

"The new band, the Breathing Cage, has got Michael Kimes (bass), Gary from the Jean-Paul Sartre Experience (drums), and Maria Karoni on keyboards. We'll start playing in late March."

Playing new songs?

"Some ... about 75 percent new. There's a good feeling in the band. It's good to have another woman in the band, and a friend too. We're planning on being in Auckland by mid year, and hoping to record a 12 inch single to coincide with this."

Michael Kimes seems to have stuck with you over a long period of time — They Were Expendable, the Expendables, your new solo album and now the Breathing Cage.

"Yeah, Michael and I have developed a good rapport, real empathy. He's quite plugged into my style of songwriting, and with his bass-playing, it's nice to have someone who's capable of playing both complex and simple, solid stuff. And I'm really pleased to be working with Gary Sullivan — 'the man with the delicate touch.' Colin Hogg or someone called him that. He helps out with posters and gigs too; drumming, he knows when to be full-on and when to hold back."

"I think I've been lucky with the quality of musicians I've worked with. I'm really grateful to the people I've worked with throughout my career — it's been a learning experience with all of them, all five musicians in their own ways."

After a reasonably lengthy period in between bands staying solo with acoustic guitar accompaniment, what was the motivation to return to a band environment?

"Ha! You don't get so shit-scared for a start! I was basically playing solo because the band [Expendables] was in limbo and I didn't want to go rusty. But it was worthwhile in that I learnt from it, it changed my style of songwriting."

Is that reflected in the new band?

"Yeah, somewhere in there. It's harder to keep an audience's atten-

Songs from the Sky Jay Clarkson's Breathing Cage

Jay Clarkson has had a long career — eight schools, a few less bands than that, but nigh on as many records. Plus, a short solo career in between, a new band in Christchurch called the Breathing Cage, a child, a mortgage ...

And what does she want to do with her life? Be a chanteuse in front of a big band — but these days, "That'd be a bit ridiculous, wouldn't it?"



tion on your own, so song structures have changed from that."

Heaven Sent

What about pressures of other people relying on you in a band situation?

"No, not if the other band members are enthusiastic, for example Michael. It's nice to have people sharing responsibilities."

And supplying songs?

"Well, I write songs at home. They fall out of the sky and take from half an hour to an hour to complete, words and all. I hardly ever pick up my guitar unless I feel a song coming on. I always tape it because I've lost too many melody lines in my head, and then practise it lots, because my vocal melodies are quite often different from what I'm playing on guitar. It takes a lot of practice."

What about the fear of the "supply from the sky" running out?

"I've just come out of a dry patch that lasted from June '85 to two months ago. I wrote only three songs in that time. For songs to come, something has to happen in my personal life, something dramatic naturally. It is frustrating when you have other musicians waiting but I'm writing quite a few songs now."

You've moved around a bit, being in bands, living in Christchurch, then Auckland, and now back to Christchurch. Do locations affect your songwriting?

"It's not so much locations themselves, but certain people in those cities. Like 'The Boy with the Sad Hands,' which just came about as I was thinking about this person. It started to arrive and the stereo was going full blast in the house, so I had to go outside and sit in the car. I have to have periods of silence to write or I can't hear the melodies in my head."

What about Progressive — is it a sympathetic recording space?

"Terry King's always been very supportive of me, really encouraging. We have a very relaxed working relationship. I think that with a studio, it's a matter of learning its potential; you could have half a

dozen bands all recording with the same equipment, but depending on their experience and energy, the outcome is variable."

Playthings

What's the difference between a "Jay Clarkson" record and an "Expendables" one?

"You'd probably be able to tell me! But it is easier as far as working in the studio went. Less people to organise, more control. It meant more responsibility for me, but there was no band as such and I had commitments to my son and work. The solo album was an in-between thing that seemed to take a long time."

Last year threw up an interesting, contrasting marker to the solo album in the form of the posthumous Playthings live album.

"I loved it," says Jay. "It made me feel really nostalgic. It's really dated but that record makes me realise that we fitted into 1980. It was lovely to hear Nicky singing ... Lyrical differences? I'm not trying to change the world now, thank God!"

