

Flat City Sounds: The Christchurch Music Scene

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The importance of locality in music making is a subject which has been explored increasingly in popular music studies. In his essay "(Dis)located? Rhetoric, Politics, Meaning and the Locality", John Street (1995) breaks down the manifestations of locality in music making into five categories: industrial base, social experience, aesthetic perspective, political experience, community and scene. Scene, as defined by Will Straw (1991), refers to "that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilisation." It can be argued that place-consciousness is an important source of musical identity, and although there are no clear or direct links between music and locality, local music practices, venues, recording studios, record labels and music retail and media outlets are important in providing indicators of community and difference, as well as building links with a global music culture.

This paper examines the modalities of (predominantly rock) music making in Christchurch, a flat, green and very English South Island New Zealand city with a high youth suicide rate, which often suffers an inferiority complex in relation to its more internationally acclaimed southern neighbour Dunedin. A brief history of rock music in Christchurch will be given, with some focus on key figures such as Bill Direen, Roy Montgomery, Chants R&B, the Bats and the Renderers, the Failsafe record label, music venues and record stores, and references to Christchurch in various Kiwi rock songs. It will be argued that the predominantly sedate, bland, conservative and British university town image of Christchurch hides an underbelly of angst, revolt and antagonism which frequently finds expression through music.

References:

Will Straw (1991) "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," in Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (eds) *The Subcultures Reader*, London, Routledge, 1996.

John Street(1995) "(Dis)located? Rhetoric, Politics, Meaning and the Locality," in Will Straw et al (eds.) *Popular Music - Style and Identity*, Montreal.

FLAT CITY SOUNDS: TOWARDS A CARTOGRAPHY OF THE CHRISTCHURCH MUSIC SCENE

"Few people seem to know it, and it probably doesn't matter, now, anyway, but Christchurch was never supposed to happen. The ground on which it was built was no ideal piece of real estate ... But the practicalities of building on (Lyttleton's) precipitous slopes, and the lack of a reliable local fresh water supply in the crucial town-site area, plus, one supposes, the eternal cussedness of human-kind, sent the newly-arrived settlers over the hill and down to the swampy wilderness, where at least the ground was flat. They drained the swamps, tamed the streams, barbered their banks, laid out the streets four-square, with just enough illogicalities and diagonal meanderings to humanise the planners' geometric precision, and ... called this new city after the Oxford college of their leader, John Robert Godley ... turn(ing) a swampy, scrub-covered waste into an approximation of an English cathedral town, and a wilderness into something not too far distant from an English county or a corner of the Scottish Highlands ... "

Errol Brathwaite (1988) *Christchurch, North and Mid Canterbury*, Wellington, GP Books, 14.

Churches. Townships with churches
I'm counting bibles, counting pews
Cathedrals. Cities with cathedrals
Stained glass windows are my view
Christchurch. In Cashel St. I wait
Together we will be, one day
Swampsides. Pukekos skirt swampsides
Schooldays diesel into the dust
Pavements. Now people pace pavements
Cursory glances catch-call a bus
Christchurch. In Cashel St, I wait
Together we will be, together one day

The Dance Exponents, "Christchurch (In Cashel St. I Wait)", 1985

"Back in Christchurch, I sat in my hotel room, staring at my feet. I watched a New Zealand version of *This Is Your Life*, paying tribute to a middle-aged Maori singer, and when the man wept openly at seeing his family traipse into the studio, I became so depressed I drank most of the mini bar. ... I called my wife and told her what an awful time I was having. We both cried, She was miserable, she said. I said, So was I! ...

The next day, Sunday, still feeling morbid and stunned by the sunny emptiness and indifference and the almost indescribable boredom of sitting alone in front of a fan heater ... in a transported culture ... the most terrible aspect of which was that the New Zealanders themselves did not seem to know what was happening to them in their decline - there stole upon me the sort of misery that induces people in crummy hotel rooms to make sure the cap is on the toothpaste and the faucet is turned off, and then they kill themselves, trying not to make too much of a mess.

Get me out of here, I thought. And I headed for the wilderness."

Paul Theroux (1992) *The Happy Isles of Oceania: Paddling the Pacific*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 9-10.

Christchurch : A Good Place to Escape From

Paul Theroux's sentiments about Christchurch as a site of "transported culture" and "decline" with an overwhelming sense of isolation, alienation and depression for the accidental tourist are to a certain extent reflected in the city's role in New Zealand's popular musical history. This traditionally very prim, quiet, conservative English city, which was founded by four ship-loads of "Canterbury pilgrims", whose descendants still enjoy some of the status of a social elite (McMillan 1992: 255), has consistently proved to be a good place to escape from for musicians wanting to make a mark nationally or internationally. Likewise Brathwaite's portrayal of an accidental, fragile and geometrical neo-Gothic English cathedral city that "was never supposed to happen," built over a swampy wilderness, reflects a uneasy tension between an imposed colonial social order and an underlying sense of chaos which can also be found in the city's music. The nationally popular 1980s pop group Dance Exponents' portrayal of the city as a place of waiting, yearning and loneliness, over-run with churches, Calvinist attitudes and suspicious passers-by reflects a mood of melancholy resignation echoed in other songs produced from the experiences of living in the city.

Often referred to as "Flat City" or the "Garden City", and with a population of 307,000 (McMillan 1992), Christchurch suffers something of an inferiority complex in relation to the other major cities in New Zealand. Auckland ("Queen City") has always been the metropolitan and Polynesian center of New Zealand (see Mitchell 1995), with almost a third of the country's 3,500,000 inhabitants, and 17.7 percent of its Maori and Pacific Islander population, compared to 4.4 percent in Christchurch. (Pett 1994:28) Auckland is also the national music and entertainment capital, where most successful musicians from Christchurch have usually relocated before attempting a career in Australia, the UK or the USA. Wellington ("Windy City") is the official political (and some would say cultural) capital, and in musical terms the "Dunedin sound" has in the past two decades become associated with the Flying Nun, Xpressway and IMD record labels and all that is innovative and off-beat in Kiwi pop, rock and experimental noise music. As Colin McLeay has stated in his cultural geography of the "Dunedin sound", "Whether considered for its accuracy or its invisibility, the Dunedin sound is continuously equated with the home of authenticity in New Zealand rock music." (1994, 43) The products of the "Dunedin sound" have been increasingly released offshore on independent labels in the USA, and rapidly gained a high degree of subcultural capital through the US-based NZPOP and DroneOn internet listserves and fanzines such as *Popwatch*, *Magnet*, *CMJ* and *Forced Exposure* (see Stahl 1997, and Mitchell 1997).

To make matters worse, Flying Nun, New Zealand's most internationally successful independent label, was originally founded in Christchurch in 1981 by Roger Shepherd, a record store manager, but soon began to develop a much closer association with Dunedin bands and musicians. In 1988 Flying Nun relocated to Auckland, as Christchurch lacked the industrial infrastructure to support a label which was expanding into the country's most important outlet for independent rock music. James Guthrie's internet web site "Bartleby's Christchurch Music Page" begins with a reference to this transferral of support to Dunedin by Flying Nun:

Christchurch bands perhaps don't have the same profile as our southern friends in Dunedin. The boost Flying Nun gave to that scene a decade or so ago has never really been felt here, and no other label has tried to rally together the Christchurch scene into a collective force ... But, even without the encouragement of a label with world-wide renown, local musicians have still persevered in getting their sound out to the masses. The Bats, JPSE, Pumpkinhead, Loves Ugly Children and the Exponents have all come out of Christchurch, and are all excellent examples of the diversity and depth of the city's music. (Guthrie 1995)

Guthrie, who plays bass guitar in the jangly Christchurch pop-rock group Cinematic (whose self-titled 1994 release was recorded and produced in Wellington and released on Wellington independent label Bodega) presents an alphabetical index of 57 Christchurch bands, of whom only four (The Bats, JPS Experience, Loves Ugly Children, Pumpkinhead) have had any prominent national or international profile, and only two of these still survive. (Of those, Loves Ugly Children have translocated to Auckland, and although three of the four members of the Bats are still based in Christchurch, their singer-songwriter, Robert Scott, who shares duties in the Clean, lives in Dunedin.) While Dunedin's extreme isolation more than 350 kilometres south of Christchurch has contributed to its international reputation as a strong and close-knit musical community producing a high degree of distinctive and original rock and experimental noise music, Christchurch appears to have suffered the more extreme isolation born of transience and neglect.

Rock Music, Locality and Identity

The importance of locality in music making is a subject which has been explored increasingly in popular music studies. In his essay "(Dis)located? Rhetoric, Politics, Meaning and the Locality," John Street (1995) breaks down manifestations of locality in music making into six categories: industrial base, social experience, aesthetic perspective, political experience, community and scene. Scene, as defined by Will Straw, lacks the interaction between contemporary musical practice and musical heritage which defines a music community, but relates to "that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilisation." (1996:494) Place-consciousness, Street argues, derives from the "roots" rhetoric of folk music and blues, and has manifested itself particularly since the 1980s in the rhetoric of rap and indie rock music, in relation to both musical infrastructure and musical identity. It also intersects with the reclaiming of the local in popular music as a roots experience to be valued in the face of a perceived global homogenization process. But as Street argues, local musical practices continually interact with national and transnational ones, in an ongoing process in which the local and the

global are intertwined. While questioning whether locality affects the meaning of music, Street notes that it is important in terms of the politics and ideologies connected with local music venues, which "constitute a form of enfranchisement, a way of getting recognition for the place in which people live." (260)

Historically, place-consciousness has been a vitally important source of popular musical identity, distinction and difference (eg in the cases of New Orleans, Nashville, Liverpool, Manchester, Seattle, Compton, etc.). Although there may often be no clear or direct links between music and locality in terms of defining any particular regional "sound," (except, perhaps, when it involves a particular producer or recording studio) local music practices, venues, recording studios, record labels and music retail and media outlets are crucially important in providing indicators of local music scenes, as well as in constructing local links with a global music culture. In an essay entitled "Music and Identity" (1996) Simon Frith has argued, in a way which impinges directly on the relation between music and locality, that it is important to regard music as producing rather than reflecting an idealised individual and social identity which is often linked to locality :

the issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience - a musical experience, an aesthetic experience - that we can only make sense of by *taking on* both a subjective and a collective identity. ... identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; ... our experience of music - of music making and music listening - is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*. Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. (1996:109)

What follows is an outsider's attempt to reconstruct a cartography of the city of Christchurch as what Frith describes as "a web of identities" (121) through its various formations of rock, pop, dance and rap music, drawing on ethical and aesthetic histories of musicians, venues, recording studios, record labels and media outlets in order to chronicle some of the mobile processes of identity formation which have occurred in particular moments of the city's history.

