

"We always had a lot of confidence in what we did, and I know this sounds like bragging, but it didn't really surprise us when people liked our music because we'd been playing live for a long time and we got a lot of people at our shows, which kept us going and feeling positive."

Two years ago Australia's Men At Work cleaned up in America with 'Who Can It Be Now?' and 'Down Under', two songs that hardly warrant a look in the singles' hall of fame. But there it was in green and white, the dollar confirmation that overnight sensations do exist.

"I don't think they've ever existed," contradicts Colin Hay over a mid-July trans-Tasman phone

'SHRIEKBACK' FROM PAGE 14
This tiny little voice comes out of the speakers. It's just a method really."

Another ongoing impression of Shriekback is that the songs come across less as a series of songs than as a soundtrack to a series of events — almost like film music in the way they involve atmosphere. Andrews agrees:

"Sure. But I don't know, it always seems to me when I listen to anybody else's songs that there's a movie going on — like I listen to Aswad and there's definitely a movie going on. And that's what makes it nice, that the music has all these associations and all these colours that just conjure up something else. And then you're in that movie theme. I think that's true for, y'know, George Gershwin ... and Monteverdi. It's all the same issue really and all of those things, if you want, could be seen as film music.

"In producing this last album I tended to look very much at what pictures were evoked as early as I could in the tracks. What could be the atmosphere and character of the track — what kind of movie it was going to be. That tends to be something you can use to guide you through it. When there is a decision to be made about whether the guitar should be distorted or clean, should this vocal be yelled or quiet, you can make it in the light of what would be appropriate to the film you're making."

Andrews explains that this album, like previous ones, was built from the rhythms up, the final tracks being plucked from an original 30 or 40 rhythms generated in the rehearsal studio, recorded and then getting instrumentation and a vocal. So why work from a rhythm rather than a tune?

"I suppose it always seemed easier. Because a rhythm has to make sense within itself, has to make sense to the body. And if your song does that then you're a long way there. Whereas if you come in with a freshly-written song that you've been playing on your guitar at home and then ask the rhythm section to put something to this, maybe it'll work, maybe it won't, and there's nothing worse than a rhythm that's not quite right. It would defeat the whole object and spoil it really. Having a half-baked rhythm with a really good song is quite depressing really."

It can be a shame to drop a half-baked tune on a great rhythm too ...

When John Cale visited this country a couple of years ago, as part of his policy of being keen to talk about anything but his own music, he was

Hard Work

Men At Work's Colin Hay Explains It's Virtues

link. "I suppose in a time scale we were an overnight sensation but we still had to work really hard. Our manager was in America for months trying to get them to release the fuckin' first album and it got rejected twice although it had sold three to four hundred thousand in Canada. It was our first album and although it became really successful we didn't know about that as we were there in the middle of it and we'd been working two to three years every night of the week. So for us it was 'Thank God something's happening.'"

singing the praises of Shriekback ("I wish I'd discovered them ..."). He even mentioned that he might have been keen on working with them, but Andrews didn't even know JC was a fan:

"No, I had no idea ... that's interesting news — wait till I tell the lads!"

Is there anyone the group would like to work with?

"Well we quite fancied working with Eno, predictably enough, at one point, but a lot of things happened, he was too busy and we did the album later than expected. But there wasn't really anyone else it seemed like it would be a fruitful collaboration with really, rather than just a record company policeman coming down to make sure you don't do anything too weird. But, y'know, we're up for it, if somebody came along — I think the idea's got to suggest itself really, there's got to be positive reasons for doing it, rather than 'Well, everybody has to have a producer'. It works quite well at the moment with me producing it and everybody contributing things."

So Shriekback are still happy as a self-contained group in a day when it's almost fashionable to be a project, or a collaboration, or a corporation or whatever?

"Well we started off with just that in mind actually. Because everyone was a bit shy of joining another group — I was at the end of working with Robert Fripp and that had got a bit ugly, Gang Of Four had split up in ranting acrimony and Carl had just finished with a band of his called Out On Blue Six, which was apparently quite a painful split as well. So we were all feeling like 'Hey, we don't wanna get into anything too heavy'. So the initial thing of Shriekback was just a loose collaboration between old friends of Dave's basically. And it was only after about seven or eight months that we started to discover that power that a bunch of committed people did give. We started to rediscover what it was being in a group of people who've made a fairly long-term commitment to work together, and what extra leverage that gives you. It's a very powerful thing."

So Barry Andrews has his cup of tea and I get along and see Not Really Anything. I dare say we both enjoyed ourselves. Andrews' wife is a New Zealander and he's keen for the band to visit these shores after their American tour ends in November. Given the character of the music on *Oil and Gold* and Andrews' expressed attitudes, it seems likely that Shriekback would be tremendously good live. Inspiring, even. Here's hoping.
Russell Brown

The commercial attention that hit Men At Work led to the over-exposure of a band that was, at best, mediocre. Their marriage of reggae and colonial vulgarity in 'Down Under' didn't improve with constant and display neither did the more acceptable but still brash and obvious blare of 'Who Can It Be Now' and 'Be Good Johnny'.