"Playing solo helped my singing — it's harder when you have to shout over everything. Gradually over the years I've learnt to let go and incorporate 'correct breathing' etc."

"My secret ambition is to sing and not have to play guitar, to walk into a band where there are beautiful arrangements and I just have to sing."

Harking back to the big band and swing era?

"Yeah, I'm quite regretful that I missed that, but now it would just be a bit ridiculous wouldn't it?"

What about people who've influenced you?

"My mother was the biggest influence. She was a really good singer and she taught me to appreciate and even analyse songwriting at a very early age. My parents had a really big collection of 45s and 78s — a hotch potch collection, y'know, Roy Orbison, Roger Miller, Glenn Miller, and later on the Beatles, of course. I'd hear a lot of 60s stuff because my older brother and sister would always have the radio up full blast ..."

Favourite singers?

"Peggy Lee, Billie Holiday (of course!) and a lot of male singers of that type — Tony Bennett, Peter Skellern, Frank Sinatra, early Nat King Cole ... I started out in music as a guitarist influenced by John Lee Hooker, Mississippi John Hurt and co. With songwriters, it is often just one song by a person, eg, Andy Williams's 'Can't Get Used to Losing You,' and I don't even know who wrote it! And of course, Roy Orbison because my mother was really into him."

Limelight

With the Chills riding a wave of (relative) success at the moment, what hopes do you have of some of that limelight being shared?

"It would be nice if their success did have more far-reaching effects. But like Split Enz got famous so New Zealand radio played *them* and that was as far as it went for New Zealand music. It's stupid — what's everyone scared of? Radio stations are frightened of exposing anything ethnic. Basic honesty is lacking."

And success just over the hilltop for ...?

"A new band with a big long German word for a name that means 'soft yummy universe,' I think. It's Alistair Parker from the Gordons and Hamish Kilgour's band. They're looking for a black funky bass player."

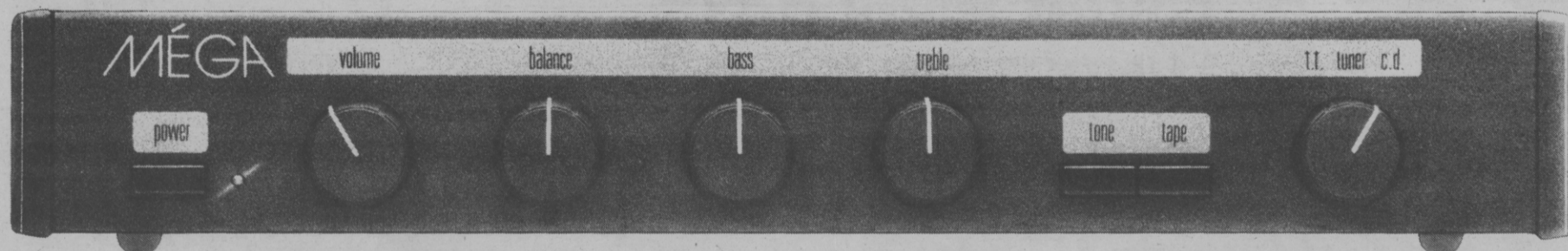
"It's the first time I've been excited about a band since the JPSE, and before that, the Headless Chickens and Double Happys. Shayne Carter is a great natural performer and the Straitjacket Fits have some great songs too."

And the Breathing Cage, back in the groove?

"At times over the last three or four years it's been a drag, getting 15 songs together then the band lineup changing all the time — Martin Phillipps feels the same — but after a year of playing solo, playing before the Jean-Paul Sartre Experience in Dunedin, I decided I'd had enough. So I got a band ... it's good fun to be up there, turn around, and have the band smile back at you."

Paul McKessar

Loud & Clear ...



Most music is meant to be listened to ... loudly.

People buy Méga amplifiers for one reason; they like to listen to music. Most of all they like to listen to music loud, without hurting their ears. Have a listen to the Méga M105b ...

... the loud HiFi amplifier with the clearly low price.

Available at your favourite HiFi store.

M É G A
S Y S T E M S

Designed and Manufactured in New Zealand
PO Box 6234 Te Aro Wellington.

Trade enquiries welcome.