PART 4

PLACE STUDIES II: CHRISTCHURCH AND DUNEDIN

CHAPTER 13

Flat city sounds redux: a musical 'countercartography' of Christchurch

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1950s southern gothic: picnicking with the devil

In the 2009 issue of *New Zealand Geographer* devoted to Christchurch, Kevin Glynn and Julie Cupples begin with what has become a regular reference point for the city's 'dark side'. Former splatter-horror director Peter Jackson's 1994 film *Heavenly Creatures* deals with the infamous Parker-Hulme murders that took place in the Cashmere hills just outside the city in 1954, and:

> exquisitely contrasts the official face of respectable Christchurch, site of the murder, with many of the city's darker undercurrents, its overt and covert class, sexual and racial hierarchies and oppressions, and its postcolonial psychodynamics of Anglophilia and repression.

(2009: 1)

Heavenly Creatures portrays the deep contradictions inherent in the Cathedral city, Flat city, 'city that shines', more commonly known as the 'Garden city' – which won an award for the 'garden capital of the world' in 1996, ahead of more than 600 competitors (Glynn, 2009: 9). Its surface veneer of British gothic revival architecture, numerous churches and conservative heritage politics, and its underbelly of violence, crime, murder, mayhem and transgressive youth activities come together in the film's portrayal of a crime in which, as Redmer Yska has claimed 'what really rankled [among adults] was that the girls had asserted their separateness from the adult world' (1993: 63).

The Parker-Hume murder provoked New Zealand's first post-World War II moral panic, and its first public (and international) case of juvenile delinquency, drawing comparisons with the Leopold and Loeb 'intellectual murder' in the USA 30 years earlier (Gurr and Cox, 1960: 5). Jackson's film explores the two teenaged girls' 'unhealthy friendship' involving musical fantasy worlds based on medieval literary texts, Hollywood movies and the operatic recordings of Mario Lanza, leading to their 'moider' of the mother of one of them with a brick in a stocking in the elegant garden setting of Victoria Park. The film revived dark memories that had been suppressed in the city for 40 years, and its international success even led to a journalist's rediscovery of one of the girls, now living in Scotland as Anne Perry and the author of more than 50 books of Victorian crime fiction. She was the subject of a lugubrious 2009 documentary, *Anne Perry: Interiors*, by German film maker Dana Linkiewicz, which revealed the details of her reclusive life but said little about the murder and nothing about Christchurch (see Christchurch City Libraries blog, 2010).

Heavenly Creatures' orchestral soundtrack, composed by Wellington rock and jazz pianist Peter Dasent, was described by Jackson as a 'rich and joyful' evocation of Parker and Hume's imaginary 'Fourth world: an absolute paradise of music, art and pure enjoyment' (Jackson, 1994). The pre-credit sequence presents the opening segment of a 1950s New Zealand tourist board documentary, *Welcome to Christchurch*, referring to the 'city of plains', and featuring the city's cathedral, the University of Canterbury, the prestigious Christchurch Girls' high school, cricket in Hagley Park, boat races down the river Avon, spring daffodils, and the city's numerous 'gay gardens'. This portrayal of a staid and demure British theme park is then brutally interrupted by a steadicam sequence in which the two girls, their clothes splattered with blood, flee screaming from the murder scene. The film continually uses orchestral music in conjunction with Christchurch's park and garden landscapes, as well as dramatically underscoring different moods, from joy to frustration and murderous intentions, and portrays the two girls positively and sympathetically.

'Crimechurch'

Heavenly Creatures exposes the stuffy and hypocritical provincial repressiveness of the city, with its orderly network of streets dotted with churches, and its leafy parks and gardens, constructed over a swamp that symbolically represents the city's dark and sinister underside.

The Ballantyne's department store fire of 1947, vividly described in Christchurch social historian Stevan Eldred-Grigg's 1993 novel *Gardens of Fire*, is a further example of this dark underside. Forty-seven people died in this tragedy, which occurred due to inept and archaic workplace practices and the entrenched social divisions in the city.

The Charles Aberhardt gay bashing and murder in Hagley Park in 1964, in which the six perpetrators were acquitted of manslaughter, provides another example (http://www.gaynz.net.nz/history/Aberhart.html).

More recently, in 1993, Gay Oakes drugged her de-facto husband's coffee, and, with the help of a friend, buried his body in the garden, where police found it 14 months later. She unsuccessfully claimed in her defence that he had battered her, and was sentenced to life imprisonment. And in 2010 Jason Paul Somerville was sentenced to a 23-year non-parole prison term for killing his wife and a woman neighbour, having sex with their bodies, and then burying them under the floorboards of his house. This murder took place in Wainoni Road, an address in a run-down area of the city. The house became known as 'the house of horrors' and was subjected to three arson attempts after the murder (Ninenews, 2010).

Another double murder, in which a prostitute and a mother were both sexually assaulted and murdered, emerged in 2010 (Booker, 2010).

