

# New York Stories

## Bailter Space

*"Speed's the thing. I know I've sped up just in general because I have to process really quickly. You talk flat out constantly. So it's a speed thing and it's motion. When you come back here it's just like everything has a different motion and a different colour. And the sun's really bright..."*

“Speed's the thing. I know I've sped up just in general because I have to process really quickly. You talk flat out constantly. So it's a speed thing and it's motion. When you come back here it's just like everything has a different motion and a different colour. And the sun's really bright...”

Bailter Space's Alister Parker is a man possessed. Not by any biblical demon, but by the twin towers that are his music and the band's adopted home of New York City, where for the last five years the singer/guitarist, drummer Brent McLachlan and bassist John Halvorsen have managed to survive, while the city has driven them on like the huge spherical boulder in *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* that threatens to turn Indiana Jones from daring adventurer into white-man purée.

Talking to Parker and McLachlan in Flying Nun's downtown Auckland offices, one thing is patently obvious — *they don't live here anymore*. Put simply, they just appear to be existing *faster* — faster than myself, the room we're in, and the city beyond its walls. Throughout the interview Alister's NY accented voice is heard the most, although McLachlan's mere presence — as a band member and another new New Yorker — ensures Parker's rapid-fire talk of new albums, new record companies, new experiences (and of course New York) stays at a constant Manhattan level.

By the time a group get to album number six there's almost an obligation to stop liking them anymore, especially if, like me, your past interest in them has verged on fanatical. But after a couple of listens to *Capsul*, Bailter Space's latest effort, it is clear whatever magic the band have had in the past is still there, and continuing to evolve.

*Some of the vocals almost sound quite angry, particularly 'Pass it Up.' Is this the case?*

AP: “Well, it's not angry, but ‘pass it up’ means ‘get over it’. So, it's like you're talking to someone about something and you just go, ‘Get over it!’ It's like, stop fucking talking about that shit.”

*Sometimes it almost sounds like you're rapping.*

AP: “Especially in ‘Velo’ where I sing really fast, I mean, I just really like doing that at the moment. So, I don't know how that eventuated, maybe that's a little bit of an influence or something. A lot of studios we make records in are crammed with hip-hop guys and, like, rappers and stuff with their posses.”

*What do they think of what you're doing?*

BM: “They walk past, just sorta looking in, sort of thinking it's strange...”

AP: “...they're normally *really* stoned [laughs]! But a lot of studios, they have like four or 15 [rooms], so you're kind of walking around going from studio to studio to do another mix or something, or you're just hanging out with all these guys, and no one says much to each other. It's kind of fun.”

The majority of *Capsul* was recorded in 96 at Auckland's York Street Studios during the trio's previous New Zealand visit, with long-time friend and collaborator Nick Roughan. Parker describes what it's like to readjust to New Zealand's slower pace.

AP: “When you get off the plane you just get into this shock scenario. And for about a week you go for walks around the block going like, ‘Whoooooooh.’ So, you're trying to like really quickly line everything up. Maybe it's to do

with the gravity force of everything in your brain swirling around the other way. Beats me, man, but it's very disorientating, and finally you find it's a rhythm thing or something.

“We got off the plane in Auckland a month or so ago, and we'd been flying directly from Manhattan, and I'm walking down the corridor from the plane and it's amazing. Everyone looks like they were floating and the sense of movement was so slow, and I could hear so much more intricate detailed noises like the ‘clack’ of a pram [laughs]. I don't know how to describe more than that, it's just like you feel like in outer space. I had to go walking on the beaches and things, you know, just to realign. After that it's more enjoyable.”

*How long had you been back in the country when you started recording Capsul? Were you still in that shock phase?*

AP: “No, we'd actually been back in the country for a few weeks and then we decided to do the record in New Zealand, like, ‘This feels good, let's start the record here while we've got the opportunity,’ you know. We were still a little bit floaty when we made all the samples, which was one of the first things we did, in some apartment in Christchurch, and that was exciting in itself.”

*The samples are quite prominent on this record, particularly on 'Argonaut'.*

AP: “Right, coming to the fore a little more, because we used to bury them in with the tones a lot more, and on this record I guess we've actually kind of highlighted them as, you know, *stuff*. Yeah, that's cool!”

Parker laughs and seems pleased with this vague description. Recording *Capsul* in Auckland brought back memories of making Bailter Space's third album.

