

INTERVIEW WITH PETER STAPLETON
INTERVIEWED BY ZOE DRAYTON FOR THE AUDIO FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT
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Interviewer:

So Peter thank you very much for giving us your time again here. I wonder if we could possibly start with you letting us know what you're doing at the moment?

Peter:

Well I'm just finishing my honours thesis which is to do with New Hollywood, that's the Hollywood of the late '60s and early '70s popular music soundtracks and it's probably the first time I've been able to incorporate music or some musical aspect although it is from a film point of view not from a musical point of view into what I've been doing.

Interviewer:

Is the degree a film degree rather than a sound degree?

Peter:

Yes. It's in film and media.

Interviewer:

Which is pretty much a part of your interest generally though isn't it, maybe sounds more would you say?

Peter:

Yes, increasingly I've been interested in film sound too, not just soundtracks but the diegetic sound and stuff like that too.

Interviewer:

Sound design or sound effects?

Peter:

I suppose one is made up of the other isn't it ... like a sound track is all those elements ... but yeah I'm doing this on music specifically.

Interviewer:

So is that an era that really interests you musically and phonically?

Peter:

Yes it does, I've done quite a few soundtracks for Kim's films and that's something I'd like to do more of in the future.

Interviewer:

But that particular era ... the '60s?

Peter:

Well I saw *Easy Rider* when I was about 14, I think, and that had a bit of an impact but most of the others not really. Probably musically the era I identified with most is the

subsequent decade, the punk/new-wave, mid to late '70s, although I like a lot of '60s stuff too.

Interviewer:

You would have been a teenager in the '60s so that would have been the first musical influence you would have had?

Peter:

Yeah. Well I didn't have any older brothers ... I was the oldest in the family so I didn't really have the benefit of an older brother or sister's record collection so I probably wasn't aware of popular music until about 1967 when I was about 12.

Interviewer:

Were your parents musical at all?

Peter:

Not really. They liked Gilbert and Sullivan and things like that. Oh, odd things ... they liked Paul Robson and people like that but partly because of his politics because they were very socialist, both of them trade union socialist people, and so I think they liked him for his politics as much as his voice ... a few people like that.

Interviewer:

Was there folk music there as well because of that?

Peter:

We had the Red Army Choir doing 'The Volga Boatman' song and stuff like that. But not really ... I think they kind of liked music but they weren't that into it.

Interviewer:

What drew you to music? Have you always loved it or where did that come from for you?

Peter:

I think I was aware of sound from a pretty early age. I remember liking the sound of the car on long trips and the sound of the vacuum cleaner and things like that.

Interviewer:

Droney sounds?

Peter:

Droney sounds ... which came out many years later! I think we had a couple of records, I remember being given ... it was probably an EP ... of 'Peter and the Wolf.'

Interviewer:

Oh that's such a great soundtrack though.

Peter:

Tchaikovsky, I think, with each character in the story ... with a musical motif for each one ... and I quite liked that but I never really got into actually listening to music myself until probably my early teens.

Interviewer:

What was the popular music that you were listening to at that point?

Peter:

Well I remember people in my class had the new Beatles singles and stuff like that. I remember going round to peoples' places to listen to whatever the new Beatles single was in about 1965 or something but it didn't really have any impact on me, except that the Beatles were famous. I remember being in a school talent quest, singing 'New York Mining Disaster' by the Bee Gees in a group with a couple of guitars.

Interviewer:

You weren't playing drums by then were you though, so you were singing?

Peter:

Yeah, singing. I used to be in the school choir. I never really got into music myself until about 1967 when my parents gave me a transistor radio and I used to listen to Radio Hauraki late at night and things like that.

Interviewer:

Which was relatively kind of innovative in those days wasn't it?

Peter:

Yeah it was stuff that wasn't played on the NZBC. There was very little ... I think there was maybe a Sunday night show on one of the NZBC stations too that was quite good and they'd play mainly mid '60s British stuff like the Yardbirds, the Animals and the Small Faces ... those kind of people.

Interviewer:

But you wouldn't say any of those were influential at all?

Peter:

I think it was the first time that I connected. I actually liked what I was hearing ... but nobody in particular.

Interviewer:

I guess it would give you a song based structure to come from?

Peter:

Yeah, and sort of rock rather than pop. I never went through a pop music phase because I was probably a little bit older. I would have been 12 then and the first records I got ... I remember my mother asked what did I want for my birthday and I said the new Jimi Hendrix EP which had 'Purple Haze' and 'Hey Joe' and a couple of other songs on it. She complained but she went and got it for me ... she complained that she had to go past all these 'boddies' because it was Friday night and they used to hang around ... guys in stove-pipe trousers, pointy-toed shoes and slick-backed hair who used to hang around the EMI shop on a Friday night in Christchurch. I think it was in Cashel Street or wherever it was ... it wasn't called EMI, no it was HMV I think ... and they used to hang around the entrance and she complained but she wouldn't be intimidated, she would have just walked through them, but yeah ...

