

Rose Bayonet

On Tour! **HEAVY METAL!**

DECEMBER

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29 WAR MEMORIAL HALL, TAUPO
31 OHOPE HALL, OHOPE

JANUARY

3 MOUNT STADIUM, MOUNT MAUNGANUI
5 WHANGAMATA HALL, WHANGAMATA
6-9 LADY H, HAMILTON
13-16 TURANGI, TAVERN TURANGI
21-23 LENNONS, HASTINGS
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Mental As Anything, ever since their emergence from the East Sydney Art School, have been teasing Aussie audiences with their cheeky concoction of rockabilly, bluegrass, C&W, R&B and rock'n'roll.

Reg Mombassa, one of the guitarists, one of the vocalists and one of the songwriters in the Mentals, puts it another way:

"In the band everyone has fairly eclectic tastes and it all comes together in one horrible sort of curry."

Mombassa is talking from Sydney, I am listening and asking questions from Dunedin. The band will appear at Sweetwaters, and if their last three albums are any indication, they will be one of the high spots. At the time of the phone interview the Mentals are in the middle of a period of 'bludging around' which includes organizing songs for their next album and jamming with Cold Chisel vocalist Jimmy Barnes. At the beginning of next year they will begin an Australian tour and appear at Sweetwaters Festival.

But back to the curry. Did they have a hard time making it in Aussie?

"No, we were lucky when we started that there weren't all that many full time bands playing in the pubs coz at the time, early '77, the concert thing was still big. Since then it has exploded."

Let's talk about eclecticism. What are your tastes, Reg?

"C&W, blues, rockabilly, peurile film soundtracks and Perry Como. Martin Plaza, our lead vocalist, is very fond of Frank Ifield and Frank Sinatra and anyone who's first name is Frank, I think. Peter (O'Doherty, Reg's younger brother) is a jazz aficionado and Greedy (keyboards and harmonica Smith) likes C&W."

What about the band's humour, is it contrived or natural?

"It's not contrived, it's just our outlook. I'm not so keen on these existentialist bands and all this deep thinking. That sort of attitude is contrived and a bit pompous."

Get Wet was a fairly confident first step, what was the band aiming for?

"Getting an album out that was reasonably like us. We had no great plans of what it should sound like although that was probably a bad thing as it

As Anything's
Reg...



Mental As Anything, Reg on left.

should've sounded better. But it was done hastily and it's not a bad album."

The good British-press reviews must've expanded a few horizons?

"No, the only effect it had was that it got us a bit of kudos back here but on a practical basis, it didn't do much as the record never really got played in England. But we got good press out of it which impresses people here."

The new album, *Cats and Dogs*, is the Mentals' best. It's still lean, yet richer in texture and the songs still bristle with hooks. Happiness is the new album?

"Oh yeah. The first two were a bit hastily recorded whereas we took our time over this one."

The first two were done in a block of six or seven days but we recorded the new one over a three month period. It's the one we're most comfortable with so far."

Mombassa talks with an Aussie accent but that's understandable, I suppose, if you consider that he left NZ as far back as the late 60s when he was 17. On *Get Wet* he has a song, 'Talk To Baby Jesus', that mentions Tokoroa and Papakura, the latter being the place where he used to live. Anyway the song's about a forestry worker from Tokoroa. He shared a cabin with two of them on his way to Aussie. On *Cats and Dogs* his songwriting has become more metaphorical:

"Yeah, the lyrics are more obscure. Songs like 'Chemical Travel' and 'Psychedelic Peace Lamp' are fairly hard to explain. But 'Psychedelic Peace Lamp' is really about a present my brother gave me for Xmas. It is a sort of plastic globe with a rotating cylinder inside it, switch it on and the light throws these beautiful colours around the room, it makes it a religious kind of love object."

Mombassa puts their distinctive sound down to their varied influences, but whatever the causes they sure stand apart from other Aussie acts. Speaking of which, who impresses him in Australia?

"The Sunnyboys are pretty good although they might be a bit hard to get into at first."

I mutter something about not being too impressed with their song on *South Pacific*. Reg lets it pass.

"The Reels are very good."

Reg is also a Cold Chisel and Icehouse fan, and if you wise up you can be a Mentals' fan. They're as good as anything to come out of Aussie since the Bee Gees. The Bee Gees?! George Kay

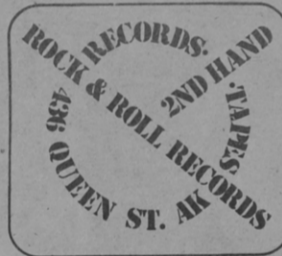
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