



## B52s

June 17, 1980. The B52s pass through Auckland. These are foreign parts for the band. After 3 days in Fiji, looking around, resting a 4 am start, a dose of jet lag, and a 6 hour jam-packed stop-over in Auckland before flying on to Sydney, they may be a little giddy, but otherwise all is taken in their stride.

### Thrift Shops

The first thing they do here is visit a "thrift" store. "We weren't prepared for this, (a reception organised by the record company) we thought we'd be sitting at the airport for 6 hours," says drummer Keith Strickland. "So we made a pit stop at a thrift shop for new clothes." It explains the \$2 tag on Fred's wrist.

Fred Schneider III shares vocals, organ, keyboard bass and guitar with Kate Pierson. The elusive Ricky Wilson plays guitar. He arrives in hat and dark glasses, skipping the questions to take a "stroll around the neighbourhood" of mid-Auckland. Very unassuming. His sister Cindy Wilson plays guitar, percussion instruments, and, of course, sings as well.

### Private Idaho

The band will be away from their adopted home of New York for about 5 weeks on this tour, and Australian audiences will be the first to hear songs from the second album. This will probably be called *Private Idaho*, the name of a song on it.

"It's about a state of mind, a state of crime,"

Keith says.

Recording took place over 4½ weeks at the Compass Point studios in the Bahamas, with producer Regte Davies, who has also worked with Roxy Music, Eno, and on Talking Heads' *More Songs about Buildings and Food*. Keith describes it as a progression from the first album.

"It has some new things, some narratives, some instrumentals. 'Quiche Lorraine' is a story about a man's relationship with his people."

The song emerged from a poem Fred wrote, while "Party Out of Bounds" came from an old etiquette book, explaining what to do, and what not to do, at a party.

How does Ricky feel about the album?

"It's better," he states, "we had a lot more rapport, we were more relaxed. The first time we were a bit nervous, and more or less let Chris (Blackwell) do what he wanted to do." He is unsure about which song will be released as a single though, maybe "Give Me Back My Man", or "53 Miles West of Venus".

The band is never short of ideas, it is just a matter of finding time to put them down according to Fred.

"We're slow to write, we don't just pop out one song after another. We like to make sure what we do really pleases us, but an idea may be spur of the moment then later we'll work on it."

Certainly there are no egos to impede the band's development. A high spirited Cindy says

"we eat, drink, talk, and play together, and we don't hate each other."

### New York, New York

Last year, the band toured with Talking Heads in the States. the B52s are now managed by Gary Kurfist who they met through Talking Heads, and who also manages the Ramones. They live just outside of New York. When they left a plague of caterpillars had just devastated the area.

"There were hundreds of them, covering everything, eating everything. They made the trees look like old lace ... we were quite glad to get out of it," Kate recalls.

### Wigs and Wardrobe

By this time, her own red hair has disappeared under a "perky" blonde wig — and the conversation turns to image. Dress. Keith does not dress up. When you are playing drums there is no room for it. It gets too hot, but Fred tends toward the odd purple cape, and Spooky the Horse T-Shirts.

The band does not consciously emanate a sixties look. Keith says it is just that sixties gear is what you will find in the thrift stores. Kate calls them "cultural museums", and it is where the B52s do their shopping. But the sixties are vanishing, and the seventies are coming in.

"I'm afraid we'll have to wear polyester for our next tour," Kate laughs.

"I like things no one would ever wear on the street, or things you find and you can't possibly

imagine who would wear it, or why."

"Things you have difficulty fitting through doorways wearing," Keith says.

But aren't the wigs inconvenient on stage? Kate replies:

"Once, on a TV show in the States, the woman made my wig so tall (2 feet), when I shook my head I was afraid I'd topple right over. But usually it's like wearing a hat. One like this I hate to take off because you get use to it."

### Athens

The band initiated a tradition of dressing up in Athens, Georgia. The Wilsons grew up there, Keith too, while Kate and Fred lived there long enough to be called Athenians.

"We used to dress up to create a new atmosphere, it's a kind of ceremony," Kate says.

"On our next tour we're definitely going back to Athens," Keith enthuses. "There are a lot of new bands there now. When we started there was nobody, it's exciting."

