

One of Aotearoa's finest, The Clean did it their way and inspired a generation. This is the definitive story in the band's own words.

I've been practising frantically on the guitar – and I know a huge 5 chords (2 really well 1 pretty well 2 well enough to use). Hamish bought a drum set for \$90. A friend of mine [Peter Gutteridge] is learning bass.

— David Kilgour, letter to his cousin John Lewis, May 1978

Went to lectures – got V.U. live and The Saints – sold some records at Roy's. Went to Joe Cocker – got ripped – good concert – came home listened to V.U.

— Hamish Kilgour, diary entry, 1977

We lifted our game when working with each other; it was always a joyous adventure.

— Robert Scott

I never stopped loving The Clean. I was an ex-member but I was always a complete fan of what they did.

— Peter Gutteridge

It was nice to play with The Clean that much. And I was able to keep Hamish and David from ripping each other's throats out.

— Chris Knox on touring with The Clean, 1989

Everything we did, we didn't do it easy. We could have got caught up in being like a touring rock 'n' roll machine band and had roadies and da dah da dah da dah. We always did it the hard way.

— Hamish Kilgour

We get as far as Christchurch in the rental and discover The Enemy's van is not fixed. Hamish and I had this existential meltdown – we're insane, what are we doing? We can't carry on, we can't go to Auckland, we're insane. We've gotta go back, let's go home. We stayed up all night having this breakdown.

— David Kilgour, on The Clean's first attempt to get to Auckland, 1979

David and I, like any siblings, have tension. But as Iggy Pop says, the good thing about having brothers in a band is they've got this blood thing going rhythmically.

— Hamish Kilgour

I always felt powerful in Hamish and Bob's company, something to do with potential and possibilities, the joy of creating something that's good.

— David Kilgour

The Clean in the dreamlife you need a rubber soul

Richard Langston



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The Clean

The Clean in the dreamlife you need a rubber soul

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Richard Langston



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Preface

Over a coffee in a Cuba Street café in Wellington many years ago, Auckland University Press director Sam Elworthy proposed I write a book on The Clean. Which I thought was a good idea – someone *should've* written that book. I personally didn't know how to go about such an undertaking – just because you've listened to a band for forty years does not qualify you to write about them. And finding the time was another issue due to my daily commitments as a television director and journalist. The idea lay dormant.

Some years later, out of the blue, I was asked by a publisher who specialised in covering niche and underexposed rock music scenes, Todd Novak of Hozac Books in Chicago, if I wanted to turn the six issues of a fanzine I'd edited about Flying Nun music in the '80s, *Garage*, into a book. The result, *Pull Down the Shades*, was published in 2023. Sam Elworthy, quick as you like and cunning as a bush rat, phoned and asked, 'Bitten by the book bug yet?' Well yes, actually. When I think about it, a book on The Clean was an idea that David Kilgour and I had previously discussed. I had once told him, possibly more in a daydream than in any reality, that I was thinking about writing a book on Flying Nun, and he said in an uncharacteristically forward manner, 'No, write one about us!' Holy shit, that's a good idea. With Sam's prodding and my recalling David's comment, I thought it was time to do something about it.

Once Hamish Kilgour and Robert Scott also agreed to tell the story, David and I discussed how to go about it, and we agreed on an oral history. We liked that format of storytelling as you can hear the unmediated voices of the different participants, giving it an immediacy, and the richness of multiple voices talking about the same events. From there it came together quickly over eighteen months or so.

Sadly, by the time the writing of the book was underway, Hamish Kilgour had died. Hamish had always been a great talker and there was an archive of his interviews to draw upon. The other founding member of The Clean, Peter Gutteridge, had also died, but again there were his past interviews to call on. Even though he had been kicked out of the band early on, Peter played intermittently with The Clean until his death. He never lost his love for the music they made.

