

# Sweetwaters REPORT

If it achieved nothing else, Sweetwaters blew away the long-standing myth that festivals are simply a stamping ground for earth-dwelling vegemunchers and weekend hippies.

More than 40,000 mainly average, everyday people crammed themselves onto 400 acres, put up with heat, dust, flies, indifferent water and toilets, for three days of sometimes-excellent, sometimes-mediocre music.

And yet hardly anybody went away feeling hard done by.

Sure there were gripes about sanitation and living amongst piles of garbage. Such organisational problems seem inevitable at festivals. Maybe they wouldn't be the same without that faint odour of excrement, tinged with exotic foods and narcotics. The smell of the festival is as much part of the atmosphere as the sights and sounds. People go to them to experience something different, to escape the grey urban environment for just a short time.

There was little excuse for ennui at Sweetwaters, with 12 hours of music a day and dozens of ancillary attractions. Pottery, woodwork, clothing and ginseng tea sat happily alongside Project Jonah, the Anti-Vivisection League, and the Salvation Army. Poets recited, shoppers browsed and Tim Shadbolt was Tim Shadbolt.

Up in the hills, those in search of themselves sat cross-legged while yogis lectured on mystery, manners and meditation. Another tent preached the Heal Thyself philosophy and offered massage for the aches and pains. A second, smaller stage gave lesser-knowns a chance to strut their stuff, earnest individuals demonstrated alternative energy forms, Jesus freaks clapped and sang, and one optimistic soul gave a slightly hysterical talk on the evils of rock and roll. Children swung themselves happily on a flying fox, took time out at the circus, and howled when they inevitably got lost.

In temperatures which neared the 30's, the river drew wide attention, even though it was still dirty from floodwater. Showers were hard to find, and a cold plunge first thing in the morning did wonders for many a sore head. A sobering sight on Sunday morning was a boat drag-

JOHN MARTYN

RENEE GEYER



ing the water for the body of a youth missing, presumed drowned. High spirits and over-indulgence took their toll, but this was only to be expected under the circumstances.

## BLOODSHOT TO SWINGERS

The music was, as mentioned before, a mixed bag, with some of the acts seeming out of their element. In that category I would include Elvis Costello, but more of him later. Another such act were pub-rockers Bloodshot, who had the unenviable task of opening the proceedings on Saturday. Rick Steele and his band made a slightly bigger impression, with a good-humoured set of electrified hoedown that was far more appropriate to the setting.

Appaloosa took the stage, a three-piece, with their familiar jazz-rock format. It sounded dated, but drew its share of applause, as Harvey stretched out and showed his guitar virtuosity. Sam Hunt and Gary McCormick staggered around, threw out a few lines of verse, gathered some laughs and retired under the trees to seek some inspiration from the scenery.

The Swingers, too, were a band unsuited to the venue. Their adventurous, organised cacophony sounded harsh and brittle in the open air and they left to scattered applause.

## MARTYN, CB, ENZ, SAILOR & X-7

The first big attraction of the evening was John Martyn, who drew a solid core of fans and a big contingent of the curious, which grew as his set went on. The most amiable act of the festival, he cracked jokes, shared joints with

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NEIL & TIM FINN, ENZ.



McARTNEY & BRAZIER, HELLO SAILOR.

GEOFF & MIKE CHUNN, CB.

CROCODILES



**IN THE MARCH 'RIP IT UP' SPLIT ENZ REVEAL TRUE COLOURS INTERVIEW**

COSTELLO & BRUCE THOMAS



Elvis Costello's recent visit to New Zealand was certainly a quieter event than his previous trip to the Antipodes. On his Australian tour last year Costello provoked a number of near riots when he played a feisty forty-minute set and then refused to return for encores. But, as Bob Dylan can testify, the ever-present possibility of the unexpected is the stuff on which rock'n'roll legends are based. A little mystery goes a long way.

But when Elvis Costello and the Attractions climbed onto the stage before an estimated 45,000 festival-goers at Sweetwaters, such considerations are soon forgotten as they kicked into an aggressive version of "I Stand Accused", an old Merseybeats song. In contrast to Mi-Sex, who followed Costello in the festival line-up, the Attractions eschewed all but the essential staging — there's no intricate lighting arrangements, no banks of keyboards, indeed Pete Thomas doesn't even use the drum riser provided. Instead Costello's set stands or falls on the songs and the Attractions performance of them and, while the sound may be less than perfect and the band's playing not always totally synchronised, the show always avoids the predictable or tame.

