

# SMASH' FROM PAGE 12

nightclub owner. "I've got to look after my part-time staff, you must understand."

It was a tense Dave Dobbyn who took the stage that night after leaving a present behind in the band-room. Perhaps it was something he ate in the mediocre Mexican restaurant. But, as with the power cut in Invercargill, the band having to rise above a negative situation sharpened the performance. It was as though they'd said to themselves, you can't show the audience we're disappointed, that's ripping off the ones who've paid. The whole band, and particularly Dobbyn's singing, had bite.

Magic. What She Do' was pure magic. On radio, the song sounds almost as lightweight as an orange juice commercial, but live, it's a vehicle for Dobbyn's remarkable voice. It seems capable of anything, from a macho baritone to a poppy falsetto, wails, shrieks and cries. He pours out the soul, the little man with the big heart and 100 faces: the romantic, happy and sad, but always the optimist and 'The Pleaser'.

It's one of those transcendent moments when a song's performance leaps out of the concert. I catch Roger King's eye — he spotted it too. Then, looking around the audience, I do a double take. Standing beside me is a Dave Dobbyn lookalike: the same profile, high forehead and curly hair. Several times during the evening I see him again, each time thinking, "Dave didn't tell us he had a brother in Queentown." It's actually a local builder called Steve Harvey, and after the concert he introduces himself to Dobbyn and they get their photo taken together by the nightclub's photographer. Harvey seems resigned to living with such a familiar face: "It doesn't worry me at all, I can cope," he says. "I've got used to it."

The locals yarn with the band afterwards, appreciative that they've come to their town, and sympathising that the crowd wasn't larger (once again, the 200 mark was only just reached) — it's the transition season, Harvey explains. "If you're in Queenstown at this time of year, you're either a builder, rafter or waitress."

Outside, Lake Wakatipu is still and dark. Looming high above the town, lit up in the blackness like some huge space station from a video game, is the restaurant reached only by gondolas: the "marae in the sky".

**MEMO.** Things to remember: 1. Look for Halley's Comet, while we're out of the big cities. 2. Try the legendary Hangover Cure — champagne, with a sugar cube dosed with bitters.

The exhaustion sets in during the long haul in the van the next day through the dead hydro lakes of the Mackenzie country to Ashburton. The scenery for passengers is limited to the white line and thousands of fence posts alongside the road, so Ian Belton ("the Australian in the group," as Dobbyn introduces him each night) is given the driver's seat with the best view. As the energy levels ebb and flow the conversation turns into long periods of silence, as the fellow travellers sleep or catch up with their reading.

The cocooned environment of a touring band is a stimulating insular world of in-jokes and incidents. What goes on outside is irrelevant and ignored. The things that matter on tour are few, and contrary to the rock and roll myth, sex and drugs are well down the list of priorities. Each day, the same mundane questions are asked — What's the food like? (Usually lousy: instant coffee, tasteless coleslaw, gravied mutton or ham steaks, and chips with everything.) How's the door-take going? When will the first person get up and dance? (Once the ice is broken by a brave couple, the dancefloor fills quickly, and the band loosen up.) And, most important, will the hotel open up the house bar afterwards... then, the uppers can be celebrated and the downers forgotten.

Arriving at the Hotel Ashburton, the band stays in the van while Roger King goes in to sort out the accommodation. Owned by the Ashburton Licensing Trust (the town was dry for many years) the hotel could be any one of the concrete DB complexes around the country — none of which welcome bands with open arms. The usual treatment is to stick them in a wing miles away from other guests, insist that they are staff-members, eat in the staff room, don't use the house bar and don't have any parties in their rooms. The Hotel Ashburton didn't go that far, but, there was a feeling...

"It's quite a hoony town, Ashburton," warns Gary Verberne, who as a Christchurch-based guitarist played all over Canterbury. "Tonight's Friday night — you can expect some agro. There are a lot of bikers around here — maybe it's the straight roads."