Interviewer:

That's kind of cool, that sort of memory.

Peter:

Yeah. it's an odd thing, a sort of a hangover from the 1950s, I guess, because it was the

middle of the 1960s in Christchurch ... that era.

Interviewer:

What led you to play the drums then?

Peter:

When I was at primary school, it was funny they asked us ... they were going to start a musical group ... and they asked us what we wanted to play and for some reason I said the drums. I don't know why I said that.

Interviewer:

It's been there for a long time?

Peter:

But they didn't have any drums so I got to play a triangle or something ... something like that.

Interviewer:

It's still percussive isn't it?

Peter:

Yeah they're classed as part of the percussion section of the orchestra, I guess.

Interviewer:

I shouldn't probably do this but do you remember the kid's programme that used to be on, on Sunday mornings, there was a little story about a kid that played the triangle as part of the orchestra, do you remember that?

Peter:

No.

Interviewer:

Okay forget that.

Peter:

I can imagine because it's sort of the smallest, least significant, part of the orchestra, yeah.

Interviewer:

He kept a peanut butter sandwich in his pocket. So did you like play on the table, did you practice drumming in any way?

Peter:

At some point I did because people used to complain all the time ... my parents and that ... although they didn't mind particularly. Then I got into music quite seriously, probably from around 1967/'68, and started buying a lot of ... well not a lot, but records for myself. I used to really like Cream, Traffic and that kind of thing, mainly British stuff, and I decided I wanted to play the drums. There was a theoretical band in my class at school that never actually materialised. I think probably one or two people could play and the rest of us couldn't really. I met Stephen Cogle about that time. We went to the same school. We weren't in the same class but we were in the first cricket X1 and we both refused to play for the first XV ... we were both rugby players too ... because we didn't like the coach and we didn't like being forced to play rugby. Rugby was compulsory.

Interviewer:

Was it? I had no idea.

Peter:

But we were both in the first X1 cricket team for several years and we were really interested in music and so we decided to start a band ... as you do! I think it was maybe in our last year at school.

Interviewer:

This is still in Christchurch isn't it?

Peter:

Yeah. Maybe just after we left school. I was going to go to university and he got a job in a wool store or something. I was tossing up whether to go to university or not.

Interviewer:

Did you go?

Peter:

Yeah, I did actually. I ended up going and he didn't. And we went to Holstein's Auction Rooms and got second hand musical equipment, so I got a drum kit ... one of those kind of garish tiger-skin drum kits ... and we started playing or started trying to play. But from an early age we decided we wanted to be songwriters.

Interviewer:

What made that happen?

Peter:

I'm not sure. There must have been some other ...

Interviewer:

As opposed to what? As opposed to rock 'n' roll musicians?

Peter:

Yeah, well the idea of it ... I don't think either of us ever had that thing of wanting to be in a band because you get girls or you get fame or anything like that. We just never had that. We had this weird idea of ourselves, kind of like Brill Building songwriters, and what we started doing was writing songs in various genres.

Interviewer:

That's pretty interesting.

Peter:

So I wrote lyrics and he wrote music. I'd probably already dabbled a little bit in poetry, because there were poets that I'd liked ... that I'd done at school ... like Dylan Thomas and Baudelaire. I really liked Baudelaire who we did in French.

Interviewer:

And so that would have influenced your whole lyric style wouldn't it?

Peter:

Yeah, there were quite a few ... Sylvia Plath and people like that.

Interviewer:

Hence the dark tone?

Peter:

All these people are dark and there are a few other people like that too.

Interviewer:

And of course Christchurch in those days was not the most flourishing culture to be part of in some ways. I mean I don't want to be negative about it but it was an era where there wasn't a huge amount happening maybe?

Peter:

Yeah, I'm just trying to think about that. We were aware there had been ... probably a bit earlier ... there was a tradition in visual art. I did art at school and I remember we used to go to exhibitions by Rita Angus and Olivia Spencer-Bower and people like that, so there's some. I know Stephen's older brother was a fan of a lot of 1960s Christchurch groups, rock groups ... I'm trying to remember some of the names ... I think Chants R & B maybe and those kind of groups ... the more underground New Zealand rock groups. There had been quite a strong Christchurch scene, probably around that time, but we weren't old enough to go.

Interviewer:

But you were aware of it and maybe you heard the records?

