

IT'S A WHIRLY WHIRLYWIRLD

It's not often that on their first-ever public appearance a group displays the kind of whatever-it-is that you know is world-shattering. Whirlywird's debut gig, at the Crystal Ballroom, was not such an occasion; but it came damn close.

There were moments in Whirlywird's performance that I would rate as some of the best live music I've ever heard. I said 'moments' because only occasionally did Whirlywird climb to such ecstatic heights — they were plagued by technical problems, and also, I suppose, a certain nervousness — but when they did it was evidence enough to convince me of their real capabilities.

It was (at times) a spine-tingling, thrilling experience — simultaneously looping and pulsating synthesizer lines, insistent drumming, soaring guitar work, and, on top of it all, some of the most determinedly impassioned singing you're ever likely to hear in this day and age.

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I'm aware of the group's origins, and the forces that've influenced their evolution, but the conclusion they've arrived at — the discovery they've made of themselves — defies my analytic capacities.

Perhaps all I should really say is that, quite simply, Whirlywird are something new, compelling, and important. If all this does sound like reactionary overkill — and it may well be, only time can tell — then the only thing left to do is let the group speak for themselves.

common, and as Ollie said, 'we decided to leave our respective groups and form a group together'. That was in June last year.

A one-time member soon joined the group and then left just as soon, but gradually the line-up stabilised, with Ollie, John Murphy, Andrew Duffield, on keyboards, Dean Richards, on guitar, and Simon Smith, on another keyboard. Since then, Philip Jackson has replaced Andrew Duffield (who went on to contribute synthesizer to the Boys Next Door's album), and Simon Smith has left the band.

Throughout Whirlywird's internal upheavals one thing has remained constant, however; and that's Ollie's determination that the group play 'electronically', which, of course, is the most immediately striking thing about them.

'People are complaining about electronic music', he said, 'especially rock'n'roll musicians, but I mean they play electric guitars — they're playing electronics. It's basically electronic, everything they're doing, it's very basic electronics though. We just take it a step further, we've accepted it.'

'I've been interested in electronics from virtually the day I started playing music. It's something that's always fascinated me, because it's the only form of music our generation could call 'new'. There are just so many possibilities

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Although Ollie is adamant about Whirlywird's exploitation of the possibilities of electronic instrumentation, he's the first to admit they are indeed 'pretty damn naive'.

'I think my biggest influence is my technical incompetence. One of the things about the start of Whirlywird was me giving up guitar, because I thought — and a lot of people won't believe this — that I became too technically competent! When I started keyboards it was very much a two-fingered thing, and the style has seemed to come almost from mistakes.

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against is formulae. As soon as we see formulae appearing in our group we try to smash them, because it's a waste of effort'.

It's apparent, however, that Whirlywird songs do have an underlying continuity.

'We are still what I'd call a group that bases a lot of it's stuff on repetition', Ollie explained, 'and just building layers of sound over the instrument plays another pattern.'

'I would never say we're inventing anything particularly. I think what we're doing is **new**. I don't think we'd exist without Punk! It's a well known fact — and I'll repeat it — that it gave younger musicians an opportunity to play, and now it's come around to the stage where young musicians are starting to experiment'.

Whirlywird are unlike many of their global contemporaries in that theirs is a very emotive music, that thankfully avoids them the stigma that (justifiably) surrounds the English electronic groups.

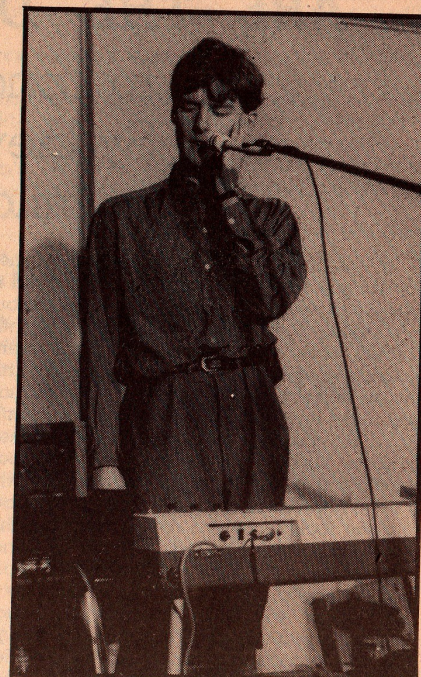
Ollie agrees. I think that's another thing that plagues it — that electronic music can't get away from being high-brow, intellectual.

