

Maria Del Mar speaks out

National Velvet riding a rock wave

by Bruce Gilchrist

The interview with National Velvet's lead singer, Maria del Mar, took place on a bench outside the A&A building. The temperature was around zero.

Gaz: First of all, I'd like to ask you about the song "Flesh under Skin".

MdM: The song was written by Mark Storm, our bass player. A friend of his died in a drunk driving car crash, and to him it's a song about loneliness and losing his friends. He was feeling very empty and guess that's where the line "I feel no one's love tonight" comes from.

Gaz: Do you feel that the band was punkier on your first album than you are now?

MdM: Punkier? (laughs) I don't know, I guess that with the addition of Tim Welch we've sort of taken on a rockier image.

Gaz: He used to play with Alannah Myles didn't he?

MdM: He's been in several bands. He played with Images in Vogue, Alannah, Lisa Dalbello, and Gowan. Tim starting jamming with us during some rehearsals in Toronto. A couple of months went by and then he came on tour with us. He started writing with us, and as a result he became the sixth member that we always felt was missing.

Gaz: How is it with the two lead guitarists? (Mark Crossley and Tim Welch)

MdM: They both have pretty distinctive styles. It's not like we have a rhythm guitarist and a lead guitarist situation. They're just very different and they work extremely well together. At times they almost have an orchestrated sound.

Gaz: How did you feel about the video for "Sex Gorilla" being cut?

MdM: Oh that, I think that's it kind of a funny situation. It seems that you put something to rock music and all of a sudden it's taboo. The thing about it was that one of the scenes that was cut out was of a couple of orangutangs copulating, and that was taken from a Lorne Greene wildlife show. It had probably been aired several times during the family hour. It was cut just because it was put to a rock beat and the title "Sex Gorilla".

Gaz: How about the song "Rattlesnake"; who's that about?

MdM: Well, there's a little bit of William Kidd in there, with Boston, and he was charged with piracy and treason. I think what in-

spired it was this family I met in Toronto. At the time we were an unsigned band and we working on a four song EP which we financed and distributed ourselves. On it there was one song called "Not Thunder". I saw this boat at the harbor called the Rattlesnake. It was a replica of a 1600's French merchant ship that was captured by pirates and eventually driven into a reef. This family spent their whole lives building a replica of it, and they lived on it, and went around the world on it. I saw it and just had to write about it. I didn't think it was strange at all. I think it's romantic, I think it's great! I asked them if we could shoot a video for "Not Thunder" on the boat, and at first they wouldn't listen because of rock music's reputation. But once they heard the song, and met the band they changed their minds about it and let us go. The father even came down and put on a captain's uniform, great, really barbaric looking, and so he ended up in the video.

There's something really intriguing about the seas to me as well. My name means 'of the sea' in Spanish, so I felt compelled to write something about it.

“But we're not as helpless as we like to think.”

Gaz: Do you have extensive voice training?

MdM: No. I had two older siblings, and a younger one, and we fought a lot when I was a kid, so I think that's partially responsible for strengthening my vocal cords.

Gaz: Are you having a lot of fun with your work?

MdM: Yeah, oh yeah. This is something that I've been working for a long time. I started at a very early age, when I was fifteen, writing and performing in bands. I'm twenty-six now, and I consider myself really lucky to be one of the few that has a chance to record their songs, and travel and meet people. It's quite a different way of life being on the road, but it's exciting because you're seeing more in two months than most people see in a

National Velvet letting things "happen naturally."

year. Just the amount of people that you meet, it's incredible. Also, just geographically, how people change from place to place. The East Coast has probably got to be the friendliest place I've ever been to in my life.

Gaz: You used to live in Vancouver for a while. Did you like the scene there?

MdM: Yeah, it was pretty crazy but I found it hard to finish things that I had started in the West Coast. It's very much alive, and the scene at the time was great, but it was just really hard to get any further than playing a bar. I moved back to Toronto and things seemed to pick up after a year of being back and hating it, because I really did fall in love with the West Coast. I found it difficult for the first year being back in Toronto, but everything went my way, and here I am freezing my butt off outside!

Gaz: Do you want to go back in?

MdM: No, I'm liking this — the cold weather makes me feel like I'm alive.

Gaz: What about Bob Rock? There was speculation that you wanted to have him to produce your third album.

MdM: I think Mark Crossley mentioned that at in interview at one point. Personally, I have no idea who I want for our next pro-

ducer. We're concentrating on writing songs. As far as I'm concerned it's really too early to tell. We haven't developed the songs to a playing stage yet. All in good time.

Gaz: Do you try to avoid a generic image?

MdM: Well, I don't try to do anything. I just let things come naturally. I'm not a person that's hung up on appearance, or what people think, or on what is the going fashion. I just really don't give a shit about stuff like that. For me, what's important to find in a producer, is someone that gels with the band, and becomes an extra member of the band. Zeus B. Held certainly became this.

Gaz: Is that his real name?

MdM: Well I'm sure he's got another one. He was great. He was like the mad scientist with a heavy German accent. He jammed with the band and got right in there. That's sort of what you look for; somebody that it's not another gig for them you know, extra Christmas money or whatever. But someone that has genuine interest for the music. I think that is pretty easy to spot in a producer. You almost have to overlook the things that producers have done as far as musical taste anyway, and really get down to the technology, and what they're capable of doing and how that could apply to your music.

Gaz: What are your inspirations? What bands do you like out there?

MdM: I really like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, I love Stompin' Tom Connors, because he's such a storyteller and a real character. There's a wide variety, I love XTC and the Stranglers (Hey alright!). I mean, I could go on forever. There's many really good Canadian bands that I like, like the Tragically Hip.

Gaz: Do you feel that there's a movement towards more serious stuff these days?

MdM: Personally, I don't like to see people get to a point to where they're taking themselves too seriously, and then they start getting preachy and they start shoving down your throat that you should be a vegetarian. I think that there's got to be an element of entertainment and enjoyment and FUN! I love doing rock and roll, and if fun is becoming a bad word then I'm going to push it even harder. On the same hand you do have a responsibility to help encourage people and make them aware of what's going on. One underlying message in my lyrics is that you're significant as an individual and anything that you do is going to be a direct result in our society. A lot of times I think that people feel helpless, that they really can't do that much. But we're not as helpless and little as we like to think.

