

album is quite hard. Especially seeing as we've done Peel Session versions of some of the songs and you start to think you'll never really get the final version. But in the last week or so I've become aware that we've actually done what we hoped we would. And there's still a lot of room to build for the next one."

There's an obvious sense of getting good, clean version of those songs. It's almost a documentary in that respect.

"Yeah. Because this album, probably more than any other one we do, will be the one that's played to the greatest number of people who haven't heard us yet. So what they'll need to hear is the strength of the songs and a bit of power, without the power drowning the songs, which is always the temptation."

'Dark Carnival' is one of the most striking things on the album, probably more assertive than the rest of it — and it was a studio creation?

"I took in a whole lot of scraps of the song, and the idea was to do it like 'Dream By Dream' on *The Lost EP*, have everyone throw in crazy ideas and come out with something. But it was a bad day basically, and I ended up having to do the whole thing myself, which wasn't what I'd wanted."

"I don't know, I suppose there were expectations about this band that weren't really realistic. This band still can't jam together properly — not in the way I always envied bands like the Stones and the Clean being able to do. I think we're capable of it, there are just a lot of barriers on different levels to break down before we can. And that was what came out of that day with 'Dark Carnival' — we're not the sort of band yet that can get ideas flowing that quickly in the studio. Well, it didn't work that day anyway."

Another notable thing about 'Dark Carnival' is that it's got, gasp, a *drum machine* on it ...

"Yeah. I'm still not sure quite why. Caroline programmed in this beat as a guide beat. We recorded everything else and the drums were the last thing and it became obvious that she couldn't drum as precisely as the drum machine — who can? — and the song by that time was really depending on the absolute precision of that rhythm. So, much against what I would have decided two years ago, I thought it sounded great with the drum machine. The song's about insanity and I quite like it like that, the way it doesn't stop, you can't find the human in the drum machine."

"Also, I feel a bit gleeful about it because we tackled a tiny slice of technology and

won. That's really good, and what I intend doing a lot more on the next album is not running away from the capabilities of 80s technology, but actually trying to use it to get a Chills sound."

Have you tried to broaden your own listening tastes here?

"Well I got a friend of mine to make me up a taste of hip-hop stuff, but I haven't had a chance to listen to it a lot. Last night I watched the Stump video for 'Big Bottom' and I think that's more where my modern music interests lie rather than hip-hop. I need to hear more music, but I think the Chills' music is going to naturally evolve into something more modern anyway."

There's a lot of potential for achieving sounds in Chills' songs using modern technology ...

"Now that we've overcome the fact and we're not afraid of using samples and that kind of thing, when they're right. When they're right they can be really powerful. And it opens up so much room in terms of what we can do. The imagination really is the limit with those machines. And still at the core of it all I came from a guitar-orientated background and I know where my rock music strengths lie. But it's the combination of those things which is going to be interesting."

In the big soup of the music scene, the press is expected to play a part in making some sense of the milieu. They find it helpful to sort things into boxes. The Chills have been placed firmly in the box marked "White Indie Rock," along with the likes of the Weather Prophets, Bodines, Mighty Lemon Drops and 60s period stylists Primal Scream.

Do you feel at home in that box?

"Not really. Not that those other bands aren't, but we're going places musically. A lot of it seems very stagnant — and very old hat. Not that the Chills is totally new, but I can't think of a single song that sounds like someone else. Or even wholly a style — like 'Look for the Good' is punk rock, but it's still a bit different from that. I've got a whole stack of R&B songs I don't know what to do with!"

Hopefully the album should finally free you of labels like "jangle pop."

"Or 'psychedelic,' yeah. It's a strange album overall. I can't place it myself yet, be-

cause I'm still too close to it to actually hear it alongside anyone else's record. But it doesn't sound to me like any other record, and for that reason as a record listener I find it hard to imagine actually getting it out of the shelves and playing it. The record covers too many areas to put on at one time. There's a bit of party music on it and a bit of sitting-round-quietly-by-yourself-to-music music. If you were sitting quietly and 'Look for the Good' came on ...

"It might turn out to be a bit of a failing actually, we'll just have to see how it's taken."

It might serve well as a sampler; a tin of assorted biscuits.

"But they're all going to be like that, that's the trouble. They're all going to be a real cross-section — otherwise we've failed I reckon. So far there's been quite a mixture — the last single ['House with a Hundred Rooms,' which will probably see NZ release after the album] had three very different areas. It'll be interesting to see how it's taken, talk to a few music listeners."

House with a Hundred Rooms' marked a nadir in press attention to the Chills. It's easier to get noticed as Pop Will Eat Itself with 'Beaver Patrol' than as the Chills with 'House,' a soft, subtle little farewell to a dead friend ...

There are rather a lot of words on the single — and quite a few on the album for that matter.

"Yeah — it's something I've decided to watch for. There's the single and songs like 'Speak for Yourself,' which is like a continuous stream of words. They mean a lot to me — I got onto a theme and had so many words to get into the song that it was crowded. But it doesn't bother me, because if I was a listener I could read it and read it and still find things that are worth dwelling on."

"And I can explain every word on any of those tracks, which I don't think is always the case with a lot of writers these days. Of late it's been really important to me to make full use of lyrics. Not the least reason being having a girlfriend with a literary fixation. It's been really driven home to me the power of words. Obviously it's possible to go overboard, get too poetic and self-indulgent, but I think I've avoided those traps."

"I want to keep up that level of intensity in a way, whether it be light-hearted or a bit more

solemn, but also to tone it down a bit, bring it to a better level. Because I really love a lot of Ramones' lyrics, and pop lyrics where you can actually say something in the smallest amount of words. Like Alan Moore in his comics — you'll read a little paragraph, just skim through it then think, 'wait a moment,' and read it again and there's not a word out of place, it's all been thought through so carefully."

'Speak' is one of the "destiny" songs on the album — very much one foot up on the rock and gazing boldly into the future. There's not too much that's frivolous ...

"Not sort of jellyhead 'Kaleidoscope World' type things, no. It's a matter of if you've got to choose between that and one of your more impressive, enjoyable songs, there's no choice really. That's another trap — there are a couple of lighthearted ones coming up."

Let's talk Noo Yawk. You landed there from jaded, fickle London and suddenly it was all different ...

"Yeah — it was like going back to New Zealand in terms of the initial excitement the Chills met the first time we left Dunedin and started touring round. Just people coming up to you and saying: 'You're the best thing I've seen in ages, thanks for coming.' It was nice to be appreciated again."

Why hasn't that happened here in Britain?

"I don't know — we haven't played as much as we should have and we know that now, looking back. We'd hoped to make every gig count, but so many of them went wrong for stupid reasons, bad PAs, bad bills with other bands, just bad gigs. We've had our fair share of problems this year in England. And I think the core of the problem lies with the press. They just weren't there — it was like we'd been done the last time we came. We were a new thing then and they were all excited, but we were an old thing by the time we came back. And we were feeling too fresh and young to be treated as an old thing — it was like a slap in the face."

It will be amusing if things go as well as they conceivably could and you end up getting held up by the NZ music industry as some kind of Crowded House-type success. How would you feel about that?

"It would have been clear-cut three years

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