

TEXAS RADIO & THE BIG BOOT BOAT BEAT

One of the pleasures of putting together the *Cat In A Hat* project was the opportunity to hear some great, new local talent. Certainly coming across relatively unknown gems at the time was one of the highlights for me and hopefully a lot of other people as well. One band that really caught my attention when I heard their demo tape was Texas Radio and the Big Beat, a band I knew completely nothing about at the time. *Wasteway* was the name of their track and its reggae tinged pop melodies were refreshing in this age of heavy guitar rock.

Texas Radio and the Big Beat basically started about four or five years ago when its two principal members, Joe Williams and Philip McIntyre were sharing a house together. This duo, who still form the basis of the band, were jamming together and found that the chemistry was so great that they had to get themselves a drummer to make this more than a regular jam session. After auditioning numerous drummers, Joe and Phil settled on Dave Carruthers to fill the drum stool. As a three piece Phil admitted they were limited in the material they could write and perform, though he said this was not a major concern for the band.

The band have made a conscious decision not to overdo live performances in the Newcastle area because, as Phil explained recently, too much gigging can be overkill in a place as congested as Newcastle, especially for those bands concentrating on original material. The other major reason Texas Radio and the Big Beat haven't been playing around town recently is that they are currently in between drummers and Joe is studying at the Australian Film and Television School in Sydney.

"Uh it hasn't affected it a great deal," Phil said of Joe's move to Sydney. "Both of us actually write the material and we kind of correspond by cassette more than anything else, and I think we're proficient enough musicians to actually learn off the cassette and we really only need a couple of rehearsals once we get back together, and since we've written the material and we're that familiar with it it doesn't take much to get the band back up to scratch."

I suggested to Phil that in the not too distant future he and Joe would be corresponding on-line, sending each others musical parts down the phone line. "Yeah that's right," he laughed. "While he's in Los Angeles making his million dollar movies he can just send me a couple of messages down the Net."

Musically speaking Texas Radio and the Big Beat play a bit of just about everything. From the reggae influence of *Wasteway* the band encompass rhythm and blues, the funky end of things, four-to-the-floor rock, swamp and pop to create a unique musical blend, a blend resulting from years of listening to the radio.



"Both Joe and I grew up listening to the radio and not having much other musical input other than family playing around us," Phil explained of the band's major influence, "and when you listen to the radio you don't get the same song played every time, especially when both of us came out of the country. Listening to country radio you get so many different styles on country radio, you can have a rock'n'roll song, you can have a Mantovani piece and then you could have Dean Martin and then a dance tune and then a classical piece, so I guess that sticks in your brain as you're growing up. Also too with our record collections they are very diverse as well. We just like songs, it doesn't really matter what style it is, we just like songs."

In fact it is songs that Texas Radio and the Big Beat are most concerned with. While many bands of today are too busy concentrating on making money and trying to build a loyal following, Phil said the main interest for both himself and Joe lay in the process of songwriting and recording. He said it was these two areas that were most important to Texas Radio and the Big Beat, with the songwriting process holding a particular allure to Phil. He has just completed a thesis on the topic of Newcastle songwriters and discovered some very interesting similarities between local songwriters.

"I interviewed a number of people who were working in a number of different styles," he began, "from punk to grunge to very much mainstream to metal, which is what I wanted to do, look at a broad cross section and surprisingly they all had a very similar approach to their songwriting. I don't think

any of them were actually learned or studied people but they picked it up from their own listening experiences, like they picked up the formats and some of the general rules I suppose that go with songwriting and they tended to write in a very similar way. You know usually if a songwriter hasn't got a song written in 20 minutes then there's usually something wrong with that song, I mean you can go back and edit and craft the piece after it's done but if it doesn't spill out in about 20 minutes or so well skip that song and go onto something else."

"It is a dangerous industry to get involved in..."

"I really don't think there's a difference between writing at the local level and writing at the international level," he continued. "Obviously once you've got the song written then having the money to go out and do something with it in terms of recording etc, I think there's a significant difference. But I think the songs themselves and the songwriting process are pretty well exactly the same and, to put a plug in for Newcastle, there are a lot of great songwriters in Newcastle that I think stand up to anyone."

Texas Radio plan to head into the recording studio early next month to record 12 tracks, which should be released on CD some time next year. The plan is not to make a lot of money with the discs release, rather it is to get the songs out there. However, if of course

the CD takes off and sells millions of copies then Texas radio won't be knocking it back but "it's not the central issue at the moment."

"We've got enough money together to actually record and I really just want to concentrate on just getting the recording done initially. Then it's a question of getting enough money together to get the artwork done for a start, because that's reasonably expensive, and then I want to press up enough copies to get those sold at gigs and various other places so that we can recoup the money back and go and make a second one. Both Joe and I are really interested in the songwriting/recording process more than anything else."

To date the only recorded product the band have released was their track on the *Cat In A Hat* compilation CD. Phil said he was pleased with the response Texas Radio and the Big Beat had received from the song, and hoped that it would lead to more people seeking out their own CD when it comes out.

"I think it surprised a few people," he said with surprise in his voice. "I think it's a terrific way (to introduce the band) and I think the whole album itself is probably really good for Newcastle, especially a lot of those bands that were on there, because a lot of them hadn't had much exposure including ourselves, and I think it was actually a good way to actually say this is what we're about. I think it's done Clorkwork a lot of good and various bands like that."

"*Wasteway*, I thought, came out really well and that was basically a live track, I mean we went back and overdid my vocals and some harmony bits but that was about all, and I think it's the performance that I guess is the essence of a song as well and I think you can only capture that if you go in and do things live. I think you can labour over material far too much and it loses all that life out of it, all that energy and consequently all the emotion and I think that's what music is all about, getting to the heart of that process."

I finished up by asking Phil about the name Texas Radio and the Big Beat, which comes from a Doors song called *The Wasp*. The opening line of this song says 'I want to tell you about Texas Radio and the Big Beat' and I was just wondering why this particular Doors song was chosen.

"I think without people knowing that it's a Doors tune itself and what the Doors tune is about they assume that as soon as you say Texas that you've got an implication of country and western music which is not really the case...I mean Joe and I are both what you'd call radio heads, we've been listening to radio all our lives so that part fits in, and the Big Beat well that's rock'n'roll."

"We've had a few problems with it in terms of advertising, like we've had Texas Radio and the Big Boat, and Texas Radio and the Big Boot, and we've even had people think that we're two bands as in Texas Radio and the second band, The Big Beat but what the hell, it's a source of amusement."