



Rude Boys

He's Chris O'Connor, the guitarist and main singer, the one with the dark curly hair and glasses. He's been explaining how the band's use of humour on stage creates closer contact with the audience, which is a fine thing in itself. (In case you didn't already know, Painters and Dockers have this wild reputation for causing mayhem whenever they play. Fans tend to slam dance and break bones and jump on stage and tear off their clothes in drunken frenzies. And they're subdued compared to the band members.)

I'm just a bit worried that by identifying so closely with the Average Aussie Blokes in their audiences, Painters and Dockers are no better than a bunch of yobs themselves.

"We don't use our humour as a gimmick, it's just the way we are—we couldn't play straight if we tried," Chris explains. "We can laugh at ourselves."

Misery

The Melbourne seven-piece first started out five years ago

"I'm amazed at the number of guys who jump on stage and make complete dicks of themselves."

No, that's not a punter talking about Aussie band Painters and Dockers, but a Painter and Docker talking about their fans.

partly as a rebellion against all the serious musicians that were around at the time.

"It was when bands like the Birthday Party and other post-punk groups were around and everyone wore black and looked miserable. We were different and

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that's why we caught on. Some bands wouldn't even play with us 'cos they thought we were silly, but we can live without those sort of people. There are definitely too many serious musicians about—they're just wanking in their own little worlds."

Entertainment is a large factor at a P&D gig.

"I don't think music by itself is enough," says Chris. "A band has to be entertaining. Every band has to have a gimmick or they'll just be the same as any other band, otherwise you may as well listen to the record, or go to a gig and keep your eyes closed all night."

"We like to make contact with the audience. Some bands have this attitude like, 'We're the band up here on stage and we've got these black boxes in front of us and we're going to use them to create a barrier,' instead of letting the audience get involved. To me it feels magical when the audience joins in and has a good time. We want people to smile and have a good time."

But there is a more serious side to the happy-go-lucky bunch of comics. They've played charity gigs and helped put out a compilation album with the proceeds

going to SWAPO (South West Africa Political Organisation).

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issues, like our anti-nuclear song 'After the Blast.' And we do one called 'Safe Sex' which is about AIDS and how it's taken the spontaneity and fun out of sex. But we're really into the politics of having a good time."

Racism

Chris can see the band commenting on racism in its own paddock with Australia due to celebrate its bicentenary next year. He doesn't see much to celebrate, with Aborigines still being badly treated.

"We've been able to avoid the problem by keeping them apart from us. Australia's so big that we've shoved them in the middle of the country and forgotten about them. In Perth they still won't serve Aborigines in some pubs. It's shocking."

"It's interesting coming here and seeing the Maoris, who seem to have a strong, unified presence. Things like having the news in their own language on telly; it's great."

Another area P&D have put a bit of serious thought into is their future. Rather than age into wrinkled tired rock stars they are putting their energy and money into their own record label Doc Records.

"You have to make the choice at some stage to be just a band, or diversify and get into other things and establish a network, because five years down the road when the band finishes, there's nothing to do. It is a big commitment for us."

The band bought a pressing

plant last year after quitting Big Time Records, who "didn't do much for us." Since then they've released a live album *Bucket* on their label and two singles, 'Nude School' and 'Die Yuppie Die,' with the help of Mushroom's White Label. They've also released records by fellow Melbourne bands X and Olympic Sideburns.

"We've realised that recording and playing live are two totally different things. Now we try and make records sound like records, not like playing live."

"*Bucket* captured our live sound well, but to get your records played on the radio you've got to have good sound quality. If it's too rough they won't play them."

Bull Market

This more commercial outlook has brought cries of "sell out" from some P&D fans and critics. "But we're not selling out—the rest of the world is buying in," is Chris's outlook.

"We can't be accused of selling out with a song like 'Die Yuppie Die.' It's getting quite a bit of radio play, which is ironic, as DJs are the biggest yuppies of them all."

Their accompanying video

"'Die Yuppie Die' is getting quite a bit of radio play, which is ironic, as DJs are the biggest yuppies of them all."

shows the band playing an impromptu gig in front of the Melbourne Stock Exchange, a relatively sedate affair compared to their video for 'Nude School,' which was (predictably) banned in Queensland.

It was inspired by a report about an American school where pupils attended in the nude, and their video clip was shot at a Victorian pig farm, and has the band stripping off and prancing around in their unrefined glory.

