

**Are there any songs on the *Bike* album that relate directly to the Fits experience?**

"The sole song that pertains to the Fits is 'Old and Blue', that was a conscious reference to the band. It may not make any sense to anyone else, but it does to me."

After his departure from Straitjacket Fits, Brough returned to his hometown Dunedin, reluctant to leap straight back into musical life; "As soon as I finished with the Fits it was a case of throwing the guitar out the window and not having anything to do with writing music." Midway through 1992, he assembled a band and called it *Bike*, but at that stage Brough had no serious intentions for the band. That would come when he shifted back to Auckland.

"Auckland is the first step towards the big wide world so there was the feeling that if I stayed in Dunedin I was missing the boat. I didn't want to be one of those people who ended up residing in Dunedin throughout my 30s, feeling like I hadn't made the best effort to get my music out.

"I regard the beginning of *Bike* properly as happening at the beginning of '95 with Karl Buckley [drums] and Tristan Mason [bass], when I decided that was the line-up I wanted to go on with. I like to think that even though the name *Bike* had been bandied around for quite a few years, it's actually only a two year old band."

With that in mind, Brough is content with the pace that *Bike* have adopted; a debut EP, *Save My Life* out in 1996, and *Take In The Sun* out this month.

"While there was that gap between leaving the Fits and 'Save My Life', that time was required to sort things out. I needed to get my head around whether I did want to do the music thing, and it took me a few years to realise I did want to take it as far as I can. Once the band was up and running, we were in the studio recording the EP within a year, and a year after that, an album, so I'm happy with the progress."

**Did it seem odd to be nominated as Most Promising Band at the Music Awards this year, when personally you've been around since the mid 80s?**

"It felt odd personally because I had a long history and I'm not exactly new to the scene, but as far as *Bike* goes and the public's awareness of the band goes, we are a new, and possibly promising band."

**That nomination, and last year's APRA Silver Scrolls nomination for 'Save My Life' — do those industry accolades mean much?**

"It's nice to get a pat on your back, but it's not a priority for me to be recognised by the industry in New Zealand. If the new album wasn't up for best New Zealand album next year it wouldn't disappoint me in the slightest."

*Bike* recorded *Take In The Sun* in Auckland on and off for three months, across the summer of '96/'97. "It was good having the gaps because it meant you could take time out and get a perspective on what you were doing," says Brough. During his Fits days, Brough was most recognised for his dreamy, chiming guitar ballads, 'Down in Splendour' and 'Sparkle That Shines' — the antithesis of Shayne Carter's writhing, muscular pop epics. Brough says his songwriting style has stayed, "pretty consistent" since the Fits; he sees little progression in his manner of writing, but that's not a problem.

"If I was to delve into different musical styles, that might be regarded as progression, but essentially I'm working within the traditional perimeters of songwriting, and I'm quite happy to work within those confines. Contrary to some opinion, I don't think working within that verse/chorus structure has been exhausted, even though it would seem that way, as a lot of the Top 40 pop is rehashed songs that sound like other songs. It's basically about convincing people they can still have faith in a three and a half minute pop song, that originality can still exist within that format."

**Did you wish to have a feel or a mood running through the record?**

"Yeah, the feel is essentially melancholy, even the songs that have a brighter feel about them. I like to have a melancholic edge to it — a genuine, honest feel about the music. People can relate to that and pick up on that melancholy, and say, 'Life isn't all a bunch of roses, there is quite a bit of sadness about existence.' Working through that sadness is aided by listening to music that projects that

sort of feel. It's because I feel that way, obviously it's going to come through in the music."

**Was it a therapeutic album for you?**

"It definitely is for me. The day I finished making it I thought, 'well, I think I'll head off home now, and give music a miss,' but it really doesn't work out that way. It's a bit difficult to know now what my goals are."

Actually, Brough's goals seem crystal clear — he craves acceptance as an artist, and outward appearances suggest all his hopes are pinned on *Bike*.

"Believing in yourself as a musician means that you want people to hear what you're creating, there is that need for validation. There isn't a need for pop stardom, in the sense that I don't want to be recognised by every person in the street. But as an artist, you're just driven by this need to be recognised, it's not enough to sit in your bedroom and come up with a great song, the first thing you think is, 'other people have to hear this.' It's important for me to be recognised as a songwriter in New Zealand, and if I can be recognised further abroad that's even better."

**What level are your ambitions for the album pegged at?**

"It's really important for me that Flying Nun work towards, not just the domestic market, but work towards getting the album happening overseas. If this doesn't happen, I'm going to be very disappointed because you can't sell enough records in New Zealand to make a living. Part of my thing of wanting recognition is, I want it to be as international as possible. If a teenage kid in America is saying, 'Bike are great,' that's what I want. The best buzz I ever had, in terms of recognition, was when the *New York Times* did a review of the Straitjackets and they selected one of my songs and printed the lyrics in bold print. I like that sort of thing, that's recognition, it makes you feel that you're making some headway internationally."

**You mentioned you'd be disappointed if the album doesn't happen...**

"I'm not saying that if it doesn't work out with this album then that's it, but with the Straitjackets, there was always this feeling of progress, and it's important to me that happens with *Bike*. So far, there has been progress, but if you start to feel like you're stagnating..."

**In terms of the band, are you a day-by-day or five year plan type of person?**

"I starting to think in terms of the five year plan, two years of that has gone already. In three years time it will be time to assess everything."

**How old are you now?**

"... early 30s."

**Turning 30 has obviously had a major affect on you, what is it about that age?**

"There's a lot of pressures; a lot of your peers are maybe working in good careers, they may have families, own their own houses, and then you start thinking, 'shit, I'm way behind.' In western society that's a huge pressure and you start to feel it in your 30s, you want to have some stability as well. It's that old cliché that if you haven't made it by 35, your chance of achieving what you wanted is over. Often it's in the 30s that musicians says 'stuff it,' and give up, they think their too old to be on stage — 'am I too old to rock?' But I never feel that at all, there's not a date that you have to get out."

**How's life in general?**

"Life in general doesn't get much of a think about these days, I tend to get up and worry about the music thing for the time being. Personally speaking, it seems like a transitional phase of my life going from your 20s where you want to be in a pop band, to that 30s thing where you start to think that you need some security in your life, whether it's financial or emotional, whatever. In your 30s, there's more internal and external pressures to have those things; having your own house is a cornerstone of stability in this society. Sometimes I think, 'yeah, I would like to work towards that, but is music going to help me achieve buying my own house?' I've been quite prepared to suffer the financial of being a musician in this country, to make sacrifices for the music, but I guess it'll come to a point in a few years time where I'll have to sit down and decide if music is going to provide me with a stable lifestyle."

JOHN RUSSELL

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