

# DANCE EXPONENTS Young Men Go West

There's not much room left in the little lounge of the Dance Exponents' motel — the band, Donna who does the lights, a couple of Dabs, some girls. No one's over 23. Cans of Australian beer, an old movie on the telly. Beats working ...

Singer Jordan Luck lights up a cigarette and gets told off. He shouldn't smoke, it's bad for his voice. The rest of the band have been teasing him, telling him he's getting like Rod Stewart.

Luck, guitarist Brian Jones and drummer Michael Haralambi retire to the bedroom to do the interview. Outside, the fun continues.

The band is planning the national tour to promote the new single 'All I Can Do'. They're not expecting to make a lot of money, but what they do get will be useful to help them in Australia. They plan to head across the Tasman at the end of May. They'll have the support of Mushroom Records over there but little else is planned. They're confident about the venture. They're planning on being there for a year or so, before, hopefully, moving on to bigger and better things.

"If we do well, I think it will be a rapid rise, like it always has been for us. But if we don't do well it'll be a hard slog, which we're not really accustomed to. If we've got to slog for years I think we'd just try and go somewhere else," Jones says.

"I think with some bands there must be something missing in the suss department," Luck adds. "They must realise when they're barking up the wrong tree. For some reason they just keep on slogging. I mean, why they don't move or split up is beyond me."

"Still," Jones muses. "It's better than working."

Luck says he's keen to go because he feels Australia is central to international music at the moment, there is a lot of attention paid to it. He feels New Zealand bands are quite capable of becoming part of a new "second division" coming through, bands like Hunters



Dance Exponents: Michael Haralambi, David Gent, Brian Jones, Jordan Luck.

and Collectors and the Church.

"New Zealand is a good place, but it's slack. And I think the only way you can get on in New Zealand is to be slack. I think that's why we've achieved so much — because we're slack." General laughter.

"It's true — you work really hard in this country and you'll work hard for about three months, but then all the hard work will come to nothing."

Jones agrees: "Bands like the Narcs worked their arses off and just got themselves further into debt."

"We've done about everything we can do. If we do another tour we're just going to fizzle. You can't just keep touring — I think DD Smash have proved that. Their last tour wasn't as successful as their first few."

No one seems to be worrying about the venture.

"If it bums out, it bums out," Haralambi shrugs.

"We've had a holiday," says Jones.

They don't consider themselves up to international standard either live or in the studio

at the moment, but they have faith in Luck's songs.

"If you write a good song it'll sell because people want to hear songs," Luck explains.

He's happy with his writing at the moment. The band's relatively light workload has given him a chance to come out of the dry spell he encountered last year.

Are his new songs different from the old?

"Yeah, they're changing all the time. It's not so much that the songs are different because I'm not a very good guitarist, but the guys are all fresh, they go in and they've got heaps of ideas when I play them to them."

Unlike the band's previous two singles, the latest one was done in the small, eight-track Azimuth studios. It was produced by the band and soundman/manager-by-default Ben Free. They're happy with it.

"Neither of the other singles really sounded like us, but this one does," Haralambi says.

"It's probably more the feel, but the sound is good too," Jones explains. "It's very crisp."

"The other two were sort of flat sounding. Everything was there, but it wasn't. There was

no character."

So why did the small studio stuff turn out better than the 24-track recordings?

"I think a lot of it is just experience," Luck says.

"All I Can Do" took three days on eight-track, but the others were just one take stuff," Haralambi explains. "When they mixed down 'Victoria' we went to the pub and saw the Meemees!"

They're not in any position to confirm the theory that the 'Airway Spies' single was deliberately mixed for radio either. It certainly sounds much better on radio than on my home stereo.

"We've noticed it," Jones says. "It was intentionally done I suppose — not by us."

Despite being pleased with the new single, they have no thoughts of releasing it overseas — eight-track recording won't do for the world market.

The recording was paid for by Mushroom Records after plans to record an album fell through when the producer wasn't available. The new plan is to do a single as soon as they reach Australia and later, an album.

The album will be composed of the best of their live material. They'd like to re-record 'Victoria' and 'Poland'.

They don't know who'll be producing it yet, but, Jones says, they're confident of "getting someone reasonably good".

The band's confidence at the outset of such a major venture is only natural. Since they began, penniless in Christchurch, they simply haven't had the usual knockbacks that make bands cynical. But by the same token that same confidence has been responsible in no small part for their rapid rise.

Sure, almost every New Zealand band that has crossed the Tasman has died in Australia's cultural quicksand but this one may be a little different. They're not rock stars (the kind who are rock stars because they don't know how to be anything else), they're not going to get trapped in the booze/drugs spiral — they don't do any drugs.

They're at once woefully naive and charmingly fresh. They're in it for the fun, not the money.

"But I think long-term we could earn heaps — I hope we do. I think I'll be a millionaire by the time I'm ... 23. I think things happen fast," Jordan pronounces.

