

# RIU

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Say "Newz" in Christchurch and you'll find the city is divided. Twenty four hours after their debut album *Heard the Newz* was released, Record Factory had sold their 100 pressings. Yet a local bumper sticker reads, 'NO NEWZ IS GOOD NEWS'.

When in Christchurch the band plays six nights and Saturday afternoon in the Aranui Hotel lounge bar. Popular they are, with their own tunes shuffled among the numerous new wave covers they've learnt in two years on the same stage.

The odd bumper sticker could hardly unsettle frequent wearers of such sticky labels as 'cover band', 'resident band', particularly when their all-original album has been in the NZ Top 50 for seven weeks.

**To Aranui or Not to ...**

RIU was confronted with the Newz over chips cooked in newspaper on their last visit to Auckland. Indulging in conversation and hot food were, Simon Darke (vocals), Bryan Colechin (bass) and Phil Jones (guitarist).

"The Aranui is not the biggest venue, but it's the best venue in NZ in terms of stage, lighting, size and soundproofing," says Simon.

Phil adds, "in a residency, we can practise six nights a week." They used to like it a lot but admit it's getting very boring now. Simon sums it up.

"When I joined Bon Marche, I had no idea that we'd stay in the residency situation we're still in now. I was expecting to stay for three months. We're still there now. I've f---ed my voice from overwork."

This year, the recording of their debut album and now their singer's voice hassles has confined the band to Christchurch. At their last Aranui gig (July 27) prior to his throat operation, an XTC cover was appropriately introduced as "Making Plans for Nodules", as plans can't stay the same if your singer is off the road for four weeks.

In the meantime, the rest of the Newz are gigging as the Eels specialising in sixties favs — Kinks, Spencer Davis, Small Faces etc.

## Phil Sherry likes the...



**Recording**

The year started with the name change, from Bon Marche to the Newz. Keyboard player Lance Parkyn had left in December and Tony Rabbet (rhythm guitar) and Brad Coates (keyboards) joined in February, the month Newz began recording. For five weeks they recorded at night after playing at the pub. They mixed the album by mid-May.

Producer was ex-Heatwave man, Eric Johns.

How did working with Johns compare with recording with Jay Lewis (In June '79 Bon Marche recorded a 45 for Stetson Records at Marmalade Studios — Phil Judd's 'So This Is Love', and BM's 'I Want To Be An Arab').

"It was different," says Phil Jones, "when we recorded with Jay, we didn't know what we were going to record. Jay said, 'here's a song I think you can do it well.'"

"It was really good working with Jay, but he

didn't understand the band like Eric, who has played with us. (Johns played with BM for three weeks in mid '79.)

The band were not happy with the Jay Lewis single.

"We walked into the studio with Jay as Bon Marche. We came out as one of Jay Lewis' bands. Even 'Arabs' is far prettier than it should be. Eric captured the humour in the band and got the band sounding pretty much like we do on stage," says Colechin.

"As far as arranging the songs went, Eric put in ideas, but he didn't tell us to do it. Jay Lewis said, 'No don't play that, play this.' Which is a subtle but important difference."

How did Johns cope with 8 track equipment?

"He enjoyed it. It was a challenge for everyone: the little studio; gear stacked up to the ceiling; wires for miles. Most of the time the studio was trying to get everything to go at once."

**The Covers Brand**

'Cover Band' is a misleading label to attach to Newz. They do play too many covers but words like safe, predictable, emotionless and clinical, that go hand-in-hand with the covers label, just don't fit.

Bryan Colechin insists, "we very rarely work off a set list on stage. We just choose songs as they come."

"Even that RWP concert in Wellington — they said, 'we need an exact list of songs for camera angles.' But by the third song that list had gone by the wayside. The producer nearly had a heart attack. We f---ed it all up for them."

Soundman, Grant Frazer agrees, "I never know what's coming up ... or anything."

So Newz don't go on stage like safer acts such as Toy Love — like mothers going shopping — they list-less-ly blunder around and what you get is what you get.

Why so many covers? To make big bucks?

"It's partly true," says Mr Darke, "we want to make money to go to Australia."

"We don't make a lot of money," says Phil.

Bryan's turn this time; "I don't think it's fair to say we do covers to make money. That's never been in anybody's mind. It's necessary to play covers because we play in Christchurch."

"It's different in Auckland where a high percentage of gigs use a support band. A headlining band never has to play more than two 45 minute sets.

"You can't write three original songs a week and expect a high standard of material. It takes a week to arrange a song, where as you can learn three covers in one morning.

"We're very fussy about original material, maybe that's why we haven't got a lot," says the now chipless vocalist.

"Every band I've heard, apart from Hello Sailor, that does straight out original material, I've been bored. There's nothing to relate to."

A historical perspective is provided by Bryan Colechin: "For NZ bands to play original material has only developed in the last few years. New bands are learning material before they're playing.

"We were on *Ready To Roll* four times doing Elvis Costello songs before you were allowed to do original songs. Now if you've got a song, you're on there."

Phil (the band's 'major bulk writer') makes a point; "You can learn from covers. I've got a lot of ideas. If you work a song out you learn something from it, a certain chord, a certain riff or something."

**Christchurch, Australia**

Are the Newz reluctant to tour away from Christchurch?

"No", says Simon, "it was a matter of getting some original songs together to get out and play. Last time we played Auckland, we had eight, this time it's 15, and next time it will be 25 to 30.

When did they decide they wanted to work outside NZ?

"That's been our goal right from the start, says Phil," any professional band's goal is to work overseas."

With *Heard the News*, Newz prove that they can write, they're not just a jukebox. You also have to agree with Phil when he says; "We're increasingly conscious of what direction we want to go in."

Did someone say "North"?

**Murray Cammick**

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