Christchurch crime fiction writer Paul Cleave achieved international success with his 2007 novel *The Cleaner*, and has built his career on a series of novels about serial killers who operate in the Garden City:

> "Christchurch is a great setting for crime – it has two sides to it, there's the picture perfect setting you see on postcards everywhere, but there's also a dark, Gotham city feel here which has, sadly, turned this city into the murder capital of New Zealand."
>
> (Cleave: 2009)

According to *Listener* writer Jane Bowron, in a feature entitled 'Blood man of the garden city', Cleave lives 'in a very orderly street in the quiet suburb of Redwood with his girlfriend and three cats', does very little research for his books, writes feverishly while listening to UK pop group the Killers, and has been overseas only once, for a crime writers' festival. He appears to epitomise the dark side of cosy Christchurch provinciality (Bowron, 2010).

After the Somerville murders, the *Listener* ran a feature entitled 'Murderers most foul' on New Zealand's 'two-time killers, multiple murderers and baby killers', listing numerous examples going back as far as 1969, with comments from Canterbury University criminologist Greg Newbold (Lomas, 2010). This appeared in the same issue as the Cleave feature, and was followed up two weeks later with a cover story asking 'Why are so many Christchurch women brutally murdered?' featuring an image of a red high-heeled shoe superimposed on an aerial view of the city. Here the term 'Crimechurch' was introduced as an alternative moniker for the city, and Parker and Hulme were re-examined alongside serial rapists such as John Douglas Bennett under the rubric 'insidious class system'. 'Canterbury Crime Tales' listed 19 murders in the city between 1986 and 2010, and Newbold ascribed most of these rather callously to 'outcasts, losers and loners … weird Pākehā people … lumpenproletariat, just no-hopers and ne'er-do-wells' (Macfie, 2010: 16–17). According to the author of the article, despite the fact that Christchurch's crime statistics are in fact lower than other New Zealand cities, its reputation for 'gruesome high profile crimes', an unsafe city centre, and 'a state of denial and stiff-upper-lip attitude that can be traced to the city's English roots' (Ibid, 21) makes it the crime capital of New Zealand in terms of media coverage. Causes are assigned to the city's isolation and cold, grey and wet climate (by crime geographer Greg Breetzke, who compares it with Finland), the release of former mental patients into the city, the transfer of prisoners from other parts of the country, the trials of high-profile Dunedin murder suspects David Bain and Clayton Weatherstone in the city, and the apparent obsession of the *Christchurch Press* with teenage prostitution. In most of these cases, media sensationalism appears to be a major factor.

There is little doubt that Christchurch's reputation for murder and crime has affected its music. In his article about the punk and post-punk Christchurch music scene from 1978 to 1981, guitarist Roy Montgomery, formerly of the Pin Group, speculates ironically about the impact of *Heavenly Creatures* on Christchurch's international image, suggesting that 'it will strike most people as a severely pretentious sort of place, full of anally retentive inhabitants who occasionally go berserk'. Montgomery portrays the city during that period as the most Eurocentric in New Zealand, largely due to the 'relative absence of Māori, 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 made up most of the punk rock scene, he suggests, whereas he claimed to be the only person from a state house area, and where 'most hipsters came from two-parent families living in relatively good, often exclusive neighbourhoods' (1995: 49). Montgomery draws comparisons with Boston and Vancouver, while Christchurch is also frequently compared with Adelaide, also a 'city of churches' with similarly dark, criminal undercurrents, and a history of gruesome murders.[1]

[1] Bruce Russell notes that two other key figures in the Christchurch punk and post-punk scenes, Peter Stapleton and Stephen Cogle, were also from working-class backgrounds, and worked as a stevedore and factory process worker respectively. He also notes that 'Christchurch is all about what school you went to … punk was closely related to schools' (email to the author 18 January 2010).

Coming home in the dark

The Parker-Hulme murder site in Victoria Park is described in a 1988 guidebook as:

> immensely popular as a picnic ground ... renowned for its stands of exotic conifers and native bush, and its rock gardens ... and a remarkable and beautiful collection of rather more tender trees and shrubs from regions such as Australia, the Mediterranean, South Africa and Mexico.

(Braithwaite, 1988: 41)

Or as Michelanne Foster, the author of a play about the two girls, *Daughters of Heaven*, which pre-dated Jackson's film, stated: 'On the outskirts of the city's level lawns and daffodil gardens two girls picnic with the devil' (1992: 11). The path in Port Hills on which the murder took place was appropriated in 2001 for an eerie, ominous photographic diptych, 'Doublet, Parker/Hulme Crime Scene, Port Hills, Christchurch', by Anne Shelton, which has been described by Felicity Milburn as though:

> the paths, leading away from one another, out of frame, represent the increasing separation of history and myth, an interpretation reinforced by Shelton's later description of its subject as the site of 'the Heavenly Creatures crime'.

(2004: 7)

Milburn was one of the curators of a 2004 exhibition, *Coming Home in the Dark*, which explored the 'southern gothic' aspects of Christchurch and the South Island through visual and sonic art. The exhibition concentrated on:

> the subtler undercurrent of isolation and anxiety that clings to the flipside of Christchurch's genteel English appearance – a seldom-advertised aspect of local life that has seeped quietly into the province's music, literature and film-making as well as its visual arts practice.

