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# JENNY UNDER FIRE

From this side of the Tasman, the Australian rock industry seems to be a white, male, corporate monster. From the screaming pseudo-blues that Barnsey peddles to Midnight Oil's worthy but macho rock, something about Australian music sets your teeth on edge. Of course there's been some notable highlights — the Saints, Nick Cave, Yothu Yindi, Helen Reddy.

It's a monster industry that has swallowed Jenny Morris whole. The Australians love her — her second album, *Shiver*, went platinum three times over and she was recently voted Australia's most popular female vocalist. Meanwhile, *Honeychild*, her latest album, has been in New Zealand's charts for more than 15 weeks and the single, 'Break In The Weather', was a top five hit. We love her here too.

Normally, I couldn't care less what goes on in the world of corporate rock. It's like a distraction for the masses while the *real* music goes on, but something about Jenny Morris bugs me. Her heavy-handed sex-bunny posturing annoys the shit out of me, not unlike the makeover job that was done on Kylie.

(Although Kylie's leap into the you-can-fuck-with-me league was rather more manufactured). In real life, of course, she's a perfectly ordinary woman who considers herself part of the beast.

"I'm definitely part of the Australian rock industry. I guess in all fairness, Australia has made me successful, they've given me the breaks. But I consider myself part of the industry in New Zealand too, because the record company takes the time and effort to promote my stuff, they've made a success of it here. But the reason I live in Australia is because there's more people there to support what you do and that's why we go further afield as well, like to Europe."

Hamilton is a far cry from

European tours opening for Tears For Fears and Prince, but the recent underage gig was a success for all concerned, as 2,000-odd turned up, ranging from pre-teens to fans in their 30s.

"It was great," says Jenny of the gig. "I don't think they'd seen a big show for a while, if ever, and I have a huge band — it's really a big set up, quite awesome when you look at it. There are seven players in the band, plus me."

"Generally I've noticed over the years a more immediate response as you walk on stage because the audiences know the songs. I think people feel a certain amount of pride when Kiwis do well overseas." The Australians, though, are keen to claim her as one of them.

"On a game show the other night one question was 'Which one of these famous Australians was actually born in Australia.' There was Mel Gibson, Nicole Kidman, Jimmy Barnes, myself and Debbi Boone and Debbi Boone was the one actually born in Australia. But they called us all Australians, even though they admitted we weren't born there. They like to claim us as their own when we're successful, but they didn't do that the first few years I was over there. I was always New Zealand singer, Jenny Morris."

It may surprise many to learn that Sly and Robbie were drafted in to play on *Honeychild*. It was the idea of Nick Launay, who produced eight of the songs on the album. Morris and Launay were surprised also that

the dynamic duo said yes.

"I thought they'd be too busy to bother with this girl from Australasia. They were really good. I met up with them in New York and that's where they did the rhythm tracks and they didn't want to hear any demos before the morning we started work and they just listened to the demos and we did three tracks a day. They were so cool — funny, warm people, I felt like I'd known them all my life. They certainly deliver too."

The Sly and Robbie tracks are softly funky and tight, next to the ballady-type numbers, like 'Tall Poppies', on the album. Morris has



it's going to sound like until it's down on the tape."

Can you say what inspires you?

"Life, really, personal situations that I might find myself in, situations that I might see people around me in, looking at the news, visiting different countries. I've been re-reading Simone de Beauvoir and her biography. Existentialism is very interesting again to me."

Morris has been in the business for a long time — remember the Crocodiles? — and at that time didn't think she would become so successful.

"I just really liked playing music and I didn't want to be a pop star and be rich and famous. I was just ambling along doing what I considered my job. It was only when I started to have some modicum of success that I started structuring things and thinking more carefully about things such as image and the effect certain music would have."

"Fame doesn't really attract me that much, I'm sort of ambivalent about it, but I do like success. I like to think that lots of people like what I'm doing, that's good. And also financially, I like the freedom that having enough money to do what you want to do brings."

The video for Morris' latest single, 'Zero', has caused controversy across the ditch by being banned until after 7pm and in fact it's been re-edited to suit the censors. In it, Morris is a vamp in a cat suit and sunglasses, spraying bullets from a 1940s-style machine gun. The ending, which has been edited out in Australia, has Morris face down across a table in handcuffs while a SWAT team points guns at her. Frankly, I found it offensive.

"I'll try and explain by saying that obviously I'm anti-guns and obviously they're so much part of our life — every time you turn on the TV you see guns and I think it must be very confusing for people, especially young people, who see guns as glamorized all the time and yet are told they're so bad. Loading the gun with bullets that said 'love' and 'amour' was a way of saying this is what should be happening. This is

what should be a priority, not shooting lead into people and killing them."

And the ending?

"The SWAT team idea, which we knew would be pretty controversial and in fact I was a bit iffy about it right up until the end, came from the fact that in the 30s and 40s when you did a movie that was a gangster movie, or showed adultery or something illegal, the censors said you could portray that if, in the end, people got their come-uppance. You had to show them being convicted or taken off to jail or something like that, so this was a stylised way of saying that."

"I really liked the concept and I really liked the idea of making guns seem such ridiculous things and why do we make guns — to kill other people and how ridiculous that is. I told Andrew (the director) that he had a tough job ahead of him. But, most of New Zealand, they put it straight on the air, most people seem to have got the point, people I've spoken with in the last couple of days seem to have got it."

It's true, considering the sexist rubbish that's on TVFM on a Saturday morning, New Zealanders probably don't give a toss. De-sensitised or what? But Jenny's got the business to think about.

"I'm touring for the next couple of months. I've got a big concert coming up, it's to raise funds for the AIDS ward and the heart transplant ward at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney. It's being held at Centennial Park, which has never, ever been used for a concert before and never will be again and they're expecting 100,000 people. It's a great bill — INXS, Yothu Yindi, Crowded House, myself, Johnny Diesel, Ratcat. Then I'm coming back here around June to do a tour and then I'll get another album under way."

"It's hard to say what I'll do for the next album, because I never know, those are always impromptu things. I think that's why they always work out so well, because I'm a great believer in what will be will be."

FIONA RAE

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