

# Fagan It

Andrew Fagan is clowning — as usual.

"Thank-you very much, and now we'll all show our appreciation in the usual way . . ." he gabbles for no particular reason. That's the fourth time he's said it in ten minutes and the interview hasn't even started yet. "Seeya Phillip!" he calls as his record company person leaves the Warner boardroom. The record company person's name is Jeremy and this is Andrew's idea of a high old time.

Sorry, did I say *Andrew*? His mum can call him that, but we'll all have to call him "Fagan" from now on. Not only is he not calling himself the Mockers, he's dropped his Christian name too.

"Well, it was like an abbreviation that everyone uses anyway, so . . ."

Actually, mate, we used to call you "Fag-end" but that's another story. Anyway, Fagan's back and gearing up to go national with a tour that crams in 32 centres between Kaitiaki and Invercargill. He'll be singing, playing guitar, doing poems from his new book *Serious Latitudes* — and clowning it up.

"I've got my guitar and a little amp with lots of natural distortion to play through. I'll just be keeping it quite loose and reading my poems to break up it. I'm sure it'll fall into a natural pace once we get out there and check out people's attention spans, see what we're dealing with, Planet Earth 1991! Humans!"

The fact that he'll be able to take on those tricky small-town crowds is due in no small part to the remarkable success he found as singer-centrepiece of the Mockers throughout the 1980s. Hit singles, gold albums and a Top Male Vocalist Award — they were big down home. But pop bands tend to mutate into pub rock bands just to stay on the rails and in 1988 he saw the "No Exit" sign and headed for Britain.

His sparky new single, 'I Still Want You' was actually played by the final version of the Mockers at their handful of gigs in London, but it was



hammered to death. Imagine 'Forever Tuesday Morning' as performed by Cold Chisel.

"Yeah, we evolved into a real R.O.C.K. band. Live it was all very energetic, but it just wasn't where I thought the song should be. So it's been quite a long and involved process getting to this point, but we're here, which I'm really pleased about."

'I Still Want You', produced by Paul Moss and Malcolm Smith of the Fan Club, sounds like it should — Fagan's quirkiness to the fore over a clippety dance-pop beat. But it doesn't necessarily indicate the nature of the solo album pencilled in if everyone's pleased with the way the single does.

"I've got a big backlog of songs and really firm ideas about how to colour them. Each song's got to come out in the way that suits it. They're all different melodically and they'll lend themselves to their own interpretation. It's certainly not going to be all the one style."

Fagan assembled most of his backlog of songs while he and his partner Karyn Hay lived on a boat on the Thames, drifting along by the stately surrounds of Hampton Court Palace. Geography didn't stop him writing some of them with longtime collaborator and original Mocker Gary Curtis, who works in a 16-track studio in Wellington, creating jingles and music beds for ads. Most, however, he wrote himself.

"I've really been working on the songwriting. Getting into the isolation, socially and physically, gave me time to apply myself more to that. We did a lot of live playing with the band and that in itself takes up so much energy."

Those songs very, very nearly landed Fagan a solo deal with a German label which was even going to freight his yacht over from New Zealand so he could sail round the UK as a publicity stunt. A political wrangle within the company saw the people who had negotiated the deal stepped on *the day before* the contract was due to be signed. It's not something he's desperately keen to talk about, but perhaps it all worked out for the best. Back here, he and Karyn are working on a final draft of a film musical script called *The Statue Service* ("it's a dry, surreal black comedy . . . at least I hope it's a comedy!") and he's inclined to look forward rather than back at a fairly long career in the music biz.

"It's just writing songs, and in this case, poems, just doing your self-expression. That goes on and everyone has their own personal gradient of absorbing experience. It's all such an individual thing. If you're still getting fired up from coming up with an idea or putting a song together and doing that for your own pleasure, then that's a piecemeal, ongoing thing. I don't think it's of any real benefit to step back and look at your history in some sort of capsule — it's got to be an incremental thing."