1950s Southern Gothic: Picnicking with the Devil

The international success of Peter Jackson's 1994 film *Heavenly Creatures*, about two teenaged Christchurch schoolgirls involved in an "unhealthy friendship" who in 1954 hit the mother of one of them 45 times with half a brick in a stocking, battering her to death, brought back ugly memories to both the perpetrators of the crime, Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker, and to a city which had by and large successfully managed to conceal a dark secret for 40 years. In his tourist guide to Christchurch, Brathwaite characterises the sedate botanic site of the murder, Victoria Park in the Cashmere Hills on the outskirts of the city, a scenic reserve since 1883, without any hint of its dark history:

Victoria Park is immensely popular as a picnic ground. It is renowned for its stands of exotic conifers and native bush, and its rock gardens are famous, with subalpine plants along the eastern face, and on the western face a remarkable and beautiful collection of rather more tender trees and shrubs from such regions as Australia, the Mediterranean, South Africa and Mexico. (1988:41)

But to many residents of Christchurch this park with its exotic fauna has been out of bounds, as it will always be associated with a brutal and scandalous "moider" (as Parker described it in her journal) which brought unwelcome international attention to the city. Australian journalists Tom Gurr and H.H.Cox, the authors of *Obsession*, a fictionalised potboiler based on the Parker-Hulme trial, described the murder as

the crime of this era. Nothing like it had happened in the world since the famous "intellectual murder" by the university students, Leopold and Loeb, in Chicago thirty years earlier. ...

The cathedral city of Christchurch, so polite and urbane, so primly English, reeled back from the horror of the murder. How could this, the world's most appalling essay in personal violence for thirty years, happen in its midst? (1960:5, 114)

It is no coincidence that, like Gurr and Cox's book, both dramatisations of the Parker-Hulme murder, in which the two girls invented their own shared imaginary world inhabited by mythological characters culled from Medieval literary texts, Hollywood movies and popular music, and fuelled by recordings of operatic

arias by Mario Lanza, have been by outsiders. Splatter-horror film director Jackson and his wife, *Heavenly Creatures* co-screenwriter, Frances Walsh, are both based in Wellington, as is former rock pianist Peter Dament, the composer of the film's classical orchestral soundtrack, which Jackson has described as a "rich and joyful"(1994) evocation of Parker and Hulme's imaginary "Fourth World, an absolute paradise of music, art and pure enjoyment".

The pre-credit opening sequence of *Heavenly Creatures* shows the genteel Englishness of Christchurch in the 1950s, portrayed as "the city of plains" in a tourist documentary of the period, *Welcome to Christchurch*, which focuses on the city's cathedral, Canterbury University, Canterbury Girls' School, cricket in Hagley park, boat races down the River Avon, spring daffodils and the city's numerous "gay gardens." This is then brutally interrupted by an insistent buzzing noise, accompanying a nightmarish steadycam sequence in which the two girls, their clothes splattered with blood, flee screaming from the scene of the crime. Weaving arias by Mario Lanza into the texture of its narrative, the film continually uses music in conjunction with Christchurch's elegant park and garden landscapes, as well as as a dramatic evocation of mood, in portraying the two girls positively and sympathetically and exposing the stuffy provincial repressiveness of their environment.

Heavenly Creatures was preceded by *Daughters of Heaven*, a play about Parker and Hulme by US-born playwright Michelanne Forster first performed at the Court Theatre in Christchurch in 1991. Its author described the play as

the story of Christchurch in 1954, restrained and nice with implicit attitudes about class and gender suddenly being confronted with evil. On the outskirts of the city's level lawns and daffodil gardens two girls picnic with the devil. (1992:11)

During her research for the play, Forster found that "the story still had the power to wound" (10) and was surprised at the intensity of people's memories of the murder and their reluctance to talk about it. The play's director, Elric Hooper, who was a first year university student in Christchurch at the time of the murder, has recounted the controversy and accusations of bad taste which the play stirred up: "It was as if the story was still the personal and private possession of even those who had even the slightest contact with the events." (8) Hooper regards the murder and subsequent trial as signalling his "loss of provincial innocence and the beginning of disillusion." (7) In his commentary on the Parker-Hulme murder in his insightful book about New Zealand teenagers in the 1950, *All Shoop Up*, Redmer Yska makes similarly far-reaching claims in assessing the significance of the Parker-Hulme murder as marking "a turning point in relations between young and old in the fifties":

Because the newspaper coverage concentrated so heavily on the ages and gender of the "dirty-minded" murderesses, the Parker/Hulme tragedy had repercussions for New Zealand adolescents of both sexes. Attitudes hardened among adults that the postwar generation of so-called "teenagers" were an irredeemable lot - spoiled, ungrateful and not to be trusted. Beyond the horror of the murder, what really rankled was that the girls had asserted their separateness from the adult world. (1993: 63)

Such assertions of separate imaginary worlds nourished by the "transported cultures" of US and British popular musical, literary and cinematic influences were particularly widespread amongst disaffected youth in the stagnant, provincial and anglophile atmosphere of New Zealand in the 1950s. And nowhere did this stagnant provinciality assert itself more strongly than in the leafy parks and gardens and neat networks of streets dotted with churches in Christchurch.

In his article about the Christchurch music scene from 1978 to 1991, guitarist Roy Montgomery, a major if largely uncredited figure in the scene, speculates about the effect of *Heavenly Creatures* on Christchurch's international image, commenting that "it will strike most people as a severely pretentious sort of place, full of anally retentive inhabitants who occasionally go berserk." (1995: 49) Montgomery finds this impression justified to a certain extent, portraying the city as the most Eurocentric in New Zealand, largely due to "the relative absence of Maori, Polynesian, Asian and Eastern European peoples" and the strong presence of a "middle and upper class elite who inhabit certain parts of the city." This elite, he claims, even carried over into the Christchurch punk rock scene in the late 1970s, where he claimed to be the only person from a state (ie. council) house area, and where "most hipsters came from two-parent families living in relatively good, often exclusive, neighbourhoods." (49) Montgomery draws class analogies between Christchurch and Boston and Vancouver, while in Australia comparisons are often made with Adelaide, "the city of churches," which has similarly dark, criminal undercurrents.

Montgomery's portrayal of a music scene dominated by a middle and upper-class elite was echoed by

musician and commentator Grant McDonagh in a feature on the Christchurch music scene of the following decade by New Zealand national music monthly *Rip It Up* in 1995, who perceived

two distinct cities. There's the West Side, Fendalton, Riccarton, places like that, and then there's the East side, with some of the poorest parts of the country. There's two quite distinctive cultures. There's a middle class, cum successful yuppie-oriented society. Then there's a real down and out working class society. There's two distinct kinds of music associated with those two things. It seems to me that Christchurch goes through cycles, whereby one has the upper hand at different times. For the past two to three years it's been the up-market music, and the whole things has been orientated toward that, like the *War of the Bands*, *Goodthings* and *Avalanche* (compilations of Christchurch bands). They're all sort of middle to upper class kids, with flash amplifiers, playing (a) really safe kind of pop music.' (in Pett 1995:12)

Although McDonagh's comments drew letters of protest from musicians and roadies claiming poverty and the pursuit of musical quality in the following issue of *Rip It Up*, with one accusing him of "deluded stereotyping," (1995:11) the student-dominated nature of the Christchurch music scene inevitably leads to related class assumptions.

The Parker-Hulme case and its dramatic representations can be seen as illustrations that the predominantly sedate, bland, quiet, elitist and conservative university town image of Christchurch hides an alternative culture of alienation and antagonism which has sometimes found expression through what could be described as the "Southern Gothic" aspects of Christchurch-based music. In a city which, according to a US news item reported on the NZPOP internet listserve in 1996, "had something like the fifth highest depression rate for any worldwide city, something like 11.8%," the often morbid, alcohol-drenched and melancholy songs of country-noir group The Renderers provide a fitting soundtrack, especially their keynote song "I Hear the Devil Calling Me" which became the title of an Xpressway compilation of New Zealand music in 1991. Reminders of this dark underside also permeate the sometimes dark, demented and skewed dance-rock songs of Flying Nun band the Terminals' 1989 album *Uncoffined* and their 1990 single "Do the Void" and "The Deadly Tango", the gloomy Satanic deathcore of Into the Void, or even the often mournfully melodic folk-pop songs of The Bats or Jay Clarkson. A more arcanelly dark subculture stems from the crazed, blitzed sounds of Ape Management and the gothic "instrumental and emotional discharge" of the more noise-oriented grind-core on the mail-order cassette label KRKRKR by Noise/Horror Collision, Coitus, Leonard Nimoy and others.

