



Circus of Power

Circus of Power (of the infamous 'Motor' song, the one that lovingly compares a woman's body parts to those of a motor-cycle) have just released a new album, *Magic and Madness*, and it's a humdinger, if you dig raunchy, blues-based rock with lyrics that revel in rock mythology: evil women, swamp devils, tequila mamas, backseat mamas, trash queens — you'll find 'em all in the songs of Circus of Power.

But three albums into their career Circus of Power are still a little-known commodity here, and in America, although they've just finished a three week tour with Alice In Chains and Masters of Reality, they're hardly a household name.

"Slow and frustrating" is how guitarist Gary Sunshine describes their progress over the phone to me from their new home in Los Angeles (COP hail from New York originally). But things are better now they've switched labels.

Gary is remarkably subdued, polite and matter-of-fact — it's hard to get a rise out of him. When I ask him if the band lives the sex, drugs and rock and roll lifestyle they write about in their songs, he says simply "Not necessarily as much as we did at first, I think you kind of have to pace yourself on the road, same old story with everybody." adding, "I guess that's part of the language of rock and roll and the blues, it's hard to avoid."

As for the perception of the band as a biker band (hardly surprising when you consider the lyrics and the photo of them grouped around a couple of Harleys on their first record), Gary says it's not accurate. Some of them ride, some don't. Music is more consuming right now and they have neither the time nor money to indulge their taste for bikes. Oh well. Funny that you can count Iggy Pop amongst your fans (he wrote a

song specially for them on their first record even though he'd never met them) and still be broke.

This time Ian Astbury does vocal honours on a song called 'Shine', another celebrity COP fan. An idea they cooked up when they bumped into him at a Raging Slab show in LA. Appearing together on an animal rights bill a few weeks later (animals are a passion for singer Alex Mitchell who counts a wolf dog called Tonka among his best friends) Ian sang some Neil Young and Beatles songs with the group and subsequently recorded 'Shine', on which Ian (to quote Gary) "sings his ass off".

Circus of Power have also toured Europe with Black Sabbath ("it had Tony Iomi but it wasn't really the full Sabbath so it wasn't what it could have been. It wasn't Ozzie singing or anything like that") and America with Blue Oyster Cult, the original dudes, but past

their prime.

But Gary does get enthused when asked if he digs the blues.

"Sure, absolutely, no question, it's where all rock music starts. Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Robert Johnson, Albert King. We certainly have a deep affection for it but we're not limited by it. We like all kinds of other things, jazz and punk bands. I have personal favourites from different styles — Albert King, John Coltrane — there's a few that are just the greatest musicians that ever lived and those are my personal inspiration. But as far as bands — the Ramones are always an important band, and the Clash and the Stooges and the Beatles."

And will Circus of Power be gracing these shores with their presence any time soon?

"It's possible," concedes Gary with a sigh, "We're supposed to go everywhere."

DONNA YUZWALK

Another installment in our independent record label round up — Donna Yuzwalk talks to ROB MAYES of Christchurch's premiere sound house

FAILSAFE

"It's sort of like charity work, I suppose", says Rob Mayes, toying with a salad leaf in an Auckland cafe, "I'm the arts council of the south. I really like New Zealand music, I really like the bands around me. In Christchurch, no-one's helping anyone."

Except Rob, aka Failsafe Records of Christchurch, who spends most of his time and a lot of his money (saved from his day job as a Canterbury University School of Music technician) recording local talent.

"The stuff I'm dealing with I consider art," he continues, warming to his theme, "It's like I've just collected 15 paintings and I preserved them by putting plastic over the top of them. It's all music I think is worthy artistically."

He's referring to his latest project, *Avalanche*, a five band, three songs-each CD compilation featuring Supertanker, 147 Swordfish, Pumpkinhead, Love's Ugly Children and Lurch — all Christchurch bands nobody else was interested in preserving for posterity, although Love's Ugly Children are the underground darlings of their hometown.

