



PHOTOS BY KERRY BROWN



'ROJAS' FROM PAGE 14

the Simms Brothers and shuffled along to Rojas' room. The door was wide open.

"Come in and meet my wife," he smiled indicating a hotel cleaning lady in the bathroom. "I always refer to them as my

'wife'." He laughed. This incident was indicative of his droll sense of humour.

Rojas is also something of a bassist having spent the last ten years working with Labelle and Nona Hendryx. The association with Hendryx explained why her recent solo album featured

heavily as warm up music during the two shows here.

But in the beginning:

"I started in '68 as a roadie with Sly and the Family Stone. I played drums first then I went to bass. I got disgusted with it because it just wouldn't fall right so I learned to stop putting pressure on myself and instead just let it happen. I never wanted to be a professional. I play guitar and keyboards too. You've got to be adaptable because there's so much competition."

He must have had feelings of apprehension about following such a formidable rhythm section as Davis and Murray?

"Nah, not at all, this is another time and another vibe. They were great and we have a high respect for each other."

Again Nile Rodgers was the link. He introduced Rojas to Bowie and he 'played his ass off' to get into the Great Man's band. What is the attraction of playing for Bowie?

"He's a conceptualist and I'm into conceptual things, images and he's one of the kings at that. The guy's ahead of his time. He can mix art and rock without being pretentious."

But the *Let's Dance* album isn't ahead of its time. In fact, it's a response to the current environment. Agree?

"Pretty much, but he did a strange twist — he put a blues guitarist in a funk album, and that's how he thinks. You're always on your toes. You could ask him now: 'David what are you going to do next week?' And he'd say he doesn't know but when it comes to the last minute he'll say, 'OK guys, swing band'. Oh shit!"

Rojas then became distracted by this black guy with glasses who was crawling like a snake across the king-sized bed. He was grinning from ear to ear and at first I thought it was drummer Tony Thompson but when Rojas addressed him as Carlos, the penny dropped that this was none other than the Carlos Alomar, Bowie's musical general.



Carlos Alomar

General Alomar

Live, Alomar seemed to be in charge both in the 1978 and 1983 tours.

"I've got all the control and all the responsibility, that's why I've got this hunchback," he joked. "And I'm the only one who makes mistakes."

How did this band compare with those who toured in 1978?

"This is a great, great band," chipped in Rojas.

"Yeah, I'm gonna steal this band," Alomar agreed. "But both bands were full of excellent musicians, it just depends on the combination. In the 1978 tour we featured instrumental specialists in Adrian Belew and Roger Powell and back then David was pushing synthesiser music. This tour Bowie sings David Bowie, the songs are the speciality, introducing the audience to all the songs."

Alomar has been with Bowie since *Diamond Dogs*. Ten years is a long time but has he influenced the man over the years?

"You bet your ass," Alomar cracked in disbelief at the dumb question. "When I started with David I brought my people with me — Dennis Davis, George Murray, Luther Vandross — and this influenced his style. And when he wanted to change I was able to change. Most of the stuff is conceptualised in the studio on only guitar, bass and drums and we'd pick two or three ways to present it. Then we let him hear it and whichever way he likes it that's the way we go. I've always had a lot of control in the studio but what you have to remember is David brings out the best in me because he makes me drop wrenches in the music which I ordinarily wouldn't do."

Has he had enough credit for his contributions?

"I'm not into that. For the last ten years I haven't done any press. It's just on this particular instance that I'm saying anything. I'm older now, I've got a six-year old and so I've got my own needs now and so I can talk. Other than that I like being back there. If you come to the concerts you know who I am. But you're not going to hear any statements made by me other than this year."

Has touring with the bigger line-up caused problems?

"This has been the easiest and sweetest tour I've had in my travelling career. The band clicks, unlike last time, as there haven't been any ego problems or conflicts of interest. It's been as smooth as silk."

In Wellington I gained the impression that David Bowie had become too big a business. The spectacle was too removed from rock'n'roll.

"Don't sound so damned political. You have to release yourself and do something for the masses. He's had more people to play to than he's ever had before so what's he gonna do? Drown them out with the new *Let's Dance* album?"

Album wise have things turned out as expected?

"Nothing in my history of working with David has ever turned out as I expected. And that's been a delight. Sometimes he'll take my guitar and bury it behind the choo-choo trains somewhere."

Favourite album.

"I like *Scary Monsters* because there's a lot of nice strange things happening."

Carlos Alomar seemed like a nice, strange gentleman.

Exit

Before we left, Alan Edwards introduced us to road manager Arnold Dunn, a quietly spoken, very sane man in charge of an insane job — that of guiding the whole circus around the world to a fixed schedule. For him, the veteran of five Rolling Stones' tours and countless heavy metal band excursions to Europe, the 1983 Serious Moonlight tour had been a breeze.

We left him to relax in front of televised golf and as we walked down the plush corridors of the Sheraton I wondered if the Man Himself would jump out and demand an interview with *Rip It Up*. He didn't but for a few brief moments I lived in hope. George Kay