As Yska has illustrated, the moral panics about delinquent youth generated by the Parker-Hulme case in the mid-1950s were contemporaneous with those surrounding the demonised Australasian variants of the British Teddy Boys, the bodgies and widgees, with their "duck's ass" pompadour haircuts, stovepipe trousers and drape coats, ponytails, black sweaters, tight tights and reputation for gang violence. Bodgies and widgees were described in the *Australian Truth* in 1951 as "the most freakish and sinister youth movement since the old days of the razor pushers ... a fruitful field of study for psychologists, a headache for the police, a puzzle for educational authorities, and a source of amazement for the 'square.'" (in Yska 172) One of these psychologists was A.E. Manning, who published *The Bodgie: A Study in Abnormal Psychology*, based on a study of 15 bodgies in widgees in Australia and New Zealand in 1958, who, he concluded, were "social 'boils' on the body of a tense and emotional society" (in Yska, 205). And despite frequent claims that the rise of juvenile delinquency in New Zealand was due to the influence of pernicious musical and subcultural trends emanating from the USA and disrupting cosy British colonial values, the US academic David Ausubel, visiting New Zealand in 1957, proclaimed in his book *The Fern and the Tiki* that the New Zealand teenage subcultures he observed were more extreme than their counterparts in the USA:

Adolescent cultism as such is much less extreme (in the USA) than in New Zealand. In fact, there is no term in America that corresponds precisely in meaning to "bodgie," ie. a teenage cultist with a distinctive haircut and costume who frequents milkbars, is a rock and roll addict, races about on a motorcycle, tends to be sexually promiscuous, and engages sporadically in hooliganism, vandalism or other kinds of unlawful activity. (in Yska 208)

Ausubel confuses bodgies and widgees, who did not ride motorcycles, with the similarly demonised delinquent youth subculture of "milkbar cowboys", leather-clad motorcycle gangs inspired by the Marlon Brando film *The Wild One* (which had initially been banned in New Zealand in 1954). "Milkbar cowboys" got their name from the local equivalent of ice-cream soda parlours, where motorbike gangs congregated around the jukeboxes, listening to the atavistic rhythms of Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins and others, and later Auckland rock and rollers Johnny Cooper and Johnny Devlin. Through these juke boxes,

rock and roll became inscribed in New Zealand history, and its blaring sounds and exhilarating rhythms provided rallying points and focal hearths for an idealised outlaw form of youth rebellion and identity construction which ensured that these social "boils" infected the body of postwar New Zealand society. Rock and roll was also synonymous with the origins of alternative postwar youth subcultures in New Zealand, which had their own idiosyncratic manifestations in Christchurch.

Christchurch Rock and Roll Prototypes: Max Merritt and Ray Columbus

Indigenous rock and roll arrived in New Zealand in August 1955, with Johnny Cooper, the "Maori cowboy," a country and western singer who was persuaded to record his own version of Bill Haley's song in Auckland, which Dix claims was "the first rock and roll recording to be made in New Zealand and probably the first rock and roll recording made outside the USA." (1989:16) Christchurch was to produce its own Maori rock and roll singer-songwriter, Peter Lewis, in 1960, backed by local Maori group Martin Winiata and his Moonmen. According to Dix, Lewis' frenetic rock and roll homage to local "Kiwi rhythm," "Four City Rock," was "arguably the best local recording of 1961." (39) But prior to Lewis' brief, Eddie Cochran-influenced career, Christchurch had already produced two of New Zealand's most durable and prominent rock and roll bands, Max Merritt and the Meteors and Ray Columbus and the Invaders.

Merritt's band emerged in the mid 1950s, playing first in a teenage band at a youth club his parents opened for him, and later in a Christchurch dancehall venue called the Teenage Club. His first foray into the local charts was in 1958 with a humorous song called "Get a Haircut." (G. Baker 1991) Initially inspired by Bill Haley and the Comets (hence "the Meteors"), Max Merritt and the Meteors began to play versions of obscure imported US rhythm and blues releases brought to them by US servicemen stationed in Christchurch as part of Operation Deep Freeze, which was set up after the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959. Merritt and the Meteors were the obvious choice as support act for legendary Australian rocker Johnny O'Keefe when he played in Christchurch in 1959, and according to Dix, "Max and the Boys stole the show every night," (32) although this was no doubt due as much to local pride as any perceived superior musical prowess and ability. After they returned from recording a series of songs in Wellington, the Meteors' popularity in Christchurch increased even further, and in Dix's words, "Max Merritt and his Meteors entered the '60s as a Christchurch institution." (33)

During the Meteors' residency at the Teenage Club, Merritt was approached by Ray Columbus and his fledgling quartet for a gig, but as Dix puts it, Merritt "had the Christchurch scene stitched up" (33) and asserted his local power and cultural capital by borrowing members of Columbus's group on occasions, permanently appropriating Maori multi-instrumentalist Billy Karaitiana (aka Billy Kristian). Columbus eventually got his break after he stood in for the lead singer of a rather conventional dance band called the Downbeats at Sid Hollis' Ballroom, subsequently introducing a repertoire of rock and roll standards, and gaining a reputation for the band as Ray and the Drifters in 1961 at a venue called the Plainsman. After Ray and the Drifters were invited to play at a US servicemen's Christmas Party at the Bird Dog Club, like Merritt before him, Columbus was introduced to the funky sounds of James Brown and Ray Charles and other exponents of US soul and rhythm and blues. As New Zealand music radio at the time relied mostly on mainstream popular hits from the USA, UK and Australia, backed up by a discreet amount of local talent performing mostly covers of suppressed local releases of US and UK hits, the more extreme African-American recording artists were largely unknown.

The fortuitous exposure to black American music which their Christchurch location afforded them, Dix comments, gave both Columbus and Merritt an advantage over other New Zealand bands (42), and both groups left the city for Auckland in December 1962, establishing a migratory trade route which many other Christchurch-based musicians would follow in the decades to come. Merritt and the Meteors consummated their local "institutional" civic status by playing a packed farewell charity concert at the upmarket Theatre Royal in Christchurch in November 1962, which was attended by the city's mayor and other dignitaries, but the group never returned there except when touring, consequently losing much of its local respect and following. When they arrived in Auckland, they found that Ray Columbus and the Invaders had stolen their thunder. Columbus' band had quickly developed a huge following, astounding Auckland audiences unfamiliar with their American R&B, rockabilly and instrumental repertoire, matching suits, Shadows-style dance routines, Fender guitars and tape echo units.

By November 1963 Ray Columbus and the Invaders were ready for the next step on their career path, Sydney, where, in the wake of the Beatles' and Rolling Stones' worldwide success, they tried to develop a British mod style in a musical environment dominated by surfie and rocker subcultures. In February 1964

their cover version of the Beatles' "I Wanna Be Your Man" (which was also covered at the same time in the UK by the Rolling Stones) became the first New Zealand recording to feature in the Australian charts. The recording followed a trend begun with Johnny Cooper of releasing local artists' versions of US and UK hits, aiming at total simulation; as Columbus later commented, the band "got as close to the Beatles' version as possible ... only carbon copies were acceptable to NZ radio at the time, in fact the group were praised as being as good as the real thing." (1985) Wearing hybrid hairstyles which reflected their dual overseas influences, Elvis-style pompadours which could be unleashed into Beatle "mop tops" when dancing on stage, the group introduced a dance called the "mod's nod." This local hybridization of influences achieved considerable popularity when in October 1964 Columbus' version of an obscure English composition "She's a Mod" topped the Australian charts and became the first international no.1 hit to be recorded in New Zealand (a record which stood until 1996, when OMC's "How Bizarre" stayed at no.1 in Australia for five weeks).

Although his group's Australasian success was established, Columbus insisted on being based in New Zealand, frequently returning to Christchurch, and as a result the band was unable to consolidate its Australasian status. Their career peak came in early 1965, when they toured Australia and New Zealand with the Rolling Stones, the New Beats and Roy Orbison - an oddly heterogeneous line-up which reflected the geographical and economic hardships involved in enticing US and UK artists to tour Australasia in the 1950s and 1960s. In July 1965 Ray Columbus and the Invaders split up, two of the group's members immediately joining Max Merritt and the Meteors, who were to soldier on through more than 20 different formations. Columbus later spent two years in San Francisco with his US-born wife (the band had been refused by the US Musicians' Union on previous attempts to go to the USA) as a solo artist, releasing 12 singles, some with a band called the Art Collection, and forming a record and publishing company. (see J. Baker 1995) He subsequently returned to Auckland in 1968 and began working in television and as a music journalist.

Max Merritt and the Meteors had had a much tougher time establishing themselves in Auckland, but after they toured Australia in 1965 with the Rolling Stones and the Searchers they were able to establish themselves in Sydney. By then, as Australian rock music historian Glenn A. Baker has commented, "Armed with a half dozen years of solid experience in New Zealand, Max could dish out surf instrumentals, Merseybeat, r&b or rock and roll at call." (1991) The "live jukebox" function that most Australian and New Zealand rock bands fulfilled from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, and which continued into the 1980s and 1990s in the form of "covers bands", also carried over into their recording output. Merritt went on to become something of a legendary figure in the New Zealand and Australian music industry after staying in the business for more than twenty years and establishing himself on three continents. In 1967 the group moved from Sydney to Melbourne, which was by then considered to be Australia's rock music capital, and by 1968 Merritt had become, according to Dix, "Australia's undisputed King of Soul." (53) The group recorded an album in 1969 which Glenn A. Baker regarded as "easily the most impressive created in Australia to that point." (1991) In 1971 they flew to London, eventually becoming part of the pub rock scene there (which included Brindsley Schwartz, Bees Make Honey, Doctor Feelgood and others). After punk rock took over from pub rock in London, the Meteors split up in 1976, and Merritt settled in Los Angeles, where he became moderately successful as a singer-songwriter, occasionally returning to Australia to perform. By this time, Christchurch was a distant memory.

Both Columbus and Merritt and their bands established themselves as prototypes of New Zealand rock music, evolving through a process of different musical styles as Anglo-American popular music idioms changed between the late 1950s and the late 1960s from US rock and roll to British beat and R&B. Like most rock and roll groups in most countries of the world at the time, while both groups wrote and recorded a considerable amount of their own material, their music always followed dominant US and British patterns, idioms and models, and their translocation to Australia tended to blur any residual New Zealand inflections. (Columbus, although an Americanophile, tended to adopt a British accent when he sang, while Merritt's gravelly, blues-like, soul-inflected vocals sounded more US-oriented.) Both groups proceeded to all but erase their Christchurch origins and assume an amorphous Australasian identity, establishing a pattern which continued with other internationally New Zealand musicians, and most notably with Split Enz in the 1980s and Crowded House in the 1990s. The small population and the lack of recording facilities and marketing infrastructures in Christchurch (and Auckland) in the 1960s forced them to migrate to musical power centers overseas. Nonetheless both groups managed to maintain something of a locally-based musical mythology, as many Christchurch rock and roll fans preserved memories of their performances, and they also provided notable reference points for subsequent Christchurch musicians.

