

## THE NORTH FITZROY BEAT

'The meaning of life  
is to play like puppies'

'Feel the heat'

Two things moving in opposite directions rarely meet, especially when one proposes itself as the answer to the shortcomings of the other. However some time ago such an event occurred. The Boys Next Door played at Hearts, a agency controlled venue in Carlton. But the evening was rescued from non-event status by the third Melbourne appearance of the North Fitzroy Beat.

Coming along in support of The Boys Next Door were Too Fat To Fit Thru The Door, Ronnie and the Rhythm Boys, The Take, The Morpions and The Alan Bamford Musical Experience. Interest was high, the performances were eye catching, enthusiasm and energy could be felt and laughs were had. A new kind of experience was felt and questions came back into peoples minds again.

The North Fitzroy Beat consists of the Primitive Calculators, Whirlywird and a whole basket full of 'little bands' staffed by a collection of musical (technical) incompetents who have ideas they feel are worthwhile trying out and will be of some interest to onlookers. The overall sound of the little bands is loud, brash, inconsistent, flat and vital, urgent, demanding, expressive and honest. Honest in its desire to give and to inspire. And honest in its declaration of intent: 'I can't play but that won't stop me from playing'.

What you have here is a discussion between 4 people all of whom participated in that evening. 3 of whom are also in Whirlywird and the Primitive Calculators. Stuart Grant plays synthesizer in Ronnie and the Rhythm Boys and guitar in the Primitive Calculators and Greg Sun and John Murphy, Whirlywirds' rhythm section on bass and drums, both played guitar in the Alan Bamford Musical Experience. Alan Bamford is the Maxwell Smart of North Fitzroy.

A. Who coined the phrase 'The North Fitzroy Beat' ?

S. Ollie (Whirlywird singer), I guess. Me and Ollie were talking about it.

A. Is there such a thing?

S. Well, obviously both bands have a very different beat. I don't suppose you could say there is a beat that belongs to North Fitzroy.

J. It's a location... and attitude.

G. And the fact that both bands like disco.

A. What do you like about disco?

S. The beat, the production.

J. Tribal rhythms.

S. The girls.

G. The glitter.

J. The lights, the action behind the scenes.

G. The blacks.

S. It's the only pop music that's relevant to today.

A. But should pop music simply mirror all the shit that's around or should it try and go further?

J. It doesn't really matter... pop music is what you make it basically.

S. There's always some pop culture that's more prevalent and predominant for the youth of the eastern world than any other pop culture and the predominant pop culture of the past few years has been disco.

A. Why does that make it worthwhile?

S. Because as a pop music culture it's a rallying point for many people. It's the leisure and excess time of a whole generation. It doesn't mean to say that the music will be of any quality.

G. Applying it to what you said about mirroring something - all the North Fitzroy beat does is mirror the social life and beliefs of those involved.





- J. The people at discos are only there to have a good time and even for us - it doesn't really matter... people should just enjoy the music our two groups play and shouldn't sort of intellectualise on it.
- A. Well, if it's established why disco is made, why do your two groups do it?
- J. Well, someone has to do it.
- S. It's what I think people should be playing.
- A. So you only see disco for it's phenomena value?
- S. I appreciate disco purely because it's the most prevalent pop music culture in the world today.
- A. Well, given that the two groups have quite different influences and inspirations, what do you think has drawn you so closely together?
- G. Denise makes great coffee.
- S. Our two groups have everything in common musically except for the way it comes out in the end. People in both groups were all real influenced by punk rock.
- J. I have a fair idea that if punk hadn't come around, where rock music would have ended up... it would be just so... bland.
- A. But you've been playing drums for thirteen years... you'd still be playing.
- J. Ahh, no I wouldn't actually. I was thinking of giving up the instrument in 1976.
- S. Yeah, I was too. I did not want to play music any more.
- J. I didn't like the unnecessary emphasis on technique.
- S. Our two groups were influenced by just a few of those early groups. One of the first new wave records I bought was Maxs' Kansas City and when I heard Suicide and Pere Ubu I just knew that there was something cooking here that was going to be real different and new.