*What makes the record different for having recorded it here as opposed to back in New York?*

AP: “Just the feeling of being in New Zealand. And that idea of when we first moved away from New Zealand we spent the month before we went making *Robot World* and just [worked] all the time, and then the plane was going and it was like, ‘We're wrapping up the studio, doing the last mix.’”

BM: “‘Moving out forever.’”

AP: “That didn't seem real at the time. I had these memories of walking around in the docks in Wellington listening to rough mixes and just [experiencing] the light and, you know, the motion. That was really cool, you know. So, we thought we'd try and catch a bit of that.”

*What sort of influence do your earlier albums have on the next one, if any?*

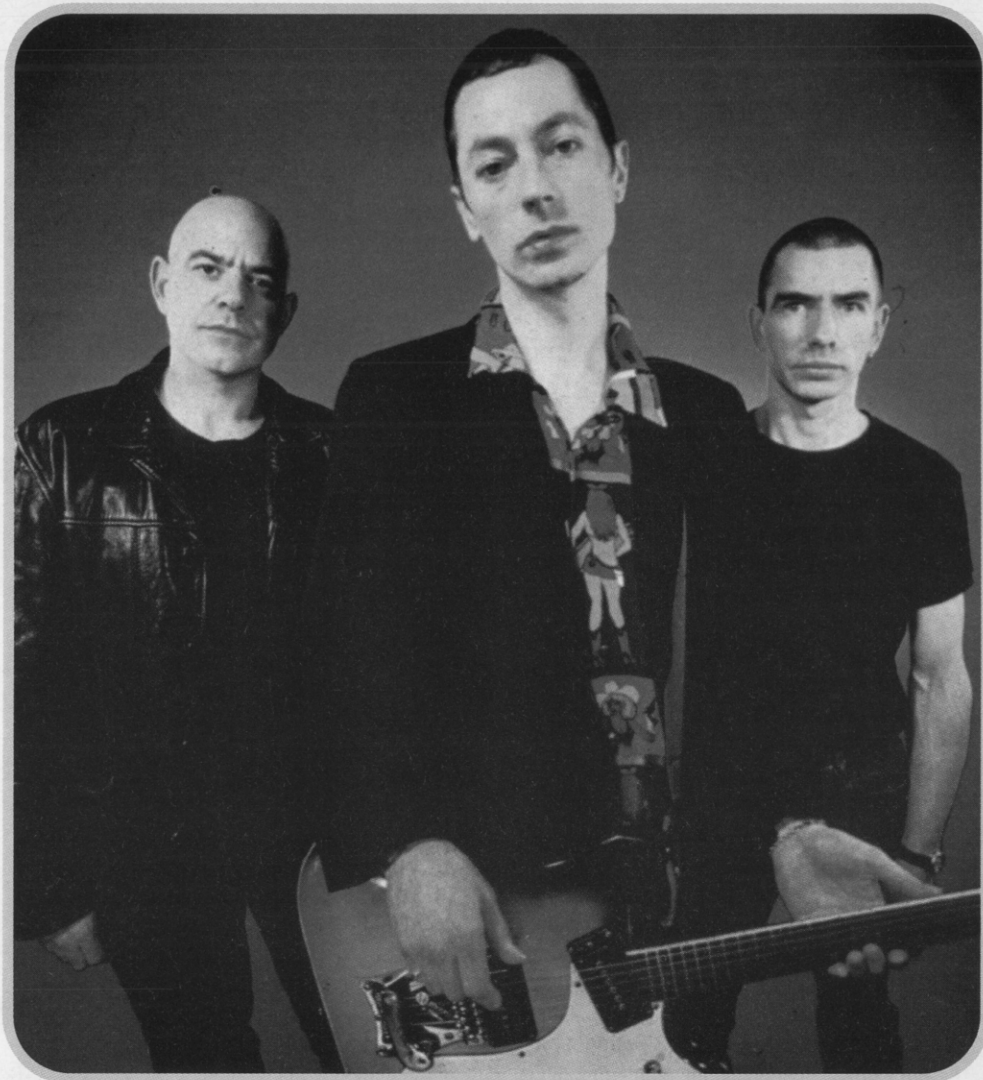
BM: “I don't know if they have an influence. I know most albums, when we do them, we generally feel this is a better album than we've ever done, and it seems to happen with every album.”

AP: “The excitement of the time.”

BM: “Yeah, which is cool, you know. I think if you're a band that's made the best album you think you're ever going to make, then that's probably it, you may as well give up.”

