

# SOMETHING Beginning With E

You don't have to convince the drunken hordes at an Exponents gig that they're watching a great New Zealand pop group, but quieter types might need a little persuasion. In which case the Exponents might just let their new album, the mysteriously titled *Something Beginning With C* do the talking for them. Because snuggled next to rabble-raising hits like 'Why Does Love' and 'Who Loves Who' are one or two love songs sad enough to please the most tragic Morrissey fan.

In 1992, father-to-be Jordan Luck wears his heart pinned on his sleeve, and we're not talking *Studs* contestant here, we're talking sensitive, romantic soul. Their record company continues to exploit the crowd-pleasing angle with the release of their third single, 'Tracey', another up-beat sing-along summer song in the irrepressible Exponents tradition, but the real strength of the album lies in the love songs. 'When She Was In Love', 'I Loved You', 'There's Only One Love'... obviously love is a subject Jordan feels comfortable with.

"It seems to fit a lot of the melodies," he replies, sober since Christmas thanks to a \$12,000 bet, kicking back with an orange juice in the Polygram boardroom one Thursday afternoon, "I don't really work on writing, it just comes really quickly. It's really just what I'm thinking of at the time, I just write it straight out and usually I keep what comes out straight away. A lot of it is like a jam, like for 'Erotic' I didn't even have lyrics, just went into the studio and started singing, there's quite a few tracks like that on the record."

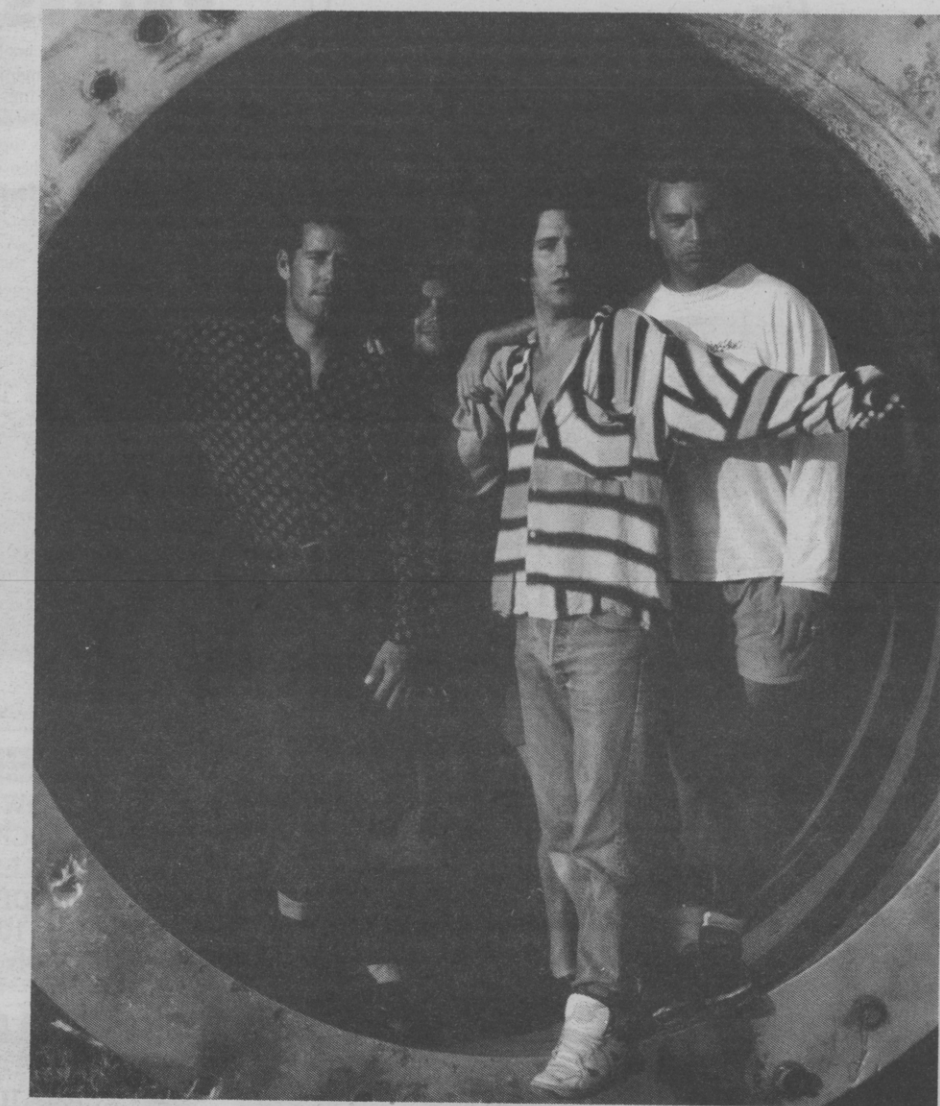
So songs start from singing? "There's basically three ways — one's out of the air when I don't know where they come from, one's

where I've got the title and the tune'll come and one's where I've just got a riff."

