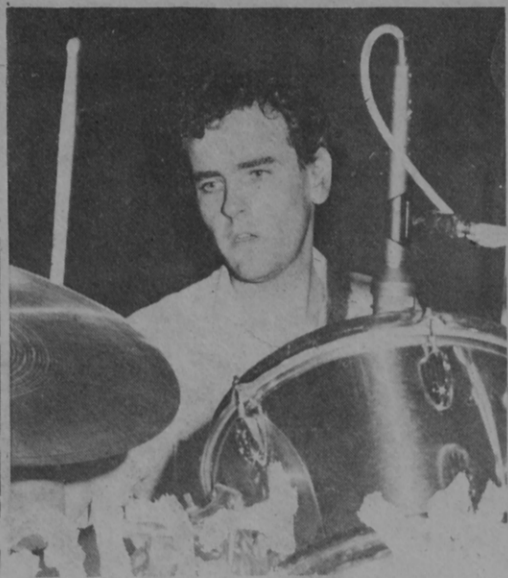




Martin Lubran, guitarist.



Doug Falconer, drummer.



The skull on top of Greg Perano's hot water cylinder.



Greg Perano, percussionist.

Photos by Colin Bower

The rhythm of life is the heart beat. The heart beats a 4/4 rhythm.

BEAT the First (drumming of fingers)

A room full of melancholy babies, waiting, worrying. Things could be going better for Hunters and Collectors. The main problem is that, in Christchurch, on the day of the first gig of the band's New Zealand tour, 194kg of their gear is being held by customs, who won't give it back until they get a \$5000 bond for it.

It's a matter of endless, costly toll calls and authorisations from everyone from the Australian treasury down.

And there's no water in the motel, so the toilet is becoming increasingly objectionable to use. It's the council's fault, apparently.

Things are brightened by the arrival of the tour T-shirts. They are v-necked and shit-brown — horrible.

More merriment ensues from the reading of a letter from their record company telling how "stoked" everyone was with the album sales and promising a "ripper" weekend in Auckland. Record companies don't seem to have any idea about this band.

BEAT the Second (tapping)

But this band knows all about record companies.

"We made it very clear from the outset that we weren't going to be manipulated by a record company at least on an overt level. I mean they all do a bit of manipulation here and there that you don't have much control over," says drummer Doug Falconer.

"They very rarely go out of their way to find out what you want or the way you want things done, but they've got their end of the business to keep up and they think they're doing a great job. I suppose they are."

"I don't think we reflect their work ethic very well at all," says smaller, younger, paler, quieter, angrier guitarist Martin Lubran.

Still, they are pleased with the White Label spinoff they demanded before signing to Mushroom Records in Australia. It's working out.

They are less pleased with their debut album.

The studio to us so far has been a medium for us to recreate what we do live, for people who can't hear us live, or can't hear us live enough," says Falconer.

"I think mainly we've failed. We've succeeded on a couple of occasions, but usually when we fail there's some quality about what we've produced in the studio that is worthwhile."

The album sounds a little washed-out in spots because instead of being on a stage with lots of volume around you and an audience to work off, you're sitting in a cramped little air conditioned room with a set of headphones on and no real feedback."

"I'm still trying to come to terms with the fact that listening to a record is not going to be the same as listening to us live," ventures Lubran.

"It's got to work in a different fashion. It's got to obviously have a different effect to be good."

But the band is learning about the studio. They are pleased with the recording of their new EP, which should be out some time next month.

They see the music on the EP as a progression from the album. "It's become less overtly rhythmic, less of a pounding rhythm. More, the rhythm is implied by a group of different sounds," says Falconer.

"I just think we're not afraid to try more things, we're more adventurous," Lubran says.

There follows a general criticism of the type of Australian bands we are more used to seeing and, as they point out, the kind of New Zealand bands they usually see.

"Nothing annoys us more than seeing bands do safe renditions of well-known songs. They play audiences for fools, really," says Falconer.

"Unfortunately, in a lot of cases ... no, I won't say that," says Lubran, too late.

There is a possibility of a New Zealand tour by some of Australia's younger, more adventurous bands, brought to you by the same people who are organising this tour.

On to the band's graphics, put together by the mixer, Robert Miles.

"He wanted basically to put together a collage of images that were in keeping with the style of music," says Falconer.

"We never had aspirations to be an aboriginal-inspired band, of course, but Australia is a big, generally empty, dry place, while at the same time people are concentrated in urban centres on the coast.

