

# A Reach As Long As Your Arm

BILL DIREEN  
PART TWO

## More Life! Every Heart ...

Beatin Hearts is your most comprehensive record and probably the most widely heard. Were you happy with it?

"I didn't feel it was quite what it could have been. I was trying to make it the rough-edged masterpiece which would correspond with my fond memories of playing with the Vacuum and Kaza Portico, a couple of really good bands, in 1979 and 1981. And I think really it's not possible to do that. I can't really listen to it without thinking that it hasn't quite got it."

How did you choose the songs? The number of older songs on it makes it a bit like a "this is what I have done thus far" statement.

"There was quite a lot of material to choose from — and some of it is on the second album. But in choosing I looked for the

simplest songs, apart from 'Heartbeats A-Go-Go'. I think I had gone further, before the record, in other directions, but in the sense of the three-piece band with few overdubs, yeah, I think it was about as far as I could go."

It seemed quite appropriate that you used the words from Denis Glover's 'Magpies' for one song because there seems to be the same indigenous element in many of the songs as there is in the work of Glover and other New Zealanders who work in different creative fields. Were you conscious of that?

"Well no, not at the time. But there's a new breed of songwriter in New Zealand, as you're probably aware, that doesn't necessarily have to write like anyone they've heard overseas. But of course that has to be qualified with the fact the you can't escape your influences — in some cases there'll be a British element or a slight Americanisation. But I think a lot of people are becoming aware of the post-colonial stage of development that New Zealand is at. In, say, Australian art, a lot of the strongest work reflects a breaking out of post-colonial complacency. Many South American painters work in co-operatives and there's something similar here, particularly in Christchurch. Someone presents a painting or something and often they don't say who they are, but they say where they come from, what co-operative they work for. And the sharing of equipment and practise rooms in Christchurch is in a way similar to that."

But in rock music there's always going to be a conflict in that sort of area because it's much more of business than any other art form.

"I don't know ... I don't think it is any more than any other, it's just that the artist is the frontman. Which happens in painting or whatever as well. It's just that it's a prerequisite of rock music. For instance I've come to terms with the idea of, say, speaking to you because it's necessary, so that people know what you're about or want to know what you're about before they buy your record."

That's interesting because you have a

reputation for being difficult and obscure, notoriously so. That wasn't deliberate?

"Not at all, no. It's just that I haven't paid any lip service to the way that people go about things in America or Britain — or here if they're wanting to make a concert for *Radio With Pictures* or something. Perhaps if I'd been a bit more approachable I might have got a video paid for or perhaps even the video we made for 'Russian Rug' might have been shown on TV. And maybe if I'd been more forthcoming and so on perhaps I would have been asked to do some more recording and have some more recording paid for. And perhaps if I'd gone out to sell the bands some more they wouldn't have been received with such cynicism by a lot of people."

Cynicism?

"Well I think Above Ground was never really received as well as it should have been because the excitement of that band was the rhythm getting through. With rock music you can only go so far — once you've reached a certain level of expertise it's a piece of cake. And then you can do it every night and get girls or money ... the whole lot, whatever you like. But then there's no real excitement in it — and the idea of breaking ground in rock music is important and increasingly difficult the longer you play. And breaking ground for an artist is very important. That's probably why the life expectancy of most people in the rock world is probably four or five years from when they start playing — and why there should be a longer and longer gap between things, they shouldn't just come off like a production line."

"With Above Ground two of the musicians were almost completely new to rock music and they were discovering at an incredibly fast rate, the way a baby learns, and it was coming through in the music. It may not have been high-powered but it was exciting if people had opened their ears to it. That isn't a bitch, but ..."

Do you find yourself periodically losing enthusiasm for rock music?

"Oh yeah, often. I think the hedonistic aspects of rock music are becoming more and more

revolting to me. It is so closely akin to the sins of the flesh (laughs) ... without sounding prudish, it has just become a vehicle for all the nasties associated with commercialism. And it has become the victim, rather than standing up against anything as it used to be. It began attacking — but I suppose it depends on where you think it came from — say, the white, American middle-class ethic, but it's been progressively becoming that for years and it became that almost immediately for the people who supposedly founded it. I suppose it's just a matter of course but it's becoming increasingly a vital and defining feature of it."

"I also think a lot of the excitement goes out of it when the reaction of the audience is limited. Like when we're doing our plays part of the excitement goes out of it when the reaction of the audience is limited. Like when we were doing our plays part of the excitement of it is that you are opening yourself up to the criticism of hoons — but they give it. There's a break in the thing and someone belches or yells out 'we've had enough' or whatever. They can say that and they do and often those things get more reaction from the audience than the actual play, a more vocal reaction anyway."

Why choose a mediaeval farce as the play to take into a pub?

"Because originally those plays were performed in a market place, a public place, and the players who performed them, *le sots* in French, were bald-headed travellers dressed in yellow and green and they would be ridiculed or entertain people, depending on what the feeling of the place was. If you're putting on a play you've got to think about what sort of reaction you want to get — are you encouraging complacency, which is what the Court Theatre does. I've just finished working with them and it doesn't encourage people to even think about their lives, think about the way things are at the moment."

"I don't think the play necessarily does that but at least by putting it on in a pub you're encouraging people to think 'this isn't usually what happens in a pub' and first of all, 'what are they doing

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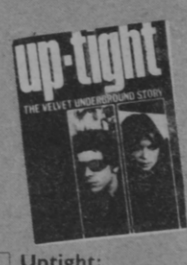
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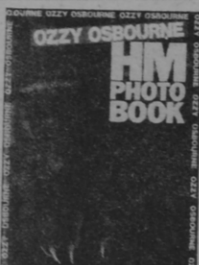
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