

**R**ecord company conference rooms are dull places — they're all swimming in shiny surfaces, pastel walls, expensive stereo systems, and usually the fruit bowl will have cost more than your rent for the year.

Festival Records boardroom is no exception, but Auckland band Grace have draped themselves about, so that makes it alright. I haven't come up trumps in the *Win A Dream Date With Grace* competition that a local teen mag is running — the reason for this meeting is the release of their debut record, *Black Sand Shore*.

They, brothers Jason, Paul and Anthony loasa, are looking

sharp, surprisingly so after the night they've just had. Auckland's Galaxy Theatre was the venue, and surrounded by friends, fans and freeloaders, Grace launched the album with their first live show.

"We didn't make the obvious mistake of trying to copy the record," says Paul, "so we ended up having a good time."

The threesome, all with a history of banging away at various instruments, hooked up as Grace in late 1993. Paul began at age eight, taking lessons in music theory before picking up a guitar at 11. Anthony was a self-taught drummer at 4 years old and played in his Dad's covers band, while

nine year old Jason practiced constantly on the bass. What's weird, is the individual influences they brought to the band — Style Council, Prince, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Yazoo — are hardly detectable on *Black Sand Shore*.

Made at the Lab Studio in Symonds Street, *Black Sand Shore* floats from the smooth pop of the title track, to piano driven ballads like 'Distant Blue', on to the rock feel of 'Winter Madness', and reinforces the band's reluctance to be categorised.

Paul: "Everyone thinks we're a soul band, but we've never said that."

Anthony: "Part of us is soul, but part of us is rock

as well."

With bulk commercial radio play, widespread media coverage and a forthcoming nationwide support slot for Ruby Turner, Grace appear to be, in rugby terms, 'on the burst'. But, in reality, they have come at us slow and steady, void of hype or theatrics, and without bruising each others egos. A calculated approach that the trio are convinced will keep them away from *Where Are They Now?* territory.

Anthony: "We don't want to be a trend band, that's why we started out the way we did."

JOHN RUSSELL



DIVINE INTERVENTION



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