

# Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way?

Spencer P. Jones of the Johnnys on the line, a little late but better than never. It sounds as if Sydney's late summer afternoon sun drove him to seek refuge in a local public house. Makes sense; a Johnny would feel at home there — Spencer's booking agency told him the band did more gigs last year than anyone else on their books.

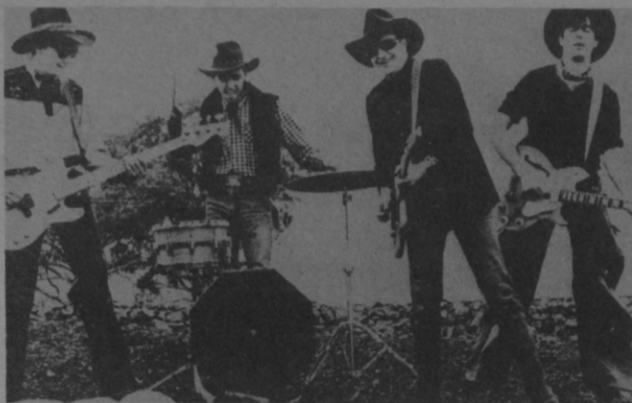
"We go anywhere!" sez Spencer. They break out of the big flat place with the desert in the middle this month when they do a series of gigs in this country. In pubs, natch.

"Actually, I hate doing phone interviews. I prefer to be able to converse in a more relaxed situation." Like ...

## Golden Guitars v Homos On the Range

Country 'n' western music has three major strongholds outside the US of A and Australia and New Zealand are two. The other is Scotland.

"Graham (Hood) our bass player and myself, we're actually New Zealanders originally, we've been over here several years. One of the great unsung heroes over here is Tex Morton — and he was a New Zealander too. We've taken all the



The Johnnys

best aspects of the traditional country and western thing, but we're more like the Sex Pistols, I'd imagine."

Naturally, certain real country music fans didn't take kindly when this bunch of commie weirdos donned stetsons and spurs in early 1983 ...

"Some of them hated our guts. Some of the writers called us powder-puff cowboys with Hollywood hankies round our necks and all that that sorta stuff. We had one headline in the *Truth* that read 'Homos On the Range' — which was great — fantastic stuff. But that was two years ago and the guys who wrote that sorta stuff are starting to come around, they think we're not too bad after all."

The situation was improved by

having local country hero Chad Morgan in their last film clip: "We ran into him and asked him and he said 'Sure, anything to help you young guys.' And Chad didn't have a clue what he was in for, but he liked us."

## First Take Principle

Spencer maintains a couple of songs on the Johnnys' near-completed album would go down big at Oz C&W's Mecca, Tamworth: "All these truckers could be playing them on their cassettes while they're drivin' down the highway. But then there's other songs that sound more like the New York Dolls. I don't think they'd like them."

The album is being produced by Ross 'Mondo Rock' Wilson, a fan introduced to the Johnnys by his 14

year old son. Wilson is known, is he not, to possess a sense of humour?

"Yeah. We hate serious people."

So does any seed of seriousness lurk within the Johnnys?

"Oh yeah, there are definitely undercurrents of sort of earnest, er, meaningful ... shit. But the general overtone is not to get too morbid about anything. There's plenty of people who've got that area pretty well mapped out already. Like, I wouldn't go into the studio with the intention of making a Nick Cave kind of record."

"But we're just talking about our first album. In a few years' time, if I was really depressed or something, we might make a serious record, I dunno. It would just depend on how one felt at the given time."

Bands which hinge on stirring up a wild goodtime in pubs often have trouble getting that across on record, but Spencer says Wilson and the Johnnys aren't having too many problems.

"We've been pretty lucky. A couple of songs on the record we did, like, we played 'em once. And if we thought we could do it a bit better, we'd do it again. That's a lot better than making a record like MiSex and taking six months and putting a thousand fuckin' overdubs on it. We were doing stuff live in the studio while we were putting the rhythm tracks down, just turning up the guitars."

Is that element missing in a lot of today's music?

"Oh yeah, definitely. I mean, you know that. Chad Morgan said a classic thing, he said: 'These groups these days, they can fuckin' record

it 10 times until they get it right. When I started recording there was no fuckin' around, it was direct to disc. You either got it right the first time or you didn't get it right at all."

"And I like that, there's a lot to be said for doing it first take. Even if it's sloppy it's still there, it's honest. It's not like you've hired some ace guitarist to come in and overdub a lead break just to make you sound better. I hate all that bullshit and it just goes on too much these days. There's too many groups who've got the wrong idea, I believe. They're too concerned with making the perfect hit record rather than documenting where they are as a group at that given time."

## Buckskin's Back

It would be manifestly unfair to accuse the Johnnys of jumping on the country punk bandwagon. After all, they started up before any of the hoo-ha had reached the Antipodes and, as Spencer points out, when Rank and File were still playing punk rock in the Dils, the various components of the Johnnys were doing much the same thing in sundry Sydney bands.

The band was originally to be called the Cartwrights — but a punkrocka mate suggested the Johnnys and plans were changed — before they found out there was a band of the same name in New Zealand, Japan ... and God knows where else.

Spencer shifted to Sydney in early 1977 ("the year we fought the big one") and thus missed the resurgence of the NZ music scene, so he's looking forward to getting a look at what's gone on. One band

he's been a big fan of from afar is the Clean/Great Unwashed and he's disappointed that he's unlikely to see them live. And given that the whole swampy cowboy thang is a lot bigger on the other side of the Tasman than here, how does he think the Johnnys will go down?

"Well, it might take people over there a little while to warm to us ... but I think we'll definitely be a whole mindfuck."

## The Robert Mitchums of Rock 'n' Roll

There have been dozens of descriptions of the Johnnys' music — punky and western, Marty Robbins meets the Sex Pistols, the list goes on ...

"Yeah, I've heard 'em all. But we're like the classic rock 'n' roll band. New York Dolls, Sex Pistols, any number of those 60s groups ... We're a band with two guitars, a bass and drums. And if the music sounds like country and western then thank Christ we were able to play it."

"And if it sounds rough it's because we don't know any better, y'know. Like one day we'll probably make really suave-sounding albums. After we've been at it for long enough that we've actually learned how. We're a rock 'n' roll band. We like gettin' dressed up, like everyone, but we're more extreme, we're Robert Mitchum fans."

"We're intelligent. That's something that's never been printed about us. The tongue's so firmly buried in the cheek sometimes that we just about have to go to casualty to have it removed."

R. 'Spurs' Brown

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