'I can appreciate what people like Eno are doing, and like what our local contemporaries are doing, but our approach is somewhat different, in the sense that I believe music should be something that hits you in the stomach. And you can't ignore it.'

'We don't follow any conscious philosophy, it just comes out that way. Basically, what we play is what we feel.'

'We want to make, I suppose, a Statement. I'm not quite sure what that Statement is, it's very very . . .'. He trails off.

Looking to Whirlywird's lyric content for that Statement might only make matters more confusing. Although Ollie says, 'Most of my lyrics are based on what I see, and my interpretation of what I see, I don't have any definite views', he will admit, 'It's got a lot to do with the sound of the words, it's almost a phonetic process, like the voice becomes an instrument. Eventually, I'd like to have the vocals become electronic too'.



pic — Clinton Walker

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The single was recorded in early October, in a very bad studio, under pretty bad circumstances — we had a lot of problems with the engineer, and the producer. It was our first time ever in a studio; although it was only an 8-track, it was quite a new thing to us. At the time we thought what we'd got was pretty good. Since then I've remixed it.

'But the whole thing is very old-fashioned now. We've had two line-up changes since then, but the most important thing now is the addition of electronic drums. And also the fact that musically, as far as songs go, the group has progressed a lot'.

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Basically, Whirlywird grew out of Ian 'Ollie' Olsen's dissatisfaction with playing in instrumentally conventional rock'n'roll groups, where he was forced to compromise his ideals. He 'paid his dues', as it were, with the Reals, one of Melbourne's earliest-on-the-scene Punk groups (who evolved into the Negatives, a Suicide act), and immediately prior to Whirlywird, with the Young Charlatans. The Young Charlatans were a group who 'enjoyed' a very minor cult status in Melbourne, and indeed, at the time they were probably the most exciting group around (with the possible exception of the Boys Next Door), and quite conceivably could've 'succeeded', if not for personality problems. (Fortunately, however, their eventual dissolution wasn't a complete loss, as their creative impetus continued through Rowland Howard, who joined the Boys Next Door, and Jeff Wegener, who's reunited with his former comrade, Ed Kuepper, in his new outfit, Laughing Clowns). They were, as Ollie described them, 'a guitar band', and although they were innovative within that context, he was growing bored anyway.

Ollie had a lot of ideas as to what he wanted to do, but no real idea as to how to do it. Meeting John Murphey, however, was an inspiration. The then News drummer and Ollie, at that stage still in the Young Charlatans, discovered they had a lot in

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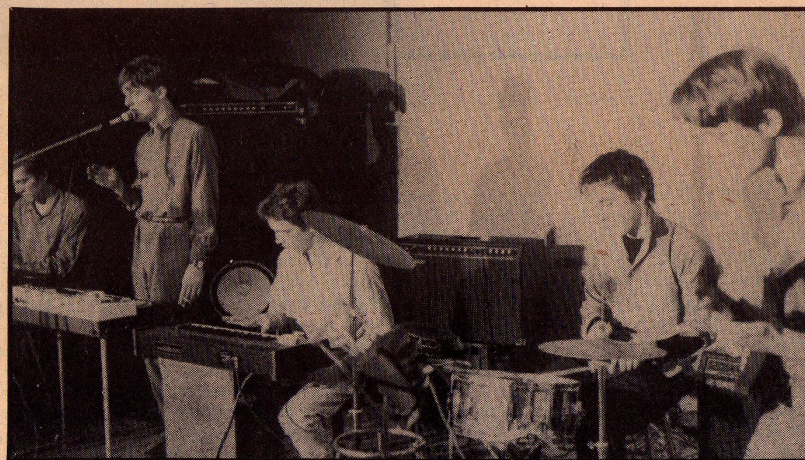
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inexperienced, so as they're evolving, becoming more technically competent musicians, so are the songs. Same thing with me — I write songs on a keyboard, and as I get better so do the songs'.