"So it's a strange contrast of dry and dirt and dust and cities which can be just as arid. He wanted to show that it can be just as arid in cities as anywhere else, so the images of man-made objects have the same sort of earthy quality as the rest. And there were also a couple of specific images that had to do with the band at the time."

The band's ages range over 12 years and individual experience varies likewise, but they don't consider either of those factors important. What about social backgrounds?

"You mean being upper-middle class poofters?" says Falconer. "Yeah. But we've got a couple of token workers."

"I think it's pretty important if you're going to be expressive in any way," Lubran comments.

"I suppose it forms you in ways you're not always aware of," says Falconer.

"But the thing that strikes me about the way we approach our music in contrast to a lot of other bands is that we think about it a lot more."

"I'm not saying we think when we're writing a song, wouldn't it be good to put a G in there or a snare beat in there or hit the wang there, because that would be socially aware. It's more

that we try and understand the philosophy of the kind of music we're playing. A lot of bands don't seem to do that, they just launch into it."

Mood creation is very important to this band on stage and the pair feel again that it's something other bands tend to overlook.

"We sometimes even surprise ourselves with the different moods we set up," Falconer says.

So — how do most audiences react, bearing in mind the fact that most of what they hear is unrecorded material and all of it is uncompromising?

Falconer, deadpan: "It varies a lot. Sometimes they stand there like stunned mullets, sometimes they walk out the door and sometimes they go apeshit."

BEAT the Third (CRASH!!)

Jesus. I had no idea they were going to be *this* good. Hunters and Collectors took the Hillsborough crowd by its collective throat and shook.

After a little rattling, the beast got the idea and shouted and danced and, when it seemed to be over, asked for more.

Let's not mess with specifics, they will only cloud the issue. Suffice to say that what set Hunters and Collectors apart was mood. You damn well *had* to believe them.

And dance? Until I dropped.

This is a different band from the one you'll hear on record. So much harder, so much more exciting, so much more rhythmic, so much more demanding.

Demand and rhythm, demand and rhythm, demand and rhythm.

BEAT the Fourth (echoes)

Percussionist Greg Perano is pleased with the crowd reaction, but he's used to that kind of thing.

"They took a little while to get started, didn't they? Still, it was really good at the end, they really got moving."

A former New Zealander himself, he likes the local crowds, finds them very aware. He has just been discussing Theatre of Hate with a great big rabbit hunter, he says.

The thing he has noticed in the short time he has been back in the country is the rise of a racist element among his countrymen. It worries him.

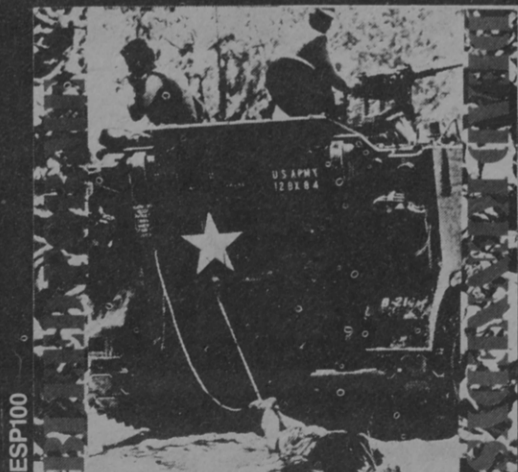
But the party is moving into the public bar. Everyone who wants to know pours through. Time for a drink and a rest.

That's your four beats. You're not going to get any more. And we haven't even got to the scary bit yet.

The scary bit is, Hunters and Collectors are going to get better.

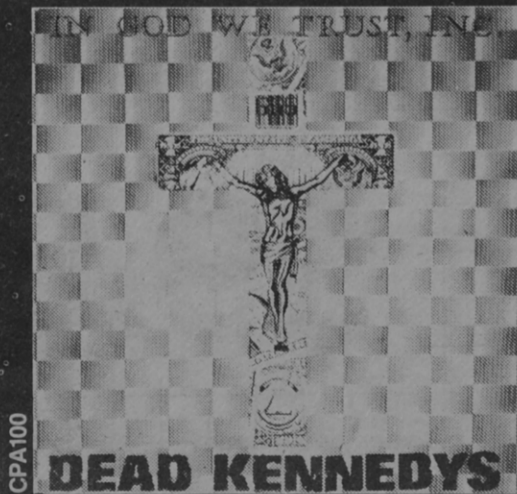
Russell Brown

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