



SPACEMEN PERVADE NEW YORK

A new Baiter Space album, *Wammo*. Reviewers the world over are getting out their old metalwork textbooks for descriptions, fans are blacking out their windows for the impending atmos, and vocalist/guitar player, Alister Parker, is transmitting interviews from Gotham City.

I'd always thought the idea of interviewing Baiter Space clashed with what they were about. That mysterious audible presence didn't deserve to be dissected. The people behind it didn't need to be shown. But this time it's different. This time these three New Zealanders, voluntarily stranded in New York, are going to surprise you with just how human they've become.

Think 'The Aim'. Think of an even bigger leap than *Robot World* to *Vortura*. Think of lyrics you can decipher, distinguishable guitars and bass. Think of the KGB opening their books, or clear case Gameboys, or something. Baiter Space are letting you inside.

"The idea was no overdubs. Just a live recording of the band. Whereas in the past we've used a lot of things like that to make the sound very textural. This time we were into really raw, straight, honest Baiter Space, with lots of tuning things. Like, the drums were tuned, our instruments were tuned, and we got these harmonic levels happening between the three instruments to make sub-melodies and stuff. Then we didn't need to put any overdubs on it.

"In the past we've talked about our albums while we were making them or while we were mixing them. With *Wammo*, we thought about it and got together and talked about the album before we made it, and before a lot of the songs were written for it."

Is the album a new direction or is it just an experiment?

"Well, it's what we're doing at the moment. It incorporates the old Baiter Space sound, but it's more straight. It's like a live recording. So, it's fresh and exciting for us."

Over the last three albums your sound has flipped on its head. How much has New York had to do with it?

"Well, we've been travelling a bit, and hanging out in London for half a year as well. I think New York's influenced us. People have said that to us, but it's hard to really be objective about that. The change in sound is just the essences of the songs, and not getting too tricky on production and all that. I think all that is a little bit 'out' now, you know, you've got to get the real feel of the group on tape and then just get it to move in the mix."

Are you more conscious of your lyrics now the sounds are so much clearer?

"Yeah, I think so. The thing to keep developing is vocally as well. I've got that in the back of my mind."

The lyrics are a side to Baiter Space songs that haven't so much been ignored as unnoticed. But *Wammo*'s got its fair share of bewdies, like 'Retro': 'Spaceship landing, spacemen stranded, not where they wanna be...'

"Do you remember when the USSR started to split up, and they had some cosmonauts in space just waiting for commands? Then they just had to turn the spaceship off and be in orbit till they fuckin' worked it all out. No-one went up and helped them, like America wouldn't bring these guys back to Earth. So that song is, like, these poor guys just flipping around up there"

Wow. A story. I've only thought of your songs as overall feels, you know? Tasty lyrical blanc-mange?

"Well, we've tried to maintain that. The lyrical content can be taken lots of ways still. And I love that open ended kind of thing, rather than making solid statements; to write something you can take lots of different ways depending on how you feel that day, you can still make your own story."

What about the 'Splat' single?

"There's all sorts of things that can be read into that. Something that crossed my mind recently was the industrial thing and, like, people focussing on money, and fucking things up for everyone else, and political lies. That was in there, and then you could think of it like a couple of people that have hot feelings for one another"

Yeah, well. I think I'll leave the rest to my own imagination thanks. No point in spoiling them.

New Zealand bands have been heading overseas to make it big for years: especially bands from the Flying Nun stables, whose overseas sales base has created interest in the weirdest places (the thought of Germans getting into Chris Knox is just strange, admit it). But for every hopeful tour, there have been

casualties, be it band members leaving or bands completely splitting. That is, apart from Baiter Space. Maybe they've got cast iron guts. Maybe it's their supportive deal with Matador. Whatever. They're still over there and they're still making it work over there.

"It was a big decision and it needed a lot of commitment. All of a sudden you realise you can't just go back to New Zealand when you feel like it, so you've gotta keep on punching in case you hit something."

Would you ever move back?

"Um, in the short term I'd say no, because it's been a very productive environment for the group. I don't think we've lost any of our roots at all. We're still this bunch of New Zealand guys in New York City, doing our thing. And we've earned the respect of the New Yorkers, and that's just fucking great, really inspiring. So, while it's this good, we're gonna stay here."

You realise half a dozen bands will read this and think: 'Fuck! We're off to New York, New Zealand music's promised land. Baiter Space are just cruising. It's easy!'

"It's not that easy. There's a lot of tough points to it as well, like we're foreigners in somebody else's country for a start. We're lucky we're in such a friendly place, but it's pretty hard sometimes, not being in your own land, and that gets to me. Sometimes I really can't stand America. I'm looking for something else. I'll go to Britain, or maybe even back to New Zealand, and that saves my state of mind."

"There's always the constant threat of danger, which you can't be too relaxed about. I haven't come across any myself, but it does exist out there and you have to be very aware of it. This place requires that you're always feeling good and that you've always got tonnes of energy. If you get tired in New York, or like I was homeless in New York, you get eaten up."

You were living on the streets!

"Close to it. That wasn't so long ago. Someone pulled a scam on me with an apartment deal. I got the money back off them, but I had a schedule to attend to and I had nowhere to be. It was really tough. People are really stuck for space here, so it's really hard to just find a place to be. And it's really expensive."

"We're not living in any sort of elegance. The quality of life is a lot lower over here, for what you pay and what you get. We all live in pretty tiny apartments, especially myself. I live in the smallest apartment of anyone."

Describe it.

"Well, I've lived in six different places since I've been here. At the moment I'm in a little pocket of mid-town, surrounded by 20, 30 and forty story buildings. There's a little park that's really cute. It's really quiet and I can see the top of the Empire State Building, that changes colour every month."

What with, pollution? Your state of mind?

"Nah, you know, they light it up, which is kinda cool. Brent lives downtown, the lower east side. He's got a lot of traffic noise, lot of noise all the time. Lot of noise from the bar underneath his place, lot of noise from the street, sirens. Things are really going on down there."

So it's just a matter of time before we get a four-track album from his lounge then?

"Oh yeah, for sure. We're getting the four-track in next week," laughs the crooked voiced Parker.

"It's great being able to focus on playing music. We're very broke, and have been for a long time too. But there's so much going on here, like your senses are being bashed all the time. With *Wammo* and the tour and stuff, we're just hoping things will take off a bit. We've got a solid audience base, and it'll be better for the band if a few more people bought the records. We'll just see how things go"

What's the average Baiter Space fan like in the States?

"Well, we get everyone from mods, nerds, clubbers, students, conservative people and really right out there people. I think the feeling of our performances is that they're really fun, and people really enjoy the sound enough to smile while they're listening."

People come along to smile at Baiter Space gigs?!

"Yeah, they love it. It's good, makes them feel good..."

Sounds like something out of *The Brady Bunch*!

"People smile a lot in New York."

You'll get a chance to smile at them when they return for a couple of gigs after Christmas. In the meantime, *Wammo*.

JOHN TAITE