



# Knox Given Lightly

## A phone call:

"Hello, Casio here."

"Hi, I want to make some enquiries about keyboards."

"I'll put you through to our keyboard expert. Please hold."

"..."

"Hello Keyboards. Chris Knox speaking."

As my English teacher would've said: "Sometimes fact is stranger than fiction, deary."

The other Chris Knox, the one that plays Casiotones, not sells them, is sitting in his kitchen eating his pumpkin soup dinner and washing it down with a Speight's. In the lounge, his son John and partner Barbara watch *The Simpsons*.

Knox is resplendent in jandals, banana print shorts and a blue woolly jersey, but more on fashion later. I'm here to find out about his fourth solo album, *Songs of You and Me*. Fans will suggest it follows the same musical and lyrical themes of its predecessors. Detractors will say they all sound the same.

"In terms of the general feel of things, I don't think you could give a blindfold test to someone and say which of these albums came first. I mean, *Seizure* was mostly recorded on 16-track. In terms of technology someone might pick it as the latest album. I think of them as four albums of a type — certainly. But lyrically there are things I'm singing about now that I wasn't when *Seizure* came out five years ago. The fuzz song ratio has probably gone down a little, though it's still very much there."

Twenty or so years ago, Knox vowed he would never work a nine to five job again. After a decade or so on the dole or the sickness benefit, he has spent the last 10 years keeping himself through his music, drawings and other odd jobs (like the five grand he got for writing a rejected screenplay). A recent European tour

paid for itself, with enough profit to take Barbara along and purchase a 1984 Nissan Bluebird station-wagon. Things are all smiley faces and cuddly kittens

at the moment. It wasn't so two years back, when a lot of the writing for *Songs of You and Me* took place.

"It happened, strangely enough, not long after I turned 40 a couple of years back, over the Christmas holidays. Christmas holidays are terrible when you're not a very great parent. Plus, I had problems with my lower colon, so I was constipated in every possible way. I got quite down and a lot of songs on the new album were written during that period.

"There are some about Barbara and my relationship around that same period, when it was strained because she was having to put up with me looking pasty-faced and sorry for myself all the damn time."

'Split', off the *"P Duck"* album, had to be labelled 'fiction' on the lyric sheet, to stop people coming up to Barbara and saying: "Oh dear Barbara, that song, oh dear..." Lyrics like: 'Apart, you'd be my good and trusting friend,' off *Songs of You and Me*, imply their relationship is in trouble.

"Every album is always out of date by the time it comes out. Now I'm much better, we're much better as a couple, and I'm not writing songs like that at the moment. When Barbara clicks what the lyrics are about, she sits me down and makes me talk about it.

"Why did you write this?"

"Well, it just sort of came out."

"Yes, but why did it come out?"

"So, we have a good in depth talk and we feel better about it, because we always feel

better after we've communicated at an honest level."

We're used to knowing *all* about our overseas celebrities. Knox stands out in New Zealand because of his willingness to show his family photograph album to the public.

"It does feel a bit like that at times. But the more people tell the truth about themselves, the better it's got to be for the human race in general. Secrets are bad. Communication is good. That's why I'm happy to show the photograph album around, even though it's got some really ugly pictures."

Lyrics are only his secondary consideration. Sound and melody always come first in importance. The songs have mostly come to the listener via Knox's fascination with lo-fi.

"No, you're completely wrong," he says. "It's not lo-fi, it's lo-tech. It's very hi-fi. It's much closer to the original sound that's coming out of the mouth and the instrument than most 48-track digital recordings, which have been gussied up and EQed the shit out of. I'm bi-fi... we started it up overseas, while playing in a lo-fi festival, and several of us reacted against the title. Actually, it's a German sausage, Blfi, but we're not homo-fi or hetero-fi, and it'll appear on all albums henceforth."

A couple of bi-fi albums coming up will be radical noise orientated ones, put out under a different band title. But enough about music. Let's get to the real issues: footwear, and more specifically, jandals. Anti-cool, or just uncool?

"It's just that I've got really stinky feet, so if I wear shoes I have to use Granny's Remedy, which costs \$19 a pot," says Knox pragmatically.

"I like shorts too. I haven't really got the sort of body that's a suitable fashion clothes horse — so why bother trying? There's a certain amount of statement in what I wear, but it's

mainly just comfort. It's sometimes rather disturbing to see the people who most dress like me are all street people."

Time to pick him up and hurl him onto the psychiatrist couch. On 60 percent (fact!) of the songs on *Songs of You and Me*, you sing about eyes being mutilated or not being able to see. Explain yourself.

"Perhaps eyes are the most sensitive piece of human anatomy males and females share. The two things you use to see what someone is thinking is their body language and their eyes... and eyes is fucking easy to rhyme.

"Or this might explain it — in my early 20s, while tripping, I stared into the eyes of another person without blinking and had these extraordinary visions. That night, while attempting to read myself to sleep, I read about these Buddhist monks that used eye contact without hallucinogens as a way of probing each others souls. They sometimes couldn't get to sleep for days afterwards and would end up with permanent psychosis. I lay there thinking: 'Aargh!'"

He no longer uses drugs and avoids getting pissed as a fart most of the time. This may explain his call ups from *The New Zealand Herald*, TV3 and the publishing world.

"I was asked to be a film reviewer for a TV show. 'Yes, yes, yes, fine. I won't tell anyone I haven't seen a mainstream film in 10 years, but I can bluff my way through, I'm sure.' Now I'm a film expert."

"Some guy from Penguin came round and said: 'We'd like you to write a novel. I said I'd like to do a children's book first. I roughed out an idea and showed it to him, and he said: 'It's a bit *moral*, isn't it?' People have this expectation from me that I will give them some product that is wild and crazy, but that's not what they get."

DARREN HAWKES

semi lemon kola  
new 3 track single otherwise  
available mid june

auckland release party  
friday june 23rd kurtz lounge  
on tour throughout july