



Tasman Tea

Once, there wasn't a Chase property development on that lot. Just an old Auckland Electric Power Board building that had lots of empty rooms. Rooms for bands to practise in. Bands like the Able Tasmans.

"We could explain the Ables with diagrams," says vocalist Peter Keen. "An orchestra would be fun — Lord knows what I'd do with it though. Throw it open to discussion, I guess."

The happy Tasman couple of keyboards and drums has changed since 1983 and given birth. They're now eight people, in fact. Ready?

Graham Humphries, life member and stalwart, sings and plays guitar with the same fire he plays his keyboards. Leslie Jonkers has evolved with piano, merged with Graham. The entire group has "evolved" in a very natural growth, member by member. No auditions, none of that rubbish. Dave Beniston and former drummer Stuart Greenway have worked brilliantly. Flautist since Jane Leggett left is Tracy Collier. New drummer Peter Moerenhout has brown hair and drives ARA buses; AEPB building band Rancous Laughter gave to the Tasmans guitarist David Tennent and Peter Keen.

"And now," says Peter, "you try and pin me down with difficult questions to describe the album! ... One side is connected," he says, and sits back satisfied that he's off the hook.

Tea Time

Their new album *A Cuppa Tea and a Lie-down* is a collection of snapshots illuminating diverse moods and subtleties. Peter's fine claret voice works superbly with Graham's. But also, Andrew T Cole's violin — 'And We Swam the Magic Bay' off the album is violin-as-gannet. Have you ever watched gan-

nets? "The band, says Graham, "is a structure for Andrew to paint pictures upon."

Things these days are much more considered (and serious, even). The days of travelling downtown in a car with no spare and the bare essentials are less, and their appreciation of beauty goes beyond the white faces and black clothes in the Windsor's earlier days.

Graham: "There is simplicity and paying attention to the little things — that's kind of a big thing. If you can figure on a perception of place and timelessness, then you have a broad theme for the album."

"The diversity of musical skills allows heaps of variety in arrangement. We focus on strong original melodies, competent and innovative pop songs, but with warped edges. We all have different leanings, and somewhere they intersect."

Musical Flair

Having always enjoyed a reputation of being unpretentious, they laugh at a recent tag of "musically wearing flares." The Tasmans couldn't get an image if they tried.

Leslie sees the band as having "very distinct tendrils" and enjoys being part of a show that is varied both physically and musically. All agree on the desire to move into mixed media — Brian Wills uses film with the band, and Graham's involvement as musical director of the dance group Te Kani Kani o te Rangatahi brings much lateral thought to the group. He plays several roles in their present perfor-

mance *A Show of Hands*.

A Cup of Tea ... is set for release on Flying Nun. Eight or so musicians are looking to inject an otherwise lowkey year with their desire to *play and have more fun*. The Able Tasmans never really fitted in with rock and roll conventions, and appear to be getting closer to their concept of "a show." They have an ability to strip the crap and not get caught in their own powers of vision.

The Able Tasmans are among those valuable bands that don't insult your intelligence. In a sense, they're a very magical band.

Barry Caitcheon

Windy City Struggle

Steve Cochrane is the man behind Skank Records. He sits opposite, and over a beer tells me the story. In many ways it's the usual yarn of getting by with a little help from friends.

We have seen over the last six or seven years an explosion of people who care enough about the thing they're into to go out and do it themselves. The nationalist or patriot calls it Kiwi ingenuity. It's also the "don't take no for an answer" idea ("you've got nothing to lose").

But being independent does mean you lose. Cochrane talks of the jobs he's lost — "We were on tour" — and if you don't tour you don't get exposure. Then there's the money: a little from the Arts Council, but mostly it's "pay for it yourself." Why let ideals languish in the dust?

It's bands like the Glass that prompted Cochrane to get Skank going. Bands that will disappear forever because there's no vinyl offering left behind; such a waste.

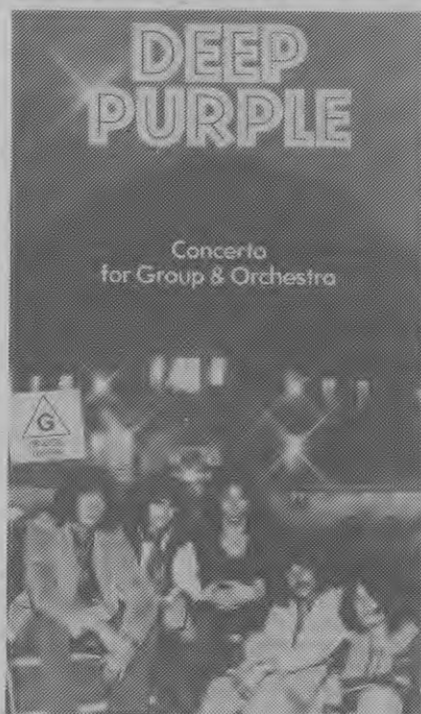
So put your money on the line and get it going. The knocks and the knockers will always be there, you just have to ignore them and try to get on with it.

But the real point is that Wellington now has another independent label. Far from the world of big bucks, with a sincerity that makes you believe that it can, and will work. The label has just released a compilation of Wellington music and a debut EP for Skank Attack. Coming up are EPs from the Glass and Wazzo Ghoti, plus distribution of the Wild Poppies' *Heroine*. And Skank looks set to continue with the aim of improving its distribution network, and improve communications between other networks.

They are on the lookout for other bands as well, indigenous to the Wellington scene or anywhere else, to help through the hassles of recording and releasing records. Skank's commitment is to the bands: let them express their own direction. One can only admire the commitment of the few people who have stayed with getting this label up and running.

Tim Byrne

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