



Groove On Down The Road

In April of this year, **SUPERGROOVE** embarked on a world tour that saw them charge through Australia, Asia, the United Kingdom, Europe, and briefly the USA, selling over 150,000 copies of their debut album *Traction*. At the time of this interview, the band were relishing a rare two day break as they travelled through Europe for the second time. Frontman **KARL STEVEN** has been asleep all day in his room at the Columbia Hotel in London, but has stirred sufficiently to divulge the trip hasn't all been wine, women, and songs.

"We're all pretty tired out. At the beginning of the tour we could take in a lot, especially in Asia and India, and it was all very exciting, and getting to Europe the first time was exciting. Now we're just too exhausted to take anything in, all we're worried about is sleep and food. But as we've been playing the shit out of every two-bit little town in the world, I think when we come back to the rest of the world at some stage next year, it's gonna have paid off. We're starting to make a few ripples."

How did it feel shifting from playing to massive crowds here, to smaller audiences?

"That was really good actually. It can become, in New Zealand, that people are so looking forward to us playing — all their friends are there, and it's such a big event in a lot of towns — that even if we do a pretty shitty show, people are still happy we're there, and that can be a little bit disheartening when we know that we've been really bad. So, it's been good to play to some small and really discerning crowds, who aren't going to just love you when you suck. That's what's improved us, I think, in our live playing. You just can't get away with a bad gig, 'cause if you play like shit then no one's gonna ever like you in that country again."

Is the band playing hotter than ever due to the amount of shows?

"I think our live show now is a helluva lot better than ever before, but on the other side of the coin, we're the most dissatisfied with our music than we've ever been. We're totally sick to death of every song we play live, therefore it's lost a bit of its heart 'cause the songs just aren't fresh any more."

Are you just going through the motions then?

"To a certain extent... on a bad night. What happens most nights these days, is we

fuck around and clown around to make it interesting for ourselves. The audience enjoys that, but it becomes a bit of a travelling circus... we're just so bored shitless with the songs."

What has been the worst time on the tour?

"We played a gig in Paris, and a bomb had gone off half way down the street from where we were playing. They closed off that part of town, and the local radio was warning people not to go down there. So, we got about four people — who I think were undercover cops."

And the best?

"The highlight was playing in Bombay to 4,000 people. That was wild. It was a free concert and they were all men. It just seems women don't go to concerts in India. The whole Asian part of the tour was really a hell of an experience — and we didn't get our kidneys stolen either."

In the Philippines, where 'daylight robbery' means more than losing your cash, Supergroove's record label, BMG, took extra precautions to ensure the band avoided becoming victims of the notorious black market trade in body parts.

"When you're a lone white dude walking in the Philippines, or any of the more run down, seedy parts of Asia, everyone's watching you, there's always groups of men checking you out and looking mean. The record company was very cautious. We had these bodyguards with machine guns walking with us everywhere we went. Even when I went to the toilet, one of them stood next to me with a gun while I was having a piss. There's all this shit that you never hear about happening in Asia. A few years ago Deep Purple's road manager ended up at the bottom of a lift shaft for no apparent reason, and I heard that 60 people died at a Metallica concert 'cause they started climbing over the fence and were gunned down. At the end of our gig

in Jakarta the audience were pushed out the door by the butts of guns. It's pretty wild being from New Zealand, then seeing that kind of stuff."

In August, when the first leg of the European tour drew to a close, Supergroove returned to England and spent a month writing songs in a secluded farmhouse rented for them by BMG.

"We were staying in the tiniest village known to man, called Hancrof, in Sussex. There we wrote one song a week, and we joined in the village cricket games every so often. But my record breaking feat was that, over that month, I consumed 50 bottles of wine and 800 cigarettes. That was my song-writing tally."

How do the new songs differ from those on *Traction* and *Tractor*?

"They're a lot more melodic... the crafting, the actual method of writing... we've learnt a lot in the last year. We've been listening to your classic pop music, like David Bowie and Lou Reed, the Beatles, Blondie, even Duran Duran, and heaps of 80s new wave. We're listening to good, immortal pop music, and thinking: 'This is a helluva lot better than anything we've done.' *Tractor* was a little experiment, recorded and written very quickly, just to see what it was like to bash away at songs. We did that because *Traction*... it's not like they're songs, they're like a hell of a lot of style and very little content, there's no substance to it. We're pretty dissatisfied with *Traction* these days."

Sounds like you're wanting to get a great deal more serious.

"Yeah, we definitely are. We've learnt a lot since we started this tour, just about who we are as a band, and how good we are. When we left New Zealand, it was like: 'Yeah, we're gonna take on the world, we're as good as any of the bands out there.' But just from playing the songs every night for months on end, and seeing other bands,

and dealing with the international music industry, we realise we're potentially a very good band, but at the moment we're just an OK band."

BMG proved how serious they wanted to get when, in May, they chose to add Supergroove to an exclusive list of artists considered 'long term development priorities'. Other acts on the list include Annie Lennox, the Dave Matthews Band and Take That.

"Being on it means you get these weird BMG executives appearing out of nowhere at a gig in Stockholm, saying they've flown in from New York to see you — and they tell you after the gig! It's not like they're suddenly pouring bucketfuls of money on us, but I like the name and I like being associated with those other bands... at least, on a bit of paper."

Before Christmas, Supergroove will play shows in Indonesia, Singapore, and Australia, content in the knowledge they've been granted a month's holiday in January next year. The follow-up to *Traction* is due to be recorded at York Street Studios in February, and the band will fly out to tackle America soon after. But when we spoke, Supergroove were still weeks away from boarding a plane to Auckland, and all those comforts of home.

"Basically I really miss... well, you've been round at my house more recently than I have."

And your room's a shambles.

"Oh god, it's still messy is it? I was hoping it had maybe been tidied in my absence by some fairy godmother. I miss my stereo and my couch, and all those little pleasures that you take for granted when you *can* go home after work every day. When you've been away as long as we have, all that stuff becomes very valuable."

JOHN RUSSELL