Anything else?  
"Yeah. Thank you very much and now we'll all show our appreciation in the usual way."  
RUSSELL BROWN

# Gary Clail

From dodgy Bristol hooligan to socially aware chart topper without losing an ounce of credibility, Gary Clail's made a seemingly impossible career transition. Actually, when you talk to him it doesn't seem so strange. He's friendly, intelligent, extremely articulate, a key member of a very powerful and talented group of artists and this is all before breakfast and with a bit of a hangover courtesy of the manager of a venue he's about to play. So if it's not too much effort for this time of day, Mr Clail will explain how a white guy ended up at the helm of a cutting edge reggae sound system.

"Basically I started out doing club promos. When I was 17 or 18 I moved to a Black area of Bristol called St Pauls, and I used to go to a lot of Blues, which were illegal parties with speakers the size of wardrobes and a guy playing records while another guy toasted, and these were just brilliant. So I started doing two nights a week in clubs, mainly reggae and some hip hop when it started kicking. Around this time I met Mark Stewart who introduced me to Adrian Sherwood, and I wound up going on tour through Europe with Mark Stewart and the Mafia."

"I don't know how I became the front man for the On-U Sound System, it just happened. I'm not really a musician, but with On-U Sound everyone has a job to do, and I just decided I had to have something to do as well. I asked Adrian if I could start remixing rhythm tracks for the Sound System and he said, 'Yeah, do it!'. So I took these early African Head Charge and Tackhead tracks and remixed them Dancehall style, then I do my thing over the top. That's the great thing about technology, I can take a



Doug Wimbush bassline and put it with an African Head Charge rhythm track and it's cool."

Clail's lyrics are heavily contemptuous of society as we know it, and incredibly blunt and direct. It seems a miracle that the staid English establishment allowed such a thing anywhere near its charts, let alone on its pop program, but Clail fails to see what the fuss is about.

"I never thought I was political. All I've learnt I've learnt from the media. When I was 15 or 16 I would see kids starving on TV and I'd think 'What is this Third World they're talking about, why are they telling me about this place that doesn't really exist as a place?' and I'd ask questions like 'Why are my parent's taxes being used to stockpile frozen food in Europe when people are starving.' The more questions I asked, I just discovered more questions rather than answers. Basically politics are bollocks the world over. I'm only political because of the information the media gives me."

As the British dance scene becomes positive and independent of American styles, On-U Sound has become more and more popular and representative of the new mood, and as Gary Clail sees it this is just the beginning.

"In 1988 this whole scene kicked in, everyone was well happy and

Ecstasy went massive, but now it's the start of the end. This drug seemed so nice, but now we're starting to see the casualties. The Raves are still happening too, but now they're packed with Teds, like 16 year olds basically, and all they want is techno. That scene is coming to an end, and now we're seeing real instruments as the next thing, people like Primal Scream infusing rock with a dance beat. It's a way of tapping your feet at the same time as assimilating information. Most kids nowadays don't know shit, and I'm trying to give them information in a positive way, I'm saying 'How about a little respect for people?' My way of fighting is through music, I've tried the other way, I've been there done that seen that, and I think it's time to move forward."

On the subject of moving forward, what happens now for Gary Clail, poised as he is on the brink of massive public success?

"I've had long discussions with Sherwood about this. It's like now the four record companies who previously wouldn't sign me, who said 'Well Tackhead have promise, but lose Clail.', are all wanting to sign! But as Sherwood says, I'm playing to the converted and I think it's time to bust out some young artists. I'm happy to make one more album, then use whatever mainstream power I've got to help some newer artists. I'll take a step back and do some producing, On-U Sound System will go on and I'll still be involved in making music. It'll be like the Sir Coxson Sound System, he kept the music alive by putting his name onto an idea, letting young people take the message out. I've done it without compromising so if I can open doors for others, it's all the better. I reckon music sells sex and jeans and cars, so why not sell respect for a change."

And just in case any of you are having doubts about trooping off to see a Sound System, Gary Clail's parting comments should pretty much squash them.

"It's gonna be heavy, I just hope the rig's up to it."  
KIRK GEE

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