



TISM FULL TRANSCRIPT

Originally from FasterLouder.com.au

Interview by Anton Trees

Anton S. Trees: How was last night? You have a good night?

Humphrey B. Flaubert: Well I think last night was a night of magic and celebration. I think the audience was perplexed last night. But I think it was a very warm and celebratory evening.

Ron Hitler-Barrassi: It's always good when there are girls up the front.

AST: Or one girl.

RHB: Well, yes, girl. Using poetic license. It was a good gig because we all got headjobs actually during the gig from each other, on stage. Live: The Canterbury Bulldogs, Germaine Greer, ah every TISM website thing...this is a website thing isn't it Anton?

AST: Yep.

RHB: Are all the apostrophes going to be in the right place or what?

AST: Na', I'll just be writing 'LOL' everywhere.

RHB: (Talks about grammar and the misplacement of the definitive article, etc.)

HBF: If you were referring to our body of work and you were saying TISM's single recurring theme, well that'd be S apostrophe, wouldn't it?

RHB: Yes, yes.

AST: Did I misplace an apostrophe in my review?

HBF: No idea.

AST: Is that where you're going?

HBF: No, no.

RHB: We're saying we know that the web is horrid. Like, there's the animal sex, and the crap sex. I can put up with that. I just can't put up with the shoddy apostrophe placement. I think Merlin from Big Brother's brave protest against the spelling of the definitive article is uh, something we should all hold to the fore very much... What the fuck are we talking about again?

AST: I dunno', I'm lost.

(Laughter)

RHB: Great article though Anton [the review of the White Alburn on FasterLouder.com.au], marvellous. We read it on the plane and it warmed the cockles.

AST: I apologise for being so uh...for lauding you so strongly.

HBF: Yeah, it's a bit of an unusual phase we're going through Anton.

AST: Well it seems a lot of critics seem to actually be doing a bit of a reversal and going for the clever 'I no longer think TISM are shit,' and going for the 'I think TISM are good' thing.



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RHB: Well that's kind of disturbing because what the fuck are we going to whinge about in interviews now? Our whole schtick has been 'well, we're shit, and everyone else is shit so why doesn't anyone say everyone is else is shit?' ...They've trumped us...

HBF: I spose they're still not saying everyone else is shit.

RHB: They've trumped us Humphrey... 'cuz they're saying everyone else is good, but we're good as well. It's something that, as artists, we have to deal with. You know success is like a new team - with new players and everything - and I think you need to be able to play in the finals for a couple of years before you've got a shot at the grand final.

HBF: Do you think that maybe that means that people are going to be at a TISM gig in the future sort of after a is song performed as if it was like Ben Harper or the Art Of Fighting or something...they'd all be there going 'oh!' They'd all be shaking their heads...

AST: A religious experience?

HBF: Yeah, yeah. Maybe that's the next sort of rung down that we have to step to.

AST: I think you'd be surprised how many people had an epiphany last night... um...particularly a bunch of bogans behind me who were having a *great* time humping pretty much anyone...they really enjoyed that. And it's great that TISM can provide a medium in which bogans can hump other people.

HBF: Low-level sexual harassment has always been high on TISM's list of ambition, in a live performance context.

RHB: It's a little bit like a JBT gig, where's he's been on for two and a half hours. It must be great if you're there watching JB and you're two and a half hours in and then he pulls out some Indian string instrument that was used in Bengal in the 13th Century and he says 'I've just about learned how to D-tune a bouzouki' and off he goes on a 20-minute bouzouki solo. That must be quite depressing because you've still gotta' go 'marvellous! Marvellous! What a marvellous multi-instrumentalist drawing on the kaleidoscopic cultures of world music!'

AST: But you guys are sort of shooting yourself in the foot there surely? You're insulting your man Tokin...I mean he did open up the '97 tour with Yob played on a sitar... wasn't it?

RHB: Was it a slide guitar?

AST: Oh, it was a Hawaiian guitar.

HBF: Yes, Hawaiian guitar, yes.

RHB: We plead guilty Anton.

HBF: Ah yes. We're certainly dilettantes of the worst kind. We kind of uh, it's a bit like how *Daktari* - a television program - tried to approximate the Aboriginal population in a very racist, hegemonic style. That's our pilfering of world music. We're not anywhere near as sincere about it as the John Butler Trio. I reckon the guys in the John Butler Trio are really just there to pick up an SBS root. By that I mean...

AST: Indira Naidoo?

HBF: Yes, like an SBS hard-on. So you go along to John Butler and the girls are looking at you there thinking 'he must be a fairly sensitive kind of guy' and really all you wanna' do is jerk off on to their backs.



