

Tales of XS. 80-81

by Bryan Staff

It was Sheryl who suggested we start it and it was Garry who made it possible. The *Star* said I started XS with my flatmate and girlfriend, but that was only half the story. Mike Chunn and I were running Ripper

Records, and I figured that if we had a venue for our acts to appear at as well, then we would do okay. Mike in his wisdom declined, and it took Sheryl, Garry and I a year to lose three grand apiece.

I guess each of us saw ourselves as swanning around all night with a drink in our hands while the others did the work. Certainly, whoever you spoke to swore the place would be better off "if only the other two would pull their weight". Such are the joys of a partnership. The name came out of a wet afternoon

tossing ideas around. A graphic designer knocked up the sign for \$15 and a ticket to the opening night party ... and God, what a party! The newly-formed Techtones on stage, not a bootboy in sight and queues trying to get in. By day the Swingers would rehearse or screenprint posters on the tables; or Murray Cammick,

Mark Phillips and I would bundle *Rip It Ups* for mailing and fight over the stereo. More than one band stayed over when they arrived in Auckland — camping on the floor in return for the odd spot of "cleaning" — usually a cursory sweep with a broom, as our vacuum cleaner had given up very early in the piece.



Garry got pissed off with macho boot children punching holes in the walls of the lavatory, so one day he bought some sheet steel, screwed it up on the walls, and painted the whole room. That night we counted the red knuckles. Garry was also famous for his carrot cake — in fact he was definitely the baker amongst us. I would generally do the dishes so that I couldn't see the fights — but it was usually me who stopped them. I would grab whoever was getting beaten up and throw them out — then say it was for their own safety!

It was rough. Our lack of organisation depended on a loose roster of friends who would work behind the counter in return for free whisky and the opportunity to watch "the entertainment" — and I don't mean the bands! By reading up on the liquor laws, we found that management were allowed to drink but patrons weren't

— well that got up a lot of people's noses, and one little bootgirl took to Sheryl one night for doing just that; and for dressing better than she did!

Another way around the liquor laws was the old Private Party. Prepaid tickets — invite only, a la 21sts and tennis club socials. Except most of our lot weren't 21 and didn't know what tennis meant, Club, yes, that was what you raced out to use on the V8 boys, the KCs, or, in one foolhardy instance, the police ...

Somebody threw a bottle at an unmarked police car and the long baton boys arrived. I was making a milkshake for a girl at the time, and when I turned around to give it to her she was underfoot and screaming. It is impossible to say in print what actually happened, but sufficient to state that many people who didn't start fights were clubbed down with long batons and thrown into police vans. Newmatics were playing that night, and they wrote a song about it called 'Riot Squad'. Certainly it was the first time any of us had seen long batons — or the vicious force with which they could be used on unresisting people.

There were elements of humour in running the place as well. One night a shifty-looking character wandered behind the counter and began idly fingering the toasted sandwich machine. Macho me asked him what he wanted: "Inspector Hugglestone," he replied. "Just having a look around." I glanced at his heavily tattooed hands and, suppressing a grin, asked for some identification. "Don't need it mate," he told me. "I'm above that — but give the boys a ring and they'll

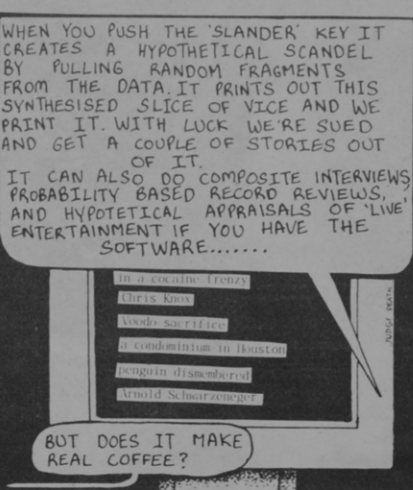
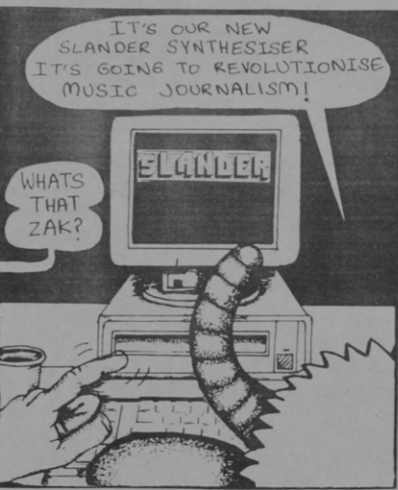
tell you who I am." So we went to the office and grabbed the phonebook. I dialled 111 and said it wasn't an emergency, but Inspector Hugglestone wanting verification of his identity. After describing him, the officer on the phone sniggered and said they would send a car around. Well when it came, the guy yells "Thank heaven you've arrived — these people are trying to say I'm a policeman!"

It didn't seem to matter how diabolical the bands were at XS, as long as they were perceived to be vaguely hip. I booked Al Hunter — God's gift to country rock — for a weekend. Not one person came, and our regular patrons sat over in the car park and threw bottles! Harvey Mann and Ed Hansen did marginally better, but the place really belonged to North Shore bands who were about a year out of school. The Screaming Meemees were the most famous of these, but the Ainsworths, Rebel Truce, the Regulators and a whole host of now-you've-heard-of-them-now-they've-broken-up bands would pull more people than supposedly *real* musicians.

What closed us down was the burglary. The council had been hassling us about the graffiti on the surrounding properties — I tried telling them 'Newmatics' was a sex doll used in Rainton Hastie's club up the road. But our insurance was cancelled through umpteenth claims for smashed toilets. Then we were burgled. Amp, turntable, cassettes, cigarettes ... the lot. We heard on the wind that it was bootboys; or skinheads; or would-be apprentices ... but by then we had had enough.

Bryan Staff

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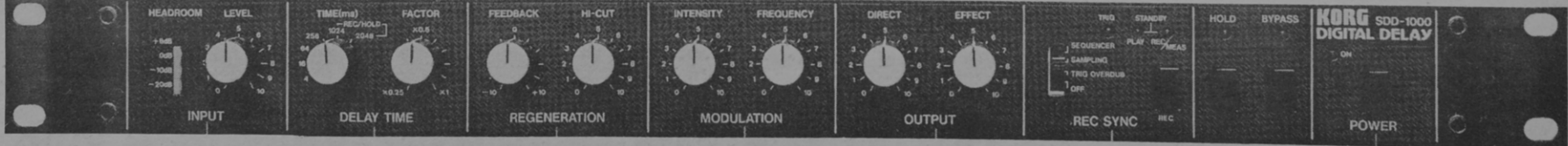
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