

AGAINST THE WIND

Wellington's music scene has long seemed the poor relation to those from other cities — and indeed, to Wellingtonians themselves. The Capital never seemed to be able to hold onto a decent venue, nobody else liked its bands. Every gig seemed to end up in a confrontation with the police. It didn't even have a presentable venue for international bands.

The old Wellington clichés, of course, but there's still some truth in them. But good things have happened, and are continuing to happen, in the Capital. The city seems to be entering a period of strength and the development of that strength rests on two men: Jim Moss of Jayrem Records and Graham Josephs of Cosmic Rock Consultants.

Moss's record label has been available to virtually anyone who wants to use it thus far. It has yet to produce a record of real class, but it can only be a matter of time. The development of the music scene will depend on who he chooses to encourage.

Josephs has brought some semblance of order to the city's venue situation. He has tied together several pubs, in both the city and suburbs, and the new Sheaf nightclub. The first benefit will be that Josephs has made it possible, and, indeed, profitable, for outside bands to play in the city. Local bands will benefit, but exactly how much remains to be seen. And the city's faithful 'zine *In Touch*, has split into two apparently healthy parts — The

PHOTO BY BRYAN STAFF



Spines' John McLeary, Wendy Calder, Ross Burge.

Other Magazine, a thin fortnightly freebie and *IT Magazine*, a more substantial quarterly.

But the city hasn't been a complete musical void (no pun intended) up until now anyway. Some of the best records of the past year — by the Spines, Naked Spots Dance, the Hulamen, the Mockers — have come out of it. Maybe we'll see even more in the next 12 months.

Russell Brown

COMING TO THE PUNCH

When the Spines' John McLeary first wrote the band's latest single, 'Punch', the other members refused to play it. Eventually, after a change of personnel, it was played and then wormed its way on to the A-side of the single by default. Now people are calling it the best New Zealand single so far this year.

When McLeary wrote the song he couldn't play it himself — there were too many rhythm changes. It took some time to master that but he was pleased with the result.

"I think it's the best thing we've ever written. It's good because it's not compromised at all but it's slick at the same time. It sounds like you could hear it on the radio and people wouldn't go 'Arrrrgh!'.

"It cuts a fine line because if you listen to it the lyrics are really heavy and the story is harsh. But it's no harsher than a kid's Punch and Judy show."

The Spines began about two years ago with McLeary, Rob Mahon and Caroline Easter. That lineup recorded the band's first single, 'Fishing'. Then Easter left to be replaced by Tim Robinson (now with the Neighbours). Mahon departed to be replaced by Wendy Calder on bass. When Robinson left Ross Burge came in on drums to complete the existing lineup.

All this seems to give credence to the idea that the Spines are John McLeary.

"Yes and no. We play all my songs and I suppose I'm sort of the boss. But musically it's always been very democratic. We'll always write the songs together, I'll just write the shell of a song."

All of those to play with McLeary have been accomplished musicians, a fact he puts down to being Wellington-based.

"There's a lot of that sort of

musician here — young ones, not just the old restaurant types.

"When I got the Spines together I had no real credibility as a musician at all. I couldn't have gotten musicians that good in a place like Auckland. In some ways I still have no credibility — I can't read or write music, I don't know my scales or any of that sort of stuff. I'm just a songwriter and I can get songs across."

Being Wellington-based must have helped from the point of view of being allowed to develop without hype or pressure?

"Yeah. If we'd been picked up at the start we'd have been horrible. But as it is we haven't been picked up at all, so I don't know which is better. But now we're at a stage where we can cope with it musically."

"Comparing Wellington audiences to those around the country, they're quite hard to play to. So we became quite good at coping with audiences. Not by saying things to them or anything, but just being able to put the music out."

"The band as it is, is basically a dance band. We're playing dance music, but it works on both levels, people can just sit and listen."

McLeary feels quirky dance rhythms are becoming an increasing part of his writing.

These days we're moving away from the standard 4/4 type rock thing. We're getting strange time signatures — not flexible time signatures, but five beats to the bar instead of four, that sort of thing. And trying to make those things accessible."

Accessibility's important?

"Yeah, it's important that people don't say 'I don't like the sound of that' and bugger off. That people can get past the overall sound and listen to what's going on. I don't want to be too insipid either — there'd be no excitement in it for anyone."

Some people would say deliberate inaccessibility was a trait of Wellington bands.

"A lot of that probably stems from the fact that there are a few bands around Wellington who aren't very good. But a lot of the more avant-garde bands are quite good and they just play what they want — which is the thing for Wellington, I think."

