

Les Pattison and Pete De Freitas, bassist and drummer respectively for Echo and the Bunnymen, are revelling in the first bit of decent sunshine Auckland has seen this spring. Dressed in swimming trunks, they're suggesting a dip in the hotel pool to all and sundry. The locals amongst us are not so keen, knowing the water is cold enough to freeze the balls off a billiard table.

Will Sergeant takes a photo of Pete standing amongst some vaguely surreal sculpture of the pool, and departs. Ian McCulloch looks exhausted when spotted briefly after returning from a soundcheck, and has retired to his room to crash. Les and Pete pull up a couple of lounge chairs and prepare to talk.

An incongruous setting, this one, for a band whose members seem to be more creatures of the night, full of dark passions and broody sentiments. But then, Les and Pete are a long way from home. They've come here via America, a country which gives them mixed feelings.

"It was great," enthuses Pete. "Much better this time. We went there in April and did a three-week tour which wasn't really that good, but this time round there were really good receptions, except for Los Angeles."

"California crowds expect to just listen to us, instead of

places, and we actually gain a vast amount of popularity through people hearing about the live show. That's what we did in England, we really built up our following from the live show. It affects people, because somehow it seems more real, and honest. It is important, because everything has gotta work, the lights and the music, for you to be really great."

The lighting and other props are conceived by manager Bill Drummond, former light operator Bill Butt and his successor, Kit Edwards. It was Butt who made *Shine So Hard*, and Drummond who got the 'camo' idea and bought the army surplus camouflage nets. The band dressed up in similar gear, not for any paramilitary reason, but because they enjoyed the dressing up. Also, the dirtier the props got, the more effective they became. The band themselves decided to go to the plain white backdrops, using colours to evoke moods, while Drummond, Butt and Edwards thought of using shadows. At the outset, the band didn't have the confidence needed to project themselves onstage, so the setting was important. The Bunnymen have matured, and so has their stage act. The camouflage had already been dropped when Butt got the idea for *Shine So Hard*, and it was decided to resurrect it just for the movie.

"At the time, we weren't all that keen on doing it, because

thought, I suppose."

Style has become a big thing in British music, sometimes overriding the actual music played. The Bunnymen are very stylish, if the UK music press is to be believed, but their approach is more realistic.

"We do worry about how we look," says Pete. "We try and involve ourselves as much as possible in everything that people are going to see about us, like the album covers and the T-shirts, so we're portrayed in the way we'd like to be. We don't like obvious advertisement posters, we like a poster to look good. The way we do things is by instinct. Some of our ideas are just naturally our personality, and that's the way we play it. We feel the same way about clothes, like we tell each other whether we're looking crap, and so on."

Influences are difficult to pin down, though Mac has confessed a liking for the Doors, the Velvet Underground, and Bowie. Les and Pete don't buy the notion that they draw inspiration altogether from the 1960's.

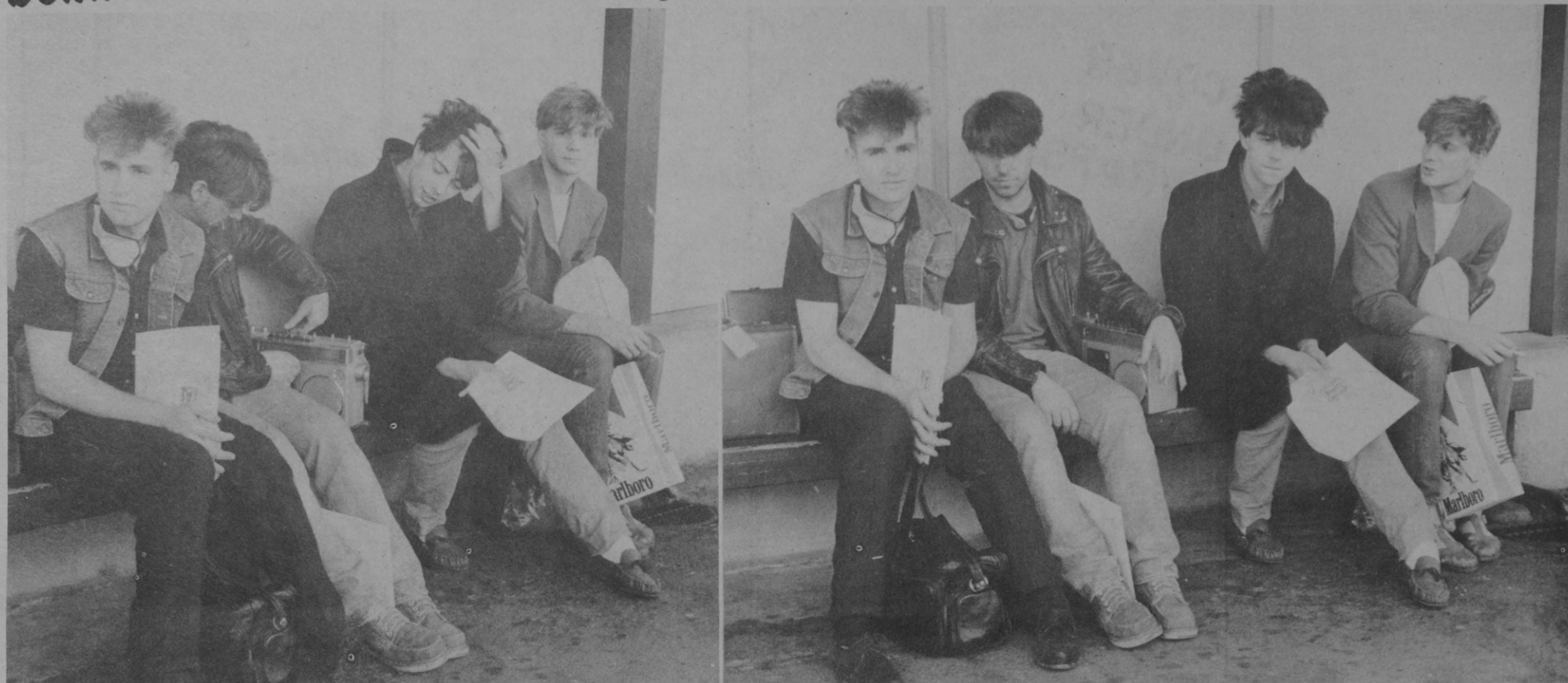
"I was inspired by my childhood, when I grew up," says Pete, "but it's not really reflected in the music style, like a ripoff of the 60's. In a way, it's difficult for us to say what our influences are, because we just do what seems natural."