Sure enough, there's a fight outside before the concert has even started, a knife is removed from a patron, and the police are called. But being a venue close to a big town, the crowd are blasé about the concert, there is no reaction until 'Outlook for Thursday', when the dancefloor fills instantly. "The hit single reaction is frightening to watch in Australia," says King, "it's like flies to a corpse." The dancers, male and female, are big and out of it. The 'Outlook' singalong ("otherwise fine... otherwise it's dandy"), some nights inspirational, sounds like a tired routine. Dobbyn's annoyance at the apathy of the crowd begins to give his guitar lines a harder edge. It turns to anger backstage when the crowd take it for granted that there'll be an encore. It's a two-way thing; the band have worked hard, how 'bout some appreciation? Snapper, clutching the door-takings in a money bag, leaps on stage and grabs the mike. "Ashburton! Do you want some more? Let's hear it for Dave Dobbyn and the Stone People then!"

It's pure showbiz, but it works perfectly. "Been a long time since I rock and rolled..."

Afterwards, King and Dobbyn are denied service in the house bar. "We don't serve people like you," says the bartender. "People like us?" says King, relishing an argument with absurdity. "Now who are 'people like us'?" There's no point in persevering, though. She's sticking to "the rules" ... and besides, who wants to drink stirred martinis with no olives?

So the band and three or four friends are forced to retreat to a hotel room and drink from the mini-bar at inflated prices. They yarn and watch INXS on 12 O'Clock Rock, delighted at the success of upwardly-mobile Kiwi-in-Oz Jenny Morris, now almost a permanent member of the band. The soiree is interrupted however by a knock on the door.

It's the manager, yet another obese specimen, asking for Dave Dobbyn, the drawcard responsible for the evening's high bartake. "The police are on their way," he says. "Hide any drugs you might have, and go to bed." It's heavy-handed tactics, but it works perfectly. Life's too short to battle with Canterbury rednecks.



Dobbyn reaches for the sky, Ohakea.

Gary Verberne, although from Christchurch, is one of the gentlemen of New Zealand rock music. He seems to have relatives all over the country, and his parents come down to Ashburton to see his latest band. Anything but verbose (as Peter Warren has nicknamed him), he's sad to be leaving friends and family behind, but plainly rapt to be joining DD Smash. "This is a dream come true," he says in a husky voice. "Dave's amazing, man."

Jerry Jeff Walker's 'Red Necked Mothers' is the soundtrack to the trip north alongside the Kaikoura Ranges. Dobbyn points out the roadside phone-booth where DD Smash Mark 1 heard that the Cool Bananas album had hit No 1 in its first week. Roger King looks up from his Kafka short story to see a motor bike passing the van. The pillion-passenger is waving while grinning broadly.

"Shit!" he says, ducking down. "It's Joshua!" The Motueka pilgrim has caught up with the tour



Mike "Snapper" Knapp: "I want to take you higher!"

again, undoubtedly heading for the Blenheim gig. He might even want a final decision on the contract he offered the band to record an album live in a Napier church. Happily, when we stop in Kaikoura for a beer and some crayfish, he tells us he's got a job down south and is heading home to sort things out.

The Raffles Hotel in Blenheim supplies the best meals of the tour, smoked salmon entrees even, and have worked hard to set up the gig in a small country hall several miles out of town. "Dave Dobbyn and the Stone people live at the Grovetown Hall" attracts all sorts of people out of the cold Marlborough night, but there's a heavy percentage of bikers and hippies. When the band arrives at 9pm there's a line of 25 large bikes outside, all Triumphs, Nortons, Harleys. Inside, the air is already fetid with smoke. In the kitchen are 100 dozen cans of DB for the thirsty. Have you heard the news? There's good rocking tonight.