My thanks to the band and those interviewed in the book for sharing their memories and insights. David Kilgour and Robert Scott opened their considerable archives of letters, photos and diaries, and the ever-helpful Alec Bathgate was an invaluable source of photos, gig dates and insights. I want to thank Matthew Goody for laying the foundation stone of Flying Nun history, *Needles and Plastic: Flying Nun Records, 1981–1988*. I called on Matthew’s brilliant research many times, and he offered further help and encouragement during the writing of The Clean story. My thanks to Craig Robertson for sharing his years of research into the Chris Knox story; to documentary makers Pat O’Neill and Stuart Page, and Gavin Bertram of the *Otago Daily Times*, for providing additional interviews with Hamish Kilgour and Peter Gutteridge. To Alec Bathgate, Terry Moore, Craig McNab, Chris Knox, Reg Feuz, Jonathan Ganley, Tim Soter and Carol Tippet, who dug into their photo archives. To Simon Grigg who, among other things, tracked down the date Dylan Taite’s influential report on punk was first broadcast in New Zealand in 1976. To Michael Brown of the National Library for general help in using their substantial Flying Nun archives. To Bob Sutton for cassettes of his Clean recordings. To the tireless Andy Ellis, who runs the Unofficial Flying Nun Music Vault from his Dunedin home, for scanning posters, photos and visual material. Andrew Schmidt for sharing his research. Shayne Carter for encouragement and advice. When he wasn’t in the surf, a long-time friend of the band’s, Paul McNeil, telephoned to keep me on track, and offered early advice: you have to interview the women! On that note, in researching this book, I came to understand what a strong woman Hamish and David’s mother, Helen, was. She kept her family together as a working solo mother when her husband’s mental state deteriorated. When David accepted the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2001 for services to music, he did it for his mother as much as anyone.

To Vicky, and our children, Kate, Jack and Milly, who listened through their childhood to the sounds of The Clean, which they said made a welcome change from listening to The Go-Betweens, The Chills and the rest of the Flying Nun stable. My thanks also to those friends who offered support and encouragement. To my twin sister, Suraya, who provided accommodation, many laughs and many music-listening sessions on my various trips to Dunedin. To the production team of Sam Elworthy, Sophia Broom, designer Katie Kerr and editor Caren Wilton for shepherding the project through the many gates and out into the open paddock. To Martin Phillipps, who made time for me when he knew his was running out. Martin warmed to the task, telephoning David Kilgour to check facts and compare memories. Ever polite, he thanked me for sparking what he said was his longest chat with David for some time. Again it was only in researching this book that I came to understand how much Martin shared in The Clean story. RIP, old buddy. You’re much missed.



The Clean at Big Daddy’s takeaway, Dunedin, 1989. From left: Hamish Kilgour, David Kilgour, Robert Scott. Photograph: Craig McNab, pufferfish-photography



The Clean by the subway at Dunedin Hospital, 1980. From left: Robert Scott, David Kilgour, Hamish Kilgour.
Photograph: Craig McNab, pufferfish-photography

Punk Arrives



1

The Sex Pistols sneered their way onto New Zealand television in December 1976 courtesy of a report for the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation by savvy London-based New Zealand journalist Dylan Taite. Incipient punks sat up and took notice. Two brothers, Hamish and David Kilgour, were teenagers living in Dunedin, a slow-paced city near the bottom of the South Island. Hamish was nineteen and David was four years younger – they were ripe for the new primal rock sound coming from the other side of the world. They were strong-minded outsiders whose obsessions were not the sporting icons of the prevailing culture, notably the national rugby team, the All Blacks, but The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and anything that had attracted their searching ears.

Punk hit the brothers like a thunderclap, as it did another music-obsessed and artistically inclined teenager, Robert Scott, who lived in the small settlement of East Taieri, 15 kilometres from the city. Within a few years, the trio would form the enduring line-up of The Clean, which would create music for thirty-six years, and become pioneers of DIY. They were there at the start of a music scene in Dunedin that earned fans and recognition around the world.

