

management and sound crew equally dividing the \$400 guarantee and hoping for a percentage on the door. The door take didn't show, the eight members split the cash in hand and then pitched money back in the kitty for petrol to get themselves home to families. The following week there was no gig at all ... and no income.

On their tours the group has the advantage of playing material that may be familiar to their audiences ... their six-track mini-album was released mid year and while not exactly a big seller (Less than 2,000 copies) it did rise to No. 18 on the Auckland charts. ("A Top Twenty record!!" roar the band with delight.) "What's Be Happen?" is a remarkable record, one that the group are justifiably proud of. The diversity of styles assimilated and brought out is evident even after a single hearing.

From the highly politicized "Azania" that opens the album, ("Pretoria, we see through all your lies, hiding your evil system under multi-racial disguise...soon come Azania, power to the freedom fighters") through to the delicate acoustic tribute to Bob Marley in "Reggae Doing Fine", the album touches all kinds of feelings. "One Brotherhood" for example is a plea for unity in the face of racial diversity, set against a soft pulse of South Pacific guitars, "Whistling In The Dark" conjures up streetcorner huddles of K.C.'s in Ponsonby side streets.

Loud acclaim

Local music critics were loud in their acclaim of "Whats Be Happen?" As highly respected Rip It Up critic Duncan Campbell put it, "This record marks a major step forward for New Zealand music ... one which the participants can be truly proud."

However that was no guarantee that the songs would get the all important radio play and in fact some stations refused to give air-time to "Azania" because of its strong anti-apartheid sentiments and the not-so-coincidental arrival of the Springboks in the country. The group also feel some anger at the lack of effort put in by local distributors, whose efforts they feel are minimal, only paying lip-service to local music. Of the music however they made no excuses.

"We were really pleased with the tracks and we only put six tracks on because we heard that was a new thing overseas. It also kept it to a realistic price", says Toni, "but we knew we wouldn't make any money. We just felt it had to be done, that's all."

And the album was only one of the things that Herbs felt had to be done. Early on in their career they set themselves some goals ... and to date they have fulfilled all their aims, but one. And that is the one that they see as being the most important — a tour of the islands. Something that could be seen as a spiritual journey, perhaps

("For Phil (the groups pakeha bassist) it's missionary work," jokes Spence.) A learning experience to be sure. In the silence that follows the question, Why go to the islands? it becomes clear that this is something beyond words. Searching for roots in Hawaiiki comes up somewhat self-consciously. But the tour is the test.

Too many strings

Originally scheduled for last July, events overtook the tour. The support concerts provided much sought after experiences, but more importantly, money. The financing of the tour is awkward and the frustrations of manager Will 'Ilohia come through when the subject is raised. It's the anger of what HERBS call their "street-management" trying to deal with figures and estimates that run off like telephone numbers. The time spent negotiating their way around a maze of Government Departments in search of financial assistance.

Like the album, which appeared on their own Warrior label, the tour has all the idiosyncrasies that one expects from this unique band.

"The first thing is that control must be kept within the group", says Will "and so that has counted us out of a lot of funding things because there's always strings attached."

The initial tour budget looked to be around \$64,000 but some very interesting possibilities emerged even at the outset of the planning. The Commission for Independent Pictures saw the potential for a 50 minute documentary film emerging and were prepared to make provision in their own finances to come along for the ride. From their interest came unexpected bonuses.

Motels in Fiji and Tonga were prepared to offer free accommodation in exchange for some discreet screen time. Air New Zealand also saw possibilities in the film ... the band carrying Air NZ bags, the koru appearing on the groups gear and such. On the other side there was some less attractive aspects, the "strings". There was some suggestion that the band could write and presumably perform a song about the virtues of flying Air NZ. "That was something that we would have to look at."

Retain independence

A brewery was particularly keen to become involved too but, as Will says, "the band would have to consider whether we wanted to be seen to be promoting beer." It all kept coming back to control... and in these last areas the group could see their independence threatened. While deliberating on the commercial aspects, Will has approached a brace of Government agencies. The Queen Elizabeth Arts Council came into the picture early and although the timing of funds from that source seems undependable they made out a case for \$15,000 and have come to a loose ver-

bal agreement for something a bit less. Nothing definite, just a fingers crossed situation at present.

Some money can come from Warrior Records, from funds set aside to promote the album on tour, again not a great deal, but possibly enough to shift the album in the islands visited.

Approaches made

Approaches were made to the Maori Affairs department via guitarist Dilworth Karaka, but ironically their case couldn't be considered within the terms of the Maori Trust because of the five permanent members, only Dilworth is Maori. The matter is now being considered by other departments that could make finance available under trusts for Pacific Island peoples. Again though, it's a wait and see situation.

The current line of enquiry is through the Tu Tangata scheme, the scheme established to encourage the cultural identity and pride that HERBS are naturally associated with by their large following in Auckland. The Tu Tangata perspective is quite different, and more encouraging than other areas. Recent discussions have been positive and understanding has developed between the parties. Tu Tangata see HERBS as a group with possibilities beyond music making.

"We've got to get some goals," explains Will, "and we hope to get some money from the Tu Tangata programme if they will see us as a business. There could be either a grant or a loan if we can prove that we've created employment then they could give us a grant. At present HERBS has provided employment for the guys in the band, for me, the sound people and others who are working with the band. But its over to us again. Tu Tangata were quite keen and now we are talking about a business plan."

Not over

And so the tour, initially planned for last June, deferred till December, is now tentatively scheduled for June '82. And all things being equal it could just go ahead ... if the financial help arrives in time.

Three years up from the street working on their own, HERBS have played their part and earned the respect of street kids and the music industry alike. They now wait for those efforts to be acknowledged by someone with access to the public coffers.

So the story is a hard one, a story far from being finished in its telling. "Never get far if you stay where you are".

And where will HERBS be in eighteen months time?

There is a long pause.

But the journey isn't over yet.

The answer comes slowly, but when it comes it comes with an affirmation borne out of the years gone before....

"We'll be around".

"Yeah, we'll be around".