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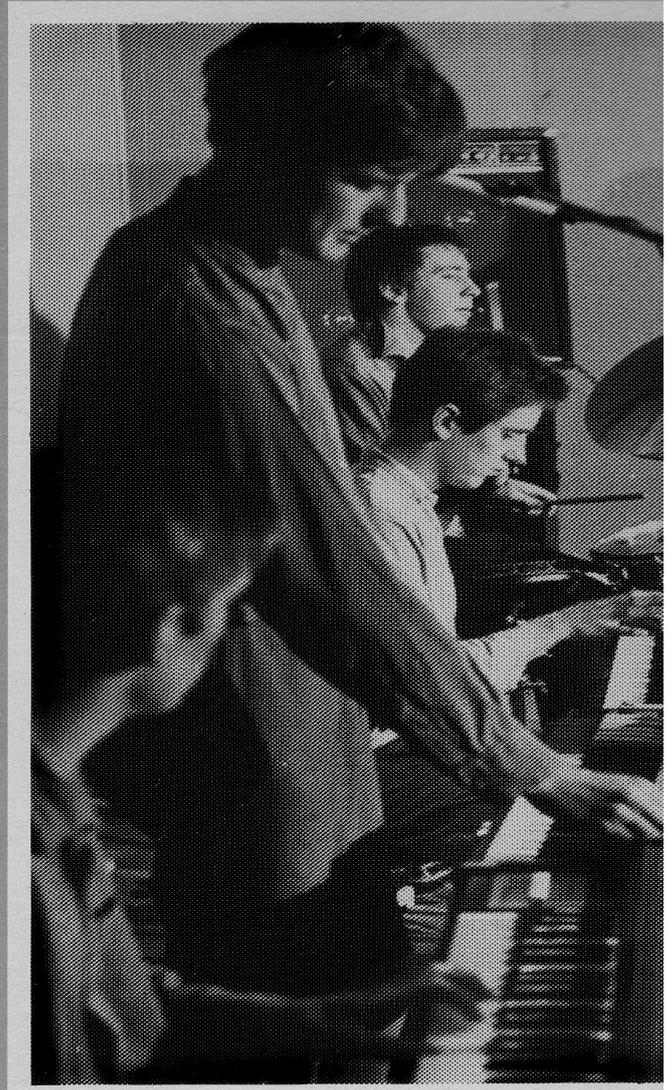
ell, back then - just after the initial outburst of punk - the imperative, however naive, was to progress, to break the boundaries, experiment ... test, test ...

If punk had purged the excess and irrelevance of mid-Seventies rock by going back to basics, returning to what was essentially the traditional tenets of classical rock 'n' roll, the new guard was self-conscious enough to want to take giant leaps forward from there. To propel rock into the future. And a good place to start it, it seemed, was to supersede some of the traditional instrumentation - get rid of the guitars (those vile phallic symbols) and bring in the Synths. So synthesizers became synonymous with an advancement; rock's new 'avant garde' was electronic **musik** (sic.) The object, as one trade paper put it at the time, was 'rather trying to incorporate the synthesizer into a conventional rock format, (but) trying to create its own musical context'. There were so many possibilities ...

What the great record buying public ended up with, of course, was Gary Numan, which was all the disillusionment electronic music could have asked for, but integration was inevitable. Electronic music *per se* was freed of a burden; so that now we may have Tears For Fears or Psuedo Echo, but we also have Laurie Anderson and New Order. If it was Kraftwerk who, in the early Seventies, engendered an electronic thrust in rock, it was the post-punk electronic outfits of the late Seventies that assumed the initiative, extending it and paying the way for the broad acceptance of electronics in the Eighties (there's not many records made nowadays **without** an electronic component).

A great breakthrough that bands like Cabaret Voltaire and Suicide made was to demystify electronics. Thanks to the do-it-yourself ethos they shared with punk, they made do with a minimum of technology, and even technique, bringing electronics back down to earth and within everyone's reach.

