

# COUNTING (ON) THE BEAT!

The number of bands that can be labelled essential come and go every year but from where I'm dancing, the Beat sure look like a vital band, meaning they're plugged into the current energy form and articulate to boot.

Last year, the six individuals involved surprised even themselves with the freshness and pace of *I Just Can't Stop It*, an album that also showed the band's readiness to comment on things political and social.

That was then, and now on a London line is David Wakeling. It's one o'clock in the afternoon there, and according to the Beat's vocalist/guitarist/lyricist, the sun had just ducked behind a cloud. It's a cold midnight in NZ, but Wakeling's amiable, intelligent and forthcoming conversation proves worth waiting up for.

Prior to the inclusion of Ranking Roger and Saxa, the original Beat — Wakeling, David Steele (bass), Andy Cox (guitar) and Everett Morton (drums) had been working around Birmingham playing originals and covers like 'My Boy Lollipop'.

"It was very varied. Everett was very into soul music. Me and Andy had been listening to punk and our 'old wave' favourites were Captain Beefheart, Tim Buckley and a bit of Van Morrison on a good day, and Andy quite liked Bob Dylan. Our favourite groups at the time when the group started were the Buzzcocks and the Undertones."

Early 1979, Ranking Roger joined, and later that same year veteran saxophonist, Saxa, was drawn in just before the release of their first single, Smokey Robinson's classic 'Tears of A Clown'. It was on 2-Tone of course, launching pad for the ska fraternity and a label that has suffered more than its fair share of backlash. Did the Beat agree with the antipathy towards 2-Tone?

"When we were asked to do the first single, 2-Tone were just starting up, but a few weeks before the record came out, 2-Tone had become a media thing and so it was going to be hard to control. Anything that gets that big has gotta have a reaction to it. I don't think it was that incestuous. The Specials knew what they wanted to do from the beginning and are still doing that now. When something becomes that huge, it isn't your personal property anymore."

The Beat's music works on two levels: lyrically Wakeling shows the world isn't exactly full of laughs at the moment, yet their music is bright and almost hopeful in its danceability. This is the essence of Beat music?

"I think so. It's something that goes through all the other groups on 2-Tone too. We think we should reflect the society we live in and that it's in a pitiful state. I don't know whether you've read of what's happened in England in the last week?"

The Liverpool riots?

"Yeah, the place is falling to bits really and so we want to reflect that in the lyrics, but we've got to start thinkin' of some positive things to do about it and there's no better way of makin' yourself feel positive than by dancing. So we want the two things to complement each other. Not dancing to escape but dancing to be strong, to do something about it."

Rock'n'roll is about now, about having your fifteen minutes' worth and then moving over. Does Wakeling worry about the fact that their songs may not survive the current social scene?

"Yes, but I think the material we write in the future won't be so specific anyway coz I've said all I want to say about the political and social situation. The basic idea is that we're trying to live under a system that is totally outdated, it is much more suited to Victorian society than it is now. I think I've covered nearly every aspect of the bits that are outdated — the ridiculous lip service to nationalism when the world is obviously international. Now we've put ourselves on the spot by saying how dreadful we think everything is perhaps we're gonna have to come up with some suggestions of how to make it better. Perhaps the lyrics will start having a positive feel to them but still mixed with a certain amount of desperation because I don't think we have much time left."

Does he feel concerned that his lyrics may go unnoticed or be misunderstood?

"That was a reaction to our first album, as the girl who runs our fan club spent most of last year answering letters to people who wanted the lyrics and so she begged us to put them on the new album."

"I really like it when people misunderstand the lyrics and make up their own version. When you have a favourite song and you sing along with it for about three weeks, then you read the lyrics and find it's about something completely different."

"Some of the lines on the new album are consciously ambiguous to make sure that it doesn't come across as a dry political line. But the lyrics weren't put there to be a gospel or anythin'."

Back to the Beat's first LP and specifically 'Mirror in the Bathroom', a slap at vanity. Is the band vain?

"Not as a group, I don't think, but everybody personally is vain. It was an attack on little bits of vanity I'd noticed in other people but it doesn't take more than a minute to realise that you do exactly the same things yourself. It wasn't just attacking vanity but saying that we ought to try and accept it as we are all as guilty as each other on that one. It's those things that keep people apart from each other."

"The album was recorded very quickly, very hecticly. Everything had just happened and we were all anaesthetised. It was just a rush, you just get gripped and carried along by the situation."

"The songs were ones we'd been playing in Birmingham for four or five months. We'd been gigging solidly so the songs were pretty well worked."

How does he view the album now?

"I like about half the tracks and I wish we'd had more chance to be retrospective about the other half. When I look back on it I think it was just good fun. Nobody could believe we were in the studio doin' it and nobody could believe we just had a hit single. It was all a bit tongue-in-cheek really. Y'know people from the media and record companies running around saying how great you were and it was all a bit hard to take seriously."

Good reviews and the Beat go hand in hand. Does he take all this favourable press seriously?

"That's the trouble when you get lots of good reviews. You're tempted to take them seriously and when you see a bad one you feel like throwing the paper away and saying

'Pah, you don't wanna believe nothin' you see in the papers': It goes in little phases in England because having four weekly music papers with a lot of journalists writing, it's a bit like one of those quiz programmes where they push the button before the question's been asked. There's a lot of pre-empting going on so you'll get a couple of weeks where you're the cat's whiskers and then a couple where you're a bunch of sharks."

Good press also greeted The Beat's second album, and rightly so, as it is a record of implosive power, of subtle musical allusion — a direct contrast to the explosive hyper-energy of *I Just Can't Stop It*. *Whappen* is deceptively laid back as the barbs and the bite are there more cutting than ever beneath the easy-going ska surface. Originally, the album was to go under the title of *Dance Yourself Stupid*. Why the change?

