

# The Southside Sound Pure Funk from Auckland's Ardijah

"There's a story in it. It's about a girl that wanted a guy, but the guy was just mucking around ... then the girl gets known and so the guy wants her, and she says ... stick it. (ha ha)"

"Mucking around" is something Ryan Monga of Ardijah hasn't got a lot of time for. As the band plays to a crowded pub or nightclub, there's little pause between songs and a lively interest in keeping things moving. The same applies for Ryan and the band when you're talking Future. Everyone wants to get on and be successful, but from what I've seen, no one deserves it like Ardijah.

The band cut their teeth out in the great industrial park behind Panmure, in South Auckland, where Cleopatra's nightclub sits uncomfortably between head offices and car wreckers. For six years, on and off, Ardijah played resident band to a crowd that nurtured their talent and demanded the band play cover songs at least as good as the original versions. Ardijah did just that, and even with a disco standard like 'Which Way is Up', can take all the urbanity and senselessness and whip out something really smashing.

To Ryan and the rest of Ardijah, those days as a club band meant friends and plenty of good times. But it was time to do something new.

The old band split up last December. Ryan sees the new Ardijah as a totally different project, even though there are no new members of the group. Ryan plays bass and keyboards, his wife Betty is lead vocalist, while Simon Lynch is keyboardist and Tony Nogotautama sings and plays guitar. They reformed in February, without their old guitarist and drummer, with Tony taking over lead guitar, and a drum machine taking over the beat.

What's new is the common ambition to get away from being just a club band. Now that's happening. 'Give Me Your Number', the band's first single, has been released by Pagan Records. The song is also featured in the film *Queen City Roker*. If Ardijah is ever going to get its big break it looks like being now.

The Ryan Monga I met is a shy and considerate guy who has a real love of music and his friends. He takes it to the point that some might call opinionated — but I see as knowing what you like and not being afraid to stand by it. Maybe it's the same thing ...

What are the South Auckland club bands like? Like you?

"There's a lot of club bands, the do play stuff like us ... a lot of it, they're just trying to follow something. We get influenced by stuff like Prince and Mtume. The club bands play a lot of Top 40 covers; those bands would be too scared to get into the heavy funk. They'd just hit on the commercial side. I've been trying for years with this group to make a break from that."

Has the revival of soul and disco made any difference to how people see Ardijah?

"The fact that people like soul music at the moment certainly helps. I can remember going into the Battle of the Bands, I think in '81, and we were good. You couldn't say our music was bad because it was nice and clean. But in those days they weren't into that and we got booed. Some people said 'play some rock and roll' and all that. We played rock all right but you had to jump around and throw your head around before you got looked at."

"We just played what we've wanted to play and we've been through lots of times when trends have gone in and out and people were telling us to play this and that. We stuck to our guns. Now it's coming back our way, and we can just say, oh well, good one."

"I can't say that everyone's just going to grab us. People think we try to be too Yankee, a lot of people don't like that. But they don't see that other



Ryan Monga

bands have their influences too, they might be Pommy or Australian influences. We've had a hard time through that, 'cos we sound too much like Kool and the Gang — to us, that's a compliment! Far out! A lot of people have said play some Kiwi music, play some original stuff. And we say, but that is original!

"I thought well, hey, what do you have to do to make it in New Zealand? Sometimes I think they like to see what you can do. You have to prove yourself. You've got to be able to play your own stuff."

Do you write songs for people you know will like that style?

"Yeah, I kind of write for the Cleo's crowd, but it's just because they were the people we played most to. Other

crowds we played to really enjoyed our music. Playing this type of music in New Zealand, it's kind of new to be going this way — pure funk. Only a few bands like Seven Deadly Sins are doing it. People are kind of shy to let their emotions go, it's a cool music so they sit back and be cool and we had that all the time. They'll get up and dance, but they'll always be looking over their shoulder to see if the other guy is doing it. If he's sitting down they think, oh, I'd better sit down."

"Mormons, you know, are some of our biggest followers. They know when we're going to play somewhere and they'll hitch-hike from up north and down south and when we started playing, they'd just stop dancing

and they'd just walk to the front of the stage and just start screaming at anything we did. It just felt like we were, you know, big stars or something."

