



# THE GREAT SCORCH

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MURRAY CAMMICK

## ACHSCTUNG!

Sichtung tend to provoke strong reactions.

Morton Wilson, guitarist for the six man aggregation, narrates a little story on this subject. "I was walking down the street in Wellington wearing a Sichtung T shirt which we'd just had printed. And this teenage girl about 16 or 17 came up to me and said, 'I think your band is f\*\*king shit'. They she walked on before I had a moment. It was brilliant."

Unlike most of us, Sichtung don't mind the odd insult.

Andrew Hagan keyboardist, vocalist and guitarist is adamant that a reaction one way or the other is better than no reaction at all. "I do like people who come up to me and really hate it. Some people approach us and say, 'You can't dance to it and this and this and this is wrong!'"

They've listened to our music and they've considered it and they don't like it. And good on them. They've made a serious attempt."

Morton backs up this statement: "We wouldn't be doing much good if everybody liked it. In fact, it would probably be very boring and we do want to surprise people."

Luckily not all the reaction Sichtung receives is so negative. On their second night in Auckland they were brought back for an encore after two hours of original material that few in the audience were familiar with. A vindication of their ability to reproduce and even improve on their recorded sound. Furthermore their first album, logically titled *Sichtung*, has already sold out its first pressing, moving 500 copies alone in the band's home-town, Wellington.

So what is a sichtung? The word comes from a Monty Python routine but more particularly it relates to the musicians who have formed around the nucleus of Mort and Andy, the principal songwriters.

The music on the album displays a considerable variety — from what are best described as impressionist sound pictures to more simple, albeit quirky, pop songs.

Andrew admits the music has tenuous connections to rock. "It's more classical than rock 'n' roll," is his description but is hard pressed to explain quite why it's happened that way.

"We are rather specialised. But we don't design it that way, we're just doing what we can do."

Morton and Andrew began writing together on acoustic guitars while still at school. "We spent the next two or three years writing stuff and doing the odd coffee bar around Wellington. Then Jeff the drummer turned up and said, 'You lads need a drummer'. After numerous changes the band has settled into its current line up which has been together for 15 months."

Their beginnings bear some resemblance to Split Enz who also began as an essentially acoustic act. Indeed the Enz have been a great influence on Sichtung, not so much musically but in showing the possibilities of playing out-of-the-mainstream music in New Zealand. Andrew agrees vehemently: "A brilliant band and they've done so much for us. They showed the possibilities of hitting NZ right in the stomach and saying, 'We're going to do exactly what we want to do.' They're the first band that did it and they proved a great incentive to us."

Sichtung have also come in for some stick over the nature of their lyrics. Songs about talking to trees and going 'doon the dunny' are to some meaningless. Not surprisingly the criticism didn't phase Andy.

He maintains their songs are "basically pretty serious stuff. We're singing about what's happening to you and me right now. The things that we've experienced. I talk to trees and I'm not ashamed of it. I mean you're stark naked singing about talking to trees. If you went down the pub and told the barman you talked to trees, he'd think you were crazy. But I still think it's something people should be aware of."

Andrew's explanation of "Doon the Dunny" is equally terse. "Have you ever been down in the dumps? What more can you say? The music's all there."

Their confidence in the quality of the lyrics carries over into a relaxed confidence in the future for Sichtung. Planning is already underway for their second album, but Sichtung is looking even further ahead. "We're gonna make it very big in about two years and we're in no hurry to do it."

In an earlier lull in the conversation Andrew gave perhaps the best idea of what Sichtung are about — "I mean what else can you say about Sichtung except listen to it."

Alastair Dougal



Sichtung are from left to right — Rob Sinclair, Geoff Bowdler, David Bowater, Andrew Hagan, Morton Wilson and Paul Jeffrey.

The sky cleared about ten thirty. Then commenced the great scorch. In prospect — ten or eleven hours, sun, seven bands, more searing, midsummer sun.

Shortly after eleven, more or less on time, Wellington's Country Flyers opened. "Hello out there," announced a friendly Midge Marsden, swearing he'd never played at such an early hour. The Country Flyers offered what was in some ways the most enjoyable set of the day. Beaver singing and making eyes at her children in the front row helped enliven an already intriguing and eclectic repertoire. They covered material ranging from Ray Charles to Commander Cody, nursing the crowd into the spirit of things, enjoying themselves in the process.

"Good Morning Citizens", the Chunn brothers burst into action next with their now familiar catchcry. Citizen Band entered in an unprecedented mood of vigour, treating the exercise like the frontal assault on Omaha Beach, Mike Chunn's bass simulating the naval bombardment. Unhappily the band who are consistently impressive in a smaller setting adapted only moderately to the great outdoors. Apart from the fact that the bass overpowered everything, Geoff Chunn's singing didn't carry well and it was fortunate that the material and arrangements remained strong enough to keep the whole venture afloat.

Meanwhile the sun had reduced our lunch to a molten ooze and the St John's contingent were dealing with their first heat casualties.

I believe I spent the first quarter of the Rocking Horse set in a baked stupor. Perhaps it is some small tribute to their energy that they managed to rouse me. At any rate, Rocking Horse, a band to whom Aucklanders have never been very kind, played to their usual high standard, finishing with lively versions of "Dixie Chicken" and "Oh Atlanta". Beaver walked on for vocal backups on the latter two which also featured from Kevin Bayley, New Zealand's most eccentric guitarist, solos which rate as minor classics in the comic grotesque.

Next up: Alistair Riddell and his Wonder Ones. Although Riddell's comeback is as yet limited to one good single he and the band have an album in the ofing and all bar one song was prospective album issue. None of the material has the immediacy of "Wonder Ones" though it passed by inoffensively enough. We will really have to wait for release to see if its impact grows with familiarity.

