

What do a guy and a girl have to do to score a free lunch?

For the past 20 minutes, Jan Hellriegel and myself have been darting about Ponsonby and Jervois Roads in the back seat of a flash record company car, driven by promo man Steve Booth. It's mid-afternoon on a Friday, so in every restaurant, and more disappointingly every bar, there's no such thing as a vacant seat. Growing increasingly impatient, we tear down College Hill at the speed of light and secure a table at Rick's Cafe. Steve gets the drinks in, Jan and I are gracious enough to let him put them on his expense account ("No Steve, we insist"), and finally we're smiling.

Jan Hellriegel is the (once) blonde wonder responsible for the best local debut record of 1992. *It's My Sin* arrived blessed with an impressive selection of dynamic, often eerie, bittersweet pop songs, in particular the live favourites 'The Way I Feel' and 'No Idea'. For the latter half of that year and well into the next, it was impossible to flick through a magazine or switch on a television without seeing her, armed always with a red guitar.

It's My Sin left local music writers drooling. Interest was looming large from the Australian and European branches of her record company. In April of 93 the album earned her the title of Best Songwriter and Most Promising Female Vocalist at the New Zealand Music Awards. All these things, you would expect, would make a girl feel great. But despite these positives, when the pace became a little less frantic, an unexplainable lack of self-confidence became an ever present companion. The biggest Jan fans at her record company left the label, and the huge ground swell of momentum started by *It's My Sin* waned in intensity. So, in March 1994, Jan acted out the equivalent of packing up her troubles in an old kit bag and moved base to Melbourne, to clear her head and start fresh.

"I really wanted to go on an adventure, and I needed to have an adventure. I was getting too stuck in my ways and was totally unconfident. I wasn't doing any writing and I just didn't think I could any more. It didn't have to be Australia. If any friend in any part of the world had said: 'Come over and stay,' I would've gone."

With a room in a friend's flat already secured, the first step was to find a job. Having spent days upon days folding the covers of *It's My Sin* prior to its release, working in a warehouse packing heavy metal and techno records was a cinch. The hardest part was summoning the courage to begin playing solo again, something she eventually wound up doing a great deal of.

"In the end, playing in Melbourne was really good for me. I was really surprised anyone would like my stuff, but they did — it was just my imagination that they wouldn't. I couldn't play in New Zealand any more because I had no new material, and I think people were sick of hearing the same songs. I didn't want to play any more in New Zealand until I had a new album. If I hadn't ever had a new album, I would never have played again — as simple as that."

Aside from a brief visit back to New Zealand to appear in a Coca-Cola commercial, Jan spent the first eight months in Australia working and writing songs. In November the green light was given to make a new album. With much support from her immediate circle of friends, Jan ditched the spectre of self doubt that had threatened to put her out of commission.

"Other people around me informed me that I could write songs. Once it all started rolling, I realised I could actually do it."

Tremble was recorded over a six week period at Melbourne's Sing Sing Studio and Sydney's 301 Studio, and is the best evidence of Jan's new sense of well-being. It's an odd mixture of raucous, edgy statements of intent and more dark, haunting pop exorcisms. When she speaks of it, her enthusiasm is overtly obvious.

"The album happened exactly as I wanted it to be. I'm really, really happy with it. This one is more me. It feels like a really complete piece of work. I've never felt so content with something in my life. I wouldn't change anything. I'm 100 percent happy with it."

Although more cohesive, *Tremble* shares with its predecessor a range of indefinable styles, made harder to pin down by the use of high and low dynamics, and slightly more than passing nods as to what other singers — past and present, male and female — are doing.

"I've got this theory about my writing. I don't

write in any style, and I'm not consciously going out to be in some scene or sound like anyone in particular. I just write songs and they come out the way they do. I've been likened to so many different singers, but I actually like to think I sound a bit like Nick Cave, except my voice isn't so low."

And neither do her lyrics reach the depths of despondency that has become Cave's trademark — no swallows sharpening their beaks, or crumbling ivory towers. That said, *Tremble* boasts its fair share of mood swings — bleak and bitter images are thrown up back to back with calls for unchecked hedonism. It hardly enters the creepy bi-polar territory of Kristin Hersh, but to say it's a bit fuckin' flighty is to summarise with a marvellous sense of understatement.

"Well, who isn't all over the place? I'm in different moods all the time. I'm one of the most up and down people I know. The thing is, the songs that sound really happy are about the worst things and vice-versa. Some of it's really fun and some of it's really heavy, but they're not all about me — there's two that are, but you can guess 'cause I'm certainly not going to tell you."

That sounds a lot like a dare to me. By this stage we've both no doubt had too much to drink, and are making less sense than earlier. I begin a stream of consciousness that says if you write a song that's going to remain in someone's head, then you have to be careful what you write. Jan, growing exasperated, counsels that I shouldn't read too much into the lyrics, and be content not to read in between the lines.

