



EMILY WATT in Wellington

THERE is something slightly unsettling about the fact that the man who penned our second national anthem isn't typically Kiwi.

He can't swim very well, doesn't drink, doesn't go to the races, is a fairly bad fisherman, and admits he's not very supportive of rugby (where many of his songs are raucously belted on any given weekend).

"It's like I'm exactly the wrong candidate," Dave Dobbyn chuckles. "A little, spotty, bald guy from Glen Innes who can't play rugby."

Not that we care. The country has claimed his 30 years of music as its own.

So how did he write those alternative national anthems? "I still have no idea," he says. "All

I know is that it's not a decision a small group of people can make or even one person can make.

"You can't just consciously write an anthem; that doesn't work. People just pull it out of the air. It turns into this massive movement of the heart."

Dobbyn should know, he's crafted a fair few.

When the New Zealand music industry gave him a lifetime achievement award in 2001, the announcer's speech was simply a list of Dobbyn's song titles: *Whaling, Language, Outlook For Thursday, It Dawned on Me, Slice of Heaven, Magic What She Do, Oughta Be In Love* and others.

Now he has released a two-CD compilation of the past 30 years, starting with 1979's *Be Mine Tonight*, filled with the

braggadocio of youth through to more sombre reflections from recent years.

Despite Dobbyn's 30 years of hits and a status as the grand statesman of Kiwi music - someone who, a reporter noted, could record a fart in a bottle and we'd try to sing along - he is afflicted with a crippling lack of confidence.

"It's probably my biggest battle really, in every level: lack of confidence and just the blues. I think it's just one of those things, if you're really good at something there's just something that's a thorn in your side to offset it. Maybe to keep your feet on the ground."

The confidence issue has led to the stretches of silence between albums, but he says the drive to make music, the addiction to it, ultimately, forces you to challenge your



sense of uselessness and just get on with it.

The self-described benevolent uncle of Kiwi rock is now 52 and lives in the Auckland suburb of Grey Lynn, and has a bach at Northland's Mangawhai Heads. It is a simple lifestyle, nothing too flamboyant.

He married his childhood sweetheart, Anneliesje, and has two children, Grace, 16, and Eli, 14.

He says little about his family other than: "The family, for me, is a great grounding thing.

"You can let your creativity wander off in all kinds of directions, but if you've got that to stand on and to centre your life around it, it's got to be healthy."

This is Dobbyn's tale of his

childhood: a painfully shy kid, terrible at sport, who had a musical ear which he kept glued to the radiogram. When he was about 10, he got hold of a ukulele and straight away set about trying to make it mimic an electric guitar.

On sports days he was left running at the back "with the fatties and the mutants". In those days it was compulsory to play rugby .

"Thankfully, my team was so bad I got put on the wing and the ball never came to me. Except once and I scored a try. It was accidental. I fell on it."

At school, music was the one thing Dobbyn could do well. "I was a startled chook for a few years really. Very short and very anxious and fearful and shy.

"Playing the guitar was something I could do, I could kind of hide behind it in a way, hold it up my sleeve and know I can do that."

When friends from Selwyn College invited him to join Th' Dudes, his performing experience numbered gigs at Kingslea Mental Hospital, a rest home and St Mary's School, where he played John Lennon's *Imagine* on the piano to a hall of girls but was too shell-shocked to sing.

"It was deeply terrifying. But I was drawn to it like a moth to a flame. They've got no idea the flame's going to burn them, you know? That comes further down the track," he laughs.

CONTINUED Page 19



D Scene

Wednesday 18/11/2009

Page: 18

Section: General News

Region: Dunedin Circulation: 48,479

Type: Community

Size: 1,610.28 sq.cms.

Frequency: ----F--

Brief: WINETOUR

Page 3 of 3

A Kiwi classic

FROM Page 18

BY the late 1970s, the swaggering kid who wrote and performed the cocksure *Be Mine Tonight*, complete with a knowing line about “Asian cigarettes”, was still shy, terrified of girls. The song was all bravado and bullshit, he admits.

The band moved to Sydney, and things took off. He knew he wanted to do this for the rest of his life.

“It all happened really quickly from memory. Life is pretty exciting in that way.”

They were rock’n’roll years: booze, gigs, parties.

After Th’ Dudes folded, he set up DD Smash and continued to rock. In 1984 his popularity and reputation took a nosedive when he was accused of inciting Auckland’s Queen St riots. “It was like the opposite of getting the key to the town.”

He was doing a gig in Aotea Square when police began to fight with the crowd. Dobbyn said: “I wish those riot squad guys would stop wanking and put their little batons away.”

Cue looting and chaos.

“The scariest thing was when it actually happened. There was so much fury in it. There was this incredible tornado of anger through the place which will always sit with me.”

He was vilified and hauled

before the courts. It was high profile and high theatrics. His lawyer, Peter Williams, was pitted against Crown prosecutor David Morris - the pair had last crossed swords in court during the Arthur Allan Thomas case. Dobbyn’s parents were there to support him. He remembers standing in the dock as the loneliest place in the world.

He was eventually acquitted of behaving in a manner likely to cause violence against person or property and using insulting language.

Has the experience forced the “w” word from his lexicon? “I wish I didn’t [still use the word] . . . but there’s a lot of them out there.”

For example, he makes a tidy segue, look at the *Loyal* video and “that bloody jersey”. Its loud patterns, scrunched sleeves and shapeless form was a terrible choice. What was he thinking? He was grumpy that day, he recalls, and his wife had picked out several wardrobe choices to wear for the video. “It was quite a cool day anyway so I just left the jersey on. Nobody said anything. Bastards.”

Some time, about 1996, he gave up drinking. He went to Alcoholics Anonymous, discovered it wasn’t very anonymous, and quit on his own. He also became a Christian, the result of a life-

long search. He is open about his faith, but not preachy.

Now Dobbyn’s released a career retrospective. It is “a funny job”, a career that has taken him to provincial New Zealand and round the rest of the world, playing to the entire royal family, war veterans, corporate clients, jails and schools.

The new compilation album is an unburdening of sorts: “It allows me to say ‘there it is’ and move on to something completely new and wild.”

He has set aside next year - after the *Beside You* tour this month and a tour of wineries with Bic Runga and Tim Finn during the summer - to write another album.

You’d expect him to say his best songs are ahead of him, and he believes it.

“It becomes an all-consuming thing, just a need to craft another great three minutes.”

Regrets, he’s had a few, he sings Sinatra-style down the phone.

“Buckets of them. But I keep handing them in on a daily basis. I don’t think we were meant to hang on to things. It’s just figuring out which things you need to hang on to, to be able to keep leaning forward.”

DOMINION POST