



There's no denying it, Sharon O'Neill is "making it big" this time. She's got a second album released, a television special just screened and her face on the cover of the *Listener*. There's a trip to Australia coming up too. But after ten years in the entertainment business, O'Neill seems unsuspensible to hype. She takes the latest batch of praise and press coverage in her tiny stride ("Petite" is the appropriate physical description) and toddles forward to do battle. At 27, O'Neill is not playing around.

Her attitude to live work is an example. Her musical standards are such that she demands highly capable backing musicians when playing live. In a concert situation she aims at giving the audience as good a version of what they've bought on record as she possibly can.

The obvious answer is to take her session musicians out from the studio and onto the stage, but as this is often impossible — they have other commitments — she'd rather stay away from live work altogether than play with some garage outfit.

"I like working things out with a band and the longer you work together, the tighter it becomes. I'd like to work with my band like Debbie Harry does with Blondie. And I know I'd never be able to go on stage on my own." This month's 17-stop national tour, with Jon

Stevens, is O'Neill's first opportunity in over a year to take her musicians on the road. Her choice is Clinton Brown (bass), Denis Mason (percussion and sax), Brent Thomas (guitar), Ross Burge (drums) and Wayne Mason (keyboards).

These are the same musicians used on both her albums — *This Heart, This Song* and *Sharon O'Neill*. But, she acknowledges, there's quite a difference between the two records.

This Heart This Song was O'Neill's first album, released in 1979. It was produced by Dick Le Fort in Wellington and, says O'Neill, was a "rush job, though I'm still pleased with it, for what I was working on at the time."

The new album, *Sharon O'Neill*, is however, the masterpiece of which O'Neill is justly proud. This time the producer was American Jay Lewis, a factor which, says O'Neill, made all the difference.

"Jay's musical tastes fitted in exactly with what I was writing then. He also introduced some foreign blood which is a good thing too," she said.

The album took two weeks to record in August last year. Jay Lewis took the tapes to Los Angeles where he did the final mixing. He also brought O'Neill in on Jon Stevens' album, recording their duet of a Brian and Brenda Russell song, "Don't Let Love Go", which is newly released as a single.

To promote the album, O'Neill — at the instigation of manager and boyfriend Brent Thomas — co-produced her own television special. She'd been less than happy with the "soft show" TV1 had filmed of her in 1978, so with substantial backing from her recording company CBS, she worked with independent film-makers, Concept Video in Wellington.

O'Neill is most pleased with the results, screened late last month on Television New Zealand. And, although she's miscast in some of the "scenes", it looks perfect for overseas sales, which is at least a part of the reason the programme was made.

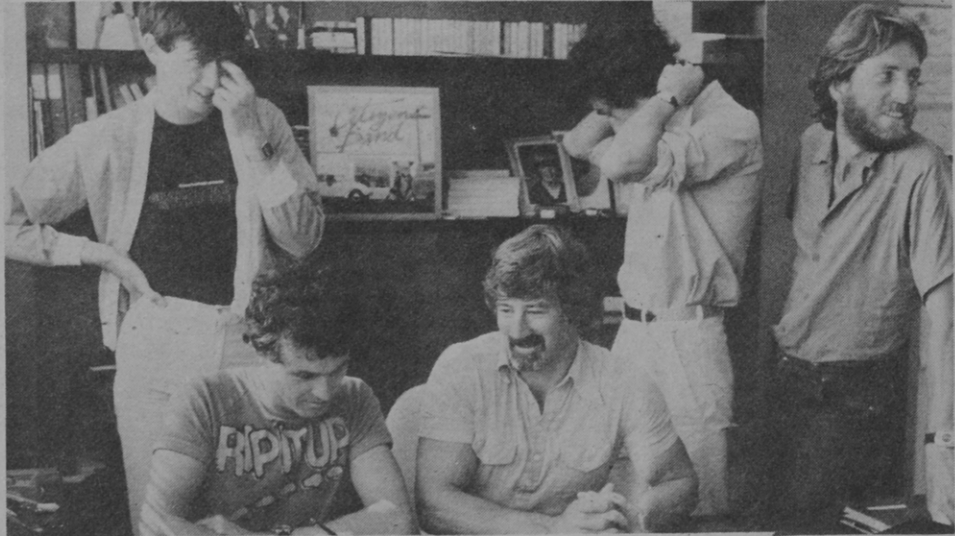
That's where the plans for 1980 fit in. CBS is pushing release of her album — it's already out in Japan — and is right behind a trip to Australia, with her backing band.