Chants R&B: Ferocious Southern Garage

The next local rock and roll "legends" to emerge in a discontinuous Christchurch music scene were the Chants (later Chants R&B), who have been described by Glenn A. Baker as "the most ferocious garage band ever." (in J. Baker:1988). On John Baker's retrospective Flying Nun compilation of Kiwi Garage Rock from 1966 to 1969, *Wild Things*, the group emerges as the most extreme, distinctive, distorted and inventive of the 12 groups selected. Like the far more mainstream Merritt and Columbus, Chants R&B were also heavily influenced by US soul and rhythm and blues, but more directly by wild and ragged British garage blues band the Pretty Things. The Pretty Things' Australasian tour in 1965 had produced widely-publicised scenes of mayhem and debauchery which had never been witnessed before in rock music in the Antipodes and caused their drummer, Viv Prince, to be sacked on the group's return to the UK. Andrew Schmidt records that after being told about Chants R&B, the Pretty Things invited the band to join them on stage in Christchurch, but Chants R&B "declined, a little awed by the offer", subsequently becoming "in their own backyard ... as much an influence as the Pretty Things." (1995:27) This influence exerted itself in a much more alternative, abrasive and independent form than any previous Christchurch musicians.

Chants R&B became the center of a small but intense Christchurch music scene in the mid-1960s at the Stage Door Club, a dark, dank cellar (with overtones of the Cavern in Liverpool) formerly known as the King Bee Koffee Keller. This was situated at 4 Hereford Place, in an alley near the prominent Cathedral Square in the center of the city, and had been taken over by a group of actors in August 1965 who wanted to establish it as an actors' venue. The Stage Door also held folk music nights, poetry readings and theatre productions, but on weekends it belonged to Chants R&B, who played four-hour sets of wild, distorted covers by the Pretty Things, Downliners Sect, Graham Bond Organisation, Them, the Animals and other more extreme mid-1960s British R&B groups. This colonial "live jukebox" repertoire, which included almost none of the group's own material, enabled Stage Door regulars to experience a vicarious, simulated and idealized ritual re-enactment of British R&B scenes. Schmidt has re-evoked the atmosphere of these gigs as follows:

The club was often crammed to its 200 person capacity with long hairs, students, and those (Chants R&B vocalist) Mike Rudd remembers as "dissolute kids, schoolgirls, the unemployed and the unemployable."

Half the time, the crowd just stood around the stage soaking it all up, while down the back on the couches social intercourse (anything more and you went behind the curtain by the pump) bubbled to the sounds. Those who had it nipped on concealed hip flasks of sly grog. The more adventurous tried something stronger - pills, pot from the wharves or morphine sulphate lifted from lifeboats. (29)

While middle-class students no doubt predominated in Chants R&B's audience, and the Stage Door's other activities attracted an inner-city "arty" crowd, there was a strong sense of alienation, disaffection and even nihilism among the followers of the loud, "dirty", raucous and abrasive sounds of the band and their British influences. The Pretty Things' influence constituted a strongly-defined anti-aesthetic and a negative, despondent, anti-social perspective. Chants fans also had a loose aesthetic and political association with the more extreme fringes of the British mod movement of the mid 1960s, although the Pretty Things were generally considered to be too outlandish to be associated with the uniformed quasi-tribalism of the British mods.

One thing Chants fans did share with the mods was a tendency to indulge in alcoholic and other excesses. New Zealand licensing laws forced pubs to close at 6pm until 1967, when 10 o'clock closing was introduced, so alcohol was not usually available at live music gigs, providing an inducement to young rock audiences to explore adventurous and furtive avenues of procuring alcoholic or other stimulants as accessories to the abrasive, provocative and often inebriated live performances of Chants R&B. Apocryphal accounts describe the band's drummer swinging from the Stage Door's rafters, the lead guitarist nailing a feedbacking guitar to the floor at a Wellington gig (Schmidt 1995:32), and smashing up cheap guitars and tambourines under strobe lights, in emulation of the Pretty Things' live performances. (29) The intense and cramped basement atmosphere of the Stage Door also established it as almost literally an underground bunker beneath the staid parks and neo-Gothic architecture of Christchurch. Chants R&B's gigs also took place within a context of running battles between mods, rockers and surfies around Christchurch - sometimes in Cathedral Square, which has long had a reputation for violent encounters, otherwise at the appropriately-named Brighton Beach, in apparent simulation of the famous Bank Holiday weekend mod-rocker encounters in Brighton, England, in 1964 and 1965. (see Cohen

1972) In December 1996, moral panic about youth violence broke out in Christchurch when a local rocker was killed with a rifle after a group of rockers tried to invade a house containing three mods. As Schmidt records:

The trial went on for three days, shocking prim Christchurch with its disclosures of youth gang crime and teenagers drinking, having sex and fighting. As if the killing wasn't enough, the lower court depositions hearing brought scenes of new hostility ... rows of mods and rockers glared hate across the courtroom at each other. (35)

Just as the US armed forces had exerted a strong influence (musical and otherwise) on Max Merritt and the Meteors and Ray Columbus and the Invaders, the proximity of Christchurch to the port of Lyttleton brought many sailors from overseas into the city. Lyttleton itself had a raunchy reputation, particularly for a pub called the British, frequented by sailors, prostitutes, transvestites and gays, which also later became a live music venue. Dix notes that the Christchurch scene in the mid-1960s included "many of the raunchier bands" in New Zealand, such as Pete Ward's Prophets, the Next Move, Just Us, Blue Nazz and Vacant Lot, "vying with each other for the limited gigs at venues such as the Laredo, 99 Club, the Plainsman, Safari Room, Stage Door, Velvet Glove and Zodiac Lounge." (64) But Schmidt has described a pivotal Christchurch music scene in the mid-1960s as situated around Chants R&B and the Stage Door:

The history of rock music is full of such moments, when innovative sounds grab the imagination of young musicians, who want to emulate them, and fans, who want to dig the sounds live. All they need is a focus. A venue. In turn, that fusion of style, movement, music and home breeds a scene. In such a way a scene was born in Christchurch in the mid sixties. (27)

Chants R&B also introduced noise distortion to Christchurch, feeding their guitars through the Action Fuzz Box, invented in Christchurch by a local teacher, Bernie Bisphan, who detuned a transistor for the purpose and also custom-built the band's amplifiers. The group recorded their first single in 1966 at the Christchurch radio station 3YA- an incongruously respectable venue for such a wild ensemble, and evidence of the lack of recording facilities in Christchurch at the time. The single was a cover of Otis Redding's "I've Been Loving You Too Long," but it was the remarkable B side, the group's own composition, "I Want Her," which was more memorable. Chants guitarist Jim Tomlin has recalled it as "probably one of the weirdest local compositions ever heard. At times it's out of time, out of tune and instead of a guitar solo I played an Indian snake charmer's flute I'd recently been given." (Schmidt 31).

The only original song the group ever recorded, "I Want Her" is an extraordinarily eclectic mixture of skewed blues slide-guitar and Pretty Things- and Them-influenced vocals, with the Indian flute introducing a stangely incongruous psychedelic, San Francisco-style hippie flavour. The group's follow-up single, recorded in Wellington, but, like its predecessor, released on the band's manager's own Action label - a rare Christchurch-based venture - and distributed nationally by HMV, was a crazed, Yardbirds-influenced version of John Mayall's "I'm Your Witchdoctor", which went to number 12 on the national charts. Dix has described it as "a Kiwi classic with a twin-guitar attack that threatens to melt the stylus and as much treble as your ears can bear. Demolishing the John Mayall/Eric Clapton original, even those proto-punks the Pretty Things rarely burnt up vinyl like that."(64)

Although restricted to "live jukebox" gigs and recorded cover versions, Chants R&B ensured their renditions of imported songs were so wildly distinctive, skewed and distorted that they virtually made them their own. After gigging successfully in Wellington in late 1966, they followed Ray Columbus and the Invaders' trail, moving to Auckland and then Melbourne. The Stage Door was closed down shortly after they left by the Christchurch council as it contravened fire and safety regulations, but it still exists as an empty basement where rock music graffiti is still intact. According to lead vocalist, Mike Rudd, Chants R&B's broad-based repertoire of R&B and soul covers proved "too eclectic" for the more specialised interests of the different sectors of Australian audiences (Schmidt 33) and the group soon split up, Rudd basing himself in Melbourne and playing with Australian recording groups the Party Machine, Spectrum and Ariel. In 1995 Rudd summed up his group's career trajectory in retrospect, reflecting the dilemma of most Christchurch bands from the 1960s to the present: "The Chants, at our particular age, had the best shot at fame and fortune, only the machinery wasn't there to make it happen, particularly in Christchurch." (Schmidt 33.) But it is primarily for their performances as "local legends" in Christchurch at the Stage Door, preserved on vinyl and on a CD released retrospectively for posterity in 1995, that the group will be remembered as an important contributor to local and national music history, in the context of a widespread reevaluation of mid-1960s New Zealand garage bands which took place in the early 1990s.

Christchurch Overground and Underground in the 70s

Dix has described the early 1970s in New Zealand rock and roll as "the age of banality", with television beginning to play a strong role in promoting local pop music talent, which continued to follow US and UK musical trends. Amongst the few rock groups who managed to achieve some degree of mainstream success was the Christchurch-based Chaptá, who gained exposure through Christchurch television's *Moving* pop music program, and whose line-up included Nelson-born vocalist Sharon O'Neill, who had begun her career in the Christchurch folk scene in the late 1960s, and subsequently achieved some success in Australia. But an underground rock scene quickly developed throughout New Zealand, influenced by the acid rock of Cream, Pink Floyd, Hendrix, the Grateful Dead and others.

