

PERSONALITY CRISIS, WHAT PERSONALITY CRISIS?

Matt Mabel Sound April 9,1977

You work hard and eventually convince your record company to give you an open cheque book to accompany you into the studio. The result is a huge hit spurred on by a nationwide tour.

A year later you repeat the cycle and become staple diet of both the album chart and disc jockeys who profess to program 'rock' radio. The second tour goes so well that a 'thank' you gig is arranged at London's Royal Albert Hall. It sells out.

After the gig you vanish, leaving the album charts and the playlists behind. Another year later, you sit between colourfully carpeted walls at the Record Plant in Los Angeles and say "I sure hope they haven't forgotten us in Britain".

So says Roger Hodgson after ace Record Plant engineer Geoff Emerick gives the Supertramp co-leader permission to leave the control room where the mixing of the new album, "Even In The Quietest Moments..." is almost complete.

In their own minds Supertramp haven't 'moved' to L.A., according to Hodgson, who loyally sports an A&M Records t-shirt and is pretty shagged out, as the Americans would say, after two-thirds of a day of listening to playbacks.

"We live in a Supertramp bubble. We are each other's friends so it's like the English vibe is still there. L.A. is a totally crazy place, none of us like living here particularly. We like the weather and that's about it".

Since they'll be touring for nearly a year following the album's release, there is hardly a question of living anywhere in the first place. Bette Midler cleverly dubbed the City Of Angels "The Home Of Absolutely Nothing" on this year's Grammy Awards telecast and Supertramp fit comfortably into her definition.

"We haven't found anywhere we want to live really, although I don't think we want to go back to England.

"I don't personally miss it but some of the others do. If anything I miss the subtleties of the English".

Supertramp have taken a big step on the new LP and decided to produce themselves, jettisoning the services of Ken Scott. That move comes as a reaction to their last release,

'Crisis What Crisis'. Problems Hodgson sees in 'Crisis' have been solved on 'Even In The Quietest Moments'.

"'Crisis', he explains with an either-you-laugh-or-you-cry-smile, "came to mean more to us as a title than it did to other people because it was really a crisis album. We learnt how not to make an album, coming right off the road and going into the studio.

"It could have been much better that 'Crime Of The Century' but it wasn't. We had a lot of bad luck in the studio. We really didn't enjoy making it and in the end it was kind of a patch up job. A lot of people liked it but for us it missed".

Funny how they don't tell you that before the album comes out. Still. This time around after 1976 North American tours they took a three month planning period, similar to their occupation of a Somerset farm house three years ago planning what would become their best seller, 'Crime'.

With 40 songs in hand, the band worked arrangements of 7 and had the set pretty much in mind before they began recording at Jimmy Guercio's Caribou studio last November.

Appropriately, working with material that sounds as if it has come more from the heart than ever before, the Tramp have captured warmer, fuller sound

"Working with Ken we became perfectionists in a way and went overboard on 'Crisis' and became perfectionist technically. Now we are concentrating on getting the feel of a song down. That's why it has taken so long. Some days we don't feel like playing. So we don't play.

"Now the sound is not quite so clinical, it's more live and definitely much better."

Hodgson himself, has discovered the Oberheim synthesizer since we heard from him last.

"It's an amazing instrument, we did most of the strings and a lot of other sounds with it. It gets any sound under the sun".

Two of the new tracks stand out in his mind, one of which is recorded to be the band's best, a ten minute job called 'Fool's Overture', once had a provisional title of 'The String Machine Epic'. It closes the album.

If you're wondering why the 'Overture' is reserved for the end, then you'll have to get into the, er, depth, of the message. The album ends with a conductor tapping his baton on his music-stand after a track dealing with The End Of Everything As We Know It.

With such honest material they are leaving themselves open to plenty of criticism, which, no doubt, by press-time has manifested itself.

The other stand out track for Hodgson is so because he sees it as 'a hit', is a voice approaching the Queen's English. Not that Supertramp think product-wise, of course, but "it will help in America because you really can't do anything here without one.

"You just write and record your songs. 'Give A Little Bit' is one of mine. Obviously if you play the game right it is good if you have a number that is going to be a single.

"Next year we'll probably put out singles as singles as well. We've got songs that'd make great singles but wouldn't fit so well on an album".

The tour, which begins in Canada to coincide with the album's release, took a month's rehearsal. Fans who have already seen the 'Crime Of The Century Film' time and time again will be happy to know that it will be taking back seat to a new film, shot to coincide with 'Fool's Overture'. There'll be slides, too.

"The set is going to be really amazing. For a start it will be much stronger cause we've got three albums to pull material from. We can pick the ones we enjoy playing and the ones which are most popular.

"It'll be great to play England again. We don't want to lose our English identity. I dread the thought of anyone ever thinking we were an American Band.

"After the American tour we do England, then Europe, some recording, then another American tour, a bit more recording after that, then Japan, Australia, and if we last that long we'll be happy".

So, you spend time on another album, until you are completely satisfied, you aim for the charts and the air waves, and try to remind your audience that your vanishing audience that your vanishing act can't go on forever. Supertramp's quietest moments have temporarily been cancelled.