

Croc-Snappy-Pop

"We've all given up something for The Crocodiles," says a straight-faced Jenny Morris.
 "I've given up my virginity," says Tony Backhouse. Collapse of sincere, serious atmosphere. But then it's hard to be serious for long with this crowd.

Fun is what the Crocodiles are all about, as those who caught them at Sweetwaters will testify. A little silly, a little naughty and a little camp (not in the Mr Humphreys sense). Musically, you can spot snatches of The Beatles, The Bonzos and The Kinks, but the soon-to-be-released album also shows a more contemporary "urban" trend, with Steely Dan springing to mind first. A band of many colours, all of them bright.

FOWLEY CONNECTION

The Crocodiles have only been in existence a matter of months, but they're drawing considerable attention. One beady eye watching them closely is Kim Fowley. Spats broke up about a year ago, and Tony Backhouse and Fane Flaws started looking around for new opportunities. They took tapes of Spats to Auckland, where Fowley was working with Street Talk. "Fane and I played him all our songs and he liked about 0.1 percent," says Backhouse. "He thought we were too cute." Still the signs were promising, and Fowley gave some useful advice on what moves should be made. Flaws went around hassling record companies with Fowley's name to back him up, while Backhouse had a brief sojourn with Rough Justice. But already, the former nucleus of Spats, which also included keyboards player Peter Dasent and drummer Bruno Lawrence, had formed the nucleus of The Crocodiles. An Arts Council grant gave the finance for an album, which Glyn Tucker agreed to produce. The band had found its vocalist while Spats were playing their last gig at Wellington's Artists' Co-op. Also on the bill were the Wide Mouthed Frogs, then featuring one Jenny Morris. She refused when Flaws asked her to become a Crocodile, but agreed to help with the album, and finally joined the band.

LITTLE LIVE WORK

About a month was spent rehearsing the new material (only a handful of Spats numbers were retained) and the album was recorded in September. Mark Hornbrook played bass, later to be replaced by another Frog, Tina Matthews. At that time, The Crocs barely considered themselves a working unit, having never played live. "In Spats, we'd all got f**ked off playing in pubs and stuff around the country, and thought maybe we could just be a recording band and



Crocodiles (L-R) Peter Dasent, Tina Matthews, Fane Flaws, Jenny Morris, Bruno Lawrence and Tony Backhouse.

do TV work and stuff like that," says Dasent. "We didn't want to have to play for our living, because that just becomes like a job and it stifles the creative flow." "Last year, we never spent a hell of a lot of time together because we were all doing different things. Tony was in Rough Justice, I was doing cabaret, Bruno was filming and things like that. So if we were ever going to do live gigs, it would have to be planned six months in advance. So we decided it couldn't go on like that and we'd have to become a fulltime working band." That decision was made last December. Prior to that, gigs had been on a rough-and-ready, one-off basis, which did little for the group's spiritual or musical well-being.

FIRST SHOW

Their first-ever show was at a fashion parade at the James Cook Hotel, and brings forth groans of dismay at its very mention. The audience wasn't exactly the type that could relate to The Crocs, and the PA had a hernia halfway through the set. Things had to change. The current lineup made its debut at the Last Resort just before Christmas, and since then, it's all been up. They played the Brown Trout Festival, and at Sweetwaters everything

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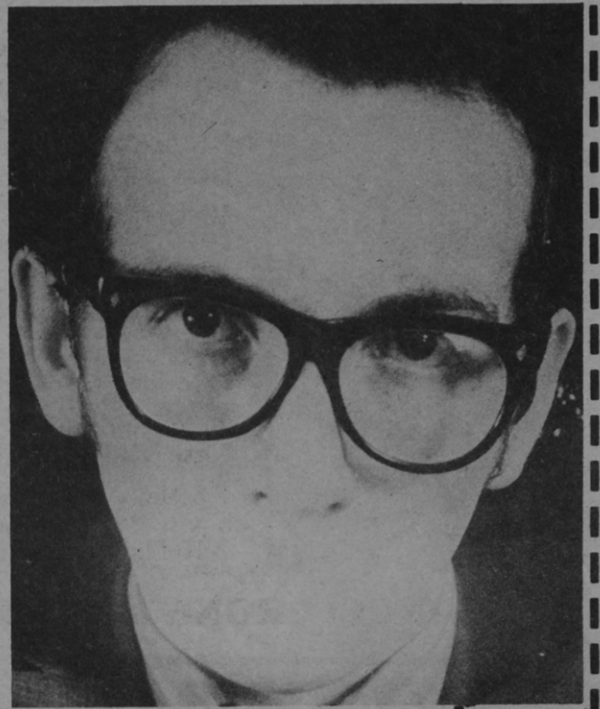
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"came together."

The Crocs have since been domiciled in Auckland, where word of their Sweetwaters performance has ensured a steady stream of punters, though audience reactions have been mixed to date. But that doesn't bother the group. They're confident in their ability to win friends, and the album can only help them. The single, "Tears", is more than catchy enough for good airplay, and those who have seen The Crocs will attest to their visual appeal.

They now have more than 30 original songs in their repertoire, with half a dozen cover versions thrown in as extras. Songwriting is shared equally, but a large amount of credit for sometimes-whimsical, sometimes-biting lyrics goes to Arthur Baystings (aka On The Level).

"He's the source of our inspiration, a good catalyst," says Dasent.

OVERSEAS PLANS

Once the album is released, it's off around the provincial circuit, spreading the word. After that, who knows? The Crocs are keen to try overseas pastures, and are considering several moves at present, though nothing is definite yet.

"Fowley made us aware of marketing, which is what he's really into," says Backhouse.

A further debt to Fowley is acknowledged.

"I suppose it was partly the fact that he was an American and kept talking about international release and things like that, and partly because he was so positive about everything," says Dasent. "He gave us a taste of energy, and that's still with us."

"He was saying 'Look, it's all possible. You don't have to have a New Zealand inferiority complex.'"

So The Crocodiles will probably eventually join the drain, if only because they feel they've been here too long. As a band they're very young, but their collective musical experience covers decades. Yet another band to be enjoyed while we have the chance.

It's nearly time for the band to start psyching themselves up for the night's performance ("Does anyone know the words to OM?" asks Backhouse).

The question "Why The Crocodiles?" automatically begs the response "Why not?" The name, in fact, was another Fowley suggestion, taking a line from one of the group's numbers, "New Wave Goodbye".

"It's just a name," says Backhouse. "I mean, who'd call a band The Beatles?" asks Morris.

Duncan Campbell

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