

Kink leader Ray Davies raced through Auckland earlier this year on a part-Low Budget promotion part-is-it-feasible-for-us-to-tour visit that lasted literally only hours. Media were rushed in and out of Davies' room while would-be Kinks tour promoters gobbled free food and drinks and watched concert video next door. Davies was alert, witty and friendly throughout the *Rip It Up* interview (he had been sleepy and vague only an hour before for *Radio With Pictures*) and not surprisingly there were still ticker-tapes of questions wound around the interviewer's head when his time was up. The Kinks have done quite a lot, after all.

On the way back to the airport, I nearly cause the lady from EMI to drive her red mazda off the road by stating solemnly that the Kinks have never really done a great album. "But they've done more great songs" I add hastily as the Mazda rights its course "than just about anyone."

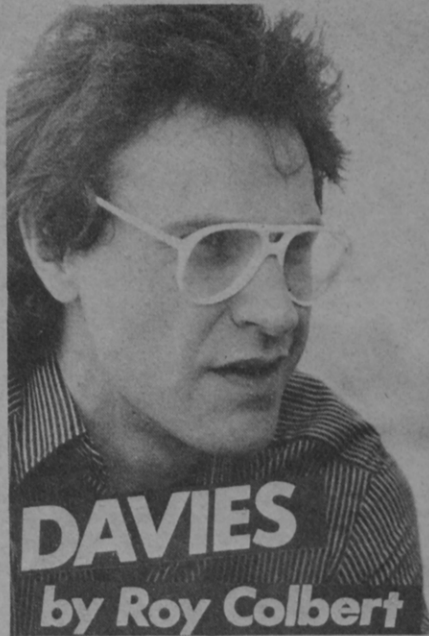
Lately Ray Davies has been paying more attention to songs, and less to rock theatre and concept albums. "The past really wasn't that good" he says, looking back over the 1970s. "But I now feel as though I am in a very good phase."

The last three studio albums for Arista have all been strong, and *Low Budget*, and after fifteen years of half-trying and half-not-being-allowed-to-try, finally broke the band hugely in America.

The live double album, which Davies was mixing at the time of the Auckland interview, was scheduled as the home run.

Davies is looking forward to a break after a hectic morning with newspapers and television, but there is no sign of impatience or weariness. He's extremely friendly — a little shy even — and he gives the impression fifteen years of rock'n'roll are in front, not behind. The reported distance from interviewers is hardly evident, though he does tend to touch only part of a question. And he seems genuinely eager to please.

After 35 minutes we bow to the hand-signalling manager. Davies asks if it was alright, and points to the tape machine. "I've got one of those" he says. "An NP — they're good."



They're not really, unless you're on a low budget. At eighty New Zealand dollars, there's nothing cheaper in fact. One seriously doubts whether American millions are going to change Ray Davies. Thank God.

Tell us about the forthcoming live album. "It was done in the course of a tour of America. We recorded ten dates there, and two in Europe. The problem I'm having is trying not to make it sound too clean. I don't want it to sound like session-men, I want it to sound like the Kinks, and we have rough edges. If the Kinks do a live album it's got to have rough edges. I want to keep the mistakes in — it's a bit of a gamble really."

The old *Live At Kelvin Hall* album wasn't received too well at the time, but it has since picked up a degree of respectability and mystique.

"That was in the days when record companies had a lot of say. It was recorded badly, with four microphones, though in a sense it was a good representation of what was happening then. Certain people think it is one of the great documents of the 60s. It's a good exciting album. This time I have more control, and I think that is reflected. Certainly the spirit is there. And the charm."

The Kinks' reputation as a live band seems to have picked up a lot in the last few years.

"What we've had to do is change our image in America from that of a singles band to an album-orientated group, and that has meant touring throughout the last three albums there, one place at a time. It's beginning to pay off now fortunately. Now we feel we're ready to play in another country — like New Zealand."

In the early days in America your name was largely kept afloat by a small band of hard-core Kinks fanatics and a few critics. Are these people still around — people like Freaky Frank?

"They used to be called Kinks freaks, but not now. They've come to be known as sort of rock historians. There are a lot of new listeners in rock'n'roll who have all this knowledge, like who was the bass player on Chuck Berry records, and it's important to know that. It's a step forward. Freaky Frank is out there, he's a long way down the river. But he's alright. He knows so much — not just about us, but about everyone, the Yardbirds, the Knack..."

There haven't been a lot of Kinks covers considering how long you've been around. What do you think of the more well-known ones — the Jam, the Pretenders and even Bowie's *Pin Ups*?

"I think The Pretenders was good ("Stop Your Sobbing") coz they've changed things a bit. There's one in Australia which is quite good by Jimmy & The Boys. It's a bit *Saturday Night Fever*, but it's alright. And I've heard The Knack have done "The Hard Way" on their new album."

Would you like some of your songs to have been done by MOR interpreters, not so much for the job they'd do, but for the prestige it gives you as a writer?

"Well, Sid Vicious isn't around. "My Way" was one of the great records of the last five years. That was a great interpretation. But yes, I would like a few straight MOR singers to at least try some of my songs. I wish there was more crossover actually."

A lot of my favourite Kinks songs of the 1970s were ballads — "Celluloid Heroes", "Oklahoma U.S.A." and "Little bit of Emotion" on the last one. How do you regard ballads?

"I'm a bit careful when I sing ballads. I don't like the out-and-out romance bit. If I have a date with somebody, I'm clumsy. I can't write a sophisticated tune — maybe for a certain artist, but not for myself."

If you made a solo record, would it sound like the Kinks?

