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During their brief two-day (and two nights at Mainstreet) stay in New Zealand, Simple Minds made lasting impressions — all of them favourable. They brought a little bit of Glaswegian empathy and warmth and a whole wave of rock'n'roll spirit and feeling. You need look no further than *New Gold Dream* to discover a band who are on the threshold of merging real emotions and discovering new sensitivities. A soul record in every meaning of the word.

Live and the first night at Mainstreet. The band emerged during the P.A. introduction of 'Somebody Up There Likes You' and they went straight for the tape with an athletic set focussing on the new album and past high points including devastating versions of 'I Travel', 'Celebration' and a faster rerun of 'Sweat in Bullet'. The band were excelling but parts of the packed Mainstreet audience were restless, seemingly intent on using the concert as an opportunity to attract attention. No encore.

In the dressing room after the gig, the band explained that there was no encore because certain people in the crowd were endangering others. This was a subject that was to be broached in more detail the next day.

It's Tuesday afternoon at the RTC offices in Parnell. The local rock'n'roll press and media faces are noshing up as Jim Kerr, obviously shy and apprehensive at the size of the reception, Charlie Burchill and Michael MacNeill are ushered in. Conspicuously absent are bassist Derek Forbes who cut a bottle and a half of Jack Daniels the night before and was too tired to make it and drummer Mike Ogletree who was out buying equipment.

Anyway with the best interview room full of *Radio With Pictures* crew, lights and Karen Hay, Jim Kerr sat on an empty bread tray in the kitchen to talk to the *Auckland Star*. Patience and finally *Rip It Up* manage to guide Jim Kerr into an office with chairs. A step up from the kitchen. Right Jim, what about last night?

"There was a drunken quantity who were making it rough for everyone. At the start everyone was getting into it and then the attention was getting moved as you had to watch you didn't get banged on the head. It was stupid."

At this point Charlie Burchill arrives and believe me, he's Glasgow sunshine. Talkative and direct, there's no middle ground. He was annoyed about the first night:

"People could've been really badly hurt down the front, they could've been cut in half as there was no way they could push the audience back and there was a real bad feeling beginning to spread."

But that sort of behaviour at gigs is commonplace here. Jim: "I know, but it shouldn't be commonplace. I've spoken to a few people who say bands never come here and no wonder they don't."

But what about Australia? Jim: "Much more civilised. If you get twelve drunken yobs who spoil it for the rest then that's not on. They're not there for the music, they're there because there's a crowd or a rage and we're not a rage band. If we felt we had played crap then we would've been back to justify it but we felt that we'd done well. But towards the end it was just these fuckin' yobboes."

Charlie: "Put us in control of it and we'd handle it no problem but there were five security guards there who told us during the day that they wanted to handle it themselves."

Jim: "Some of the atmosphere from the people at the front reminded me of the outskirts of Europe, like Italian gigs. And because you don't get many gigs when one does happen it's a barndance."

Charlie: "The start last night was really great, the potential of the gig was fantastic."

Jim: "It becomes a certain duty not to go on for an encore as it makes the audience look at themselves. Without being too condescending, audiences here have got to learn or else bands

won't come or they'll think it's a fuckin' outback full of yobboes."

But surely in Britain you'd be attracting a different type of audience. Here you'd be attracting a wider spectrum?

Jim: "No, that's rubbish. In English we attract over the board. We don't want to attract cunts who throw things at gigs or push for the sake of it. Where we're from anyway isn't England it's Glasgow and we see enough yobs, we can see them coming a mile away."

Changing tack and I mention to Jim and Charlie that they seemed taken aback when they were confronted by the big press entourage assembled here:

Jim: "Yeah, it was strange, I heard a buzz of chat before we came in. But we're not razzamatazz or showbiz, we're warm people, so we can't go like 'hiya folks, good to see you all'. Although it would've been weird if we'd come to New Zealand and there was no one here to speak to us."

So shyness is the main reason why the other members of the band rarely speak to the press?

Jim: "It's a bit of that but hardly any people ask you about the music as such, just the concept. And because we don't plan that much we really don't have the answers laid out."

At this point keyboards player Michael MacNeill arrives and Kerr quips:

"Here's a silent member, get a quote from him, I don't think there's been a quote from him in history."