(Milburn, 2004: 6)

The exhibition took place in the then controversial new Christchurch art gallery, an aggressively postmodern, undulating, glass-fronted building partly based on Māori designs representing waves, which opened in 2003 after provoking vociferous opposition from conservative devotees of Christchurch's British heritage buildings (Glynn, 2009). The title *Coming Home in the Dark* was taken from a short story about the gruesome murder of a family on a trip to Mount Araki in the South Island by Oamaru-born writer Owen Marshall, who suggested in comments about the exhibition that:

> Perhaps beneath the vaunted Englishness ... there has long been in Canterbury repressed unease arising from a sense of colonial imposition on a very different landscape, history and culture. And one expression of this is a contest of influences, usually creative, between overseas art and the homegrown.

(2004: 7)

This 'contest of influences' played out on the Canterbury landscape is also applicable to some of the music produced in the city, which tends to focus on 'the dark side' of Christchurch Gothic. In another article in the Art Gallery bulletin, exhibition co-curator Peter Vangioni uncovered:

> a layer of music in Christchurch that occupies another shadowy underground world. Darkness, anxiety and despair are recurrent themes often found in the city's sound culture. Christchurch's music scene has had a strong undercurrent of dark sounds, particularly bands associated with the Flying Nun label, founded in Christchurch in 1981. Of particular note are bands such as the Pin Group, the Terminals, Scorched Earth Policy, Into the Void, the Gordons, the Shallows and the Renderers. Musicians in these bands have repeatedly explored a theme of darkness in their music and lyrics.

(2004: 11)

Vangioni begins with a quotation from the lyrics of The Terminals' 1992 song 'Something dark', which describes a body being dug up from a garden, and which Piero Scaruffi has described as evoking the viscerally gothic guitar thrash of late 1960s US band The Velvet Underground, a major influence on the Flying Nun bands:

> demonic and cacophonous ... [with] a dejected tone of gothic punk but a frantic pulse ... menacing and desperate, with a guitar-drums workout that evokes the most evanescent 'cosmic' of the Velvet Underground.

(Scaruffi, 1999)

Vangioni places particular emphasis on Lyttleton-based guitarist and electronic musician Bruce Russell, founder-member of internationally recognised improvised drone-noise rock group The Dead C, and of the underground music labels Xpressway and Corpus Hermeticum, and author of the widely distributed '"What is Free?" A Free Noise Manifesto' (Russell, 2009). Three of Russell's sound works were featured in the exhibition, creating what Vangioni calls 'a sense of anxiety and unease'. Two of the members of the bizarre underground noise-metal band Into the Void, Jason Greig and Ronnie Van Hout, are also visual artists whose work was represented in the exhibition, and their music expresses:

> a cacophony of distorted electric guitars, an unrelenting pounding of the kick drum and ride cymbal overlaid with Van Hout's rambling lyrics: 'Number one, evil. Number two, evil. Number three, evil' ... dissonance and pandemonium ... Like their artworks, their music is not mainstream, it is not easy listening and remains in the shadows of Christchurch's music scene, firmly embedded beneath the surface.

(Vangioni, 2004: 11)

Even further in the 'shadows' of the Christchurch music scene is its metal subculture, intriguingly revealed in a 2002 article by Sarah Forgan entitled 'Subcultural capital in the Christchurch underground heavy metal scene'. One of the examples she gives is as follows:

> Local Christchurch metal band 'Meatyard' is an extreme form of death metal. Labelling themselves as 'Death/Grind', they write songs which are overtly against the dominant culture and disciplinary control, with song-titles such as 'Kill the Bill', the latter's message focusing on the hypocrisy of police brutality.

(2002)

Other metal groups located in Christchurch at the time included Wet Cherry, Full Kerb and Grief. Forgan argues that the Christchurch metal scene tends to consist of largely working-class participants, and took exception at the reproduction of their style by the Glassons clothing chain:

> Many local Christchurch metallers, aside from being angered at this appropriation of their style, couldn't help but be amused at these 'rich kids' paying exorbitant prices for a ripped shirt. Most metallers wear ripped shirts because they are much-loved and old and because they can't afford to buy replacement ones!
>
> (2002)

An incident in Christchurch in 2002, in which a grave was broken into and a skull stolen, was blamed by the media on the metal subculture, causing a local moral panic in which punk and gothic subcultures were also targeted and associated with witchcraft and paganism. Forgan argues that members of these subcultures were 'physically and emotionally attacked' for weeks after the incident, and quotes a 2002 article from the *Christchurch Press* associating them with Satanist cults:

> Police today expect to arrest two more members of a Gothic-style group of heavy-metal music fans who dug up a Christchurch grave and removed a skull. He could not discuss why the skull had been taken or what condition it was in when it was found by police, but said the cult-like group of young people were involved in the local heavy-metal music scene.
>
> (in Forgan, 2002)

The incident led to the formation of internet discussion groups such as MetalNewZealand@yahoogroups.com, where these issues of demonisation and victimisation were debated, as well as providing a sense of belonging among related youth subcultures. As with the graffiti writers and skateboarders discussed by Glynn, these music-related subcultures are involved in:

> decentring the city's official image and emphasising instead its dark aspects and hidden, repressed or underground spaces, landscapes, and geographies, its alternative mappings or countercartographies ... perspectives that evoke but transgress, rework, and re-imagine (and thus begin to transform) the city's normative geographies, sense of place and dominant identities.
>
> (2009: 20)