Peter:

Well through him, yeah. So there was a bit of that. There was never much of ... I don't know ... a literary tradition or anything like that in Christchurch ... though I might be doing it a disservice.

Interviewer:

Well yes I don't know either. I was just thinking that era generally was a bit odd.

Peter:

You heard about Dunedin having more of a reputation in that way.

Interviewer:

You began writing songs?

Peter:

Yeah, we had these imaginary ... all these different genres that we'd write in. We'd write a number of surfing songs or a number of ... but then it started getting a bit more for real so we'd write songs, say Roxy Music songs or something like that or Doors songs. Then we started and it became less writing for other people and more for ourselves. The first ones were embarrassing but it sort of got better reasonably quickly because we used to play every weekend, practice every weekend.

Interviewer:

You'd be singing and he'd be, or you'd be playing drums and he'd be ...

Peter:

I started off singing, trying to sing, and it was pretty bad without decent microphones and

trying to drum and sing. And so, I think, eventually Stephen started singing when he figured out how to play and sing at the same time. It was about going through that process. So we quickly got quite a lot of songs together and we'd pretty much given up the genre thing and started writing ... although we had different sets of our own and different styles. I remember we had like a kind of darker urban set, then we had a rock set, and we actually had a free-form one.

Interviewer:

How old were you then?

Peter:

Oh, we'd just left school, 17 or 18. Because when I got into music, I'd started getting records from places overseas ... you had to because there was nothing available here ... and I started reading English music magazines like *Melody Maker* and discovering new ... I had things like Miles Davis and John Coltrane and various sort of left-field rock music stuff, more experimental stuff, from then. Stephen never really got into it but he used to hear it ... I used to play it to him. So we had a, what we called our free-form set. Actually, there are two things that appeared with the Terminals ... 'Mekong Delta Blues' came from that era and a thing called 'Medusa' too, which was a detuned thing that was repeated over ... it was an experimental thing ... and 'Mekong' was sort of an indeterminate length although we'd have an actual melody and some lyrics.

Interviewer:

It sort of falls in and out of noise doesn't it, yeah?

Peter:

Yeah they came from that.

Interviewer:

But that was a lot later wasn't it?

Peter:

That came from about 1974 so that was sort of a couple of years later.

Interviewer:

After you got together with Stephen did you add some more people in?

Peter:

Yeah, we tried other people but the best one was a woman called Theresa Maguire who was in my brother's class at school. He said 'Oh, Theresa plays guitar' and she started playing guitar with us ... she was a really good guitar player, a singer too, and she could play violin as well. Stephen always wanted to play bass, which is the reverse of most ... you get all these bass players who want to be guitarists because there's a kind of hierarchy in rock music ... but he wanted to go the other way round and that was good. So we had the three of us and we still practised every week and basically played ... well I guess we were writing songs all the time. I wrote a couple with Theresa too, but mostly Stephen's and mine. Oh, that's right. She used to do the Patti Smith version of 'Gloria' because that had just come out. So, going forward a little bit, to about 1975/'76 or something ... it was really the first thing that we heard of that ... we were really interested in what was happening ... sort of American independent groups like Pere Ubu, Television and Patti Smith who put out singles very early on like about '75 or that. I managed to get a couple of them by writing away to places.

Interviewer:

You read about them first and then ...

Peter:

We read about them in magazines and stuff. They were quite influential then that whole ... I guess you'd call it the CBGB's scene ... were very influential on us. That was just slightly before the British punk thing happened and when we finally saw that actually it was quite funny. I think it was on the news ... it was Dylan Taite, who was a reporter, interviewing John Lydon outside Buckingham Palace. It was so weird ... I'm pretty sure it was Dylan Taite ... it was somebody like that. Anyway they had a bit of footage of the Sex Pistols.

Interviewer:

Right when they'd just started?

Peter:

Yeah. Because they were causing such a stir and shock and outrage. We thought 'oh good, there's a band that sounds like the Stooges' because we liked the Stooges. That's what we thought of it. It sort of shook up things a bit, but they were like the Stooges who we liked. Actually to go back a bit ... the biggest influence on me was the Velvet Underground when I first heard them. Probably in about my last year or the first year after I left school I heard one of Lou Reed's solo albums ... I remember I got his first solo album. I'd seen a picture of him in *Melody Maker* and he was wearing mascara and everything ... this is before David Bowie ... and I thought he just looked like nobody else. I was curious about this group but you couldn't get anything here and eventually I think I got a compilation from overseas. That's right, then there was a compilation released here of the Velvet Underground. I remember going and listening to it in a shop and the first song was 'The Story of My Life,' which is like a quiet country song, and I thought I must have got it wrong but the second track on the compilation was 'Sister Ray.' So it was quite an interesting track order for a compilation ... I guess they were hoping to sell to mainstream people!

