

U2: Bono In Dublin

One of the most exciting debut albums of last year was U2's *Boy*. It mixed terse emotion with the full sound that most bands only dream of. Currently, U2 are in Windmill Lane studios in Dublin, recording the final tracks for their second album, tentatively called *Scarlet*. After a couple of words with ace producer Steve Lillywhite, I am passed on to chief lyricist and voice Bono Vox.

In his soft southern Irish accent, Bono wants to talk about this side of the world. After five minutes, I steer the conversation around to U2.

"U2 didn't really form," he says. "We sort of evolved. We were just four adolescents who got to know each other and our instruments at the same time. We started playing seriously about two years ago."

One key factor in the U2 sound is Lillywhite's production. How did the union come about?

"We always wanted a really big sound — like surround sound. We felt that Steve was also working towards that sound. Before that, we worked with Martin Hannett, but we approached Steve anyway. We were lucky really. Both guys are not prepared to accept the norm, and it has spurred us into working exceptionally hard in the studio."

Were the songs on *Boy* stage favourites?

"They were actually written over a period of two years. 'Out Of Control' was written quite a long time ago, whereas we came up with 'I Will Follow' just prior to going into the studio. You can see the progression from well-trying live pieces to studio numbers like 'The Ocean'."

"The new album is different because all the songs were written in the space of three weeks. We did a lot of travelling in the last year, then we had three weeks off. It was like a valve opening, and all these songs just came about. Only one or two have been played live. At this stage we have about five days in the studio left. I'm very pleased with the way things have gone so far."

On *Boy*, the songs seemed to revolve around the theme of growing up. Was that deliberate?

"I never sat around and said there was going to be a theme. I haven't done that for the new album either. Most of the lyrics on *Boy* were written on stage, because I felt more honest that way. The only real theme is adolescence

through my eyes. I had a very aggressive adolescence, and I was trying to come to grips with it. The next record is more influenced by travel, and what has happened in the last year. I sense dishonesty in a lot of band's lyrics and I think it's because they are writing about things that they don't really care about.

"I suppose I should be writing about Northern Ireland, but although it's happening only fifty miles up the road, it still hasn't affected me enough to make me feel I can write about it. Maybe if I sat down and thought about burning issues to write about, that would be the one. But the emotions I feel when I'm writing are quite abstract. Consequently, so are my lyrics."

Do you think establishing yourselves has been harder because you are from Ireland?

"Making it out of Ireland has been a struggle I am grateful for. Breaking out of Dublin was just a rehearsal for London. We couldn't find places to play when we started, and our audience couldn't get in to see us. We had problems with under-age drinking, and kids hanging around outside pubs. In the end, we would play a carpark in the local market on Saturday afternoons. We were attracting about seven hundred people. But it is still a struggle here."

"In London, people are spoilt. There are always places to play, cheap studios and record companies chasing you. I don't think people from London or New York would have the same level of endurance as someone from Dublin or Auckland."

How important is touring to the band?

"People have to see you live to form their own opinion. That was the point of the punk explosion. We need that excitement of the audience and the band becoming one. That seems to be lacking in some of the larger cities. They don't seem to be giving anything, just trying to see who can pose the best."

And the States?

"I was knocked out by our reception in the States. I thought they would be very conservative. If they are exposed to new music, American audiences can be very positive. Before we went to the US properly, we did a two week tour, playing with anybody just to see what sort of reaction we got. I'd recommend it to any band."

"If you get the chance to play Linda Ronstadt's dressing room, do it!" There's no point in playing to the already converted. I want our music to break barriers, not make them. I can't understand why youth culture has to be broken down into little groups — mods, skins, punks or whatever. If you enjoy the music, what difference does it make what you look like?

"We used to attract a very intellectual audience. I can't handle the way they monitor your performance without any reaction. Our music needs a reaction — even if it's negative."

What are our chances of seeing U2 in New Zealand?

"We will be there early next year, April at the latest. It is very important to us to get out and see what is going on. We want to know who plays our records and writes about us. I'm opposed to bands who keep to themselves when they are on tour. We want to meet as many people as possible."

Mark Phillips



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