Are his lyrics an important part of the songs?

"In a way, less and less. Before the Spines I was in Negative Theatre, which was drama and music, the lyrics were all story type things. The original Spines were the same sort of thing just taken a step further. But these days the lyrics tend to be more nebulous in meaning. They don't have a fixed meaning, they're quite flexible. But they're still quite important — the actual sound of them, rather than the meaning. Words aren't very good for expressing feelings unless you're actually singing or pronouncing in a certain way, accentuating certain things."

The band members each have other interests, McLeary paints, Calder is studying music at university and Burge is a respected session player. With two singles out and critics saying good things can he see the point where a decision will have to be made between outside interests and putting everything into the band?

"Yeah, it's coming to that very soon. What we're trying to do at the moment is just clear up our debts, which we're doing through working day jobs. We can't do that through the band because we can't afford to play too much as no one would come. Over the last couple of years we've probably played more than any band in Wellington."

"Ross and I are keen to get back on the road."

McLeary can't see the band being able to stay in Wellington past the end of this year, but he's dubious about how long the rest of the country would hold any allure.

"What can you do? Go to Auckland and play there for a few months? What we want to do is go to Japan, that's our big idea."

The Japanese idea is still in its infancy, but at least it's different. Enquiries about record distribution have already been made.

On the domestic front some more substantial recording is planned — a mini-album or perhaps even an album. Of course there's the money to be found for that.

Several days after this interview the Spines played a weekend at Wellington's Cricketers Arms. Crowds weren't big.

It would be ironic if Wellington's very nature — which has moulded the Spines into something unique — was to be that which destroyed them.

Russell Brown

NEW BOOTS AND COMPROMISES

It's not the sort of thing covered by the Census but it's a safe bet that Wellington has more punks and skins per head of population than any other centre. Bands more or less fitting the category — Riot III, First XV, Unrestful Movements have come out of the city and it recently hosted the Golden Showers festival which featured bands from three cities.

"The support in Wellington is just growing every week," says Gerald Dwyer, co-organiser of Golden Showers. "There are underground bands starting all the time. Apart from bands like Flesh D-Vice (Dwyer's own band) and Aftershock, there are new bands like Destructive Adolescents and Suicide Pact. They're countless."

This isn't just 1977 punk trailing on, y'understand. This is the new punk.

"It's so big in Britain now. Much bigger than it was in 1977. It's just that it's not at the forefront of the media any more," Dwyer explains.

Along with Riot III's Void, Dwyer has been organising dances for local bands to play at for some months. Golden Showers was the biggest venture yet, with costs of about \$1500 to be recouped. It broke even. There was a little bit of trouble there, mainly discussions between Auckland and Wellington punks on who was tougher. But nothing like the violence that has been a problem for the city's punk scene for so long. The answer lies in part with the security. Void and Dwyer have hired the same security guards for every dance. The guards don't wear uniforms and they have gotten to know the punters.

"They don't take any shit and they don't usually get any either," Dwyer adds.

There has been little trouble at any of the gigs but it is still hard to find venues.

"And even when you do find a good venue there's always a handful of people who do fuck it up for the next time. One mindless idiot smashes a toilet or smashes someone over and everyone gets the blame."

"There's only a handful of louts here. They're not even into the music. They just come along to beat up some young punk and it's

Riot III's Void, Flesh D-Vice's Gerald Dwyer. Below: Body Electric's Alan Jimson.



MORE SONGS ABOUT CIRCUITS AND DIODES

Friday night. Cricketers. The Body Electric perform supported only by choice, imported rock video: Cabaret Voltaire, Clash, Zoom Lens, David Byrne. Watching the Body Electric is like watching video; ex-actor Garry Smith captivating as he plays out the songs with resonant voice and co-ordinated motion. Ex Steroids Alan Jimson and Andy Drey, the electric to Garry's body, work intensely at guitar or synthesiser providing a rough underside to the vocal gloss and synth-drum polish.

The Body Electric, as Alan says later in more convivial surroundings, "was a plan of Andy's and mine for ages. We wanted to do something different — starting with small synth machines and graduating as we needed to. Gaz came to practice one day and we caught him for his voice."

Synthesisers prove to be a passion for Garry and Alan, their interest lying in the vast possibilities such machines offer. Their mainstay, the versatile Prophet 5, which will have cost them "around twelve grand" when it's paid off, evincing their fanaticism and concern for quality. They had hoped recently to augment their equipment with Linn drums but the cost was prohibitive. And the

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