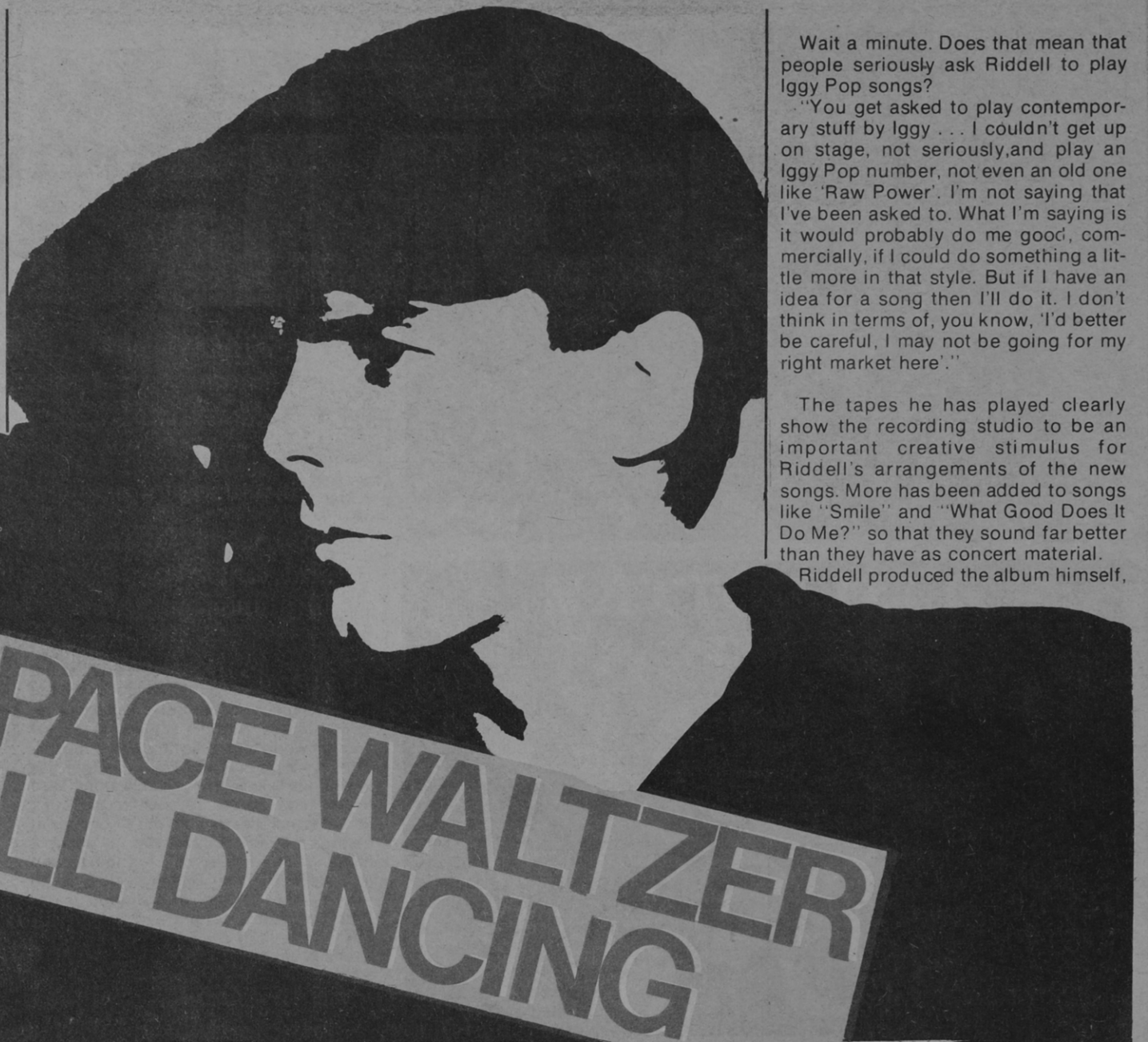


As the roughly mixed tape of "Wear My Light" finishes, Alastair Riddell settles back into his chair. "I'm really pleased with this album", he says. "I'm pretty confident about it."

The last time I interviewed Riddell, nearly two years ago, he had been hesitant to commit himself on the future and described his position as "a virtual retirement". There had been rumours that American producer John Boylan wanted to take him to the States to record an album but he wouldn't say anything about that. He had recorded three songs at Mandrill Studios a few months earlier, but it wasn't until last year that one of them was re-recorded on the new 16-track that studio engineer Glyn Tucker had



Wait a minute. Does that mean that people seriously ask Riddell to play Iggy Pop songs?

