

Mark Seymour

Interview

The Great Aussie Tug ...

Among the changes Hunters and Collectors has undergone in the past year or so is that it's become more Mark Seymour's band — in the sense that the music reflects the singer. The music is intense and wirily muscular but coloured with a strong sense of humour. Like Mark Seymour.

He does more interviews now than he used to, genuinely seems to enjoy talking about the band — and the world in general.

He's pictured onstage with his arms thrown wide in an expansive gesture on the cover of the new Hunters and Collectors live LP, *The Way To Go Out*. The album has reached these shores to coincide with the band's tour, but it's actually the soundtrack to a live video package. The video

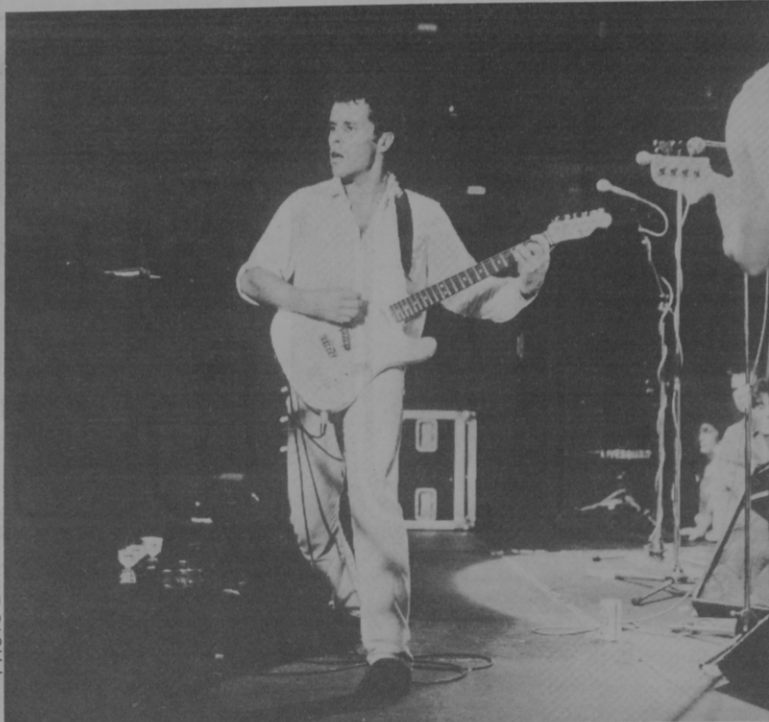


PHOTO BY ROBERT SHENNAN

Mark Seymour, Auckland University.

was made to give European audiences a glimpse of what the band is like live. They can't afford to tour to that part of the world and their English distributor CBS couldn't hear a single on the last studio LP, *The Jaws Of Life*, and so was reluctant to cough up with financial support for live work. It looks like Hunters and Collectors will be staying put for the time being.

A shame really, because the more recent material lends itself to live performance ...

"Yeah, much more so. We wouldn't have been able to do a live video the way we used to play, because the songs were too drawn out dynamically and you had to actually be in front of the PA to get the sense of power."

The Jaws Of Life had a very live sound to it too.

"Yeah — we spent a lot of time during the mix-down explaining to the producer that we wanted to just keep it bare bones, really skeletal and up-front — as much a reaction to what it was like prior to that as anything. We used to go for a much bigger, wall-of-sound approach. But the next record we make won't be quite as extreme in that direction."

Does the word "reaction" indicate that you were unhappy with what went before?

"Yeah. What happened before was that we'd sort of been playing along on the wave of success we got with our first record. But all of it, I would argue, was based on how hard the media was pushing us. It was really strange, like everyone was jumping on the bandwagon and that lasted for about a year — it went long enough for us to start believing it ourselves and when that happened we lost the context of why we were doing it in the first place.

"So although that second album was well-produced, it didn't really sound like a band as far as I was concerned. On *The Jaws Of Life* we just wanted to dispense with all that bullshit. We wanted to make a record that sounded honest — all the dynamic elements that we'd invented in rehearsal we wanted to be really obvious on record."

When did the problems with Greg Perano and Martin Lubran start?

"It was building when we went to England. I was having real conflict with Greg. I'd sort of withdrawn from the band by the time we went to England, whereas everyone else was sort of rolling along, not really communicating with anyone else. And I thought 'well, if no one's aware of this problem then I'm not going to tell them.' I just withdrew from the whole thing and it rolled on on its own momentum until we got back from England. Then we had to make a decision about what we were going to do. And I figured that seeing as we'd been running around for two years saying how democratic we were then they could decide. And then Greg and Martin left before we went to Germany and we recorded *The Jaws Of Life*."

I take it you don't think it was a good move going to England when you did.

"No. It was for completely the wrong reason. We went to England because it was expected of us to do it. It was the fashionable thing to do. We'd only been playing in that lineup for a year and a half, which is no time at all. All the other bands that have ever done it from Australia have been together for three or four years.

"It contradicted what I felt about music at the time anyway. I felt and I always have that there's no reason why you can't make good music and maintain your self respect in the colonies. You don't have to go away to the other side of the world to prove your own worth.

"But our reputation had got so much larger than what we were really like as people that I couldn't see it in its true context. Now, we just wouldn't go. Not unless we had a really fat record contract and the record company was going to put on great shows for us and we had complete control over what we were doing. We went over there and basically starved. I'm just not prepared to do things like that any more, but we had to learn the hard way."

So would you advise any emerging band from this part of the world to go to Europe?

"Well, the Chills are going to go but I understand they'll be going for two months and they'll save up enough money to live there comfortably for two months and then they'll come home. That to me is a far more logical way of doing it, because you're treating their culture and musical environment in the same way as you would treat your own, rather than thinking you've got to in some way pay your dues to them. Because when you go over and realise what the musical scene's like there you realise how great the bands are where you come from. Why should you go and eat shit for them? They've got no exuberance, English musicians. They don't get into just being alive and having a great time — they're really guilt-ridden or something. And they just treat Australian bands in a way in which you've got to eat humble pie first. And if you don't ..."

I can recall some very patronising early mentions in the *NME*. A sort of giggle at this tribal chic from the Antipodes.

"I think that had something to do with the fact that we signed to Virgin. That made us automatically suss as far as English critics were concerned. It just smelt a bit and I can understand them for reacting like that because at the time it did feel like that. The word that Virgin was putting out was that we were going to be big, that was the whole push. So in a way we had it coming. But whatever reviews we get now are much more realistic and closer what the material's like than they were then and yet we can't really do much about it.

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