Ollie is obviously the mainstay behind the group's direction. 'I write the songs, basically', he said. 'The songs have a basic structure, and we rehearse songs, and people come up with new ideas for them. And within songs there's an awful lot of improvisation.'

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Nevertheless, the single has almost sold out, and Whirlywird hope to return to the studio soon to record their second.

Right now, Whirlywird are probably at the crucial point of their career. From this point, they can make it or break it, and it's largely up to them.

They're still reluctant to do what little live work is available to them, and while I wouldn't like to apply the 'beggars can't be choosers' argument to this case — there is a question of integrity involved, and that's important — surely it's just as important that the group be seen.

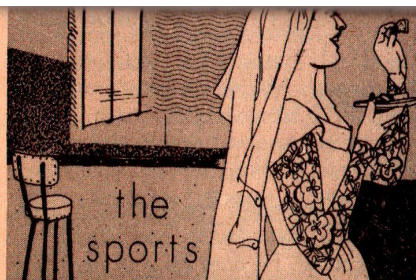
I respect their ambition not to become 'just another pub band', but that's hardly likely — they're not exactly the kind of group Melbourne pubs want.

Even if live performance isn't their forte — indeed, Ollie says, 'Whirlywird would be perfectly happy just being in a position where we can record' — there's little else they can do at the moment.

For their own sake, Whirlywird must expose themselves — because one of their real problems is the fact that most of their development has taken place behind four walls, and that this has created a distance between them and their audience.

Whirlywird's *Missing Link* single is quite accessible, but anyone who went to the Crystal Ballroom expecting to hear a group like the one captured on those grooves

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The second EP is the 12-inch platter on Mushroom. The EP was recorded in England during the Sports' tour earlier this year and is a very live sounding affair, certainly miles away from the smoothness of the *Don't Throw Stones* LP. There are some who say that the Sports are better live than they are in the studio and this EP makes every effort to capture that rough live edge. It's certainly more direct and exciting than the studio offerings. *Wedding Ring* is a great rendition of the old Easybeats song (I'm sure Harry and George would love it), *Live Work and Play* snaps crackles and pops, *Little Girl* swings while *Radio Show* with its jagged guitar work really exemplifies the changes the Sports have gone through since Martin Armiger joined the band. Good value at \$2.95.

The Hitmen's first outing on WEA is a well crafted piece of danceable rock called *Didn't Tell The Man*. A good hook, jangly guitars and some nice harmonies make this definitely worth the price of a listen. The slightly less well known **Radiators**, also from Sydney, have served up a dynamic first offering that has what is coming to be identified as *The Sydney Sound* — throb bass, meaty drums and staccato guitar/organ. The track is called *Coming Home*. It's well structured, well produced and catchy as hell. Watch out for it on Countdown real soon. And the third new offering from WEA (Oz) is **Swanee**, with *Another Crazy Dream*. I am not being deliberately unkind when I say that it sounds like little brother Jimmy's band (Cold Chisel).

Over a very sparse disco based backing Dury intones, chants and mumbles some unconnected gibberish (to call it singing would be most inaccurate.) sounding a lot like he is making the lyrics up on the spot. The Blockheads go for a pleasant Sunday stroll, never work up a sweat, and are quite content to follow the leader, who if this is any indication, doesn't know where he is going. The B-side, *Common As Muck*, has a lot of name dropping on it. Sorry, Ian, but I'm sure you can do better than this.

At least **The Police** know where they're going. They might not go very far and when they get there they tend to batter you to death with the chorus but *Can't Stand Losing You* is as insistent and infectious a piece of quasi-reggae as you are ever likely to hear. Try to ignore the clumsy attempt at toasting in the middle. It sounds like it was just stuck in there for the lack of anything better to do.