Christchurch rock 'n' roll prototypes: Max Merritt and Ray Columbus

Christchurch played a vitally important role in New Zealand's early rock and roll history, producing two of the country's most prominent and durable rock and roll bands, Max Merritt and the Meteors and Ray Columbus and the Invaders. Merritt's band emerged in the mid-1950s, playing in a Christchurch dance hall venue he started himself called the Teenage Club. Initially inspired by Bill Haley and the Comets (hence 'the Meteors'), Merritt's band began to play versions of more 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 John Dix in his encyclopaedic study of New Zealand rock and roll from 1955 to 1988, *Stranded in Paradise*, 'Max and the Boys

stole the show every night' (1989: 32). This was perhaps due as much to local pride as any perceived superior musical prowess and ability. Merritt's self-penned 1958 song 'Get a Haircut' is generally considered to be the first New Zealand original rock 'n' roll number, and later became the title of a 2007 compilation of New Zealand rock songs compiled by John Baker, stretching from 1958 to the early 2000s.

Merritt and his band also backed another Christchurch-born singer, Diane Jacobs, later Dinah Lee, who moved to Auckland soon after Merritt did, where she became one of the most prominent pop stars during the 1960s as a local 'queen of mod'. She had New Zealand's first no.1 record on the Australian charts in 1964 with 'Don't you know Yokomo', and her other hits included 'Do the Blue Beat'. As Diane Jacobs, she performed in Christchurch with her then partner, prominent folk singer Phil Garland, in 1962 in a rock 'n' roll band called Phil Garland & the Playboys, with green Fender guitars which offset the Invaders' red ones and the Meteors' white ones. In 1963 the Playboys were invited to substitute for the Meteors, who were on a national tour, in a six-week residency in the prestigious Top 20 nitespot in Auckland, after which both Garland and Jacobs stayed on in Auckland pursuing solo careers. After he returned to Christchurch, Garland began to develop an interest in folk music (Garland, 2009: 18).

Like Merritt before him, Ray Columbus was also introduced to the funk and soul sounds of James Brown and Ray Charles and other exponents of US soul and rhythm and blues, when he was invited to play for the US armed forces. They were also able to import US Fender guitars through the armed forces at a time when these were unavailable in New Zealand. This fortuitous exposure to black American music, which their Christchurch location afforded them, gave both Columbus and Merritt an advantage over other New Zealand bands when 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 civic and 'institutional' status by playing a packed farewell charity concert at the upmarket Theatre Royal in Christchurch in November 1962, as had Columbus and the Invaders previously, supported on both occasions by Phil Garland and the Playboys. These concerts were attended by the city's mayor and other dignitaries, but the groups never returned there except when touring, consequently losing much of their local respect and following. When Merritt and the Meteors arrived in Auckland, they found that Ray Columbus and the Invaders had quickly developed a large following, astounding Auckland audiences unfamiliar with their American R&B, rockabilly, and instrumental repertoire, matching suits, Shadows-style dance routines, Fender guitars, and echo units.

Another Christchurch-based rock 'n' roll group was Peter Nelson and the Castaways, who formed out of a group called the Diamonds and featured Nelson and Kaye Bassett on vocals, and a distinctive Hammond organ sound, before moving to Wellington in 1965, and then Australia in 1966. They had a number of singles before returning to Christchurch in 1968. The group re-formed to take part in the ROCKONZ concert in the Christchurch Town Hall in 2007, which celebrated 50 years of Christchurch rock music and featured Ray Columbus, Dinah Lee, Max Merritt, Toni Williams and a number of others, who were all presented with keys to the city, acknowledging the important contribution they had made to Christchurch.

Chants R&B: 'ferocious' southern garage

While the Invaders and the Meteors were establishing themselves in Australia, another group of local rock and roll legends, the Chants (later Chants R&B), had begun to emerge. Chants R&B were later described by Glenn A. Baker as 'the most ferocious garage band ever' (in J. Baker, 1988),

and on John Baker's retrospective Flying Nun compilation of Kiwi Garage Rock from 1966 to 1969, *Wild things*, the group is easily the most extreme, distinctive, distorted, and inventive of the 12 groups featured. Like Merritt and Columbus, Chants R&B were also heavily influenced by US soul and rhythm and blues, but more overwhelmingly by wild and ragged British garage blues band the Pretty Things and Van Morrison's Them. The Pretty Things' New Zealand tour in 1965 had produced widely publicised scenes of mayhem and debauchery more extreme than any 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 (see Mitchell, 2010). Andrew Schmidt claims that Chants R&B subsequently became '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 centre of a small but intense Christchurch music scene in the mid-1960s at the Stage Door club, a dark, dank cellar just off Cathedral Square with similarities to the Cavern in Liverpool. The group played four-hour sets of wild, distorted covers of songs by the Pretty Things, Them, Downliners Sect, the Graham Bond Organisation, the Animals and other 'darker' and more extreme mid-1960s British R&B groups. This repertoire, which included almost none of the group's own material, enabled Stage Door regulars to experience a vicarious, simulated, and idealised ritual re-enactment of British R&B scenes.

While middle-class students 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, disruptive, anti-social perspective. The Chants and their 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 this subculture.