"We never worried about over-exposure but in America they'd had us played for about a year and we felt fuck, they could do with a bit of a break, plus we needed a break. Not so much over-exposed, because when you're hot you're hot and we didn't stop to think about the situation because things were just happening to us. We needed time off because we didn't want to fall into the rut of recording-touring, recording-touring. We wanted more time to develop."

What about record company pressure to repeat the successes of past hits?

"I think that's largely a myth. We received no



Colin Hay, Men At Work.

pressure at all for our new album. We produced it ourselves and nobody in the record company really knew what we were doing, we just kept sending them tapes and they said they liked it. So we recorded the album and presented it to them. They're not that stupid as to ask us to repeat the success of the first one as all that happens then is that a huge level of paranoia creeps in or we would have told them to fuck off."

The new album in question, *Two Hearts*, is an improvement on their past efforts. Its mid-Australian pop has more restraint and taste:

"There was more spontaneity with the songs as they developed more in the studio and they are more reflective and personal. They reflect the extraordinary experience of the last few years. We produced it ourselves so you have to be self-critical and none of the songs have been road-tested so we don't know which ones work live."

The album was recorded with only three of the original band — Hay, Greg Ham (keyboards) and Ron Strykert (guitars). The rhythm section had been sacked:

"We parted company, they quit."

But you would've fired them anyway?
"I don't wanna get into it. The band, when we finished touring, didn't really exist at all as we all wanted out as it all kind of exploded at the end. We all ran away and hid in our houses and we didn't see each other for a while. I wanted to carry on with Ron as he and I felt that the direction we wanted to go in wasn't compatible with the rest of the band and so we kept Men At Work going. Jerry and John went their own ways, I don't know what they're doing now. Then when we started touring, Ron said 'fuck it' and he quit as well. He didn't want to deal with touring, so he's in Greece somewhere."

Back In the USA

"A lot of Aussie bands in the 70s treated Aussie as their boundary and they'd never dare venture out into the wilds of the world as they thought they'd get eaten up. A band would come from overseas and people would say 'oh, they must be good' and often they were fuckin' shit. That attitude still exists."

It's an attitude, until recently anyway, that's been encouraged by the British press:

"Yeah, pretty much. We toured with the British Beat and they'd only been gone for six months and the press were saying 'What happened to the Beat, oh good riddance, they were terrible anyway'. This attitude comes from the fact that it's the end of the Empire, it's the last outpost for their superiority. The English people are a strange breed, they're very violent and heavy at the moment, but they still have that fuckin' superiority thing about Britain, a little country that's running out of time and money."

"As for us, we've never been the darlings of the rock press, we've never been a fashionable band, which is quite understandable as we've never really chased the press and they've never really chased us."

Have you met with any resentment for your success in America?

"Everyday I get resentment but it happens in little ways. Everybody has a preconception about what a person's like after he becomes successful — they immediately think that that person becomes a shit, but I've always been a shit so I haven't changed at all! (Laughs) In America they believe just go for as much success as you can and they don't resent it, they just think that's fantastic. They ask 'hey, what's the formula?' because bands over there are so into what it takes to become a hit."

Did you see your breakthrough in the USA as another triumph for Ock Rock?

"We didn't really feel a triumph as an Australian band as we're a band first and Australian second. We didn't go away flying any flags but when I thought about it having a song like 'Down Under' was pretty obvious, but we didn't think about that at the time."

"When we went away a couple of years ago it was when there was a very high level of fascination for things Australia, especially from America. That's died down but we still get telexes from America that say 'put another shrimp on the barbie'. That's the way they relate to us; they think that every Australian every day goes and lights up his fuckin' barbecue and puts these prawns on it."

So what is Australian rock 'n' roll?

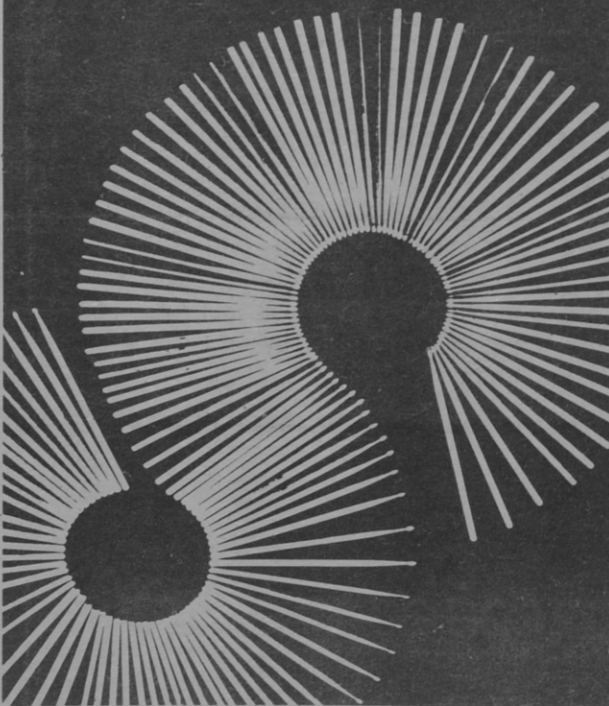
"You can't put your finger on what is Australian or New Zealand. I think it was Reg (Mombassa) from the Mentals who said that we take music from Britain and America and send it back with a few corrections."

George Kay

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