*Do you have a feeling there's a kind of goal or pinnacle you're going for, or is it more a present moment kind of thing?*

AP: “I know sometimes I think about [Dinosaur Jr.'s] J Mascis when he was backstage at the London Astoria and, like, someone was talking to him and he just cracked up and he went, ‘I want more, I want *more!*’ [Laughs]



He'd just done it before, you know, like had these conversations backstage, and done the show, and the same talk, and he just cracked up. So, sometimes it's very present, and it's just like this is all that counts, and other times it's like, ‘I think there's *more*.’ We all feel like that, and we want to go after it and see if we can, like, you know...”

We both finish his sentence with the same two words.

“...get it.”

For a brief moment it feels like I have a glimpse of where they're at. It's a nice feeling, sort of like the one you get from a drop of fine Scotch, which I happen to know Parker has a fondness for.

*Can you recommend to me some good whisksys?*

AP: “Bowmore 16's a good one. We had that bought for us recently by a recording studio in New York for Christmas. It was rather a lovely present, that's why I can remember it.”

That particular fire-water, which I can tell you did taste damn fine, came from Baby Monster studios, where the finishing touches to *Capsul* were made. These, included the recording of ‘II’ and ‘Picking Up’, and remixes of ‘So La’ and ‘Argonaut’, which appear on the band's first release on their new record label.

*You're no longer with Matador?*

AP: “We're with Matador, but we're not with Matador to make another album. We made them three and that's cool. We got together with them, and we thought, ‘What's going to be best for everyone?’, and we thought, ‘We'll see what's about,’ and then we found this little record company called Turnbuckle. We just thought, ‘This is it, this is, like, perfect.’”

“I mean, the power they put into that [seven-inch single] release and bringing things together was so great. We were one of the original signings of Matador — along with, like, Unsane and Pavement — and it's like all of a sudden they've gotten a lot bigger, and so we don't feel like it's good to hang in there just because we're friends. It's better for us to keep doing what we originally set out to do.”

Residing in New York has been an integral part in the band achieving their objectives.

AP: “You're driven to be productive. It's like an environment that's attractive, obsessive, addictive, and then if you want to stay at that point you just have to be productive otherwise the general consensus is, ‘Piss off!’, because there's really just no time for anyone to bum around — you get in the way.”

*Is that a survival kind of thing?*

AP: “It's just you're not a part of the action. People get so respected there, and there's so

many innovative composers and people who are just doing the New York thing, they're challenging the edge. They're going for the point that breaks through.”

*So, that huge environment is somewhere where something that is really innovative and catches people's imagination will just take off. I don't think that can happen here, it's too small and people are too protectionist.*

BM: “[If] it's bit weird, there's not enough weird people to get into it.”

AP: “And you might not be able to find the right kind of contacts or avenues to take it at the right time, while you feel like with a place like New York City you're surrounded by *possibles*, you know, and if you want to do well then you have to stick it out. And it's really tough.”

In spite of this, the three members of Bailter Space are managing to keep their heads above water, outside of their activities with the band.

*Is your position in New York a bit more established now as far as paying the rent goes?*

AP: “Oh, *god* — I mean, come on, man. I don't know how long it's going to take me to learn that skill [laughs]. I mean, I guess I look at my parents and I think they've got it down. I'm talking to psychologists about paying the rent because, *why?*! It's like, you know, it's too hard. I mean, okay, *everyone* does it?”

*But you've produced a couple of bands?*

AP: “Yeah, I've produced one, the Sunday Puncher, an interesting Brooklyn guitar band with an East Coast kind of edge. I just made an album for them. That was exciting, that was brilliant fun, I want to do a little more of that.”

John Halvorsen, meanwhile, has been involved in archiving the work of avant garde musician Karl-Heinz Stockhausen.

So, with all this intensity on the other side of the world the following question inevitably has to be asked.

*Where feels more like home at the moment?*

AP: “It's New York at the moment because I think it's just been such a long time, and you have to learn about another culture so you can become a part of the society there, you know, rather than be voyeurist and always stare out the window. I mean, I have an apartment there, like us all, that I rent, and I'm really looking forward to thinking about New Zealand from a studio apartment in Manhattan again. And the retrospect's going to be great, you know.”

“Crazy things happen in New York, there's so many levels to it. Little oddities and weird scenarios just turn up in your face every day and that intrigues me, I draw them down in a book. Every day there's a little New York story.”

JUSTIN REDDING