

Live

Ardijah Sidewalk 42nd St
Auckland, August 10

To a large percentage of New Zealanders, the backing track to their lifestyle is funk, and, to quote Parliament (Clinton's, not Lange's), "nothing but the funk."

A vastly different dance stance to those who hold that the Dance Exponents or Flying Nun represent the New Zealand sound. Every weekend, clubs are packed with people dancing to the DJ's discs and watching some of our best musicians, the musicians who make up what some call in a demeaning voice "just the club band." The three top bands at the moment are Ardijah, Sidewalk and 42nd St — all play funk but each has its different style and approach.

Ardijah's strong points lie in the hard bottom line of Ryan Monga's bass — when he hits the opening riff to Jeffery Osborne's 'Stay With Me Tonight' it's just pure class. The two vocalists, Betty Monga and Tony Nogotautama, have a perfect grasp of what makes up a good rhythm and blues vocal style; at times real cool and sweet and then nice and tough. It would be good to see the band push them to the fore, with just a microphone, rather than standing behind the conga drums. Their choice of covers and sense of dynamics is great, world class material.

Sidewalk have a lighter feel, a finely honed clean sound, obviously a lot of work has gone into achieving such a professional tone. Mike Hall handles Marcus Miller's bass lines on 'Loving You' in fine style, with guitarist Pat Pratt throwing in some jazzy touches. Vocalist Dawn Wingate handles things real nice, with wonderful versions of 'This Song's For You' and the S.O.S. Band's 'Just Be Good To Me'. The use of drum



42nd Street, Club New York.

machine is good, because they need something to fill out the sound a bit more, give it that extra funky punch.

The word "punch" is a good way to describe 42nd St. The band just hits you, the vocal section of Barrie Wetini, Kathy Rapana and Georgina Tewhata really cook. The girls move well and do a great version of Teena Marie's 'Lover Girl',

everyone on stage is in constant movement. A real visual treat, in the grand tradition of New Zealand showbands. Highlights include a version of Earth, Wind and Fire's anthem 'Boogie Wonderland' and a percussive treatment of 'Bodywork', which evolved into some dynamite jamming, featuring Niki Nahi on percussion. When it comes to visual presentation, '42nd St' has it all over the other

bands. The girls looked perfect, the horn section worked well, the whole band put on an exciting show.

All these bands have been working for years, working on cover versions that enable them to consolidate their strengths, to hone their skills. People tend to think that playing covers is something to look down on, but in a club situation, bands are expected to play familiar songs and there is nothing demeaning or easy in performing very complex arrangements like Earth Wind and Fire's 'In the Stone'.

There is no question about how hard-working and talented all these bands are — the big question is what are they going to do with it?

If these bands are going to do their own material, and go into recording studios, they're going to run into many problems. The level of sophistication and expertise needed to translate black American funk onto vinyl just isn't here. The bands are ready for a new

move, but there is no one out there able to help. The bands need arrangers and producers who understand the nature of the sound. Alas, there don't seem to be too many NZ Nile Rodgers out there.

It's really a cultural thing, the club scene is based in South Auckland, in clubs like Club New York in Papatoetoe (great neon and an enthusiastic atmosphere) and Cleopatras in Panmure (great owner and friendly people). Club-goers are predominantly Polynesian and working class. The link between this audience and black Americans is perhaps stronger than you might imagine, it's a cultural bond.

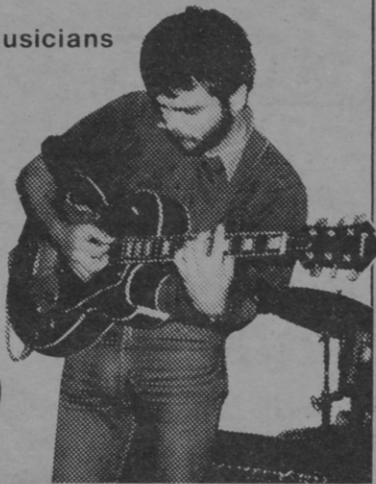
Here, some of the antagonism towards club bands is in many ways a political thing. In other words, a disguised form of racism. This intensifies the bands' sense of identity, and that isn't a bad thing.

The future for these bands is now looking brighter, however, with some people interested in record-

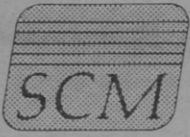
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