

WATCHING THE THOMPSON TWINS THE DETECTIVES

Local girl makes good is the angle of this one. In 1976 Alannah Currie left New Zealand and on the second day of March 1983 she's on the phone from her London flat ecstatic about the fact that the Thompson Twin's third album, *Quick Step and Side Kick*, has entered the British charts at No. 2. Not bad for a girl who landed broke and unknown in London six years back in search of "punk excitement".

"I grew up in Auckland and when I left school I did a journalist course for a year and got a job with Radio Windy for three months. I interviewed Lou Reed who threw my tape recorder across the bloody room and so I left after that thinking this isn't the life for me. I went to Australia for a year and then on to Britain where I bought a saxophone and started just blasting."

Her voice is full of exuberance and soft London inflections. The news of the album's success was relayed to her only that day but how did she first meet up with the hitherto virtually unknown Thompson Twins?

"I was in an all girl band for a month and then I met up with the Thompson's Tom Bailey who lived in the same street. I mucked around on the edge of the band for a while



Thompson Twins: Joe Leeway, Tom Bailey, Alannah Currie

because I had punk-art tendencies and I didn't want to do recording but about two-and-a-half years ago I dropped the saxophone and took up percussion and joined the band. The Thompson Twins used to be a seven-piece experimental outfit — brilliant to play in but not so good to listen to — so in April 1982 three of us (Bailey on vocals and synthesiser and Joe Leeway, synthesiser) decided we wanted to do dance music and it got more poppy and synth-based and so we split from the others."

The name, the Thompson Twins, comes from Hergé's *Adventures of Tin Tin*. In the comic strip they're well intentioned but bungling detectives, ideal foils for the cool-headed ability of the hero. I've always been a Captain Haddock fan myself. But what prompted Tom Bailey to use the name?

"In 1977 everyone was into macho names like the Stranglers and the Sex Pistols and being Tom Bailey he decided to pick a really wet name. When I saw them they were angry, not wet, and they were doing more interesting things than a lot of others who had the name and the cash. The band got a very good reputation as a live act but couldn't cut it on record."

What drove the current three-piece Thompson Twins to take on dance music?

"Two years ago we were into reggae because we live in South London and there's a lot of Jamaican people here and the more we got interested in percussion the more we got involved in African and Latin American stuff, so the rhythm thing was strong. Then Tom went back to synths and we decided to marry that with percussion plus we were all influenced by the New York funk thing and we all iike to dance."

What lessons were learned from the commercial failure of the old Thompson Twins' lineup?

"With the old band we wrote songs, gigged them then tried to record them with the live feel and it didn't work. So this time we wrote the songs, taped them then took them to a really good producer to record them. It's the first time we've tried that and it's worked."

The songs in question make up *Quick Step and Side Kick*, recorded in the Compass Point Studio in Nassau and produced by Grace Jones' producer Alex Sadkin; it was released in late February in Britain and took only ten days to hit No. 2. My copy of the album, being an advanced test pressing, has a blank sleeve and no song titles on the label and so Miss Currie

grabs her copy and we go through the songs.

Unknowingly I start with *Side Two* and 'Watching' which she says is her favourite song, and then on to 'We Are Detectives':

"That's us being humorous. It's just a complete piss-take of decadence. I sing it and we wrote it after watching *The Pink Panther*. The record company has persuaded us to release it as the next single but we're not happy about it as it isn't representative of us. It's a joke song."

Next is 'Kamikaze', very melodic, followed by 'Love Lies Bleeding' which, with its synth-funk, is catchy enough to be a single:

"It's a good dance mix but it won't go down as a single over here."

Side Two concludes with 'All Fall Out', slower, more intense. Over to the first side and 'Love On Your Side', the second single from the album and one which made the Top Ten in Britain. I suggest it sounds Tom Tom Club-ish. A laugh then a bright denial:

"I don't know about that, it's very Thompson Twins."

Then there's 'Lies': "That was the first single from the album material that we did at Nassau, it got to about No. 60 then died."

Following the dance numbers is 'If You Were Here', soberly paced, and then 'Judy Do' on which, like on one or two other occasions, Tom Bailey sounds like Phil Oakey and the impression is Human League-ish. Alannah Currie sounds incredulous:

"Human League-ish? I don't think so. Tom doesn't sing all that well so perhaps that's why he and Phil Oakey and all the rest sound the same."

'Tears' concludes *Side One* and wraps up the discussion of the song content. The album is bright and likeable with a relaxed and natural feel giving the varied songs some sort of album continuity — that's the effect of the Bahamas and Alex Sadkin:

"Recording in Nassau was like living in a travel brochure. We heard Grace Jones' *Nightclubbing* and we were looking for a new producer who could clean up our sound because we used to have too many ideas for our own good. Sadkin gave us the sound and feel of the album and we had all the songs written and arranged before we went."

A couple of years ago Alannah returned to New Zealand but after three months she went back to Britain:

"I can't say I miss New Zealand, but I miss my mum."

The price of fame. George Kay

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