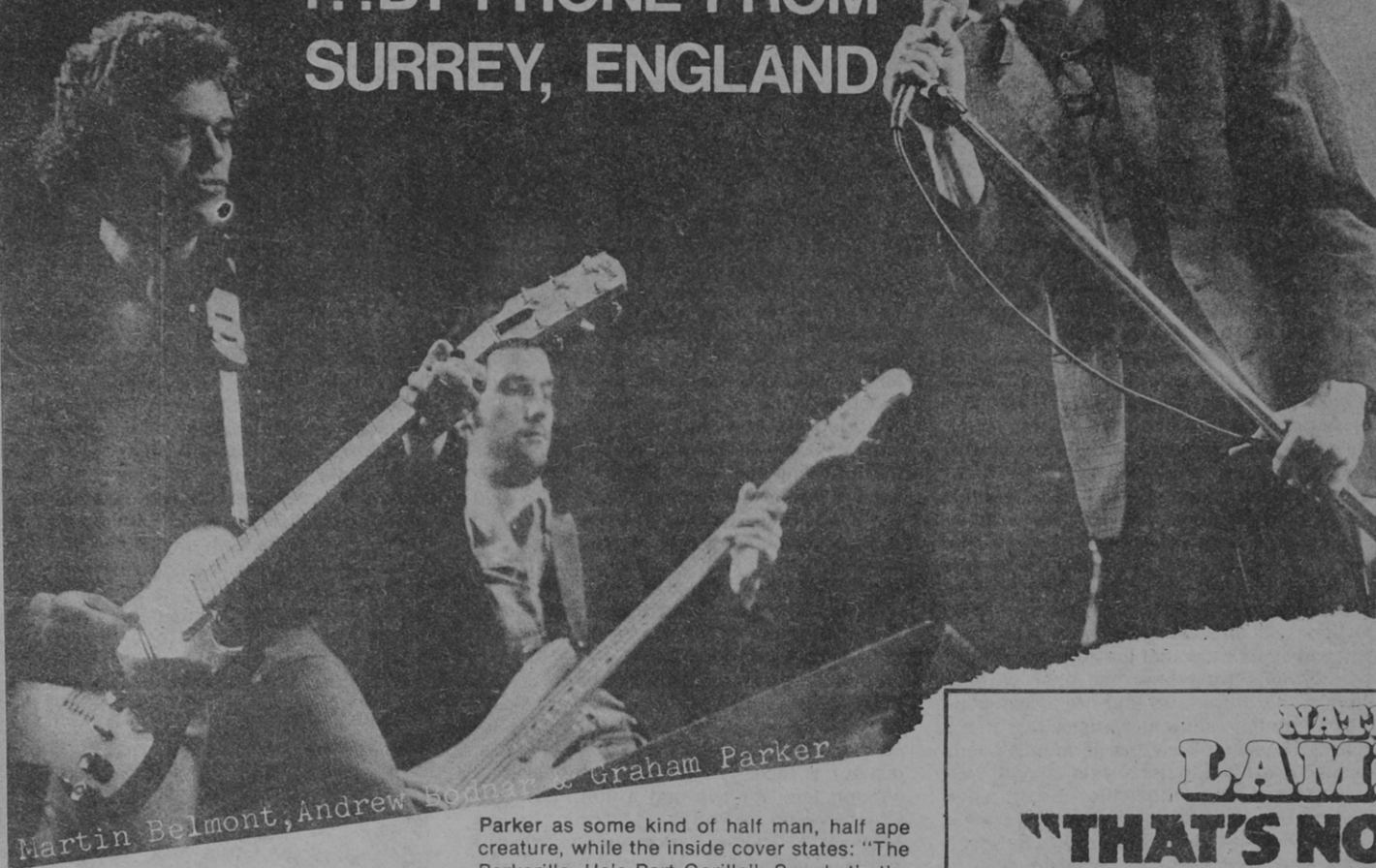


# GRAHAM PARKER LIVE

## ...BY PHONE FROM SURREY, ENGLAND



Martin Belmont, Andrew ... Graham Parker

Talking to overseas musicians in New Zealand can be a harrowing experience. Press conferences tend to be conducted on a gang rape concept — you line up and attack at the first opportunity. Phone interviews are prone to their own set of troubles, not the least in this case a telephone exchange full of confused operators as Graham Parker was switched from Auckland to Wellington to Christchurch and finally back to Auckland for a series of interviews. 12,000 miles and a three second time lag do not ideal interview conditions make, but hell let's not be picky about this. After all, this was Graham Parker.

