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This Sporting Life ...



Gary, Ben, Simon (sound), Paul, Daron.

This Sporting Life are Auckland based, the remnants of Alms For Children, and newly linked up with Christchurch's ubiquitous Flying Nun leisure combine. I met them on top of the Government Life building on the afternoon before they were due to support the Fall in the Christchurch Town Hall. As it happened the view of Christchurch from ten stories up left something to be desired for them and a hasty trip to the nearest pub was arranged where the lack of Mac's Real Ale notwithstanding we managed a semi-coherent conversation.

If This Sporting Life bear a distinct visual resemblance to Alms For Children then it has probably got something to do with the fact that Gary Charlton, Daron Johns, Ben Hayman and Paul Fogarty were AFC. When that band folded, vocalist Charlton and drummer Johns went their separate ways leaving guitarist Fogarty and bassist Hayman formulating plans with a new drummer. Charlton returned and This Sporting Life came into existence. After one gig their new drummer found Christianity and left. Johns returned.

"There has to be a similarity because it's the same people playing the same instruments, but we hope it's a progression, hopefully we're better. There's a different overall view and different structures."

Since their formation in February, This Sporting Life have played occasionally but their major project has been the recording of tracks for their upcoming debut, *Show Me To The Bellope*. That title comes from a practise session to set levels that saw Gary and Paul taking liberties with 'Happy' and apparently turning it into a mini epic about hunchbacks. 'Happy' appears on the record in that form at Doug Hood's insistence but the band aren't quite so sure. Perhaps you had to be there ... ?

Bellope's ten songs and thirty minute duration makes it close to a debut album. They're happy with the \$6.99 price and very happy with the final tapes — but why not a single?

That they didn't want to start off with a single is probably explained by the fact that they've been that particular route with Alms For Children although in markedly different circumstances. The AFC record was done on Harlequin's 24 tracks, a process not entirely suited to the band as they were.

"To record at Harlequin you need to use one of their people and that means you end up with their sound."

Recording at the new four track studio, the Lab, with Doug Hood, was far more appropriate.

"It's really big and relaxed. You

can run round and scream at the Lab, but you can't do that at Harlequin, as we found out."

Recording this time around has also been easier on their wallets.

"The AFC single cost us five hundred dollars for those three tracks and it's money we've never seen back again. It also cost five hundred to do the ten tracks on *Bell Rope* and we hope to come out of this one with a slight profit."

They are unconvinced that the Auckland scene is as dead as some would like to make out.

"There is a shortage of venues, there's only one we can play now, and you can't hold dances because people come along and fuck them up. But it serves no purpose to just criticise, Auckland needs support."

Gary is full of praise for new bands, particularly Coalition (ex Hercos), Fish School, Nocturnal Projections and the Bombers. On the live front Auckland has its problems. They have a suspicion that A Certain Bar (new music disco) represents an unhealthy trend because it is drawing away people who would otherwise go and see live music.

"But it's a better bar to meet people probably, because it isn't quite so loud and it's fairly respectable. Most of the band venues are real dives, really grotty."

And some valid observations on the insularity of Christchurch.

"You have to have a record out to play down here. Last time at the Gladstone (with AFC) it was alright because we had a record. This time we didn't and the audience was very reserved. It was like it took them the three nights to decide whether we were good or not. And it would have been really uncool to get into it when everyone else was so laid back."

For the future they hope to play occasionally in Auckland if anyone will have them, make it down to Wellington at some stage and hopefully get to Dunedin. But This Sporting Life is not a fulltime concern. All have other projects, jobs and things.

Playing with the Fall was great but they had little contact with the band with the exception of some constructive criticism from one of their guitarists. He suggested Paul should take his amp down to a quarry and blow it up.

Michael Higgins

Dragon

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