

5 years on...

ENZ IN GREAT WHITE NORTH

'A roomful of Canadians is much like a roomful of New Zealanders.' (Tim Finn. Horseshoe Tavern, Toronto. May '82.)

To a transplanted kiwi, the bar-room scene borders on the bizarre. Exhausted but ecstatic bodies press against the small stage from which New Zealand's finest launch into an encore comprising such off-the-wall selections as 'To Love Somebody', 'Jamaican Farewell', and a version of 'I Hope I Never' that features a soaring guitar solo from one Mick Ronson. It is party time in Toronto, and the faces of the Enz are split with smiles, for they know they are amongst friends.

Canada now clasps Split Enz to its musical bosom as tightly as a grizzly hugs a trespassing tramp. Nowhere else outside Australasia has shown such a taste for the band live and on vinyl. Want some figures? *True Colours* has gone, wait for it, double platinum in Canada with sales of 200,000, *Waiata* has gone platinum, and even the belated release of *Frenzy* last year has seen it notch up the respectable figure of 40,000 copies. A&M Records in Canada are confident that *Time and Tide* will outsell even *True Colours*, and its first single here, 'Six Months In A Leaky Boat', is already a certified hit.

This current Canadian tour is the most extensive yet with some 20 dates, and such is their disproportionate success here that Split Enz originally planned to forsake the U.S.A. completely. As Eddie Rayner claimed: "there are two ways to tour the States. One is to be like Peter Dinklage and do the big grind for 6 years until you make it big. The other is to do a short tour of your key markets."

"That is what we've decided to do for two weeks. Originally we weren't going to play there at all unless we had a Top 30 album, so this is a bit of a compromise."

Time and Tide is starting to sell well in the States and 'Leaky Boat' is gaining airplay, so the decision to head south from Canada now appears a wise one.

The reasons Split Enz are so much more popular in Canada than the U.S.A. are not too difficult to fathom. Radio airplay is one key. As Eddie explains "Canadian radio stations offer much more space for new bands, while in the States the whole industry is very wary of taking risks because of the recession. We're not getting the AM crossovers you need for a hit, and hit singles are essential there." Band manager Nathan Brenner: "The whole music scene in Canada is less industry oriented; they are more open to new things."

In essence, the answer may simply be that put forward by Lorna Richards of A&M (Canada): "Split Enz are bigger here because Canadians have better taste!"

Perhaps in a throwback to days when the Commonwealth meant something, Canada has a tradition of breaking British and Australasian acts before the U.S.A. Examples range from Supertramp to the Boomtown Rats and XTC, while even Mi-Sex scored Top 10 with their *Graffiti Crimes* album. Men At Work and Mental As Anything are making inroads now, and this is encouraging Nathan Brenner to consider an Australasian package for a North American Tour.

Another chapter in the Split Enz success story here could be entitled 'The Importance of Video', for that has become a major weapon in the fight for chart action in North America. Nathan Brenner: "Video is a definite bonus for us, as the band, and especially Noel, have such strong visual ideas. We have premiered video clips on MTV, a cable outlet with an audience of five million, and soon we'll shoot a special live feature for them."

The Canadian rock media has also played its part in promoting awareness of the band, for Split Enz have garnered a more favourable coverage here than 95% of foreign bands. Examples: "There isn't a more completely talented band in rock right now." Peter Goddard, *Toronto Star*, 1982. "Split Enz came across as amiable, danceable, and perfectly delightful." Alan Niester, *Globe and Mail*. "Time and Tide has the kind of startling brilliance only rarely encountered outside the best literature." Greg Quill, *Music Express*.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Split Enz's Canadian success is the diversity of the crowd they attract. The audience at its Toronto shows ranged from professional types in their thirties to pre-teenyboppers there to dance in the aisles and whistle at Neil. Reports of semi-hysteria from screaming girls have been received, but Eddie Rayner has a few reservations about this kind of reaction: "We do see all the young girls getting hysterical and a few of them fainting. Perhaps we appear as father figures to them. I feel that old, but Neil does look very young and cute. Unfortunately it does put off older people who I'd feel more comfortable with."

In Montreal in 1976, I noticed that the only Canadians to pick up on the Split Enz of the *Mental Notes* era were the more intellectually inclined fans of groups like Roxy Music and Genesis. The increasing accessibility of the 1982 model Split Enz is reflected in the varied composition of their present audience.



Split Enz embarking for Canada.