The Christchurch underground scene in the early 1970s gravitated around Aubrey's, where a rare all-Maori rock group, Butler, attracted a strong local following, before returning north to their native Rotorua in 1971. Playing a mixture of their own compositions and Led Zeppelin and Wishbone Ash covers, Butler released an album, achieved moderate success in New Zealand's northern cities, and gained television exposure on national music shows *Happen Inn*, *Popco* and *Free Ride*. Their residency at Aubrey's was taken over in late 1971 by Ticket, an Auckland group Dix calls "one of *the* great underground bands" (112) and "New Zealand's ultimate acid band." (113) Influenced by Traffic, Crazy Horse and Hendrix, live performances of Ticket's most popular song, "Dream Chant," reportedly lasted for 40-50 minutes. The group soon gravitated back to Auckland and over to Sydney and other Australian cities before breaking up in Auckland in 1972. But the fact that Ticket had been unable to get gigs in Auckland prior to their success in Christchurch suggests that, despite the city's reputation for conservativeness, Christchurch music venues could support and sustain more extreme, experimental and underground rock music than other New Zealand centers. This is confirmed by Dix, who characterizes Christchurch as "a town noted for its alternative music." (304)

Into the 80s: Punk and DIY

Auckland was undoubtedly the capital of the heavily Sex Pistols and *New Musical Express*-influenced New Zealand punk rock scene which exploded in 1977. (see Dix 1989: 205ff) But if Dix is right in his claim that punk rock had "a greater impact on Godzone (ie. New Zealand) than on any other country in the world," (205) Christchurch, which developed what Dix describes (somewhat oxymoronically) as a "healthy punk scene," (282) although an almost exclusively local one, was a not inconsiderable center of punk rock in the late 1970s. As in many other localities, the sense of freedom offered by punk rock's two-chord anti-aesthetic to aspiring performers and exhibitionists without any developed musical ability to start playing in public led to the growth of a small but strong and energetic local scene in Christchurch. Dix lists late 1970s Christchurch punk groups the Androidss, the Newtones, the Vauxhalls and the heavily Velvet-Underground-influenced Vacuum. The latter was led by Bill Direen, who began performing at the Christchurch Folk centre in the early 1970s, and was subsequently to become something of a local and national musical "legend," recording on Flying Nun before setting up his own label, South Indies. (see Walker, 1995) The chief constraints preventing these groups from any wider recognition were the shortage of local venues and recording facilities, despite "a considerable amount of low-key recording in Christchurch basements, bedrooms and bathrooms." (Dix 282) The "live jukebox" dynamic of earlier eras continued in the Christchurch punk scene, with the Androidss in particular playing a lot of Iggy Pop and Stooges numbers. Peter Arnold's recollection of the Androidss on the Kiwimusic internet listserve, linking the punk underworld of the British pub in Lyttleton with Christchurch's reputation for murders and civic pride, also indicates that the group continued the city's Southern Gothic traditions as well as the northward migratory tradition of bands of previous decades:

My God! The Androidss at the British! I remember someone souveniring an Androidss poster from a British gig which had been splattered with blood, possibly from a murder the previous night. They served Depth Charges in the downstairs bar, where pimply teens in ripped shirts rubbed shoulders with Ladies of the Night intended for the consumption of sailors. ...

The Androidss were a truly great live act. They had a killer song called "DMA." They used to cover a lot of Iggy numbers and even the Beatles' "And Your Bird Can Sing" with the lead guitar exactly right. I remember how betrayed we all felt when they uprooted to Auckland. (1995)

In his survey of Christchurch music from 1978 to 1981, "The Scene That Never Was," Roy Montgomery lists 35 active punk and post-punk bands in Christchurch between 1979 and 1981, asserting that although

this meant that "there was at least one interesting thing to go to every weekend - and sometimes two" (49) it did not constitute a scene, since "it was not something of which most people would have been consciously aware." Montgomery, whose 1994 US-recorded solo ambient guitar evocations of places near Christchurch, *Scenes from the South Island*, have earned him cult status amongst US lo-fi independent music aficionados, claims that the best local Christchurch music since the 1980s came from a very small group of musicians. He lists Bill Direen's various groups, their offshoots the Victor Dimisich Band, the Terminals and Scorched Earth Policy, and his own groups the Pin Group and Dadamah, who all played to very small audiences "of friends and relations (including the household canines), tended to have low public profiles and were generally comprised of people who were not well-adjusted socially." In 1994, in the midst of a considerable spate of recording in San Francisco and New York, Montgomery recorded two lo-fi 7 inch singles of songs from the early 1980s by the Pin Group, Victor Dimisich Band, the Shallows and Dadamah, with some assistance from Bill Direen, and with extensive liner notes. This amounted to a legitimisation of these initially obscure, originary Christchurch post-punk recordings as part of a musical canon and an acknowledgment of the quasi-mythical subcultural capital they had accrued in US indie circles over ten years. Montgomery's liner notes describe the Christchurch scene of the early 1980s as "composed principally of lapsed or collapsed Catholics, and introverted, slightly puritanical misfits ... Christchurch audiences tended to be rather reserved and tight-lipped, and bands had to find out how they fared more by osmosis, but it was a good testing ground." (1996)

Nevertheless, Montgomery argues that "Christchurch has produced the most important, if not the bulk, of what is referred to as alternative music" (49) in New Zealand, and that the music produced by these groups "will eventually eclipse much of the catchier Kiwi output of recent years." (51) He goes on to assert that despite Dunedin's "pop sensibility," "the significant sounds have come from Christchurch, or from people who have had the dubious distinction of having spent their formative years, or a part thereof, there." Citing Baiter Space, This Kind of Punishment and the Clean as examples, Montgomery attributes Christchurch's influence to its sense of cold scrutiny, lack of open acknowledgment of effort, and "a culture where dislocation and alienation of one sort of another is the norm." (51)

This insistence on alienation as a productive impetus for creativity (Montgomery cites Clinton Heylin's book *From the Velvets to the Voivoids* as an illustration of this in the US punk rock context) could be seen as part of the anti-aesthetic and nihilist politics of punk rock, but it is arguable that there is also a more historically-based, albeit discontinuous, sense of this ethos of alienation in Christchurch's rock and roll history. All the negative aspects of Christchurch and its lack of a strongly-defined musical scene, Montgomery appears to be arguing - its smallness, isolation, lack of cohesiveness, opportunity and encouragement, and sense of alienation - have contributed to produce distinctive "alternative" music, perhaps out of a sense of urgency and compulsion. Montgomery's perspective appears to be re-affirmed by the Renderers, who moved south to Dunedin after producing their first country album, which they regarded as "like a parody of American stuff" on Flying Nun, and whose subsequent albums, recorded in Dunedin and released on independent Chicago-based label Ajax, have displayed more up-tempo rock influences. Renderers singer-songwriter Maryrose Crook has stated "Coming down here (Dunedin) I've developed a total faith whereas while I was in Christchurch every time I wrote a song I'd think it might be my last," while her husband, Brian Crook, noted, "In Christchurch you felt that people were crippled by their own cynicism." (in Stapleton 1994)

Enter Flying Nun

By April 1981, when Roger Shepherd decided to set up Flying Nun records - initially as a vehicle for recording the Christchurch bands he admired - most of Christchurch's punk bands had disappeared or mutated into post-punk combinations. Nonetheless Toy Love (and later Bats) bassist Paul Kean, with his four-track, and Nightshift Studios engineer Arnold Van Bussell, with his eight track, had managed to record for posterity DIY (Do It Yourself) sessions by Christchurch groups such as the Gordons (later Baiter Space), Newtones and Playthings. Nightshift Studios was to become an important recording outlet for Flying Nun and in particular the Bats, who epitomise the guitar riff-based, melodic "jangle" sound often associated with Flying Nun and Christchurch bands (and whom Montgomery describes as "fabulously mainstream" (51)). This association appeared to be officially acknowledged in the Bats' 1993 Australian tour with The JPSE and Straitjacket Fits, which was entitled "Beyond the Jangle," transmuting to the more nationalistic "Noisyland" for the US tour which followed.

The Bats recorded their first two eps at Nightshift in 1984 and 1985 and most of their first album *Daddy's Highway* there in 1987, and returned there to self-produce their notable 1995 album *Couchmaster* after

having had unsatisfactory experiences with producers in the USA on their previous two albums. The group's attachment to and connection with the transplanted Celtic culture and landscape of Christchurch and the South Island of New Zealand is expressed in the song "Land 'O' Lakes" on *Couchmaster*, and in his study of the group, David Eggleton has claimed that Robert Scott's lyrics "are partly southern Gothic, partly quasi-Celtic folk tales about loss and regeneration," while the group's music captures "a sense of the South Island landscape - the slow turn of the seasons, and of what it's like to live in the landscape." (1994:44) The Bats remain one of the few active New Zealand groups to remain based in Christchurch, juggling US and European tours with an ongoing involvement in the local music scene - particularly by bass player Paul Kean, who has acted as entertainments officer at Canterbury University as well as hosting a program on student radio station RDU. The association of their music with their city of origin could be seen as something earned by their support for the Christchurch scene. The Jean Paul Sartre Experience (JPSE), whose name derived from a Christchurch friend's description of a bad experience with psychedelic drugs (McKessar 1993), and who also recorded their early output at Nighshift in 1986, had a similarly jangly, Velvet Underground-influenced, and sometimes mournful, guitar-based sound, with added psychedelic overtones, before the group moved to Auckland in 1991 and split up in 1994.