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RHB: Or if you can't cum you just spit on their backs and say 'that was great.'

AST: I agree absolutely. I've seen John Butler and the urge to ejaculate on anyone really, was something that was very difficult to fight back.

I was just reading yesterday Michael Dwyer's take on you guys, and he said that you had become - or always were - crassly commercial. Do you feel like you're reaping the rewards of your apparent commercialism?

HBF: (Laughs). Ah, no.

RHB: We have no words to say against Michael, he's a marvellous journalist. Except for you Anton, he's the second most intelligent person to ever interview us. That article was a watershed for us because it was a double page spread in the Age full of fair, laudatory, important [writing]...it had a sense of importance which was completely unusual. We're used to Pat Donovan's tossed-off one-liners. Hasn't Pat had his pants pulled down?! The first thing that happened in this whole process was Pat saying that on first listen our music is just the same-old, stuck-in-a-rut...ooh he's had his pants pulled down by Michael Dwyer and the rest of them. Because everyone is giving us four and a half stars and we're now national treasures, Australia's most interesting artists for the last 20 years and all that palaver. I think Pat should be having a good, hard look.

AST: At least there are journos out there writing the predictable 'I've got TISM worked out' articles.

HBF: There's always, of course, Rolling Stone magazine, Anton. And Rolling Stone have the opportunity to have a quick look at the song titles and work us out from that. The grand tradition there.

AST: Yep, yep.

I've heard reports that you're genuinely proud of the latest album Humphrey.

HBF: Genuinely proud...yes, I don't know about that. I mean I'm certainly always proud of everything we do. It's sort of like when I'm proud of my poo. I look down on it and think 'that's well-formed, that means I'm healthy.' I'm a bit ashamed of being proud of it.

AST: What poos do you not think have been up to scratch? What poos haven't been well-formed? I hear you didn't like Hot Dogma much.

HBF: No, no, I didn't like Hot Dogma. I wince when I hear it.

AST: I think it's probably the second best album of all time. But that probably says more about me than it does about the album...

RHB: Well, what do you think is the best album of all time.

AST: You don't wanna' know...(silence)...I think Karma County's Last Stop Heavenly Heights is the best album of all time.

(Laughs all round).

HBF: Oh well, ok.

AST: Sorry about that guys (laughs).

(Laughs all round)

RHB: I might've guessed that.

AST: That's because I'm a sensitive person.



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HBF: No, no, that's fine. Um...yeah...I find lists are always very difficult. I mean, I reckon Barry Crocker's probably released one of the best albums of all time.

AST: I've never listened to Barry Crocker.

HBF: Well, I just sort of picked him out at random really. But I think Hot Dogma, I suppose had a lot of good things going for it. It had a lot of songs on it.

AST: It did have Life Kills at the end.

HBF: Yes, it did have some of good lyrics on it. I just hated the quintessentially 80s music on it. I've always thought that TISM has always been unfashionably - to our own detriment at times - sort of not sounding like anyone else. And sometimes that sort of sheer dagginess...that album because...

AST: Well it had Leak all over didn't it?

HBF: Hot Dogma?

AST: Yeah it had a lot of lot of 80s guitar rock. Incredible riffing.

HBF: Well he was a very talented person of course...

AST: And what happened to him?

HBF: Well, he had to go.

RHB: He was making us look bad.

HBF: Yes.

RHB: It's hard when you talk about albums because it's something that controls you more than you control it. It's hard when you're writing...From the act of writing - and we write a lot - like, we write a lot of songs and then we edit down - I guess in that act of selection, of editing, we have some control. But it does seem that other bands are worried about every knob, and every turn of the knob and every dB and mastering. We don't sweat on it as much.

AST: So you're not Craig Nicholls-esque, thinking 'we have to have 8 more harmonies?'

RHB: No, no, no. We tend to be, for one reason or another - part of it is that we haven't got time, and part of it is we haven't got the inclination - we've never really mastered - except for possibly Humphrey - we've never mastered the whole idea of the studio, and I think that's a double-edged sword. Like, in some ways you can master the studio to your own detriment. Everything can seem more controlled and everything can seem more processed, which is bad. But there are some artists I think who use the studio as an instrument - Prince I guess. He sonically seems to think a lot. But then he's gone right up his own arse. It's a very fine line.

AST: Apparently he has just returned out of his arse with his latest album.

RHB: Yeah apparently.

AST: Of course no one's actually heard it.