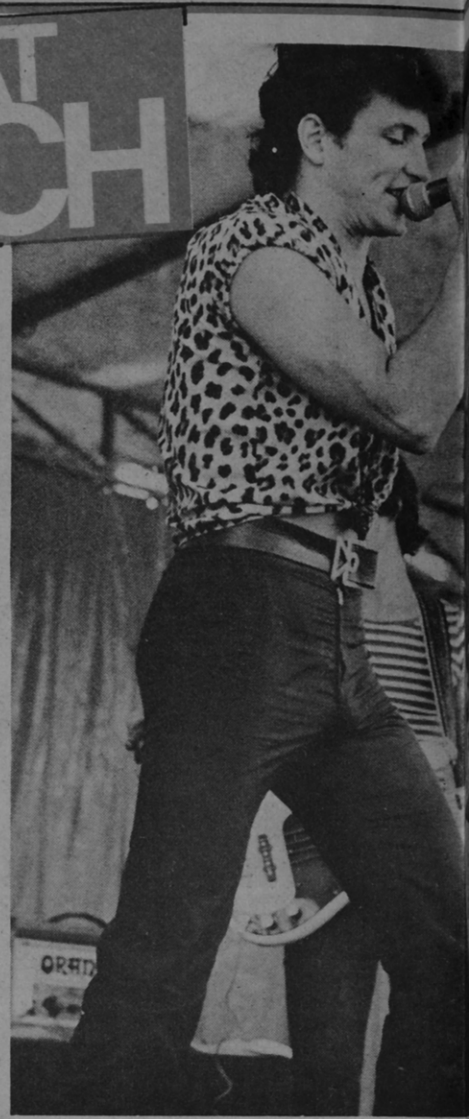
At this stage the recorded disco noise pollution that the P.A. pumped out between acts was conspiring with heat stroke to drive me bananas. When will promoters understand that, given a whole day's rock and roll, people appreciate a little silence, that this incessant intervening throb bores and deafens and jades the pallet.

Presently the portly 12M D.J. who had been doing the honours all day welcomed "My personal friends" (quick read of his clip board) "Ah, Graeme and ah Harry" (another glance at the list) "and Ricky and Lyle — Hello Sailor". Hello Sailor were probably the chief crowd pleasers of the whole function. They lost a little to Dragon in that Dragon were the headliners and exuded a professional gleam, but held a prior advantage because their material was more familiar. Hello Sailor's image and approach has become unified over past months, a development which adds a stage presence to existent talents. Their adopted air of amused toughness is expressed in the winning little rhyme from new song "Son of Sam" which runs *Son of Sam I am, Son of Sam, bam bam bam bam bam*. Altogether a humorous and punchy wee number.

And so to Dragon. Three and a half years in Australia have suffused Dragon with confidence, given Marc Hunter greater singing competence and the ability to handle an audience. The younger Hunter has become very much a focal point, teasing the crowd with his drawled pseudo-theatrical patter, dominating the hit singles with some fine and well defined vocal work, dancing with eye catching flexibility. Dragon's performance was, one feels, well tempered to their Australian market, opening with the strongest and best known material from *Sunshine* and winding up with some hard and fast played boogie. There was evidence here that Dragon have the polish and do very nicely for themselves indeed.

So staying just long enough to observe Living Force playing more crisply than is usual and with their habitual enthusiasm, we left, like most of the crowd, to nurse our ringing ears, our tired limbs and our sunburn.

Bruce Belsham



Graham Brazler, Hello Sailor.

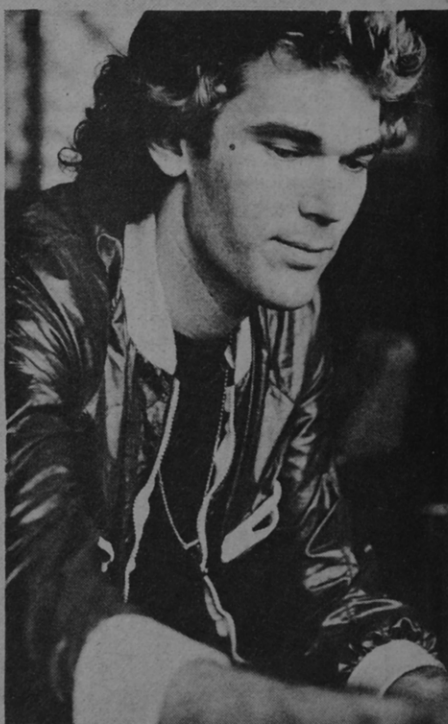
## Dragon ~ the Beat

When Dragon played the Great Western Music Festival, while the bulk of the crowd was yelling out for their latest single, "April Sun in Cuba", one old fart with a long memory called out for "Weetbix". That request caused much laughter on stage and the next day Marc Hunter remarked "My God, what a fossil", when I reminded him of the interjection.

His reaction serves to underline the massive changes Dragon have undergone since they left New Zealand three or more years ago. Then they were a somewhat turgid "progressive" band playing original material interspersed with more commercial songs. Two albums and constant work got them nowhere fast here so they split for the Big Apple — Australia.

They were instantly disillusioned. As vocalist Marc Hunter explains, "We went there thinking we were a terrific band with all that long winded crappy stuff with 20 minute lead guitar breaks. We thought we'll teach these swine . . . we'd heard the stuff they were playing over there and thought it was terrible. I mean it was *pop music*. At those words Marc puts on an exaggerated grimace. "We thought ooh . . . ooh," he says with mock disgust, "*pop music*. But we learnt."

Just what did you learn? "We learnt how to pack it into 3 minutes," lanky guitarist Robert Taylor explains.



Marc Hunter at Auckland's 'Big 1'.