"We tried to make it a bit out of the ordinary; so many videos are all the same with the obligatory beautiful girl in the clip. The reac-

tion we've received from 'Nude School' has made me realise the power of video. All of a sudden people wanted to talk to us."

Savage

Having such a reputation as savage men of Oz rock is not always easy to live up to, especially after travelling for 12 hours or so cramped together in a little van.

"It's hard sometimes then to be energetic when we're all tired, but after the first couple of songs we always get back into it."

"We've played our worst gigs when we're really drunk. We played this gig at four o'clock in the morning in Melbourne once and we were pathetic; we were just pissing on the audience who'd paid money to see us. People seem to think we're drunken junkies half the time but we're not really into drinking."

"That's the weird thing about the music industry. You get up, get drunk and go and play a gig. There aren't many industries where you're expected to get drunk before work."

Chris says the Dockers never planned their image as wild Ocker rockers. "Our image isn't something we conceived, it just happened because of the people in the band. It was never a planned thing that we were going to 'be wacky.' Half the time we don't know what songs we're going to play before we're on stage."

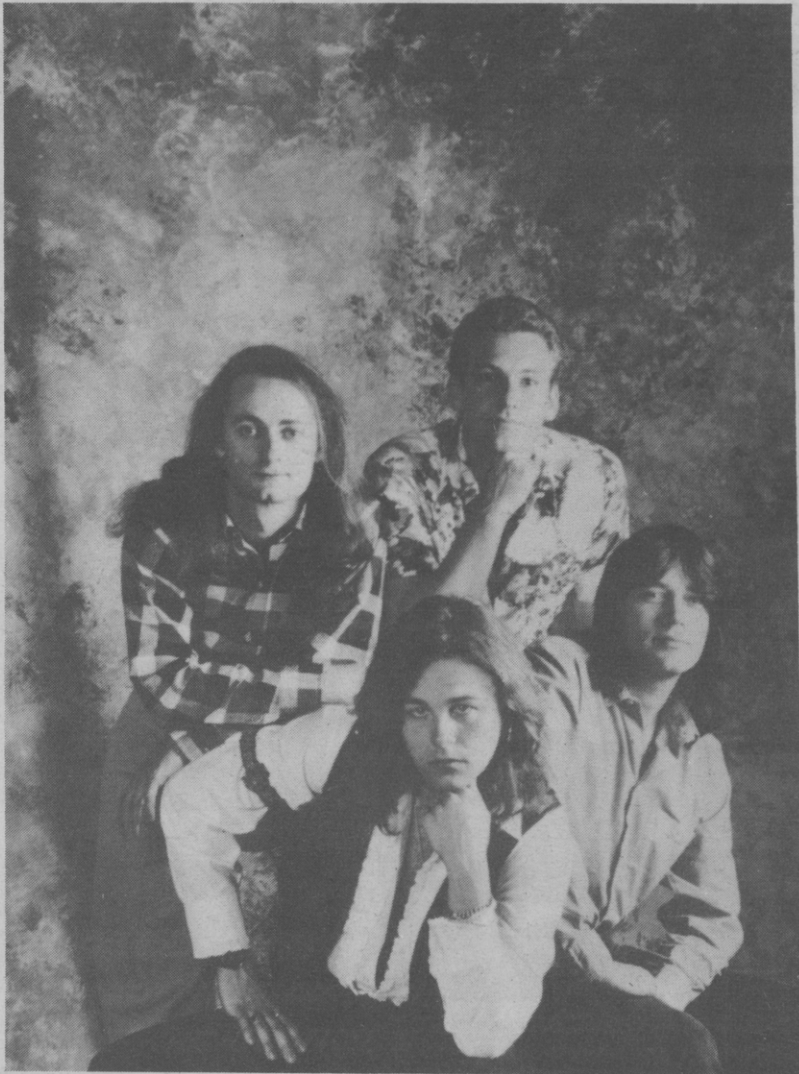
So they were quite a contrast to Billy Idol, whom they supported recently on his Australian tour.

"Every move he did was stylised and choreographed. Every night his show was exactly the same," says Chris. "One night he just went berserk when a fan in the audience undid his shoelace; he was really angry. Bit wimpy for a so-called punk hero. Paul, our singer, has injured his back and broken his collarbone at some of our gigs."

All in the name of having a good time.

Boys will be boys and Aussie blokes will be yobs. But better a yobbo than a yuppie, I s'pose.

Sue Camden



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