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 10pm 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 alcohol or chemical stimulants as accessories to the atavistic, 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' and the Who's live performances (Schmidt, 1995: 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 took place within a broader context of running subcultural battles between mods, rockers, and surfies around Christchurch, sometimes in Cathedral Square, which has long had a reputation for violent encounters. These clashes also took place at the appropriately named Brighton Beach, in apparent simulation of the famous Bank Holiday weekend mod-rocker encounters in Brighton, Margate and Bournemouth in England, in 1964 and 1965 (see Cohen, 1972). And there were also renewed associations between music and murder. In December 1966, 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.

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 rather raunchy reputation, particularly at the British pub, frequented by sailors, prostitutes, transvestites and gays, which also later became a live music venue. But Schmidt has described the 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."
>
> (1995: 27)

Chants R&B returned to Christchurch in 2007 and 2010 for triumphant gigs at Al's Bar, releasing a DVD of the 2007 performance, 41 years after their residence at the Stage Door.

Into the '80s: Mollett Street, punk and DIY

The 1970s progressive rock scene in Christchurch was dominated by two 'underground' rock bands. Butler, a Māori group originally from Rotorua, formed to play at the Open Door drop-in centre, and released their only album in 1970, continuing to play locally and nationally until 1977. Ticket was an acid-rock group who introduced the city to independent and underground rock, influenced by Jimi Hendrix and Traffic. With a residency at Audrey's nightclub in Chancery Lane, Ticket made the national charts in 1971 with their song 'Country High'. The group sometimes played extended jam versions of their song 'Dream chant' for up to 40 minutes (Wilson et al., 2006).

Auckland was undoubtedly the capital of the very British-influenced New Zealand punk rock scene, which exploded in 1977, but Christchurch also developed what Dix describes as a 'healthy punk scene' (1988: 282), although an almost exclusively local one. As in many other localities, punk rock's two-chord anti-aesthetic offered aspiring performers and exhibitionists without any developed musical ability the freedom to start playing in public, which led to the growth of a small but strong and energetic local scene. Dix lists late-1970s Christchurch punk groups The Androidss, The Newtones, The Vauxhalls, and the heavily Velvet Underground-influenced Vacuum as important groups. 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 punk 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, 1988: 282).

The 'live jukebox' dynamic of earlier eras continued in the Christchurch punk scene, with The Androidss in particular playing Iggy Pop and Stooges numbers. Peter Arnold's recollection of The Androidss on the Kiwimusic internet listserve links the punk underworld of the British pub in Lyttleton with Christchurch's reputation for murders and civic pride, and suggests 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.

(Arnold: 1995)

In his 1999 book *Have you checked the children?* Christchurch writer Wade Ronald Churton surveys the New Zealand punk and post-punk scene from 1977 to 1981, and reveals the Christchurch punk scene as being particularly eccentric, often combining a mixture of styles from the early 1960s, glam rock, and 1970s prog rock. As he points out, one basic difference between the appropriation of punk in New Zealand and other eras of rock music was that none of the British or US punk bands toured New Zealand until the early 1980s:

> Punk ... was fundamentally different to earlier imported trends in that the entire message did not arrive in complete pre-fabricated form but as a set of stylistic ciphers and a do-it-yourself ethic. The phenomenon was to be decidedly marginal in commercial terms even in its English and American strongholds, but the ferment it stirred up with a generation hungry for self-identification and a little daring fun was unstoppable.

(1999: 32)

One distinctive Christchurch punk group was The Doomed, who based their repertoire on the *Roxy London WC2* live compilation of British punk groups, even appropriating some of its between-song banter. The Doomed were the only Christchurch punk band to be featured on a 1978 television *Eyewitness* report on the New Zealand punk scene, performing an original song, but causing embarrassment in some quarters. Churton describes them as:

> "the city's first overtly punk rock band ... which mashed together elements of the old and the new; long hair and flares coupled with the sneering punk confrontational stance, bolted to a slightly rickety high-speed blur-rock chassis."

(1999: 60)

The main location for Christchurch punk – and other musicians who didn't quite fit the punk label – was Mollett Street, a market and band practice room which in 1976 became the principal Christchurch alternative music venue, featuring bands who played mostly punk and pre-punk covers, especially of songs from the 1960s. It also included other decidedly non-punk performances by fire-eaters and cabaret groups, and an early incarnation of lesbian comedy duo The Topp Twins, and had a strong connection to Christchurch's gay scene. The punk groups included The Detroit Hemroids, The Kippers, The Basketcases, and in the early 1980s, the soul and R&B Louie and The Hotsticks, fronted by Mollett Street luminary Al Park, who later became the proprietor of Al's Bar, one of the main music venues in the city (Schmidt, 1995).

