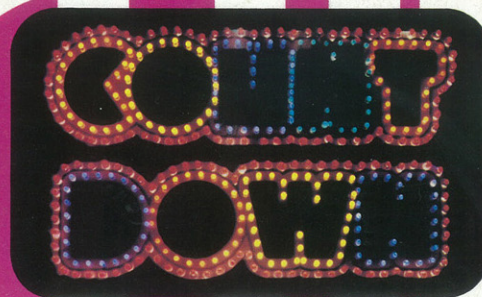


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MAGAZINE

MONDO ROCK



Band of the Month

An intimate fire-side chat with Ross Wilson and Eric McCusker from Mondo Rock. Wherein they divulge to Countdown Club Melbourne reporter Karl Van Est their innermost thoughts about songwriting, rock 'n' roll longevity, the delights of Melbourne, and foxy European film stars!

CDC: One thing that impresses me about Mondo Rock is that you're always working.

ROSS: Well, we believe that the best way for people to understand what's happening

on an album is to see us live to fill in the picture. It closes in the gaps; like sometimes when you see a film clip and you then understand the tune a lot better. I think that happens when you see us live. There's a whole other side of us that emerges.

CDC: *Mondo Mania* is a good example of that. It fits into a set. On the *Chemistry* album there was *Mondo Sex* and *Mondo Shakedown* on the one before that. Is it a takeover song?

ROSS: It's not so much a take-over song as an advertisement of personal achievement. But not just for us. One of the reasons we called our last album *Nuovo Mondo* was to give a reference to Australia being the new world. It means to me, as much as anything else, the emergence of Australian rock music. Australian rock groups in general are spreading their feelers out and travelling around the world. It's expressing that feeling.

CDC: What's happening in America for Mondo Rock?

ROSS: America is a long term goal. It can take a long time, as we've witnessed with Split Enz. There are definite steps to be taken. Look at Cliff Richard; he said he'd never go there until he had a big hit and it took him twenty years. The thing is, we do have an outlet for our music here. We have a strong record company in Australia and we can sell records locally in seemingly enough quantities, fingers crossed, to pay our bills. So anything that comes after that...

CDC: Eric, let's talk about some of your songs. Who is *The Queen and Me* about?

ERIC: Songs aren't always literal. That hasn't actually happened. I've a picture on my bedroom wall for 3-4 years now. It's of an actress called Natassia Kinsky, who was in *Tess* and *Cat People*. I saw a photograph of her when she was only about 15 in an Italian

Vogue magazine so I cut it out and stuck it on my wall. It's the sort of thing, when you're sitting there trying to write a song, that you look up and see it right in front of you.

CBC: *No Time* opens with a chant — Hey-oh, oh-way-oh. How did you stumble across that idea?

ERIC: It's funny 'cause it was actually a guitar line but I ran out of hands. When I was in the rehearsal studio working on it, I was playing the guitars, James was doing something on the keyboards and there were no instruments left over. So we thought we'd better sing it, and it sounded ok. Then we tried a few different primal sounds. It's good to sing, audiences explode into it spontaneously. It grew out of a guitar riff and we assumed the same role as that which the audience takes. I remember the first time we played it to our manager John Blanchfield he went away singing the chant. Then as soon as we

began playing it live, the people did as well.

CDC: How do you arrive at a haunting song like *Out The Window*? Did you know what you wanted it to sound like when you went into the studio or did you have to play around with it?

ERIC: It's a long and involved process really. You can sometimes go in with an idea of the overall sound or maybe with ideas for some parts, or a couple of chords to throw at the band and see what they come up with. That was a combination of all the approaches.

CDC: *Up And Down* is lyrically amazing but it's too short. I'd like it to go on for another two minutes.

ERIC: In that case we wanted to see if we could actually get a record to come in under three minutes. I really like the lyrics, they're not complicated at all. It's nice to say this — the words roll off the tongue.

CDC: Where do you find all the lyrics Eric?

ERIC: I just write everyday. I remember a bass player in a band I was with six years ago telling me that what is needed in a band is someone who just writes heaps of songs. So I got into a thing of writing everyday. That way, when the deadlines approach I've got lots of stuff to choose from and work on, so we don't end up short changed.

CDC: Ross, you co-wrote the music for *Touch Of Paradise*, a song written with Australian rock legend Gulliver Smith. How did that come about?