"I think the thing about the 60's is that music did have that

BUNNYMEN RAP...

Les Pattison, Will Sergeant, Ian McCulloch, Pete de Freitas.

Photos by Carol Tippet



dance and get into it," says Les. "After we went off, they really applauded, and when we came back on, they just stared at us and wondered what was going on. It was really weird and upsetting. It was like that in New York as well."

So how did the New Zealand shows match up?

"Wellington was the best reception," says Les (the Auckland gig had yet to be played). "They've been good audiences, and we've been fairly happy all round."

The Bunnymen have been big news in the past year, breaking out of their Liverpool hometown on a tide of national and international acclaim. People have different ways of measuring success, especially their own. Do they feel successful? Artistically and financially? The question provokes chuckles.

"That's always the hope, to combine the two," says Pete. "To try and do what you wanna do, and make it commercially successful. But a lot of the time, like in America, the record company doesn't think that way, it has a very standard idea of what is commercially viable, and anything outside of that isn't worth taking risks on financially, so they don't put any sort of backing behind you, really."

"But we do alright, we get by, we balance the accounts, just. I mean, we owe the record company a fair amount, but it'll get paid back eventually in sales and stuff. But all round, I see us as being one of the few bands around that actually doesn't give in to that idea of commerciality, yet can still sell."

"Some bands when they start up, they can be weird and arty," says Les. "And then they start selling records, and they see they're gaining in popularity. It gives them a sense of knowing where they're going and they tend to sell out a bit. But I don't think we've done that, I think we just do what we want."

And you feel you've been accepted on that basis?

Pete: "I think generally, wherever we go, people tend to realise that we're a no-compromise band, that what's there is good and, I suppose, challenges the mainstream. That's important. We try and keep ourselves on our toes and change ourselves, as we do in the live performances. The English press never really knew what was going on, because we'd do a tour in a certain way, and the next tour would be different. That's what happened with the camo thing."

"Camo" refers to the camouflage-type set the band used to use onstage, and which can be seen in their film, *Shine So Hard*.

"We knew they were going to hate it," says Pete. "It was quite obvious we were going to get slagged off for that. And then after we'd done that, we thought we'd get away from it, and go totally down to nothing, which was what we did on the next tour. We just had the white backdrop, and mostly white lights with about two colours. We also had this thing with shadows on the back, which was quite different, and we still use it, though we've developed from that again. We've got a more interesting backdrop and more colours, but it's still fairly stark. But it works, and that's the thing. We decided we had to be there, and we had to be good, rather than depending on all this smoke and flashing lights that we had with the camouflage set."

So the presentation is important?

Pete: "I think the thing about us is that we go to a lot of

it's hard to try and rehash something like that," says Les. "It doesn't seem right, it doesn't feel right. And the actual concert suffered from that, because it was pushing something which was a bit old."

"But it looks great on film, and that was what we wanted, just to be able to see it like that," says Pete. "When we went into the studio and saw ourselves on film, we all said 'Oh God!' But I think everyone's like that, with a first film. I think it's absolutely excellent. When you look at a lot of video that bands have made, they just don't have that kind of quality."