She hopes to establish a base in New Zealand, find the right sort of work in Sydney, and — her biggest hope — get to the United States. For there, she says, is where her influences are, with the West Coast rock musicians; The Eagles and Marc Jordan are named as favourites.

Meanwhile, Wellington is O'Neill's home and with no interest in pub touring she spends most of her time there. Marmalade Studios — the venue for both albums — provides her with ample session work and jingle singing. But by the looks of the charts and the interest the woman has engendered lately, she may have put an end to such necessities. Then she can spend all day and night doing just what she likes — singing and writing with a band of top-knotch musicians in support of her considerable talent.

Louise Chunn

Citizen Band with CBS' John McCready



CBS making it work

For a company set up principally to service established overseas CBS artists stopping over in this country, CBS Records New Zealand has certainly proved its worth on the local recording scene. There's only three acts signed to the label and every one of their records has proved something of a winner. Disregarding such local organisations as Viking which sells thousands of poi and haka records, CBS must be near the top in sales of indigenous recordings.

The fostering of precious native resources was not however the aim of multi-national company CBS, when a mere two years ago it appointed John McCready general manager of the New Zealand outpost. Rather, CBS felt the need for its own personnel to look after CBS artists when they came to New Zealand, and this is still a large part of the Parnell company's work.

Because it fell outside of current considera-

tion, during the first year of operation in New Zealand CBS had no budget allocation to cover local artists. John McCready — seeing the potential of certain acts — strived to make un-budgetted profits and then sunk the excess into local recording.

The proof of the pudding being in the eating, CBS now has a "substantial" (but unnamed) budget for this purpose and, so says McCready, is probably the only company in New Zealand currently budgeting for recording local artists.

Much of the CBS success can be put down to picking the winners. In its two years in New Zealand, CBS has signed only three acts: Sharon O'Neill, Jon Stevens and Citizen Band. The ensuing singles and albums have caused ripples of varying degrees. Jon Stevens' triumph of removing his own "Jezebel" from No 1 to replace it with the second single "Montego Bay" is unparalleled in local chart history. Both Sharon O'Neill and Citizen Band, while not so spectacular on the singles charts, have struck near the top of almost all the latest popularity polls, and their album sales have never embarrassed.

McCready denies that CBS backs New

Zealand artists out of some well-meaning patriotism. Recording is a money business. "Our job is to develop an artist whichever way we can to help sell records — even if it is in long term," he says.

To varying degrees, CBS has kept its artists to this dictum. Jon Stevens is a fine example. "Discovered" through Rocky Douche of Marmalade Studios in Wellington, Stevens is seen by the company as a contemporary pop-soul singer. McCready admits to being pleased that Stevens doesn't carry a suitcase of his own songs which he's aching to record. This way the company can wield greater influence in the style of song they'd prefer him to record. They have the chance to tailor him to suit the market, although with Steven's they must first contend with his manager, Danny Ryan and his rock plans for the singer. But that, McCready acknowledges, is what it's all about: give and take.

Sharon O'Neill on the other hand says she has found support when and where she needs it — and it's principally in the cheque-writing field — but no undue pressure from CBS. She maintains that any other company would have forced her to tour in order to promote her records, in spite of her reservations about adequate musical backing.

