

Just as Blam Blam Blam's album *Luxury Length* is released, the band is setting out on yet another national tour. And in August an Australian tour supporting Split Enz is likely — a timely promotion for the album's Australian release.

The Blams episode has continued longer than Don McGlashan, Tim Mahon and Mark Bell thought it would.

"When the Whizzkids split up, the lowest common denominator was left," Mark says. "The three individuals that didn't moan in the back of the van on the last Whizzkids' tour."

"We were the only ones that used to turn up to practice," Tim adds.

Continues Mark dryly: "Every day Blam Blam Blam has gone on has been a blessing. I've never expected anything more from life than carrying on another day."

"It's been good fun," Tim says. "Going up to Mangonui over Easter and to the West Coast."

Don: "I think our real saving grace is that we do things other bands don't do."

Tim: "We don't destroy hotel rooms."

Mark: "We certainly haven't got that one together yet. We couldn't even bend a TV aerial with all of us straining on it."

Stage wise, life is more fun.

"At least," Mark says, "we don't feel quite so terrified. In the Whizzkids you could be fairly sure there'd be at least three songs which would go hopelessly astray. With the Blams, you go on knowing you're going to do your bit reasonably well."

"Playing as a three piece is demanding, and it's one of the reasons we bought Dick Driver in — to relieve the stress a bit. I've no regrets, but musically we were heading in different directions."

Comments Don: "When we first started recording the album, we had Dick with us and he did quite a few vocal tracks. 'Pensioner Love' is the one we've kept."

The Blams are pleased with production for *Luxury Length*, and credit Harlequin's Paul Streekstra with full marks.

"I think recording quality is finally getting to be on a par with overseas," says Don. "With the Graeme Gash and D.D. Smash albums, a really strong New Zealand sound is emerging."

The *Luxury Length* album was recorded in 200 to 250 studio hours, with sessions spread over several months.



"It was done in bursts," Don explains. "We'd go in, do three sessions, then we'd be away two weeks, then come back tired, do a session, and not achieve anything at all."

"On the other hand," Mark points out, "you can go away having done a track, think about it, and come back to it. There probably isn't a track on the album which hasn't been adjusted, remixed, rearranged, or shortened."

"We were going to drop almost every song at one stage because we got so insecure," Don says.

*Luxury Length* includes old and new material.

"Some of the lyrics go right back to 1977 when Richard Von Sturmer was writing for the Plague," says Mark. "The Businessmen", and 'Bystanders' date from those days. The songs have changed though. The album version of 'Businessmen' is the current rendition of an on-going series."

Though 'No Depression' delved into politics, Tim does not view *Luxury Length* as being more of the same.

"All the words are about different subjects and feelings. The only one possibly to get close to being political is 'Learning to Like Ourselves Again', because it's an anti-patriotic, or patriotic song, which ever way you choose to look at it."

"I've been trying," Mark claims, "to write songs about Think Big, but I've been thwarted, and haven't got it quite right."

"We've all been influenced by Richard Von Sturmer to some extent," Tim says.

"But you move through that," Don replies. "I don't feel comfortable writing 'comment' songs now. I want to write something closer to me that I really know about, and can explore personally."

Lyrics remain the band's top priority.

"I think that's how most of our successful songs have come about — with the lyrics being there, and the music fitting in around them as a mood," Mark comments.

And Tim agrees. "We find getting the whole thing together musically quite easy, but it's difficult to find the right lyrics." Most of the statements on the album are personal. "Personal politics," Tim calls it.

Mark sees the band as attempting to face the fact of being

New Zealanders.

"I think a lot of local musicians aren't prepared to come to terms with it. They're trying to slip into something that's easy for them to do — like playing cover songs and playing like other people. They're not trying to change people's attitudes or the way they listen to music. They slip into a role which frustrates them."

And the Blams don't?

"We have been guilty of doing that," Don answers.

"And the reason," says Tim, "is because we have to work every week, have a PA and lights on hire. In NZ you have to pound up and down the country so that when your record comes out you can sell it."

"It's like door to door salesmanship," Mark says.

"I've had it with the amount of gear you have to cart around, especially when you're not making a cent from it. Somebody said at one of our gigs that for the best paid band in the country, we could dress a bit better, but people don't realise you don't make a cent," Don adds.

The Blams don't expect to make money out of *Luxury Length*, but they do hope to cover costs.

"I just don't think we'll make any money on it," Tim comments. "We have to recover something like \$21,000, which is a pretty tall order. We haven't had to worry about finance with this album though, which put us in a better frame of mind for recording."

"It's hard for a New Zealand band to record an album. The Dum Dum Boys recorded an album for \$10,000, and someone mortgaged a house to help them. I don't think I could personally go through that."

The Blams respect the Do It Yourself principle with all the hardships involved.

"All credit to the Gordons," says Mark, "for a self marketed product which has broken even."

The band is hoping to chart in Australia, even if it is, as Tim says, "at the bottom end." The chance to tour with Split Enz in the same month *Luxury Length* is released there, means the Blams can promote the album without having to start at the bottom.

Their aspirations remain modest. Success means people in New Zealand knowing the songs, and being able to earn a "living wage per week."

"The main thing is not that people buy records and we get money, but that the music reaches people through radio, word of mouth. That's why we do what we do, so people listen," Don says.

As a three-piece Blam Blam Blam feel they've "gelled" but have yet to explore possibilities the unit presents.

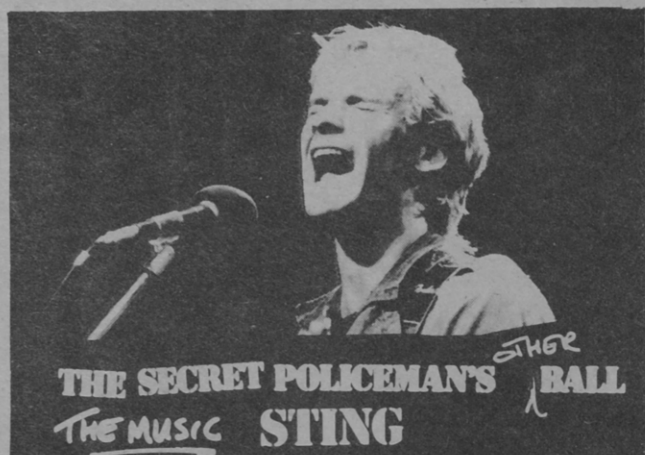
Don comments: "The three piece is a workman-like situation. There's no chance to be a prima donna. There are some good things you can do. I'd like to extend the rhythm box area. The next plan is to get a plug-in horn section."

"It would be really nice to do a tour with a horn section — two trumpets, and a sax."

The Blam's stage presentation is in for brushing up too. Mark says it'll be something really Blam Blam Blam.

"I think Don might do an acoustic version of 'Pensioner Love'. Bring out the stool. We'd also like to do a bit of street theatre like we used to do in South Auckland."

AnnLouise Martin.



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