

Worlds Apart If This is Paradise ...

To their credit, China Crisis have tried to push themselves into new musical areas rather than regurgitate old formulas. Their last album, *Flaunt the Imperfection*, experimented with the smooth sound of Steely Dan, with Walter Becker producing. For their latest, *What Price Paradise?*, they've recruited the British pop-masters of the 80s, Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley, responsible for the pure-sounding hits of Madness, Dexy's Midnight Runners, Lloyd Cole and Elvis Costello.

The band was to have made their first trip to New Zealand this month to headline at the Palmerston North rock festival, but that's had to be postponed due to vocalist Garry Daly's father suffering a heart attack. From his accent over the phone, there's no mistaking where Daly comes from — he speaks with the same Liverpool lilt and dry wit that melted the world in 1964.

Liverpool Skies

At the height of Beatlemania, the *Daily Worker* said the sound of the Merseyside was the voice of thousands of unemployed. Now, that's more true than ever. "There's not that much work about," Daly agrees ... "It's the kind of place where there's not too many jobs, and people are likely either interested in music or football."

Frankie Goes to Hollywood named their latest album *Liverpool* as a gesture of support for the city. You must feel the same concern.

"Well yeah, but even more so, be-

Polished CD music or precious AOR, how you take China Crisis depends on your taste in pop. But no one's going to accuse them of being rough and ready — their music is slick and sophisticated, with any sharp edges being carefully airbrushed over.

Formed eight years ago, they see themselves at the mature end of pop, away from the fly-by-nighters and teen idols who stick safely within their target audience.



Eddie London and Gary Daly.

cause they don't actually live here anymore. So I dunno why they feel this great concern. They obviously don't feel it that much."

Does Frankie (and the Beatles) leaving town cause resentment among the people of Liverpool?

"Not so much, because you forget how many groups Liverpool ac-

tually has — OMD, Echo and the Bunnymen, ourselves, lots of groups. It's hardly noticed Frankie Goes to Hollywood have left because there's so many great ones still here ... I've been around the world a couple of times and I don't know of anywhere else that's better or where the people are better, but

then again, I haven't been to Australia and New Zealand, so I don't actually know.

"I was talking to a fella recently from OMD. They've recently been in New Zealand, and he was saying how much he disliked Britain because it was so small and niggly and gossipy and all that. Well that's the beauty of it! There's nowhere else quite like it at all in the world. Here, people will actually tear you to bits for the least little thing. You don't get your stardom cheap here."

Avoiding a star trip, China Crisis have been playing concerts in some obscure places lately — unpublicised pub gigs in the Scottish highlands, a tour of Spain, and the first ever rock concert in Gibraltar.

"Last year to write the songs and arrange them for the album, we visited places where no groups had played, except summats like the Three Degrees, summatt like 28 years ago, so there was a lot of weirdness going on."

How did the changed environment affect the songwriting?

"Quite a lot, because we've never actually played music to an audience before recording it since the very first album, so it's quite a new experience — to watch the audience react just to a song, without knowing the record, that was brilliant."

A Day's Work

China Crisis have a smooth, well-crafted sound — how does that get across live?

"It's got more of an edge to it, because people are people — they want to deliver it their own way. People like Gazza [Johnson] our bass-player and Kevin [Wilkinson] our drummer have not been in the business too long, but long enough to

know their craft. They can get on stage and deliver music. They're performers — I don't like the term musician, that's too professional — and it should always be fun. They're brilliant players, and that performing background carries us off."

For your latest record you got Langer and Winstanley to produce ...

"Yes, well for quality music you must use quality music," says Daly, laughing. "Nah, really what it was, we were trying to see who would fill Walter Becker's shoes because he's been such a great influence on us. We couldn't really find anyone — that's why we went to Spain, when we should have really been in the studio. Our record company approached Clive Langer. He thought he'd find this little electronic duo in the corner, and I think he had the shock of his life to see a group rehearse, with songs arranged, waiting to be recorded by someone. We were interested in the things he'd done, like with Bowie on 'Absolute Beginners,' Madness and all that stuff. We knew he could capture a performance."

They've got a very natural, uncluttered sound, with simple hornlines.

"Yeah, they don't interfere, they don't sprinkle any stardust over it or anything like that. That do capture a performance, they actually talk with the person who's gotta put something down on tape. It's him they want to capture, not what he's doing, but him, that personality, on tape — because that's what makes the music really."

