

Frostbite and Cold Sweat

The Chills in Europe, Part 2 • By Russell Brown



Martin Phillipps tries the 'Sounds' play-by-numbers technique.

Having battled Goths, the Damned, and a rampant flying nun at the Milky Way ('Dutch Courage and Dan Destiny,' April *Rip it Up*), the Netherland dancing Chills reach Amsterdam ...

Feb 23

A Day Off in Sin City

After a night in one of the expensive hotels that the journalist has to sneak into with a sleeping bag and consequently doesn't get breakfast at, the tour party heads back to Amsterdam for a day off. Unfortunately, it's Monday and all the museums are shut, so the chief remaining spectacle is Amsterdam's red light district.

The vexed question of perceived sexism and reasonable behaviour has already arisen and been discussed at length on this tour, but the heart of the city's institutionalised sex does have to be seen first-hand. It being Monday, many of the shopfront windows are curtained off, but as many are open for business.

In some, scantily-clad women preen and mouth "come on in" to you as if you're the first man they've thought worth smiling at all day, while others just look bored. A fan who saw the Milky Way gig recognises a couple of the band and extends an invitation to a live sex show. There are plenty of those. Plenty too, of shops

full of small, lurid books covering every sexual inclination short of bodily wounding, including bestiality and "water sports," and all kinds of object-orifice interface. Many of the bookshops also carry standard newspaper and magazines for the locals.

The problem with the red light district is that not a lot of people smile or are relaxed, which is odd for this city. There are a lot of young to middle-aged men shuffling down alleys together basically.

On the fringes of the area there are a number of head shops — those which specialise in drug paraphernalia and ephemera. The largest, the Old Man, carries a truly astounding range of cannabis consumption devices, from small pocket-pipes and rainbow papers to towering tubular bongos and ornate Eastern chillums. Down the back it gets sleazier. In glass cabinets are an array of devices for the measuring and consumption of powder drugs like cocaine — and even packets of neutral white crystal to cut them with. The staff look nervous. Dave Vanian comes in to look at knives (they sell ornamental ones) as we leave. Almost all hash cafes display notices forbid-

ding the sale or consumption of hard drugs (rule number two is "Aggression will not be tolerated") and so these are marketed furtively on the street. Dealers obviously feel it's worth the risk to come to their potential consumers outside the head shops — and were treated to a little spectacle as we emerge.

A shifty, olive-skinned little man coaxes a young male tourist down an alley and we hear the word "coke." As we have a last look in the window, there's activity of some kind down the alley and the other shifty men and the tourist's friends look concerned. The young man has tried, purchased and been promptly busted by card-waving plainclothes cops.

Locals begin to emerge from nearby shops to look and laugh. Laugh like hell, in fact. The police are interested in the dealer and eventually send the young man on his way with a smacked bum and a lighter wallet, his heart probably still doing double time. Street rate for coke is said to be about 150 guilders a gram, which puts it behind Ecstasy, the now-outlawed designer psychedelic; a tinkling at the molecular level with 60s drug MDA.

All this takes place in a relatively wide, bright and busy street and is just absorbed into the afternoon, which is the way Amsterdam is. But it shows up what a turkey idea buying drugs in the street is. If you manage to avoid getting ripped off in some way (and if they can, they will) you might get busted.

Back at the hotel, everyone rests up for a while. Caroline declares her intent for an early night, day off or no. She's been getting run down by the touring bustle and needs a rest. Tall and strongly built, she's possessed of the kind of well-rounded, solid sanity you often find in long-term Wellingtonians. It helps them live there. At 28, she wouldn't have been in the Chills had it not been for the fact that Martin admired her playing and made it clear she was the drummer he wanted. The tour has been an upheaval and she's been spending rather a lot on toll calls to her boyfriend, Alan, who is scraping up the money to come to England.

A European tour is a pressure-cooker way for roles to emerge in a new band, but things are settling into a kind of order. Andrew Todd, for instance, is the main musical collaborator with Martin — because he's classically trained and because his instruments, the synth and electric piano, colour the sound of each song most (and Chills songs are often about colour). It also makes things difficult for him and he worries over it. He'd like a big sampler and a proper Vox organ to play with.

But it's just going to take time to find the depth in songs, he says: "With all Martin's songs it's like getting a great big box of chocolates — it takes a while to get around them all." The first songs

to come together have been the rock 'n' rollers, more about the guitar and rhythm section and he sometimes ends up looking estranged off to the side of the stage behind his keyboards. One senses that he'll come into his own in the studio.