"I think it's very well put together, and I like all the window shots and stuff like that. I mean, it's a different angle, approaching the rock film in a different way. It's not really about us until we come to the live thing. We're just there, which is good. Each time I watch it, I see different things."

To me, the non-concert footage seemed to raise a lot of questions from random images.

"I think that's what everything about us wants to do, make people draw questions," says Pete. "That provides depth to any form, if there's more to it than what immediately meets the eye. I suppose if there's a Bunnymen aim, more than anything it's to show people that there's more to rock music than obvious lyrics and obvious music."

"Lyrically, Mac (Ian) makes people think because he does things in a very ambiguous and sometimes obscure way, though he doesn't do it intentionally, it just happens that way, that sort of rambling consciousness that he sometimes gives onstage, which I think is a shame that a lot of people miss, because we can understand him, and we know what he's saying. It's that which makes music more lasting and contemporary, like Adam and the Ants, who's going to listen to them in five years?"

Whether another movie is made depends on Butt's commitments. He's currently working on his own film, called *Grind*. The immediate project for the Bunnymen is a series of 12 British dates following this tour. In their words, they'll be grand, Neuremburg-style shows, with searchlights underneath the seats and similar spectacular ideas. The Bunnymen enjoy playing, and involving, big audiences.

"There's something good about a lot of people being in one place at one time, that sort of congregation feeling," says Pete.

The Bunnymen say they have little trouble playing to big audiences, although Mac appears fairly aloof onstage. The music is intimate and personal, and what he's got to say, he says through his lyrics, which don't always come out the way they were originally written.

Lyrically, the Bunnymen shy away from global politics, in a time when making statements is very chic. They function on a more personal level. They also adroitly avoid tags, although they've been labelled "New Psychodelia" and similar.

"I feel it kind of transcends that, because it can appeal to more than one kind of person," says Pete. "We get a lot of people dressed up as Spandau Ballet, we got a lot of punks, a lot of skinheads, we get hippies who think we're 1968 coming back again. We're not really anything in particular, we are just Echo and the Bunnymen. But we do in a way stand for a lot, and it's quite definitely not psychodelia. It's more to do with music which is important, music which is an emotion, and

importance, which it lacks now. Somebody once said that was the only similarity between us and the 60's, because music had a lot more to it than just the rock and roll business. And now, what seems to have fallen down to the smaller, independent level, is music which is important."

The conversation turns briefly to lyrics, but without Mac, the man who writes them, it is pointless. It's agreed that he's a cynical observer, far more so on *Heaven Up Here*, looking back on past experiences and accusations, denying many labels that people tried to place on the Bunnymen. *Crocodiles*, by comparison, contained more desperation and uncertainty, reflecting the confused feelings of young men making their first record.

"*Heaven* was really good because we learned a lot of new techniques around the studio," says Les. "We understood the studio a bit more, which helped."

"We're very attentive about what goes on in studios, because we want to have a large involvement in what we do," adds Pete. "That's why we co-produced the second album with Hugh Jones, who did the engineering on the first album. What will happen on the next one, we don't know yet. It's very important to us that we know what's going on, and that we are there when it's done. We couldn't possibly just let somebody do our songs the way they felt they should be done without our role, our definite stamp on it."

The songs on *Heaven* are more informal, less structured than those on *Crocodiles*, mainly because of their typical dilemma of recording that first LP, with songs that are well known, then being under pressure to write more, without the time to do it in. Much of the later material was born of riffs created in the studio. Les doesn't mind that, feeling the songs were more spontaneous, and therefore had more emotion. The band was also more skilled instrumentally, and the producer had also learnt.

Ideas are already there for the next album, and recording will start sometime in the new year. Whether they'll use the same producer is uncertain. The material coming will be 'different', but little can be said beyond that, since it's still in the creative stages. Another producer may also be used, and Talking Heads' Jerry Harrison has been suggested. The Bunnymen are keeping an open mind on that. They only know that they don't want a dictator. The music belongs to them and nobody else. But they obviously owe Jones a big debt for their recording sound, especially *Crocodiles*.

"We did a week's rehearsal with him, and he helped us with some of the arrangements, because the songs were in a very elementary stage," says Pete. "He was the studio engineer in that particular one we worked in, and so he knew what he could get out of it. He had a lot of ideas. He used to work with Will, who didn't know what he was doing a lot of the time. Hugh would sit down with him and pick out a lot of the things, and piece it together for Will, in a way. He managed to pull out of Will some of the best guitar playing he's ever done, and Will's getting better all the time. Like, I listened to a live tape recently, and Will's guitar is just God!" Pete giggles at the statement, slightly embarrassed, even though it's honest.

Echo and the Bunnymen believe in themselves.

Duncan Campbell