

Success in most fields of endeavour will invariably bring you money. Unless, of course, you are a musician in New Zealand. The Screaming Meemees surprised themselves and the music industry when 'See Me Go' shot to number one earlier this year. A lot of people assumed that the Meemees and Propeller Records had made money. In reality, they barely covered their costs.

To the layman, the whole exercise may seem pointless. Surely you must become disillusioned if hit records fail to give you the fame and fortune you would receive in any other western country? Michael, the Meemees' guitarist, doesn't quite see it that way:

"I'm not disillusioned, really. I never wanted anything out of it all, and that's exactly what I've got!"

The Screaming Meemees started life on Auckland's North Shore, but in the early days, the majority of their performances took place at XS Cafe. Although still at school, they then began to play support gigs at pubs.

"We used to sneak Pete out from his parents' place!" says Mike. "We'd say we were at my place, studying. Then we'd go and play at Liberty Stage, and when I'd take him home, he'd be pissed!"

"The first time we were supposed to play at Liberty Stage was with the Primmers. We couldn't get the car up the drive at Pete's, so we ended up being really late, and the Primmers, who were headlining, had to go on before us!"

Are you concerned about your sudden success?
 "Yes, we do feel a bit guilty that it's happened so quickly, when other bands have been slogging it out for years. I think I'd rather have it the way it was about a year ago, when they all thought we were absolutely useless."

Tony doesn't necessarily agree.
 "I think we're always inclined to underestimate ourselves (hoots of laughter). I mean, if we really were that f**ked, we wouldn't be anywhere. People aren't really that gullible."

Tony continues: "A lot of those older musos dislike us because they think we have an unprofessional attitude. I think it stems from the fact that we just grew out of the audience that was XS."

All the Meemees agree that they couldn't have approached things the way a band such as Penknife Glides did. While the Glides spent a year behind closed doors rehearsing, the Meemees practised in front of a crowd at XS.

The Meemees don't see themselves as having a lot in common with NZ bands of the past. Their favourite band of a few years ago is Propeller stablemate the Features. They do, however, admit to liking Th' Dudes' albums, which has probably got something to do with that band's former guitarist, Ian Morris, being producer of their debut LP.

"I think they were probably ahead of their time," says Tony, "though the thing I didn't like about them was the old-style, long guitar solos. The problem with musicians is they like to show everybody how well they can play."

So what about your style of writing?
 "The way we write is to work out a riff, and I just sing over the top of it. There are never really any concrete lyrics to the songs until we come to record them. Basically, we're a dance band, so the music always comes first."

We never really wanted to propagate any particular message in the lyrics, though over a period of time they have

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MEEMEE



Tony Drumm, Yoh, Michael O'Neil and Peter van der Fluit

become more involved. We're trying to elevate the songs in a way, put more emotion into them."

Do you see your music as fashionable?
 "Not really," says Tony. "We don't hold with fashion in a musical sense. Like, we could never be a futurist band, because we want to play music for now, not the future."

Overseas travel always seems the next likely step for local bands. Tony has very definite opinions on excursions.

"If we went overseas, we'd like to have the same attitude as when we started here. You have to treat it like a whole new start."

"If we went to Australia, we'd only go for a two-month working holiday, because it's not the sort of place we'd like to get bogged down in. I'd rather go to Japan than anywhere."

The Meemees' most immediate project is the recording of their debut album.

"We used to say 'I'd love to get back into the studio,'" says Tony. "Now, we've been in the studio nearly every day for the last two weeks and we're sick to death of it. I'm glad we're going on tour, because it'll give us a chance to have a break from the studio. We'll come back in December and finish the album."

How far have you got?
 "Well, we've done both sides of the single, 'Sunday Boys'

and 'At At', and we've put down the rhythm tracks for 'Day Goes By', 'Fly By Night', 'Orson Welles' and three others. We have some ideas for songs at the moment, and we hope to be able to develop them on tour and record them when we get back."

"The way we did 'Sunday Boys' was quite strange, in that we recorded the song before we had played it live, which is quite risky when you consider how much our songs usually change between the time we first play them and the time we come to record them. I think it shows we're getting more confident about the material we're writing."

Do you see your songwriting strengthening?
 "Well, when we first used to write songs, I'd think of a tune that admittedly was pretty derivative, but by the time the song was finished, the tune would be nothing like what I envisaged. So the songs were actually quite original."

"These days, it's far more communal. We just jam at practices, and the songs come out of that. Our biggest fear is that we may try to put too much in one song."

"I don't want to play anything too complicated," says Michael.

"I do!" says Pete.
 "We have to keep the reins on Pete," explains Tony.
 Mark Phillips

I'd love a Beer.