A release by a Christchurch band in the Flying Nun catalogue which is now considered a collector's item is the Pin Group's 7 inch single "Ambivalence" (included on a 1997 Pin Group retrospective compilation by US independent label Siltbreeze), which was the label's first release, the 300 copies issued disappearing almost without a trace. (The second single in Flying Nun's catalogue, "Tally Ho" by the Clean, also recorded at Nighshift, was actually released before "Ambivalence" and went on to make history.) Other early Flying Nun releases by Christchurch bands included another single, "Coat," and an EP by the Pin Group, and EPs and 7 inch singles by the Bilders (featuring Bill Direen, and also known as the Builders), Ballon D'Essai, the all-women band 25 Cents, Richie Venus, an "old time rock and roller" (Dix, 284) the Bats, Scorched Earth Policy, the Expendables (featuring Jay Clarkson), Not Really Anything, Axemen, the Jean-Paul Sartre Experience and an album by the Gordons. Many of the label's 1982 releases by Dunedin bands the Clean, the Chills, The Verlaines, the Stones, Tall Dwarfs and Sneaky Feelings, as well as the famous "Dunedin Double" compilation, which resulted in the label's shift in alliance from Christchurch to Dunedin, were also recorded in Christchurch on a four-track in various living rooms by Chris Knox and Doug Hood. (Sneaky Feelings' Christchurch sojourn was reflected in "Walk to the Square," on their 1987 album *Sentimental Education*. A companion piece to the Chills' 1984 single about the monotonous routine of being unemployed in Dunedin, "Doledrums," the song is a catchy, melodic evocation of passing time sitting around in Cathedral Square doing nothing in particular. The lines "This town is so black you can hardly see" suggest darker overtones of ennui and desolation. Another song which reflects more disturbing "southern gothic" aspects of Christchurch is Auckland group the Mutton Birds's 1992 "A Thing Well Made", whose quietly obsessive narrator-protagonist is the proprietor of a sporting goods and gun shop near Cathedral Square. In its rhapsodic description of the craftsmanship of a rifle, the song alludes obliquely but eerily to the Aramoana massacre, in which a man shot his wife and family to death in a small town near Christchurch in the late 1980s.)

Inspired by the DIY punk ethic of English labels like Rough Trade and Factory, Flying Nun was identifiably independent, "lo-fi" and "alternative," and as its "official history" on its internet website states, had an "erratic distribution system" and a "rough-hewn but engagingly 'home made' sound," as well as featuring distinctive poster and art work done by band members, most notably Chris Knox. (1996) The label's output has become increasingly diverse and eclectic, producing "anything from garage to straight pop to alternative dance" (Mayes 1993) - one of their first dance-oriented releases was by Christchurch band Not Really Anything (NRA) in 1991 - but its focus has been consistently on what Paul McKessar has described as "creation for its own sake on its own merits." (in Mitchell 1994: 41)

The early output of Flying Nun served to legitimize the Christchurch music scene of the early 1980s as a definably local and self-sufficient phenomenon no longer dependent on the "transported culture" of previous decades, and no longer a place that musicians needed to migrate out of in order to pursue a career in music. This was partly due to the bad experiences of Chris Knox and Paul Kean in Australia in the early 1980s attempting to establish their band Toy Love; returning to New Zealand they passed on the message to other musicians that translocating to Australia was not worth the trouble. This led to a shared practice among a number of Flying Nun groups of basing themselves in Dunedin, Christchurch or Auckland, and touring sporadically to the USA and Europe to promote overseas releases of their recordings. As a result, the local scenes of these cities, particularly Dunedin, were considerably enriched: local bands were achieving international reputations and as a result being valued all the more highly on the local scene.

But the music coming out of Christchurch in the early years of Flying Nun did not reflect a very positive

outlook. Commenting on a particularly maudlin song about getting drunk and depressed, "That's What Friends Are For," released in 1982 on Flying Nun by Christchurch band Mainly Spaniards, Dix notes that much of Flying Nun's early musical output tended to express "terminal pessimism," commenting that "Christchurch groups in particular have been generally short on smiling material." (284) This is confirmed by Mac Hodge's review of the Pin Group's *Retrospective* album, which describes the group as "definitely a sombre lot, but where today this affliction is a marketing ploy, the Pin Group were the real McCoy, placed firmly in VU (Velvet Underground) reverence and aspirations (often attained)." (1997:28-29). This acknowledgement of a sense of authenticity in the Pin Group's expression of angst and musical heritage combines with a perception of Christchurch as representing the disappearing originary source of Flying Nun's recorded output and the subsequent international recognition of New Zealand rock music to give the city a particular valorisation in rock music lore and legend. This helps to explain Montgomery's claims that Christchurch in the late 1970s and early 1980s was both "a scene that never was" and the most important site of production of alternative music in New Zealand.

One advantage of the relative quietness, smallness and sporadicness of musical events in Christchurch in the early 1980s was that groups and musical events tended to be well scrutinised and relatively easy to follow and digest. Name-checking three Christchurch acts among his "canon" of New Zealand musicians, Geoff Stahl suggests that this contained nature of the independent music scene in New Zealand may be one reason for the musicians' growing cult status and popularity amongst aficionados in the USA:

The canonisation of select groups and individuals (The Chills, the Clean, the Bats, Dead C, Peter Jefferies, Alastair Galbraith, and the recent rediscovery/recuperation of Roy Montgomery and Bill Direen) is motivated perhaps by an atavistic reminiscence of some prelapsarian moment when the proliferation of sounds and scenes in North America proceeded at (a) pace deemed more manageable (this is a common lament among lapsed alternative rock fans). (1997:71)

Montgomery's musical ethos, which favours harmony and "melody over sheer dissonance," (47) can be associated with a perceived Christchurch musical tradition. He sets himself apart from the Dunedin-based "lo-fi festishism" (Hopkins 1997:20) of Bruce Russell, Michael Morley, Peter Jefferies and other prominent musicians associated with groups such as the Dead C, This Kind of Punishment, A Handful of Dust, Trash, Gate and others who initially recorded on the former Xpressway and IMD label, which he regards as "tone deaf." Russell moved to Lyttleton in 1994 and set up the Corpus Hermeticum label, which he has described as an outlet for "No-fi noise rumblings from the edge of the earth, packaged in hand-assembled CD cases, often including anarchic or esoteric tracts of philosophy or free jazz lore." (Russell 1996:15) He has also recorded with two former members of Dadamah, Kim Pieters and Peter Stapleton, which places him very close to Montgomery in terms of band personnel. Russell's "Free Noise Manifesto," originally published in 1994 in his *Logopandocry: The Journal of Vain Erudition* has also become, via the internet, an influential text for lo-fi random noise musicians and listeners worldwide. While Montgomery's music is more ambient-oriented (in the literal sense of evoking place) than free noise, Craig Willingham (1996:15) has suggested that the two sub-genres intersect in what Russell referred to as "the empty quarter" in his "Free Noise Manifesto." This "empty quarter" is "an area between other forms of music where all of the 'rules' which hold them apart cease to apply." Invoking the minimalism of La Monte Young, the Velvet Underground, Cecil Taylor and the free jazz musicians of the 1960s, John Cage's advocacy of noise, as well as Stockhausen, Xenakis, Crumb and others, Russell calls for an end to the dichotomy between noise and music, suggesting that "noise is a superset embracing music within itself."

Russell's advocacy of a spontaneous, improvised form of music in which "'notes' don't matter, the playing and the elapsed time do" (1994) often produces formless musical doodlings which break down the song format, a format which Bill Direen has argued is endemic to both the Celtic and Maori cultures which intersect in Christchurch. (1995) Both Direen and Montgomery's music, which often incorporate Velvet Underground-influences and other noise-oriented elements, follow song-oriented concepts, which places them closer to a perceived Flying Nun melodic ethos (and the Bats) than to Russell's "noise rumblings."

Christchurch Music Venues

Because of the lack of a strong industrial infrastructure of recording studios, record labels or anything like a distinctively local music radio station or music television channel until the mid 1980s, any sense of heritage provided by the Christchurch music scene consists mainly of live venues which provided spaces of social experience and aesthetic and political perspectives focused around local and visiting groups. In her historical overview of Christchurch music venues since the 1970s, "The Ghost of Venues Past," Zita

Joyce (1996) tends to highlight particular events featuring visiting Dunedin groups like the Enemy, Toy Love, the Clean, the Chills, the Verlaines, Straitjacket Fits, Look Blue Go Purple, etc. She claims, rightly, that since the 1980s Christchurch has sustained "some of the country's most enduring acts": the Bats - still with the same line-up after 16 years - Bailter Space, Jay Clarkson, Bill Direen, The JPSE, the Terminals and Alec Bathgate (who constitutes one half of Tall Dwarfs, who have existed for almost 20 years). As a result, Christchurch is "quietly important but generally ignored," and lacks the "concentration of energy and feeling that there is little else to do" which constitutes the "musically incestuous community" of Dunedin. The main distinguishing factor in Dunedin's centripetally focused music scene is its university, which is in the heart of downtown Dunedin, whereas Christchurch's university moved from the city center to Ilam, in the outer western suburb of Riccarton, in the mid 1970s, fragmenting any sense of a cohesive musical focus or infrastructure. As Joyce states, "Christchurch died in many ways when the university moved out of the center."

Warners, a hotel in Cathedral Square which Brathwaite notes has existed in various forms since 1863 (17), has provided one important large central venue since 1988 for both Flying Nun and local bands. Described by James Guthrie (1996) as "old, wooden, rundown (and now demolished), but solid supporter (sic) of Christchurch music", it was a "traditional" and "grungy" venue in which local 1990s bands like the hard-rock Pumpkinhead and neo-punk outfit Loves Ugly Children built up their early reputations, playing to audiences of up to 600 people. A local covers band, Machine Jam, featuring a heavy rock repertoire of Rage Against the Machine, Tool etc, were also a regular weekly feature. According to Guthrie, Warners' cultural capital in the Christchurch music scene was considerably high, despite its dirtiness and poor sound quality: "Crowds tend to be friendlier, because if you're there, then you have some sort of aura of being 'in the know.'" (1996)

Warners' demolition in 1996 left the Edge (where the only Christchurch gig of the 1995 Flying Nun 15th anniversary festival was held, featuring a re-formed Terminals, the Bats, Loves Ugly Children and Tall Dwarfs), with its "terribly 90s wine bar atmosphere" (Joyce) as the only important larger central venue, with a capacity of about 800. Situated in Hereford Street, near Cathedral Square, The Edge was established as a music venue in 1994, initially specialising in jazz, before adding DJs and cover bands. Owned by the same proprietors as Warners, it has better sound quality and is much cleaner, although, according to Guthrie, it is "something of a 'noters' venue - lots of yuppies (and in Christchurch, there's a fair few tryhards in that mob) hang out there; if you're (a) grunge-kid spinning out on some kind of illegal substance, you may find the atmosphere a bit sanitary." (1996) Guthrie mentions "one of the best gigs in town for ages" at the Edge in February 1996 by local groups Cinematic and Loves Ugly Children, which drew 600 people.