"Well, there were a lot of titles from *Dance Yourself Stupid* or *Dance Yourself Twisted* to *Motion Lotion Human Racing*. We didn't get the title until three minutes after we'd mixed the last track. The title is a Jamaican phrase and it's used as a greeting, 'Y'know, How're you goin'? How's tricks?'. It's also a sort of 'what the earth is happening at the moment?'. So it's sort of on two levels. On the front of the album there is a tidal wave and socially that's how we see it. Everybody is OK at the moment but there's a huge wave looming up."

A mushroom cloud?

"Yeah, right."

The differences between the first and second albums are obvious, but what are Wakeling's views on the distinctions?

"Most of the reviews go on about how it's lost this frenetic speed. I found after about four months of listening to the first LP, that it was often too fast to dance to unless you were close to amphetamine, and that's what quite a lot of people said to us. It came to me at Dingwalls on the dance floor when they put on the twelve-inch version of 'Hands Off She's Mine' and about half way through it I was out of breath. I thought 'that's too fast to dance to'. The third album may be somewhere between the two. We may

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Win one of the ten amazing USA picture discs, given to *Rip It Up* by Polygram Records. These 12" discs are clear with an Enz design inside. All you have to do is tell us WHY YOU DON'T WANNA DANCE in 20 words or less. Write it below or on a piece of paper and post it to *Rip It Up* by August 30.

... and now for the easy questions:

Name .....

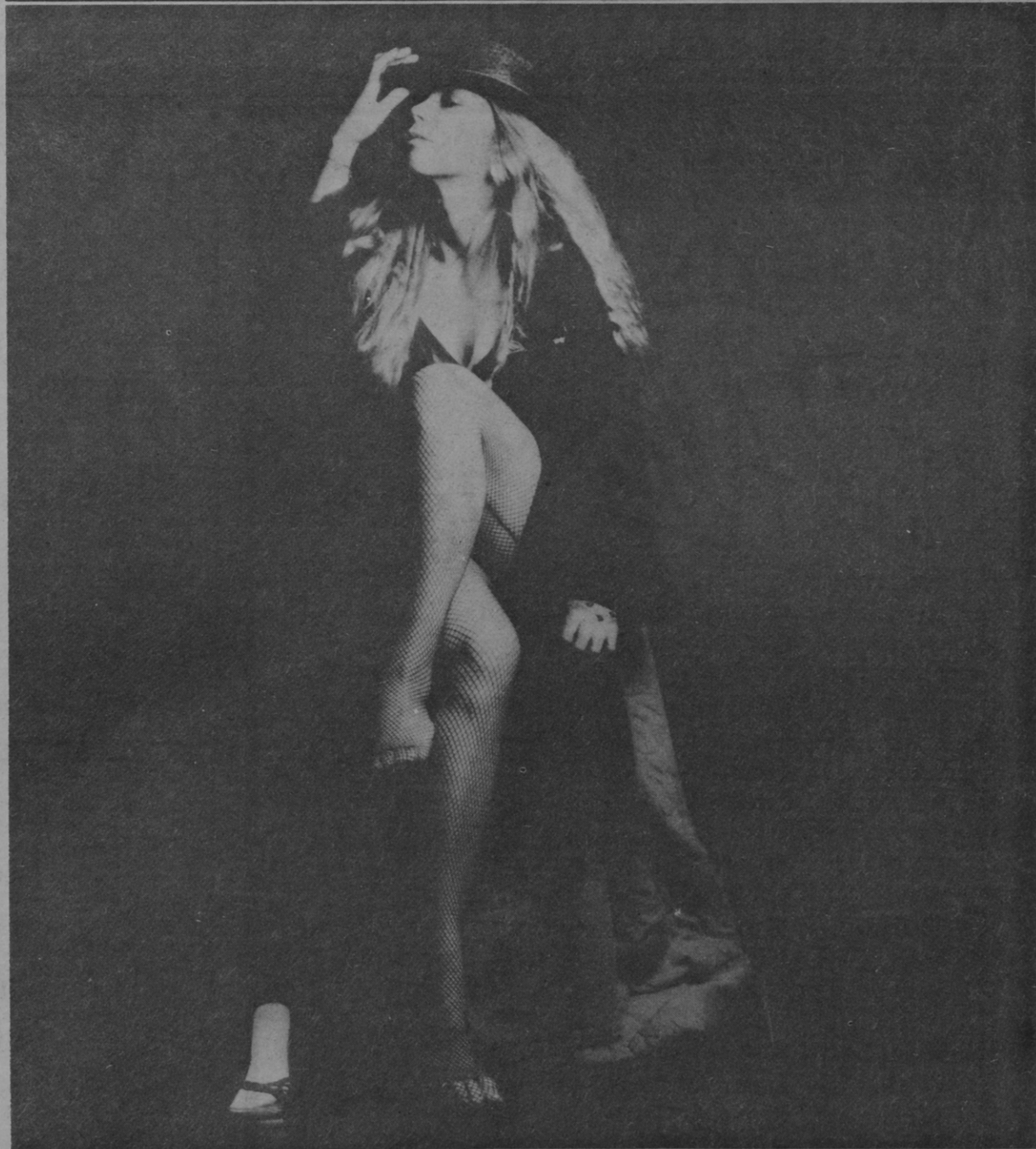
Address .....

Post to *RIU Enz Competition*, PO Box 5689, Auckland 1

In Enzed 'I Don't Wanna Dance' has two live Split Enz tracks on the B-Side, 'Shark Attack' and 'What's The Matter'.

## Rickie Lee Jones

## Pirates



**Rickie Lee Jones is back with an album that is every bit as breathtaking as her debut album.**