Interviewer:

But it was totally eaten up by the public wasn't it at that time? I mean the sort of underground public.

Peter:

Well not quite then. I think when David Bowie became like the biggest star in England and then he mentioned the Velvet Underground a lot in interviews ... as being an influence ... I think that's how they, and then Lou Reed's solo albums became more well-known. I think it was a bit like that because the Velvet Underground had been forgotten and they never were very big in their own time anyway. I think it was through that kind of reflected thing that happens ... like it happened years later with Nirvana talking about people ... stuff like that.

Interviewer:

Yes I remember there was a couple of others that sort of came back up again, Can seemed to come back up at that point as well?

Peter:

Yeah, possibly. I really liked Can too from around that time. I remember hearing 'Spoon' on the radio because it was a single and it had been a hit single in England which is so weird

... and again thinking 'this sounds like nothing else' and going out and buying each of their albums.

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Interviewer:

You were playing with Theresa and Stephen?

Peter:

Yeah and ...

Interviewer:

Were you playing live by this point?

Peter:

No.

Interviewer:

Still practising?

Peter:

I can't actually remember whether we ... I think we expected that we might play live sometime but there were no places to play and at that time in Christchurch it was very sewn up. There were bands of 'musos' ... well that was our perception anyway ... who had particular venues sewn up and there was nowhere for new bands to play. They were generally playing a kind of '60s rock or blues. There was a place ... I can't remember the name of it now ... in what's now the Cashel Street Mall ... which had supposedly more alternative bands. I remember once or twice going there and there was a band called Maud and the Kippers playing with supposedly these kind of hot-shot musos and they were doing sort of blues-rock stuff. There were people smoking dope and stuff like that, which was kind of out there for the time and place. But we felt we were out of place so it was not really ... there was nowhere that we could play.

Interviewer:

You played together at home for a few years?

Peter:

Yeah, basically we just played every weekend and developed our songs and we had quite a large repertoire of original songs, mainly original songs.

Interviewer:

That's kind of unusual isn't it that you would have had that much time to practice before playing live?

Peter:

Yes it is and that was the main ... just because we didn't know where we could play and whether there was anywhere. It was the thing you had to have been playing for many years and to be part of the network of Christchurch musos who'd played in '60s bands to get to play anywhere.

Interviewer:

Where was your first gig?

Peter:

Well, we never actually played live with Theresa. We wanted another person in the band, like a guitarist or a keyboard player, and we ... again through my brother who was actually quite influential on the choice ... he'd heard of or he knew this guy Bill Direen who I think had played in folk clubs, who was a folk musician. So he got him along and there were two guys who turned up and one did all the talking and the other said absolutely nothing. The one who did all the talking ... it turned out it was the other guy who was Bill. The one who did all the talking was Tom Scully and he was sort of like Bill's manager or something, which we were a bit bemused by. Eventually it turned out that this other guy was quite a good guitar player, although in a very sort of Bob Dylan style. And we didn't really ... we didn't dislike Bob Dylan but we hadn't listened to much of his stuff or anything. So it was kind of ... it was a bit of a novelty having these and he was doing originals. He had some original songs too because we said 'have you got anything of your own?' They sounded like Bob Dylan songs and they went on for a long time ... they had a lot of words and many verses and they were in that style. We played him the Velvet Underground and of course there was some relation between them ... I think Lou Reed was probably a little bit influenced by Bob Dylan ... and so he could sort of relate to that. So we were doing I guess more rock versions of his sort of folk songs but we mainly did our songs.

Interviewer:

They both played with you at that point?

Peter:

Yeah at that point. So there was Theresa and Bill. Then I think Bill went away to whatever it was called ... radio announcer school? ... to learn how to become a radio announcer with the NZBC. He went to Wellington for a while and he sent us this tape of songs he wrote in Wellington and we were incredibly impressed with it. Then he was posted to Blenheim, I think, and so it was sort of spasmodic from then on. At the same time Theresa was becoming more interested in kind of blues and folk stuff, sort of bush band stuff. She started playing bush, which was kind of like New Zealand folk music for want of a better word, with a tea-chest bass, and she played the fiddle and stuff like that. We weren't into that at all. We were into louder electric stuff. Bill and Theresa didn't get on and Bill ... I think he's often had weird relationships with women in his bands but I won't go into that any further because it's sort of speculation. Theresa didn't like Bill and then at some point with all these comings and goings Bill said 'I don't want to play with Theresa, I don't want her in the band.' We were like 'well what do we do now?' But Theresa wasn't really into what we were doing, where we were headed, anyway and she left. She was really forced out I think which we weren't very happy about. It was a weird situation that neither of them wanted to play with the other one. But Bill's sort of ... what he was doing was closer to what we wanted to do.