The Gresham pub in Cashel Street, its upstairs bar a well-known gay hangout, was demolished in 1978, and the British in Lyttleton, also a haunt of the gay scene, became another punk venue. In the same year the Christchurch scene was shaken up by a visit from Chris Knox's Dunedin group the Enemy, who soon mutated into Toy Love and moved to Auckland. Mollett Street closed down at the end of 1978, and some of the musicians associated with that scene relocated to Auckland. The new wave scene that supplanted punk established itself in 1979, with The Vacuum, The Vauxhalls and Vapour and the Trails becoming prominent, the latter two playing in pub venues the Gladstone, the newly opened student bar Dux de Lux and the British. The Androidss (the double 's' was a deliberate echo of the Nazi Waffen SS) developed from the Lincoln Road Loonies in 1979, and became a cult band, playing covers of the Velvet Underground, the Rolling Stones and Iggy Pop, who actually witnessed one of the band's performances at the British during a promotional tour, and made encouraging remarks. As Churton, who in 2010 unearthed an EP of unreleased Androidds material, 'In Christchurch Tonight', notes:

> "Right from the outset, there was something of the demimonde about the Androidss; they became well-known not only for their infectious live show but for their unashamedly hedonistic ways and in particular the fact that they could always be relied on to spread a little of that goodtime feeling around."

(1999: 162)

In his survey of Christchurch music from 1978 to 1981, Montgomery lists 35 active punk and post-punk bands in Christchurch between 1979 and 1981, but claims that this did not constitute a 'scene' as such, since 'it was not something of which most people would have been consciously aware' (1995: 49). 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 most significant Christchurch music since the 1980s came from a very small and almost invisible group of musicians. He cites Bill Direen's various groups, the Victor Dimisich Band, the Terminals and Scorched Earth Policy, and his own groups, the Joy Division-influenced Pin Group and Dadamah, who all played to very small audiences:

> "... of friends and relations (including the household canines), [who] tended to have low public profiles and were generally comprised of people who were not well-adjusted socially."

(1995: 49)

Elsewhere, Montgomery describes 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: 51)

He attributes Christchurch's main musical influences to this sense of cold scrutiny, lack of open acknowledgment of effort, and 'a culture where dislocation and alienation of one sort or another is the norm'. (1996: 51)

The Flying Nun years

By April 1981, when record shop owner Roger Shepherd decided to set up Flying Nun records – initially as a vehicle for recording the Christchurch bands he admired – Christchurch's punk bands had disappeared or mutated into post-punk combinations. Toy Love (and later Bats) bassist Paul Kean, Chris Knox's four-track, and Nightshift Studios engineer Arnold Van Bussell, with his eight track, had managed to record DIY sessions by Christchurch groups such as The Gordons (later Bailter 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.

In his study of The Bats, David Eggleton makes a direct link between the group's music and the countryside around Christchurch, claiming that the group's lyrics 'are partly southern Gothic, partly quasi-Celtic folk tales about loss and regeneration', and he suggests their 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 after more than 25 years, juggling US and European tours with an ongoing involvement in the local music scene. The association of their music with their city of origin could be seen as something earned by their support for the Christchurch scene. Their 1986 song 'No trouble in this town', seemingly about Christchurch (although their singer-songwriter, Robert Scott, lives in Dunedin), was included on the 2005 EMI double CD compilation *Christchurch: The Music*, along with tracks by 44 other Christchurch groups and musicians. The liner notes comment: 'The Bats' importance to the Christchurch (and NZ) music scene has often seemed underestimated' (Wilson et al., 2005). Their exclusion from Bollinger's 2009 *100 essential NZ albums* would seem to confirm this (Bollinger, 2009).

Many of Flying Nun'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.[2]

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 stated in 1996, had an 'erratic distribution system' and a 'rough-hewn but engagingly home-made sound', as well as featuring distinctive poster and art work and recordings made by band members, most notably Chris Knox. The label developed a reputation for being an 'artists' label' that put the pleasure of making and listening to music before any commercial imperatives, and placed emphasis on original composition in the sense of what French theorist Jacques Attali has defined as:

> playing for one's own pleasure: the musician plays primarily for himself, outside any operationality, spectacle, or accumulation of value; when music, extricating itself from the codes of sacrifice, representation, and repetition, emerges as an activity that is an end in itself, that creates its own code at the same time as the work.
>
> (1985: 135)

[2] Sneaky Feelings' Christchurch sojourn was reflected in 'Walk to the Square', on their 1987 album *Sentimental Education*. 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 the Mutton Birds' 1992 'A Thing Well Made', written and sung by Don McGlashan, 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 south of Dunedin, in which David Gray shot dead 13 people in a small town near Christchurch in the late 1990s.

As a result of this artist-first policy, Flying Nun's output became increasingly diverse and eclectic, producing 'anything from garage to straight pop to alternative dance' (Mayes, 1993).[3] The label's focus was consistently on what Paul McKessar has described as 'creation for its own sake on its own merits' (in Mitchell, 1994: 41), at least until 1997, when Shepherd sold Flying Nun to the mainstream Australian label Festival Mushroom, which was absorbed in 2005 by US major label Warner Music. Shepherd's decision in 2009 to buy back the label from Universal for an 'undisclosed figure' means that much of its obscure back catalogue may at some point be re-released on vinyl, mp3 and CD (Kara, 2009; see Bertram, 2008 and Greive, 2006).

The early output of Flying Nun served to legitimise the Christchurch music scene of the early 1980s as a definably local and self-sufficient phenomenon no longer dependent on the cover versions of previous decades, and no longer a place that musicians needed to migrate from to pursue a career in music. This was partly due to the bad experiences Chris Knox, and Christchurch musicians Alec Bathgate – a stalwart of Knox's group Tall Dwarfs – and Paul Kean had had in Australia in the early 1980s when attempting to establish their band Toy Love. Returning to New Zealand they passed on the message to other musicians that moving 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. Some groups, however, such as the Axemen, remained virtually unknown at home despite their reputation abroad.