But why should anyone pay for all these phone calls to Graham Parker, you ask. Well, there's a very simple reason. Graham Parker and the Rumour are coming to our very shores. So if you happen to be in Dunedin on the 3rd of September or in Christchurch on September 4th or in Wellington on the 6th of September or Auckland on September 8th, then the boy himself will be tearing your local Town Hall to pieces. That's guaranteed.

If you should require evidence of Parker's ability to do this after August the 7th you can rip along to your local record emporium and pick up a copy of GP and the Rumour's excellent live album — *The Parkerilla*. And if that doesn't convince you, you're either deaf or a Seals and Crofts fan.

In fact, *The Parkerilla*'s three live sides (the fourth side is taken up with a 33 1/3 version of GP's latest single "Hey Lord, Don't Ask Me Questions") neatly sum up the Parker story — so far. An opinion I'm happy to report Graham agrees with, "Yeah, it's supposed to sum up what we've done and sum up all those changes in type of material and put it into one thing with the live album."

The album goes far beyond merely recording the established stage favourites. For in nearly every instance the live rendition cuts the studio recording dead. This is particularly true of the tracks which failed on Parker's last album — *Stick to Me*. Here, "New York Shuffle" and "the Heat in Harlem" work with a tension and drama that was almost totally lacking in the originals. *Parkerilla* may not present any breakthroughs — there are no new songs here — but the ground gained so far is held with ease.

One could do a lot worse than heed Parker's words on the subject: "A lot of people think we're a good live band. Live we certainly put as much percentage as we can into it and I think probably the live album is our best."

The live album comes at a much earlier point in Parker's career than is standard practice. To what extent was its release influenced by the fact that reaction to the band's live shows had always been so enthusiastic?

"Yeah, it is largely to do with that," says Parker. "But I dunno... after *Heat Treatment* I was thinking: one more album and then a live album out quickly and get this stuff over with. Then, when we get into newer and better material, we'll put out a newer and better live album."

"So maybe we'll have another live album out in a year or so. I think that'd be great."

*The Parkerilla*, besides boasting a somewhat unusual title, on the cover presents

Parker as some kind of half man, half ape creature, while the inside cover states: "The Parkerilla, He's Part Gorilla". So what's the story behind all this, Graham?

Graham's long distance chuckle echoes down the line. "There's some kind of insane reasoning behind it but I wouldn't take it too seriously," he asserts. "We got the word *Parkerilla* from a Swedish review. We couldn't read Swedish but this word *Parkerilla* popped up and it seemed extremely funny. There was another word too, *Parkerin*. "Dunno what either of them means. Parker's feet or something. Dunno. So I thought that was a great name for an album — *The Parkerilla*. I was talking it over with my manager and I said something about part gorilla and he said: 'Part Gorilla! Great Idea! Let's do a thing, where you look like a gorilla and then you take the shades off and underneath there's a gorilla.'

"It's a big joke really," Parker assures me, "You take sunglasses off and look like that! There are actually people who think I really do look like that with sunglasses on."

Indeed, shades have become such a familiar part of the Parker image that he must be the only case on record of a celebrity who takes his shades off when he doesn't want to be recognised.

"More and more often it's happening that someone recognises me. So sometimes I don't wear them if I'm gonna get out of the car and go into a shop. I take them off just in case.

"Not that I mind being recognised, it's just that people tend to treat you differently and I don't want to be treated differently all the time."

Graham, a little earlier you said that *Parkerilla* is the end of Graham Parker Part 1. So how will things change?

"Well it must be different from now on. Like we've relied on brass a lot and now we're cutting it down so that at the moment we use brass on only about half the songs. So we're getting away from that and relying on ourselves a bit more. The next album's gonna be different."

Any more concrete ideas on how it'll be different?

"Not really. No. It'll be a different producer. It's not gonna be either Nick Lowe or 'Mutt' Lange who did the other albums. We're gonna look around for something a little bit different.

"And I'm hoping to get a lot of different things out of the band. I think that certain things we've relied on we've got to look at closely and get some changes.