Like most towns and cities in Australia and New Zealand since the 1960s, the live rock music scene in Christchurch has configured around pubs, which are often cramped, dank and uncomfortable places with poor sight lines and little separation between the stage and the audience. This intimacy can generate an enforced cohesion among patrons and contribute to a sense of ritual participation in musical events, the physical discomfort of smoke-filled, overheated bunkers often adding to the sense of authenticity that may be recognized in a new local talent. Pubs are also subject to publicans' commercial policies, and local musicians are notoriously badly paid for playing in pubs. Often more marketable commodities such as karaoke bars or covers bands force out local groups playing original material, and the clientele associated with local independent music generally do not have a great deal of disposable income, which makes the pub scene a fragile one for local musicians. But it is also essential, as emerging bands have to gain local exposure before achieving any kind of national recognition. Joyce describes the Gladstone pub (later the Durham Arms) as the longest-standing music venue in Christchurch, operating since the early 1970s - although it was closed in 1981 due to a series of violent incidents, re-opening in the mid 1980s. (Bill Direen's group The Builders released a cassette of a live performance by the group there in 1983, and crazed neo-punk group the Axemen have also released live tracks recorded there in the same year.) Its large lounge bar hosted some of the major Flying Nun bands as well as Loves Ugly Children. (Joyce 1996) The Carlton operated over roughly the same time period as the Gladstone, hosting commercial bands such as the Dance Exponents, who originated in the southern town of Timaru but began to build their reputation in Christchurch at the Hillsborough pub in 1981 and at PJs and the Aranui pub in 1982 before migrating north, but whose largely teenage audience made pubs, which have an age restriction of 20, unsuitable venues. (Dix 310-311)

Montgomery signals the importance in the Christchurch punk scene of a venue called Mollett Street, which operated in 1978, and where out of town bands played. (1996) Joyce refers to Mollett Street as the "first regular punk venue in town," describing it as "derelict, damp and perfectly punk." (1996) Initially an arts and crafts center situated in southern Christchurch, it began as a music venue in October 1977. It

had no liquor license, but used to serve home made wine from flagons, until it was closed down by the council health and safety department in December 1978. Montgomery also cites Forrester's Hall, where Dunedin bands the Enemy and the Clean played, and the Gladstone and other pubs where "fringe bands" played in 1979. Other venues in the 1980s, Joyce remarks, were "mostly bizarre out of the way places in the suburbs" such as the Hillsborough, Club Leander, Papanui RSA (Returned Services Association) and McGillicuddy's Country Pub (later the Zanzibar and Old Star). Another important venue was the Subway (later the Southlander), a venue that was "smaller and seedier than the Gladstone," as well as being "out of the way and in a dubious area," hosting local Flying Nun groups the Strange Loves and Not Really Anything (NRA) in 1986 and 1987, but suffering from unpredictable crowd sizes and becoming a karaoke bar in 1991. The Zetland (later Cafe Bleu), smaller and more central than the Subway, featured important local bands such as the Renderers as well as Dunedin bands in the early 1980s before it became a university club in the mid 1980s.

The longest lasting Christchurch venue is the former student union in the center of town, which became known as the Dux Deluxe in the late 1970s and was the site of the Flying Nun 10th anniversary celebrations featuring the Renderers, the Strange Loves, David Kilgour and the Best Minds, the JPSE and Bailter Space - an extraordinarily impressive line-up - in 1990. (Joyce 1996) According to Guthrie, "the Dux has provided the stage upon which many a new Christchurch band has slipped into the limelight," partly because it looks crowded even if only 30 people are there. Small, with no cover charge and a capacity of 100, low attendances tend to lead to what Guthrie refers to as "the Christchurch Gap ... with everyone bottlenecking around the door, being too self conscious to step into the space between band and bar." (1996) This confirms Montgomery's impressions of undemonstrative audiences which subject bands to cold scrutiny and show little acknowledgment of merit or pleasure, suggesting a sense of alienation which may spur musicians on to greater achievements.

Other venues which Guthrie mentions are four different spaces at Canterbury University, which regularly features Orientation gigs by local and other New Zealand and overseas bands in February each year, just before the commencement of the academic year, as well as other gigs throughout the year. The Occidental is "just a normal pub" which occasionally has music gigs such as the local Failsafe label's *Good Things* compilation launch. His Lordships (also known as "Lordies") was a "Dark and decidedly dodgy ... a notorious ... watering hole for the seedier side of Christchurch's population" (1996) hosting hard rock and heavy metal bands before ceasing music operations in 1997. The Wunderbar and Harbourlight in Lyttleton also occasionally feature music gigs. Only three music venues in Christchurch are not pubs or wine bars - underage gigs take place at the Caledonian Hall, and high profile overseas acts play at the Theatre Royal, while the city's Town Hall hosts the most prestigious overseas acts (or successful "local" acts like Crowded House). As in other large New Zealand cities, the Town Hall has played an important historical role in putting New Zealand "on the map" in musical terms, hosting influential overseas groups such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who and the Pretty Things (who almost set fire to the Auckland Town Hall) in the 1960s, and managing to survive as a music venue in the face of civic opposition to the noise and unruly behaviour associated with these groups and their counterparts in successive decades. The fact that city Town Halls have survived as music venues indicates the centrality of rock music to the lives of New Zealand's urban youth.

"The City that Shines" in the 1990s

The sense of alienation Montgomery and others pinpoint as important to the development of a punk anti-aesthetic in Christchurch in the early 1980s is still present in the 1990s, but a number of musical infrastructures have proliferated and developed in the 1990s which have contributed to the development of a more cohesive and diverse music scene in the 1990s. Cry TV (a name which suggests continuing mournful associations with the city), New Zealand's first 24-hour music channel, went to air in Christchurch in 1993, closely followed by Max TV in Auckland. Both have provided an important outlet for music videos by local bands and musicians, as well as news and interviews with protagonists from the local music scene, although the majority of both channel's output is US and UK music videos. (The government-sponsored NZ on Air offers grants of \$5,000 to bands and musicians to make videos, as well as producing *Kiwi Hit Disc*, a quarterly compilation of tracks by New Zealand bands and musicians for radio airplay.) Canterbury University's student radio station RDU, which is part of a network of six university-based radio stations throughout New Zealand, has also provided an important focus and outlet for an increasing diversity of Christchurch-based music, as well as keeping up with international music trends. This diversity includes, in RDU's case, blues, country, world music, dub, hip hop, trance, ambient, reggae, heavy metal, techno and drum and bass as well as a Maori program, indie rock programs, a

program hosted by Bats bass player Paul Kean, and a considerable emphasis on local independent music, including demos. A notable example of the prominence of local content on RDU was techno-dance group Rotor's remix of the Bats' 1987 "classic" song "North by North," which stayed at the top of the station's charts for eight weeks in 1997. As Stephanie Brennan has pointed out:

All student radio stations have a self-imposed New Zealand music quota of 30%, specialist New Zealand music shows and several Kiwi music weeks a year when only New Zealand music is played. This compares favourably with radio New Zealand's stated objective of playing 10% New Zealand music. Beatson and Beatson (1994:170) claim: "Student radio stations have done sterling work for local alternative rock culture, not only by playing its music but by interviewing emergent musicians and giving technicians and announcers hands-on experience." (1996:91)

RDU takes this music quota even further, claiming in an advertisement in *Rip It Up* in February 1995 to play 40% New Zealand music and 20% women's music, as well as using the Maori name for Christchurch, Otautahi. Christchurch also has the only Iwi (tribal) Maori-language radio station in the South island (there are 22 in the North Island - see Wilson 1994 and Mitchell 1994), established by Mahina Kai, who also runs Te Waiata Maaori Tuatahi (Maori Music in Christchurch), a "flax roots level" community organisation promoting Maori music. (Smith 1994) There is also a local community access radio station, Plains FM, which runs an enormous variety of specialist community-oriented programs as well as music shows featuring jazz, country, hip hop, Elvis, the Beatles, Gaelic music, nostalgia, gospel and punk.

Christchurch is also the first and only New Zealand city to have two websites featuring its music scene, James Guthrie's "Christchurch Music Page" (formerly "Bartleby's Christchurch Music Page") and RDU's "Christchurch Music Page," which includes *Volume*, a youth culture E-zine. As a globalization of the local, the internet's World Wide Web has proved particularly conducive to idealized constructions of the attractions of cities, but only Christchurch appears to have taken advantage of this in promoting its music scene (although the Auckland dance music scene also has a web site). Compilations of music by Christchurch bands and musicians have also proliferated. *Avalanche*, featuring Loves Ugly Children, Pumpkinhead, Supertanker and 147 Swordfish, appeared in 1993, followed a year later by *Good Things*, featuring these bands and 15 others. These were mostly recorded in the local Avalanche Studios, launched with live gigs at Warners and the Occidental and released on Rob Mayes' Failsafe Label, which features "mostly alternative guitar-based music." (Mayes 1993) RDU has produced the *Sheep Technique* series of local compilations, named after its New Zealand music programs, as well as *Hi Fibre* and a series entitled *Flat City*, all featuring local groups and musicians in diverse musical genres. There have also been two Pacific dub, reggae, dance and hip hop compilations, *On the Beat'n'Track*, produced on local dub group Salmonella Dub's Curious Recordings label, and including what is claimed to be New Zealand's first jungle release, "Osaka," by the Doctor Loveglad Sound System. Other locally-based independent labels include New Edge, Passage and Nightshift Records.

