

Eyeball to Eyeball

The Residents — Alien Music for Alienated People

The "13th Birthday Tour" is the Residents' largest ever. They'd only previously done one other tour — the Residents' Mole Show — around Europe and the States. And before that? Just *four* live appearances in eight years! Their tour this month is their first time down under ...

"But hopefully not the last!" chimes in Hardy. "We're all having a great time. In Australia they've been virtually lining up round the block to get in — all the shows have sold out. Everybody's happy and we've been doing lots of TV stuff."

So why embark on such a major tour now, after 13 years of *not* doing it, at all?

"Well a lot of it has to do with the Residents, just wanting to do a show for their birthday, with material from everything they've done over the years — a thing that'd be fun to do. It started off just as one show in San Francisco, and when my partner and I sold Ralph Records about a year ago, and became just management for the Residents, we thought we'd promote it into a larger tour. Now we've ended up doing Australasia, not just Europe, and we've even done Japan. It's turned into a tour of the *Western* world anyway ..."

What about Russia?

"Well," he says, "they would go, but ...! They've actually talked about wanting to tour to India and South America too — just places they'd like to go to, with touring being a good excuse. The Residents aren't particularly economically *sensible* ..."

The "show" sounds like a mighty undertaking — three hours long, made up of a 20-minute video intro and two hour-long sets linked by a 20-minute interlude of electronic music synched to video.

Hardy says it's a retrospective — "covering the entire 13 years of the Residents' work. It's all been rearranged, so the songs won't be like on the records."

The Residents must be the oldest on-going cult concern in the world, and even as they have a worldwide party to celebrate their 13th birthday, the story of the most anonymous band in the world amounts to little more than the myth that they themselves have been lovingly cultivating over the last decade ... the Eyeballs have it ...

Finally arriving back in his hotel room in Sydney, dripping wet after what he calls a "swim in the Sydney rain," is Hardy Fox. Now Hardy claims to be the Residents' manager, and it is in that capacity that he will discuss the band as he removes his clothes. From this end of the telephone, I suspect that Hardy may indeed *be* a Resident — but I doubt if I'll ever know for sure ... so on with the "telephone strip show" (his words, not mine)!

English arch-weirdo and Residents' crony Phil Lithman, alias Snakefinger, will be performing with them and the show includes a couple of songs from his early albums, co-written with the Residents.

At this stage, Hardy is interrupted by his doorbell — somebody has come to restock the hotel room's mini-bar. He is apparently unperturbed by the semi-naked vista in front of him — well y'know, these guys are *well-known weirdos*, aren't they? So what if they take their clothes off to talk on the phone ...

With the interruption over, I ask Hardy how the Residents feel about over-the-top serious interpretations of their work, such as Andy Gill's "*Eskimo* is the most important album ever" ... review.

"I don't know that the Residents laugh *at* people — the Residents laugh *with* people. They don't think that anything should be taken too seriously, and in terms of their records, there is usually some element of humour in them, and some element of *terror*! They feel like it should provoke some kind of response from your emotions.

"With an attitude like theirs, they'll never take a strong stance or ridicule anyone, because they can always appreciate different ways of looking at things. They were flattered by Andy Gill's statement. It was a strong statement, and to make that strong a statement about anybody, especially the Residents ... Well!"

The Residents (especially on *Third Reich 'n' Roll*, where they destroyed at least 29 classic songs of the 60s) have a penchant for weird cover versions. They once said, "We are a band of the present making music for people living in the past," but what does it all mean?

"Well, the Residents believe that people will listen to music that they like, including the stylistic aspect, to the degree that they listen to it so much that they can't hear that song anymore. The Residents like to make those songs — take their essence — so that people can hear them again. They also think it's ridiculous to write songs, particularly what they do, when the songs are already written — because there's a wealth of great material out there



The invasion of the Residents: the eyeballs have it.

anyway.

"In fact they had this theory that when they wrote a song or an album, they always had to *undo* it, like to do other people's music, that side is contradictory to the original in order to negate it. This is so their karma won't get laden down with all this trash — they can uncreate the trash, but doing other people's music — that doesn't matter."

So they can play with it how they want, without affecting their own karma?

"Right — they can use other people's material like that."

Weird, eh? (But what does it all

mean?) And what are the Residents working on now?

"On the largest plan at the moment," says Hardy. "The 'American Composers' series, which runs to the year 2000. They are recording the music of the greatest American composers, and it's almost like a massive study programme where they're learning from the start. They break the works down and study really carefully, with the idea that they have to figure out what it is that makes that music what it is, so that they can then re-do the material. It is a matter of finding the essence of that music to work with."

So, in the year 2000, the Residents could possibly create the ultimate American musical statement?

"That is what I suspect right now that they are working towards ... I think if the Residents ever do something large scale, sort of by the year 2000, I hope what they're working towards is the Great American 'thing'."

What if that made them megastars?

"Well, I think that for that to happen it's going to require large scale acceptance of the Residents, which is unlikely. Not that Bruce Springsteen or anyone has got anything more to offer than the Residents ..."