Alongside Cabaret Voltaire and Suicide, Melbourne-based band Whirlywird were also pioneers in the field, but like many an unsung pioneer their achievements remain unrecognised. In a career that lasted barely three years between 1978 and 1980, Whirlywird released only two records, both EPs on the Missing Link label, and as prophets do, if they made little commercial impact then, their influence can still be felt today. Whirlywird began life as an almost-orchestral, yet still hard-edged, all-



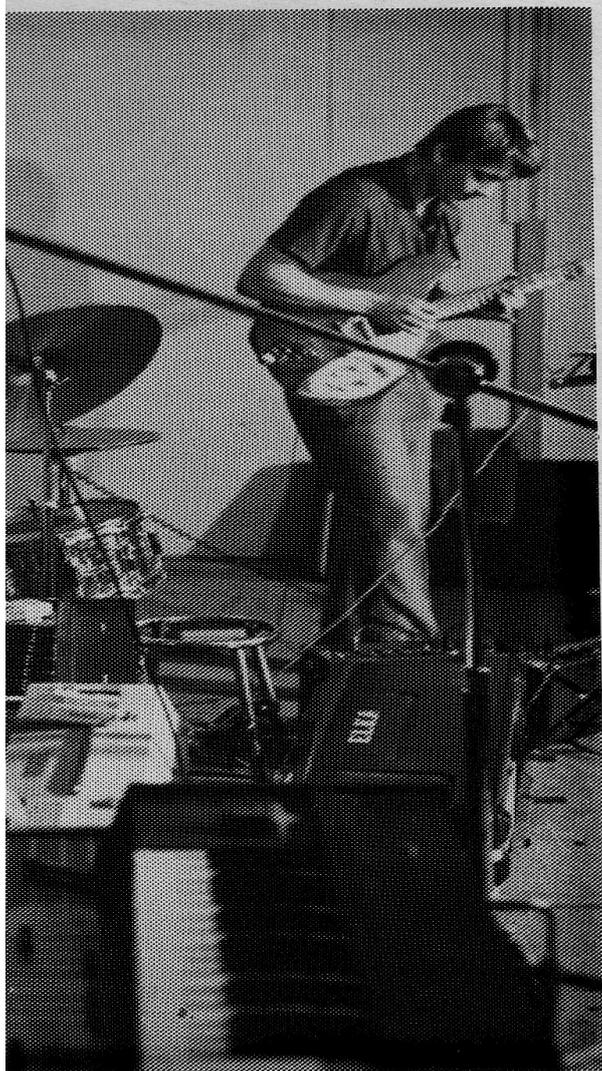
WHIRLY

electronic ensemble evolving into an all-encompassing almost-free-from aggregation by their end.

In stressing Whirlywird's innovations, however, it's easy to overlook what is perhaps their deeper significance - the **effect** of their muse - their supreme emotionalism, the philosophy of their position, for which elements such as electronics and structural divergences were, of course, merely **means**.

To begin with, Ollie Olsen, who fronted the group, was always a great songwriter; one possessed of vision, and the ear to steer it in the right direction. Moreover - and this is a bonus - as a singer too, Ollie was nothing short of magnificent; able to wring every drop of blood, sweat and tears out of every song he sang. But if Ollie was wilfully perverse

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you contained in these grooves, but it's gratifying for me to come back to these tracks and find I still feel much the same way about them, that they still wield the same power. No, to me, this music has lost none of its authority.

Ollie Olsen, like John Murphy, like myself, was a product of the punk generation (in fact he still calls himself a punk, a true punk). In 1976, as a guitarist, Ollie formed one of the first punky crews seen in Melbourne, The Reals, who on occasion shared the bill at suburban dance halls with The Boys Next Door. The Reals would eventually mutate into Suicide-stable band The Negatives, but before that Ollie had become dissatisfied with their exclusively savage, guitar-based attack and left, The Young Charlatans were awaiting him.

