

Terry Williams sits down, seemingly the only one at ease in the Sheraton's squeakily self-conscious "intimate" bar.

He joined Dire Straits about five months ago, replacing original drummer Pick Withers. He is a tradesman player, has been drumming for the last 20 years.

Williams came to the band fresh from sessions with Tom Petty and Phil Everly. He toured with Meatloaf for a year before that.

"That was a strange year. But the band he had was great, fabulous."

Would that writing had that extra dimension to convey Williams' native Welsh accent. At times it fades, buried under years of trans-Atlanticism, only to tumble back on the emphasis of a point.

Of course this Welshman's best known, previous work was with Rockpile. Was there a Rockpile influence on the *Twisting By The Pool* EP, the first recording he has done with the band?

"That's where I started playing, that sort of thing. I started playing Chuck Berry things and that kind of drumming is just natural to me."

"I've got a different style from Pick — more forceful. I mean, I can play quietly as well, but Pick was more technical."

"But *Twisting* was really just a bit of fun and to get to know me. It seemed the right thing to do to put out a rock'n'roll EP after *Love Over Gold*. The band used to do the songs as an encore a few years ago. They just wanted to do them again."

Williams was involved with Stiff Records during the heyday of punk.

"We used to go round the 100 club, the Marquee, places like that and look at all the new bands that were coming through. We'd hear a few songs, think 'No' and on to the next club."

Among the bands he and his partners passed up on were Siouxsie and the Banshees and 999. He's a little hazy on the chronology of it all but he thinks they saw the Sex Pistols when they were still contractless.

"But most of those early punk bands were awful live."

Did he identify with punk?

"I could identify with the energy that was going around at the time. There was a sense of something happening."

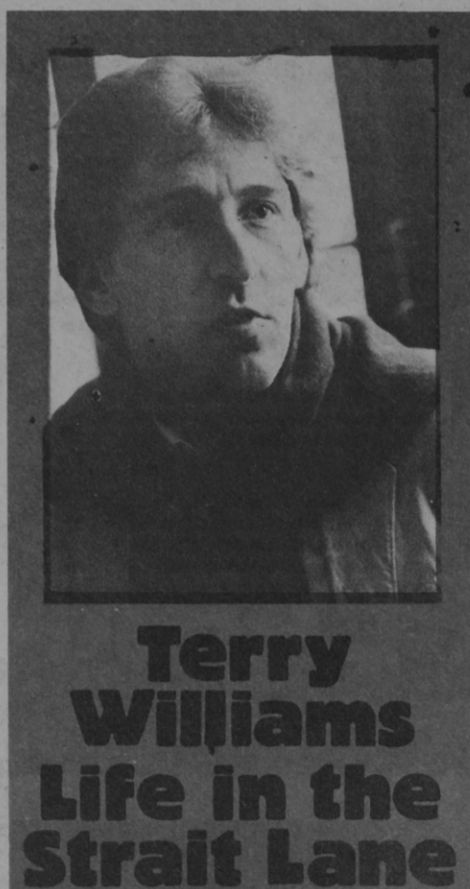
"I wouldn't say most of the music was brilliant, I think most of it was rubbish. But the atmosphere, the kind of rejuvenation lifted everyone."

Even Dire Straits were tagged "new wave" when they emerged in 1977-78. Did that help the band?

"Well obviously I don't think Dire Straits were ever a new wave band, but it was the same with Rockpile, we were called new wave. The music scene had been a bit stale for a while and all of a sudden there just seemed to be a glut of bands and any band that came out then was labelled new wave."

Williams still has ties with the old Rockpile days. He is "looked after" by the flamboyant Jake Riviera, Elvis Costello's infamous mentor.

"Jake is just my advisor, he makes sure I don't make any mistakes. Like, I was offered some session work with a heavy metal type band, I can't remember the name, and I asked him about it. He advised against it, he said it was dodgy, drugs and so on, it might not be



good for my credibility. Also, the record might do badly. So I didn't do it. I understand the record bombed.

"But with Elvis, Jake had to take a stronger guiding role because Elvis just knew nothing. I mean, he'd done the odd pub performance before but that band (the Attractions) was his first."

And the big Rockpile question. Did the band break up on unfriendly terms?

"Ah, no. But Nick did think Dave's reason for leaving was silly."

He doesn't elaborate. He's been asked that question too many times.

He came into Dire Straits from being a session player, as did the other non-original members. Does he worry about one of the usual criticisms of the band, that it is just Mark Knopfler and backing band?

"I don't see any problem in it. Because Mark'll say what he can hear and he'll let you do it in your way."

The problem of being overshadowed by Knopfler's creativity is less acute for Williams as he is the only band member who doesn't at least dabble with songwriting.

"It doesn't bother me. I enjoy playing, trying to interpret what a man can hear, especially someone like Mark. If Mark can hear something in his head and say to me 'can you play it?' and I can, well I enjoy that."

So — aside from Knopfler's writing talents, what is the secret behind the band's popularity?

"Well, it's a strange thing — someone said to me yesterday the band's success is strange because everybody who likes the band thinks that they're the only one who knows about it."

Not in this country mate. The worst a Dire Straits' album has done is mere single platinum

status and 60,000 New Zealanders won't exactly be keeping mum about it all at Western Springs. And the music does seem to appeal to many age groups ...