There's nothing slack about **Nick Lowe's** *Cruel To Be Kind*, though. It's superbly crafted, brilliantly constructed, infectious as the plague and despite all that, is racing up the U.S. charts. Ye Gods, there is some justice in this world of rock'n'roll! God save and preserve ol' Nick, there is none better.

Moving right along now to the electric live version of *Rust Never Sleeps* by that old Canadian hippie **Neil Young**. What's this? A song about Johnny Rotten? A chorus that claims 'Rock'n'roll can never die'? Neil rediscovers rock'n'roll, energy rushes through his fingers and vocal chords and California slides into the Pacific. Just about any other artist who sang a tribute to young J.R. would sound trite but Young sings it like he means it. The whole thing is as rough as a broken bottle and utterly wonderful. Will Public Image Ltd.'s next single be a cover of *Heart Of Gold*? Will John Lydon form a supergroup with Jimmy Pursey, Joe Strummer and Paul Weller? Will anyone care?

The Boomtown Rats zoomed to the No. 1 spot on the U.K. charts with their *Don't Like Mondays* single. It's their least frantic, most

overtly commercial outing to date and could be the one to crack the Australian charts for them. The first time I heard it I kept expecting it to break out and tear away from the shuffling piano, but the brakes are kept on all the way through. Very clever, as it leaves you thirsting for more. Subject matter, as just about everyone would know now, is about a young girl shooting up her school because she didn't like Mondays.

Those other exiles from the auld emerald isle, **Thin Lizzy**, sound just like, surprise, surprise, Thin Lizzy on their latest 45, *Do Anything You Want To*. Very simple formula rock. They should check out disco. Look what it did for Kiss.

Voyager could have a minor hit on their hands with *Halfway Hotel*. It's a catchy little narrative with an interesting clip and it's getting the famed Countdown push. **The Charlie Daniels Band** could also pick up some airplay with the country fiddle based tongue in cheek *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*. **The Skids** will not pick up airplay with *Masquerade* because it's too, uh, new wave? Not a bad little song though although as with the Police, the chorussing tends to go on a bit. Wizard have re-released *Really Free* by **John Otway** and **Wild Willy Barrett**, which was a hit last year in the U.K. I don't think things have changed that much since it was first released so it's probably going to stiff again. Which is a pity since it is a super little ditty. Too English and too whacky for here? It would be nice to think it wasn't.

And finally, the song that should be adopted as the official theme song of both the Labour and Liberal Parties for the forthcoming South Australian elections. Yes, readers, I'm talking about that plaintive, pulsating pastoral ditty, *The Lost Sheep*, by **Adrian Mumsey**. Baaaaaa!!! (Beauty Des.) Yawn.

— Donald Robertson

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would've felt rather bemused, to say the least. If they'd witnessed Whirlyworld's development (between last October, when the single was recorded, and now), they might've found it easier coming to terms with them, but the way things stand, the audience is immediately confronted with a group playing some very esoteric and ultimately inaccessible music.

Ironically enough, Whirlyworld's best moments on stage were with their older songs — like *Win or Lose*, which Ollie originally wrote before he joined the Young Charlatans — and these were the ones that drew the best audience reaction. Inexplicably, the group has dropped these songs — Ollie maintains they've been put into 'cold storage' until Whirlyworld have the opportunity to record them for an album — and that'll probably do nothing but make them more remote.

Ollie's songwriting has 'progressed' to the point where it's not only almost beyond their audiences, but also the group itself. This isn't a problem Whirlyworld can't resolve within themselves — it's just a matter of time — but it does mean that they should be making concessions to their audience — by covering their old, as well as new, material — just so that they too can 'catch up'.

Surely Whirlyworld mustn't regress, but at the same time they can't afford to over-step the mark. What's called for, I suppose, is discretion, but unfortunately that's a word that doesn't seem to enter Ollie's vocabulary. Hopefully their second single will do something to lessen the gap between their ambition, their abilities, and their audience.

Because although Whirlyworld are one of the best groups in this country, with the potential to be even better, unless they soon accept the realities of 'survival' they'll face the very real possibility of simply being left out in the cold.

And that will be a loss to us all.

— Clinton Walker

umbrella