Who comes up with all the hooks? "Well, I do most of the writing, he says modestly, but all the arrangements we work on. Because we've been playing together for 10 years we're arrangers now as well and we don't even discuss it, we're just in the practise room and go 'this is the way it is', there's no fights or arguments, it just goes really quick."

A rock band is a volatile unit, but the Exponents can boast the same line-up they started with way back there in 1981. Drummer Harry's defection to These Wilding Ways was but a brief hiatus. Jordan Luck's hair has gone from blonde back to his natural brunette, which means that these days he looks more like Dustin Hoffman than Rod Stewart, but otherwise nothing much has changed from the days of *Prayers Be Answered* (1983), *Expectations* (1985) and *Amplifier* (1986). They still have a guitarist called Brian Jones and one David Gent on bass. And despite the faint British dance groove of a song like 'Who Loves Who', the Exponents have not flown off on any wildly fashionable musical tangents.

"We've definitely been outside of fashion all the way through," says



Exponents (L-R) Harry, Brian Jones, Jordan Luck, Dave Gent.

Jordan with a hint of pride, "We haven't done anything musically fashionable, like during the whole synthesiser thing we were off with guitars. I don't know about their age, but I know a lot of our audience are into all our older stuff and I think that's probably because by not necessarily being very fashionable our music doesn't date so the stuff we did 10 years ago sounds like it's done now. 'Sex and Agriculture'

actually sounds more like now than now!"

Whatever that means. Anyway, the fact remains that the Exponents have an uncanny knack for writing anthemic pop songs that thrill the masses. Jordan Luck might have written 'Why Does Love' in five minutes when he was drunk, but it's right up there with 'Victoria' for irresistibility, tailor made for teenage middle New Zealand. If Flying Nun

is too weird and you're not a heavy metal hood, the Exponents are your band — upfront and obvious, they provide great choruses to sing along to when you've had a few and there's just enough quirkiness in the persona of Jordan Luck to provide an edge of derangement in the best Split Enz tradition. After all, rock singers are supposed to be a bit wacky, but not enough to frighten the rigger-buggers.

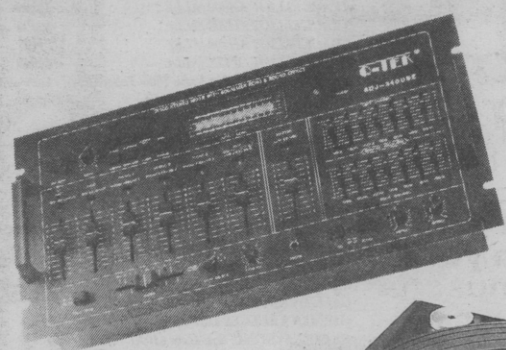
In 1987 after the release of their third album, the *Dance Exponents*, as they were then known, left New Zealand to seek fame and fortune in England, having clocked up several Top Twenty hits and achieved local pop star status. Did they 'Sink Like A Stone' in Britain or what?

"We were gigging about once every two months and they were great big shows, like 2-3,000 New Zealander things, great big parties and they were really good. We were playing well live and getting all the A&R people, everything was going really good, but we just didn't get signed. We were doing demos at the time too and they were coming back here and Adam at Polygram heard them and said 'Shit, these songs are good'. Then Grenville, the Polygram MD, flew over to London to see David and I and said 'come back and get signed'."

Having just missed out to Deacon Blue on being signed to CBS, the boys cut their losses and came home. And they're glad they did. They might have got signed in London, but they wouldn't have had two hit singles and released an album in less than a year. Next time they go overseas it will be to promote the album only. New Zealand is home base.

Were they surprised at the rapturous response they got when they returned from England? After all, three years had passed, their back catalogue was deleted (since restated) and pop fans are supposed to be fickle. But the Exponents seem to have a high loyalty rating, perhaps because for many of today's 20-somethings the *Dance Exponents* were the first big rock band they saw as teenagers in Hamilton or Eketahuna (the Exponents go down a bomb in small towns) and the impression was indelible.

"We thought it would be like starting over again, but we went out on tour and everyone came out en masse," says Jordan. "We were ▶"



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