

Six months in a leaky boat and that story nears its end for the second time in two years, as Split Enz round the bend on their last lap of touring, finishing in New Zealand. The past five months have been a variety show, the star hosts mingle with us, briefly, from their conveyor belts, flanked by the extras who are directed to have walk-on and bit parts for the day. The many famed and fabled buildings and cities roll on the big rollers past the car windows, and lots of people pass us, in a hurry, to and fro, people with different accents, different smiles, clothes, lifestyles. While we sit and stand, walk and work, moving from car to aeroplane, airport to motel to theatre, the big rollers roll in the world's projection room, on to the screens, which are our windows.

Split Enz the audience, the judge, in the van with the video sensurround windows. The selection committee. In a chartered plane, seated in rows until a kind man appears and opens the exit door, ushering us into another windowed room. We sit there, breathing in the muted greens and browns and admiring the blue sky, until we're told to get out and into another room, where soft musak whispers that life is a breeze. Water flows from taps, milk is instant non-dairy whitener, food is but a phone call and an hour's wait away, all-night television to lull to sleep, air comes from an air conditioner.

10.00 am on Monday, August 16 in Melbourne, and the band are making a film clip, 'Never Ceases To Amaze Me', that Noel has worked out with the director over long phone calls from Darwin. It doesn't finish until 6.00 pm. Last night at the same time, the band had just come off stage, completing the last date of their Australian tour, an 'Under-18's' show in Melbourne.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 17

Melbourne, 7.00 am. Grant Thomas, the tour manager, dutifully makes wake-up calls and in six homes scattered over Melbourne, the entourage is busily preparing and packing to make the flight, leaving at 10.00 am to Auckland. 9.00 am we're at the airport, tired and grizzly, only to learn that the plane has been delayed for five and a half hours. Back home for some more sleep, while the road crew opt to stay at the airport and busy themselves making badges to display their membership of an exclusive social club — the crew's very own 'Split Enz Sports And Social Club' — crew only.

The same day, 10.30 pm, arrive Auckland and proceed to Hamilton, going by the itinerary. Oops, Noel has left his bag at the airport, so we have to double back. Check into hotel, and the band settle for some sleep while I go down to the Founders Theatre to set up for the first show of the NZ tour. The stage set, which has some technical peculiarities, has to be explained and put up and the special effects projectors babied out of their case and wheeled around. Although the lighting plot was sent over a month in advance, the rigging, cabling and colouring of lamps takes forever on the first set up, so we do all but focus tonight. 6.00 am we call it quits and go back to the hotel for a few hours' sleep. Laurie Bell, the production manager works on, there are many details to be taken care of before the stage and sound people begin work at 9.00 am.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18

Sound check is early, everyone expects the first show to be difficult because of the new, unfamiliar NZ equipment — PA, foldback and lights. The Finn elders arrive, Finn cousins playing with the beach balls backstage.

The dressing room is newly painted and most of the band find they have severe headaches the next day. But battle dress donned, they take the stage with enthusiasm and anticipation, because it's great to be on home soil. The audience is quiet, polite and serious. It's been a whole year since Split Enz toured NZ and they're playing new material, working hard. There are a few technical difficulties, but only minor ones. Back to the hotel for some hot chocolate with friends, before retiring.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 19

1.30 pm. Wake up, and Eddie and I go down to the theatre to work on improving our computer programmes (Eddie's synthesisers are digitally controlled and store many different sounds in computer memories). Computers and synthesisers are relatively new developments and computers, like humans, were not designed for the rigours of the road. Just as Eddie wanders around his hotel, wondering where he is and what he is doing there, these computers become similarly vacant and he is often to be found in a state of panic, trying to reprogramme his sounds minutes before a show. The lighting desk computer is but 120 channels of memories which can be reprogrammed for particular lighting scenes or progressions of lighting changes. However, it too has a habit of becoming vacant, or worse, storing more than its share, which means it could reveal the total lighting show at the press of one memory button.

The sound crew have been working all day, trying to iron out the creases in last night's sound.

Ed and Noel go off for a walk into town, looking for water pistols. The Ed Water Pistol Collection has swelled to number 120 over three years.

Soundcheck, dinner — Noel enthuses over the six veges — back to the paintstricken dressing room an hour before the show, to put on the 'cossies' (costumes), paint the faces, discuss song lists, tell a few jokes, wet the whistle (or sip a lemonade), do armstretches and leg raises, eat some peanuts or whatever is offering in snacks. The show goes 'averagely well' (probably 'very good' in another's words), but we have our own rating system.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 20

6.00 am, get up and drive to Auckland. The car breaks down on the way, but is fixed by a kind mechanic, free of charge. We feel that this could only happen in NZ. The production crew have been waiting outside the Logan Campbell Centre since 8.00 am, but the truck doesn't arrive till 10. They begin work frantically and irritably, but still able to make light-hearted jokes, and the stage set slowly appears.

