

'CHILLS' FROM PAGE 14

It gets worse. The road to Den Haag is bumper-to-bumper for a good deal of its length. Short of driving on the wrong side of the motorway there's nothing we can do. By the time we eventually reach the outskirts of the city we're into the Friday rush hour and have to start making snap decisions on which lanes to choose. *Intense.*

By some miracle we find the building, Craig grabs everyone's passport, rushes in, and ... yes, we're late but not too late. As we drive away Craig details the awful consequences that would have ensued from blowing out that part of the tour and everyone breathes easier.

We still have to go back to Amsterdam before heading south again to tonight's gig in Eindhoven, near the German border, but that seems almost incidental by now, even though it is 4pm, the official load-in time on the itinerary.

In Amsterdam Craig decrees half an hour's turn-around — Justin and I decide to go for a chawarma and a falafel respectively and a chat. They do them just like the Middle East in Auckland, same sauces and everything. Not that Justin can have the sauces anyway. A kidney condition means that unseasoned meat, bread and potatoes are virtually all he can eat; the pigments in all other vegetables do him in.

Curiously enough, he's the most dynamic and energetic one on the tour. The Hyperactive One is the role he's settled into. Although he was a precociously skilled player in his teens, his kidneys meant a different sort of adolescence:

"When everybody else was rebelling against their folks and drinking and smoking at parties I kind of rebelled against *that*," he explains.

After playing in the original Big Sideways project at 17, he's mainly been in other-side-of-the-tracks outfits like the later Coconut Rough, and had only seen the Chills live once before going to the first practice. But now he's even remarkably clued up on past Chills lineups and is endlessly willing to discuss the band's music. If there are

still any of you dipshit industry snobs out there, he says the Chills is the most challenging band he's had to play in by far.

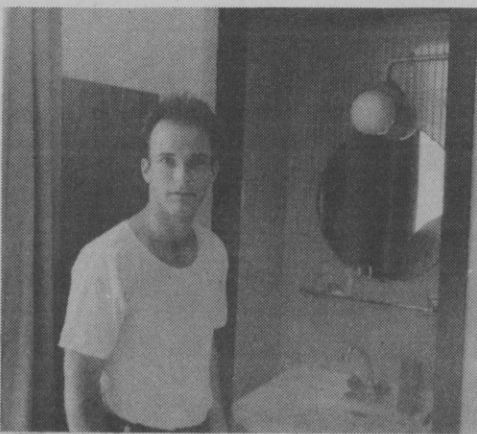
"It's Martin's songs — he doesn't write standard verse-chorus-bridge songs at all and sometimes he'll play you something new on his guitar and you'll think 'What can I do with *that*?' I thought that when he played me 'Pink Frost'."

With a mind unfettered by intoxication, Justin seems to be constantly conscious of the new musical sphere he's in, taking it in, bouncing it out, thinking about it and questioning it. He's also something every band needs — someone who's never too pissed to drive the van.

By the time we make Eindhoven it's almost 8pm and the relief on the local promoter's face when we roll up is visible. Things begin to go right — the PA is simple, without even an EQ to set, and well put together. Andrew is pleased with the sound almost immediately. In the dressing room there's a pow-wow of various promoter-type people, including the band's booking agent, Colin Davie. Two young fanzine editors take Martin away for interviews. These guys work hard — they have to interview in English, transcribe, and then translate into Dutch.

A copy of one, *Go Gor Gold*, is left behind and it's fascinating to "read" the Flying Nun background in it. The language is foreign, but the details — the Enemy, the Clean, Roger Shepherd, Doug Hood, 'Tally Ho!', \$70, etc — indicate the same old story. It's interesting that this far away it's becoming almost mythologised. Take a bow, *Garage* mag.

While there are a few minutes left before going on stage, Martin sits down and updates his diary. He's been scrupulous about daily entries and it's typical of him to not want to lose any of these experiences. There's a documentary vein to his songs now too, like the soft, buzzing 'Singing in My Sleep,' with its lines about "Trying to cope with the pressures of musical life," and "Singing in my sleep / songs of such beauty and



Lifestyles of the rich and famous: Justin Harwood in bathroom.

sadness," and something about the blind leading the blind.

The gig is a good, not great, one. A few German fans have made the trip across the border and cheer the openings of songs like 'Pink Frost' and 'Doledrums.' 'Balancing' is presented again but doesn't come off so well this time.

The south of Holland is gearing up for the start of an annual Fiesta (hence the traffic getting here) and the Dutchman we choose to ask hotel directions from seems to have been getting in some early celebrating.

Craig leans out the window: "Hey you! Ya sober?" As he totters over, he patently is not, but he'll show us — if we give him a lift home. That seems fair, so in he gets. "Haf you any beer" he asks, looking round hopefully. He shows us the hotel, we take him home and then look a little like getting lost again.

"I told you we should have just paid for a taxi from the hotel for him ..." Craig murmurs.

But we get back and everyone beds down. Craig and Colin sit up for a while and talk biz. Colin thinks the band should play a string of smaller festivals in the Dutch summer circuit rather than one big one. And then there's this thing in Italy. And the *Tube* is confirmed — at least for a video and interview and probably for a live performance.

But the big worry is the new withholding tax due to come into force in about a month. A nice little invisible tax for the Tory government (because it only applies to demned furreigners anyway), it will require a substantial upfront payment from every band playing or recording in England. It's hardly a break with form for the Thatcher government, which has been relentlessly anti-culture all along. It's not going to help anyone.

After a few days on the road it begins to sing little songs to you. Ravaged ears ring with the drones, whistles and rattles that belong to the van and from them emerge songs, with clear fluid voices. As we speed towards Den Haag I heard, I swear I heard, the Seekers doing 'The Carnival is Over.' Scary, man ...

Martin: *Billion Dollar Babies?* Now there's an album I could probably sing the words of from beginning to end ... 'Hello, hurray ...'

Feb 28

Waakzaamheid, Koog a/d Zaan

There's an irrepressible cheer before the gig in the curiously named town of Koog a/d Zaan; there's a good pinball machine, a dartboard and great food. And this is the last gig in Holland. It's been nice but it's been flat and enough is enough. The band pulls out a really good gig but the curiously mixed crowd hang back like stunned mullets until the very end. As soon as the gig ends the reason is clear — it's a disco; they simply didn't know what hit them. Oh well.

It's the last load out for the journalist and he gets right into it. Ask any roadie about the simple joy of lifting things. If you do it right it makes you feel *great*.

After dragging Andrew Todd off the dancefloor, we head back to Amsterdam for the last time.

Feb 29

Sweden and goodbye

No chances are being taken this time. Everyone's up good and early for the drive to make the ferry. They've said goodbye to Frank and Phillip and added a photo and their names to the latest of the pile of guest books in the foyer. The Scandinavian leg will be a tough one of 300 km drives just to get to the hotel after the gig in some cases, and the van had better hold together. So — goodbye, good luck, and I'm going back to bed.

March 19

Boston Arms, Tufnell Park, London

Tom Verlaine is playing tonight, one tube stop away from the Chills on the Northern Line and it's interesting to see who gets off at Kentish Town and who stays on for the Chills. About half 'n' half of the hipsters, in my carriage.

On the bill tonight are also the Razorcuts, indie popsters drummed for in that same idiosyncrasy. *CONTINUED ON PAGE 20*

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