

Coming back can be the hardest thing. The Gordons came back to a legend that had swelled in the two years they'd been away. There were high expectations, many from people who hadn't seen them first time around. It wasn't quite the original Gordons — John Halvorsen and Brent McLaughlin were there but Vince Pinker had taken the place of Alastair Parker.

The three were originally part of an outfit called Sheep Effect that debuted at this year's Punakaiki festival. When Bill Vosberg "disappeared" from the band, Sheep Effect became the new Gordons. Why a return to the old name?

"The Gordons had done years of hard work as the Gordons," says John. "And it was a very opportune time. The doors were wide open and if we wanted to work hard we could get somewhere. Whereas the Sheep Effect would probably have remained an obscure Christchurch band without a future."

"We thought, 'Okay, we're the Gordons'

# QUALITY CONTROL FACING UP TO BEING GORDON

because we were a three-piece and that meant we could play some of the old songs. I really like those old songs but I would have left them alone if we'd remained Sheep Effect."

It seems that it's those old ones that audiences react to. Is that a worry?

"The same thing happened in Christchurch on the first couple of nights but we did five nights altogether there and by the end of that people weren't calling out for the old ones any more, they wanted new ones like 'Revolution' and 'Rain'," says Vince.

Were you apprehensive about living up to audience expectations?

"Yeah, a little," John admits. "But it's okay because we're doing new material. It would have been a real cop-out if we did the songs on the album or something like that. But I think people always think of the Gordons as something that's changing and they were ready to accept it as a different band."

## quality control

After the new Gordons' debut the talk was as much about the volume, the size of the PA, as the music. Why so many watts?

"The PA wasn't really adequate for the job, that's why there was such a mountainous heap of it," John explains. "We were trying to get a good sound — it wasn't to be loud. Being loud's not important, it's reproducing the tones faithfully."

But the Gordons have always been considered a loud band. Is that volume an essential part of the music?

"I don't think it's that essential. We can play very quietly and still have the same tones. Like, without a PA we can still get the same full sound."

"What we try and do is reproduce our stage volume, because that's the volume that all the tones are working at. So if you take anything off the volume you're also going to take the peaks off the tones. And we'd like people to hear exactly what we hear, what we're playing," Vince explains.

Do you worry about being too loud?

"Yeah, I do worry about that," John admits. "We rely on the soundman there. But there's always people yelling out 'turn it up' so it's really hard to know."

## revolution

How would you characterise the new material?

It's a little less manic ...

"I'm a little less manic. That's the result of a holiday, probably. The Gordons, they got more manic as time went on. Also we haven't got Alastair — he was pretty manic."

Can you put your finger on the difference Vince has made?

"Well, Vince is a bass player, whereas Alastair and I were both guitarists who used to swap duties. We've got bass frequencies now, whereas before we played bass like guitar. It went from middle right up to the top without any bass frequencies."

Is there much improvisation on stage?

"Yeah, in just about every song and there'll be more in the future. We rely on the audience for that. If there's no one dancing ... well, people don't have to dance, but if there are a lot of people there who want to have a good time you're more inclined to leap off into the unknown, put everything into it."

"The thing is, Vince had never seen the Gordons, so he's not trying to sound like the old band — that just wouldn't work."

## adults and children

Crowd violence became a problem with the old Gordons. Has it cropped up this time?

"I think we've gotten away with it quite well really. Our music tends to squash violence rather than encourage it. People know if anything happens we'll stop playing. If we ever got a reputation as a violent band we'd go on holiday for a long, long time, like we did last time."

"That was actually a lot to do with why we stopped playing last time. We weren't really having trouble with violence but it was getting to the point where all these skinheads popped up in Christchurch — young kids were turning into skins and thumping each other. You couldn't play in a hall or anything like that because it would be completely destroyed. Our last couple of gigs just had hundreds of them running around. We knew we had to stop because if you get labelled like that you just can't get bookings."

## machine song

The Gordons are part of a co-operative that is putting together Freefall Studios in Christchurch. They have space and an eight-track recorder but still lack a good mixing desk (the most expensive component) and an effects track. The studio will be available at very reasonable

rates to local bands and will also have its own record label.

"It'll be a studio where the bands have the final say on production, which isn't very common these days," says Vince. "If people want us to produce them we're willing but we try to encourage them to produce themselves. We want to share our knowledge as much as possible because, especially in the South Island, there's just no one who can operate a mixing desk. And in essence, it's very simple."

## future shock

How hard will this Gordons work?

"We're going to be working very hard. We're also going to be taking holidays whenever we need them. We're not going to drive ourselves into the ground — that's a pretty easy thing to do in New Zealand, you wear your audience out in no time."

"But we're going to get into recording as much as live performance. I want to master that skill, do it really well. I want to know the equipment backwards, be around it all the time."

"I'm very keen to do a live album. In fact, in a way I wish the first two records had been live because it would probably have been more representative of what we were doing."

So you're not entirely happy with those records?

"Not entirely, but I don't think anyone ever is with what they've done. I'll be a lot more happy with the album when the next album is out so that it's taken all the weight off that one. A lot of people who never saw the Gordons think that's what the Gordons sounded like. But it never did. That was what the Gordons sounded like a couple of nights at Harlequin Studios."

So the Gordons are back, with a healthy attitude and plenty to do. After the initial rush of pleasure it has become clear that the new Gordons have room for improvement. They'd be the first to admit that. Live performances have been erratic, good one night, bad the next. But there remains that sense of purpose that made this band what it ever was.

Building their studio, releasing records for themselves and others, playing live, changing. And there's that open invitation for Alastair Parker to return any time he wants, with no strings attached.

I can't see it being less than interesting. Russell Brown

in colour

**Ryuichi Sakamoto**

**David Bowie**

**Fidel Castro**

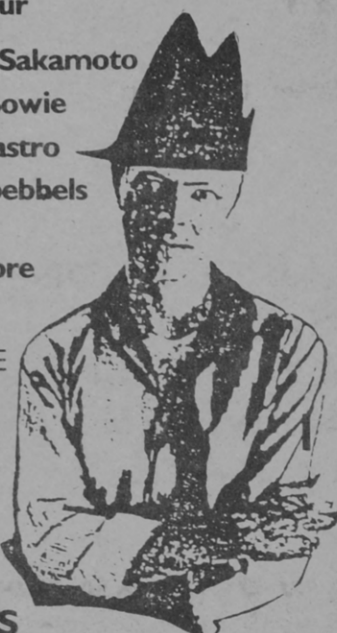
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