



GREAT EXPECTATIONS: Dave Dobbyn says he still gets butterflies before every gig knowing he has to live up to the affection people have for his songs.

Kiwi rock senior statesman Dave Dobbyn has been writing and recording for 30 years and is celebrating the anniversary with a best-of collection and a book in which he writes about the inspiration for his songs. In this extract, he reflects upon the inspiration behind five of his biggest anthems

Be Mine Tonight

I clearly remember the moment it hit me in a Brighton Rd, Parnell house I was sharing with two student-teacher friends in 1977. The ringing guitar chords hooked me. Of course I was convinced it would be a huge hit overnight.

Springsteen's *Born to Run* had got to me, along with an overdose of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Brian Eno and Lou Reed, so I was going guitar crazy. I wrote this song on a brand new \$650 blond Fender Stratocaster that weighs a tonne.

I played the verse chords over and over for hours until the words came. I was too shy for a girlfriend at that age, so I had to write with the swagger of one who'd had many — as you do. I think I got away with it. Th' Dudes hadn't long been performing, and from the moment we included this one in the set it shone and people connected with it. When fans say, "I grew up with your music", I say, "Well, well, so did I." I continue to play this song as much for the young dudes as for Th' Dudes.

Whaling

I was touring in Australia with DD Smash, and the whole song came to me in Kings Cross at the house bar of the Barclay Hotel in the wee smalls.

I remember the words flying on to a beer coaster. I was deeply missing my fiancée and we sent letters across the ditch daily. The touring was gruelling; we were playing eight shows a week and losing money.

The idea of the reluctant whaler appealed to me as an expression of exasperation and a symbol of my homesickness. The verses are self-encouraging and an aid to persevering against the tide in what seemed insurmountable waves of hard slog.

I finished the verses of *Whaling* in the summer of '82 on the shores of Lake Okataina in the Bay of Plenty. Anneliesje and I were together there after my months in Oz. We had just toured New Zealand to full houses, only to lessen the debt of what we had endured. The reluctant whaler is still out there, so this song remains in the live set for those who are fellow sloggers.

As to the metaphor of whaling, it went completely past a Melbourne radio programmer, who refused airplay on the grounds that whaling was a "dead issue".



Loyal

Loyal was written as a devotional love song. We were living in a Sydney flat near a park at the time. There was a pathway outside that students would use on their way through after school. One sunny day on the deck I came up with the basics of this one, and after singing it quietly over my strumming, under a fully bloomed flame tree, hearty applause came up from the pathway. I blushed.

That was all the encouragement I needed to finish it. The “pour your heart out” bit came next. I remember nailing this one lyrically very quickly, to the point where it was almost fully formed. I love it when that happens.

I couldn't resist the word “loyal”. It's such a wonderful word, a poem of a word. There's an essence to it. It's simple. I had no idea it would become such a favourite for people, especially having worn that jersey in the video! It's amazing what a song can survive.

Beside You

A song of apology, *Beside You* was the clincher for me on *The Islander* album of '98.

From the start it felt like a traditional Irish love song, full of promises and sorrow, although it has become more like a prayer. I say that because people get married to it. You never think about that when you're writing songs.

People tell me their stories and where the song fits in their lives. I'm amazed at the reach of a song — it can be a key into a family's heart. Maybe that's why I get butterflies backstage before every gig, just knowing I need to live up to something that's dear to people.

It can be daunting, but you rise to it with due respect and the reward is immeasurable.

Welcome Home

On a marae we are sung in and respond singing. The protocol is honouring and deeply communal. The barriers melt and we all

become us.

I was moved to write this after viewing a report on an anti-racism protest in Christchurch. It demanded a response. Everyone here has migratory roots, and we're altogether “us” as far as I could see. “You'll only get man's inhumanity to man on the goggle box,” I'd hear my father say as he ate crisps in front of the TV. I was feeling that in the last generation it was all about occasional songs and maybe we lost something on the way to modernity in not embracing that tradition. How to write something so simple and built to last, of sentiment though not sentimental — this was a big ask. A welcome song as deserving as the goodbye of *Now Is the Hour*. Goodness. I've been transfixed by *Now Is the Hour* since birth. How many families sang this together around an upright in wartime? How many goodbyes? How many guitars at airports? Arms waving on the shore. We miss you already, come home. How many stories?

How many letters to sons and daughters. With all this in mind I took to crafting a welcome. It had to be durable and an occasional song with wide-openness at its core.

You have to want to sing along in the chorus. It needed a respect about it. The lyrics were critical and I rewrote them many times.

They had to look good on a page to be sung easily. I finished it with superb production and coaching from Neil Finn.

From the moment it set sail this song travelled well. I've had the huge privilege of performing it at the Hyde Park New Zealand Memorial dedication, where 32 of our veterans were honoured by the entire royal family and all the nation. I sang it when the bodies of our Air New Zealand crew that crashed off the coast of France were returned to their families — a deeply moving honour that will stay with me always. Likewise, with privilege, I sang it to a young man dying, his family all around. Sometimes a guitar can take you places you wouldn't dream of. That's something to be grateful for.



LOWDOWN

Who: Dave Dobbyn.
What: *Beside You — 30 Years of Hits* on CD and DVD is out now and features among its 39 tracks five re-recorded versions of past hits. *Dave Dobbyn: The Songbook* (Craig Potton Publishing \$50), featuring the inspirations behind the songs, photos, lyrics, piano scores and guitar tabs, is out this month.
Also: After playing sold-out dates in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch this month to mark his 30 years in the business, Dobbyn and Gin Wigmore are touring summer holiday spots together between Boxing Day and New Year's Eve. He is also part of the More FM Winery Tour with Tim Finn, Bic Runga, Boh Runga and Che Fu in February.

THROUGH THE YEARS: (Top)with Th' Dudes; (above) DD Smash adn below with Tim Finn and Bic Runga on their first joint venture tour.



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Page 4 of 4

