



Photo by John Reynolds

When Blam Blam Blam made their debut, late in 1980, they seemed an unlikely bet for success. Sudden time changes and anti-nuclear songs hardly make for conventional radio material. Yet last month, their first EP reached number nine on the Auckland sales charts.

Tim Mahon, Mark Bell and Don McGlashan have all recorded before. Tim and Mark with the Whizzkids, and Don with From Scratch. Their first real taste of a large studio, however, came with 'Motivation' — their *Class Of 81* track.

"That song was only the second thing we'd done on 24-track," says Mark. "It was very experimental because the people working on it didn't know anything about the machinery. In a way, we were Harlequin's guinea pigs."

Don continues, "What we didn't realise then was that it's that last hour before you go to bed that is the most important. We put quite a bit of work into thinking what the song should sound like, but come that last hour, we were just too tired, and we let it go."

By the time the Blams came to do the EP things had changed. The material had developed, as had their understanding of the studio.

"Well," says Mark, "that was the first time we had ever been in the studio and not been conscious of the money we were spending."

The band's first single, 'There Is No Depression In New Zealand' will be out very shortly. The song is the theme tune from a cabaret show devised by Richard von Sturmer. Don describes it as an attempt to expose the way New Zealanders build myths around themselves. The flip, 'Gotta Be Guilty', has been around for a while as 'Thomas Is Guilty'.

In the short period they have been performing, the Blams' music has diversified considerably. Frantic numbers like 'Battleship Grey' have given way to more subtle ones like 'Respect'.

"We have this desire to be an orchestra," says Mark, "but slowly we are coming to terms with the fact that there are

only three of us."

Don elaborates. "Because we are starting to improve, we are finding that we are able to fit more notes in than we used to be able to. Lately we have been writing these huge funkadelic epics that sound as if we should have ten people on stage playing cowbells. There is another song without drums, like 'Respect', on the way. I would like to do a bit more of that sort of thing. I like to have that soft feel too, rather than be full on all the time."

The problem with more adventurous material is achieving a good live sound, and the Blams acknowledge their debt to long-time sound man, David Rudolph.

"We have never tried to hide the fact that David is the fourth member. If he wasn't capable of getting the sound that he can, a lot of the things we try would be impossible."

Currently the band is on a large-scale tour with the Screaming Meemees and the Newmatics. Billed as the Screaming Blam-matic Roadshow, it is a venture that until now would have seemed impossible. Originally devised by Tim and Simon Grigg, it was turned into reality by the Students Arts Council.

Don explains. "We presented the idea to Brian and Gissella of SAC, and they sold to the Universities. Organisation is the hardest part. We are travelling in three vans — only one of which is certain to make it. I think plasticine plays a big role in holding together the Meemees' van!"

Once the tour is over, there are high hopes for an album. "It's all quite hazy," says Mark. "It is something that will be funded by Propeller on a private basis. It will be low budget, because a three-piece can do things more quickly. We hope to start as soon as we get back to Auckland. Some of the songs will have to be re-arranged and shortened. Other than that, they will be songs we have written recently. We have four new ones that we hope to break in on tour."

Although Blam Blam Blam try to be optimistic about their future, they are certainly worried about the state of

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the local scene. Tim has very definite thoughts about it.

"It costs heaps to perform. If you make \$700 on the door, chances are the bar has taken about \$1000. Yet the band has to pay for advertising, PA, wages for door people and sound and lighting crew. It all adds up. There was a time when the breweries used to organise tours. The bands not only got guarantees, but also a percentage. These days there are just too many bands and too many agencies. In Australia, you pay \$5 to see a band — here it costs less than going to the pictures. We hope the University circuit will open up."

Any ambitions for the future?

"We'd like to make Simon Grigg rich. Apart from that, we would like to live in a studio for three weeks. We don't have any goals like going to the States or Britain, because we don't feel we've done enough here yet. Perhaps after the album. As for me personally, I'd like to play cocktail music on a cruise ship."

Mark Phillips

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EXTENDED

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PLAY

CUBAN SLIDE
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*LIVE TRACK RECORDED
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GATES OF STEEL

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PLANET EARTH