

rip it up 1977-1982

The Songs

The third in this series chronicling some of the great New Zealand songs brings us into an era where local artists are working successfully in very diverse styles and genres.

There are songs deriving their form from funk, country, folk, pop and heavy rock, and there's the emerging sounds of Pacific Island or Maori harmony traditions.

In no area is there more diversity than the songs here from the Flying Nun artists. Can anyone seriously speak of a "Flying Nun sound" after hearing these disparate creations by Straitjacket Fits, Headless Chickens, Chris Knox, the Chills and LBGP?

By the late 80s, New Zealand artists are recording all over the global village — there are songs recorded in Auckland, Wellington, Los Angeles and England, and who would deny that the most exciting, the most radical stuff here, is recorded in New Zealand.

The writers who pressed the record button, whilst speaking to a songwriter (they are all alive this month) were John Russell and Chris Bourke.

1986

DAVE DOBBYN
Slice Of Heaven (CBS)

"I had to find this incidental music for *Footrot Flats*. I thought, I can learn a lot here. I threw myself into the process of how films are put together. I was a complete novice, but I knew I could do it.

"My equipment wasn't state-of-the-art, just an Emulator 2, with an eight-track sequencer and a pissy little screen I'd look at for 15 hours a day. It was a happy, lucid moment when that song popped up, as a feel. It was the first time I got into playing feels on rhythm instruments without having to have an argument with a drummer first. It was fun.

"I played the guitar as a backbeat. The rhythm guitar chords are quite Stonesy — 'I'm so hot for her / and she's so cold'. The feel came first, before any of the *da da da* stuff. I remember hearing the wooden flute in stupid jungle movies, there was always an African flute when you entered a village.

"It was about the time of Paul Simon's *Graceland*. I liked the male voices. I grew up hearing island choirs in the church across the road. I felt I'd get a Pacific Island choir, but we didn't need that because the Herbs sounded like a football team on their own. It was an overdub that only took a couple of hours. That gave it a Caribbean feel.

"It's funny, the only thing I really produced myself is the most successful I've ever done. But radio hated it. Hauraki wouldn't play it, even when it was Number One on their own chart. That record became a hit in an old-fashioned way, it bypassed radio. It was a trailer before *Crocodile Dundee*, which made the public go into the record stores and buy it. It was an accidental marketing move that paid off. Eventually radio came around — then they wouldn't stop playing the song. So everyone got sick of it! That's what happens with hit songs."

Dave Dobbyn

ARDIJAH

Give Me Your Number (Pagan)

"I wrote that song when Ardijah was playing the club circuit in South Auckland. It was recorded on a shitty tape deck, I did all the guitars and bass and drums. Then I played it at a studio, and Trevor Reekie [Pagan Records] heard it, and he got us a part in movie *Queen City Roker*. At the opening of the movie, we played on the night, and everyone wanted to hear 'Give Me Your Number', but the band didn't know how to play it because I'd played all the instruments on the recording. We ended up playing a whole lot of covers, because at the time that was our only original.

"When it was released as a single, we got good radio airplay for it, it got thrashed. At first people



from out of Auckland thought we were a band from the States, 'cause it was one of the first funk/rock tracks from New Zealand to hit the airwaves. We'd always played funk music in the South, but we knew to get accepted by an audience outside we had to have a rock sound to get our foot in the door. We'd been playing clubs and doing residencies for six years, and we were able to get out of that scene, and go down the line and play on the strength of that song, it opened a lot of doors for the band with the public, and the recording industry."

Ryan Monga

1987

SHONA LAING
Glad I'm Not a Kennedy (Pagan)

"I saw Edward Kennedy on television, and in the time it took me to have the thought 'glad I'm not a Kennedy', to going outside and getting the keyboards switched on, I had the drum pattern, and 'imagine being a Kennedy'. The next day almost, I took it to Bruce Lynch, who immediately thought of the string quartet. It had a freshness to it.

"It took a while to find the melody because the production was so much part of it. When I do it live now, I do it as a lament, just with an acoustic. I hear Margaret Urlich has just done a version of it.

"It was on the *Genre* album in 1985, then picked up a couple of years later — a guy in Brisbane was importing *Genre*, and there was some interest. Gilbey from MCA Publishing heard it, and flew across the Tasman to convince me he was going to make me a *staaaarrrrrrrr*.

"The archival tape came from Radio New Zealand. It came up in a discussion that there was no copyright on anything written by an employee of the United States government, and of course Kennedy was an employee. So it was free. We listened to 45 minutes of Kennedy speaking — we could have had wonderful fun making him say all sorts of things.

"It had a good life in Australia, it was Number Nine there. It was controversial — they took it very seriously. But then they took the piss out of it. We had this terrible run-in with Triple-M in Sydney. Without asking, they did a version called 'Glad I'm Not a Willessee', so there was a bit of a shit-fight about it. It was pretty abrupt, the end of my rela-

tionship with Triple M — which was probably the end of my career in Australia!

