

3Ds

It's lunchtime and I'm in an upstairs room with a pinball machine, a bag of parsley, a three-year-old boy and a bendable Simpson's figure. None of these belong to me, but through various relationships and associations they are connected to David Saunders and David Mitchell who are also present. They are here because of another association. They are half of a Dunedin band called the 3Ds who have just had their debut album, *Hellzapoppin*, released.

Still the only band in the world to fit the label thalidomide rock, in the 18 months since I last spoke to the 3Ds they've become popular, especially in places beginning with A: Auckland, America, Alaska. Yep, a self-confessed Alaskan pirate finds the band the ideal placebo for those chilly polar mornings.

I don't quite know what it is. Perhaps it is the absurdity of it all, the inanity of their intuitive inconsistencies, but people like me like them. Well actually, people unlike me like them as well — a crowd of people on Their Vision Decision who, motivated by marvy Martin, say fuck and giggle before cheering when someone says the 3Ds were better than Nirvana. The lunchtime I shared with Davids S & M was just prior to that support so, sorry kids, no juicy backstage stories from America's number one rockers. David M said he would have preferred to support the man they removed from number one anyway.

Popularity? They seem to be handling it well. Though the interview with *Tearaway* was difficult. Why do we appeal to teenagers? Asks David S. Do we appeal to teenagers? Asks David M. The phone interviews with American journalists seem to have gone well though. The reviews are good. David M looks at me. Well they are good aren't they David? Now David S is looking at me as well. No, not you, the other one.

"It's strange, you read all these things. You really get the feeling people are trying to sort you out, work out what your ambitions are. I think a lot of bands enter into music with something quite definite in mind and know where they want to go, whereas a pack of aimless

characters like us... It's quite strange being at the bottom of the world just doing what you've always done... Yeah, it just can be strange someone trying to corner you; a pack of New Zealanders trying to do Sonic Youth or a pack of New Zealanders trying to do this."

Quite a few Americans have been interested in cornering the 3Ds, hence a Stateside tour is being arranged for May. One of those X-number-of-gigs in X-3-days schedules. The band were meant to be there now, but the visit has been delayed to allow for some time lag between the release of *Hellzapoppin* and the tour. Released the same time locally, the album is by far the band's most successful venture into Fish St studios. The opening track had me dancing around the lounge the first time I heard it. In fact, in places things are a bit more poppier than in the past, probably the result of David S contributing a few more songs. Particularly 'Sunken Treasure' with its great teenage pop vocal delivery. David M's ugly guitar is there and is better translated than on previous efforts and Denise Roughan's 'Sunken Head' showcases the 3Ds' unsatisfied desire to understand. So why the title?

DAVID M: "It's better than Pimpzapoppin, though that may have gone down better with teenagers."

DAVID S: "It's the name of a song on the album..."

Yeah I picked that up. The one that goes 'Hellzapoppin, Hellzapoppin, Hellzapoppin, Hellzapoppin.'

DAVID S: "... and the word sounds quite nice to say. It's actually the name of a 1940s film musical set in hell, but we didn't find that out until

recently. We thought it was the name of that Peter Cooke and Dudley Moore film *Bedazzled* which is quite good because it's a better name than *Bedazzled*."

Like their previous recordings, the 3Ds worked at Steven Kilroy's Fish St studio. This time, however, mixing was done in a Port Chalmers lounge; saved the engineer the hassle of having to come into Dunedin every day, though the same old problem of equipment breakdown plagued the recording, resulting in a bizarre assortment of amps being used. David Mitchell believes it is the freshness of the songs which helps create the album's overall sound:

"A lot of the songs sound the way they do because they are being played for the first time, so any extra guitar sound would not have made

discovered that, well, some of the new songs, although they ended up on tape truly fine, are almost impossible to play live. Guitar levels are so loud on the album that live they would drown out all noise in a 4km radius. There are also problems with specific songs as well, as David M explains:

"There's a song, 'Swallow', which I can't play and sing out of time with the band and guitar which is what the vocals do on the recording. But I quite like that, there are a couple of songs which are..."

DAVID S: "... wild..."

DAVID M: "... yeah, completely."

There are also a couple of songs which are completely different for the 3Ds. Well, completely different from the rest of what *Hellzapoppin* offers. One, 'Jewel', is in fact the first

considering our ability. We've managed to create a variety of different sounds and atmospheres to each song. Guitar-based music can be quite limiting, but we've got these three voices we can use and unusual soundscapes..."

