



paul colman trio

by Wez Jay

Through the window of the taxi that's hurtling from Melbourne's east along the new Citylink to the airport in the northwest, the Paul Colman Trio can see nothing but rain. Heavy rain. Thank goodness none of us are driving!

The Paul Colman Trio is on the road again. There's not a lot on the map that hasn't been traversed over the past few months. As individuals, Paul Colman, Grant Norsworthy and Phil Gaudion have slogged the highways in a number of groups for several years.

Paul (lead singer/guitarist) has two highly acclaimed solo albums under his belt. He's worked with some of Australia's leading Christian musicians plus Jack Jones (Southern Sons), Graham Goble (Little River Band) and Richard Clapton.

Grant (bass/vocals) has worked in a variety of mainstream bands including Rockett, Stealers, Vasoline and Super Nova, as well as a couple of tours with Kathy Johnson.

And Phil (drums/vocals) has worked with a number of leading bands performing at more than 600 gigs during the past five years.

Now a trio, the guys have quietly discovered there is no shortage of places to play. In a few days they're off to America for their first US tour. Paul's third. Two weeks ago more than 1000 people filled the Boggo Road Gaol supporting Brisbane City Mission's Winter Sleepout. Not long before that, more than 1100 patrons filled the Camberwell Centre in Melbourne to launch Serious Fun — the trio's debut CD. That's some of the biggest Christian pop concert audiences seen in Australia since Amy Grant's visit in the early 90s.

Now the group is on its way to Sydney for a short promotional visit to record a new video, media interviews, instore appearances and several localised gigs. The cab journey is like one of the group's shows with great camaraderie and a sense of fun. Everyone is laughing — including the taxi driver. The group chuckles at the suggestion of doing an interview in a taxi and being expected to be sages as well as musicians. The guys admit they don't often partner for chats. When they do they finish each other's sentences and at times play a game of one-upmanship, each spurring the other on to more ridiculous heights.



"We have a lot of fun doing incredibly diverse gigs in schools, churches, pubs, shopping centres, concerts," says Paul.

"We might go into a school on Friday afternoon, and then a pub on Saturday and deliver our music and message in a way that's neither cheesy or over religious," explains Grant.

"Then on Sunday morning, we'll play a bunch of songs and Paul might preach in the local church and present the same message, but in a way that's meaningful to the congregation," adds Phil.



The taxi driver looks at the rear view mirror. He's shaking his head. He's heard Christians that were irrelevant and boring and didn't know how to have fun — let alone Serious Fun! "That comes out on our record too, whenever we perform, how we relate to one another and how we organise what we're doing," says Paul. "Our purpose is to provide music that uplifts, serves, heals and entertains anyone who listens. We want people to understand the message, but we also want them to tap their feet while they're working it out," he says taking another swig of bottled water.

As the rain stops, the conversation shifts to the new album Serious Fun. "The album reflects who we are and what we do," says Paul. "It presents a balance of serious and fun music with lyrics that deal with some basic issues of living as a follower of Christ. Basically, I want people to know that the most serious fun they'll ever encounter is following Christ, letting Him take control of the serious issues of life and discovering His joy," he says.





Like a well-rehearsed machine, Grant and Phil break into the chorus of Sweet Voice. In a lot of ways this sums up the intention of the album. "When I first heard the first verse I thought it was a song about a girl," says Grant. "But when you listen to it a bit more deeply, you realise Paul's saying life's a lot better when he's opening himself up to the Word of God. It's just Paul trying to seek and work out his faith."

For many — including the taxi driver — the idea that a so-called "Christian" group might see themselves as "seekers" or people not having all the "answers" is refreshing. He says as much, relieved he's not driving a bunch of religious wackos. Paul attempts to convince him to swap the fare for a CD. But as quick as a taxi eats up five dollars at the traffic lights, Paul's back on the topic. "The three of us really relate to people who are yearning for the deeper things in life," he says. "We're searching just as much as anyone else. And we're no better than them," he admits.

"We're followers of Christ. We've found the One who's got all the answers, but we're still searching and questioning things," Grant comments.

"It's not like we haven't found something that's true. It's just that we're continuing to find out more about what we believe is true. We feel we have connected with the person who is the answer," Phil adds. Each member again finishes one another's thoughts.

The taxi arrives at the airport. The band checks in. But where's Paul? Fishing for change in his pocket. Looks like the barter system didn't work this time. He hustles for an upgrade while Phil says "forget it!" Grant tells me that no one "shmoozes" like Colman. The guys waltz into the newsagent to purchase supplies for the plane. Colman gets the latest edition of Rolling Stone magazine, Norsworthy buys lip balm, travelling sweets and a World War 2 magazine, and Gaudion flicks through Modern Drummer from cover to cover, then puts it back on the display shelf. "Phil wouldn't shout if a shark bit him," quips Paul.

One of Colman's better traits is to segue from small talk to the issues about the cosmos and beyond in a single breath. He puts his arm on my shoulder and says that one song explains what the trio's all about. "Dear God emphasises that while we've arrived at the conclusion that God is real and that He is love, we still have questions and don't understand a lot of things," he says.



This stimulates a whole new thought. "Who is this character of Christ? Who is He?" asks Paul. "His life was so bizarre compared to what we consider success to be. He was born 2000 years ago in an under-privileged society to a pregnant teenager. Yet this guy was God! How could God be so humble? How can he do that? He obviously wants to deconstruct the whole concept we have of power and authority and say that He is the servant king. So for us to go out and say we've figured it all out, this is it, package it, sell it — nothing could be further from the truth. We're fellow seekers, fellow searchers."

"It doesn't matter if we're talking to an Atheist, a follower of Christ, a Buddhist, or a Muslim, the message is still the same. God wants to engage us. He's for everyone. Let's try to understand what it means and engage that in a pure sense, rather than talking about power and control," he explains.

"That's one of the reasons Australians have rejected a lot of the church's teaching," says Grant. "It's been presented like a club where we follow certain rules and experience faith in a prescriptive way. Relationships don't work like that and I don't think God does either."

"Jesus wanted to show people His Father", continues Paul. "So what did he do? He served them and placed them as more important than Himself. Too often people say, or give the impression they're saying 'We've figured it all out' and it's not true. We haven't figured it out, so the album paints a series of pictures and stories that we hope will lead the listener to a point of engaging the whole concept," he suggests.

Serious Fun is in the stores. Fill My Cup — the first "radio single" from the album — is in the Top 5 on The Rock Across Australia chart. Radio loves it. For the past few weeks, the song has been the most played song on Christian radio in Australia. And if that's not enough, the trio has been the most played act. The group also holds the number one position on TRMG's Independent Artists sales chart.

The boarding call comes over the speaker. I watch the boys walk to the plane. You couldn't assemble three more diverse individuals. But something holds them together. Paul would say that it's the Spirit of God. What awaits them on the flight? More Serious Fun — naturally!

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