

# Lost and Found Dead Famous People

The thing that strikes you about a room full of Dead Famous People is that they like each other so much. These Dead Famous People are musicians and their friendship is evident in their songs, their record and their live performance. This is a rare band, an Auckland pop group with something to say.

Three of them, Wendy Kjestrup, Donna Savage and Biddy Leyland, sat down over several pots of coffee and chatted about the inanities of most Top 10 pop and the strengths of Dead Famous People. Says Biddy: "There isn't any other band around like us."

Donna: "It's not just that we're all women. What we have to say is our contribution to New Zealand music and some of the things we say are

not so much personal as universal."

Wendy: "I can't believe the lyrical content of some pop songs. I think half the problems of adolescence are the love songs that go on about how it's perfect forever and ever. It fucks it up. Songwriters should be more realistic."

## Spider Webs

Dead Famous People's songs do address some fairly harsh topics



Dead Famous People (L-R): Biddy Leyland, Jenny Renals, Wendy Kjestrup, Robin Tearle, Donna Savage.

but always present them with a cheerful and catchy little melody. "It's like the spider and the fly," says Donna. "The fly's attracted to the pretty web but then gets snared. People that don't want to listen to

the lyrics or know what they're about are attracted to the music first. It's a lucky coincidence that it ends up that way really."

The five songs on their EP *Lost Persons Area*, out now on Flying

Nun, are fairly indicative of this. "I wouldn't spit on you if you were on fire," croons Donna on 'Who Cares.' "Yeah, that's Donna's idea of a love song," laughs Biddy. The next track 'Traitor to the Cause' contains the line "I just never thought you'd turn out to be het," which "We just put in for our mates really, to stir," says Wendy. "Although it has relevance."

Donna: "It means what it says but it has a lot of other things in it. It's about morals and betrayal." It's exceedingly catchy too. I have some funny visions of extremely unlikely people singing that song in the shower.

## Class Wars

Not all DFP songs are about the pain of love. "A lot of our songs are about class wars too," says Biddy.

Wendy: "That's not pain. That's a healthy rejection of things that we are supposed to accept. It's not sad and bitter or victim-like. We do it from a position of strength. That's where the cheerful tunes come in. People can think, 'Yeah, that's right,

but they won't go away feeling depressed. You can be positive and do something about it."

Donna: "My latest song is about a man who broke into our house. It's a real situation and I think you have to write about things you know. He broke in and he was just standing in the doorway. Things like that really stick in your mind."

"Donna waved an axe at him and yelled Get out! — but he didn't," says Wendy.

"So I went away and wrote a song."

Donna does most of the songwriting, although Wendy has contributed two songs to the EP. Donna: "I can't play many chords on the guitar, but when I find some that fit the mood of the words I've written they just sound right together."

Wendy: "Donna breaks the rules a bit with her chords. She goes totally by ear and that makes our music different. We're very straight and melodic with the classic harmony styles, but the original chords give our songs a slightly different tune."

## Flower Power

Although the band have had short dry patches, "they pass and new songs pop up," says Wendy. "Donna is a veritable flower field of new songs popping up. It's quite organic, really."

Donna: "Flowers are a feature, actually."

Wendy: "I'm a closet hippy. A burgeoning earth mother."

The consequent hilarity is followed by a discussion of Chris Knox's last *Listener* column, in which he made some fairly poignant points about some of Auckland's better known all-women groups. "I think he had some really good points but you can't assume that every woman in an all-women band is a politically aware feminist," says Wendy.

"It's like saying 'all blacks have rhythm.' The particular band I know that does covers of men's music like those songs. They don't care who wrote them. When they sing them, they become different songs. 'I saw her walking down the street' has a whole different quality of situation when it's sung by a woman."

What are Dead Famous People aiming for in the long term? Donna doesn't like those last two words. "I hate this slog thing. Biddy and I have an urgent desire to see the fruits of our labours, more so than the others probably, because we were slaving away for so long in the Freudian Slips. We've had lots of band practices in our lives."

I'm betting that this is where they pay off.

Debbi Gibbs

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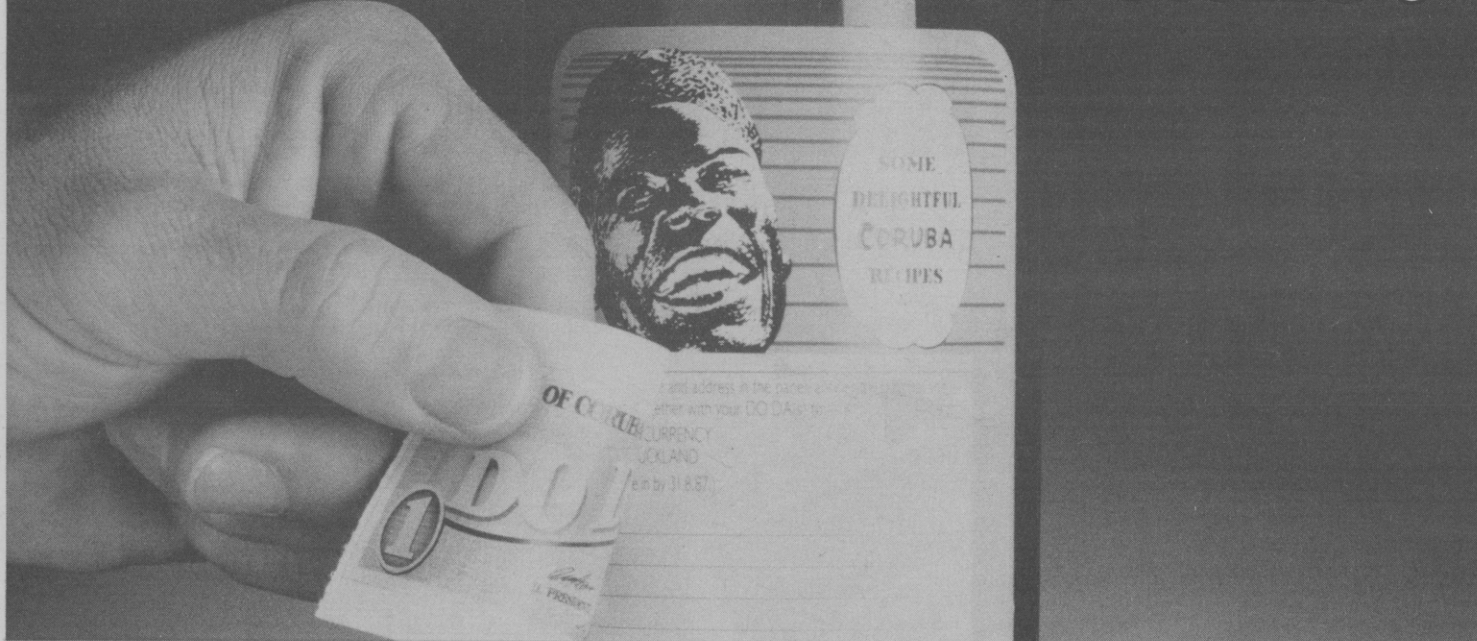


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# RIP IT UP 10 YEARS

This month *Rip It Up* is 10 years old. To celebrate, we've put together two special editions. This issue concentrates on the writing that's appeared in the mag, with excerpts from reviews of pivotal live shows and singles by New Zealand acts, with many rare photos and memorabilia, readers' letters, plus an article examining how *RIU* has covered the local rock scene since 1977. Next month Murray Cammick tells a few behind-the-scenes stories, there's a history of New Zealand rock magazines — and a special 10th birthday column from 'Arry.

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