Amidst the laughter we're told our time is up but the three interviewees make assurances that there would be plenty of time after the second night's stint.

Tuesday night and it's a different vibe, man. The Simple Minds' fans are here determined to find out why this band is in ascendance, why they can touch dormant passions and sensibilities. It's all in their empathy, their mutual respect and understanding of each other. It's the same set as the previous night: 'Miracle', the opener 'As Love Brings the Fall', 'The American', 'Glittering Prize', 'Hunter and the Hunted' and 'Someone Somewhere In Summertime' shine out. Two encores, 'Love Song' and 'Room' from *Empires and Dance*. No complaints.

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Champagne, Australian, and beers at the reception in Mascot Studios. Michael MacNeill and I escape to the kitchen where there's some semblance of tape-able tranquillity. He's the quiet man, modest to a fault yet it's he along with Burchill who's responsible for those aching Simple Minds' arrangements and melodies. Background:

"I started on keyboards when I was about ten and learned the basics. I first started off on piano accordion playing Scottish Country Dance music. I played that until I was seventeen then I bought a synthesiser. That's why my left hand on the piano is really naff because of the accordion you have buttons and they're no problem."

"Before I joined the band they were Johnny and the Self-Abusers and I saw them at a pub one night at the height of punk and I was quite impressed with the way they were moving about on the tables and things. I joined them shortly after that when they changed the name."

Do you work on your own technique much?

"No, I don't sit down to try and become original. I just sit down with Charlie and Derek and enjoy myself. I never worry about technique or style. We've grown up a lot as far as song-writing goes and we've sussed how to arrange things and how to maintain interest. In the past we used to hide behind sound as we were a little embarrassed by some of the melodies but we've grown out of that."

Who's responsible for the melodies?

"We all sit down with a tape machine and we try to get a concentrated period where we can play and enjoy ourselves and then we listen to it back and pick out bits and maybe get the roots to one song out of three hours."

It would be fair to say that if the main melody is carried by the keyboards then you'd be responsible for it? I'm thinking of 'The Big Sleep'.

"Yeah, that one in particular just started off with a keyboard and then we got a bass line for it. But it varies. Sometimes it depends on what the guitar's doing as to what I'm gonna play. If I come up with a melody that doesn't fit in with the guitar then I'd leave it as the guitar line might be better."

Original drummer Brian McGee left after *Sons and Fascination*. What happened?

"It was a slow build up as we could see that he wasn't into the whole touring thing plus he wanted to get married to this girl that he'd been going out with for a long time. It was his own decision to leave but we tried to advise him against it. I don't think it would be possible for us to get another permanent member as the five of us were so close and so we regard ourselves as a four piece now. In the last year or so we've had three different drummers and we'll keep changing depending on how our musical direction is going. Mike is a really good drummer — he's jazz-rock influenced and in a way it clashes with what we do so it's strange having to adapt."

Brian was a more straightforward drummer? "Yeah he was actually like a drum machine because he could really keep a steady tempo going and the repetition could hypnotise you."

Simple Minds have gained the reputation of going into the studio with very little rehearsed. Did that apply to the new album?

"No, we had a bit more rehearsed because we wanted songs completed before we moved on to the next idea but we still wanted enough room for experimenting. It's been our most controlled recording."

Real to Real was an example of us having practically nothing. We didn't know at the time the sort of risk we were taking or the expense if we didn't come up with the ideas. We just switched on the tape machine and saw what we were made of."

Finally, what's your favourite Simple Minds' song? "The Hunter and the Hunted" because it's so varied. It's a good example of everyone playing different things but everything seems to gell. I think it's the most advanced we've become musically."

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Again, a natural character, Burchill is full of life and ideas, and would have to rank as the friendliest and most approachable rock'n'roll personality that's blessed this country in a long while. He and Kerr have known each other for fourteen years and they still live in the same street with their parents when they're not touring.

What made you take up guitar? "I had a brother who started learning guitar and he encouraged me. We both used to listen to the same music — Doors, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young and we'd sit around with acoustic guitars. Even after a year and a half I believed I could play it better than a lot of people around at the time, not in a big-headed technical sense but just in an understanding of the instrument. Instruments are just there to articulate emotions. I know it sounds abstract but that's how I feel."

What is special about Simple Minds' music to you?
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