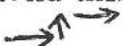
Turning the conversation to the little bands, Stuart explains how various people in and out of the Calculators had been nursing ideas for quite some time. "And it suddenly occurred to me that we could have a whole circus of little bands so I ran around telling everyone, Get a little group together--get a little group together".

- A. Is there any idea behind it other than having lots of people playing?
- S. It occurred first and then it was obvious that there would be certain repercussions from it... the most striking thing I find about it is that it's totally disposable... crummy... exciting music.
- A. Why do you think people take it so seriously, cos people stand around talking about art.
- S. Audiences are the most gullible people I've ever met in my whole life.
- J. I think it's because the people themselves, in the bands, are serious about it.
- A. The little bands have made a record. If it's so disposable, what's the point of a record?
- G. To throw away.
- S. It just seemed like a good idea to get all these bands that have something in common, put them on a record and have a piece of vinyl to look at. Isn't that the only reason you make a record?
- A. A lot of people make records to make statements.
- G. That's a strange idea.
- S. That's a real out of date idea about concepts and meaning---that's real two dimensional and psychedelic. I think the approach to criticizing music has taken on a far more cohesive method since the days when people put out concept albums and everything was really symbolic.
- A. Well, why do Whirlywird make records?



- G. Cos we like our songs.
- J. So we can put our songs on vinyl and listen back when we're old and say "I was in that group"
- G. It's to document what the group was like whenever...
- J. It shows what we're like at the moment... and besides, there might be money in it.
- A. How would you feel if one of the little bands took it seriously?
- J. I think they do.
- A. No... on a long term basis.
- S. Well, it's the same as with anything that you do... you want it to stay alive and keep changing and keep stimulating. I couldn't care less, really... I'm not the panel of review. What I think about the little bands is the more people try and do it is the important facet. I think everyone is a frustrated pop star... everyone I know is, anyway.
- G. I always wanted to be the guy behind the pop star... in the shadows.
- A. Is there any grand plan behind either the Calculators or Whirlyworld?
- J. Well I don't know about the Calculators but I'm sure there isn't behind Whirlyworld.
- G. Are we breaking up?
- J. Yes and forming a new group called 'Sons of Whirlyworld'.
- G. No... I think we'll be together for a long time.
- S. If you're talking about concepts, strategies or means to ends then, absolutely nothing at all with the Calculators.
- J. Maybe a problem with our groups is that we chance things a bit too much. With, say  everything is just so worked out that it's all safe. It's not possible for things to break down. They're becoming accepted... they're not any threat at all. And in the whole music scene in Melbourne and even Australia our two groups and the little bands are a sort of a threat.
- S. To what?
- J. To people who like  ... the establishment. The fact that we're letting the little bands play. If you look at the way rock's developed in this country with the agencies and they're pretty powerful.
- S. But I don't see it as any sort of a threat. I see it as a whole lot of guys getting up on stage and banging things. I do think that it's the first thing to happen in this country that had anything to do with the spirit of what happened in England in 1976. When that took place it was a spontaneous uprising of music... when it came to Australia a whole lot was taken from it except spirit of the whole thing, the reason it was done. All they took was the clothes and the style. Whereas the little bands are totally Australian and its totally spontaneous.
- A. What's totally Australian about them?
- S. The people in them and their backgrounds. The people are all thickheaded middle class idiots who've been very fat all their lives and have never really needed anything.
- A. And what are they doing now?
- S. They're getting up on stage and banging on things. And working real hard during the day to get money to leave. I think it's a real tradition amongst Australian youth to leave Australia.
- J. You have to.
- A. Why?
- J. Dunno... you just have to... If i had to stay here all my life I'd always wonder what was in the other contries. I'd feel very unfulfilled as if you wouldn't begin to reach your potential by staying here.
- S. There's so few possibilities offered to you in Australia and so many in the world.



