

# Waiting for a Wave

## MUSIC FROM THE MANAWATU

The Dunedin of the North? Well that's been the word for a while now about the burgeoning Palmerston North rock scene, and the recent release of the compilation album *Meltdown Town* is proof that there is indeed a wealth of untapped talent in the city which produced Mr Lee Grant, the Dance Exponents' Chris Sheehan and the Models' Barton Price.

The Meltdown label was formed with the backing of the Students' Association and is fronted by Peter Shepherd, who divides his time between studies for a chemistry PhD and rock and roll activities. He would rather the musicians themselves do all the talking but, by dint of his input, Peter Shepherd is Meltdown Records.

"We're not out to compete with other New Zealand labels," he says. "We just want to fill the void which exists in Palmerston North and cre-

ate interest nationally. Other labels may consider our stuff shit records but that isn't the point. We just want to support local music."

Palmerston North has never really recovered from the Top 40 stipulations laid down on resident bands by hotel managers in the mid-70s. Only the national stars have been able to do their own material in front of a Palmy pub crowd.

Exceptions? Well one can't go past the Stroll Band, who in 1976 were forced to find work in Dunedin

(where, among others, they impressed a young Chris Knox). Equally determined to perform original material were Barry Campbell and John Saunders. Both have played with a number of generally ignored bands over the past 10 years. In 1984 the two paired up to form Swiss Kids, whose song 'Happy' off their DIY cassette *Sunbathing at Tangimoana* is on *Meltdown Town*.

Paul Campbell is no relation to Barry, but he has long shared the same desire to perform original material, both as a soloist and with a number of bands. In 1981 Campbell was responsible for kicking off a new Palmerston North nightspot, the El Clubbo. Setting the example himself with his band Catch 22, groups were encouraged to play original music, and over the next two years a number of local bands used the venue as a springboard for bigger things, notably Jason Sad and the Tears, Shades of Grey, and Taihape's Daggy and the Dickheads.

But if the El Clubbo policy was refreshing, the sounds emanating from the venue leant, nevertheless, towards the mainstream. Not so at Snailclamps. Opened in 1983, Snailclamps was housed in a disused council building. Small, damp

and sweaty, the venue was the brainchild of the Sceptics, one of Palmerston North's more experimental and musically ambitious bands.

Although several of the current crop of young Palmy musos frequented Snailclamps, ex-Skeptic Robin Gould dismisses suggestions that the venue served as a breeding ground for the Meltdown bands. "There's nothing in common between these groups and what we were doing at Snailclamps. The Palmerston bands at the moment appear to be aiming for commercial acceptance. That was never one of our considerations."

Snailclamps closed down in 1984, and that seemed to signal an end to a viable alternative scene in Palmerston North. There has, however, been a surge of garage-land activity over the past two years, and in 1985 Peter Shepherd attempted to lure these young groups out into the open with a battle of the bands contest during the Orientation festivities. At the day's end, the Remarkables were clearly the crowd's favourite but it was the Mannequins who took out top prize — free recording time at Wellington's Crescendo Studios.



Three Leaning Men



Thin Red Line

As it turned out, the Mannequins soon split up and the Crescendo deal went to the Remarkables, but in September '85, prior to the Remarkables' release, came *Excuse Me, Big Nose* (MELT 001) from Dosage-B, who were third place. Strictly low-tech, this EP had been recorded on a four-track and produced by Radio 2XS's production manager John Haynes. The 300 copies soon sold out, by which time Dosage-B were no more. Meltdown's future depended on the Remarkables.

Last month, quite unexpectedly, the Remarkables disbanded. Throughout 1986 the group had been making waves in the North Island, their two releases (the *Waiting for a Wave* EP and the single 'Skin Condition') selling moderately well, while their hometown following rocketed. The Remarkables' demise left Peter Shepherd a little despondent:

"Unlike, say, Flying Nun, Meltdown is not trying to build up a huge catalogue but concentrate on two or three bands and take them as far as we can. The Remarkables were, I suppose, our main concern and obviously their breaking up is a lit-

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