"Alien music for other alienated people" (another Residents' quote), right? But how would they utilise rock and roll's power to move masses?

"I can't imagine ... I think they'd think they had a responsibility to try and neutralise the effect. The Residents are very scared of fascism and wary of mass movements, because like, in a fascist society, they know that they are the type of people who wouldn't be allowed."

As the 13th birthday seems to be a sort of staging post in their career, can the Residents now look back at any stated aim or ideal professed 13 years ago, and achieved now?

"That's an interesting question — I don't know that I can answer it! I just thought '13' because it's unlucky ... I'll have to ask them and get back to you on that!"

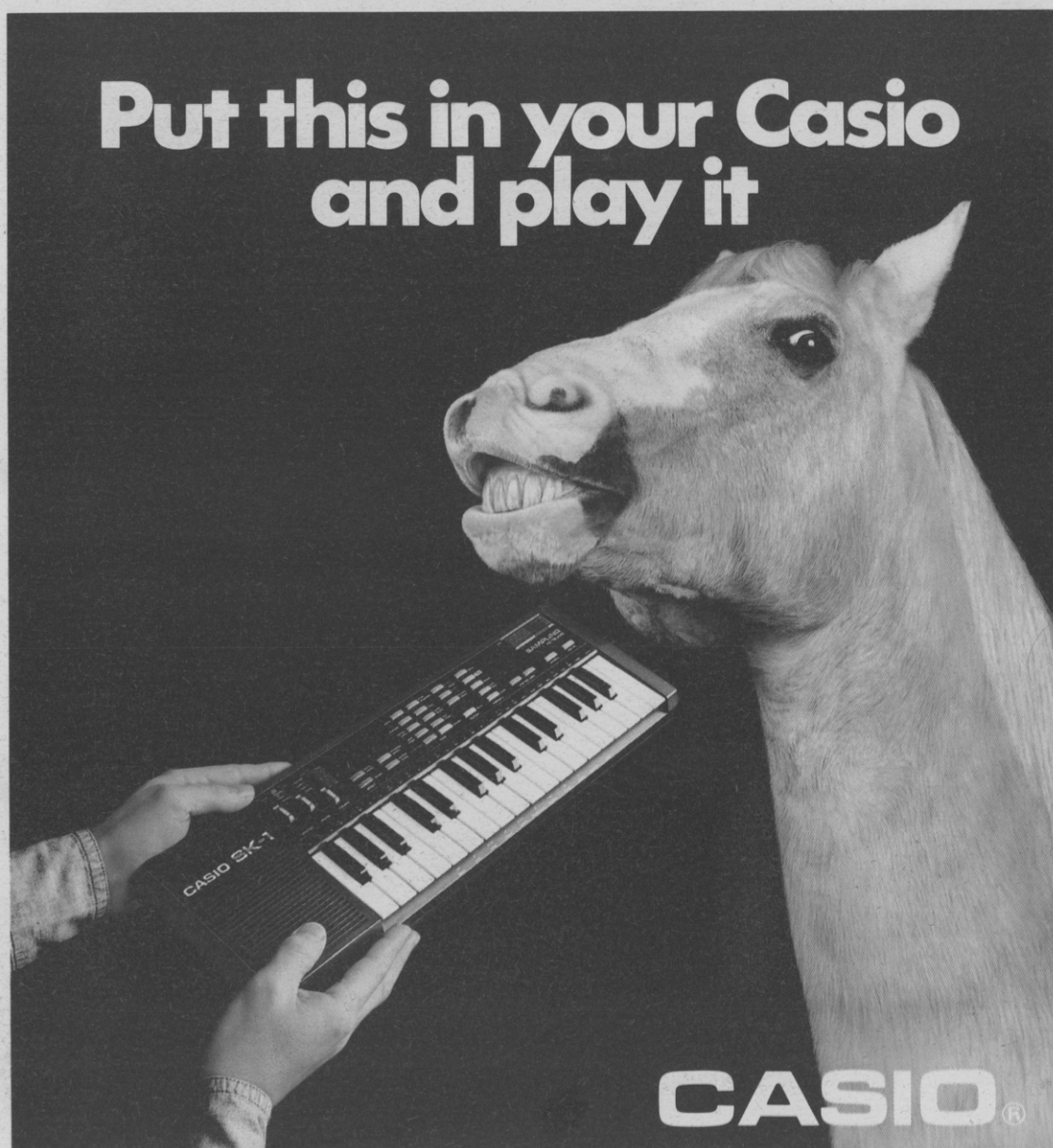
Why did the Residents move to, and set up base in, San Francisco?

"Well, that's easy to answer," says Hardy. "Louisiana (where they came from) is a fairly conservative place in the South, and not receptive to people who dare to be different. The West Coast seemed more exciting at the time — they were attracted by the San Francisco flower power/hippy culture at the time, and they were very interested, not in taking part, but in kind of 'observing' and absorbing what was going on, but the Residents aren't joiners ... it helped them to the realisation of something about nirvana there."

"They went there one at a time checking it out, and sort of drifted

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