RHB: It's hard to get that balance right. That's why I reckon getting that balance right is more a matter of luck. You can over-cement and wreck yourself, you can not care about it in the spirit of 'who cares?' I remember



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when the Clash recorded the double London Calling and they were saying 'we're in a shitty studio, and there's holes in the wall' and everyone was slagging 'em off for the album before that - I think it was Give 'Em Enough Rope - and they couldn't give a toss if it worked for 'em. It's a very hard balance and I think we've always fallen on the lack of finesse.

AST: You guys have edited out some songs which I think are some of your best work. Like, perhaps not Eckermann Is Very Silly...

RHB: Not a bad song.

AST: State Schools Are Great Schools...is very good. In Defence Of Poetry is another one I quite like. But maybe these are just me. You guys seem to have a very different opinion of your work than do a lot of your more fanatical fans that you see up the front of every single show that you've done for the past five years.

HBF: Anton, I think you've certainly hit on a theme there. The guys in TISM - a lot of the guys in TISM - have completely different ideas. And it's probably a good thing. If you were at a TISM song-writing session, you'd be amazed at how un-smiling and laughing we all are. It's all like we're writing some new fucking Dirty Three song.

RHB: I think, Humphrey, we made the mistake, when we first...what was that album before DeRigeur Mortis? Wanker.com - before Machiavelli. I reckon we chickened out. We wrote quite a lot of songs that we liked. The reactions we got was that they were good songs but they weren't TISM songs. I reckon we went a bit low-brow with the couple of albums made before this one [The White Album]. We went against our instincts and went 'alright then, we need to slag off Fred Durst.' You could tell that it sounded like TISM were trying too hard to sound like TISM. It was like we were a TISM covers band.

AST: It's a very different album. [The White Album].

RHB: Yeah. This one's there's been a bit more of a let-up on that. We've let through to the public this stuff that we've always been writing, but out of the spirit of 'we couldn't give a toss.' And I think that has worked for us. And I think there was a lack of backbone caused by success. I don't think we're on our Pat Malone here at all. But it seems that with us, success makes us too self-conscious of that...for all our anarchy and our rock 'n' roll break the rules, I reckon we paid too much attention to the rules once those rules started working for us.

AST: That goes to show that even if you guys sometimes seem to exist in a critical vacuum, you are...

RHB: It wasn't a reaction to critical success - we've never had that much and we don't care about that too much. It was more success-success.

AST: Like people genuinely liking you?

RHB: Yeah! Two songs on the Triple J Hottest 100, the gold record, the ARIA and all that shit. For all our slagging that off - and intellectually we definitely slag that off, it's all codswallop - on some basic gut level it took us two albums to get over it. By trying to put it in the background, that's still a reaction to it. And I think that hampered the work on those two albums. And I think with this album we're out of the shadow of that, and we're back to genuinely not giving a toss. And I think we've learned something from that process of...look, we've come to the realisation that nothing's gonna' get much better or worse from where we're at. That second-guessing the audience is gone.

HBF: Somebody said to me that this album reminds them off the second disc on wanker.com. And it is in a way. That's the sort of song [on Att: Shock] that we like to write. Not in isolation. We write the other ones as well. But we write the whole lot, and this time I suppose we... a song like Car Battery [from the White Album] is a bit



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like 'You Gotta' Love That' [from Att: Shock Records] in that it doesn't quite fit the normal persona of a TISM song. And this time we put it out.

AST: I think that's when you guys are at your best. When you get in there and regardless of what the critics want to believe, you are actually *saying something*. You actually are reflecting on society and all that kind of...

RHB: It also shows, I think, that kind of process of how - as artists in TISM - the critical approach to us seems like they're [the critics] completely talking about another band. I think there's been a legitimate criticism of TISM's last two albums in the reasons I just elucidated; it's too self-conscious, it's a little bit safe. It's not quite...

Instead there's just been the normal effort of 'they're jokey, they're whacky, whacko, one-dimensional whackos from TISM.' And you think...that's never convinced me. If that convinced me, I wouldn't be in the band. If I thought it was a jokey, whacko band I'd get the fuck out of it.

So you have what's really going on and the things you're exploring and learning and meeting people over 20 years and then you have...[Criticism of TISM] it's like this child idiot's version of an adult's growth. The voice of the media is hugely loud and idiot savant. It's like someone from Rain Man shouting in your ear. They might get a little bit right, but the overall impact of what they say is so foreign to what it's really like [to be in TISM]; turning up, masks off, calling each other by our real names, after our real jobs, at eight o'clock in a stinking, freezing room and asking 'who's got an idea?' That's when you think 'I wish the fucking critics were here then.' They're talking about the witty, cynical TISM and the marketing ploys TISM and the TISM that's all self-conscious about the industry and the whacko TISM. You see what we're really like! It's seven blokes in a room who are tired, have real lives, and real jobs and no ideas, 'so let's get a beer, boys.'