Does the band feel responsible for generating this spate of creativity? Keith is reluctant. "I guess we contributed."

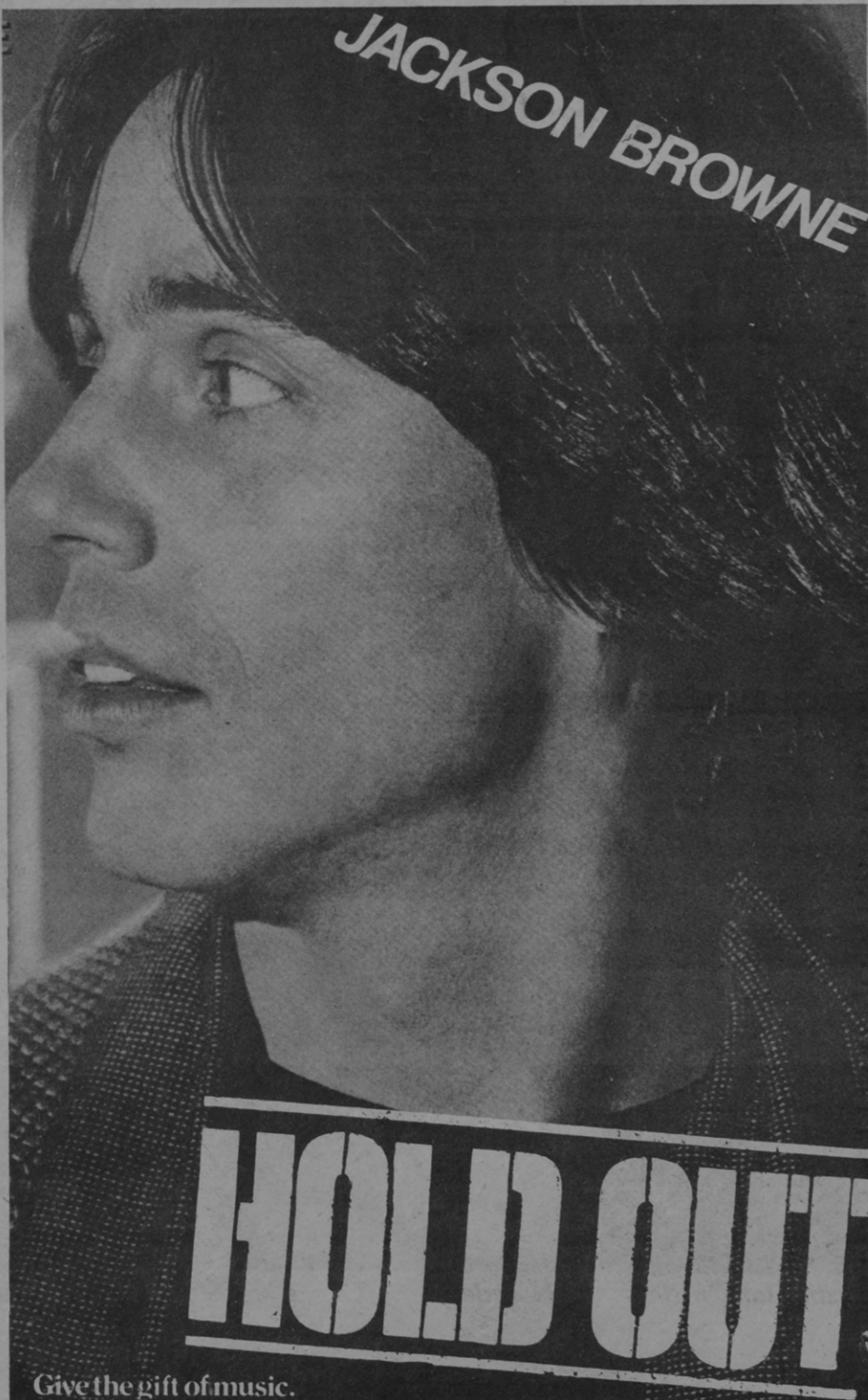
August 25, Central Park, New York, and the B52s are scheduled to play an afternoon concert. It is about the time album will be released there. It will have a red cover Cindy tells me, and they will be sitting down.

Annlouise Martin



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