On this tour, Split Enz have been supported by one of the more promising young Canadian bands, the Payola\$. The presence of Mick Ronson on keyboards for them may have pulled in a few extra diehard Bowie and Hunter fans, but the tour's success has undoubtedly come down to our kiwi boys making good. The biggest crowd to date has been 10,000, but, "we try and play the large theatres, rather than those big stadiums where you can't communicate with the audience," says Eddie.

Conducting such a cross-country tour from an Australasian base means fighting the 'tyranny of distance', to use Nathan Brenner's phrase. Few bands in North America make big bucks on touring, and as well as Split Enz are doing, they are just 'getting closer and closer to break-even point. If we were a U.S.A. band we'd make \$80,000 or \$90,000 profit on the tour', says Brenner.

Another index of Split Enz's current drawing power is the fact that their latest visit to Toronto sparked off a dispute between rival local promoters. The original promoters of their date here had their noses and bank balances put out of joint when they were overlooked for an extra gig in favour of the large Concert Promotions International group. A.C.P.I. spokesman was very tight-lipped about any financial details, but reiterated their "commitment to breaking the group here."

The touring life that is allegedly so destructive certainly does not seem too painful for Split Enz. "We don't get into much of that 'life on the road' stuff; we take what we do too seriously," says Eddie, sighing contentedly in his tasteful hotel suite as the masseuse does her obviously skilled stuff on his sore shoulder.

Travel has had a strong effect on Split Enz's lyrical concerns, especially on *Time and Tide*. For Eddie Rayner, "this is our strongest album lyrically, that's for sure. Ninety-five percent of the old songs were about love and relationships etc, but now we're more outspoken, and our ideas are a lot more global. We have seen so much more, plus the world is changing rapidly. This is the first time I've really got something out of our lyrics, and Tim is certainly feeling prouder of them now."

"*Waiata* was not a great album; it had a lot of flaws. I go by first impressions, and I have a gut feeling that *Time & Tide* is our best album. (Co-producer) Hugh Padgham was like a sixth member of the band. He is very strong on engineering, while most of the artistic production decisions were taken by the band."

While *Time & Tide* includes a number of potentially successful singles, the band denies any advance planning to this end. "We felt no pressure in regards to sales and hit singles," claims Eddie. "We had no preconceptions at all, but after the last two albums were pretty poppy we wanted some more 'real' music. We went into the studio with just a bunch of ideas, and worked a lot with these in there."

1982 sees Split Enz complete the first 10 year cycle of their career, and it remains a possibility that they'll still be our musical ambassadors in 1992. "Longevity is the key to success for me," maintains Eddie. "Ninety percent of these bands making it big are here today and gone tomorrow."

Such a criterion of worth is a mite suspect, for it would rate surviving turkeys such as REO Speedwagon and Styx above short-lived innovators like the Sex Pistols and Joy Division, but we let that one slide unchallenged.

"Split Enz will definitely diversify. It won't be just this album/tour cycle for the next ten years. We would like to do a film and we already have guaranteed backing. We just need a good script." (Eddie Rayner)

Whether the next 10 years sees the tide of their commercial fortunes ebb or flow, Split Enz have already won themselves a warm place in the heart of this Great White North. Let us hope that for kiwi rock in North America, this represents not the end but the beginning.

Kerry Doole

Stiff in New York



Bruce Kirkland

SoHo — short for South of Houston St — is the artists' quarter of New York. Lower than Greenwich Village on a Manhattan map, it is where the city's painters and sculptors inhabit airy lofts and work on crazy-quilt rooftops. Down on the street level there's all the horror of urban blight: stripped-down burnt-out converted cars, semi-trucks thundering down one-way streets and chicken wire stretched over every available door, window or grill.

The flailing American arm of Stiff Records is a tenant in the area. Out of cramped mid-town offices, it's now spread all over the fifth floor of the SoHo warehouse it shares with a Chinese laundry and other disparate spirits. Loud with music, painted white and peopled by as many Cockney accents in mini skirts as work permits would allow, it looks a long leap from Wellington's Courtenay Place for its manager, expatriate New Zealander Bruce Kirkland.

