

## Head Hunter

To a writer it's heartening – if incomprehensible – to hear that even Mark Seymour finds writing difficult.

Yes – he of the dark but insightful tableaux of the soul struggles for the right words too.

'I find writing lyrics is always difficult,' says Mark, 'because there's always an uncertainty about whether they're finished or not, and because it's easy to be banal when writing words.'

Banal? Are we talking about the same Mark Seymour?

'Oh yeah,' he affirms. 'A lot of the lyrics I write never see the light of day because the next time I look at them they seem prosaic and one-dimensional. And I suppose you never really know when you've got them right.'

The fans know. Record sales nudging two million and an enduring local and national following for his work with Hunters and Collectors and as a solo artist have seen Mark firmly establish himself both as a popular musician and a serious artist.

His distinct brand of storytelling is richly evident in his latest album *Embedded*, through eleven new tracks that explore the themes of human artifice and duplicity that continue to fascinate him.

'The sense of the unknown and mysterious in human nature intrigues me more than anything else,' Mark muses. 'That is, things I don't understand, and the complexity and contradictions of what people say and do. I'm forever investigating the reasons behind that sort of thing, and stories always emerge from the process.'

'And songwriting is really only storytelling. I try to make the imagery as vivid as possible, and there's a certain level of subterfuge involved, because while I tend to make things sound as though they're about me, they're not really. With this album in particular, you can sense a persona – this bloke living in a house somewhere with all these things going on around him. There's a bit of me in that, but mostly it's another character who's quite separate from me.'

'But having said that, the level of intimacy on *Embedded* is more focused and confronting than anything I've done before, because I've had time to think about what I wanted to write. It took a long time to separate my consciousness from Hunters and Collectors, in that writing for myself is totally different from writing with a group of players in mind. Even with my first two solo albums, I had the sense that I was forming a band of some description. But now I've got to a point where what I'm writing is really about my voice.'

Being three years in production, *Embedded* - part urban fable, part searing vocal, part heady percussion - is a vial of the eclectic sound that has become Mark's calling card.

'The creative process involved in putting these three-and-a-half minute stories together and making them as believable as possible is what really makes this job worthwhile, he says. 'And sometimes you get to write purely for the sake of it; like when I did the soundtrack for *Through My Eyes*, the telemovie based on Lindy Chamberlain's book. I found the writing experience really satisfying because I was writing music to suit a particular story, not just to make a record.'

And are there any elements of the profession he doesn't like?

'I sometimes feel the role of music within the Australian cultural scene isn't taken as seriously as other activities, like sport,' says Mark. 'A lot of the time music is seen as something coming from radios in dentists' waiting rooms, and I suppose I see my songs as an attempt to break through that barrier of indifference. I enjoy seeing the audience's reactions when I'm on stage; knowing that a song's got them thinking about something.'

'That's what you do it for.'