

Grooving With Moog New Zealand's Music Press



Two things were different about going to a movie in the 60s. First, you were obliged to stand up for 'God Save the Queen.' And at half-time, there were advertisements for *Playdate*, only 2/- at the Nibble Nook bar.

Owned by Kerridge Odeon, *Playdate* developed out of their house organ *Cinema* in 1960. Very similar to *Shake!* in format and content, its coverage extended to music and other youth topics. *Playdate* is New Zealand's most successful young person's magazine ever. The magazine lasted 12 years, and in its hey-day had a circulation of 75,000 copies, with a readership of four or five times that number.

Although *Playdate* was the idea of *Cinema*'s editor Sid Bevan, he left shortly after the magazine started,

and for most of its life Des Dubbelt was the editor. "I felt that to go anywhere, the magazine had to shed the feel of a handout, it had to have a consumer feel," he says. Dubbelt describes his employer Sir Robert Kerridge as "a true impresario, not an accountant" — so the magazine was not limited to KO films, but also covered Amalgamated's releases and television stories, with genuine criticism, not just publicity. "Kerridge saw you've got to go with the flow. If you're in show business, it doesn't make sense to ignore your competition."

The magazine was aimed equally at males and females, though the healthy advertising (some issues nearly reached 200 pages!) was mainly cosmetics and clothes (Slimryte Rolls! Bri-Nylon!) for the young Slenderella. "We followed our own interests a lot," says Dubbelt. "We thought if it interested us, it

would interest our readers. There were no readers' surveys. We were enthusiasts."

With Dubbelt at *Playdate* was Tom McWilliams as assistant editor (now executive sub-editor at the *Listener*), and young reporter Sally Reid — who later worked for the Beatles at Apple in London.

Reflecting the explosion of the decade, music became a major part of the magazine. "It was a natural progression," says Dubbelt. "The pop films started happening, Cliff Richard and so on, bolstered by personal visits. When the Beatles arrived, it was like the millenium." Dubbelt remembers taking Gene Pitney to Kerridge's Pakatoa Island resort for a story, and accompanying Tom Jones to a nightclub after his Town Hall concert — and Tommy Adderley singing 'It's Not Unusual' as Jones entered.

The burgeoning local music scene was covered, particularly the summer package tours. "Mr Lee Grant was mobbed in a way comparable with any visiting big name."



Des Dubbelt, 'Playdate' editor.

Shows such as *C'mon* made New Zealanders pop stars. "Any TV show wouldn't have done it," says Dubbelt. "Kevan Moore was a brilliant producer — those shows were excellent."

As any magazine should, *Playdate*'s layout reflects the design of the era. The change from hot metal to offset printing meant some radical layouts were possible: white type on black, photos bled to the edge. "We were dealing with a visual market: movies, fashion, rock, and this technology meant we could look different from the things the *Woman's Weekly* were doing. The readers saw this — they didn't want something that reminded them of their mothers' magazine."

The innovations of *Playdate* meant the magazine attracted work from the "young, adventurous" photographers of the day, such as Max Thomson, Rodney Charteris, and Roger Donaldson. "We couldn't have afforded them, but they liked the type of layouts we used, and to see their work well presented." While they were using Mondrian grid layouts and plenty of white space, Dubbelt and McWilliams looked with envy at overseas magazines — the San Francisco *Oracle* even had psychedelic inks!

But the times eventually caught up with *Playdate*. By the early 70s music and movies had got more permissive, and the magazine could reflect that in its illustrations — to a point. "It was just the way things were going. Take *Woodstock*. It was a pretty raunchy film, with a permissive attitude towards drugs and lifestyle. Tom and I felt we couldn't cover the way the rock scene was going."

"That was about the time *Rolling Stone* came on the scene. They seemed to have no "no no's," with star writers such as Hunter Thompson who seemed to be doing all the drugs too. The youth market had diversified into heavy rock, with the accompanying drug scene, and teenybopper pop. We couldn't and didn't want to go into those areas."

Playdate's circulation was still healthy when the magazine was sold to the Auckland *Star* in

1972, but six months later the new owners decided to close the magazine down. Ironically, on the day *RILU* interviewed Des Dubbelt, the *Star*'s parent company New Zealand Newspapers announced the closure of their 80s teen magazine, *Dally*.



New Zealand's first rock paper of significance started in October, 1967 — a month before *Rolling Stone*. Called *Groove*, it was edited in Wellington by Dene Kellaway for the publishers Lucas Print. He'd been the editor of *Teenbeat*, which had closed down the month before.

Efforts to trace Kellaway didn't succeed, but an interview with him appeared in another short-lived New Zealand music magazine *Third Stream* (a curious mix of mainly classical music, plus folk and pop; it lasted four issues) in May 1968. Its headline read, "EDITOR RELUCTANTLY GIVES UP GROOVE." Kellaway's reasons were pure 60s. His own pop career was getting off the ground... and he'd been drafted.

While Dene did his 14 weeks of national service at Waiouru, the magazine appears to have gone into recess. What happened to his pop career (NZBC didn't buy his first single, 'I'm Going Nowhere,' reported *Groove*) is also a mystery.