The third act, Citizen Band, is something of a sore point with McCready. He's disappointed about the departure of both Michael Chunn and Greg Clarke as he believes Australia could have been the band's making. While he hopes that CB will continue with new personnel, "it will not be the same band." The members, he points out, were signed separately so any new contract must be re-negotiated once a new band has been formed.

Bands, McCready knows, are difficult and overnight line-up changes can throw all the promotion and hard work right out that window. This didn't stop CBS trying very hard to sign Toy Love. "They were the only band I wanted," sighs McCready. Still nursing his regrets at being outbid by ex-AC/DC manager Michael Browning, he has not seen another band with that potential since.

As for other local recordings, AK 79 is a favourite. Even though it's new wave, it shows how melodic New Zealand songwriters are, says McCready, and melody is where world trends are heading.

He puts new wave in the fast-selling bracket too, and, as he says "it's impossible to separate personal belief in an artist and responsibility to the company" we'd better watch out for the next horse out of the CBS stable.

Louise Chunn

ENZ:Ques

Rip It Up spoke twice with Split Enz, each time in Dunedin during the course of nation-wide tours. Time one — with just Tim Finn — was during the 1979 Frenzy tour, and it was in intriguing contrast to time two — late February of this year.

When Enz passed through Dunedin in 1979, things were at an interesting stage. Chrysalis had offered the band an either-or — either go into the studio and come out with some hit singles, or leave the label. The latter included forgetting all about a debt of some \$150,000, so it was hardly surprising Enz went for the or.

The band's future at that stage was very much up in the air. "Getting an overseas label is proving harder than we thought" said Finn at the time. "Record companies are not throwing mud against the wall anymore." The perennial Enz search for the hit single that would open doors to the mass rock audience was also still to be dealt with, and while band morale was high after a highly successful Australian tour, it did seem that Enz' future lay, merely, with delighting Australasia. And making very good albums that didn't sell too well. And making extremely good singles which radio stations wouldn't play.

But the strength of this band surprised even their hardcore followers. Enz have entered the 1980s arguably more powerfully placed than ever to make an impact internationally — with the *True Colours* album, surely: with the phenomenally fine single "I Got You", definitely. Enz have new management, a new record company (in this country), a new producer, and chart action (to coin a phrase) hitherto only dreamed of. At time of writing the single was number two and the album number one — and there were two more Enz albums in the top 40.

TICKLE TIME

The new producer is David Tickle, and his role in the renaissance should not be underestimated. Enz had XTC producer John Leckie very interested in doing the last one, but Leckie had to race off to America, and they eventually settled for Mallory Earl ("He seemed the most enthusiastic, but in the end he probably had too much influence" says Finn. "We were in a state of frustration at the time, and we listened to too many people").

Tickle engineered the "I See Red" single, and that was enough. He was flown over to Melbourne for the album.

"We were his first production, but he had engineered for people like Blondie and The Knack, and after us he went over to New York to do Ellen Shipley" says Finn. "He's about to become very famous, he's one of a new wave of young star producers — he's only 20. We all found him very good."

Tickle brought the Enz sound right up to date, and gave it a sharpness and clarity previous albums had only hinted at. He also shifted some of the instrumental emphasis over to the English bass-drums team of Griggs and Green.

"Yes, he got a really good drum sound for me" admits Green. The single is one of a number of tracks on the album attesting to that, while the closing piece "The Choral Sea" was built up from the drums in layered German disco fashion, the same approach Tickle used on Blondie's "Heart Of Glass".

Finn says this one was just an experiment, and Eddie Rayner says it was going to be discarded until the very last minute. Archivists may wish to know also that the track was named by Rayner whilst absorbed (very) in a television programme on undersea monsters.

Another feature of Tickle's production is the absence of piano.

"And acoustic guitar" says Finn.

"A piano tends to be a cloudy instrument, and it works on similar frequencies to the guitar. We wanted clarity on this album. And besides, David said pianos were old-fashioned" says Rayner (who plays piano

WE'RE ALL IN RIP IT UP NEXT MONTH, SEE YA THERE!