The Steely Dan sound is still subtly apparent, as on 'The Understudy's' cool backing vocals. With someone as talented as Becker it must be a struggle to keep your own identity ...

"Well not really, he captured what was performed and manipulated it — but let's face it, you only work with these people because you want them to influence you. You want to hear part of them on tape as well — otherwise you wouldn't pay them all that money!"

"You see we were very impressed with him because he's worked with some of the world's finest musicians, you know, all those session musicians with double-barrelled names 'n all this, and that was s'posed to frighten the life out of us. But it was brilliant, he was saying things like, 'Oh that reminds me of the Beatles,' things like that, and I was blown away."

What Price Paradise? has a very mellow sound to it — as though you're avoiding making a dance song or a hit song.

"We've never really been dance — the closest we've got to that kind of thing was 'King in a Catholic Style' and 'Fire and Steel.' That was quite dancey, but nah, we're not really disco people! (Laughs)"

Best Kept Secret

It's refreshing that you use natural instruments, with few programmed synthesisers. The drummer Kevin Wilkinson was particularly impressive ...

"Ah, yes, he's so talented. You know, Kevin listens to people like friggin' Frank Zappa and that! You wanna see the songs he comes up with, the ideas. 'The Understudy' on the album, that's his bass line. There's great talent in the group; great drinkers as well."

Recently the emphasis in China Crisis has been on the group — five of you rather than just you and (guitarist/vocalist) Eddie London.

"We've always been a group, it's really only the media that is forgetting that. They find [the duo image] easy to perpetuate; it's like Mick Jones is still in the Rolling Stones. When we travel, when we record, when we write songs, we do it as a group, so I think we'll stand the test of time."

But the group has had a rather faceless image, with just you and Eddie appearing in photos up till now.

"Yeah well, why not? A lot of the groups when we started just don't exist anymore. I can't count the amount — groups like Orange Juice and Blancmange — all these groups that we supported, don't forget — don't exist. They were all Top 10 and god knows what. We've always played this thing that it's the friggin' music, it's gotta be the music when it comes down to it. But you can have a lot of fun, we're beginning to understand that after, like, four albums — Talking Heads kind of fun, being inventive. We've never even considered imagery, we've always just sat there with our instruments. And people have proved that's all they need from us. Okay, every single mightn't have been a hit, but that really doesn't matter, as long as we function as a group. I'm really pleased — there's a lot of people fall by the wayside, there's a lot of debris there."

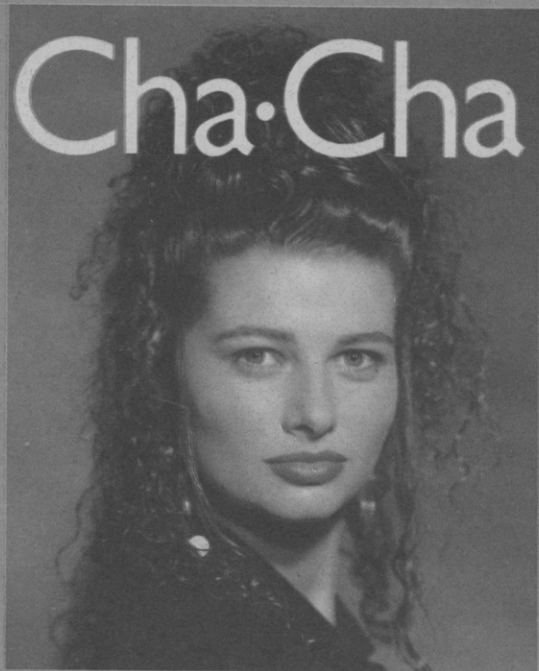
You see yourselves as waving the flag for the more serious end of rock music.

"Yeah. You know the way there's rock this and rock that and stadiums and god knows what. We could sell a million records, a No 1 all over the world, but I doubt we'll ever play a stadium. Because it shouldn't be like that. There should be a lot of varied groups, not everyone clamouring to see a handful of groups. That's gotta mean a lack of quality, a few groups playing all the same thing. Like those groups there used to be — Yes and ELP and Led Zep — it's getting a bit like that again. We're determined not to. We're more interested in what, like, the Beatles were doing — experimenting with it."

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