- A. So you're just saying that Australia is small.  
S. It's a parochial little backwater.  
G. Small brained as a country... the people.  
A. Well, given that you're all off overseas soon, what do you hope to find?  
G. Get to China... learn another language.  
S. I want to go there and do exactly what i'm doing here... but in a different environment... make little bands and play in the Calculators. I don't know anything else but how to play music... be good to be a T. V. technician but I'm not.  
A. So you're just going to go there and carry on?  
J. Yeah... from letters i've got from England there's a real need for what we are doing.  
G. It'll be good for Australia cos it'll show that it is not such a dumb place.  
A. What do expect to find?  
S. Scampi and chips.  
J. Bad food.  
S. Crummy beer.  
G. Cold weather.  
J. No meat, people in ;overcoats all the time. We're going to grow up for a start. It'll make the two groups work a lot harder cos ther's competition... there are other people in the field. And like there used to be this thing between us and The Boys Next Door and I want to leave all that.  
S. Far more ideas over there. In Australia you've got Missing Link records which is one little businessman who opened up a record shop so that he could make money out of something that he really enjoyed which was rock and roll. And he opened up an independant lable which has given a lot of dogshit bands the chance to make a record, and yet he has no musical foresight in what he records... he's not really trying to achieve anything with the records except to give mediocre bands a chance to be a little bit famous. And there's that other lable that has a lot of heavy-metal pop bands... and that is another pointless exercise. They're doing nothing for rock and roll in Australia.  
A. So you reckon the whole thing is pretty worthless?  
S. It's just corpse.  
A. But is that necessarily so. Isn't there an argument for staying and building it up?  
S. But you'd spend your whole life as just an impotent fool bashing your head against a wall until one day you fucking said, "Oh, I've had enough, I've had enough I'll fucking sign up to an agency and I'll go to Warnambool and I'll play the pits in Horsham and then maybe oneday I'll own my own ;house in Carlton but I'll be alright cos I can still think what I want to think". Theres nobody taking any risks... it's all too monopolised.  
G. I'd rather play to two people in England who have half an idea about us than a whole crowd of Crystal Ballroomites who just go out to dress up.  
S. It's the most shithouse thing in the world playing to an audience of people sitting down crosslegged on the floor looking intently trying to analyse the music, when the music just fucking reeks of... all it is, is rock and roll. Because they have this notion that synthesizer equals intellegence and "if I understand this music then I will be intelligent". And that is the reason why  will be very successful because what they do is they pat the audience on the back and say (adopts tone of patronising primary school teacher) " We play very intelligent music and if you can understand our music then you too will be intelligent". And there is no one in the world easier to fool than someone who thinks he is intelligent.