Interviewer:

But then he left anyway to go ...

Peter:

Well he was coming and going.

Interviewer:

While he was at school he would still come back and play?

Peter:

Yeah, he'd come back and then when he was in Blenheim he'd come down and go back and stuff like that.

Interviewer:

You were playing live by this time?

Peter:

No, just at that point. So that was about 1978. We did one recording with Theresa ... well with the four of us in a studio which was ... I think they normally did advertisements or something ... in Christchurch which I've never heard. Supposedly Bill's got it but I don't know.

Interviewer:

What were you calling yourselves at this point?

Peter:

Oh yeah, I should go back ... going back to when there were three of us or maybe even before that when we called ourselves the Victor Dimisich Band. Victor Dimisich was actually Stephen's partner's sister's husband ... he was Victor Dimisich ... he was possibly Yugoslav and it wasn't quite spelt like that. It was Dumicich or something. But anyway he came to see us practice one time ... we didn't have a name at that stage ... and he just sat there and didn't say a word and then after a while he got up and walked out. We thought 'oh we should name ourselves ... that's a good reaction ... we should name ourselves after him' and so we became the Victor Dimisich Band.

Interviewer:

He's immortalised!

Peter:

Yeah! He knew but I don't know his reaction. So we were the Victor Dimisich Band but when we had the four-piece ... maybe after that ... before we played live for the first time I think we had to have a name and we thought it was a different band than the original band. That's when it became the Vacuum Blue Ladder because ... again another one of those ... we saw a van from the Vacuum Blue Ladder Cleaning Company in Christchurch. The van went by one day and I said 'hey that's a good name, we'll use that' because there was that thing if you play live you have to have a name. We weren't the Victor Dimisich Band anymore and so we became the Vacuum Blue Ladder. But about that time ... that was 1977/'78 ... there was ... we heard of a club called a punk club ... this was what we were told ... called Mollett Street. It was actually a clothing market place ... it was in a warehouse space on a second storey off Colombo Street in Christchurch but it was mostly a clothing market place.

Interviewer:

During the day?

Peter:

Yeah, I think so.

Interviewer:

And the club was upstairs?

Peter:

And the club was upstairs and it was on a Sunday night maybe once a month. It was kind of exclusive and because my sister Rose worked with Bridget who was the partner of Alan Park ... Alan Park was one of the people that ran this club, so called club.

Interviewer:

So you got asked to play there?

Peter:

No. Well first of all, Stephen and I went up there one Sunday night and it was quite funny because at the top of the stairs they looked at you to see whether they're going to let you in or not ... one of those kind of things!

Interviewer:

Were you cool enough?

Peter:

I don't know! Yeah, it was kind of weird. Anyway we went in and we didn't know the band, well we knew that Alan's band was playing ... they were called Vapour and the Trails I think. But we didn't know them or anything ... we just knew that because I'd met Alan maybe once or twice before. There was this other band called Pyramid who were a sort of jazz-rock band and I remember the drummer had two kick drums and about ... I don't know half a dozen cymbals. He had this giant kit that took up this massive amount of space and you know I think one of them maybe had a double-necked guitar or something and they had long hair. The place was packed though. So it was just this warehouse space with a stage and there were a lot of people there. There was this band and there was somebody else ... I can't remember the other band but probably roughly in that same vein ... and Alan's band who played first. We quite liked them. They were playing like short, sort of faster covers of 60s songs like 'Substitute' and I remember they did 'The Price of Love,' the Everly Brothers song. They had quite a lot of energy and yeah it was quite a good thing but they got a kind of muted reaction from the crowd and it all became apparent when the main band played that the crowd was there to see them. It probably wasn't in any way a punk club and the only ... I suppose Alan's band were sort of like Eddie and the Hot Rods or one of those English pub rock bands or the one that Joe Strummer was in, the 101ers or something, those bands. They were exactly like that kind of band ... which we were sort of aware of ... but the other bands were just sort of throwbacks. The mid 70s were a sort of desert and it was terrible. There just seemed to be nothing. I guess there were people like David Bowie and T Rex who were like the pop people of the time, but there appeared to be very little else and a lot of groups that we thought of as dinosaurs. You know you just sort of rolled your eyes ... Led Zeppelin! Well we never liked Led Zeppelin anyway.

Interviewer:

It was sort of like the quiet before the storm actually wasn't it, when you look back on it?

Peter:

Yeah at that point.

Interviewer:

So who were you guys hanging out with at that point, you were at varsity by then?

