthrer was a really good find."

Gotthrer's pedigree goes a long way back. He co-wrote old standards like 'My Boyfriend's Back' and 'Sorrow', he had a couple of hits with his band, the Strangeloves, and since the late 70s he's made his name producing the likes of Blondie, the Go Gos and his greatest challenge, the Mentals. How did they get a producer of Gotthrer's stature at such short notice?

"Our manager had been in America shopping around

and he talked to Gotthrer who just happened to be available a few months ahead, so we had to wait and that meant there was more than two years between albums. It's too long because we've got four songwriters in the band and we ended up with over 30 songs demoed for *Fundamental*, more than enough for two albums.

"We put more time and money into *Fundamental* than on any other album but it was worth it. Gotthrer and his engineer were great. At times they were overly strict, as in a lot of things

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that we would've let go on other albums they insisted we do again until we got them right. That taught us a lot about making a professional album as we'd done sloppy stuff in the past."

The band has also worked with Elvis Costello, who produced the 'I Didn't Mean To Be Mean' single in 1982:

"Costello was in Australia touring at the time and we wanted to put out a single and we approached him. We knew his manager, Jake Riviera, as we did the Rockpile support in Australia in 1979 so we gave him a call and asked him if he could play Elvis these tapes.

We did the whole single in one night."

Not the band's best song: "You didn't think so? Oh well, there you go, there's one opinion. We got different reactions to it and it got a lot of airplay but it wasn't a mega-hit. We've had so many singles that people think we must be successful but in fact I don't think we've had a national number one in Australia. 'Live It Up' made it to number two, although it was one in different places like Sydney."

Your song 'Surf & Mull & Sex & Fun' has a good enough hook to make a single:

"Yeah, but the subject matter's not quite single stuff."

Is the song a list of your hobbies?

"Yeah (laughs), I gotta be careful what I say here because of the family audience who might be reading this. I don't think my mum's ever commented on that song."

Mental Notes

So far the Mentals have done two tours of America with another being planned for late this year or early next year:

"We don't need America, but you can keep on doing the rounds year in year out, which is what we do, that's our bread and butter. But it's great to play to fresh audiences who have no preconceptions about the band so we can be real idiots again. The Americans are fun to play to coz they have a little trouble getting through to Aussie humour, they're very insular straightforward people. They love the accent and the fact that we're from somewhere they don't know very much about. I've had comments like 'Oh, you speak very

good English,' and 'How did you get here, by train?'"

Any signs of a Men At Work-type breakthrough?

"No, the write-ups were good and the people liked us but you've got to have a single played right across the country to make your mark. People forget who you are unless you have that up front high profile and there was no way we had that. When we go again, when *Fundamental's* released there, we'll be known in a small way, not quite cult and nowhere near popular."

Fundamental has brought Mental As Anything back into the limelight. What would have happened to the band if the album had flopped?

"We'd probably have committed group suicide, jumped in a Valiant and driven off a cliff at Coogee. It would've been a problem but things happen the way they're meant to happen, I guess. If it had've been a turkey we could have fallen back on other things for a while. Like I'm going busking this weekend with some guys from the Milky Bar Kids, a rockabilly trio who've been supporting us."

And future plans?

"I'd like to experiment with things like something psychedelic and that might come out in the next album, it might be heavier altogether, and we'll probably find a different producer again. All of our albums and songs are different and I think that's one of our strengths."

Good luck with the busking, it might be more lucrative than working with the Mentals:

"Yeah, if it looks like being a good thing I might give this Mentals thing a shove," you guessed it, he laughed.

George Kay

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