The Christchurch web sites and the regular monthly Christchurch "Rumours" column in *Rip It Up* convey the impression of a considerable amount of musical activity and diversity which perhaps exaggerates the reality of musical life in the city. But live rock music events have expanded in size, such as "The Big Gig Out," established in 1996 at Jellicoe Park, with local bands playing to 800 spectators, and "Burning in the Light," with local bands supporting other New Zealand and overseas rock acts at Lancaster Park cricket stadium, in emulation of the Australian and Auckland day-long events "The Big Day Out." Regular events at dance music venues such as Quadraphenia, which opened in 1994, and the Ministry, a venue holding 1,500 people, and modelled on the Tunnel in the UK, led Grant Smithies to claim in *Real Groove* that Christchurch had "the nation's most energetic dance scene, with the finest raves in the country." (1997:19) A feature in the New Zealand bi-monthly style magazine *Pavement* went so far as to suggest that New Zealand dance music groups, including Salmonella Dub, may be taking over as the country's most prominent musical export from the guitar-based Flying Nun bands, whose obsolescence the author sees as being symbolized by Roger Shepherd selling Flying Nun to the more mainstream Australian-based independent label Mushroom in 1997. (Jewell 1997:56) Other dance and rave music venues on what DJ Kinesis has decried as "the very small Christchurch club scene" (1997, 25) include the Venus Cafe, Base and the Civic, which in 1997 had a record attendance for a Christchurch rave party of over 1,300 people. Another music venue which opened in 1994 was SPAC (The Society for the protection of Arts). Central Christchurch record stores Echo and Galaxy continue to provide a diversity of local and international music, as well as operating ticket agencies, and the Christchurch City Council promotes free community concerts in its Summertime program and Lunchtime Concerts in Cathedral Square. All these manifestations convey the impression of a growing local musical infrastructure.

By 1994 the city was even producing enough Maori and Pacific Islander music to warrant a feature article on it by Robyn Pett in national music monthly *NZ Musician*. One of the Maori musicians Pett profiled was soul singer Maree Sheehan, who sang with reggae band Aheka and local all-women band Black Katz while studying at Canterbury University, before moving to Auckland when Black Katz drummer Neil Cruikshank moved there to start up Tangata, a label specialising in Maori musicians. (Rouse 1994:22) Pett also cites the vocal duo Pounamu (Greenstone), whose traditional Maori harmonies were featured on a self-produced cassette with reggae and folk inflections and a hand-designed cover *Uha* (The Essence of Being Female) in 1994. The Pacific Underground Connection, a six-piece Polynesian group who performed to an audience of 10,000 in Cathedral Square on New Year's Eve in 1990, also operate as facilitators of Pacific Arts and Culture in Christchurch, while rap group Dark Tower, included on the first *On the Beat'N'Track* compilation along with fellow Christchurch rappers Beats and Pieces and Nil State, combined African-American hip hop influences with Maori chants, blues riffs, Pacific musical elements and local references. Salmonella Dub also claim Pacific-style ragga influences in their music. (Pett 1994:28-29)

In the midst of this growing musical diversity, Pett's feature on the Christchurch rock music scene in *Rip It Up* in 1995, "Rockin' in the City that Shines, almost," revealed conflict and discontent. The article was prompted by complaints by Failsafe label owner (and member of two of its groups, Throw and Springloader), Rob Mayes, that the Auckland-based *Rip It Up* ignored the Christchurch music scene "and most things south of Auckland," (Russell 1994:11) and the recent death of *Rip It Up*'s Christchurch correspondent and music scene facilitator, John Greenfield. Pett interviewed three protagonists of the Christchurch music scene: Simon McLaren, singer-songwriter with Loves Ugly Children, Grant McDonagh, editor of Christchurch music fanzine *Sunburn*, and Mayes. The title "The City that Shines" had become a new appellation for the city in the 1990s, also used by RDU and echoed in a Loves Ugly Children song on the group's debut Flying Nun EP *Cold Water Surf*, a rather nihilist, anti-social account of "teenage, nymphomaniac pyromaniacs, out to destroy the city that shines." (List 1994:8) Starting from the premise that the Christchurch scene had been very healthy in 1993 and 1994, due to the national recognition gained by the *Avalanche* and *Good Things* compilations, the opening of a number of new venues, and a growing musical diversity with the emergence of groups like Salmonella Dub and Dark Tower, Pett asked the three for their impressions of the current rock scene. McLaren gave the only positive impression, claiming that Christchurch had been "hung up in the indie, English sound time warp" but "had finally caught up." He cited the recent wake for Greenfield where a number of local bands played at Warners as evidence of a supportiveness, "lack of competitiveness or bitchiness" and "the community feel of the music scene," describing Christchurch as "(a) really conservative city, culturally, but its anti-culture has a really strong element." This designation of an "anti-culture" also suggests a historical continuity with the alternative scenes of Chants R&B in the 1960s and the Christchurch punk scene in the late 1970s.

But the two other members of this "anti-culture" who were interviewed took more dissenting views. McDonagh characterised the dominant rock music scene as middle-to-upper class-bound, and complained that the city council's Summertimes scheme was not helping "bands playing original music," and that there was a large number of local underground bands releasing music on cassettes which were not gaining any recognition or acknowledgment. Mayes, who had threatened to close down his Failsafe label in 1994 due to the lack of support or interest for it outside Christchurch, referred to some "unhealthy, decaying bits in the music scene" and criticised Pumpkinhead for leaving his label and signing with Auckland hard rock label Wildside. He also criticised the commercialisation of the local music industry, claiming that "being part of a scene ... leads to people taking what I do for granted." (Pett 1995:12) The overall impression was of a scene struggling for any cohesive sense of identity, where discontent and disagreement as well as diversity predominated, an alternative, "anti-cultural" rock aesthetic was having difficulty surviving in a commercial climate, and where Auckland was still seen as the epicentre of New Zealand music. This sense of disunity reflects Montgomery's insistence on alienation and isolation for the production of meaningful music:

the ideal environment for (music's) creation is not a thriving community of happy-go-lucky, mutually supportive, warm and loving individuals. Such environments no doubt produce a great deal of music and song, yet, I would argue that most of it lacks depth and meaning.... Music ... is a kind of affirmation, but in my view not a frivolous one. I believe this sort of music is best produced in relative isolation. Whether it is contemplative, geographic, or temporal isolation is not as important as the sheer fact of a certain remoteness. (49)

In this view, the conflictual, isolated and contradictory aspects of the Christchurch music scene, and by extension, New Zealand music as a whole, could be seen as productive in terms of the development of

hybridized musical "anti-cultures" which adapt and adopt overseas influences (in Montgomery's case, the 1970s German ambient rock of Can and Popol Vuh) and merge them with the local environment to produce idiosyncratic, syncretic results. But as Bill Direen has commented, the standard perception of New Zealand rock music from outside the country has tended to be that of an enforced, isolated Do-It-Yourself ethos: "Kiwis are so far out of circulation that they are forced to make their own amusements." But isolation, Direen argues, "tended to make us more zealous, if anything, about knowing what was going on in the rest of the world. ... We have always received overseas material but when it gets here we perceive it through our own specs. as it were." (1995) Consequently, while still reliant on "transported culture" to create its own musical meanings, Christchurch can be seen as producing its own local "web of identities" which mark out a distinctiveness in the city's music. This distinctiveness emerges primarily in live performance; for rock and roll fans in Christchurch, Max Merritt and the Meteors at the Teenage Club in 1960 were as important as Bill Haley and the Comets, and Chants R&B's gigs at the Stage Door in 1965 were as important as the Pretty Things' at the Crawdaddy Club in London, while the Androids at the British in 1979 were as conducive to a sense of "catharsis" in the Christchurch punk scene as the Sex Pistols at Winterland were for Greil Marcus (in Street, 262). Similarly, gigs by any number of Flying Nun bands from the Bats to Loves Ugly Children at Warners, the Gladstone or the Edge constitute a quintessentially originary Christchurch musical experiences which have no need for legitimization by international comparisons. Such events constitute formative sites of musical identity and mythology in which, as Street concedes:

Performance is incorporated into an autobiography, one which establishes a sense of identity through, among other things, a sense of place but not place as a particular setting, but a largely mythologized one, born of - as Marcus puts it ... "the yearning for home and the fact of displacement;" or, as Pratt writes, "a longing for place in a world in which every little personal world is being emptied out." (262-3)

With the increasing recognition in the US and Europe of independent rock musicians such as the Bats, Montgomery and Direen, who had their formative musical experiences in Christchurch, the city's musical mythology has also entered a growing network of what Mark Fenster, a US-based New Zealand rock aficionado, Bats and Renderers fan, has described as "the locally-dispersed":

that is, the construction of properties of local practice across space and in different localities through social networks and independent institutions and based upon shared social differences and affective investments in musical and cultural practice. (1995:86-7)

Such shared local musical practices constitute a shared sense of transnational identity based on an appreciation of musical formations which Will Straw has characterised as sharing a process in which "temporal movement is transformed into cartographic density" (501): in this case the locally-produced, lo fi independent, experimental, minimalist, noise-oriented rock music discussed on internet list serves such as NZPOP and DroneOn, both of which have a large proportion of US subscribers. Although Straw argues, based largely on readings of North American local music scenes, that "the global culture of alternative rock music is one (in) which localism has been reproduced, in relatively uniform ways, on a continental and international level," (499) the particularities and specificities of the Christchurch music scene, together with its geographical isolation, sense of alienation and struggles to come into existence and find an identity, have generated a process of cartography which has its own distinctive properties in rewriting the palimpsests of rock and roll history.

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