

The Best Kept Secret in the West

Graham Parker arrived in New Zealand to a full Maori welcome. Parker stood there looking alternately bewildered and amused as the thirty Maoris in front of him hakaed and chanted while the Rumour, who had flown in the day before, stood behind him, clicking their pocket cameras and quietly jeering at Parker's plight.

Parker looked even smaller than his real size — which is about 5ft 6in and 8 stone — as he hunched over beside the squat Maori woman who led him through the correct reactions to the ritual. That over, Parker, the Rumour and others entered the reception itself, rubbing noses with the welcoming party as they went.

For Parker it was Day One of a media blitz that was to last the seven days of his New Zealand stay and would undoubtedly accelerate once they hit Australia and Japan. Inside, he was whisked upstairs for an interview with TV1 and while the more gregarious members of the Rumour mingled with the media, the others sat about looking either dazed or bored.

Among the dazed was keyboards player Bob Andrews who, remarking on New Zealand's similarity to Britain, was finding it a bit unsettling to come 12,000 miles and seemingly end up where you started. Only the jetlag told him different, he explained between yawns. Parker, once released, rushed over to drummer Steve Goulding who was sitting morosely in a corner and furtively mumbled: "Are you sane? I've gotta have somebody sane to talk to." Gradually the other members of the Rumour joined the huddle and when it appeared decent to do so, they left for an Auckland night club, dragging along an unwilling Bob Andrews complaining that he wanted to go to bed.

The following day was bright and clear, a perfect spring day, it contrasted nicely with the summer these Englishmen had just fled from which as Parker's manager, Dave Robinson, caustically explained is "three months spent in Wellington boots". By midday the stage of Dunedin's Regent Theatre was already covered in cables, equipment and road crew striving to put it all together. Tonight was to be the first night in more than one sense of the word — besides being GP and the Rumour's first NZ date and everybody's first night with the equipment they would use throughout this leg of the tour, it would also be the first time in over two months that Graham Parker and the Rumour had played together. Their last gig had been as one of several support acts to Bob Dylan at Britain's Blackbushe one-day festival before an audience of 1/4 million people.

Bookings for the Dunedin concert stood at about 500.

This highlights Parker's strange position today. Graham Parker is a media star and no other kind. Treated by critics, the rock press and those dedicated to rock 'n' roll as one of the biggest things to emerge in the seventies — legend has it that Dylan requested his presence on the bill at Blackbushe — he has yet to make

much impact on the sales charts anywhere. The bookings for his New Zealand tour reflected this: the second show in Auckland was largely sold out but in Christchurch and Wellington sales stood at about half the venues capacity, while the first Auckland show registered a paltry few hundred seats sold in a hall that holds close on two and a half thousand. Sales were to pick up as the tour went on — a result of the current economic recession seems to be that door sales make up an increasingly large part of most audiences — but the second Auckland show was to be the only sold out date in a tour that would ultimately only break even for its promoters.

Sunday night. After a typically rousing opening set from Citizen Band, Graham Parker and the Rumour take the stage. As the Rumour hit the opening chords of "Stick to Me", the lights go up and Parker, dressed down from his cardigan and shirt day wear to a t-shirt and old suit jacket, moves forward, grabs the mike and instantly defines both his stance and his intentions:

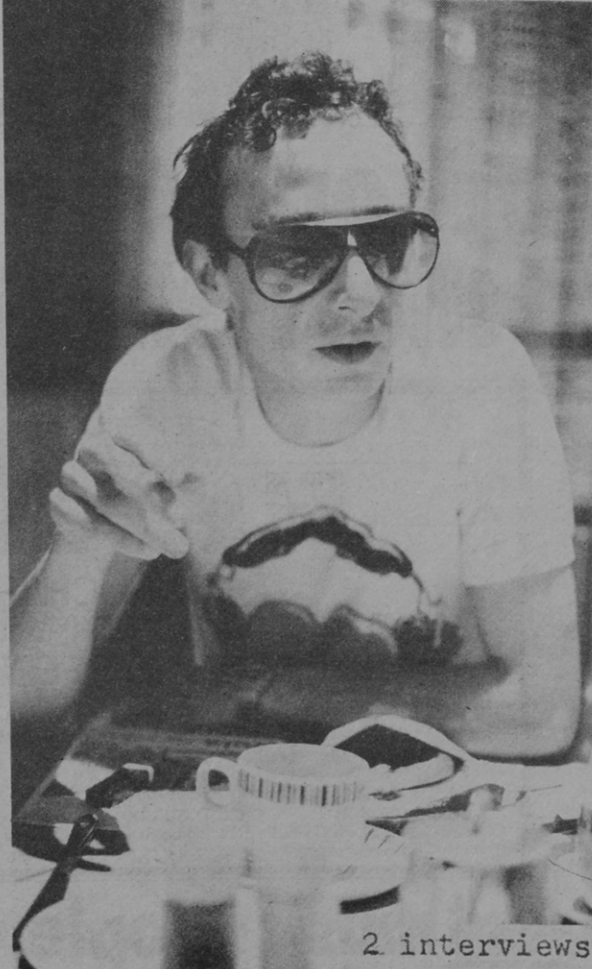
*Every last drop will go into this now,
Don't want to miss now,
I don't know when to stop,
I just pump and pump till that's all there is . . .*

As the band swing into the instrumental break, he falls back and, staring defiantly at the audience through his translucent blue shades, smashes his fist into his palm in time with the music.

The Dunedin audience went crazy. By the second song "That's What They All Say", large numbers were dancing and by the third, a new song "Protection", over half the audience was on its feet. For a group that had not played together for two months, playing their first date in an unknown country, it was just the reaction they needed. As Bob Andrews had confessed before the show, they were itching to play and it showed. The Rumour rocketed through the set that, with minor variations, was to form the basis of all the concerts.

The excess of energy they were pumping out overwhelmed some of the songs — "That's What They All Say," "Love Gets You Twisted" and "Fools Gold" — pieces that demand to be taken in a stately fashion, were bashed through at speed. But as a show of brash rock 'n' roll, it was unsurpassed. Bob Andrews idiot danced behind his keyboards, his co-ordination destroyed by his excitement; guitarist Martin Belmont's lanky frame staggered about the stage his lips mouthing the words, while Brinsley Schwarz, dressed in a white drape jacket, coolly chewed gum, only becoming animated when he moved to the very edge of the stage to toss off a perfectly realised solo. Bassist Andrew Bodnar hunches intently over his bass, the neck of his instrument lurching up and down, while drummer Steve Goulding becomes bug-eyed with intent, laying furiously into his kit.

Parker's control of the enthusiastic throng was complete. He worked the very front of the



2 interviews for breakfast