"Yeah. I think that's because it spans a wide area of music — there's something there for people who are into lyrics or into guitars or into arrangements. Younger listeners will get off maybe on the simpler things."

"Say you take a 16 year-old who's into ... who's a band with a young following?" He can't think of one. "Well, say, a heavy metal band. It's fine now, but they grow out of it."

"People in their late twenties will want to change their musical tastes to something more sophisticated, whereas with Dire Straits, hopefully 16 year-olds should still like them into their thirties and hopefully into their eighties. And we should all be dead by then."

So much for the distant future. What more short-term plans?

"Well we'll be recording some dates on our European tour this year with a view to a live album. We'll see how they turn out. And then probably January or February, if Mark's got material, we'll go in and do a new album."

Knopfler and keyboardist Alan Clarke have been asked to work on the new Dylan album in April and Knopfler has just finished work on the soundtrack for a British film, *Local Hero*. Williams himself will probably be doing some session work after Europe.

Finally, Dire Straits has always been notorious as a rather faceless band. Does that suit him?

"Yeah, it suits me fine. I've always been in faceless bands — apart from Rockpile with Dave and Nick up front."

"I have been recognised in the street," he grins. "But I don't have to wear sunglasses when I go out."

There is a lot of money being spent in Auckland this weekend — 150,000 at the air pageant, 20,000 at the Interdominions, Joni Mitchell — and 60,000 at Western Springs for Dire Straits.

It's hard to avoid getting caught up in the excitement of it all as this relatively gigantic slice of middle New Zealand files towards the stadium. It's a predominantly young, crowd — few seem to be armed with alcohol.

The throng has already choked the path to the gates and a couple of official vehicles have

been stopped dead. Car headlights stretch up the motorway like some giant, gleaming cast-off diamond necklace. They crawl along.

The backstage compound is all but deserted and its emptiness in the midst of the humanity has a touch of the absurd.

The Legionnaires finish their set to enthusiastic applause from the early arrivers. Australia's Divinyls get a distinctly more chilly reception. What passes for entertainment across the Tasman won't always wash here ...

In the marquee, the band are eating and drinking. Knopfler looks like he's at the Last Supper. A sort of intercontinental Hammond Gamble, he looks drawn and worried. He doesn't spend long in the tent and returns to his caravan after he's eaten.

The band has been at the stadium since 2 pm. There were problems with the sound check and by the time it was finished there was no guaranteeing the band would be able to get back from the hotel through the concert traffic.

As it is they're going to have to leap into cars as soon as they come off stage. That's not something Williams likes to do.

"I prefer to be able to sit around for a while afterwards, discuss the gig, but we can't," he shrugs.

The Divinyls finish loudly, some of them come into the tent, scowling. Chrissie Amphlett gets a plate of rice salad and eats it with her fingers.

"Everyone says we're much better live," Terry Williams had said earlier.

It's true.

Dire Straits records don't usually command my listening but this performance was enough to catch me up. Not set alight, but still not bored.

It's not a spectacular show, there are no laser beams or mock explosions. There is nothing visually startling — they've come to play music.

For all the fine playing of the backup musicians the show hinges almost totally on Knopfler. He gives it its light and shade, its personality. If he flags, the show flags. And he does flag at times, during the two hours he is on stage.

But just as Mark Knopfler is an honest man, so was the show honest.

Russell Brown

## ROBERT EYRES WATCHES TELLY

very silly mid-on

New Zealand is not an easy place for stand-up comics to find work but until recently it always seemed there would be openings for them in TVNZ Sports. It was sad, however, to see this summer's cricket coverage using instead the likes of John Morrison and Warren Stott, who bored us all to sleep by talking intelligently and articulately about the game as if that were the object of the exercise. In fact the whole lineup of cricket

commentators is very low on entertainment value indeed.

Alan Richards, despite his years of experience, is still more into pathos than true humour. Peter Williams' hapless innocent routine (note Harry Langton, Jerry Lewis influence) is coming along but only the low level gay undertone raises Billy Ibadulla's sub-Peter Sellers routine above the pedestrian. And that's your lot. The Ockers did much better by using the World Series as a vehicle for the All Time Rambling Bore of the Universe play-off between Bill Lawry and Fred Trueman.

Thank God rugby's back soon, and the return of the incomparable Keith Quinn. Quinn outshines even John Clarke / Fred Dagg and the slick Norman Jones-Ben Couch team as the great kiwi comedy act,

marred only by occasional lapses into pure slapstick. Graham Thorne is improving fast too but the Les Dawson influence is still a bit obvious and he does go a bit over the top on the drunken, slobbering number. However, the Harpo Marx hairdo suggests a whole new direction. Underrated is boxing man Bob Jones, who takes a lot of good old Kenneth Williams, routines downmarket but is probably a little subtle for mass appeal.

Let us hope TVNZ is not, as the cricket coverage suggests, planning to cast off all these top New Zealand entertainers. After all, we still have a long way to go to equal the truly world class Ocker league commentators. Bring on the winter sport. Bring on the clowns! Robert Eyres

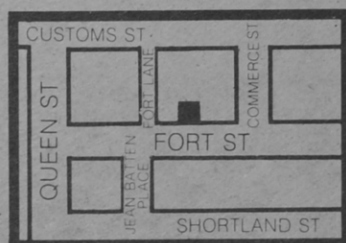
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