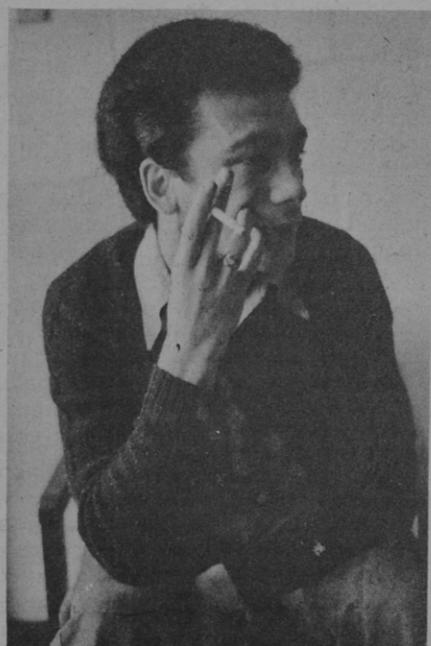


MARK WILLIAMS

OR HOW A NO. 1 RECORD DOESN'T SOLVE ALL YOUR PROBLEMS



Whatever happened to Mark Williams?

That would have been a pretty reasonable question a few months ago but there's no avoiding him now. With a number one single in "I Guess It Doesn't Matter Anymore" and a fine new album *Taking It All In Stride*, he's once again coming at you on all fronts. So, what did happen to Mark Williams in 1976?

"We kept pretty much out of the public eye last year because we realised what was happening... one of the biggest mistakes in a country this size is to keep on pouring things out as fast as you can. After all you can only do it for so long and people get bored with you. It's happened to every entertainer in New Zealand, after so long you just become totally overexposed."

"And exposure in the year of 'Yesterday Was Just The Beginning (Of My Life)' almost went overboard. I saw myself on TV, I heard myself on the radio... so the lull wasn't so much planned as that we felt we weren't going to do anything else until we had something that was, for want of a better word, legitimate."

"We felt there was no point churning things out and riding on a bandwagon that was formed by having a Number 1 record."

The 'we' Mark Williams is talking about includes his producer and manager Alan Galbraith. Williams is reticent, even shy, and Galbraith tends to leap in to expand and clarify Mark's short statements. That may sound to some like a Svengali-like situation, with Galbraith pulling the strings, but I don't think it is. In the four years that Williams has been a solo singer every step has been carefully created and acted upon by the two together. There's a mutual respect between them for the other abilities — a team I guess you'd call it. For instance, at the

Dr Hook concert Alan Galbraith was down at the mixing board making sure it came out right. And it certainly did.

Galbraith's position is that he advances Mark Williams career on any front he can. He freely admits: "I'd gladly hand the management over to someone else who knew more about it than me if there was anybody around involved in it. But all there are in New Zealand are booking agents. I'm basically a record producer, but I happen to manage Mark Williams and Sharon O'Neill for want of anyone else to do it."

The new album gains both their enthusiasm. "We both feel it's so much better than the two previous albums in every respect. Mark's got an obvious style which is being allowed to come through. And it's only recently that he's got to feel confident doing a lyric like "Taking It All In Stride", a song which relies purely on performance and not on how the guys in back are playing."

Mark agrees: "I sort of know which direction I want to go now, although the direction is still varied. I don't think I could ever settle with just one style."

Galbraith clarifies that statement, "I think we're trying to create an original style. On the album there are disco-funk Commodores style things which he performs in his own way, and there's a couple of sensitive ballads. Somewhere in there an original style emerges."

"That's the only way to go. We don't want to consciously be like anything else, nor do we consciously try to be not like anything else."

Mark agrees: "The good thing about what we're doing now is that nobody's trying to mould me."

So who tried to mould you in the past?

"I think EMI did in a lot of ways, in their expectations."

And what were they trying to mould you into?

"God knows. They'd come along and suggest songs to do. One Christmas, they brought along a corny Christmas song that Stevie Wonder had done and tried to make us do that."

"Mark was horrified." Galbraith interjects, "and he really felt the pressure of his record company saying: do this, do that. But it's also fair to say that EMI have been incredibly good. There were a few instances of certain people not really understanding what Mark Williams was about. But that would happen in any record company anywhere in the world. Now I think they've got total faith. After all, he's got a Number 1 record, so they must realise that they can put their faith in him."

Galbraith also sees a change in the audience's idea of Mark Williams. "I think a lot of people, say in the 18-25 age group, weren't giving Mark a fair hearing because they were put off by the fact that he appealed to a wide audience and that he was quite unashamedly commercial in his ap-



Photos by Murray Cammick

proach, which doesn't go down well with a lot of people."

Mark affirms this, "I got kickback on that too. If I'd go to a club there'd always be one or two who'd really despise what I was doing."

"Yeah, I think they probably thought that Mark was going out of his way to be as commercial as possible. But I think they're beginning to realise now that what he's doing is legitimate Mark Williams. It may not entirely appeal to them but at least it's honest. We should have called this album 'Honesty'," Alan says with a smile.

So after a lay-off and the release of the new album, where now? Alan Galbraith realises the problem. "This year we said 'Well, what do we do now?' So we decided to set up a Mark Williams show, with Mark upfront with his own band and a guest artist."

This far, they've toured through a few pubs but there have been problems. "New Zealand Breweries just aren't interested in entertainment. They see shows as a way to sell booze which doesn't help us very much because they don't promote the show. But now, we've put the basis of the

shows together and we hope to be able to do it properly in concert halls."

You're pushing for that?

"Yeah, but it seems silly to me that we have to push for it. It seems crazy to me that a promoter is bringing the Hues Corporation here to do a major 3 week tour and they haven't had a hit in what... a year and a half? Here's a guy who's undoubtedly got a big following, he's got a Number 1 record and yet nobody's approaching us to do a tour. Promoters are just scared of local artists."

Assuming that they manage to convince a local promoter to take the tour on, you'll see a Mark Williams Show with Rocking Horse and Sharon O'Neill doing the country within the next few months.

Where then? "I'm working towards going overseas. I know I've got to get out of here now. I didn't want to and I've always maintained I didn't want to, but..."

Alan Galbraith comes in, "We all know with 3 million people and the sort of venues which we have to perform in, we can't do much else. It's quite nice living here but there's just not enough to do. As far as I'm concerned we don't really want to just get up one day and leave the country. We feel we live here and so we want to expand from here and the obvious thing, first of all, is to go to Australia."

"We haven't planned to go to Sydney and start grovelling around working all the clubs. We think we can do it better by establishing ourselves in the area without leaving here. So, we'll try to work ourselves into the area by going there and coming back."

"We've got some fairly positive offers on the lease of Mark's recordings and it's a matter of going there and saying: 'Will you do more if we bring the artist to you?' And after Australia we'll try the same strategy in Japan, so that by the end of the year we'll have an agent and a recording company in each place and we'll return here to plan our strategy."

"We've got to get something moving because if we're gonna stay in these pubs much longer, we're all gonna die."