Meanwhile, Noel has gone to visit his folks, Tim and Neil arrive in Auckland with theirs, to spend the day together. Nigel, being the most boring (he is aware of the fact) member of the band, has experienced nothing of any interest whatsoever since

SPLIT ENZ

Raewyn Turner has been lighting director for Split Enz since 1975. She painted the cover for Frenzy and last year at Dennis Cohn Gallery exhibited drawings in her show entitled 'On The Road Again'. Raewyn has written for Rip It Up, about behind-the-scenes, staging the 1982 Time And Tide tour of New Zealand.

ON THE ROAD STORY

arriving in NZ, nor on this day, except for a sleepy interview with Colin Hogg. Eddie visits his sister and his friend Paul Crowther and they spend the rest of the day babbling about synths.

Backstage in the dressing room the champagne arrives — a greeting from the record company. The band have another of their 'average' performances, the crowd was ecstatic but the band are tired. The sound men aren't feeling happy, so they make plans to spend all day tomorrow on improvements, to further dampen the echoes.

Back to the White Heron, now affectionately known as the Red Herring (no offence meant), for a few drinks with friends in the Carriage Bar. This is the first piece of glamorous living I've experienced for about a month or more — other people might call it just having a drink — but it means a lot being able to have the luxury of changing from work clothes to casual and being with friends.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 21

1.30 pm. Wake up and with Noel and Eddie go to Parnell Village where we have breakfast with Noel's folks, who are in Auckland for both shows. A flying visit to a friend strapped in traction in hospital and it's on to soundcheck and an early show.

Nigel has spent the day sleeping, jigging and walking, his three favourite pursuits. Neil and Tim are having dinner with their folks at the table over from us. They bribe the resident pianist into playing 'Feelings' as an after-dinner tribute to the band. (This song was on the top of the list for singing at the top of one's voice while bumping along in a van through North America.)

Show over, after dismantling and loading out the equipment from Logan Campbell, half the crew drive overnight, without sleep, to Palmerston North. Half the band goes partying.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22

9.00 am. Depart the hotel for the airport. 9.55 flight departs Auckland for Palmerston North, without breakfast.

Tim feels detached from everything, and so opts for the hair-of-the-dog treatment, which will see him through until the end of the performance. The drinks backstage in the dressing room are there to be a starter motor, to kick a tired man into action. It's an early show again, and it feels good to commence the performance about an hour after soundcheck. It's still early enough to relax afterwards over dinner and watching TV.

MONDAY, AUGUST 23

10.30 am. Bags are being loaded into five cars, room bills are being paid, and we're off to Christchurch. It's a day off, everyone is anticipating what they'll do, and probably they'll do nothing. We've taken all the back seats in the plane and Ian Magan's (tour promoter) Air New Zealand voice (fondly remembering "Ladies and gentlemen, have you see this?" on flights to London) booms from three seats away. Tonight he has promised the entourage a free dinner.

Eddie and I miss the free dinner — we've been invited to his brother's house. This is one of the advantages of this job — seeing family and friends in all corners of the world at least once a year — where distance and fares would normally prohibit this. The visits are, however, usually too short and sweet.

The band enthuse over the selection of old cars in 'perfect condition' being driven around Christchurch, reeling off the makes as we drive around. Austin, Morris, Zephyr, Vanguard ... Tim's been after a Studebaker and is delighted to hear that people in the entourage have spotted three so far. Back home the Split Enz Club boasts a green FJ Holden (Neil's), a black Mark II Zephyr (Tim's), a pink Morris Major Elite 1963 (Eddie's), a 1950 Black Triumph Renown (Noel's) and a brown 1954 Fiat station wagon (Nigel's).

Today Noel went shopping and got the costumes drycleaned. Nigel went for a five-hour walk along the Avon, Neil joined the road crew for a trip to the snow, where they used big plastic rubbish bags for sliding down hills and threw snow at each other.

Tim stayed in and did an interview, then cruised around, went for a walk, I think. Ed, Clark Flannigan (Polygram Records' man on tour) and I finally got ourselves away from the hotel and went swimming at the QEII pool. It's the first day of the school holidays and Ed and Clark get swallowed up in the crowds queuing for the hydrotubes. Clark can do 50m overarm in 35 seconds, he tries out the high diving board, but Ed and I only manage the lowest. End of day off.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 24

7.00 am. Get up, shower and down to the Christchurch Town Hall by 8.00 am. It's a beautiful day, warm with blue, blue skies, the smell of blossom, cold air and woodsmoke, peculiar to NZ.

The stage set is constructed quickly and looks good. I'd anticipated, with sinking stomach feelings, that as far as equipment and organisation of technical details go, the NZ section would be the worst and most difficult of this six-month tour (probably because it has previously been that). However, there have been vast improvements made in the expertise of the hired technical personnel and in the equipment to be found here since we toured last year. It has taken a lot of hard work to elevate it to this level, and although the equipment is different to the systems currently available in Australia, this in no way makes for a compromise situation.