The band are in high spirits even before they hit the stage, and the audience are appreciative — although no one makes a move until well into the concert. The air is stifling, and it's so hot that Peter Warren's drums keep going out of tune. It's a guitar-happy crowd, and Dobbyn senses it, stretching and stretching his solos until finally going over the top with Th' Dudes' celebration of drinking, 'Bliss': "though you're already legless, get yourself another..." He leaves the stage with his guitar still shrieking feedback and those in the audience who aren't catatonic pleading for more. There has been over two and a half hours of ear-piercing guitar music bouncing around the shiny walls of the small hall, the half-dozen nice Mawlborough gels in their pearls left an hour ago, and the floor is covered with 100 dozen beer cans. The best night yet, and collapsed out the back in the band room/women's toilets, the band agree.

The next day, Sunday, is the only one of the tour without a concert. By now we've hit "road mode" — one doesn't notice the exhaustion anymore, the body and mind are on cruise control, running on empty. The day is killing time in Picton, waiting for Railways employees to grant us entry to their luxury liner. We kill time eating awful bacon and eggs (and chupps) and watch speedboats race in the harbour with bored disinterest. Suddenly, two of the boats collide and flip high above the water, and a search party is called out to look for the boatmen (corpses?). It's horrifying, but somehow so much like television that it was almost expected. "This is why I gave up TV work," says Peter Jones. "News. Too many gruesome stories." Jones, now a freelance cameraman in Sydney, has worked in TV and film for nearly 20 years. In that time he has been involved in many of the classic New Zealand rock videos — he filmed the Formyula plucking leaves in the Wellington's botanical gardens for 'Nature'; Toy Love standing on a grave in Dunedin (a clip

for which the TVNZ director general apologised).

On the ferry, the Janes carte-blanche camera works wonders again, securing a "film room" for the voyage. Poker and vodka mean the band aren't seen until Wellington. Nearing the heads, Janes goes up to the bridge to "pay the rent", filming the misty entrance to Port Nicholson. Dobbyn's old pardner Tex Pistol turns up at the Wellington motel in silver-capped boots, having booked a chuckwagon for an evening toasting Jerry Jeff.

*I really had a ball last night  
feeling single, seeing double...*

Monday night's concert is in Masterton, reached after a two hour drive through the Rimutaka hills. The venue is found after much *Spinal Tap* confusion (the heavy metal spoof is so true-to-life it's hilarious — but also depressing) ... and it's another concrete complex, with the band rooms driving distance from the rest of the motel. A handbill in each unit advertises next week's attraction: Mike Stand and the Amplifiers. Dobbyn heads for the radio station for an interview, recalling an occasion when he and



Bliss, Taihape.

Gary McCormick did a radio interview down south; the DJ — on air — said to Gary, "I saw you often in Th' Dudes, I've got all your albums." But this time its fairly straight-forward, Dobbyn outlining his future plans: back to Sydney to finish the *Footrot Flats* soundtrack and record an album with the new DD Smash. A single in August, then a major tour, and, possibly towards the end of the year, a month's residency in an Austin, Texas bar, testing the American waters.

Monday night in Masterton is obviously not a happening scene, however — only 145 people enter the hall of tacky mirrors. Wairarapa's a hot, dry climate, and it's hard to get people moving during harvest: "Come on!" exclaims Dobbyn. "Y'scared of parquet?" So the band switches to automatic pilot, and the highlight of the evening is Dobbyn's new country song, 'Unbelievers': "I wonder how do you fake it?"

"Stiffy Dobro" has become a grim nickname. Roger King decides to fly to Auckland after the



What's in it for ya? — interviews with A-Ha in London, Dave Vanian of the Damned, Oz rockers the Johnnys, Iva Davies of Icehouse, John Taylor on Duran Duran and solo plans plus stories on Ardijah and the Greenpeace Concert (lots of photos and interviews with Jackson Browne and Graham Nash). The colour posters are Dire Straits and David Bowie and the pin-up is Paul Young. There's the latest dance music news in *Shake! Zone*, movie news and reviews including profiles of *Absolute Beginners* and *Pretty In Pink*, funky fashion and loads more new news and grooves. *Shake!* is on sale at Record Shops, Magazine Stores and Dairies.

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