

# MIKE CHUNN INTERVIEW

## Part 1

Interviewed by Alastair Dougal

**Split Enz left New Zealand in April 1976. Since leaving fourteen months ago, they have recorded an album, toured Britain twice and America and Australasia once. An impressive achievement in itself. But the constant touring interspersed with periods of inactivity have taken their toll, for they have lost three members in this period. First to go was drummer Emlyn Crowther, followed after the U.S. tour by founder members Phil Judd and Michael Chunn. A few weeks ago, we talked with Michael Chunn about his experiences and reactions to over a year in the wide world of rock and roll.**

Split Enz arrived in Britain, assured that Phil Manzanera of Roxy Music would produce their new album but sure of little else. As Michael explains "we had nothing definite arranged at all, but we were very impatient and we just had to go. It wasn't that we felt that we'd outgrown Australia because we very definitely hadn't. In fact, we were very much on the way out there, but we were just dead keen on going to England. I'd always wanted to play there and suddenly there was the chance. Phil Manzanera was free and we pushed our management company, Mental Management, into it and so off we went."

Almost immediately upon arrival in England they went into the studio. In contrast to the somewhat shabby treatment they felt they'd received in the studios in Australia, recording in Britain went much more smoothly. "Manzanera was very good. Especially after the totally unsympathetic treatment we'd had when we were recording in Australia. The engineer in Sydney thought we couldn't tune our guitars and that we were unprofessional and he just showed total disinterest right through. But Manzanera and his engineer, Rhett Davies, made a very good pair. They'd go all night and had endless energy and they didn't impose at all, as some producers do. So, we basically just did what we wanted to and when it came to the mixing he sensibly filtered out what he thought was superfluous."

"Some people still think there's too much in there but that's just us anyway. What's on the record comes out on stage and we were all pretty happy with it."

However, in retrospect, they do have some reservations about the album. "One of the things we should have perhaps looked more closely at

was the choice of songs. There's quite a variety in style of songs because we were playing ones that had been written over a long period, so there were obvious stylistic differences. And, in America particularly, we found a backlash against this. They thought that we should have had a more uniform sound. But, we just did what we were, so really you just have to take it or leave it. Because we felt there was no point in rearranging a whole lot of songs that we'd been playing the same way for years just so the whole sound was similar. On the whole, everybody felt pretty good about the album."

But even with the album successfully under way, Split Enz still had no

record company in England. So, part way through the album they travelled to Portsmouth to audition for Chrysalis. This, they did by playing support at a Gentle Giant concert to prove they could be as successful on stage as they were in the studio. As Michael notes, "we went down pretty well. We got an encore and all that sort of hoo-ha. Everybody said it was the turning point, a big break and so on and as a result Chrysalis signed us."

With the album completed and the contract signed, they set about promoting the record. In August, they were booked to play at the famous Marquee Club at an invitation only reception for the press and promotion people. "We had only done one warm up for the Marquee and that was at a tiny pub called The Nashville Room which was about the size of the Globe in Auckland. We turned up with a huge PA and everybody laughed at us."

But the Marquee gig went very well. "We were terrified and we all got bruised knees they were knocking so badly. There were lots of big names there — 10 c.c., Andy MacKay and others. We'd only played the two gigs in England but that was just too bad, we just had to pull finger and do the job. Although the whole thing went by very quickly, it was a bit like when you've got the ball and you're running for a try. You just don't remember actually doing it."

Bruised knees or not, it was a great success. "The next day we had a press reception and the interest from journalists was really incredible. I remember thinking that we'd finally got somewhere at long last, because