The Young Charlatans were what might be called a seminal super-group, boasting the membership of, as well as Ollie, guitarist Rowland Howard (later of The Boys Next Door/Birthday Party), drummer Jeffrey Wegener (later a Laughing Clown), and bassist Janine Hall (later of The Saints). But if the volatile Charlatans were an extraordinary outfit - closer, earlier, to art - punk than almost anybody - their greater potential went unfulfilled. After a very brief, stormy existence, the band inevitably imploded. But by then, Ollie had met John Murphy. Murphy was manning the kit for another early Melbourne punk band, NEWS, but his ambitions went beyond their Ramones-plus-politics routine, and it happened that they coincided with Ollie's. So the pair set to mounting Whirlywird ...

Their stated priority, from the outset, was to go electronic, determined as they were to take flight from the sonic limitations of the conventional, guitar-based rock format. So the first Whirlywird to see the dim of the rehearsal room, upstairs at Ollie's house in Collingwood, was completed by two 'keyboardists', who got credited with 'electronics', Andrew Duffield and Simon Smith (Ollie too, by this point, had abandoned guitar in favour of 'electronics'), plus 'electrical' guitarist Dean Richards. Duffield would, of course, later join The Models and Dean Richards went on to front a couple of cult combos Equal Local and then the Hot Half Hour.

Call it stage-fright, paranoia or whatever you will, Whirlywird refused to play live; but they did rehearse religiously. Experimenting all the time, while Ollie was also always soul-searching. But the band did record, and the best results were

(continued on the back)

WIRLD

or obscure, this was all that kept him going and Whirlywird surging forth - the exploration of uncharted territory, discovering new reserves, a larger range of expressive scope.

Ollie only ever wanted a band that allowed for an internal rapport to give full vent to his spleen. So the importance of Ollie's faithful partner-in-crime, drummer John Murphy cannot be underestimated. Murphy was a terrifically imaginative, dynamic percussionist whose playing underlined everything Whirlywird did.

Whirlywird pushed themselves, realising a musical vision unlike any before ... a constantly shifting soundscape whose only constants were its level of intensity and its startling adventurousness.

You don't have to take my word for it because the proof is here before

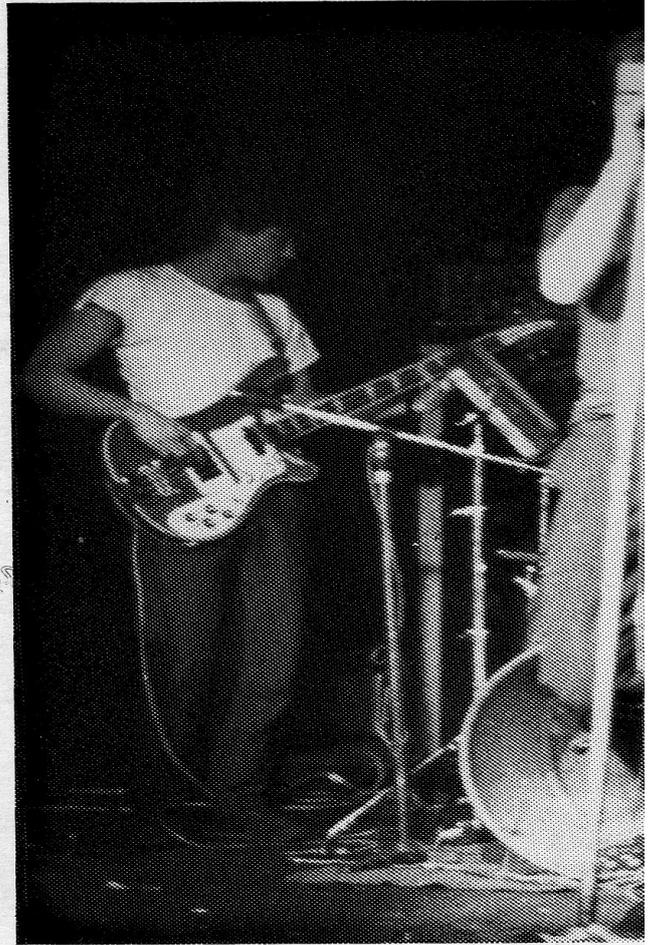
released, late in 1978, as Whirly-wirld's eponymously titled debut EP. The EP contained three tracks, 'Window To The World', 'Moto', 'Signals'. Listen to them; remember this was 1978, the same years as the first offerings from Cabaret Voltaire, The Human League and Throbbing Gristle. The Pop Group, Suicide and the New York No Wave wouldn't be heard for a while yet.