Peter:

Yeah I was

Interviewer:

What were you doing at varsity?

Peter:

I was doing history and english and I did some political science too. I was just at university ... no actually I'd just left university and I'd got a job on the wharf. So yeah I worked on the wharf for a long time after that.

Interviewer:

And that's what you did while you were making music ... that was your day job?

Peter:

Yeah. Which was kind of unusual in the music scene. Steve just worked in factories all his life, still does.

Interviewer:

So who came into the group next? The Pin Group, who was the Pin Group?

Peter:

Just after that. We may as well stick to ... It's easier for me to remember that way. We thought we missed having a violin ... we quite liked the violin because of the John Cale thing with the Velvet Underground and we got this guy called the Bod ... his real name was Peter Fryer. it wasn't because of his body, it was because he looked like ... we thought he looked like a dead body. He had this kind of blank expression. He was this amazingly sort of impassive person and he'd just sit very still and it was really hard to tell, to pick up any expression on his face so we just called him the Bod, short for the Dead Body. He became our violin player. I think he had a rudimentary knowledge of the violin but not much and we also got him to play keyboards even though he didn't play keyboard and so the first time ... well after that ... we got to play at Mollett Street and it was an actual punk evening so that wasn't that ...

Interviewer:

Pyramid didn't play with you?

Peter:

No! The thing was that Alan had wanted to introduce punk evenings to the club. It wasn't a punk club at that stage. So we played ... the first time we played was with Johnny Velox and the Vauxhalls who were these young kids ... they were younger than us ... we were in our early 20s but they were maybe still at school, I think, or just 17 or 18 around there and they were pretty good. They were doing punk versions but they were all covers. No, actually besides doing punk cover versions of things like Velvet Underground songs and stuff and basically doing them faster, they also had a number of TV ads that they did. I remember them doing 'Griffin's Gingernuts!' So there was this kind of punk version of 'Griffin's gingernuts by name,' you know, and that was really good. That was hilarious and they had a singer that used to do a more humorous version of the Iggy thing so he'd go you know onto the floor and roll around on the floor and that but not as fraught as Iggy. They were great and there was another band called the Doomed who also ... we were the only ones who did originals ... all the others did covers. The Doomed had Dick Driver as

their singer, who later became ... was he a TV producer?

Interviewer:

Yeah. I totally remember him. The name was familiar for that reason.

Peter:

The father of Oliver Driver I think?

Interviewer:

Oh is he really, that makes so much sense suddenly, okay.

Peter:

Those guys they were nice guys We got on quite well with them but they were totally derivative. It was sort of like, even the singer Dick who was called Johnny Abort his talk and everything was taken off 'Live at the Roxy,' so I mean normally ...

Interviewer:

So he talked in a London accent?

Peter:

Yeah, in a Cockney accent! So in between songs he said these things that bands had said on the 'Live at the Roxy' early punk compilation. So that was hilarious and ...

Interviewer:

Was it tongue-in-cheek or not necessarily?

Peter:

Yes and no, I think. I think they were unfairly maligned later on but, knowing them, I don't know how seriously they took themselves, especially Dick. I don't think Dick took himself that seriously.

Interviewer:

He always had that sense of humour didn't he?

Peter:

Yeah. But when they appeared on a national TV punk special I think they got quite ...

Interviewer:

Yeah they got dissed badly I remember that.

Peter:

For that stuff.

Interviewer:

But did you guys get a good reaction to your music?

Peter:

Yeah, we did actually. Well we were playing ... we did about half covers and half originals. We did mainly covers of 'Nuggets' sort of things. We did 'I Had Too Much to Dream Last

Night,' 'You're Gonna Miss Me' by the 13th Floor Elevators and a fast 'Gloria' and probably a couple of Velvet Underground songs. I think we did 'Run, Run, Run' and maybe another one, or maybe not. We did sort of ... probably about five covers and the rest were originals by both Bill and Stephen and me. So it was a mixture of originals.

Interviewer:

And you were still the Blue Vacuum?

Peter:

We were the Vacuum Blue Ladder and that went down really well.

Interviewer:

So did a theme build up from this club?

Peter:

Yeah, quite quickly a real scene built up and it became entirely a so-called punk club and perhaps there were gigs more frequently. I think they were probably more than once a month after that and there was quite a buzz and it was a place to be. It was a generational thing that had been both musicians who felt excluded and also an audience too. So it was a whole ... yeah it became a place to go for people who probably didn't feel very much at home in the usual pub scene in Christchurch.

Interviewer:

Well it was such a brand new and exciting thing isn't it. It wasn't exactly coming from a positive place a lot of the time but it was still a very exciting era to be part of.

Peter:

Yeah. There was that real feeling of that ... this is before the sort of violent thing which came in a bit later with the skinheads and all that, but at that stage there was this tremendous energy and the audiences were really good too. I remember women wearing rubbish bags and things like that ... that was great.

Interviewer:

Yeah the fashion was really exciting and quite innovative.

Peter:

And also it was kind of like just thumbing your nose at the fashion and the musical establishment and all that stuff and that was so good. We were part of that although we probably didn't fit into it stylistically. We were a little bit older and we were probably influenced more by American music and probably had more in common with the CBGBs bands. I remember we went up to Wellington to play at an arts festival or something, a student arts festival, and there were the Suburban Reptiles and the Scavengers and us and they were sort of identikit punks ... they had all the gear right down ... it must have taken a lot of time to do all that in front of the mirror!

Interviewer:

I might have actually seen you, how interesting.

Peter:

We were awful actually! We only had ... I think we only had like one amp or something and the two guitars were going into one amp and things like that and it was just a real ...

Interviewer:

So you were still finding your feet?

Peter:

I think we were pretty good. We started playing quite a lot in Christchurch and we started to get pretty good but at that stage it was all pretty rudimentary. Then we played again at Mollett Street and the Bod left or got pushed out ... it's always the thing that people leave but they probably get pushed out ... because he really wasn't musically contributing a whole lot ... although we used to get him to do the Modern Lovers' song 'Pablo Picasso' and his whole kind of blank persona was great singing that. I remember we were playing at the university ... we played at Orientation or something ... and there's that point when the song stops 'Pablo Picasso was never called an arsehole, not in New York,' and then it stops, and it was hilarious we stopped at that point and he said 'I haven't finished yet,' all this totally to himself. But he used to do things like wander off and we couldn't find him when he's supposed to be playing.

Interviewer:

The random Bod!

Peter:

Yeah. You talk these days about people being random people ... he was a random person. I used to flat with him which was actually quite good because we used to go on these long car trips and he was really into Eno and he played Eno tapes in the car ... that's where he was sort of coming from.

Interviewer:

It's quite an interesting number of influences that you've had there in lots of ways isn't it?

Peter:

And they're quite different I suppose.

Interviewer:

They are. They're really different, yeah, but it kind of all makes sense when you think about your musical history.

Peter:

It's sort of odd how people, there must be this thing that people have in common and it's whether that's enough of a connection or not.

Interviewer:

Do you want to have another break now?

Peter:

I wouldn't mind, thanks.

Part 3

Interviewer:

So random Bod left?

Peter:

Random Bod left and so we sort of looked around for somebody else and we got a guy called Martin Copeland who had been in one of the main bands at these punk evenings, a band called the Vandals which was a whole mixture of people ... a number of the people who we called 'musos' ... I realise that was from our perspective at the time but experienced musicians who'd suddenly cut their hair and become punks after previously playing completely different styles and there was a kind of arrogance that we perceived about them ... again I'm just talking from ... that they could play and they could also play punk better than us sort of thing ... well not necessarily us but the other bands that played, the young bands. So they'd play a professional version of it which ... there was quite a deal of resentment about them that they were just kind of muscling in on it because they thought of it as a fashion that they could be part of and get some sort of kudos for their playing ability. But the Vandals were a mixture of people like that and also Alan Park and Tony Peake who was an interesting guy. He was a sort of style conscious person who was very much into the style aspect. He used to run the record ... they had a record bar at the University Bookshop and they used to import a lot of the latest singles, which were quite hard to get ... sort of DIY singles, small label singles, and all that. He was very much a style person, very conscious of style and how people looked and he was a sort of non-musician but a singer who looked like a singer. I think more than anything else he looked like a singer and played a kind of rudimentary guitar. Alan was good. Alan was sort of ... But this guy Martin Copeland played at times in this band and he played with us a bit but it didn't really work out, so we were left looking for somebody else. We played with a band called European Son and at this stage the Vacuum were playing everywhere, just in dives and we played a lot in Lyttelton where other people were kind of scared to play. We played there quite a lot and played at the British very early on. We played at the British ... I think our second public performance was at the British which was in the rough part of Lyttelton and you know there were sailors off ships and somebody got knifed out the back and things like that. It was quite ... in those days there were a lot more crew members on ships than there is now and so you got them kind of wandering around.

Interviewer:

This is long before you met Bruce Russell eh?

