

The Divinyl Miss C.

Isn't it funny how misleading appearances can be?

Before I called Divinyls singer Christina Amphlett in Sydney I wondered just what I'd be getting. What sort of an interview would the gym-slipped, sleazed-up, pouting Lolita in the photos do?

"Hi, I'm Chrissie," she said pleasantly. Chrissie Amphlett proved to be a pleasant, articulate young woman. Nothing's what it seems in rock'n'roll...

Things kick off with the band's stage act, which has a pretty good reputation. What can Kiwis expect? No details, but it will be "exciting" she hopes.

"We've always worked towards that. When the band first began three years ago, I used to find it difficult to perform and because I was singing a lot of my own lyrics I used to feel a bit embarrassed about it. So gradually I worked on and developed my performance to what it is now."

"I've tried to externalise a lot more."

The Divinyls' debut album, *Desperate*, was recorded at New York's Power Station late last year with Australian Rock king Mark Opitz.

"We tried to capture as much of a live sound as possible — not going into the studio and all of a sudden doing a whole different number."

The album only took four weeks. Was it intentional for it to be done so quickly?

"Yes. It's very much the nature of this band. We knew what we were doing, we had the songs prepared and we just went in and put them down. There was still room for spontaneity, but there was a lot prepared."

But why New York?



"We needed that change. We needed to get out of Australia to go someplace else and record. You can spend so much time in a place and you need to get out. You get in a rut."

It's been said the Divinyls stand for old fashioned rock'n'roll. True? "I suppose a lot of our ethics are true to that but we're trying to break new ground. The music is the thing that counts and the audience."

"What you see is what you get," she sums up.

The Divinyls play the Gluepot on March 24 and 25. They're nothing earth-shaking, but smart money might be on the Divinyls. The album, is just far enough to the left of the Pat Benatar crowd to retain the vestiges of credibility and the out-of-character single 'Science Fiction' is a genuinely pleasant little tune that would sound good on radio.

The image is marketable, the music reasonable — it could be the Divinyls' year. Russell Brown

It's 6 pm and No Tag are out on the stairs arguing. They've been at it for a quarter of an hour. A drawing of straws decided who was to do the interview and now, apparently, a verbal manifesto is being hammered out.

It's understandable that No Tag should worry about what they say being misinterpreted; it's happened to them since they formed in late 1981. One critic condemned them as a Nazi band, a disastrous Sunday paper interview was full of violence and stupidity. You've got to be careful about what you say and do when you're No Tag.

"There'll be a punch-up soon," grins Propeller Records boss Simon Grigg, as voices are raised outside.

There is no punch-up. Bass player Mark Sullivan and drummer Carl van Wetering sit down and do the interview. Singer-guitarist Paul van Wetering listens quietly in the corner and the other guitarist, Andrew Boak, has gone to the pub.

The band is about to set off on its first national tour, to promote the new live album *Can We Get Away With It?* They are looking forward to it.

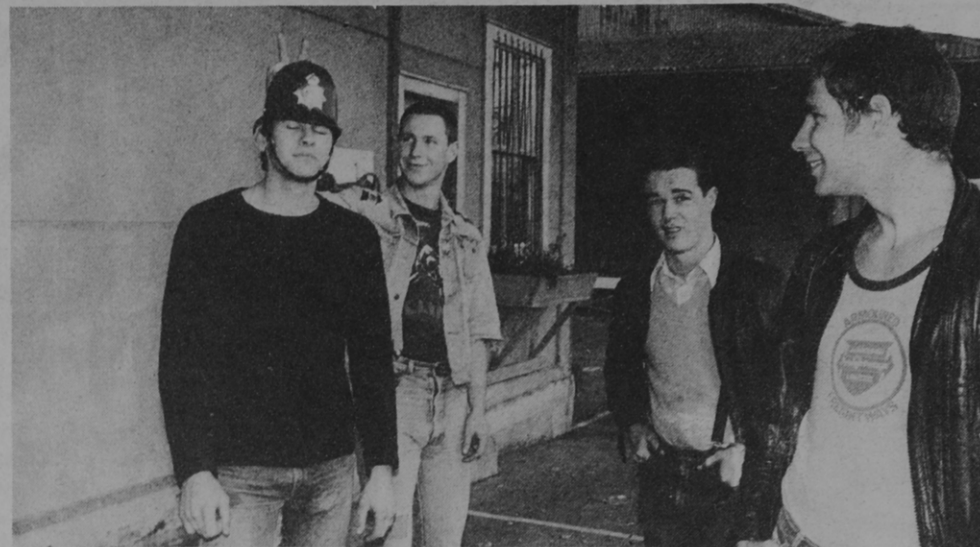
"It'll give us a good chance to pick up reaction to our music," Carl explains.