When *Groove* reappeared in August 1968, it continued its hip coverage of the overseas and local pop and rock scenes. Although the Monkees were on the first cover, Jimi Hendrix and Pink Floyd were also cover stories in the magazine's first year — using illustrations drawn by readers.

For their 10 cents each fortnight, each *Groove* reader got a 16-page tabloid with plenty of pix and pinups, reviews and news of pop stars and movies. Much of the paper's overseas coverage was taken from press releases, or syndicated from other music mags. But what's remarkable is the paper's coverage of local music. As the nostalgists keep reminding us, then we had pop stars: Simple Image ("will they keep 'Spinning Spinning' till 1968's Loxene Golden Disc?"), the Avengers, the Fourmyla, the Underdogs, Hi-Reving Tongues, Ray Columbus, John Rowles, and especially Mr Lee Grant (who wore suede boots laced at the side to an interview!)

Radio DJs were also stars, and one of *Groove*'s bandwagons was pirate station Radio Hauraki, with their "good guys." When the bill legalising private radio was passed in 1968, Kellaway wrote: "*Groove* is very pleased about the new bill and will be giving full support to any new stations that start up. In

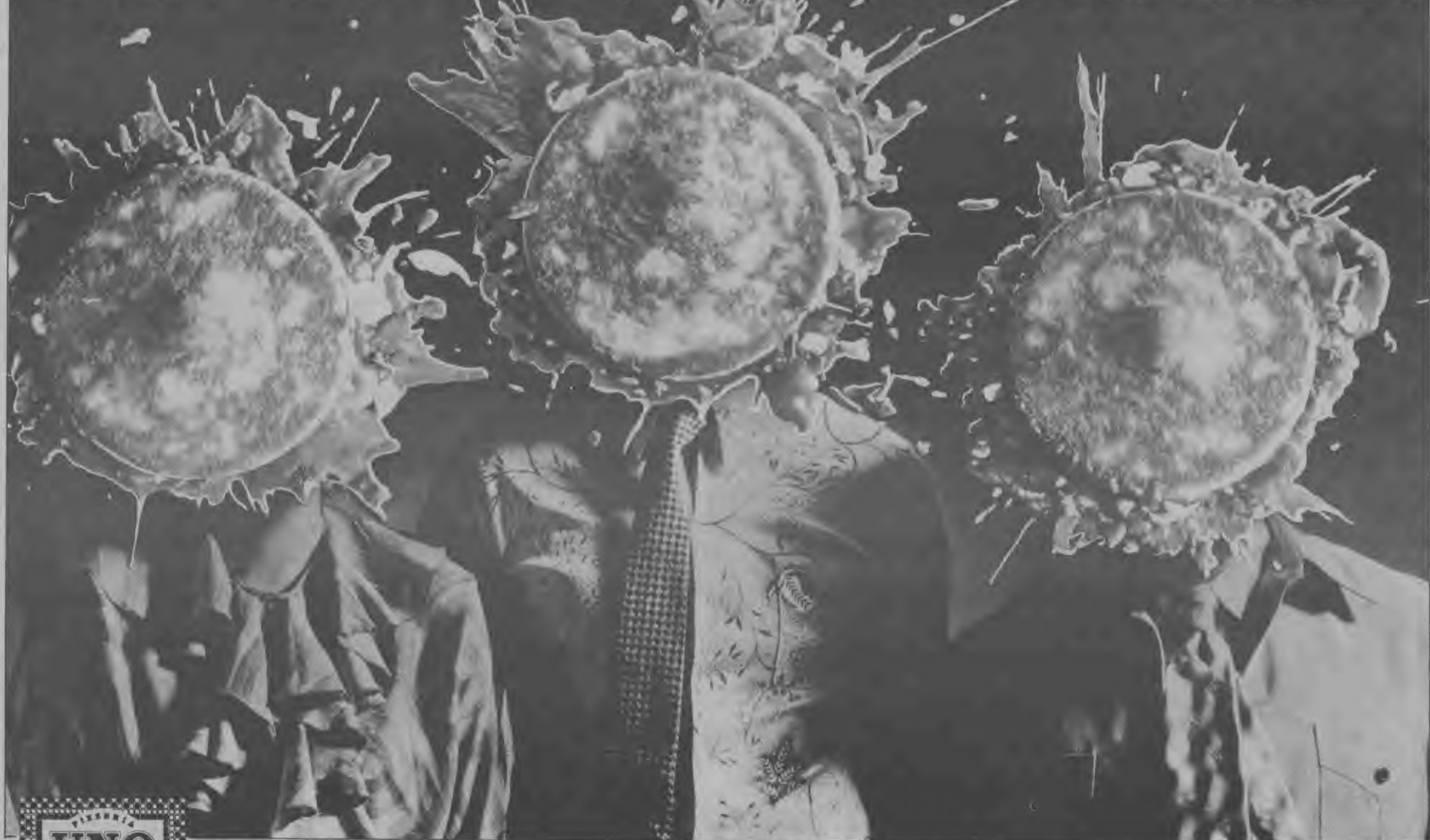


Dene Kellaway, 'Groove' editor, in 1968.

the long run it is going to be a good thing, and with the heavy competition it will bring, the standard of our local productions will improve and more local talent will

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Too dull for Pizzeria Uno.



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