



The Bats – A Night on the Couch

Robert Scott has a lot on his plate, and is wearing many hats. Two days before *RipItUp* came calling, he'd been in Dunedin's Fish St studio with his mind on the Clean, completing the finishing touches to their forthcoming album, *Unknown Country*. In coming weeks, he'll attempt to shed all distractions and begin writing tunes for the Magick Heads' second record. But today Scott is in promo mode as one quarter of the Bats, talking up the impending release of their fifth album, *Couchmaster*.

Having had plenty of practice, Scott juggles his dual roles with ease. *Unknown Country* was recorded during February and March this year, when Clean drummer Hamish Kilgour returned home from his New York base. The Magick Heads served up *Before We Go Under* in May, and *Couchmaster* was put down on tape throughout June and July.

After the travel and expense involved with their two previous albums — *Silverbeet* and *Fear Of God* were made in American studios with American producers — the Bats opted for the comfort and familiarity of Nightshift in Christchurch, where they recorded their 1987 debut album, *Daddy's Highway*. Another change in tack saw them take over the controls and produce *Couchmaster* themselves.

"The fact we've used producers in the past didn't mean we had to carry on using them. We felt we'd done so much recording we could easily produce ourselves. We know that studio pretty well, and although we could have gone somewhere else and spent a bit more money, we can take over Nightshift, pretty much, and it's quite easy to work in."

It wouldn't be unfair to say the Bats don't pull too many surprises out of the bag. With every album, like going to McDonald's, essentially you know what you're going to get. Until now. Remarkably, after four albums and five EPs, *Couchmaster* reveals a new side to the Bats. The guitars have suddenly got a bit gruffer, Scott's vocal a tad more throaty, and the usually stubborn rhythms now bash in and out at all angles. The Bats are toughening up — getting bad to the bone.

"That's quite unusual because we've never really been called tough. As far as we could tell when we went in, it was just a new bunch of songs, and we were just doing another album. We didn't set out to make it sound different. We didn't try and make it not sound like the Bats. We were just trying to take a few more chances. If you start writing songs for other people, you're not being honest with yourself."

Which brings us to another point. Lyrically, *Couchmaster* is also the most raw and revealing the Bats have ever been. Earlier, Scott had mentioned that 1995 hadn't been the best of years, and that is quite clearly reflected in many of the songs.

"I've been writing fairly dark songs, and those are the ones that we've chosen. It sounds quite dark in terms of instrumentation, which is good, 'cause that's the way a song should be done if, lyrically, it's got a dark feeling. It's quite a scary thing to put your life down in songs, and have people hear them. I never spell anything out too literally, although I guess people could guess situations by listening to the songs. But I hope the songs don't spell out too much, 'cause I don't want to be spilling my guts. A lot of writers would say the same thing, I think, that when you're down, one of the only forms of release to get those emotions out is in music."

After 18 months at home (Scott lives in Dunedin, while his fellow Bats, Paul Kean, Kaye Woodward and Malcolm Grant, reside in Christchurch), the Bats will reacquaint themselves with the touring lifestyle this month. It's a trip Scott is dead keen on making, as the songs on *Couchmaster* are overdue for an airing. Meanwhile, Mammoth, the USA independent label who license the Bats' recordings for release in North America, are making moves toward getting the band over to tour early in 96. With everything now said and done, life appears red tape free for Flying Nun's longest serving band.

"Yeah, it all boils down to how you're feeling with your lot, and how contented you are. The main thing to be is happy artistically, and know that you're creating something good, which we are."

JOHN RUSSELL

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