"It was played quite a bit in Boston, of all places. And it still pops up in the States, whenever the Kennedys get into trouble."

Shona Laing

LOOK BLUE GO PURPLE

Cactus Cat (Flying Nun)

"Denise [Roughan] wrote the song, she brought it to the band, and we were democratic to a fault, us five women, so we all had input as well. But it was really her song, and her cat that starred in the video. The cat on the cover of the *LBGP EP2*, which 'Cactus Cat' is on, was taken off the label of this South American alcohol called Anca Peseo. It's close to some kind of cooking spirit — but it wasn't that that alcohol was the choice of the band, we just quite fancied that cat.

"I remember we got this half-fan mail, half-criticism from this American guy who liked the song, but wanted to point out that the opening line, 'In the



region of Tuscon...', was wrong. He wanted us to know that Tuscon was a city and not a region, I thought that was a bit pedantic.

"It's a feel-good song, I guess. It's really catchy, and live it rocked a whole lot more, in that unique Look Blue Go Purple kind of way."

Lesley Paris, LBGP drummer.

1988

THE WARRATAHS
Maureen (Pagan)

"It was written well before the Warratahs, when I lived in Australia. I was playing socially with a band — I think Mick Cox from Rose Tattoo was one of them — and we were doing Hank Williams songs. The woman who was playing keyboards just disappeared, she 'shot through to Melbourne'. It's a very simple story, I only knew her for a week.

"That band was part of me going back to country music. I realised that's where my voice lay. I used to play a lot at home with friends, or by myself, in that style. I played in a band on Dunk Island, all those type of songs: 'Driving Wheel', 'Rock Island Line', Hank things — none of our own, that wasn't the gig. But I felt I found my feet musically.

"We'd played at the Cricketers about six months before we recorded. The first thing we did was 'Hands of My Heart', in Broadcasting House. After four or five tunes, we realised we had an album. That studio was like walking into another world. It was quite romantic, old-fashioned like the BBC, with the cafeteria down the hallway and you couldn't make phone calls. It was lovely to record in. A big piano, lots of space. It had music in the walls.

"We were very popular at the Cricketers, so we got quite a bit of radio play. It was the times: there was a good deal of honesty around, and naivete, and energy. It wasn't that long ago. We made a couple of film clips, and they appeared either side of the TV news as fillers. That wouldn't happen now."

Barry Saunders

STRAITJACKET FITS

She Speeds (Flying Nun)

"The whole song was based around the little harmonic thing in the verse, which was the little angle that made itself apparent. I wrote the chorus one morning on the way to the shop to buy some bread. The lyrics, surprisingly enough, refer to the unobtainability of a woman with better things to do. I'm not going to incriminate anybody or dispel any parts of the enigma, mate!

"In some ways it became an albatross around our neck, I always likened it to being the band's 'Long



Haired Lover From Liverpool'. I remember once we were playing it at the Powerstation and the whole audience began clapping along and it felt really absurd, so I asked them to stop clapping because it just felt so silly. I don't think we played it for another three years after that. We played it at the *Big Day Out*, which was our last gig, because we wanted to pull out everything we had in the bag. We played between the Smashing Pumpkins and Soundgarden, and wanted to kick their asses, which I was quite happy that we did.

"I haven't listened to it for years, actually. I may have seen it on television a couple of years ago, and was really shocked by our haircuts."

Shayne Carter

1989

TIM FINN
Parihaka (Capitol)

Tim Finn wrote 'Parihaka' after reading about the notorious conflict in Taranaki last century, when the Maori chief Te Whiti led his people in peaceful resistance to their lands being unjustly confiscated by the colonial government. Tim recorded the song in Los Angeles with producer Mitchell Froom, for his solo album on Capitol. "In the studio with Tim, you have to try and create a performance atmosphere," says Froom of those sessions. "He needs to record right after everything else has gone down. There was a moment when he said, 'I'm just going to go out and sing some songs. I'll just run them in order.'" Almost everything he sang at that moment is what's on the album. I thought, I just can't believe this... it was because he wasn't thinking about it at all. He hit this emotional thing and it was very relaxed, just a beautiful thing."

"After those sessions, recalls Herbs' Dilworth Karaka, Tim 'brought Parihaka' back to New Zealand and thought, bummer it, why don't I record it with some homeboys?" He asked us to do it with him. We do have this brotherhood amongst ourselves, when somebody's out there having a crack at it, we get in there and help them."

The song reached Number Six in New Zealand. Just before the 1993 Split Enz reunion tour, Tim was given a Maori welcome onto the Parihaka marae in Taranaki, to thank him for writing the song, which stimulated an interest of the tribe's young people in their history. Tim stayed on the marae for a few days, talked to the elders and went surfing with the locals. "I was so humbled by the welcome, they just wanted to say thanks," he says. "A lot of it was in Maori, so I didn't understand it, but I had people whispering in

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