Whirlywird made their live debut at The Crystal Ballroom the following year, 1979, by which time Andrew Duffield had been replaced by Philip Jackson (later Dean Richards' collaborator). Already they were altered. It was a more openly structured sound. If the EP was impressive, on stage Whirlywird could at times inspire awe.

Whirlywird would go on to play only 14 gigs in their entire career (Ollie recently reminded me), but the entity itself was obsessed with **making** music. Gradually the personnel within the band changed, in accordance with a change in direction. Richards, Jackson and Smith departed; Arnie Hanna came in on guitar, and Greg Sun on bass - two guitars. Yet John Murphy belted an array of percussion devices, natural, electronic or otherwise. There were tapes, and Ollie even tackled sax as well as keyboards. This was the era of the "Little Bands" with whom Whirlywird arose as an almost freeform affray - spontaneous and powerful - often awesome still - an engulfing and original experience.

This incarnation of the band put down a number of tracks at York Street Studios in December 1979. Four tracks came out on a 12" EP again entitled **'Whirlywird'** - they were 'Big Gun Action', 'Boys of the Badlands', 'Red River', 'Win/Lose'. The EP also contained bonus singles, 'Sextronics' and 'Eyebrows Still Shaved'. Around that time, the exodus from Melbourne began. The Birthday Party left for London. I came to Sydney, where I saw Whirlywird put in an almighty farewell performance at Rags with The Laughing Clowns, before leaving for London themselves.

Unlike The Birthday Party however, Whirlywird didn't go on to get their just desserts. Ollie and John Murphy took on new guises, first as The Beast Apparel, then Hugo Klang, and they played a handful of gigs in England, even recorded a single, 'Beat Up The Old Shack', which was released in Australia on Prince Melon Records, but eventually bitterness and neglect saw to their demise. By 1984, both Ollie and John, disillusioned, had returned to Australia. Still in search of the perfect beat though, they



assembled The Orchestra of Skin and Bone with a renewed enthusiasm, and now this even more unpromising exercise has finally borne fruit with the 1986 release of a debut album on Major Records.

Ollie Olsen was also enlisted to oversee the soundtrack of the second feature film by Richard Lowenstein called **"Dogs In Space"**. Starring Michael Hutchence of INXS, Dogs In Space looks back at the scene and the music in Melbourne in the late Seventies. One great Whirlywird song (one among many), 'Rooms For The Memory', has been recorded for the film, with Hutchence on vocals, and if it becomes a 'hit', which it could and should, it will stand as a testament to the fact that Whirlywird were simply **ahead of their time**.

It's the least we can do to pay them belated credit now, and the lesson that this teaches us is that it would be foolish to again ignore, this time around, the activities of the maverick Olsen/Murphy union.

CLINTON WALKER - March 1986.

WORLD



WHIRLYWORLD

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|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Window To The World | Ollie Olsen - Vocal (all tracks) |
| 2. Moto | - Electronics (5, 6, 7, 8, 9) |
| 3. Signals | Dean Richards - Guitar (1, 2, 3, 4) |
| 4. Eyebrows Still Shaved | Simon Smith - Electronics (1, 2, 3) |
| 5. Sextronics | Andrew Duffield - Electronics (1, 2, 3) |
| 6. Big Gun Action | Philip Jackson - Electronics (4) |
| 7. Boys Of The Badlands | Arnie Hanna - Guitar (5, 6, 7, 8, 9) |
| 8. Red River | Greg Sun - Bass (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) |
| 9. Win/Lose | John Murphy - Drums & Electronics (all tracks) |

Tracks 1, 2 and 3 recorded at M & R Stone Studios 28-10-1978

Track 4 recorded at Crystal Clear 2-10-1979

Tracks 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 recorded at York Street Studios Nov. 1979 to Jan. 1980

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Clinton Walker

Back Cover Photo:

Alan Bamford

Layout: Mick Bowden

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PO Box 5159AA
GPO Melbourne
Australia 3001