

ago. Those people, the major music industry and the radio, hadn't helped us at all. And I don't want to downplay what TV's done for us, but I think they only did what they had to, given the profile of the band, if they were going to be seen to be interested in New Zealand music. That's what started to happen on the radio too — they only started playing our music when they realised they had to because it was getting ridiculous. And ha ha to them, 'Leather Jacket' came out as a single, probably the most unradiolike of all our singles. If they'd picked up earlier it wouldn't have been quite so embarrassing for them.

"But now I'm sure we're going to go home to, y'know, people who've been putting us down now coming up to us and saying they're really proud of what we're doing and they've always believed in us ... It's just tricky because of the band changes; a lot of them have the excuse of saying, 'Now that you've finally got a serious band we're going to support you.' And that's not true and it's not fair."

Do you see yourselves anywhere in the line of national confidence back home? The KZ7 of the NZ indie scene, perchance?

"We had that sort of KZ7 crowd coming up before we left and it was quite odd. We don't know how they came upon the Chills. And more important to me, I don't know where the other people went — why they didn't even come out and have a look. There were a lot of longterm Chills fans whose faces I didn't see once. Especially in places like Christchurch, where you'd really get to know faces in the crowd. It really made me angry. Because the band was Auckland-based, because the whole idea of the Chills was old, no one was keen any more. I suppose I can understand that but it's no good for me. I'm still trying to struggle to achieve things."

Do you think you'd have done the same as an audience member?

"Mmmm — without a doubt. I'm the most hypocritical of the lot. I used to rubbish the Clean for their slightest faults. I'm glad I did because I think a lot of my criticisms of them were valid. I used to say it to their faces and we'd have arguments and stuff. But looking back, I didn't realise at the time just how important the Clean were. They're still one of the best bands I've ever seen or heard in

the whole world.

"And Toy Love, even though Chris Knox downplays Toy Love's importance compared to the Enemy. I thought the Enemy probably were the better of the two bands, but in terms of achievements, ramming it down the industry's throat, Toy Love were marvellous. It was like a real pride thing, being part of the crowd with Toy Love, that whole sort of family thing. At the time it was really exciting."

Maybe that sense of community is one of the things missing here in Britain.

"There's just no feeling here now, there really isn't. The bands don't stick together, there's no movement. I can't imagine what the next movement's gonna be but I'm worried that we're going to be hit like Split Enz were here — coming over in their art school makeup and getting hit by punk rock and written off. I'm really hoping that doesn't happen to us here, some incredible new wave of music coming along and us being regarded as old hat and being brushed aside."

"But it really doesn't look like there is, and in bands we're as likely to come across it as anyone. And if it's going to be what I'm hoping it is, we're more likely than most bands to put it forward when it comes up. It's got to be ... where the 60s were rebelling, really naive rebellion, and punk rock was kind of anarchic rebellion, the next one has got to be really sensible and really thought-out."

"Musically, obviously, it's shaping up for a turn back to melody — that's gonna please me. And I'm sure it will, because I've got a lot of respect for rhythm but I don't think it's ever the most important element in a song. I'd put melody and rhythm side by side, but it seems now that rhythm is the most important thing."

To me the Chills are still like the underground band slowly working its way up. And I can't see why we should change our ideals, we're achieving everything we want to achieve. And I hope we're setting a very good example — I want to."

Those are principles that have hard implications for your immediate position.

"Like having to turn down a major record company's vast financial offer because you don't agree with their terms."

In the event of anything happening in America there will be a few people queuing up to say the Chills have sold out.

"I've accepted the fact there are going to be people like that. And if they feel like that, they're not Chills fans to me, they're not people who understand what's going on. They may be music listeners and music lovers, but they haven't got their heads together with it, they're not really thinking."

The question of loyalty to Flying Nun must be difficult. You're as aware as anyone else of Flying Nun's significance.

"More aware than most people I think. I was there when the Clean met Roger Shepherd for the first time and Roger came out and said he wanted to do this. I've been there right from the start and that's what I believe in, but we've reached the stage where Flying Nun can't support us anymore. That's how it is in black and white — the company recognises it."

"It's been a major factor in our unhappy times this year, when we've had them. But there's no way that Flying Nun is going to come out of the Chills badly. It's of major importance to the whole band, which is quite surprising seeing as I'm the only one who has come from the Flying Nun stable. If Flying Nun haven't got the resources to support us overseas then I think it's our responsibility to move on rather than stretch those resources even thinner for everyone else on the label."

The breakthroughs seem to be happening now.

"Yeah, they seem to be. Bands like the Verlaines are being looked at more seriously by overseas record companies because the Chills have actually been to America now. It's a serious fact. And now the Verlaines are coming over, that's really good. It's hard to say, but I don't think the Verlaines would have come overseas had the Chills not come over — whereas I think Sneaky Feelings would have come anyway. Those bands are going to come here and while they might not find things any easier, the territory is mapped out, risks that we've taken and haven't paid off won't be taken again. Again, Toy Love took an awful lot of ... shit, so other people could walk in their place."

Do you have any idea of a responsibility to what's in you?

"I'm very true to that, and it becomes tricky when you realise you've got three members of the band, the manager, and eventually it's going to grow into a sound crew, a lighting crew, agents and stuff, all relying on you to earn their living. Staying true to yourself becomes progressively more difficult."

Come to any theories about your own

creativity?

"Yeah, millions ... can you be more specific?"

Well, maybe in terms of what William Hurt said, collecting an Oscar a couple of years ago, about "Love not yourself in the Art, but the Art in yourself." And Jung was always pretty big on the creative element being something that lives people, rather than them living it.

"Well I know that I'm very much living my life for my art, at the expense of things all around the place. Love is very important to me, but if love was going to come between me and music there wouldn't be any choice, because my perfect love would include my music in it. I could end up a very lonely old man because of it, but it's really something I haven't got much choice about."

Words like "spiritual" have popped up fairly regularly in writing about the Chills. What's your perspective on that?

"Well, I hope they do. Because in the lyrics I go to that extent — and probably more in the music than the lyrics. 'Night of Chill Blue' and 'Whole Weird World' are two angles on the New Zealand countryside, which is very spiritual to me. They certainly make me think of New Zealand. I don't expect them to make anybody else think of New Zealand but it's my angle on it."

The whole thing of the land — the very act of leaving makes you much more conscious of what it means to you.

"Yeah, I think so. Because a very important part of me is New Zealand. It irritated me thinking about 15 Maori who went to Fiji and talked about kicking all the white people out of New Zealand. Because I'm a New Zealander and there's no other place I feel attached to. I feel as deeply about the land and as attached to it as any Maori would."

"We've come to the stage now where you can't dwell too much on the past. It's got to be in the future, the answers. Everyone just needs to keep their heads. All this sort of anger — 'anger is an energy,' John Lydon — I really believe that. I think the energy from anger can be used a lot more constructively and positively. To be dark and gloomy and full of hate is the easiest and cheapest way out. It's so much easier to create art like that too. It's much harder to be positive."

BLUE HAWAII.

