

The Body Electric have recently released their debut album, *Presentation and Reality*, a finely crafted labour of love. Alan Jimson, Garry Smith and Wendy Calder (who left the Spines to join the band in June) produced the album themselves and paid attention to every detail, down to the artwork.

"You look at the cover," Alan says, "and the first thing you see is that the monkey's real and the doll's not. But it's vice versa."

The back cover is a story in itself, one which Garry relates:

"The guy who took the photo was in the Sudan, or somewhere like that. He patched up one of the nomadic traders on the camel train in the picture with a couple of aspros. Indebted to him for life, the traders asked if there was anything he wanted. He said he wanted to travel to the next town on the camels. That picture was taken as they were bedding down for the night. In the foreground it's dusk, and in the background the sun's still shining, miles away, on those mountains of sand. It's a weird effect, a reality not just a montage."

And where did the presentation/reality idea come from?

Alan: "Presentation and Reality is a quote from Humphrey Bogart in *We're No Angels* a brilliant film about three guys on Devil's Island who escape from prison and end up hiding in a poor family's house. The family run a business, but the uncle intends to foreclose because it hadn't shown a profit. Bogart asked for the books so he could show the family had made a profit by sinking everything into the shop and stock. When the family said 'no, don't do that', Bogart replied 'there's two things in this life: presentation and reality'."

Your passion for movies carries over into your music, like 'Night Pictures' on the album.

"That title was a quote from the days when you had actors and actresses striving to become stars," says Alan. Now we have stars striving to become actors or actresses. Look at them on *Entertainment this Week*, they've been put where they are by the public and they're trying to live up to that. In the old days they had to struggle and work their way to the top."

Like musicians?

Wendy: "Even now we're still struggling ... and learning."

The songs on the album are a step away from politics, in contrast to, say, 'Who Takes The Rap' which was very political. A conscious move?

Garry: "The problem with political songs is you're saying nah nah nah point point point.

# FACING REALITY THE BODY ELECTRIC



Body Electric (L-R): Wendy Calder, Garry Smith, Alan Im Jimson.

I don't think we want to do that at the moment."

Alan: "A political statement is your statement. I think a musician's point of view should be that of a reporter on the scene. Even doing that people agree or disagree with you. Now we're implanting a vision in people's minds, a story through images."

Garry: "Just like that Grenada feature in *Time* magazine. No matter which way you try to report it a bias shines through. That's what we wanted to get away from, an obvious bias."

Alan: "Our songs have been misinterpreted. Someone heard 'Yid Wog War' and wrote these guys take themselves so seriously politically. That song was saying if there wasn't so much money involved in the Middle East it would just

be another war. But because cameras are blowing it up out of all proportion and newsmen are making a living from it, the whole thing, the 'yid wog war' as Anthony Burgess called it, suffers from sensationalism. In our song we were saying it doesn't matter to me; it means nothing to us. There's something like 52 wars in the world. If you're going to do something on the political situation where do you start? There's a war for each week of the year!"

"When we started playing as Body Electric someone came up to me in the 1860 and said, 'I really enjoyed the guys. I don't feel like going to work tomorrow'. We'd created an escape for people. In these hard times of gloom, depression and no money, people don't want to hear about

themselves. Body Electric is an escape."

And you find that notion in songs like 'Zanzibar'.

Garry: "Yes, but there's still the question of why do we want to escape, to explore beyond our own world when we don't know that much about our world in the first place ..."

The Body Electric performed 'Pulsing' for the recent *Music Awards* show. They appreciated the opportunity and enjoyed Hot Cafe's performance at the after-show dinner. But there were complaints ...

"Look at a band like Herbs," says Wendy, "they toured in the Pacific promoting New Zealand and got nothing."

Garry puts it more bluntly: "Herbs were the token Polynesian slot. They might still tour Europe with UB40, do something for New Zealand music, but they got nothing. Criminal."

The band is soon to embark on a tour. It's been delayed a couple of times already because of difficulties associated with the *Radio With Pictures* Body Electric concert.

Points to note: First, Wendy plays a Steinberger bass. Made of graphite, plastics and resins it's shape is quite unlike a conventional bass and it never needs tuning. Although only 500 are produced annually, Tim Finn told Wendy that the best bassplayers in the States are using Steinbergers.

Second, the Body Electric plays live.

Alan: "We use sequences but no tapes. Bands like Heaven 17 and the Human League don't play live. It's quite a challenge because not a lot of bands using synths do that. It's paid off for us. When Wendy first joined the Body Electric we did a lot of gigs to get things down to a tee so when we went into the studio we could do our songs bang bang bang and keep costs down. It worked. The costs of albums by New Zealand rock and roll bands are very expensive, well into five figures, but we did ours for under \$10,000."

For those who think gadgetry makes composition easy, a child's game: "Electronics have meant a complete shift from the performer to the composer. People don't realise that synthesisers mean you've got an orchestra at your command. You can alter the tonal quality of sounds."

Wendy takes over from Alan, "You're thinking of everything at once, composition is a complete thing."

"You know, the worst thing about Body Electric," Alan volunteers, "is that we've come out of the underground and Joe Public likes us. The underground set leaves us alone now, Joe Public likes us, but the radio won't play us!"

Surely that's a case of radio's presentation ignoring reality.

David Taylor

## AUCKLAND WALK

Rhythmic  
Tendencies Tour



- DECEMBER 5 Mon, WELLINGTON, Terminus
- 6 Tues, NELSON, DB Rutherford
- 7 Wed, BLENHEIM, Woodbourne Tavern
- 8 Thurs, TIMARU, Terminus Tavern
- 9 Fri, DUNEDIN, Concert Chamber
- 10 Sat, INVERCARGILL, Waikiwi Tavern
- 11 Sun, INVERCARGILL, Concert Hall
- 13 Tues, 14 Wed, DUNEDIN, Shoreline Hotel
- 15 Thurs to 17 Sat, CHRISTCHURCH, Gladstone
- 18 Sunday, CHRISTCHURCH
- ZM Free Concert Hagley Park
- 20 Tues, PALMERSTON NORTH
- Albert Motor Lodge
- 21 Wed, WELLINGTON, Concert Chamber
- 22 Thurs, WANGANUI, Girls' College
- 23 Fri, 24 Sat, NEW PLYMOUTH
- White Hart Hotel

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