The JPS Experience, formerly the Jean-Paul Sartre Experience, was a 'second generation' Flying Nun band from Christchurch, formed in 1985, which had a similarly 'jangly' pop-rock guitar sound to the Bats. A song from their 1986 debut EP, 'Flex', about sex, occasioned a cartoon in the *NZ Listener* by Chris Knox, and an in-depth musicological analysis in *Music in New Zealand* by Sneaky Feelings guitarist Matthew Bannister. This compared their unconventional use of time signatures (6/8) and minimalist harmonic structure to other Flying Nun bands of the time, as well as the '"art song" of fellow Cantabrian Jay Clarkson' (1999: 37). Moving to Auckland in 1991, the JPSE produced music for the soundtrack of Alison Maclean's 1992 road movie-thriller *Crush*, which won them Best Soundtrack in the 1993 New Zealand Film and Television Awards (McKessar, 1993: 43). As Bannister has suggested, the group's 'brand of swirling, hypnotic post-psychedelia … was ideal for film soundtracks', and they shared with fellow Christchurch band Bailter Space 'a fascination with "sound sculpture" – swirling guitar textures, volume and minimal structures' (Bannister, 1996: 37). The JPSE toured the USA and Europe in 1993 with the Bats and Dunedin group Straitjacket Fits under the rubric 'Noisyland', and in 1994 split into two bands, Stereo Bus and Superette, both similarly 'jangly' pop groups. Bannister suggests they contributed significantly to the direction that Flying Nun bands and alternative rock in general took in the late 1980s:

> "A grandiose sound, with ringing guitars, much use of echo, obscure but threatening lyrics, anthemic choruses, generally slow tempos … [and] an apparent indifference or disengagement from society – everything is treated ironically and music is seen … as a private, enclosed system that posits meaning by internal relationships rather than by reference to the outside world."
>
> (1999: 37, 73)

[3] One of their first dance-oriented releases was by Christchurch band Not Really Anything (NRA) in 1991.

These features have something in common with what might be called a 'Christchurch sound' of the period. Christchurch bands that prospered locally outside the Flying Nun label in the early 1980s included Pop Mechanix, formerly Splash Alley, fronted by Dick Driver, a prominent figure in the Mollett Street scene in the Doomed and the Hip Singles. Pop Mechanix' single 'Jumping out a window' was a modest success, with the band moving to Australia. Bass guitarist Paul Scott was influential in the formation of the Dance Exponents, who formed in 1982. Their song 'Christchurch' (in Cashel Street I wait), sung by Canadian-born Jordan Luck, is probably the best-known Christchurch anthem prior to Scribe's 'Theme from the Crusader':

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 ...

(The Dance Exponents, 1985)

Shadows on a flat land

By the mid-1990s Christchurch had developed a burgeoning dance music and hip hop scene, with local groups Dark Tower and Salmonella Dub both claiming Pacific-style reggae influences in their music (Pett, 1994: 28–29). In August 2000, the first Aotearoa Hip hop Summit took place at the Lumiere Theatre in Christchurch, providing a boost for the local hip hop scene, which then included Ladi6's group Sheelaroc. Dark Tower was in fact Jody Lloyd, a Pākehā MC, producer and musician, also known as Trillion, who operates his own record label She'll Be Right Records, and produced his first EP, *Real Zeal Men*, in 1995. Important but largely overlooked albums *Shadows on a Flat Land* (1998), *Canterbury Drafts* (2001) – both with explicit attachments to Canterbury – and *The Dark World* (2005) followed, as well as the collaborative album of remixes, *Audio Architecture in the 21st Century* (2007), representing Christchurch and the South Island through Lloyd's consciously place-oriented beats and rhymes (see Mitchell, 2009). Collaborating with numerous other Christchurch-based artists, including his sister Delmarnia Lloyd (of the rock groups Mink and Cloudboy), Flip Grater and Lindon Puffin, Lloyd has established a distinctively New Zealand-accented, intelligent form of Pākehā hip hop which refers continually to aspects of local and national identity and eschews the fake US accents put on by many other New Zealand MCs (see Shute, 2004: 36–39). Dark Tower also included Pākehā MC Jamie Greenslade, who in 2007 under the name Maitreya became the first-ever hip hop artist in the world to raise US$50 000 through the online music site SellaBand.com. This enabled him to record his debut solo album *Close To Home* – which includes rapping in te reo Māori, and a track entitled 'Christchurch 1996' – in New York with major hip hop producer Vlado Meller.

Samoan MC Scribe's commercially successful 2003 album *Canterbury Crusader* contained the track 'Stand Up', celebrating New Zealand hip hop, and 'Theme from the crusader', a paean to Christchurch, 'with local heroes Robbie Deans, Aaron and Nathan Mauger, Andrew Mehrtens, the Canterbury Flames, Anika Moa and Scribe's own suburb Phillipstown, all getting a nod' (Wilson et al., 2005). As a result, Christchurch was placed firmly on the map of Aotearoa hip hop.