At 10.30 am, I offer to get the food — three dozen donuts, one dozen cream buns, three dozen filled rolls, a bag of apples. We work on until 4.00 pm and soundcheck is at 4.30. After a while, the band drift into playing their oldies, searching for the perfect replacement for 'Hard Act', which they're sick of.

The band are tired. After five months of constant touring and only two weeks off in the period — no weekends — they are finding it hellish to think clearly and with enthusiasm about their shows. They want to try a new set, a different way of playing particular songs, but the energy somehow keeps being channelled the same way. The shone for the Auckland shows and will probably shine for the rest, but they try to break out of their feelings of exhaustion and automatic gear.

Tonight's performance is once again good, although lacking the fire that the band are striving hard to produce. The audience is enthusiastic. The band and crew and managers return to the hotel bar, where we tell each other jokes until the small hours, winding down for sleep after a long day.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 25

8.00 am. Woken by chainsaws, jackhammers and the noise of concrete being made in a wheelbarrow. These are quite regular occurrences in hotels where we have stayed, so I drift back to sleep. But Eddie has had enough and has decided to move over to the posh hotel, where Tim and Neil have recently moved, to escape the noise. The hotel is twice the price and offers a complementary morning newspaper, but we prefer the squat NZ motels, having spent too long in high-rise hotels, with Coffee-Mate (powdered non-dairy whitener) for tea milk.

Soundcheck at 4.30, still the search for the perfect song replacement. 'In The Wars', 'Jamboree', 'Under The Wheel' and a few others are fiddled with and discarded.

Tim, Neil, Eddie and I drive off for dinner and discuss our fatigue and the artistic value (or not) of the song produced under pressure of having to be sold by a record company. The issue of touring arises and they talk about giving it up in Australia and NZ for two years, except for the occasional 'spectacular' — an alternative that would provide opportunity for lots of ideas to be exercised. Or perhaps they'd like to do a film, taking a year off to make it and write songs, using that period to develop their musical ability as individuals.

Showtime, the crew are lying around on couches drinking coffee and the first band are pounding away. Eddie is in the dressing room playing his other favourite song, 'Loving You' by Minnie Ripperton, accompanied by Neil singing. He breaks away into Chopin.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 26

A day off for some, but the three lighting technicians leave Christchurch at 9.00 am and arrive at Invercargill at 7.00 pm. (The truck has a sleeper and they take turns at driving.) The rest of the crew fly down at 11.00 am and spend the rest of the day in the hotel's spa pool. At 8.00 pm, Laurie, Glen (the set and projectors man) and three loaders unpack the truck, having first to remove a fleet of five city council vans that were parked across the stage door. Glen gets to work putting up the stage set and is back at the hotel by 11.00 pm.

Tim, Neil, Clark, Eddie and I have made plans to drive to Akaroa for some fish and chips and scenery, but Eddie and I spend until 2.00 pm buying second-hand furniture for future use, by which time Clark isn't to be found. The free day has just about slipped away. We make rearrangements with the cars and Tim and Neil go to Akaroa. Noel, Eddie and I take a drive that meanders along a peninsula beyond Lyttelton, and we end up driving along a tractor path up a mountainside. The green pastures, trees in blossom, the mountains and valleys, we can't wait to settle back here and enjoy the countryside. Tim and Neil return with tales of spectacular scenery, quite in awe of the beauty of the countryside. Neil, in surprise, says it's always so much better than he's remembered. Of course, all this talk about 'nature' crops up in our conversations especially after a few months on the road, staying in orange and purple hotel rooms. At the same time, the touring lifestyle has another advantage — it provides the blinkers and forces a total commitment to work.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 27

9.00 am. Wake up call from Grant, we move quickly and tiredly into the day.

Arrive Invercargill and greeted by an over-officious officer on the sidewalk at the airport. Magan has an argument with him and Neil throws him a coin as we drive away. Later, Magan receives a speeding ticket from the same officer.

Stop off on the way to the hotel, at the art gallery for a typical photo of the band posing next to a huge anchor for the local papers.

I go straight to work. The crew, having become accustomed to the equipment, are working very fast these days and focus is early. The set works well in the Civic Centre, because the tiers of balconies tower over the stage, which is shallow and therefore the sail has a steep incline. I don't have a good show, getting my fingers jammed in the faders, despite a grand performance by the projector operators, Glen and Keith, who are by now quite skilled.

Noel apparently just about falls backwards off his drums, fatigued and the rest of the band are tired. But there are only 11 more shows to do, so they attack each one with enthusiasm.

After the show, the musos' club is less than hospitable, hassling the band at the door. Eddie, Tim and Neil leave and end up 'helping out' Magan, who is hosting a three-hour radio show.

The road crew have busily packed clean socks for the Saturday soundcheck before heading off to Queenstown in search of the thrillseeker jetboats. Bed.

Part two of this feature will appear in next month's 'RIU'.