

Do the Thorazine Shuffle

The Thorazine Shuffle guide to a Monday night out in Auckland begins with a pint or three at the financially troubled Rugby Hall of Fame. It leads to the dark but cool surroundings of a jazz music bar in High Street, on to a hygienically-suspect kebab restaurant halfway along Customs Street, and finally to the sensory wonderland of Stages Time Out Centre, not far from the city's main bus terminal. At Point A, sitting behind a glass of Red and a rapidly filling ashtray, underneath a photograph of the 1958 All Blacks, singer and lead guitarist Josh Hetherington is replaying the events of the previous Friday, the action-packed launch day of Thorazine Shuffle's debut single, 'An Affair'.

It began at seven in the morning with a live-to-air performance on 95bFM's breakfast show. The band had been soundchecking in the station's foyer the night before. Naturally someone had brought a few beers in, and a Beatles tape was produced. Eventually Thorazine collapsed in heaps on the floor, two hours before show time. Consequently, Hetherington was still drunk when guest host Anita McNaught wandered through to watch the band play.

"She comes and watches us, and this was all quite exciting 'cause I quite fancy her. So, it went okay, and as it all finished I stole a kiss, which

was quite nice."

The next scheduled stop was a 9AM in-store appearance at Marbecks Records in Queen Street.

"We showed up, but we didn't expect more than what we actually got — there was one fan there. We shifted a few units and signed a couple of autographs, but it was very weird. The single was on rotate and there was no one there, it was very much like the scene in Spinal Tap."

If the Marbecks experience was a disappointment, the exact opposite was true when Thorazine arrived to play later that afternoon at

Real Groovy, further up the road.

"It was great, I couldn't believe it. There was probably the most people I've seen at a Real Groovy in-store, and I've probably seen four or five. It was very gratifying."

After a day of ups and downs, Thorazine finished on a high, playing to a healthy-sized crowd at Kurtz Lounge. The gig was also the debut of the third incarnation of the band, featuring Hetherington, Anthony McDonald sharing guitar duties, one-time Second Child drummer Jules Barnett, and newcomer Murray Hood on bass. From where Hetherington stood centre-stage, teething problems were nil.

"It was really exciting actually. Because we'd played twice that day already, by the time we got there I was quite relaxed. It was one of the few shows I've enjoyed from beginning to end."

Thorazine Shuffle began gigging in late 1992, making their public debut at Ray Columbus' Godfathers club at Abbeys Hotel. The first inklings of their potential popularity became evident when bFM playlisted songs taken from their self-released cassette *Stir*. Fuzzy pop songs like 'Blame' and 'Nausea' began to chart high in the listener-voted weekly *Top 10* show, and the band played to frenzied teenage audiences at the inaugural New Zealand *Big Day Out* in 1994, and bFM's annual *Summer Series* concert that same year. Armed with huge, anthemic pogo-inspiring tunes and an energetic stage performance, Thorazine secured a large and loyal fan base, and indeed their Real Groovy appearance showed they're still doing something right.

"People are always complaining that no one supports New Zealand music, these kids love it. Sometimes I feel really old, I almost feel as if I don't really have a right to play to these kids. I do have a right, but it just feels strange because they're sort of a sub-generation, and it's just wild they're so into it."

Watching this local teen mania closely was former Supergroove manager Stuart Broughton, who was soon encouraged to sign Thorazine Shuffle to his indie label, Chronic — also home to another Auckland group, Semi Lemon Kola. Having worked closely with Broughton, Supergroove's record label, BMG, expressed interest in releasing singles by both Chronic bands, and in relatively quick succession SLK's 'Before Heaven' and 'Otherwise' were on the shelves of record stores nationwide. Thorazine on the other hand, were not so fortunate.

The three-song EP 'An Affair' was recorded at York Street Studio in Auckland during May 1995, and was pencilled in for a July release. Almost immediately it became obvious the project would be delayed several months due to various practical reasons — the biggest of which was the legalities involved in the Chronic/BMG distribution contract. By December Thorazine accepted

they would have to wait until the new year, as it would have been commercial suicide for the band to drop the single into the already flooded Christmas market. Fans also would have to show patience.

"One of the biggest difficulties with it being delayed for so long is, it's always really frustrating when people come up to you after gigs and say: 'When can I get the single?', and all you can tell them about is the cassette you released two or three years ago."

Meanwhile, one bright moment amid the uncertainty was Thorazine's two-date New Zealand tour with Silverchair in early June, where the band played to full houses in Auckland and Wellington. The behaviour was insane, says Hetherington.

"Any of those big gigs are so overwhelming you just try to make sure you don't fall over — it's how I'd imagine Beatlemania. When we were soundchecking at the Logan Campbell Centre, all of a sudden I heard this huge scream outside and I thought: 'Silverchair must have just left in a van.' Then I saw Jules standing at the top of the mezzanine floor, and he says: 'If you want a cheap thrill, Josh, just walk into the foyer, face the glass doors, and wait for the scream.' It was amazing, like nothing I'd ever seen."

Band fortunes swung again in November when, with no antidote to Thorazine's problems in sight, the snail's pace the band were operating at proved the straw-breaker for founding member, bassist Chris Familton.

"With Chris, I think it wasn't so much the single came out late, I think he just got disenchanted. He said he felt like he was playing covers, he didn't enjoy playing the old songs any more. One of the biggest bummers about Chris leaving was, we had to stop and start again."

"Now the single is out, it just feels like the beginning again. It's really exciting we've got this far, and I'm really happy about it. It's been such a struggle patience-wise and work-wise over the last two or three months, but we've got the next single to look forward to. We're a very, very good band, we're proud of what we've done and what we're doing, and it's only going to get better."

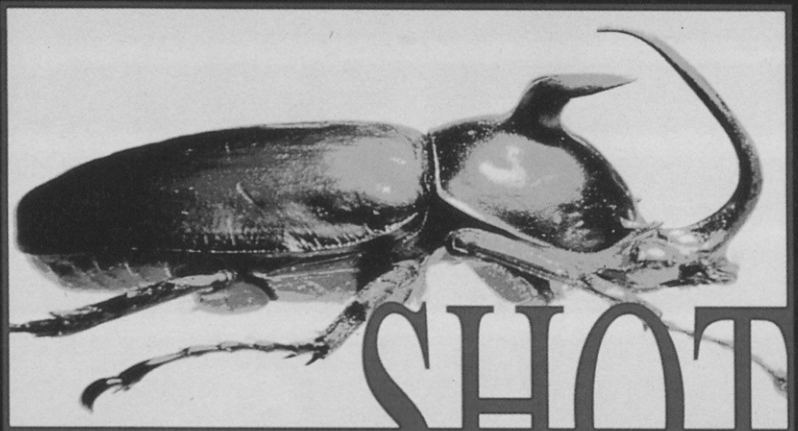
Five is asking a bit much, but Thorazine Shuffle have a "one-year plan", says Hetherington. He expects Broughton will launch a similar marketing campaign for the band as he did with Supergroove. Meaning, several profile-building singles and a cohesive approach to band imaging, before Thorazine make the album Hetherington appears confident enough about to put money on.

"It's definitely going to happen, probably three singles down the line. I'm hoping at the end of this year we'll be recording it."

That sound you can hear is Thorazine Shuffle knocking on wood.

JOHN RUSSELL

The Jesus Lizard



SHOT

IN-STORE EARLY APRIL