David Kilgour	I first read about punk through a tabloid, <i>Truth</i> . That was after a Kiwi rock journalist, Dylan Taite, filmed the Sex Pistols in front of Buckingham Palace [in early 1977] when they signed to A&M and that was on the news, and okay, that looks interesting [laughs]. Hadn’t heard the music to that point though, that was later.
Hamish Kilgour	I was waiting for punk to happen, and when it happened I was aware of it immediately. I would describe myself as being a punk from the ’60s. The Stones and The Pretty Things toured here in New Zealand. I’d heard the Stones on the radio. I had a cousin who was four-and-a-half years older than me, he was a mod in Christchurch, and I said, ‘John, what do you think of Rolling Stones?’, and he said, ‘They’re okay’, but all the mods liked The Pretty Things better. The Pretty Things did a tour in ’65 in which Viv Prince was thrown out of the band for causing mayhem. He set fire to the theatre curtains in New Plymouth, and he was on the front page of <i>Truth</i> newspaper.
Robert Scott	It was probably through listening to a radio show that was on air in New Zealand in the late ’70s hosted by Dr Rock [Barry Jenkin]. He was playing lots of classic punk stuff like Swell Maps, Wire, Suicide. That to me was wow, and then listening to Hamish and David’s record collection. I fell in love with the energy and the attitude.
Hamish Kilgour	A guy in Christchurch called Al Park said, ‘Hey, I’ve just got this record from the States, it’s The Ramones, it’s the best thing I’ve ever heard.’ At the same time, we were concurrently getting into things like Syd Barrett. David and I were avid record collectors, we collected all sorts of esoteric stuff, California and West Coast psychedelia, West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band, Love, all the garage punk, the <i>Nuggets</i> album.
David Kilgour	I always like to say the punks were just the hippies with short hair, at the end of the day the same ideals. We picked up the whole do-it-yourself thing more than anything from punk. Another thing that punk gave me was do your own thing, don’t follow anyone else, go out and do your own thing, which is why we never had managers or publicists or any of that stuff.

Hamish Kilgour	I was also into psychedelic music; I used to buy \$2 records in the supermarket, things like ‘Fire’ by Arthur Brown, Jimi Hendrix. I heard Lou Reed in 1973, <i>Transformer</i> . I was transfixed. I was big on David Bowie, T. Rex, Mott the Hoople, all the glam stuff. In 1975 I dyed my hair blond and cut it off and wore a ring because Lou Reed did that. A few years later I was hitchhiking through New Zealand with my cousin, and I heard the Modern Lovers’ ‘Roadrunner’ on a café sound system in Nelson. I was big on the Stones’ <i>Exile on Main St.</i> , and I was obsessed with things like Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. I saw Chuck Berry in 1973 with a Dunedin band backing him up. I saw Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Canned Heat, Joe Cocker. I was also an avid reader of the <i>NME</i> .
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However, finding and listening to the early punk records written about in the English music weeklies was not easy. Many had to be imported. Fortunately, Dunedin in 1977 had two record shops that were significant hubs in the punk years; they were not only places to hunt down hard-to-find vinyl, but also where an embryonic punk music scene could coalesce. Journalist and music critic Roy Colbert opened a shop in 1971 in Stuart Street, just above the Octagon, the centre of Dunedin, a stone’s throw from the statue of the poet Robbie Burns and the chiming of the town hall clock. Colbert had broad and adventurous music taste, and an encyclopedic knowledge of ’60s and ’70s rock. He wrote a music column in the local evening newspaper, *The Evening Star*. When the first punk gigs were held in Dunedin, Colbert wrote about them in the newspaper and the national music monthly, *Rip It Up*. The city otherwise did its best to ignore them.

Sold some records at Roy’s and got 1st V.U. [Velvet Underground], Flamin Groovies, Ramones at Jeff’s – came home played them.

— Hamish Kilgour, diary entry, 1977

Went to lectures – got V.U. live and The Saints – sold some records at Roy’s. Went to Joe Cocker – got ripped – good concert – came home listened to V.U.