... but the guitar is a really expressive instrument.

"Yeah, you can do a lot with it, but some people are happy to do the same thing with it over and over again."

Some people could... level that at me?"

An embarrassing silence. Any comment? Philistine, laughs David S. DAVID M: "I don't really ponder what I do on guitar anymore."

DAVID S: "What we do on guitar is not really that conventional."

David M: "There's a lot of instinct

about. What they would call a completely mindless two-chord song we have difficulty pulling off. There's a lot to be said for that. I think it's good that we don't find those things easy. It really is a challenge to get some emotional something out of a song that some people wouldn't even bother playing the two chords and attempting to write a word or two for. We definitely would."

What is it that attracts you to those beserk riffs that make a song a 3Ds song?

DAVID M: "It's good to have jaded structures because we are very simplistic in the way we approach our music. With each song we take a route which is very off kilter. To us it's not a conscious effort, we just do it and find out later that people think it's pretty daft. We actually think



3Ds (L-R) Rachel King, David Saunders, David Mitchell and Dominic Stones.

that much difference."

DAVID S: "We wanted the album to sound sketchy."

DAVID M: "Yeah, I think it does sound sketchy. It sounds like really rough ideas which in a lot of ways aren't really realized because they are quite fresh."

As with their two EPs, exactitude is not the governing concept. Songs are pretty much left to go their own way, most of the time the band is able to follow, though not all the time:

DAVID M: "A couple of fade outs are there literally because we couldn't work out what the song was doing, so some guy mastering it would have sent it back and said the master tape was faulty. So we had to quickly fade a couple of songs out."

Not all the songs were brand spanking new — "Something in the Water", which is as close as the 3Ds will ever get to rockabilly, is one of their first songs. That's why it's pretty basic, says David S. Like our later songs, clarifies David M.

In the practice room, subsequent to recording, the band has

EPs 'The Ball of Purple Cotton' — the same melody has been used, but this time actual lyrics have been written for it as opposed to a medieval nun's memoirs. With Alan Starrett guesting on violin and accordion it provides the album's saddest moment.

The other, 'Teacher Is Dead', is a bit more tribal than most 3Ds' efforts, a bit of an On-U Sound influence perhaps?

DAVID M: "Someone said it sounded like a football song. After a lot of mucking around in the studio it came out a lot different than it originally did on tape. Alan Starrett came along with these thumb screws... no, thumb pianos, sorry Alan, and Denise and Alan did all the dong-a-dong-a and I just wailed over the top of it."

DAVID S: "I find it very disturbing that David wrote that one."

The 3Ds music has always given me the impression that it is created in a sporadic and heedless manner...

DAVID S: "We work within our limited musical knowledge. None of us are really proficient musicians, but I think we're doing quite well

in the band. I think that's a lot better than a band which sits there with a map of what every song consists of and follow the route. At least we're lost in the bush desperately trying to find a way out. To me that's still what playing music is like and I'd far rather be like that than be a skilled musician."

DAVID S: "We don't make it easy on ourselves. Most of the songs are pretty hard to play, physically demanding, sorta."

DAVID M: "But then we're not. I've seen bands that have come down to Dunedin, like the Dead Flowers and the Nixons who play, in terms of physical prowess with their musical instrument, ten-fold more than us. I can't fathom how anyone can learn to play to that level of ability and then jump all around the stage and headbang to their own songs."

DAVID S: "We still haven't worked that out."

DAVID M: "I'm quite glad. We don't really fit into that whole new school of musicians who've got a stage act and they play their instruments, whereas we still lumber

we're doing what we do best."

Lyrically, the 3Ds offer a negative view of life, a bit of confusion, some would say a realistic view...

DAVID M: "I don't know. I think they're quite spiritual. They deal with the subject from quite an ordinary way of looking at the world and occasionally go out of skew, just a bit jaded. I think it's quite healthy. It's not too confusing. When you hear the instruments head off into an angry section the lyrics give you warning of it."

For a band that claims they have little ambition other than to keep playing, things are happening, and happening according to plan. In 1990 they said they would be playing in America in two years, and now in 1992 they are about to. So who's going to play Nostradamus this time? Davids S & M won't, so it's up to David M's three-year-old son. So, Oscar, what are the 3Ds going to be doing in two years?

OSCAR: "No!"

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