

Best Fetus Forward

Jed Town & Serum Fort
from A Womb with A View

It takes a certain turn of mind to live right in the heart of Auckland, a real determination. We're not talking about the "inner city" flats advertised in the paper in pansy bloody Grey Lynn or Newmarket, or even Ponsonby. We're talking within a sniff of the exhaust fumes of Queen Street, the White Lady for breakfast.

The council forbids it with bylaws, makes it increasingly unlikely by allowing old, cheap buildings to be slaughtered in favour of cold glass towers. Every now and then it trumpets its efforts in keeping the inner city alive by announcing the creation of half a dozen luxury flats to sell at 200 grand apiece to people who inhabit the city for the time it takes to walk from the Fuego to the offstreet door.

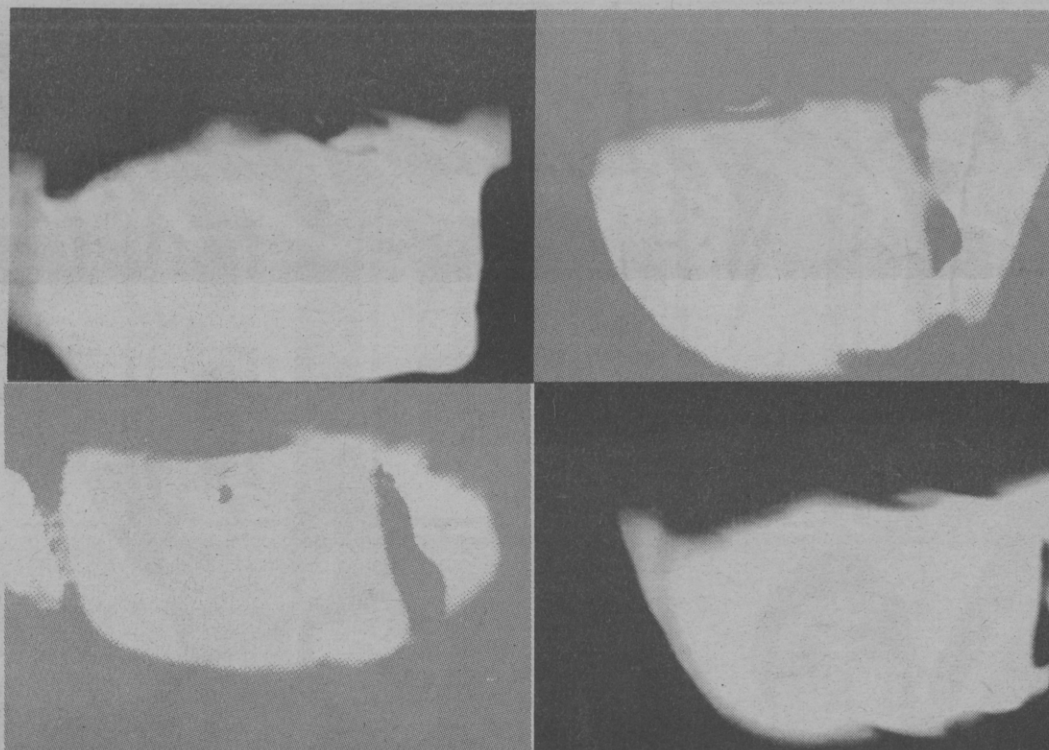
The soul of the city is the individuals who carve out niches despite landlords and bylaws and lack of plumbing and actually *live* in the place.

Jed Town's niche, Fetus Productions HQ, is two and a half rooms in an office building with bedroom-kitchen, lounge ... and 16-track studio. The walls are decorated with the paraphernalia of the F Prods career so far; pix, posters and artwork from Australia, Japan, Europe, the Windsor ...

"Fetus Productions? They're Australian aren't they?"

The current New Zealand end of Fetus Productions is Jed Town and Serum Fort. He was once in the Features and she was once a Snoid sister with precocious North Shore music/theatre group the Plague. They formed about four years ago in Sydney, with another NZer, Broxin. The fourth member, a woman called Pola, still lives in Sydney also.

Jed is tall and slim, not ordinary looking, but the only outwardly unusual thing about him is his two top front teeth, filed to points, a legacy of the first sojourn in Sydney. Serum is pale, with long



blonde hair and slightly distant eyes. She talks in a sing-song voice, with an accent from some imaginary foreign country. She can sometimes be hard to follow; her trains of thought seem to connect in different ways than most peoples'. They're both softly friendly, far from the forbidding figures some of the music might suggest.

Recorded output thus far is: Untitled LP (1981); *Fetalmnia* EP, 1982; *Self Manipulation* cassette (1982); *The Perfect Product* cassette (compilation of old and new material, packaged in Japan, 1983); *Environmental* LP (recorded on four-track, mainly by Broxin, 1984, as yet unreleased here); *The Perfect Product* EP (released late 1985); and the newly-released album, *Luminous Trails*.

There have also been various other film, art and writing projects under the Fetus Productions banner. As Jed says:

"I think everyone's got their own place in Fetus Productions. That's a point I'd like to clarify. I'd like it to be known that Fetus Productions is like a company name and within the company is different groups. There's the Perfect Product of course, and Environmental with Broxin. The three of us started the thing together and we've all gone in different directions for a while and contributed to different things which individuals have got together themselves. So there are other people besides us two in Fetus Productions."

The album is mainly Jed's work, and mainly

recorded at Sydney's Groovex Studios early last year. The songs were written as they were recorded, Jed working closely with the studio's owner, a chap named Groove:

"I basically come up with an idea and record it on four-track, just to get the structure. Then I just like to spend time trying different things out and after three or four months come up with a finished product."

As well as Jed's guitar, the recording uses sampled sounds from an Emulator, and a DX7 synth. Tracks were digitally mixed at another studio and then transferred onto a 1950s vintage Revox tape recorder, "to bring back a bit of warmth". The process began to get hurried after Groovex started folding as the result of a letdown on a costly film soundtrack deal. So two tracks for the album, 'It's Alright' and 'Sparks Fly' had to be done in the home studio in Auckland. Strangely enough, they attain almost the same sparkling recording quality. And a warmth uncommon to electronics-dominated music ...

"Yeah I think a lot of electronic music does sound cold — mainly because all the instruments are very similar, there's only one tonal quality."

It's also unusual for music methodically put together with what are normally considered "cold" instruments to make such unashamed plays on the emotions as Fetus music does.

"Yeah. I think that sort of happens naturally. When you're working on stuff you don't know how or why you're playing it and it's coming out and if you're satisfied with it, it must have rubbed off from the last few months that you've worked on it and lived. It was a strange time back then ..."

... and Kicking!

Fetus Productions shows in Auckland this year have been two-parters. There's the Perfect Product, which brings in Simon Alexander on Emulator and keyboards and plays music similar to the new album — and the Fetals, with Deberly from Bird Nest Roys on second bass guitar, a wild white-noise punk band (Ian Gilroy drums for both lineups). Was the Fetals thought up in an attempt to show the songs could work in a very direct, immediate way?

"Yeah, you don't have to think about it on stage, whereas with Perfect Product there's a lot of things happening when you're playing. You've got to be aware that *this* is going on, and if you don't it won't be there, and I'm just getting used to that now. The Fetals were like a release in a way, you didn't have to worry about what you did — those songs are quite easy to play and you can just forget about playing and do what you feel at the time. It's something I really like. It's as important to me as the Perfect Product.

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IMPORTS, IMPORTS, IMPORTS ... AAAAH GLORIOUS IMPORTS!