Then bearded, chubby and laid back, Kirkland left New Zealand around the end of 1977. A law graduate who was even admitted to the Bar of the High Court, he had never practised the profession but instead had worked four years in Wellington as the director of the New Zealand Students' Arts Council. Up until then it had been mostly a culturally-inclined body, but Kirkland turned it on to rock'n'roll. He toured New Zealand bands — most notably Split Enz and Hello Sailor — and brought overseas acts — Flo and Eddie, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and others — to the students. Plans to take it one step further by setting up an entrepreneurial company were shot down by the students themselves and Kirkland, feeling he'd reached his threshold, quit the job and the country.

In Australia, he worked for the touring department of Evans-Gudinski, owners of Mushroom Records, and learnt the mechanics of moving acts around a continent. Then Graham Parker and the Rumour turned up on his bill. Not only did they strike Kirkland as the "best bloody rock'n'roll band I'd ever seen", but they were managed by Stiff boss Dave Robinson. When they returned to England, Kirkland, at Robinson's bidding, went too.

"At first I was the Stiff house pet — Robinson used me for all sorts of things," remembers Kirkland. Only two weeks in the country, he took the infamous Wreckless Eric on a national tour. "I thought it would be chaotic but Eric was fine and the organization, a piece of cake."

Next Kirkland became a troubleshooter for the international department. He spent most of his time travelling around Europe ironing out kinks in the Stiff distribution network.

Established outside the perimeters of conventional record company wisdom, Stiff not only records its acts, but often manages them too. Kirkland cosily describes the company as a family, and from among the siblings he picked Lene Lovich for foster care. He toured England, Europe and the USA with her several times.

"In each country I took up a different job — her tour manager in Spain, her lawyer in France, bodyguard in Italy. And I still have a lot to do with Lene," says the man who won her the coveted re-opening show at celebrity watering hole, Studio 54.

A year ago the Stiff bosses decided that the American side of business needed some attention. Several years before CBS had taken over distribution when hopes of the British "new wave" sweeping America had been high. In fact, Kirkland's initial visit to the country had been in those halcyon days: "My first impression of the States had been from limos and luxury hotel rooms on a promo tour with Lene."

As with all the British acts of that time, none of Stiff's family was adopted by the American public. By 1980, CBS was taking up fewer and fewer options on Stiff product and the likelihood of breaking into the all-important market was diminishing fast.

Kirkland was glad to be sent to New York to set up an office. "This place suits my equilibrium," he says and to all appearances — he's now slim, shaves daily, works out at a gym and can do lots more than just walk and chew gum at the same time — he's right.

"Also, from working in Australia I'm more familiar with its kind of radio system than I was in Britain, and that's very important here."

Kirkland believes radio programming is the dividing line between Stiff in England and America. "In England the company has become a Top 40 hit machine. There's Jona Lewie of course. Then with Alvin Stardust, Dave Stewart and Madness, Stiff had three songs on the English Top 40 at once."

"More, that is inconceivable. Mainstream American radio is completely beyond our reach. It's money not talent that buys hits here."

Rather than work up a hernia trying to pull FM radio out of the heavy rock swamp, Kirkland is CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



Quotes from the Critics ...

"superb sense of fluid drive... the most interesting piece of recorded product I have heard from the kiwi coast... inspiring... an absorbing and stunning debut... everything that's necessarily good rock'n'roll."

Steve Kulak
AUST. 'RAM'

"the best band in the country... this superb first album will surely secure them a spot in the commercial stakes."

Anne Hogan
EVENING POST

PROPELLER
RECORDS

"natural successor to Split Enz... exciting innovative... outranks its direct ancestor (Split Enz), stronger songs, lyrically and, especially, melodically... Blams move from short stories to the great New Zealand novel... this isn't just a great New Zealand album, it's a great album... sheer quality."

Colin Hogg
AUCKLAND STAR

"the best album yet made by a New Zealand band, and is of international standard... put New Zealand on the musical map."

Kathy Stodart
SOUTHLAND TIMES

"An album too important to ignore and too tempting to pass up... there is no real comparison between this record and the latest releases of mainstream artists like McCartney and Brazier. It is sometimes interesting to listen to how they can restate the tiny rock and roll vocabulary; it is always interesting to listen to how innovators like Blam Blam Blam can add to it."

Frank Stark
NZ LISTENER

"this album deserves to achieve excellent sales, chart success and heaps of radio play."

Irene Gardiner
DOMINION



also available 'MARSHA' (K8425/REV14)
'CALL FOR HELP' (K8791/REV17)
'BLAM BLAM BLAM' MINI-LP (L20012/REV202)
'THERE IS NO DEPRESSION IN NZ' (K8422/REV11)

PROPELLER L37414/REV204