Punk bands have been almost banned from playing after trouble at gigs in places like Christchurch, but the two don't see any problems on the tour.

Mark: "When most people hear the name No Tag they associate it with violence and people beating each other up and smashing bottles — it doesn't happen at all. We have less violence at our gigs than everyone else does. It's mainly because everyone knows that if they cause trouble, first of all they're going to be out and secondly the place is closed down and we won't be allowed back there again."

"So everyone knows that if you

No Tag (L-R): Mark (bass), Carl (drums), Andrew (guitar), Paul (guitar/vocals).



THE ART of getting away with it

turn up, be on your best behaviour. The most trouble we've had with playing live is actually getting gigs. There's only a few places we can play because of these certain people who run the music scene in New Zealand."

For all their being misunderstood, the band must share some of the blame after calling their first EP *OiOiOi* — linking them with something which definitely had nasty overtones. Mark regrets the title.

"But then again, people pick up the gutter rags and all they ever talk about in the music scene is the bad points. Oi itself was alright. It was just that a few of the National Front people came along. A couple of bands were racist bands and they got all the publicity. But there were a lot of bands against it."

Carl agrees: "It's mainly because the press likes to print the scandal, not the everyday facts because everybody knows the facts. You get a rather unbalanced view of things from the way the press prints things right throughout the world. Most of the press, especially in New Zealand, is owned by a few big boards."

"Our music was Oi music, but critics like Frank Stark called us a Nazi band. He'd read about these riots in the UK with the 4-Skins playing in a pub and the National Front turning up. He obviously thought, well this is an Oi band, they're going to start causing trouble, they must wear swastikas, they must be Nazis. He's never seen us play."

But the EP cover featured the burly arm (Carl's) with muscles flexed and studded wristlets. A perpetuation of the sexist nature of the new punk?

"It was different. A cover has to be different to sell records. It can be really good material inside, but unless you've got a cover that stands out it won't sell."

The new album cover couldn't be moaned about. It's a great live

album cover, spirited and rough-drawn. It also features the lyrics of a song called 'The Thrash' — a condemnation of South Africa.

It was recorded over two nights at the Reverb Room in October. The main reason for recording it live was one of cost, but also to capture more "raw power", Carl says.

"Obviously it's not as well produced as the first EP because you're limited to eight tracks and half of that stuff is background noise, which you can't mix out. But for what it'll be retailing at, it's good value for money," Mark says.

Both profess to be quite pleased with the album.

"It grows on you with listening," Carl adds.

Is most of the album political

along the lines of Thrash?

Mark: "Not overly. Every band's got some kind of politics — we're anti-racism and anti police oppression. You've only got to go to the pubs to find out what the police are really like."

"Of course there's a few joke songs on it as well."

Carl: "It's basically about everyday experiences and our feelings and ideas on things."

After the tour is completed, the band will settle down to writing more songs, something that has been coming easily lately.

"We've been writing quite a bit of material over the past few weeks and it's been coming out pretty good. So we'd like to continue there while the ideas are still fresh," Carl says.

"There's been quite a marked change in the material actually. It's not a sellout or anything, it's just more diverse ideas coming in. We're still writing fast songs but we're also writing slow songs and medium-paced songs."

"We want to get away from the three-chord thrash a lot of punk bands play and introduce some musicianship," Mark explains.

"From what I've heard from overseas it's not three chord thrash

now, it's four chord thrash," Carl grins.

So the band doesn't identify with new punks like Chron Gen and Infa-Riot?

"Some of their songs I like," Mark says. "But I also like a lot of reggae, a lot of ska and a lot of this new romantic stuff that's out now. I wouldn't say I'm a punk rocker, I'm a new romantic, I'm a rasta or anything, but I like a lot of kinds of music and I try and put different sorts of music into one song."

Interesting. Almost a return to the original cosmopolitan punk ideals. And hopefully an escape from the ludicrously stylised, narrow new punk "movement". It's no coincidence that shaggy HM freaks can be seen in *OiOiOi* T-shirts these days.

Also planned for No Tag's future are another studio EP and, eventually, a foray overseas — probably Europe.

But studios cost goodly sums and international airline ticket prices are ludicrous, so nothing is certain yet.

If the album succeeds then it will be another triumph for the low-budget, high-integrity side of this country's recording industry. And for a change, it won't be on Flying Nun. This could be the record that makes the money Propeller deserves.

One more thing. All four band members have, like most of us, had good, comfortable, New Zealand, middle-class upbringings. Do they see any conflict between that and their adoption of what is basically a working-class stance?

Carl: "Only if you call working class talking about what you believe in and what happens."

Mark: "A lot of people don't read the newspapers so if you can make them aware of what's going on around them through music or anything else, obviously you're on to a winner. As far as being middle-class that's just another label, isn't it?"

Russell Brown

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