"I want the songs to be more... uh, I want the songs to speak more for the whole thing this time instead of perhaps the musicianship of the band... I want it to be more the songs that come through. I want us to look at that a bit more. So I think it could come out quite different."

For all the critical acclaim Parker's managed to stow away under his belt, he's still not a big record seller in most markets. Young Elvis Costello, for instance has left him for dead in the sale stakes, particularly in the vital American market. Graham Parker has very definite views on why this is.

"That's completely due to Mercury Records. They just have no idea of how to break an act. We started off with such incredible enthusiasm in America but it just wasn't followed through with any promotion. So it's

just been very hard work for us. The only audience we've got in America is the audience we've got out and played to and banged them on the head and said 'Listen to this you stupid idiots.'

"We could have cut a lot of corners with brilliant promotion and that's what you want to do, because it's quite soul destroying going to America over and over again and gaining a little bit every time. The process has to be speeded up."

But despite such setbacks, Graham asserts the band has not lost impetus.

"No, we're probably stronger than ever right now. The new songs are coming out very strong and the band have just made their second LP and that's all freshened things up a bit if they do something removed from me. So I think things are looking really good, You know?"

Parker makes no secret of his determination and ambition. One writer termed it "the ambition to matter". The tough little working-class guy with nowhere to go but up. Does he still feel this as strongly as ever?

"Yeah definitely. That just keeps coming back all the time. If it didn't it wouldn't be worth bothering. You'd just find yourself doing it cos you're supposed to be.

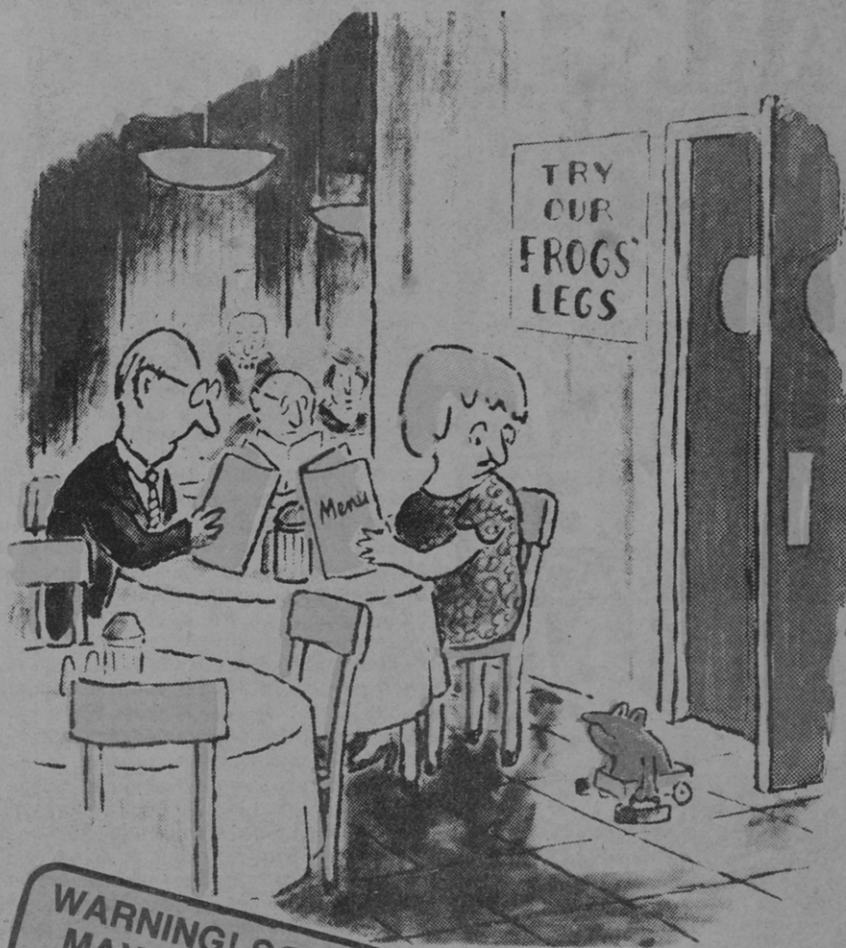
"That sometimes happens in certain parts of tours. It's like: what am I doing in this ridiculous European country playing to these idiots. But you get a good gig or you write a song and you realise what you're doing it for."

"In fact, I've just grown back to the original feeling that I've still got to give people what I think is me."

Alastair Dougal

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