In a feature on the Christchurch rock music scene in music monthly *Rip It Up* in 1995, Simon McLaren, of Flying Nun group Loves Ugly Children, praised 'the community feel of the music scene', describing Christchurch as '[a] really conservative city, culturally, but its anti-culture has a really strong element' (Pett, 1995: 8). This designation of an 'anti-culture' 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 overall impression in the late 1990s was of an independent music scene still struggling for any cohesive sense of identity, where discontent and disagreement predominated, and an alternative rock aesthetic was having difficulty surviving in a growing commercial climate. The latter was embodied by the feelers [sic], whose debut rock album 'supersystem' went four times platinum in 1998, making them the country's biggest rock band. They continue to tour extensively in 2010. In 2000, Cashmere high school boys Zed – managed by Ray Columbus – were signed up by Universal, and their debut album *Silencer* won three RIANZ awards, selling more than 55 000 copies and garnering interest in the USA. Both groups, of course, had to relocate from Christchurch.

In a survey of the Christchurch music scene in *Rip It Up* in 2005, Jody Lloyd suggested 'the quality of Christchurch music may suffer with the onset of commercial success', and that 'Christchurch audiences aren't very forgiving … the type of hype machine that forms the basis of the Auckland music scene just doesn't exist in Christchurch'. He concluded rather pessimistically: 'It is as if the underground waters have stopped flowing' (2005: 54, 55) – alluding to the swamp beneath the city which he saw as a source of creative inspiration. Nonetheless the eclectic, 1980s-influenced winners of the 2006 band competition at the Dux de Lux, who became known as Tiger Tones, spearheaded a new revival with their eponymous debut album in 2008. This was released on Pina Colada, a new independent imprint started by Tim Baird, who had previously worked at Galaxy Records, a stalwart in Christchurch's dwindling independent record shops, which also include Penny Lane, a large second-hand record shop in Sydenham. The Pina Colada label also released well-received albums by 'nu rave' duo Pig Out and Flying Nun recording artists the Shocking Pinks, both espousing rock-dance crossover genres, and suggesting a small renaissance in the Christchurch music scene.

A Christchurch and Lyttleton alt-country and 'nu folk' scene, perhaps partially inspired by the Renderers, also emerged in 2009, with a number of the groups attached to Lloyd's She'll Be Right records. Some, such as The Unfaithful Ways, the Eastern, the Easy Hearts, Lindon Puffin, Von Klap, Ragamuffin Children, and female singer Flip Grater appeared to be re-establishing Christchurch as an important location for alternative music. The highly successful Lawrence Arabia's song 'Apple Pie Bed' won the 2009 APRA Silver Scroll songwriting award, an event that was held in Christchurch for the first time in 2009. *Chart Disc vol. 2 09*, a compilation of tracks by the above-mentioned Christchurch artists, was released for the occasion, along with tracks by the Bats and Jody Lloyd, and Icelandic pop-folk singer Hera (based in Christchurch since 1994, but also recording and performing in her home country, and with five albums to her name). This followed on from Volume 1, also released in 2009, a sampler featuring Christchurch indie-pop artists.

The conflicting, isolated, and contradictory aspects of the Christchurch music scene could be seen as productive in terms of the development of musical 'anti-cultures' that adapt and adopt overseas influences and merge them with the local environment to produce idiosyncratic, syncretic results. Consequently, while still reliant on US and UK influences to create its own musical meanings, Christchurch can be seen as producing its own local network of identities and memories, which mark out a distinctiveness in the city's music. This distinctiveness often emerges in live performance; for rock and roll fans in Christchurch, Max Merritt and the Meteors at the Teenage Club in 1960 were arguably 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 or Rolling Stones at the Crawdaddy Club in London. The Androidss at the British in 1979 were as conducive to a sense of catharsis in the small Christchurch punk scene as the Clash at the 100 Club in London. Similarly, gigs by any number of Flying Nun bands from the Bats to Loves Ugly Children at local venues such as Warners, the Gladstone, the Star and Garter, the Zetland, the Old Star Tavern and the Edge constitute quintessential Christchurch musical experiences that have no need for legitimisation by international comparisons. Such events constitute formative sites of musical identity and mythology. With the recognition in the USA and Europe of independent rock musicians such as the Bats, the Renderers, the Terminals, Dead C, Montgomery and Direen, who either had their formative musical experiences in Christchurch or are still based nearby, the city's musical mythology has entered a growing network of shared local musical practices and a shared sense of transnational identity. Will Straw has characterised this as a process in which 'temporal movement is transformed into cartographic density' (1997: 501). Or as Philip Matthews has said of the Dead C, '[they] exist beyond the music business' cycles of hype and renewal; they've never been in fashion and can't be out of fashion' (2006). Sara Cohen, in her writings about music in Liverpool, has convincingly suggested that 'the notion of a local sound … does reflect the desire to symbolically assert difference and a sense of local identity' which can be found 'in the collective memories embodied in the music' (1994: 129). The particularities and specificities of the Christchurch music scene, together with its geographical isolation, sense of alienation, and struggles to find an identity, have generated a cartography of 'collective memories' that has its own distinctive properties.

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