

Sam Hunt smiles and laughs. He has a classic ruddy complexion, a slightly tipsy, having long since pushed their way to the surface, have surrendered to circumstance and gracefully dried up, leathery and permanent. Sam Hunt looks like he couldn't cut himself shaving with a machete.

The frontage of Auckland's Travelodge is in no way like the frontage of Sam Hunt. Smooth, dark, impenetrable glass walls. Two single swinging doors flank a big revolving affair that doesn't look entirely trustworthy — it's a kind of leap of faith stepping into something you can't see the other side of.

Leap I does; and after a buzz from the reception desk, Sam is waiting outside the lift on the eighth floor. From the moment of handshake he's off and talking. Back at his room the tape recorder is on for five minutes before he pauses and asks: "Did you ask a question there?" I hadn't; hadn't had to.

"What would you like, a coffee ...?" he offers. "How about a little dash of whisky in it? I always find that helps."

He fetches a miniature bottle of Teachers' and unscrews the cap. And why not? After all, it's five minutes past eleven ...

Hunt has been in Auckland for two days promoting his new book of poems, *Approaches To Paremata* (he lives at Paremata on the Pauatahanui estuary, north of Wellington). Promotion essentially means doing interviews with as many people as possible.

"I said to the woman down below, 'I've got a few interviews on today,' and she said 'Oh, are you going for a job?'" AUHAHAHAHA! the laugh is startlingly long and loud, like it's been crouched away for a few hours waiting for a burst.

Brian Eno said the problem with doing interviews was that they gave the impression that you spent all your time thinking about yourself.

"Well, in this case I do anyway, so it's alright ... and I'm sure if Brian Eno was being honest he'd say the same."

#### Do you enjoy the promo side of things?

Oh yeah, we have a good time. It's not done too stupidly — I'm able, thank God, to call my own tune. When you put out a book, it's like putting out a record, it's a time when things come together, a bit like christening a baby and I think christenings are important. It's the same with touring — as I approach my *middle years*, I'm lucky in that I can travel New Zealand at the pace I want to travel and I don't have to work every night. I don't like just going into a town, doing a



show and fucking off the next morning, because you miss out on the whole thing of what New Zealand's about. It's about small towns — New Zealand is a small town. People know each other — that incredible intimacy. Sometimes it can get claustrophobic, but not for long. You can always get out into the hills — I spend more and more of my time not necessarily alone, but with access to that kind of solitude. One tends not to go into the claustrophobic literary or intensely showbiz sort of thing. I keep clear of that because I've seen too many people go down the tube in the old business. It's bloody sad, because people start believing in the bullshit. And that's not what it's all about.

#### Are you wary of becoming an industry "personality"?

Oh yeah ... imagine doing a television series or something, that'd be the kiss of fucking death. I could no more do that than ... um ... um ... I was going to say fuck Muldoon! I had a strange dream about Muldoon a few nights ago ... in the dream he had long, very distinguished silver grey hair. And I said to him "You're looking very distinguished," and he said "I've always told you I'm dis-

## Bard to the Bone

Sam Hunt Raps Lyrically . . .

tinguished, I'm an elder statesman." At which stage I woke up thinking fuck, I don't want to be an elder statesman!

**You and Gary McCormick seem to have parted ways in that respect — he's on TV and radio and so on.**

Oh yeah, we all move on ... Gary and I worked together and had many good times on the road and sometimes I miss those times. I think when we did what we did together it was a very supportive time for us both. He was incredibly supportive of me, because although I've got the road in my blood, I'd been off the road for two or three years after my son Tom was born. So he's doing different things now and we're very good friends. I only wish I saw more of him but he's up in Auckland most of the time. But he is operating in a world which for my purposes I would tend to keep out of. I do the odd television thing, but only on a one-off basis. I mean I see enough of myself with old McGadsby or whatever his name is! I'm sick of it!

**Your current press release puts it well when it says you "balance a very public and very personal life." But you're in the unusual position of having your private life fuel your public life.**

Which is fine. And to some extent the public life sometimes encroaches on the private — but you sort that out pretty quickly. Some people have been saying there's a lot of poems about loss in the book — but over the last couple of years in terms of things close to me, they couldn't have been much happier. I've got a woman I love

**" . . . I think that the day Bob Dylan's Highway 61 came out university English departments experienced a major earth tremor, because they were threatened. Poetry was coming back on the streets . . . "**

very much, I've got a son I love very much and I've got an old dog I love very much. he's getting pretty old, but shit he's good, Minstrel.

#### He's 15 isn't he?

15, yes. He's had quite a few 15th birthdays now though. He's stopped notching it up on the cabbage tree. But to continue, it's something that I know people have wondered about for themselves. I mean, with so many bluesmen there are a lot of good times, but one tends not to write about these much. Maybe the best songs are about a certain sense of distancing or loss ... but it's not always loss — sometimes it's telling someone to fuck off.

**What's the effect of living these experiences once, and then again every time you read the poem?**

It's good for me. A lot of people seem to write poems and put them in books and the poem sort of stops there and dies. Whereas with my poems, I'm like the parent who didn't send the kids off to boarding school even though the pressure was on to do so. So my kids are still around me, waking me up and disturbing me and making my life an absolute misery, AUHAHAHA! And a fair amount of delight. So the poems are with me, they're part of my entourage ... or I'm part of their entourage. I don't like the idea of boarding schools — I mean, I know often there's no choice, for people in the country and things like that. But I don't like the idea of that. For me, parenthood is a mystery, a fuckin' magical mystery tour. It astonishes me all the time and I love it.

Oddly enough, in this book there's not really a poem directly about Tom, but he's always there. I think there's a couple of poems about Sarah, but if you wrote directly from life they'd be almost nine-tenths in a way. But it doesn't always work out like that. It's what I was trying to explain to somebody yesterday, who didn't quite understand it, this question of irony, y'know, that you write from different angles. You're not always stating the obvious thing there. Some people don't understand that. They accuse Keith Richards of being a certain thing because he's written a certain Stones song, and as he's pointed out, that's only part of him over there, it's come from there. People read things literally, two-dimensional people — and they fuck you round, they fuck poetry around too.

**So what's it like when someone comes in and starts analysing your poems? Like the child psychologist coming in?**

Yeah. It is interesting though. What I'm interested in is the person who makes the poem happen, tells the poem — but that sort of thing, a good poem will stand up to it. And the other thing is, every person responds in a different way to a poem. That's why I'm being very careful with this

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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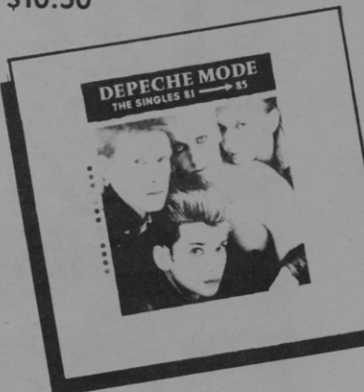
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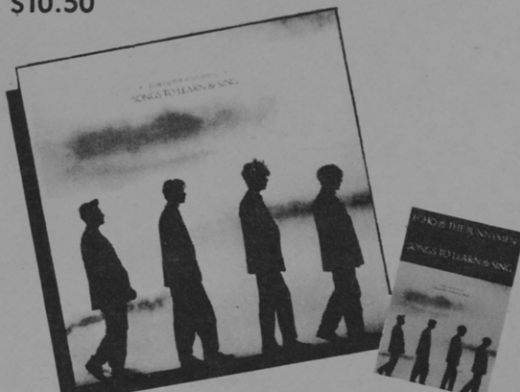
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