ROSS: It was a really early song from the days when Mondo Rock was first emerging. I was wanting to write some new material and had a couple of songwriting sessions with Gully and that was by far the best song we ever wrote. I played it live for a couple of years but when I got together with Eric it was time for me to have a rest from it. As things turned out we always had plenty of ballads. But it finally got an airing. There had been some attempts to record it in the past but it never sounded right to me so I never bothered to finish it off.

CDC: Ross, you've always based yourself in Melbourne. Ever thought of moving to Sydney?

ROSS: No, not recently. I'm

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SPLIT ENZ





NICK RHODES

Continued

still living very close to where I was brought up. Bayside, down Sandringham way. I've done a lot of travelling over the past 15 years, all over Australia and all over the world, and I've changed from having a kind of loathing for Melbourne, which I had when I was an angry young man. When I went out and saw the world I realised Melbourne wasn't such a bad place after all. I like the weather, which everyone complains about, I like that changing of seasons. There has always been that cynical thing between Sydney and Melbourne but the only time I ever thought about moving was when there was the big shift, culturally, to Sydney, about five years ago. Things were definitely on the move in Sydney then, but that's passed now. Sydney is very much a boom & bust type of town, whereas Melbourne

has a much more even keel. It has a slower and better digestion of ideas as well and doesn't just go with whatever fashion or fad is happening.

CDC: Ross, over the past 15 years you have been one of the most consistent Australian musicians.

ROSS: I've stayed around but haven't done as much as you would think. There have been a few blocks along the road. I got involved in scraps with record companies and wasn't able to record. I should have actually had more records out than I have had. I manage to fall on my feet. Things come along at the right time. Part of whatever talent I have is as some sort of co-ordinator and being able to extract from people what they're able to give. That happened with Skyhooks and various other people I've worked with, but it doesn't always happen. I get a lot of pleasure out of working

with others and I don't pretend to be the major people keep sketching me as. I have to give a lot of credit to other people. Even the failed line-ups of Mondo Rock, the ones that didn't happen on a large scale.

CDC: They made some great music and records though.

ROSS: Sure, people say great now but we didn't sell anything at the time. We weren't held in very high regard and yet I appreciate everything everyone I was involved with did. The fact that things didn't work out didn't diminish the fact that if it hadn't been for them there wouldn't be a successful Mondo Rock today. You've just got to plough ahead and one of the reasons I'm probably still around is I try desperately to get away from any bitterness about my failures. I've seen it happen so many times, Australian musicians blaming other people for their own failures.

DIRE STRAITS INTERVIEW Continued from last month

CDC: The imagery of a song like *Tunnel of Love* is very powerful.

MK: That was rag bag mixture of feelings. I wrote it at home alone one day, at the same time I did *Romeo & Juliet*. It harks back to the romance and excitement of the fairground, which is an important part of life in the north east of England. The biggest fair in the world used to come to the town moor in Newcastle every year, and there was a permanent one at Whitley Bay called the Spanish City. It was the first place I'd ever heard a carousel waltz. We'd all get on a train, with aunts and uncles and Nana and go to the coast for the day, to sit on the beach and make sandcastles. And the Spanish City with its white towers was in the background of all those days.

When I got older I had girlfriends and I'd hear this loud rock music and get totally enthralled by these tough guys who worked the waltzes. Like the image of Ringo in *That'll Be The Day*. The whole experience was spiced with danger, noise and incredible smells — all the senses fully overloaded. Compared to a Monday afternoon in school, it was heaven. David felt the same way, he had a fairground fixation as well.

That memory has become

Mark Knopfler



sort of a device that I use in songwriting. The scenario came back in *In Never Rains* on the last album. It might be a little more cynical now but it's still there. It's like, you know that an electric guitar is just a couple of bits of wood but it doesn't stop you getting excited looking at them because it's a childhood thing that overtakes you. You know, I like seeing people who are desperately into what they do because that's the great gift that we have.

CDC: Are you a prolific songwriter or do you have to force every tune out?

MK: There's no laws about songwriting. Some things flow great, come real fast. Other things might require hundreds of hours to get right. Take a tune like *If I Had You*, from the EP. That came real quick. It was inspired by Cliff Richard's first hit, *Move It*, which is probably the greatest thing he ever did. I used to play it in Cafe Races and it was one of the happiest moments of my life — a very satisfying thing to play. Actually, I can here *Move It* in quite a few of my songs.