Everybody laughs. But he's not really joking. Russell Brown

As of about three weeks ago, the Miltown Stowaways' EP *Hired Togs* had sold exactly 194 copies. This provokes ironic laughter from Fiona Anderson, Ben Staples, Syd Paisley and Mark Dansey. They'd originally been told it was 300. High finance this is not, but if that was the sole object of the exercise, the Stowaways would probably not exist. It's early days yet, anyway.

The Miltown Stowaways came together about six months ago, comprising remnants of the Newmatics, the Blue Asthmatics and the Pleasure Boys.

The members are at a loss to explain what common interests they had, apart from a desire to make music and picking influences, is just as hard. Fiona professes to a liking for Glen Miller, Ben for Ornette Coleman. Nobody wants to be pinned down and perhaps it's just as well.

The sound on *Hired Togs* is a sort of loose-limbed jazz-funk, but that's also rather glib and simplistic. Some of the ideas come close to James Blood Ulmer's theories of

## STOW AWAY ZONE



harmolodics, especially in the rhythm guitar's chord structures. But the sound is very tuneful and catchy and most certainly danceable. The curiosity is 'Reptiles', a slow and intense piece; a sharp contrast with the other three tracks. It's a band favourite because of its open-endedness, featuring a lot of free soloing from the horns and woodwinds.

The EP was due for release last year, but was delayed when the tapes got mixed up in Australia. When it was pressed, one side contained the Stowaways, while the other contained half of a Propeller compilation EP. Bearing all this in mind, how does the band see *Hired Togs* now?

"We'd been together for four weeks, we had four songs and we recorded them," says Fiona. "It was a shame that it didn't come

out way back then, rather than now, when what we're doing is a lot different."

"We've nearly finished recording for our album," says bassist Mark, "and the sound is just so different, compared to that EP."

Fiona agrees: "The band itself is tighter and yet more diverse. That sounds strange, I know, but ..."

"It's like improvising within the three minute pop thing," says Ben. "Basically, probably we're a pop band, but we're now giving ourselves more room to stretch out."

Experimentation is an essential part of the Stowaways' sound. They're surprising themselves with the ideas that are emerging. All will be revealed soon, with a new single due next month and an album, entitled *Tension Melee*, sometime in July.

The Stowaways are part of a loose association of musicians producing some stimulating and progressive music. The common link is the Auckland City Council's PEP scheme music workshops. The central figure is guitarist/musical director Ivan Zagni. Miltown Stowaways' guitarist Syd and saxist Kelly Rogers play in Big Sideways, the jazz-influenced 12-piece which emerged from the first scheme. Ben plays with Avant Garage, the new PEP group that includes ex Blam Tim Mahon, ex Blind Date Mike Caen and several members of the Auckland Regional Orchestra.

"Ivan is such an amazing person to work with, because he's so creative and so enthusiastic," says Ben. "He has a remarkable effect on the people he plays with."

"Those of us who weren't on the PEP scheme have got a lot of benefit from those who were on it," says Fiona.

"It's been a period of maturing and education," says Syd. "Speaking personally, it was just what I needed."

Breaking down barriers is a major task facing the Stowaways, something they face with determination. This great little country of ours (said with a Taihape accent) simply reeks of prejudice

of all kinds, something of which the Stowaways are all too poignantly aware. Let's list a few by example:

Women in music:

Fiona: "At Sweetwaters, I wore my artist's pass outside my jumper, because I was sick of people asking me which band my boyfriend was in. You get a band like Freudian Slips who, because they are feminist women, are immediately thought of as separatists rather than feminists, therefore they get put down to a certain extent. I don't think people take women musicians seriously in this country and there are some really tremendous women musicians."

Former bands:

Ben: "A lot of people were really pissed off when the Newmatics broke up and we've had a lot of bad reaction from that."

Syd: "The Newmatics were a band that were really close and any member that drops out is irreplaceable. So when several members decide to go, you're really got to call it a day, because it's no use recycling."

Regional barriers:

Syd: "Ben and I run the Indies mail order service and we've been trying to arrange South Island distribution for the Big Sideways album. We've written to people

but we've just had no response. I sense a certain hostility down there."

Ben: "What we're trying to do is put together all this great New Zealand music from the South Island and the North Island and then market it overseas. It should be going overseas because it's good. But first we've got to get everybody here to agree on the package."

Fiona: "I think it would really improve relations if we had a bridge across Cook Strait. Or maybe a causeway."

Mark: "Yeah, put some wood down and some concrete at each end and drain Cook Strait (laughter)."

RIU: Turn it into a pedestrian mall and give people somewhere else to busk.

Fiona: "Like us in Whakatane. We weren't allowed any posters, we were told to take them down within half an hour or we'd be fined \$400. We weren't allowed to busk, and the ... sheriff, wasn't he?"

Ben: "No, the marshall."

Syd: "Yeah, regulation 59, and he was going to run us out of town."

Mark: "Like smalltown America." Duncan Campbell

COMING SOON



SOON MARIANNE FAITHFULL 'A CHILD'S ADVENTURE' COMING SOON



COMING SOON



SPANDAU BALLET 'TRUE' COMING SOON

ALL ON RECORDS & TAPES



JOAN ARMATRADING 'THE KEY' COMING SOON