

Bands Across the Water

When Dave Dobbyn first set foot on stage at the Olympia in Dublin, earlier this year, the audience greeted him with loud bleating sheep noises.

"Fuck you too!," was his response. The crowd loved it.

The various combinations of sheep noises and jokes, often directed at New Zealand musicians playing away from home, are all well past their sell-by date, yet never fail to amuse those living north of the equator. These days there use is even more frequent, as more and more New Zealand acts ignore the 'tyranny of distance', and knuckle down with a view to making serious inroads into international territories.

For many, this move demands a return to square one. It's quite on the cards that years of home-grown toiling and touring may count for little once a band steps onto foreign soil, and/or enters a market already flooded with thousands of 'next big things'. A band that's grown accustomed to playing to packed venues at home can find themselves without an audience, and in the position of having to prove themselves, night after night after night. Whether this band travels armed with the resources available to them as a major label signing, or opts for the credibility accorded an indie, once into the great wide open, like the song says: 'The road is long'.

Currently, there are more New Zealand bands with overseas releases than ever before — the sound is very definitely out there. *RipItUp* charts the fortunes and movements of the biggest movers and shakers.

CHURNING AWAY

"There were some perceptions within the band that we were going to hit the big time really quickly. There was the feeling that we'd done our time in New Zealand, and everyone thought it was going to happen. But it's not like that. We've got to pay our dues doubly now, we've got to fit into the grind, and keep grinding. We now realise we've started all over again."

On the eve of Wellington band Shihad's first American tour, Gerald Dwyer, their manager since 1990, sums up the recent European experience, during which Shihad played over

80 dates, including several major music festivals, and 25 high profile support slots for Faith No More.

"This last tour definitely let people know there is this band called Shihad, but, we're a band coming in absolutely green. We've got this mammoth task of getting the name around, and getting in front of the right people. We've gone back to square one, and we're totally realistic about that."

In New Zealand and Australia, Shihad are contractually bound to release their recordings through Auckland-based label Wildside. Up until mid-1993, the band and Dwyer were on the lookout for a label who could release and promote their albums internationally. That year they signed a five album deal with Noise International, the second biggest independent label in Europe. Noise released Shihad's debut album, *Churn*, in early '94, and the band toured Europe briefly that year, after recording their second album, *Killjoy*, in Auckland. When Noise released the band's second album in early 1995, Dwyer says the degree to which the label was behind Shihad was evident in the effort spent on promoting the album, and the amount of money advanced to the band, allowing them to tour.

"This last tour, they spent half a million New Zealand dollars keeping the band in Europe for five months. They want to break the band, there's no question about that."

While the tour was in progress, Shihad were involved in negotiations with the American division of Noise, who had only recently opened an office in Los Angeles, and wanted to sign the band exclusively for North America. Meanwhile, major USA label Phonogram had been turned on to Shihad by members of Faith No More, and were also looking to secure a deal with the band.

"I was aware how badly Noise wanted the band, so we won considerable points on the deal because of that. It wasn't until after I

signed the contract that I found out there was a major lined up that wanted the band straight away. Right now I'm putting out the feelers with other majors that have previously expressed interest, and I'm expecting them to see us live in the States."

Shihad have a four album deal with Noise USA, *Killjoy* being the first release. The label have the option to release *Churn* as the second, or, alternatively, wait for the band to record a third album. So far the USA tour has seen Shihad play the *Foundations Music Convention* in Los Angeles, on the same bill as Monster Magnet and Quicksand, and support Misery Loves Co on a brief coast to coast jaunt. They'll spend the first three weeks of October writing new material in LA, before embarking on a 30 date tour with locals Excel. Prior to the

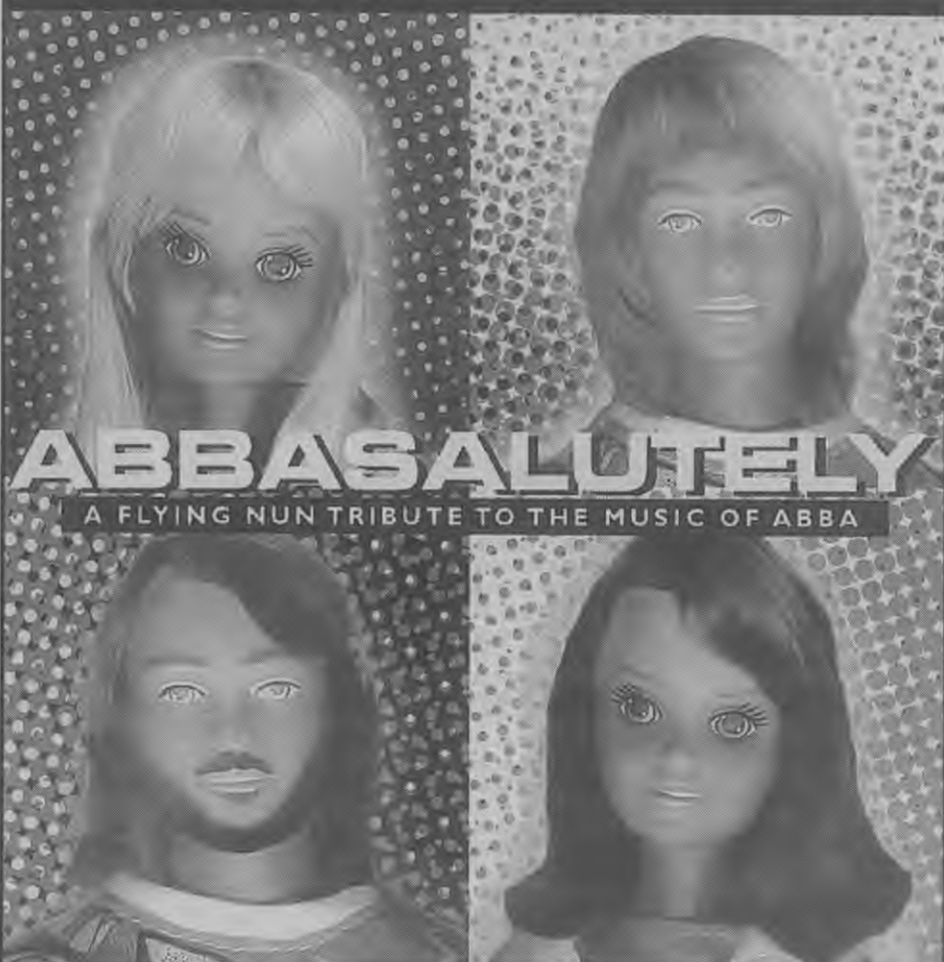
band's arrival Stateside, *Killjoy* reached Number 5 on the 'Hardhitters' Chart, an industry chart that reflects new additions to the playlists of 'hard alternative' format radio stations nationwide.

Upon completion of the tour in mid-December, Shihad will return to New Zealand and begin pre-production on their third album, due to be recorded early next year.

"It's going to be really hard work after that, 'cause that's the album Noise are really going to want to break us on, and no matter how good we are, the punters have to buy the records. We've already convinced the business over there that we've got the stuff, but there's all these things between the business and the punters that have to be done right before the punters even look at a page in a magazine and



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