



Penknife Glides: Cliff Gravelle, Jules Mahoney, Steven Gravelle, Stefan Morris.

'nervous' — us?

To live for the moment is the prevailing passion.

So reads the sole liner note on the back of Penknife Glides' *Nervous* EP. The quote was lifted from a *Time* magazine by Cliff Gravelle, attributed to a writer named Christopher Lasch. His name is not familiar to Gravelle, nor is it important. But the line is.

"It had a lot to do with those four songs," says brother Steven. "That saying held true for those songs like 'Big Business World': we got out of our jobs because of that."

It struck me because it so accurately reflected the mods' attitude to life: eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die. And in their early days, Penknife Glides were certainly branded as a mod group.

"I think that was a very mod thing, to live for the moment," says drummer Stefan Morris, "but I also think nowadays there are a lot of people thinking, 'Well maybe we've only got five or six years left, and perhaps we should only live for the moment'. There's that heavy feeling about it too."

Even dreams won't last forever ...

Nervous certainly lives up to its title. Some would call it paranoid, the lyrics of the songs full of cul-de-sac images, mystery men in shades of grey and unrecognisable stares. But if you keep up with your news of the world, you might find a lot in these songs to agree with. Are Penknife Glides at all optimistic about the future?

"For the band, yeah, but not optimistic about the world," laughs Stefan.

"It's a very serious thing," says Steven, steering the conversation back to a more practical plain. "We all finished our jobs, we all devoted ourselves to the band, because for us, this is the all-consuming passion. We never saw ourselves as another fly-by-night outfit, we're not just going to do another tour of New Zealand and then break up. But we were saying the other day, it would be just our luck to build ourselves up, do what we want to go overseas and then ..."

"Kaboom!" cuts in Stefan.

"At least we'll have been doing what we want to do up until the lights went out," Steven concludes.

A band that's had its share of knocks, this one, in its 14-odd months of life, since forming out of the remnants of such bands as the Primmers, Electrateat and Get Smart, kicking some life into XS and the Reverb Room, before hitting the spotlight with supports for the Police and Split Enz.

People tried to label Penknife Glides, as they will with any new group that comes along. It's convenient for everyone, including journalists, who are more guilty than most in their search for the identity of a sound, and their desire to account for its origins. Penknife Glides just wanted to play original material, with Steven and Cliff forming the nucleus as a song-writing team. Their listening pleasures include XTC and the

Psychedelic Furs, plus a hundred others in between. Each member has his own tastes in music, but ideas harmonise quite easily when putting the band's sound together.

"The only thing that draws us into a common ground is the music we play in the band," says Stefan.

"When a song comes together, everyone knows what they want to do," adds Steven. "We've never had a song where someone says 'Oh God, that's abysmal,' we've all got our own different tastes, but when a song comes together, it's the influence of all of us."

But when it comes to the gritty chore of writing songs, Cliff is undoubtedly the guiding light in shaping the band's sound.

"I wouldn't really like to see all of us having an equal share in it," says Steve. "I think it's important for a band like us to have a direction, and for people to say 'That sounds like Penknife Glides'."

Cliff is modest about his abilities.

"I basically start it off, but in a lot of cases Steve has come up with the words, or I've just had some ideas, and the band's done the rest. But then, sometimes, I've had a whole song and I know exactly what each part should do. But it chops and changes. A whole song might come to me in a flash, and other times I'll just get an idea and I have to keep working on it. I know I'll get there eventually, but getting there is the hard part."

Penknife Glides haven't been too pleased with their last two recordings. The debut single, 'Laugh Or Cry'/'Taking The Weight Off', suffered from production problems which left the sound thin and watery. *Nervous* was a big improvement, a much beefier sound, but still not mixed to the band's satisfaction.

They've recently finished four new tracks, and are much happier. Their deal with Reaction records, through Polygram, gives them plenty of time at Mandrill, under the benevolent eyes of Paul Crowther and Phil Yule. The band has stuck around through the long process of mixing, so that if things come out wrong this time, they've got to blame themselves.

"We're letting the music work more in its own right, rather than having structured songs of the verse-chorus type," says Steven. "It's closer to a live sound, in that it's got some guts to it, rather than the tinkly sound of the past."

Some different instruments have come in too, everything from a grand piano to a guitar synthesiser. The four tracks, 'Drums', 'Fewer Than You', 'Three Minute Mystery' and 'Money To Burn', are set for an EP which may not see the light of day till the new year. With that in mind it's hoped to have a single out before then, to bridge the gap.

Towards the end of this month, Penknife Glides set off on a three-week, round-the-country jaunt with Danse Macabre. One thing they want to avoid now, if possible, is the traditional pub-gig approach of half an hour on, take a break, then another 30-minute stint. There are only three pub gigs on the whole tour.

"We're trying at the moment to play a one-and-a-half-hour concert situation, which a lot of pubs don't appreciate," says Cliff.

"We feel that we're performers, and have an obligation to give a night's entertainment, rather than just sauntering up on stage, putting down the beer jugs and playing."

Duncan Campbell

I'd love a Beer.