Two Young Lovers is my way of saying thank you to Chuck Berry. It pays particular tribute to a song of his called *You Never Can Tell*, which is a gorgeous pearl of a song. Chuck Berry is a rock 'n' roll genius.

CDC: How did you come to work with Bob Dylan on the *Slow Train* coming album and what sort of an experience was it?

MK: It had a lot to do with Jerry Wexler who worked on our second album. He was producing Bob and they both wanted to do a tighter album than usual. You see Bob doesn't deal with music the way musicians do. He's the greatest poet who has ever worked with song and the words are very very important to him. He's liable to change keys, tempos anything as long as the words sound right

to him. So we had this little band and we tried to run the songs down before he came into the studio because basically Bob loses interest after a couple of takes.

I can best explain how I felt about working with him by explaining that, like a lot of other kids at the time, I used to sit around with friends drinking lots of coffee, smoking lots of cigarettes and listening to *Bringing It All Back Home* or *Blonde On Blonde* or *Highway 61 Revisited*. The rhythm and dynamics of all that enters your soul and becomes a part of the way that you feel — just like Chuck Berry's music.

I've been asked to produce Bob's next album, which is a great honour. I'll be using Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare as a rhythm section and I think it will be a very exciting project. I'm a horrendously large fan.

CDC: A lot of what happens with Dire Straits seems to be spontaneous. Is it?

MK: We never think of 'career' or 'commercial' because once you start doing that it becomes a job. We've done lots of things that could be considered to be dramatically wrong — if we were career minded. We play it all by ear and take advantage of the positive energy in the group. What we're trying to do, literally, is infect people with joy. Personally, I celebrate every day and my goal is to continue to write, work and get better at what I do; to continue to play and be in love with it.

It's like the difference between fashion and style. A lot of things in the world are fashion related, particularly in rock. But great style is as rare and magnificent as it has always been. Style is something that you just recognise, not something that you talk about or try to analyse. We don't try to work out what we mean in rock or what we should be doing; we use our instincts.

SHORTS

Aussie sax stars **WILBUR WILDE** and **ANDY THOMPSON** (Moving Pictures) had no hesitation in accepting an offer from **DIRE STRAITS** leader Mark Knopfler to guest with the superstar band during their recent Australian tour. Both horn players impressed Mark greatly.

The recording of vintage songs by Australia's own **EASY-BEATS** has become quite a trend in America recently, with versions done by Peter Frampton, the Plimsouls, Roy Loney, the Three O'Clock and others. Of course the first album by our own **DIVINYLS** opens with a killer version of *I'll Make You Happy*. Not only that, a recent gig by the band at Selinas in Sydney was opened by screened film clips of the mighty Easys in action in 1966.



The Spitfires

Hot news from Adelaide centres around a new outfit called **THE SPITFIRES**, a loony six-piece who churn out quirky Cramps-type 'Voodoo Rock'. Their mini-lp *I Was A Teenage Teenager*, due out this month, features such songs as *I'm In Love With A Vampire*, *Rumble In The Jungle* and *Bad Luck Bop*. One critic lists them midway between Mental As Anything and the Stray Cats.

YOU WERE ASKING

Has Ol '55 ever put out a greatest hits type album? Also, what albums did they release before they split up?

Waree, Orange NSW

Yes, there is a hit compilation album featuring 18 tracks on the K-Tel label, called 'Greasemarks' (NA561), although it is apparently hard to locate. You might have to contact K-Tel direct for it. The original Ol '55 albums were *Take It Greasy* (Mushroom L35815), *Fiveslivejive* (L36287), *Cruisin' For A Bruisin'* (Junction MLF234) and *The Vault* (Leo 2907501). Only the first two feature Frankie J Holden. The reunited Fives

can also be heard on the *Concert of The Decade and Mushroom Evolution Concert* (Mushroom L45865/6 & L80101-3)

I'm sure many people share my confusion. Is Boy George from Culture Club a boy or a girl? What is his real name and birthday?

Jodie, Newcastle NSW
Cobbity, Eltham VIC
Anthea, O'Connor ACT
Sharon, Lucindale SA

Boy is, as his name suggests, a male. He was born George Alan O'Dowd in Ireland on June 14, 1961. He has five brothers and one sister.

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