"Sometimes when I'm writing, I think other people have got more interesting things to write about than I have, so this album isn't really about me. But, I really don't like to talk about songs too much."

I rattle off a string of *Tremble*'s song titles, arguing the point — if you write it, expect to have to talk about it.

"I'm not telling," "It's none of your business," "I don't tell what any songs are about," "I'm not talking about that," and "It's just not relevant," are included in the replies. Before this conversation escalates into fisticuffs, I decide to change the subject back to that of confidence. Steve left nearly an hour ago, and neither of us has the dosh to indulge in an exaggerated round of plate and table throwing.

All writers, whatever form they come in — a songwriter, a poet (and those two aren't necessarily separate), a novelist, a copywriter, or a journalist — tend to experience massive periods of self doubt. You wonder if you've produced the best you can do, you decide too late you haven't devoted a piece of the time it deserves, or you simply run dry of words to say. But, as if to emphasise her new spirit, Jan answers in the opposite when asked about a telling comment she made to *RipItUp* after her first album had been released — that she was constantly waiting for the next personal crisis to provide ammunition for her writing.

"At that time, I did wait for bad things to happen, but I've since realised I don't need things to happen to me to have something to write about. With the last album, I just didn't have any faith in my ability. No one will believe me, but I had to learn how to like my own stuff. This time it was so much easier, and so much more honest. Everything about [*Tremble*] is really good. I'm more positive now than I've ever been in my life."

That positivity will be on show next month, when Jan and band undertake an extensive New Zealand tour. From there it's back to do the same in Australia. While Jan does hold long term plans, she won't reveal them, content to concentrate on what's happening in the next three months.

We share a cab back to the record company office, go our separate ways, then meet up exactly four weeks later in a cafe in K' Road. Jan presents a mood that's a mixture of tiredness and elation. The first copies of *Tremble* are due to arrive in the country later this afternoon, and she's akin to a child waiting for Christmas morning. In the past month 'Manic', the first single taken from the album, reached Number 5 on the New Zealand Singles Chart, meaning wise money has to go on *Tremble* blowing up real big. So, once again, count on Jan to be in every magazine and all over the TV screen, armed as always with a red guitar.

JOHN RUSSELL

STONE TEMPLE PILOTS



PURPLE includes the hit singles 'Vaseline', 'Interstate Love Song', 'Big Empty' and 'Pretty Penny'.



CORE contains singles 'Sex Type Thing', 'Push' and 'Creep'.

PURPLE

CORE

SPECIAL OFFERS AT SELECTED MUSIC RETAILERS WHEN PURCHASING 'CORE' OR 'PURPLE'



ROD STEWART
A SPANNER IN THE WORKS

The tartan terror is back! Four years after the stunning *Vagabond Heart*, Rod Stewart is back with a magnificent new album, *A Spanner in the Works* captures Stewart in many moods. Listen for the first single 'You're The Star'. One of the world's most enduring and unique voices has returned to basics and proves the best never slow down, they just get better.



ELVIS COSTELLO
KOJAK VARIETY

Elvis Costello describes his new album as "some of my favourite songs performed with some of my favourite musicians." On the breathtaking *Kojak Variety*, Costello offers his versions of tracks by Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin, Randy Newman, Little Richard, and many more.



BAD BRAINS GOD OF LOVE

Washington DC's finest hardcore heroes are back to blast your eardrums with a ball-breaking new record. *God Of Love* sees original vocalist HR back in the line-up and Bad Brains back at full strength. Check out the hypercharged tracks 'Justice Keepers' and 'God Of Love' — simply awesome!



BUSH SIXTEEN STONE

Sixteen Stone is the accomplished debut from London-based four-piece Bush. Presenting an explosive barrage of garagey pop-punk tunes, Bush are tipped to be the next major musical force out of the UK. Thrash yourself crazy with the superb tracks 'Everything Zen', 'Bomb' and 'Machinehead'.



COLLECTIVE SOUL
COLLECTIVE SOUL

After the meteoric success of *Hints, Allegations And Things Left Unsaid*, Georgia's Collective Soul have delivered the wonderful new album *Collective Soul*. Singer-songwriter Ed Roland has produced 12 gorgeous guitar-based tracks. Includes the current single 'Gel' and the forthcoming single 'December'.



THE MUFFS
BLONDER AND BLONDER

LA's band the Muffs second album shows their continuing expertise in writing perfect crunchy pop punk. Their 1993 debut album *The Muffs* won them a legion of fans with its rock solid collection of melodic pop, and their new record *Blonder And Blonder* is sure to add more. Check out the tunes 'Agony', 'Oh Nina' and the first single 'Sad Tomorrow'.

TANK GIRL
ORIGINAL MOTION
PICTURE SOUNDTRACK

The soundtrack to the movie of the year, is also the soundtrack of the year! *Tank Girl* features new tracks by Ice T, Bjork, Belly, Portishead and Hole, plus classics from L7 and Devo. The movie screens in New Zealand in July.