In the end, everyone has dinner at a nice Indonesian restaurant, but bar prices send the partying back, again, to the hotel room. A NZ dollar buys roughly and guilder and the tour party have to be careful. You too would choke if you walked into the wrong sort of bar and were asked \$13 for a double vodka and tonic. At least a decent hole is made in the beer backlog — courtesy the all-too-willing Brit indie band Stump, staying at the Quentin too. They had some beer but they drank it all, they explain.

Oh, man ... the 70s are rising and walking again. Hot Chocolate are Top Five in the UK album charts and godawful 4/4 disco is coming atcha from from Europe and Chicago ... the sound ...

But remember the way the early 70s looked? The buildings? Doesn't the sight of true 70s tack give you a little tremble? Who could fail to be affected by the naive wackiness of the original perspex hemispheres and concrete sculptures of Christchurch's QE2 park complex? The prefab kitsch of Auckland's Downtown mall facade? The spirit that put toytown houses with culverts for window frames on the hills of Wellington?

And so much of it in that misbegotten dark purple, the least appealing of a number of tacky, unappealing and, again, fundamentally naive hues in vogue for up-to-the-minute building decor.

Ah, but it was a weird time. We were so techno-naive we allowed ourselves to be convinced that a stupid plastic cone with a gobstopper in the bottom or useless plastic sticks that twisted together into models were a "space age," "70s" way to eat ice cream. There is no space age way to eat ice cream. But what do people use for towing-ball covers now you don't get it in those little plastic spheroids now?

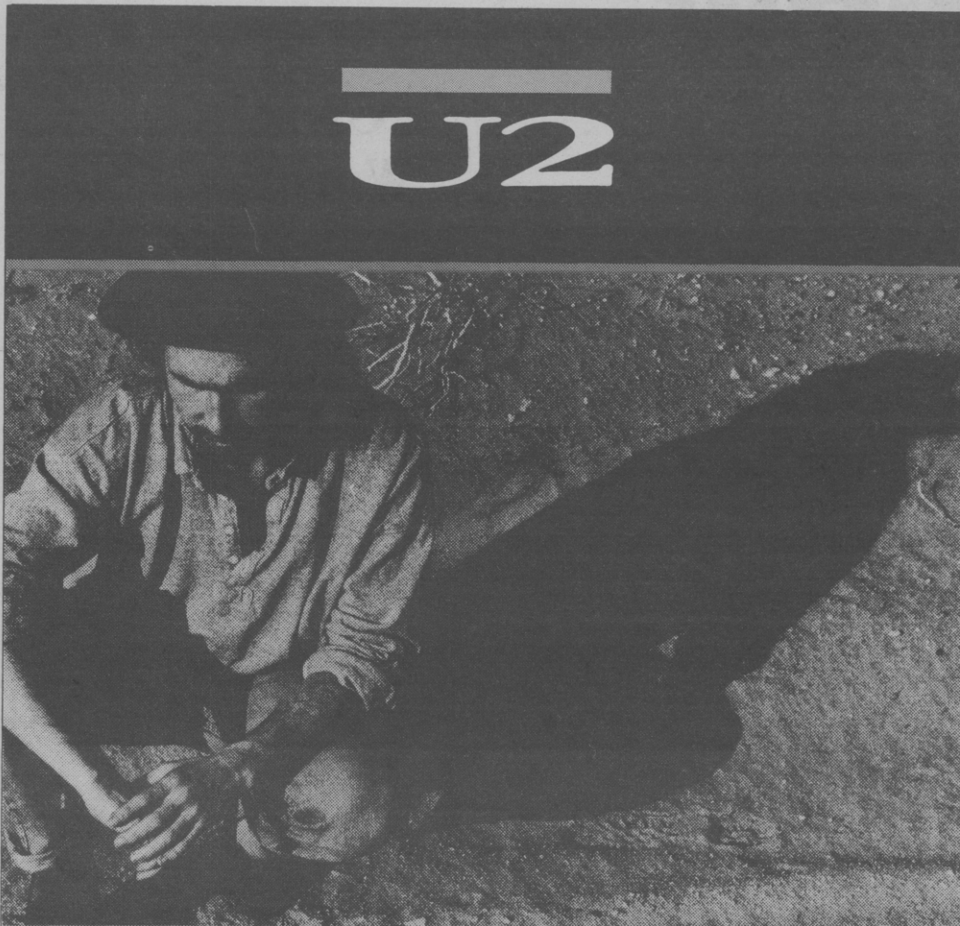
But think for us, the ones who had to pubesce into a mess, a political and cultural ice age. We absorbed oil shocks, economic collapse, a young Muldoon, Norm Kirk snuffing, a permanent economic slide and a big hangover from the 60s. It must have been so confusing.

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Doornroosje, Nijmegen

"We were doomed from the moment we left the hotel," tour manager Craig Taylor sighed later, and he was dead right.

Morning, outside the Quentin, and Martin's ex-
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