Why Mormons?

"It might be a trend to be into a certain kind of music, but I was a Mormon and it was the in-thing to get good taste in music, and I think that some of them have just got good taste. They're fussy, very fussy, but they know what they like to hear."

Is the new single the "Ardijah sound"?

"No, 'Give Me Your Number' was just a oncer, it's not like the rest of our originals. It's Prince influenced; I like rock, but not heavy rock. I like the distortion guitar, but I like the beat to be underneath. Bands like the Bar-Kays, Slave. I got a buzz when I was a "disco kid". The beat! The heavy metal! That's the kind of stuff I want to get into."

Ardijah have always been playing that but we've always been on one side or the other, not mixed. We're a bit of variety, like Prince, he's got the funk beat but he's got a bit of rock guitar. It's a good contrast between the two. Disgusting, good disgusting funk."

## Rhythm and Business

What happened with the old Ardijah?

"I was just getting so depressed, with the pressures of wanting to go somewhere and you can't. In the club, we were just there to make money, just the bread and butter each week. It was good money, but I wanted to branch out a little more and do originals and some sort of show. But being a club band was holding it all back."

"It wasn't a split. There were really talented musos in that band, but I just got sick of it. I gave up on the whole thing and gave them the chance to be on their own and let them get into what they want to do. But I'd been talking all the time to Simon about what I really wanted to do, and he was right behind me, so we started this new project."

How did Pagan get involved as your record company?

"I'd done some demos on a small machine, and while I was doing a jingle I played the tapes to the engineers. And they liked the songs, some of them, and that started people talking. Mirage Films heard about them and asked us to go and see Pagan for the soundtrack of *Queen City Roker*. That was just for 'Give Me Your Number'."

Have you got plans for an album?

"Yeah, we've got other songs ready, it just depends on how the single goes."

## "It's a telling thing"

Ardijah is a funny name ...

"Yeah, it's a silly story. It's just boy loves girl ... our first lead singer had a girl named Ardi, and his name was James. He went and put A-r-d-i and

then instead of James he just put j-a-a, and then when Bob Marley was dying we thought we'd spell it j-a-h. I've always been into reggae, but bands could never play it. And you can't tell people how to play. It's just not fair on them, then they'll say, 'Aw, well you play it then!'"

Are you tough about the band sounding right?

"I'm a fussy person about that. We've done creative things on stage, other people have too, but there was always something about Ardijah — like our beat was always there. We'd always do something weird, where other bands would be too scared and just stay commercial."

Tell me how Betty-Anne got into the group.

"When I first met Betty-Anne we were playing in a talent quest at Cleo's, against each other. We both lost. And so we asked her to join up, to join forces! We were called Ardijah even then, about 1979 or 1980."

She's got a terrific voice, like the girl from Mtume or SOS Band ...

"Yeah, we like that song 'Prime Time' by Mtume. The Streetsounds records."

The two of you decided to get married ...

"I don't know. Sometimes it was ... Well, we liked each other and it was kinda like ... like Madonna, you get a crush on Madonna and you wish you could keep her. You know? It was kind of the same thing."

Music is from the heart, and when you're singing you become closer. And every time I watched her go off into the dark I thought where is she going? And I wasn't even married to her then. It's worked out. Because we work together and because we live together we can get our job organised better. And we perform better."

Are things going to work out for the band?

"Yeah, everything's cool now. I think once the single gets released people should know where we are. We were always the gamblers, we'd go in and say let's try this — and it would work. You've just got to have stamina."

The other night I saw Ardijah play live at the Galaxy, as a support band to Peking Man. I liked them far more than the headliners. It was their quiet, professional confidence that I liked, and it seduced a crowd that had come ready for the pop abrasiveness of Peking Man. It was a surprise to see the dancefloor filled to this gentle persuasion and it shows Ardijah's intuitive feeling for soul. Last night I followed them to the Gluepot. This Wednesday night I'm going to see them at the Mt Wellington Trust. I think that makes me a fan.

Peter Grace



Ardijah (L-R): Simon Lynch, Tony Nogotautama, Ryan Monga and Betty Monga.

## Shake!



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