



EXCUSES FOR THERAPY?

When it comes to singing of sorrows, nobody does it better or more downright beautifully than the Irish. Perhaps it's something in the whisky, but poets such as MacGowan, O'Connor, Van Morrison, and Christy Moore all seem to use songs as defence mechanisms to withstand life's nasty troubles and strifes. And the three self-proclaimed "wankers from Belfast" who call themselves Therapy?, also embrace this method to get by.

From day one, Therapy?'s singer/songwriter Andy Cairns has placed his every anxiety and insecurity in full view, without thought to the holes that might be picked in his moral fibre, or possible accusations of displaying weak male behaviour in a public place. Wrapped around hellish chunks of guitar buzz, lyrics like 'I've got nothing to do, but hang around and get screwed up on you', and 'with a face like this I won't break any hearts', proved he wasn't prepared to leave any personal demon stone unturned, and showed he wasn't possessed with a pedestrian soul. Bad poetry Therapy? are not.

Living in Belfast, and finding common ground in unabashed noise and angst, Cairns formed Therapy? in 1989 with bassist Michael McKeegan and drummer Fyfe Ewing. A series of singles and mini EPs preceded their debut album, *Baby Teeth*, which led to the trio inking a major label deal and recording the 1993 album *Nurse*. For the first time, Therapy? welcomed pop music, introducing melodic moments into their otherwise Big Black-like screaming fits. Major press attention followed, and Therapy?'s cocktail of overwhelmingly brutal guitar and bone crunching rhythms was hauled into the limelight.

In February of the following year, they delivered *Troublegum* — a monumental blast of pop, punk, thrash and metal that pleased rock and indie fans alike. A heavy promotion schedule saw Therapy? soak up the following 12 months with extensive tours of the US and UK, including playing to 50,000 plus headbangers at Castle Donington, and taking time out in Los Angeles to record a version of 'Iron Man' with Ozzy Osborne for the Black Sabbath tribute album. Finally off the road, in January of this year they spent four weeks at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studio in Bath, recording the album

Infernal Love.

Therapy? were down in the Antipodes in mid-April to indulge in the inaugural *Alternative Nation Tour* of Australia, where they played on the same bill as Faith No More, Primus, Ween, Ice-T and Body Count, plus two New Zealand shows with the 'original gangsta' and his band of joke metallers.

On the afternoon of the Auckland show, Cairns returns to the Centra Hotel in Albert Street having changed his hair from bleached blonde to jet black, because he "wanted to look like a coke dealer". It's a job well done and a better look. The previous evening he was at New York band Sick Of It All's Squid gig looking like an overweight Steady Eddy. For a man who tells many tales of depression and self loathing, Cairns is surprisingly bright and approachable. He swaps his new issue of *Viz* for a copy of *RipItUp*.

Up in his room, dirty clothes strewn everywhere and the odd empty beer bottle are the only signs of hotel debauchery, and Cairns' drug of choice for the moment is a strong black coffee. He admits to having cleaned himself up a bit in the last six months. After the American tour — two months of giving little thought to what he poured down his throat or snorted up his nose — he returned to Belfast a "ghastly, bloated mess", and opted for an intense period of songwriting, rest and relaxation.

"When we returned from America we were sick of the sight of each other. All I wanted to do was be left alone, in my own house, and write the next album. Due to my state of mind, it was initially going to be another very dark and very depressing album. The problem was that I've always been very very wary of people who isolate themselves to create — it can be beneficial, but I don't feel comfortable with that. There's one song on the new album called 'Bad

Mother'. The opening lines are: 'It's a beautiful day but I don't see it that way / The sky's too bright for my tired eyes to take.' That's a reference to people who will sit at home and deliberately find something to make them feel darker so they can create. But that's not what I'm like as a person, and in the end it didn't work out."

With almost two dozen songs in hand, Therapy? went into Real World with producer Al Clay, whose previous credits include the Pixies and Pere Ubu. To the trio's pleasant surprise, the obligatory arguments and days of silence that were the norm at past Therapy? recording sessions failed to materialise. For Cairns this meant an almost total rewrite of the album in the studio.

"We were all enjoying the recording process too much for the album to be dark. There was such optimism in our whole camp, and it would've been wrong to confuse that. It would've required too much of an effort to absorb myself in something dark to make an artistic statement, and it wouldn't have been honest."

Whether the all new positive Therapy? will be as acceptable to fans waiting on tenterhooks for *Infernal Love* is yet to be witnessed. Those expecting another *Troublegum* will be sorely disappointed. Their bright side is still darker than most, but gone are the bad attitude driven, three minute punk tunes, in favour of a more laboured, seemingly more mature effort — think Sugar meets the Beach Boys with a hint of Pink Floyd at their least epic, and give it time. Wonderful and immediate though is a cover of Hüsker Dü's 'Diane'. Featuring no drums, no bass, and no guitar, just vocals and a sweeping cello arrangement, this is a personal favourite of Cairns'.

Later in the day, a very small crowd has

assembled at the Town Hall, but Therapy? could not have paid for a more supportive and enthusiastic audience. Front of stage is a scene of wild abandon, and the lack of numbers doesn't faze the band. McKeegan, wearing a Chelsea football shirt, hammers away relentlessly at his bass, while Ewing, head down and spit flying, beats the crap out of the drums. Cairns comes across all Manson-like, as he powers through 'Nowhere' and the new single 'Stories'. They close with a crushing rendition of 'Screamager'.

In contrast, both Ice-T and Body Count proved their time was up. T cruised on autopilot, operating without spark or spirit, while Body Count made every mistake and played every cliché in the book. Absolutely positively, tonight the first should have been last.

Backstage in Therapy?'s dressing room, things are as you'd expect — drink is being swallowed, drugs are being smoked, and a groupie is being procured ("We need another pass for the girl wearing the dog collar."). Cairns offers a beer and a chair, and lets out a 'this-is-the-life' kind of sigh. I ask if rock 'n' roll provides him with an acceptable opportunity to flaunt primal male behaviour for all it's worth.

"Oh, the most. Basically, you get let off with so many things because you're in a band. If I was a 29 year old man in a bar in Belfast, tryin' to get off with a 18 year old girl, you'd think: 'What a dirty old man.' But when you're backstage at a gig or in the back of a tour bus, it becomes sort of acceptable."

He turns, shrouded in a cloud of pot smoke, smiles, and says what we all know to be true.

"I think sometimes that being in a band is just an excuse not to grow up."

JOHN RUSSELL