



Jon



Nigel

SML *Smell My Licks*

In the beginning, there was Shihad, and many punters saw them, and said they were good.

Then there came Head Like a Hole, and many punters also saw them, and said they were also good.

Years passed, and both bands prospered. They also got along well... perhaps too well, for the bands then spawned issue, and that issue was SML. Not surprisingly, said issue is good also.

SML are Head Like A Hole's Date (Nigel to his Mum, and me on this occasion), and Shihad's Jon Toogood and Tom Larkin. I spoke to Nigel three days before Head Like A Hole took off to join Shihad on tour in Germany. He apologises for missing our appointment by two hours ("ooops"), then we get down to business. SML's debut single ('Mixdown', which features seven tracks) is due out this month, and an album (*Is That It?*) will follow shortly thereafter. These recordings are the culmination of two years of jamming and the occasional live performance from Wellington's sharpest dressed sons. It all began when Head Like A Hole and Shihad shared the same practise room.

Nigel takes up the story: "There was a couple of times when both bands just had these huge jamming sessions, and there was like eight of us making this whole wall of noise. We actually played in Auckland once under the name Shitfoot, after a Head Like A Hole/Shihad gig. That was the beginning. It ended out just with me, Tom and Jon jamming occasionally just for the hell of it. That was when all the guys from Baiter Space lived in Wellington and had a studio. We went into their studio [Writhe] and Brent [MacLachlan] recorded about six songs. That was kind of the first SML thing that ever happened. After that we did a couple of gigs and supported Baiter Space in Auckland. Then it was put on hold for quite a while."

What happened to those initial recordings? "They exist, and about two of those songs are on [the] SML album. The rest of them, we didn't really want to include. They're really

good songs and good recordings, but that was right at the beginning when we were just jamming, so maybe our influences are worn on our sleeve a bit much. We've done heaps more recording since then, so we had the pick of the best out of the whole lot.

"At that stage everyone in the band still had jobs and shit. Jon ended up leaving his job and we got totally into this kind of home recording thing. I'd been doing that for about the last 18 months, because I'd left my job for Head Like A Hole ages ago [and was] being a starving musician type.

"I've got a smallish four-track studio in my bedroom. That basically became me and Jonny just sort of hanging out every day, recording shit. It was never intended to be released. All of a sudden we discovered we had about 30 songs recorded. Then Murray [Cammick, Wildside Records] started talking about releasing it. That's basically what we're into, recording lots of stinky music and getting it released so we can listen to it on our own CD players.

"As well as me and Jonny doing this home recording bit, because in that kind of scene I actually played the drums, Tom is sort of like the third come-and-go member of SML. We went with him into a studio in town and did about eight songs on a bigger sounding recording. So the album is actually a mixture of four track stuff, the original Writhe recordings and the recordings we did then. So it's this best of over two and a half, three years."

What influences do you think you may have worn on your sleeves in SML's early days?

"It's kind of hard to say because it was more just the place we were in, and just hanging out, getting stoned and all that kind of bullshit. We're all into our own little trips when it comes to music. We're not necessarily on the same wavelength, music wise, even though we really get off on playing music with each other."

Can the different musical aspects each of you brings to SML be categorised?

"Yeah, they can. Jonny's basically got the melody and the nice sing-songy voice, and I've kind of got the 'let's turn it up to 10 and thrash the shit out of it and scream along'. That

means you've got someone writing nice melodic songs and then someone filling them up with lots of noise. Tom's basically just this awesome drummer who we can [tell]: 'This is the song,' and he can play to the groove of the song, and not go: 'Oh, I'm a drummer so I better put my thousand drum fills in.' That's kind of how it works. It was just me and Jonny goofing off writing all these songs, and Tom was like the professional guy that would come along and pull it all together for us."

A couple of months ago, I heard SML were playing their last gig in Wellington. Just days later came news of their impending releases. Do the recordings mark the beginning or the end for SML?

"That's a hard one. It's just on hold. I think SML's one of those things that we could play in Wellington three years down the road, not having played at all in that time. That's how it's been. It's been on hold for a year at a time, then it's been when there's time to get together and make music, we do it. Head Like A Hole and Shihad are touring, and we're gonna have a four-track on the road, so we might record an album while we're on the road. I'm taking the SML keyboards. That's basically what the difference is between SML, Shihad and Head Like A Hole, there's a lot more keyboards and sort of blippy bloppy sounds. We're hoping we might be able to play in some sleazy places on the Reperbahn or something."

Do you envisage performing in New Zealand in support of *Is That It?*

"It all depends. Shihad are really going off over there, and they've got that attitude that they wanna stay. Those guys, Shihad is totally their main project, for sure. They're really putting every effort into that. I'd say, at this stage, that SML for them would be only if there's time. The more important thing would probably be them touring their *Killjoy* album. That's just things that if they happen it'll be cool, but otherwise, no worries."

It's not like Nigel's short of things to keep him occupied. Aside from Head Like A Hole and SML, he has two other musical projects — Baconfoot and Hemi. He plans to amalgamate

the latter two projects, as he says: "Otherwise there's just too many bands." Baconfoot includes Tom and Benji of Wellington band Funkmutha, and Tom also plays with Hemi. Despite the blurry personnel lines, at least three of the bands have very distinct personalities — just like children really. Meet the family.

"SML's sort of like kids playing in the sandpit. Head Like A Hole's kids arguing over the truck in the sandpit. Hemi's just me and Tom in the sandpit," explains the proud co-parent.

No sand actually appears on stage when SML perform live. The gag lies in the suits they wear, which are cheesy enough to stock an entire dairy co-op. When I mention them, Nigel is quick to take full responsibility.

"That's kind of my thing actually. It's just that I've got heaps of them. I've got this thing about ugly suits and I'm always buying them. Actually, last time Head Like A Hole played in Hamilton, Mark [Hideo] was really keen to get back to Wellington for some reason. We didn't do this on purpose, but we happened to stop at every single op shop between Hamilton and Wellington, and the drive took about 15 hours. I got a few more cheesy suits. It's the difference between maybe teased hair and studded wrist belts."

And spandex, and root vegetables down underpants, and turning the whole shebang up to 11. Yes it's true — SML are different. Even their name is different — every time they use it.

"Originally it was Sebastian Morgan Lynch, which was this guy Jonny and Tom went to school with who I'd never met. Jonny got this job at a bakery in Newtown, which the song 'Bakery' on the album is about. His boss' name was Stephen M Lowell — he had a licence plate 'SML'. We kind of make up a different name for every time we play and let people call us what they want."

I vote people call them a Bloody Exciting Band (sod the initials) and thank physics for osmosis.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON