# Telling Secrets

## SPY V. SPY

**"The funny thing is that now people say things to us like 'How come you're not any bigger? You guys have been around for a while — we expected you to be huge by now."**

**Michael Weiley, who plays guitar with Spy V. Spy by the way, reckons that for every person who believes the band is an overnight success, there's someone else who thinks that they should be on the cover of Rolling Stone. Anyone who has followed the Spies progress over the years will tell you that it's been a long and rocky road, with any progress being the result of some bloody hard work.**

**Towards the end of 1982, Spy V. Spy actually broke up for a while.**

"That was because we were very inconsistent," Michael admits. "We were a party band. Some gigs were good and some were diabolical because Craig and I tended to write ourselves off with parties and that sort of thing..."

The Craig he refers to is Craig Bloxom, the imposing lead singer and bass guitarist with Spy V. Spy. Drummer Cliff Grigg is sitting next to Michael at Spies' headquarters in Glebe. He's pretty busy illustrating and signing promotional copies of the new album during the interview, so Michael does most of the talking.

The last time I interviewed Spy V. Spy was in 1986, when their first full-length album *Harry's Reasons* had just been released. In that short space of time the band has emerged from cult status, released three albums in less than two years, and made a pretty sizeable impression on the Australian music audience.

Their latest album, *Xenophobia (Why?)*, was "a definite challenge" according to Cliff and Michael. Basically it was written, demoed and recorded in the space of eight weeks. As with other Spy V. Spy albums, this one was virtually recorded live, to capture the feeling of the band.

*Xenophobia* — fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners.

My trusty dictionary answered that burning question, but why did the band choose that title for the record?

"Craig suggested it because he liked the word, it had a good meaning, and the idea is touched on by a couple of the songs anyway — especially *Mingle 'n' Mix* and *Soldiers*. Probably the root of a lot of the world's problems is just that peopple have this paranoia about situations and people that are strange to them."

Spy V. Spy have never been backward in coming forward about their political and moral views. In doing so they've also attracted a fair share of criticism. They've been accused of being boring, trite, heavy-handed and over-the-top (sometimes in the space of one review!). How do they react to that sort of thing?

"Well most criticism is reasonably constructive," says Michael. "Unless someone has obviously got it in for us and they bring out the knives — which has happened, as well. But we realise that we put ourselves on a bit of a pedestal anyway, and people have the right to criticise our opinions.

"Obviously it makes for a bad day when you wake up and you read a bad review, but you just have to take it. We've decided we wouldn't want to be in any other band..."

"That's why we do things like print our lyrics on record covers," Cliff interjects. "So people can give us stick."

There's obviously a danger being in a band with a strong moral conscience — people think you're deathly dull, or jumping on a band wagon. When I suggest that *Use Your Head* sounded like a community service announcement, Michael admitse that there is a fun, tongue-in-cheek side to the band, but at the same time they take their lyrics seriously. So do they believe that they've got some sort of moral responsibility to their audience?

"If lots of young kids are buying your albums and you're trying to say something, then it should be worthwhile. A lot of kids really look up to people in bands. The idea is to instil a seed of thought in their heads that's a positive outlook on life.

"The song *Free The Future* is really directed at kids just getting out of school. When we got out of school we had a real doomsday-type feeling. Stuff going to university or getting a career. We'll go and live in the squats and take drugs and drink — who cares? Then you realise the world isn't going to end, and you don't have a future because you didn't plan for it."

Spy V. Spy don't live in the squats anymore. They wrote a song called *Don't Tear It Down* that told that story, and the story of what is happening a lot in Sydney in this illustrious Bicentennial year.

The dynamic trio now earn a wage, and are able to afford the little luxuries in life like running hot water, carpet and flushing toilets.

A typical Spies' year sees them playing five nights a week over eight months, writing and recording for three months, and a month off. Just like a normal job really.

"Yeah, we work nine to five, but the hours are the other way around," laughs Michael.

It's nice work if you can get it, but I wonder if rock music is becoming more recognised in Australia, or is it sliding backwards in terms of its influence?

"Well the Prime Minister admits now that the rock'n'roll industry makes a certain percentage of the national income," says Cliff. "They flashed it on the screen at that Bicentennial show the other night. It makes everyone realise this is a real job. Your old man says 'When are you going to get a real job?' I've got one! Just because I don't wear a suit and tie doesn't mean it's not a real job."

With *Xenophobia (Why?)* in the shops, the band is waiting to see the reaction in Australia, and by about June they'll start thinking about foreign shores. Until then it's back to their regular jobs of getting up on stage every night. After all, you can't forget about the working week completely.

**BARRY DIVOLA**


# BLAH, BLAH, BLAH

Sandringham Hotel, Friday 18th March