Rob Mayes is Failsafe's boss and sole employee, although friends in bands help with distribution around the country. He used to be in bands himself (Dolphin, Throw), now he does everything but play the music. An ex-sound engineer for the Bats (he accompanied them on their 1988 world tour) he engineers and co-produces the bands, designs the cover art and carries out promotion, the part he likes least. As far as he's concerned, the best thing about coming to Auckland is being able to check out some local bands.

As you might have guessed, his life revolves around the label. He spent four months in the studio for *Avalanche* ("People don't see me on Friday and Saturday out on the town because I'm in my office trying to do GST figures), enthusiasm undimmed by the less happy aspects of running a tiny, independent record label. Like recording the Holy Toledos album last year only to have Sony step in and announce they'd like to sign the Toledos and re-record the same album. The Toledos were advised that Sony was now guiding their career and that the band were to cease promotion of that LP. Leaving Rob with an \$8,000 bill and a thousand copies of the appropriately titled *Forget and Forgive*. Before that, Rob had released a Holy Toledos EP, plus material by the Lils, Throw, Feast of Stevens and, most recently, Auckland's Malchicks. Coming up, a *Good Things* compilation of new songs from Failsafe bands.

Is there a Christchurch sound?

"There is a sound but only because it's mostly guitar based music. Everyone's trying to pinpoint the Christchurch sound and it's just that they're playing guitar."

Is there a Failsafe sound?

"Not really. In the past Failsafe has been predominantly guitar based melodic pop in orientation but I've always been interested in wider forms of music. Failsafe was the first label to work with Tinnitus. I'd like to work with more dance orientated and technology friendly music. In Christchurch there are lots of people in their bedrooms with guitars writing songs — there aren't a lot of sequencers and samplers down there. I'm not a techno freak but I'm not technology shy either. I'm into bands being as original as possible and taking musical stands forward. Bands break up quickly here and great chunks of our musical heritage are lost. That was the main reason I started the label. I can think of so many songs I've enjoyed live that I can't listen to ever again because they were never recorded."

As for production values, Rob says he's found a way round no-budget recording ("know how and time") and reckons *Avalanche* sounds as good as any independent recording he's heard. The bands might have clamoured "Make us sound like Sonic Youth!" but Rob wanted to make them sound like themselves. He decided to capture their essence live, using *Avalanche Studios* (built by himself) to make it just a little bit better. And he's pleased with the results.

"I can sit there and play it and put my hands on my belly and feel I've done well," he says, unable to hide his pride in what is, undoubtedly, a very appealing sounding (and looking) release. Still to come, a video compilation with five tracks from *Avalanche* and five unreleased numbers.

It looks like the *Avalanche* story is going to have a happier ending than the Holy Toledos episode. One thousand people turned up for the CD launch at the Performing Arts Theatre, Roger Shepherd of Flying Nun has given Rob phone numbers for distribution agents in America and Europe (and advised that Australia is "difficult"), and so far only one band (Lurch) has broken up. But Rob isn't about to give up his day job yet.

"I find it really hard to break even at the moment and that's even doing well in New Zealand. It's not a very glamorous job. I'm not too concerned if people don't buy it in bulk. I'm not trying to make a million dollars, I'm just trying to preserve art."

DONNA YUZWALK

LATE RUMOURS

Ace photographer / director **Darryl Ward** who works with Stratford and Hip Operations had his Suzuki scooter stolen. It has a red body and white seat registered 18 SBN. Any info please phone 376-1315 or 025 968-793.

No Lyz are organising a mid-winter ball at the Thames war memorial hall on Friday, July 24th, sponsored by Coromandel FM and Blue Light. Also appearing, fellow Aucklanders **Love Gone Crazy**, **Smak** and **Rainy Days** plus maybe a local band or two. Meanwhile, Coromandel FM are looking for tapes by Auckland bands to play on their Sunday night all kiwi show. Phone Leon on 07-868 6063 for more details... Adrenalin are now **Earthcircus** with a single 'World of Mime' on release independently.