There are punchy versions of favourites like "Lipstick Vogue" and "This Year's Girl", tasty rearrangements of others such as "Watching the Detectives" and "Less Than Zero" (which here takes on a funky edge) and surprise additions like Presley's "Little Sister", which Costello introduces as "also by a man called Elvis" and a superbly sung version of the Jim Reeves country oldie "He'll Have to Go". Costello also took the opportunity to preview

material from his recently completed fourth album *Get Happy* which will, Costello tells us, be released shortly on F Beat Records. His confidence disguises the fact that Costello and Warner Brothers Records (the previous distributors of his product) are in the midst of legal wrangles that could delay the album's release for several months at least.

The new songs played at Sweetwaters suggest a slight move away from the pop-inflected sound of the earlier records towards more of a soul music feel — closer in fact to the style of "Moods for Moderns" on *Armed Forces*. This shift is exemplified by the proposed release of an old Sam and Dave B side, "I Can't Stand Up For Falling Down", as the first single off *Get Happy*. Elsewhere in this set newbies like "Possession" seem reminiscent of recent Graham Parker output.

After a stirring version of "You Belong to Me" and an assurance to the crowd that they'll certainly be back to New Zealand, Costello and the Attractions desert the stage. They encore with "So Young" a song by Australian band Jo Jo Zep and the Falcons and follow-up with a rough version of "Pump It Up". They leave again and as the roadies start to strip the stage, Costello and the Attractions race back and pound into a furious "Mystery Dance" and they cap the evening with Nick Lowe's "What's So Funny About Peace, Love and Understanding".

It was a performance which showed that Costello can balance the expectations of his audience and his need to progress. The success of such artistic tightrope walking allied to his prodigious talent and output as a songwriter suggest that Elvis Costello may exit from the eighties as strongly as he just entered.

Alastair Dougal

## Mi-Sex

Mi-Sex may be international property, but they're still proud to be New Zealanders. Their magnanimous gesture in returning to this country just to play Sweetwaters is proof.

"We're not going to make any money out of the deal," says Steve Gilpin. "We came out here to play to the New Zealand people who bought the album, to play to the people that listened to it, to show them our new songs and show them what a Kiwi band is doing overseas. For them and for us."

"But it's still going to help us in the long run. We're going to touch 45 thousand people, and if we get off better than most of the other bands here, they going to say 'Wow!' This helps and they're going to buy the album."

The band badly wants to come back and do a New Zealand tour, but when that will be possible is anybody's guess. Things are just happening too fast elsewhere.

*Graffiti Crimes* has sold over 150 thousand copies in Australia, and "Computer Games", after going to number one there, is now charting around the world. It's especially popular in France and Germany, where the album is also making waves, and radio stations in Canada and the States have also picked up on it. One FM station in Buffalo, NY, is playing six tracks

from the album, and "Computer Games" is picking up good responses in American discos, of all places.

Mi-Sex laugh that off. It's success, and that's what counts.

No small part of their upward rise has to be attributed to the care and attention taken with their stage act. They reckon to have the best road crew in the world, and having gone through 26 crews in six months, they ought to know. The fact that theirs was just about the only Sweetwaters set not plagued with feedback is a testimony to the skill of their backup staff.

"The show is governed by that totally," says Kevin Stanton. "When you walk out on stage, your mike and your guitar amp have got to be in just the right position, and the guy who sets it up works 49 hours a day. Everything has to be right."

The new album is all but finished, and due for release in March or April. The title isn't definite yet, but it will probably be *Space Race*, after one of the new numbers which Sweetwaters had a taste of.

"I think it's three or four steps ahead of the last one," says Stanton. "If anything is going to do it for us, it's this one."

The new album was recorded at the Music Farm studios, which are up near the Queensland border of New South Wales. They're something like Jim Guercio's Caribou Ranch, a space-age recording complex set out in the middle of nowhere.

"It's got beautiful facilities for people to relax, and the more relaxed you are, the better the album comes together," says Stanton.

Peter Dawkins is again producing, but the final mix is being done in New York, under the guidance of Rod O'Brian, who engineered Talking Heads' *Fear of Music*.

Coming up are American and probably European tours. The band's manager, Bob Yates, is currently in the US negotiating dates. The band is going there with few illusions, knowing it's going to be very hard work to advance just a short way.

"The point is," says Stanton, "we're confident in our material, and we're confident in our live act."

Duncan Campbell