Peter:

Yeah. Anyway so we played in Lyttelton. I remember another gig we played there at some hall in Lyttelton and there were all these bikers there and I used to ... at this stage the last thing that the Vacuum did in each set was a song called 'Accident' which was basically a kind of 'Sister Ray' like thing that went on for a long time and just completely deconstructed, with Bill recounting gory details of accidents over the mike and everything just getting more and more, you know freaking out. I used to walk through my drums at the end of it which of course, with the microphones and all that, would cause a bit of a stir usually. But I did it at this thing and then I had to walk through these bikers after doing that ... I remember that it was kind of weird because there was quite a lot of tension ... those guys standing around as they do, with that kind of stance.

Interviewer:

Absolutely, but they left you alone?

Peter:

Oh yeah. I thought probably because I walked through the drums at the end of it, it must have been staunch enough for them or something. So we ended up playing in a lot of

places like that and heaps of places where people just didn't really ... they weren't interested in what we were doing or anything. So the story of the Vacuum was playing often in halls. We organised some things ourselves and played in a hall with this group called European Son and the guitarist was the younger brother of somebody that we knew ... one of the guitarists was Allen Meek. We were really impressed with what he was doing and asked if he wanted to be in our band. So we poached him and he played keyboards and guitar. He was sort of younger than us but he really loved Tom Verlaine ... he played guitar like Tom Verlaine and he also played keyboards. So that version of Vacuum really became quite good because we practised a lot ... well especially Bill and Allen did stuff together ... and there began to be a split between Bill and Allen and Stephen and me. There were people around Bill ... I don't know if it was Bill himself so much ... who used to refer to us as the 'proles' because we both had day jobs and Bill had this sort of artist thing that if you were truly committed to what you were doing you'd give up your day job and live however. I don't know if they were on the dole or what ... they must have been, I suppose. That became a source of tension in the band and at the same time the band were actually getting quite good. Then Stephen left and I said I'd leave when they got another drummer because I knew they didn't have another drummer and Stephen was replaced by John Segovia who now plays in Don McGlashan's group ... which is quite funny. So he played with us but before that Bill and us were again moving in different directions. I think Bill was quite conscious of not getting enough attention or he wanted to have a bit ... because we were usually playing to audiences who weren't very appreciative. We had a small group of people that really liked us but beyond that ... and sometimes it was a bit soul-destroying, ending up playing somewhere to maybe a dozen people that like you or to larger crowds of people who don't like you and stuff like that. He wanted to do shorter kinds of things and we didn't want to do that and also gradually as that group went on we ended up doing all Bill's stuff. He didn't want to play our songs.

Interviewer:

He's a pretty powerful personality wasn't he?

Peter:

Yeah. So there was quite a lot of tension. And then I left when they found Norman Dufty who was a drummer and they continued for a very short time ... I think as the Vacuum. Then they became ... no then they broke up ... and Bill, Allen and Malcolm Grant, who had been in European Son and was later in the Bats, became Kazaportico and then the Bilders. Meantime Allen wanted to play our songs as well. Because he liked our songs he wanted to play both and Stephen and Alan and I sort of reconstituted the Victor Dimisich Band, with a guy called Tony O'Grady who'd also been in European Son. European Son had been completely cannibalised or they'd broken up anyway. So we started playing as the Victor Dimisich Band and doing Stephen's and my songs and there was a weird thing at that time that we had of not being together too long. I remember it was this odd thing that the Victor Dimisich Band had this kind of planned obsolescence, that we'd play for a year ... it was probably about 18 months really ... and then break up.

Interviewer:

That's quite good because it gives you a framework.

Peter:

So it was like a project in a way. I think we only played once outside the Gladstone and probably maybe a dozen times at the Gladstone over a year. At that stage the Gladstone was this great ... it became this great venue ... this is a pub that had the usual kind of pub rock scene before that. I remember Stephen and I went and saw Hello Sailor there ... who

we thought were alright because they did a couple of Velvet Underground covers or something. We didn't particularly like or dislike them but that's the sort of ... that was probably the only place they could play out of the Christchurch pubs. This is like ... that would have been back in sort of '76/'77 or something like that. But at this stage the Gladstone started having local Christchurch bands six days a week ... well they started having local bands and they had music six days a week. It was amazing.

Interviewer:

That's a lot.

Peter:

And so they'd have Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday generally for local bands, new bands, and then you'd graduate to Thursday/Friday/Saturday if they thought you were good enough and if you got enough of a crowd. There were a lot of touring bands, especially Auckland bands who spent a lot of time in Christchurch around that period. They always used to say it was the best place in the country.

Interviewer:

Yeah I remember the reputation definitely.

Peter:

They'd play at the Gladstone usually ... they'd do three nights at the Gladstone ... and then often they'd go to Dunedin and play three nights and then they'd come back and do another three at the Gladstone or at the Hillsborough ... which was a horrible booze barn on the outskirts of Christchurch where bands, also bigger name touring bands, used to play.