Stolen from **Mainline Music** were three Ovation guitars without cases — 1990 Collector Series shallow bowl cutaway serial no.784, 1991 25 Year Anniversary Model Limited Edition blond, deep bowl cutaway serial no.1545 and a Pinnacle deep bowl Sunburst, no cutaway serial no.421163. Reward offered for info (09) 4862-285 or (09) 4895-919.

FUTURE RECORDINGS

BAD RELIGION, Recipe For Hate. FUGAZI, In On the Killtaker. SHIHAD, Churn. VAN MORRISON, Too Long In Exile. MARIA McKEE, You Gotta Sin to Get Saved. BULLETTYOYS, Za-Za. CHRIS KNOX, Polyphoto, Duck Shaped, "Gum". CARLENE CARTER, Little Love Letters. HOLY TOLEDOES, Blood. P.J.HARVEY, Rid Of Me. RUPAUL, Supermodel of the World. JUNGLE BROTHERS, J.Beez Wit the Remedy. BIZ MARKIE, All Samples Cleared. MORBID ANGEL, Covenant. HALLELUJAH PICASSO, Drinking With Judas. U2, Zooropa. MOANA & THE MOAHUNTERS, Tahiti. GEORGE THOROGOOD, Get A Haircut. A-HA, Memorial Beach. STEPHEN, Radar of Small Dogs. JULIANA HATFIELD, Become What You Are. MIDGE MARSDEN, Travelling On. ZIGGY MARLEY, Joy & Blues. CATHERINE WHEEL, Chrome. EMULSIFIER, Cerebral Implosion. BUZZCOCKS Trade Test Transmissions. DAVID CROSBY, 1000 Roads. LUTHER VANDROSS, Never Let Me Go. OZZY OSBOURNE, Live. ULTRAVOX, Revelation.

HARDWARE

MACKIE MIDI-AUTOMATION

Mackie Midi-Automation for their CR-1604 16-channel mixer is now available locally. The new OTTO-1604 can be installed in any Mackie CR-1604 mixer allowing the adding-on of full fader and muting capabilities. When you purchase the OTT-1604 you get free Ottomix Mac software allowing unlimited subgrouping and connecting of up to three 1604s. For further info phone Accusound (09) 815-0258.

ART SGX-2000 EXPRESS

The Express is a further advancement in ART Signal processing technology. It has additional banks of effects and extended RAM memory and exclusive guitarists' sounds, classic amp sounds and studio presets contributed by international producers from top studios. For additional info phone Accusound (09) 815-0258.

FXR DIGITAL EFFECTS PROCESSOR

A true stereo processor allowing a different effect to be used on each channel. This is the first true stereo reverb in its price range. For more info phone Accusound (09) 815-0258.

JANSEN "STATUS" SERIES

Jansen have redesigned their range of PAs to create a new series of high-powered, full range "Status" systems. The local Newzeal Band (with ex members of Twelve Tribes of Israel) are being sponsored by Jansen to promote their new range. For further info phone Jansen (09) 357-0880.

BAND GEAR STOLEN REWARD OFFERED

Stolen Auckland 24/6/93. Substantial reward offered for info leading to recover. Celestion 4x12 speaker, Marshall 2x12 combo amp JCM800, Marshall 2x12 speaker, 2 x Hartke 4x10 speakers, Gibson Les Paul Custom black, Gibson Grabber Bass red, 1972 Fender Strat sunburst red, Gibson Les Paul Jnr sunburst black & yellow, Jansen PA amp & speaker, Crate 100 watt amp, Yamaha SPX50 effects unit, Roland GP8 Effects & pedal, Shure SM58 mic, Hamer 5 string bass black, Boss digital delay, flanger, noise suppressor, wah wah pedals, two Samson wireless transmitters, Nadi transmitter. Phone (09) 366-3085 or (09) 445-4376.

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