- G. Anyone can do what they do... anyone can play rock and roll.
- S. Anyone can do what we do.
- J. Except that I don't think that anyone will. I don't think that any outside sort of group like us or the Calculators will pop up for a long time after we're gone.
- S. Not since the late sixties has there existed a form of music with NO commercial potential, like they said the Mothers didn't have... like they said the Fugs and the Gods didn't have. I think Whirlywird have a little commercial potential but I don't think the Calculators have any whatsoever. And that's why it's not going to happen in this country because people in Australia make music for money more than anything else.
- A. Getting back to what you said about analysing the music. Quite often people perceive things in the stuff people come out with that the artist isn't really aware of. What about things in the music you're not aware of... that goes beyond banging out chords?
- S. I think rock and roll has always been more than just banging out chords. Rock and roll is supposed to be a form where something is made and if you're making stuff what you're doing is taking elements A to E, juggling them in a certain order and you're going to end up with a certain outcome. Now the way you juggle the elements determines how what comes out relates to the mainstream of the form and in rock and roll elements A to E have been stuck together in that same order for so long that I think it's about time someone started chopping them about.
- A. But can you go beyond just an exercise in juggling elements?
- J. What do you mean?
- A. I mean to make statements.
- S. About what?
- A. Oh... life, god, death... anything.
- J. Oh no... not in our group. I can't see that cropping up at all. Cos we know were just hitting our heads against a brickwall anyway. Naive young men are the people writing these lyrics... bands sort of ranting on about social issues in their interviews like the Pop Group... their interviews are really overly intellectual. A lot of these new progressive groups give it all a bad reputation.
- S. But rock and roll has always been about the problems of being young and feeling shithouse. So if rock and roll words are about the traps of youth and stuff and in Australia everybody's overeducated idiots then surely a lot of the words have to be about the problem of having too much education for it to be of any use to you. And I think that's a real symptom of a lot of these new bands that they've got too much education and no brains.
- J. Yeah, that's true. It just seems to me that they're very naive.
- S. Yeah... real naive. But the best rock and roll is always naive.
- G. I mean, I really don't like any band over the age of 25 -- after 25 they're not relevant anymore.
- S. What about Pere Ubu... they're all about 30.
- A. Why do you have this thing about age?
- G. Cos I think it really comes into it... for new music definately.
- A. In age or the way you think?
- S. Yeah right. It's not a universal rule or anything but generally people of certain ages do approach things in certain ways, and by the time you're 28 or 30 people approach things differently to what you do when you're 18. People at 18, are prepared to take more risks, they play around with things... they have a bit more fun. Whereas at 28 you're a bit more level headed. And there is no place for levelheadedness in rock and roll.



- G. It's age as applied to what you're doing. I mean... the Boys Next Door, I don't like their music much, but their music suits them because of their age... it fits. But you take Mi-sex.
- J. Who are obviously people who have latched on to something...
- G. Yeah, and they come out with that song 'I Don't Care'... any punk band could have done that and done it better.
- S. But with Pere Ubu, the reason it's so good is that it's quite plain that they're only fooling around - they're not serious.
- J. Yeah, there's definitely a sense of humour there where with a lot of these groups they lack humour in their music and I really object to that. I object to people who can't laugh at themselves.
- S. To try and propose something that doesn't contain humour is real wrong.
- A. To your main motivation is fun?
- S. The main motivation?... the main reason I wanted to play in a rock and roll band is because I thought, "Fuck, there's all these people making music and they're all no fucking shithouse and I could if I wanted, do it much better and after telling myself that for a long long time I finally decided to do something about it. So I wouldn't say the main motivation was fun... the main idea was to make a statement.
- A. An important reason why performers are taken so seriously is because of the stage, the lights. They're presented as something important - there's an inherent sense of awe about them because they can do things that you admire and their achievements create a gap when they should do just the opposite. And yet a lot of musicians are dumb and a lot are slobs but because you don't know them personally myths are created. They're got to be doing something big like Picasso and all these other people I think are really important.
- S. Real sad, isn't it? Which is where the little bands come in - when it's perfectly evident that these people up there don't know what they are doing - they are just an ordinary pack of guys like the audience who have been a little bit braver and have gotten up on stage to have a bash. And that's the only way I can see that you can try and lay down a challenge to the idea of performers as God... to have hundreds of incompetents on stages everywhere. But like it's just another symptom of living in a society where you always watch stuff and never do it.
- J. There's a real myth to what we're doing and there shouldn't be any of that floating around at all. We shouldn't be on a pedestal... we're just people playing music.
- S. People shouldn't be audiences for a start.
- G. The audiences should all be in bands.
- A. And people should just go and see each other.
- J. Rock is still a spectator sport.
- S. Everything is... the whole society is built around it.
- A. Do you think there is still a place these days for bands who still work in old formula's arranged slightly differently?
- S. It makes me sick. It's retrogressive and it's destructive and it's negative and it's...
- J. Dull.
- A. Then why do you like Abba?
- S. Because Abba are not like that at all. Abba invented a whole new sound that was very influential on the sound of late seventies pop. And Abba are master technicians at crafting pop singles and they're getting better.
- G. Cos Bjorn isn't living with Agnetha.



