

Soundtrack: 118 Great New Zealand Albums

By Grant Smithies

Reviewed by Cass Alexander

I found myself reliving a dozen or so memories while I read *Soundtrack: 118 Great New Zealand Albums*. Already I felt pretty close to Grant thanks to his book, which gets to the very essence of what those 118 albums mean to a variety of New Zealanders, so when I rang him to discuss his upcoming stint in town for the Whanganui Literary Festival I wasn't surprised to hear him say, "I'm in the bath, mate, gimme a sec and I will call you back."

This is the guy who shares his life and thoughts with relaxed, lazy and possibly hungover Kiwis the country over in his *Sunday Star Times* articles each week.

The musical memories I relived while reading the book, like Grant had lived before me, were of seeing seminal New Zealand bands in varying stages of my life: Bachelorette at San Francisco Bath House (formerly Indigo), in Wellington, Fat Freddy's Drop in London's Hammersmith Arena (feeling awfully nostalgic for home) and Shihad in Hamilton, where they nearly blew my ears out during their Pacifier stage.

Some of the albums he writes about - The Verlaines', *Bird Dog*, The Bats' *Daddy's Highway* - were created while I was nipper but are still very much influential in both NZ and abroad even today (Pearl Jam, Lo la Tengo and Pavement were very much Flying Nun fans), while some bands he writes about I remember seeing in murky and smoky bars when I was a music-obsessed Wellingtonian (Ghostplane, Phoenix Foundation, HDU).

As well as reviewing the best NZ albums, the beauty of this book is that Grant has a way with getting gold out of the people who were there, and the people who care. Trinity Roots' Warren Maxwell takes the mikey out of being a 'hoary' while drinking chardonnay in an upmarket café; Shihad's rise to local fame and spectacular fall from grace to rebirth is documented while compilations of grimy Dunedin records hard to acquire anymore, made by dads and mums with 'real jobs' are reviewed and remembered in intimate detail.

Even the albums I wasn't well-acquainted with had me reaching for You Tube to check them out and songs I had loved and forgotten (*I believe you are a star* by Dimmer, *Anything could happen* by The Clean) had me dancing and/or skulking around the living room). I discovered a new-found love for Aotearoa hip hop and

now have list of rare and esoteric sounds to check out to keep me going for the next few months.

Grant Smithies is appearing at the Whanganui Literary Festival.

The Music Man

Saturday 21 September

3.00pm - 4.00pm

Venue: Concert Chamber, War Memorial Hall, Watt Street

Bookings: [Royal Wanganui Opera House](#)

Admission: \$12 (Friends \$10)