

RAW AND TENDER: SIDES OF SNAPPER



PHOTO - TERESA MOORE

SNAPPER (L-R) CHRISTINE VOICE, ALAN HAIG, PETER GUTTERIDGE, DOMINIC STONES

"Rock'n'roll is an attitude," wrote Lester Bangs, "a raw wail from the bottom of the guts." This is Snapper's rock'n'roll. They come from Dunedin and they have an attitude.

I moved to Dunedin two years ago and people were talking about this band called the Phromes. Led by Peter Gutteridge, who had played bass in the original Clean and then written classic Great Unwashed songs like 'Can't Find Water' and 'Boat With No Ocean', the Phromes proved to be an

embryonic four-piece vehicle for Peter's songwriting talent; by the time I got to see them they were called Snapper and things were starting to move.

Snapper have a formula. Ex-Chills and Verlaines drummer Alan Haig provides the band with a backbeat straight from the same swamprock brew that fuels Tav Falco's Panther Burns. Christine Voice turns that into a throbbing pulsebeat of big distorted fuzztones of organ, and she joins in with Peter, singing harmonies and some lead vocals. Peter and Dominic Stones run guitars (and more distortion!) over the top of that, and there's the "Snapper Sound." Well,

almost, cos you've gotta add the attitude: some playful aggression, the dirty look of leather'n'shades, and the video they've made for 'Buddy', a track off the band's debut EP on Flying Nun (simply called *Snapper*), a psychedelic motorbikin' video, a

rush of images. Yeah. *Easy Rider*. Everything in Snapper builds from the rhythm up. It's a rhythm that Peter Gutteridge says he's always had in his head, a natural swing. The Great Unwashed got close to it, but it wasn't until he started recording songs onto his

four-track, playing with a drum machine and then with Alan Haig, that he had a way of getting it into songs.

"Chris and Dom then heard the tapes that Alan and I had made, and went 'Ahh, yep,'" he says. "They immediately

understood and liked it. It's a rhythm that everyone in the band intrinsically understands."

It's a classic rock'n'roll rhythm, primitive.

"Primitive, yeah," says Peter, "but we've cut it down even further. We're into solid bedrock rhythms. There's not much room for fancy stuff; ours is the rhythm that makes you tick. We find it and push it as hard as it will go.

"The way our songs are designed is very simple; our melodies are born out of the rhythm, which is different to the way most bands go, coming up with a melody first."

Some people find Snapper's extensive use of distortion hard to take, like asking whether they're trying to hide something, cheating by masking everything behind layers of distortion, but Christine points out that the whole Snapper sound works on layers and like organ over drums, guitars over organ and the three voices over that, the distortion helps build intensity.

The sound actually stems from the fact that Peter, Dom and Chris all found that they had Alron distortion units.

"They have a big soft warm sound with lots of sustain," says Peter. "Rather than being influenced by bands, it was more like finding that Alron sound and wanting to use it. The sounds themselves gave birth to the music."

Other bands probably do it — the Jesus and Mary Chain are obvious, they're into big slabs of distortion. But there's lots of differences, like we're meaner!" says Chris.

How do you feel about that?

"I'm not a prop," she says. "I feel like I do fit in with the tough guy image. I'm definitely not prissy! Women in bands are usually glamorous, unless whether they're Nico or Lita Ford."

"Chris is definitely not cosmetic," says Peter.

"Replacing her as a musician or a singer would be impossible; she understands the basic way we play music, our philosophy... well, we don't really have a philosophy, it's just the way we are."

Snapperness is, then...?

"It's not street-fighting aggression," says Dominic.

"But it is aggression," adds Peter, "perhaps positive aggression, that doesn't put up with shit. There's a degree of feistiness about Snapper as well as a degree of pretence."

"Songs on our record like 'Buddy' are aggressive. But that one, we just came out and *knew* that it had to have a motorbike video to go with it! That song just made us think "motorbikes!" 'Buddy' is a big highway riff, and I guess there is something between our sound and bikes... yeah, that's a synonym for Snapper: driving fast. Snapper is like a big powerful engine when it gets going!

"The other side of that, though, the side of Snapper that will surprise people who hear our next record after this one is our quiet songs. They're not on the EP — it's full on — but they've been there from the beginning.

"I have a theory," Peter continues, "that a band like us, that can be incredibly raw, is also capable of being extremely gentle and tender. The Velvet Underground are a classic example; as well as raw rock'n'roll, they'd come up with a gentle song that'd just about tear your heart out."

Snapper: the songs, the sound, the attitude. Music that affects you, makes you dance. Rock'n'roll.

PAUL MCKESSAR

Feeling
extra-terrestrial

Get noticed,
go a
little crazy,
use your
head.

New
Wave
Gel. Mousse. Lacquer. Only from
Chemists and beauty counters.

Hair - Julie Bews of 'Shape' Hair Design.
New Wave Styling Gel, Hard Rock Hair Lacquer.
Makeup - Maxi 'Surfseekers' collection.

IF IT'S NEW, IT'S NEW WAVE.