"No, I don't think it would. I rely on that heavy Kinks guitar sound from Dave. I play a strange guitar. It's more broken up. A solo

album would probably be a reggae album then — I like reggae."

The change from RCA to Arista? "I wanted the feedback from a managing director who was interested in the music and not in holding down his job. Clive Davis has good ears and his heart is in the right place. He'd tried to sign us a few times before actually."

There has also been a change from concept albums to song albums.

"The concepts were great live, but they didn't really come off on record. I realise I'm part of a unit now. I'm happier now, more relaxed. I might do things in the future outside the band — I'd like to do more of that."

The new wave? "I don't think it's changed my writing, as much as my attitude. I felt released by the new wave. It rekindled the spirit that had died in the 70s."

The new wave have accepted very few of the old guard, but you're one.

"I don't know why. I don't pretend to know. I just do what I do and get on with it."

I'm interested in what you consider to be your best writing conditions. You've said at various times that you work best under pressure, that you like to be insecure and fighting, and that you can't write in a place like Los Angeles with all its comfort. And yet "Celluloid Heroes" was written there.

"Celluloid Heroes" will go down professionally in history as not a bad song with quite a good lyric, and it said some nice things about a certain place. But it ruined my private life totally — not so much that song, but what happened to me at the time. So the whole story is never told. Different situations produce different songs, but I like to think I've got the same approach to writing, and will reject the same amount anywhere. America brings a lot of pressure, but it helps me. I wouldn't have finished *Low Budget* in time without that pressure, and I'm going back to New York this afternoon. More pressure. But I'm in a good phase now, I can't wait to write again — I haven't written for eight months, but I've got lots of notes."

Do you work quickly in the studio?

"With the Kinks, sure. The track "Low Budget" was done in one take, "Pressure" was one take, the best take of "Catch Me Now I'm Falling" was the third take. Then again they get good when we go on the road. There's a take of "You Really Got Me" on the live album that's a killer, and we've been playing that for years."

Three of the four original Kinks are still in the group. You've had fights over the years, but you're still together. Are there lessons there for other bands?

"I think it's because I'm mad. People say how do you keep on going. I really am certain I should be certified. At this moment Mick is playing golf, though Dave, to his credit, is in the studio working on his album. But I'm over here. CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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## Musicians:

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Henry Spinetti — Drums

Chris Stainton — Keyboards

Albert Lee — Guitar, Vocals, Keyboards

Dave Markee — Bass Guitar

## Tracks:

Tulsa Time

Early In The Morning

Lay Down Sally

Wonderful Tonight

If I Don't Be There By Morning

Worried Life Blues

All Our Past Times

After Midnight

Double Trouble

Setting Me Up

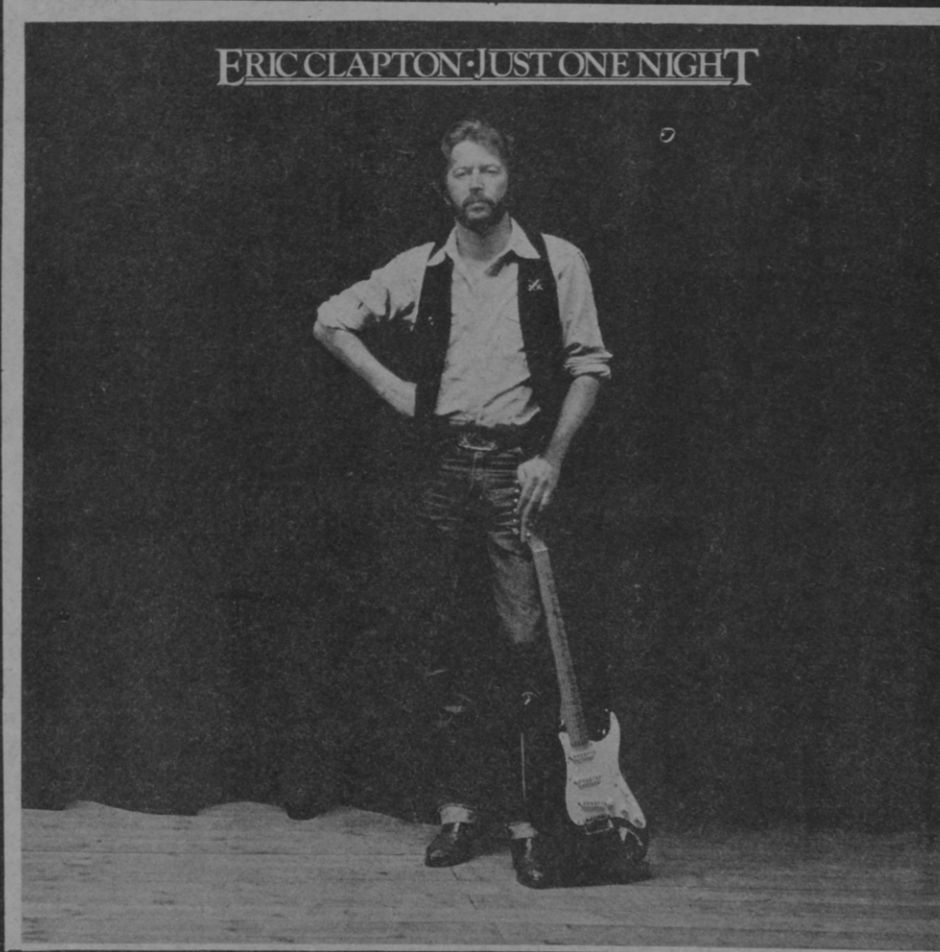
Blues Power

Rambling On My Mind

Cocaine

Further On Up The Road

## ERIC CLAPTON JUST ONE NIGHT



*Live!*  
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