



It's Wednesday night. Debbie Harwood's at home scribbling dates on posters for the When the Cat's Away tour, which starts tomorrow at 7am. The last three days have been "mental" — the Aids benefit gig at His Majesty's on Sunday night was recorded for a live album, Monday and Tuesday have been spent in the studio tidying up the tapes, plus finalising all the details for the 30-date tour.

All that to do, and for once, she's slightly behind — two hours were wasted at the airport, sending her cat down to Napier while the Cats are away.

When the Cat's Away was Harwood's brainchild. She'd known Annie Crummer for years from jingle work, and Kim Willoughby from the Gurlz/Blams tour Harwood managed. Dianne Swann and Margaret Ulrich she met when all three were contenders at the 1985 Music Awards, and they became firm friends. When she put it to "the girls" that they should sing together, they leapt at it.

Cat Nap

"We were all ripe for a rest at that time. We needed a break, and enjoyed each other's company," says Harwood. "The Cats is a break from getting our own stuff played, recorded and on radio. It's 'the girls go out to play.'"

The idea of having five of New Zealand's top female vocalists singing together in a *show*, with costumes, dancing and plenty of

humour quickly caught the imagination of the Auckland public, which has been slow to support live music lately. "The two-and-a-half hour shows are incredibly exhausting," says Harwood. "We all enjoy it so much we push ourselves far beyond our normal abilities. We're all so relaxed; we're only there to have fun really — there are no serious messages, just singing our favourites"

From the beginning, the rehearsals were "a joy," she says. "We went to Annie's house for a week, and it all fell into place. She has a great ear for harmonies, and picked out the harmonies we were each most comfortable with."

The songs they picked were "classics we'd always loved, things we'd forgotten from when we were 13. We each picked songs that suited our voices — for Annie it means she can do songs in different styles she's not known for. She's always asked to wail, but a rock song like 'Roxanne' she sings brilliantly." From the beginning there was a strong commitment to New Zealand material, and they were well chosen — 'Gutter Black,' 'Counting the Beat,' 'Be Mine Tonight,' 'Bold as Brass,' 'Shark Attack,' and 'Guilty,' which quickly became a Crummer standard.

So successful were the high-energy shows that something almost unprecedented happened — they were approached by a record company. “CBS just rang us up! So we’re doing a couple of singles and a live album, as the show is such a live thing, full of energy and atmosphere.” ‘Leader of the Pack’ was chosen as the first single, “because it’s always been the most popular number live, apart from ‘Guilty’ [which is being saved for Crummer’s solo LP]. It’s done completely tongue in cheek, with the girls providing motorbike noises.” The 10 songs on the album show the Cats’ diversity, from funk, pop, harder rock — and local favourites (Split Enz’s ‘Shark Attack’ and ‘I Walk Away’, Herbs’ ‘Dragons and Demons’).

Cat Attack

The Cats phenomenon snowballed in Auckland, but now they've got the task of taking it around the country. Selling the act to the pubs was difficult — with five vocalists and a large backing band (including the Newton Hoon brass section) the touring party comes to 18 — with the deterioration of the pub circuit, Harwood had to talk pub managers back into the idea of live shows. Without sponsorship, the Cats tour

wouldn't be possible — hire firms wanted money up front, and radio stations wanted their money before ads were even *booked*.

Midway through the tour comes a 10-date season at His Majesty's in Auckland, a multi-media event starring Limbs, the Topp Twins, and illusionist Tim Woon along with the Cats. To be newly unveiled for this tour is new theme — tropical rockarama move over, watch out Prince!

This tour is the last opportunity to see the Cats as nearly all the members are going overseas soon — Harwood to London, Ulrich to Australia with Peking Man, Swann to Sydney, “and Annie and Kim won’t be too far away either,” says Harwood. That means New Zealand music has lost one of its most tireless supporters. “To be honest, I’ve lost a bit of faith. I never thought

I would, I've always followed every New Zealand book, film, and record I could find. But with my music I'm not doing as much as I think I can do. A single and a tour a year is not enough when you want to do it full time."

This month another Harwood solo single will come out. 'Blue Water' is written by fellow Big Sideways alumnus John Quigley, with a video by Fetus Productions. "It's neat! Shot all underwater — I spent many hours drowning!"

But right now Harwood is hoping her voice holds out after the weeks of phone calls she's made to organise the Cats tour. "The reason I'm doing it is because I want to sing in the show," she says, "if I lose it, what a terrible waste!"

"I've always wanted to wear fruit on my head!"
Chris Bourke

Post to 'RIU' Letters,
PO Box 5689, Auckland 1.

Wake Up!

To Rip It Up:

So, Chad Taylor, you're not enthused about songs on emotional insecurity (ie, the penile variety), expression of women and gays and pressure to conform to the "NZ male" stereotype?

Wake up! These are things that matter close to home. Sure Billy Bragg has a very strong stance on larger affecting issues and he puts it across with real power, but that could be because he's the exception rather than the rule; he's not a macho shihead and seems well adjusted as far as treating other human beings is concerned.

Nick Smith also has a very strong message; before you try to change the world (this is not detracting from Billy Bragg's viewpoint in any way) take a damn good look at yourself. We, as males in this country, especially need a shake up of attitudes and emotional expression.

Bollocks to your slagging him

New Video Releases

Many new music vids from **Polygram** this month, including *Status Quo Live in Concert* and *Roxy Music: the High Road*, both live from 1982. More reviewed on page four.

Out soon on **CBS Fox** is Mick Jagger's long-form comedy adventure video *Running Out of Luck*. Nine songs, plus Jerry Hall, Dennis Hopper and Rae Dawn Chong

From **CIC** comes *Coal Miner's Daughter* (Sissy Spacek as Loretta Lynn) and *Blue City* (with Ry Cooder music).

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