HBF: I think also, we are actually...we've always had a very high self-criticism bar. And it's only recently we've actually realised we can lower the bar and allow more things to be released to the public without feeling afraid that we were going up our own arses. When we started, we were intensely afraid of going up our own arses. I think probably we rejected things on that basis. We're actually able now to actually relax and go 'Car Battery may be a little bit romantic and esoteric but it's still not the utter wank that we are opposed to.' It's actually ok...some people might not like that song, but I reckon there's something...

RHB: There is something about the way we write and what we put out, Humphrey, that it still is a TISM song. A TISM song's a TISM song and there's not many songs like it. There's just something built in to the seven guys we are...I think part of it is because there's a lot of talking put in the middle of it, that really makes it TISM. And of course the lyrics are like nothing else. We've never tried to copy anyone. But if you want a normal band with normal inspiration and normal rock 'n' roll, there's always going to be a better band than us. The only thing you get from us that you don't get from anyone else is TISM. And TISM's always been at our best a mixture - it could be that one song is a hard rock song and the next song's this weird thing and the next things this sort of fey - like 40 Years - this weirdly poetic sort of thing. And we've allowed ourselves on this album to do more of that. And we didn't allow ourselves enough of that on the last two albums.

HBF: I also think in a musical sense, there is a TISM identity and I reckon it's certainly worked against us with some of your more glossy mag critics. We always insist on our songs being immediately simple and accessible. Even if it's a slow song or whatever, [even] if it's a little bit sort of -

RHB: educated -

HBF: Yeah, or confronting and murky or whatever, there's an internal police force in TISM which knocks it on the head. And I reckon that some people think that it equates somehow with a lack of song-writing craft or a lack of musical prowess. That's actually not because we can't play Kid A, it's because we choose to play music like that [that is simple and accessible]. We would've lasted a year and a half if our music sounded like...

AST: 'Yesterday I woke up sucking a lemon?'



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HBF: Yeah, or if it was Slipknot. If it was as confronting musically as the lyrics and the images are confronting, you know, it wouldn't have lasted six...there's that whole other element where you look up at the crowd, past the people who, Ok, we connect with those people at the front there -

AST: - On a very visceral level.

HBF: Yes, but you look up at the back as well and there are the bank teller types and their girlfriends who are singing 'I'm fucked in the head' but in a way that's not how Fred Durst might sing 'I'm fucked in the head.' The way that Barry Crocker might sing 'I'm fucked in the head.'

RHB: Exactly.

AST: I think that that's one of the things that's awesome [about TISM]...I was yelling out 'I'm fucked in the head' last night up the front. And you can take it on a completely simplistic level of, yes, I am genuinely fucked in the head. And you can enjoy saying the word fuck. Everyone around me obviously enjoyed swearing. But a lot of people do take something away from that that's a little bit deeper.

HBF: Oh, yeah.

RHB: You're right Humphrey...it's a legitimate - no critic has ever said it because it'd be too thoughtful - but there's a legitimate argument against TISM's music in that it's not crafted. There is a sense of rough hued-ness about it. And yet, that's not just because we just let it happen. There is also a self-conscious lack of finesse. Like, we like a lack of finesse. Especially on this album, there was a lovely spirit of 'who gives a fuck?' That microphone's popping! Who gives a fuck? That organ isn't recording properly! Who gives a fuck?

AST: It's got a very bedroom tapes feel.

RHB: Yeah, and that's exactly where TISM started. So for good or for ill, it started in the bedroom and probably the best things are still done in the bedroom. And other artists don't want to work like that and they're fantastic, of course they don't. But there's a lack of finesse and [hence an] immediacy and a simplicity about not just the meaning of it but the form of it. We don't resolve from that. We think that's good. Jesus, once you get over three minutes thirty I reckon you're very much in danger of going straight up the shit chute. There's not too many artists that go over three minutes thirty and you don't think 'well if you cut that back to three minutes thirty it'd probably be better.'

AST: Yeah, there's pretty much like, one song I can think of now that goes well over three minutes thirty and actually works...like, The End by The Doors.

RHB: Yeah, yeah, yeah! Maybe that.

Michael Lynch [manager]: Time's up guys.

AST: Cool, cheers guys.

RHB: When you write this up, I'd like you to replace every mention of TISM with the John Butler Trio.

AST: Do you really want me to do that?

RHB: No.