- S. And has a new meaning to his life. Abba are great at what they do and they imitate no one. You always know an Abba record when you hear one. . . not like Nick Lowe who always reminds you of someone else's songs.
- A. But what about bands like Man and Machine, the Dots, Sneakers?
- S. If you are looking for new ways to juggle sound and still coming up with rock and roll in the end and roll that isn't that dull to listen to and if that's what people should be trying to do cos the other stuff is so fucking dull then there is no point to their existence at all - bands like that. . . apart from perpetuating the idea of the spectacle up on stage and making things like disco, totally manufactured music, even stronger.
- A. But for a night of easy fun those bands are a lot better thing than you or Whirlyworld because they are an accustomed formula to slip into with a few drinks whereas the Calculators and Whirlyworld provoke people to head rather than feet movement.
- S. Well then those people who want to go out and do that are the walking dead and I see them as having absolutely no potential to make the world a better place to live in and so I don't even consider them. They're just people who are waiting to die.
- A. They are no different to disco people.
- S. No, no different at all.
- A. Well, to conclude--I was wondering about your favourite periods in history, people or things. I mean, Genesis P. Orridge apparently took a lot of inspiration for Auswitz. He latched on to an event.
- G. John Wayne's stomach.
- S. I like the beatnik era. I like the idea of people getting up on stage and banging things.
- J. Who do we envy most. . . Howard Hughes.
- S. I like cannibals. I can see a great potential in cannibalism for being able to eat meat for a lot longer than it seems we'll be able to. I think they have tapped a fine source of food that we have too many social restrictions about. I like anthropology as a whole actually. It taught me that not every one does things the way we do.
- J. I'm a bit of a fan of people who can communicate without talking, brain to brain because I find talking really shithouse. I find the world dull.
- S. Yeah, so do I. . . that's a real big motivation for playing rock and roll. Life is a big fat shithouse miserable fucking pain.
- G. But I do dishes and I get a lot of satisfaction from making a pot really clean.
- S. Ain't that sad? That we're so fucked that we get enjoyment out of things like that.
- A. But why put pots so far down the scale? I mean, what's important?
- S. What's important? I don't fucking know what's important. I'm trying to find out what's important and what's true. What exists. I know that sounds really fucking cosmic. . . I know this couch exists but I've been fed so many lies and shit all my life and I see things as being so unfixed and relative that I don't know what's important.
- A. Does any of that get through to the songs?
- S. That's all my songs are about. They're all just fucking screams of what's going on. I want to learn who to celebrate life. I don't just want to sit around and wait till I die.



At the time of writing (mid January) Whirlyworld are in England regrouping, having left Australia after playing about 12 times over two lineups that lasted a little over a year. They will probably not return and for their sakes I hope they don't have to.

The little bands appear infrequently and the Primitive Calculators lurch on, playing more often, which is good.

But by March the whole thing will begin to further dissolve as the Calculators begin their move to Europe. And most of the people involved with little bands have identical ideas. So after about June or so there will be quite a large hole in music in this country. All I can suggest you do is do it yourself, if it means that much to you.

Fortunately I was very wrong

This whole thing just meant a lot to me so I felt it should be noted for history and for others not able to experience it first hand.

So this is very out of date  
As we all know the U.K.  
Calculators have left for the U.K.  
and the Little Bands are big business. \$ fell  
This was intended for a magazine for which the \$ fell  
thru sad tale. R/Runner wouldn't print it. I don't have  
that much \$ so I decided to do this with it. I think  
it's pretty good. And cos the Primitive group and the  
Calculators are a great reading. And cos the Primitive group and the  
a great extent are FUN this evening. Aint that great?  
Hope you had Drive carefully (Chaps) and watch  
out for the first record from  
The Beast Appa' vel. And  
listen to the radio every Friday  
at midnight  
Alan Bamford