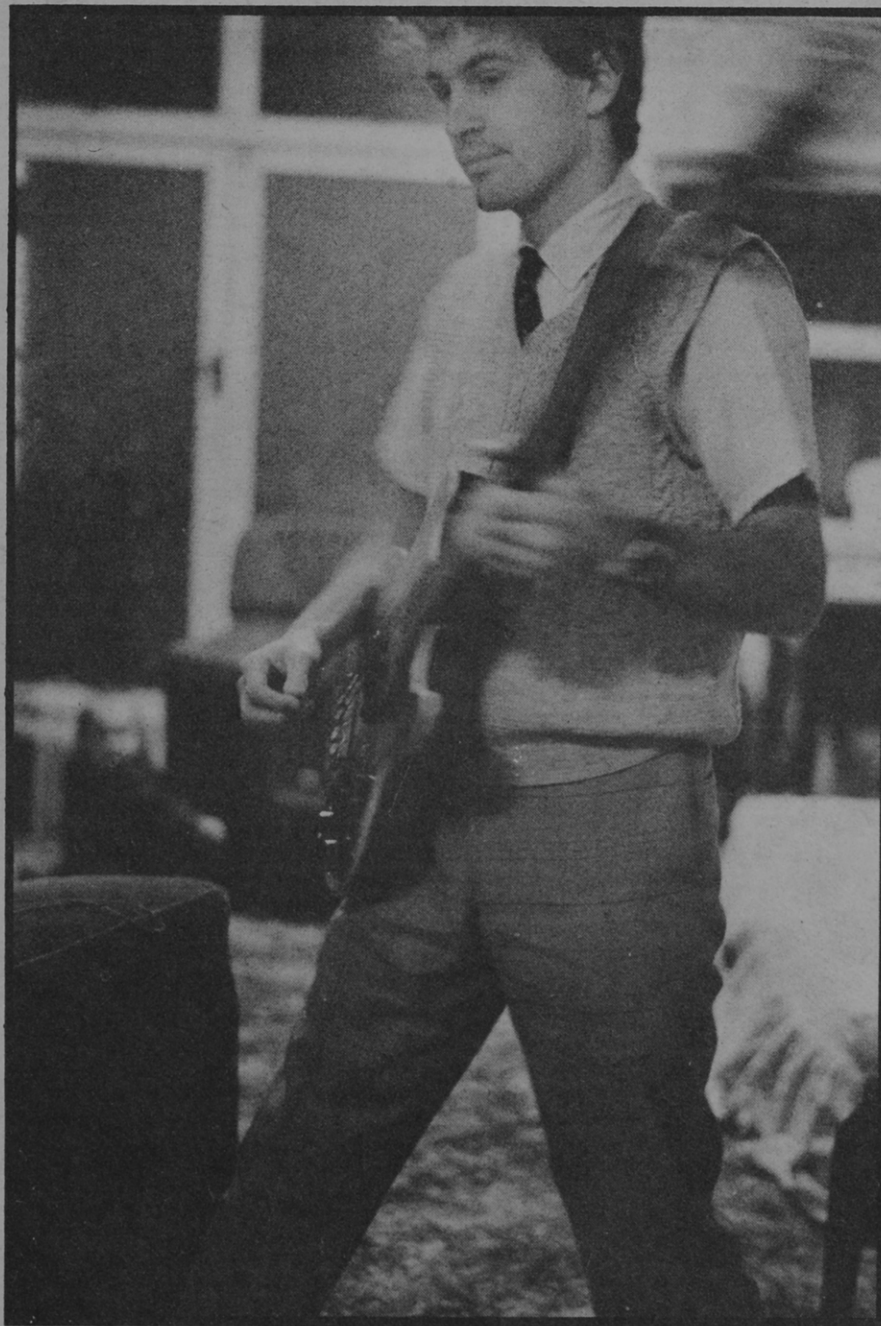
**"When we started playing we lost even more because it cost us more to play than we earned."**

there were journalists from France, Holland, Japan, Belgium and Italy as well as Britain and we got big articles as a result."

But even with such publicity, Split Enz still had no agency in England and what's more the agency they were trying to get demanded they do an audition. As Michael recalls bemusedly "They asked us to audition by doing a concert in a rehearsal room which was about 30ft by 40ft. So, there were just these two people at one end of the room and us at the other all dressed up in the twit suits and there wouldn't be any clapping when you finished a song. It was just terrible and then they said No."

Meanwhile, the band were getting very bored. "We'd just been sitting around, playing tennis, swimming, sleeping, and getting fed up. We knew we had to get an agency and the agency we wanted had turned us down and so we were just waiting. We were on a wage system from our management company of \$70 a week and we just went into the red more and more because all those months we weren't earning anything. In fact, when we started playing we lost even more, because it cost us more to play than we earned. So last year we would have lost over \$50,000. We got advance royalties on the album, and that was a reasonably large sum, but that all went straight away."

It was in this boring interim that drummer, Emlyn Crowther was fired from the band. Michael explains "We all felt we needed a simpler drummer or at least one who fitted in more with the style of music we were playing. Crowther also got extremely frustrated at not playing live, he always wants to play live, whereas I'm not really a live musician. For me, it honestly was like a hobby that suddenly got a bit big. Even though I was full of ambition it was nothing I'd



Murray Cammick

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