"You get asked to play contemporary stuff by Iggy . . . I couldn't get up on stage, not seriously, and play an Iggy Pop number, not even an old one like 'Raw Power'. I'm not saying that I've been asked to. What I'm saying is it would probably do me good, commercially, if I could do something a little more in that style. But if I have an idea for a song then I'll do it. I don't think in terms of, you know, 'I'd better be careful, I may not be going for my right market here'."

The tapes he has played clearly show the recording studio to be an important creative stimulus for Riddell's arrangements of the new songs. More has been added to songs like "Smile" and "What Good Does It Do Me?" so that they sound far better than they have as concert material.

Riddell produced the album himself,

THE SPACE WALTZER IS STILL DANCING

sold his house to buy. The song was "Wonder Ones"

Boylan had produced a large number of albums, largely by country-orientated artists like the Eagles, Linda Ronstadt and Pure Prairie League — more recently he has produced some songs on the Little River Band's *Diamantina Cocktail*. He was in New Zealand to present the RATA awards and, after asking to hear the rough demo tapes that Riddell had recorded, convinced him to persevere. They became good friends and last year, when Mike Chunn asked him to take Phil Judd's place in Split Enz, Riddell turned to Boylan for advice.

"It was a really hard thing to say 'no'", Riddell says, adding that the decision took him nine days. "I would have been in England then. Whether I'd stayed with Enz or not would have been another thing. Here I am in New Zealand and it's 1978 and I still don't have any greater prospects . . . at the moment."

"It's an uphill struggle," he explains, "particularly now in Auckland where there's more of a scene now. You've got the punk thing, you've got Hello Sailor who verge on that kind of thing and have their own following. I suppose there's only so many people to go around."

"I'm not disillusioned at all. I think I'm now seeing what the situation's really like. There's no big scene here. People talk about getting to the top in this country but that's absolutely laughable. There's no top here. You can earn a reasonable living although when you start it's not even a reasonable living."

When Riddell and the Wonder Ones began performing last year they were the lowest paid band on the hotel circuit. Space Waltz hadn't found playing in pubs easy, neither did the Wonder Ones. Riddell admits that playing pubs "squashed the performing side of me". But, more importantly, the Wonder Ones were playing new songs with a more rhythmic jazz-influenced style than Space Waltz had and not everyone liked the change.

But Riddell is himself critical of local bands.

"There seems to be a kind of desperate need for people here to identify with the music somehow but local music never sounds quite the way it should. There's always some misconception about what's happening overseas."

"I still like Iggy Pop but I can't understand Hello Sailor's treatment of him. When I hear Hello Sailor doing 'Nightclubbin'' or something like that

. . . they play the song really well and it's professional and everything. But if you're going to play Iggy Pop like that you might as well not play it. The sort of statement that Iggy made is not being made."

But when Hello Sailor play "All Aboard For Funtime" are they misinterpreting the song if they don't try to emulate Iggy? Isn't the song treated as any other Hello Sailor song in order to show the compatibility of what would normally be considered two different styles?

"I would have thought that if they re-arranged the song or something. I mean, sure, you could take any band in New Zealand, you could take Tama's Band or Cohesion and get them to play 'All Aboard For Funtime'. They would come out with something that was distinctly them and they would play 'All Aboard For Funtime' immaculately but I wouldn't like it, I'm sure."

"People usually get requested to do Iggy Pop or Lou Reed numbers. I was playing them as early as 1970, 1971, but I just couldn't do it now. It's like asking somebody to go back to reading 'Boy's Own' or something. I can't relate to playing in that kind of style at all although I still quite like it, particularly the older stuff."

with Glyn Tucker helping as engineer. There's no title yet but the album is due for release on the Mandrill label in about a month. It will include a new version of "Oh Ron", the song originally released as the B-side to "Wonder Ones":

*"I'm not exactly loquacious
Not very kind
Beginning to try hard
I'm improving my mind
Perhaps not a saint, but you know
what I mean*

Oh Ron, was I destined to lose?"
But it is the song "Through Eyes of Love" that Riddell seems happiest with, "more like what the next album will be like".

Though he is already enthusiastic about the chances of starting work on another album he will also be performing. With the bass player and drummer from Wonder Ones, a new keyboard player, a new guitarist and perhaps a couple of girl singers, Riddell intends to be "a little more particular about what we are doing and where we're working". That, it seems, means that the band won't be playing outside Auckland ("I can't afford it") and will be looking outside New Zealand for its future.

Jeremy Templar

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