— Hamish Kilgour, diary entry, 1977

The other shop was Eureka Records in the city’s main street, owned by another ardent music fan, Jeff Ruston. The Clean had their first practice room behind his shop in early 1978. It was also where some of the key characters of the punk scene met for the first time. During the autumn of 1977 two arts students studying at the local polytechnic, Alec Bathgate and Mike Dooley, walked into his shop during their lunch break. Bathgate wanted to buy a 45, ‘Neat Neat Neat’ by the English band The Damned. Behind the counter, temporarily minding the shop, was film and music freak and natural-born punk Chris Knox. He was a seasoned twenty-four. The trio bonded at that moment, and within a matter of weeks they would form The Enemy. Both of those shops were also regular haunts for the Kilgour brothers on the hunt for overseas news and sounds.

Alec Bathgate	I was just doing my normal circuit of the record stores when I met Chris in Jeff’s shop. It’s a weird thing when you think about it, because at that moment you have no idea what it’s going to mean to you. For me it meant thirty years of making music with Chris; a chance and mundane meeting and you have no idea how it’s all going to unfold.
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Jeff Ruston	Initially I opened the shop on the corner of Princes and Dowling streets. Chris Knox used to mind the shop for me. I got a copy of the Sex Pistols’ album brought back from Sydney. A friend, Chris Moody, suggested we hold a listening session for the album at his place in Serpentine Ave. An immediate hit with the lads. Knox, in a moment of uncontrolled excitement, ran back to his place in Queen Street before it finished and promptly rang us screaming its praises. There was another listening party at Moody’s for a block of twenty or so 45s that Greg Shaw of <i>Bomp!</i> had sent me, one of which was the Mumps’ ‘I Like to Be Clean’.
Jeff Ruston picks us up – preview of Sex Pistols LP. — Hamish Kilgour, diary entry, 26 November 1977	
Hamish Kilgour	Jeff was bringing in stuff like the Flamin’ Groovies, all this stuff which was almost predating punk. We were reading about the Sex Pistols and seeing photographs of them in the <i>NME</i> and <i>Melody Maker</i> , which we got by post – we were three months behind. Jeff was also bringing in <i>New York Rocker</i> and all the singles that were coming out in New York and LA and we were getting to hear them. They blew my mind. I heard the Mumps’ ‘I Like to Be Clean’ single, and I thought, that’s kind of a cool name for a band, and then there was a Hell’s Angel in a movie called <i>The Sweet Ride</i> . This Hell’s Angel had a bald head, and he was called Mr Clean.
Jeff Ruston imported a whole lot of singles mainly U.S. groups which are excellent – stuff to watch out for by groups like Weirdos, Zero, Mumps, Devo, Soft Boys, DMZ – made a 60s discovery – The Creation – were brilliant better than The Who – with ‘Making Time’ – remember Larry’s Rebels did a cover of their song ‘Painter Man’ – I don’t think much of The Jam. XTC – single quite good – so is X-Ray Spex’s ‘I Am a Cliché’. — Hamish Kilgour, letter to his cousin in Christchurch, John Lewis, March 1978	
Jeff Ruston	In 1978 I moved to smaller, funkier premises on George Street. This included a flat above and an unused room behind the shop. Hamish and David, as usual in his school uniform, asked me if they could use it for a band they were putting together. They had access to the room from behind the shop and were not to practise during shop hours! They drew some cool images on the walls in crayon. Nice boys, the Kilgours.
David Kilgour	There were other record stores we went to, the department store DIC, Terry’s bookshop, and an appliance store, Kelvinator House, which had records out the back. I got Nico’s first album there. I also used the World Record Club, which was a mail order for new records. We were obsessed with the classified ads in the newspaper on Saturday, looking for second-hand vinyl, and we hit some jackpots doing that.
Punk ignited the music the Kilgours had already absorbed. They were tuned in from an early age. As a boy David Kilgour heard pop music on the loudspeakers at the skating rink in Ranfurly, the country town where he was born, 130 kilometres northwest of Dunedin in the hinterland of Otago. There were teenage neighbours who passed on their 45s of ’60s pop and a Beatles plastic wig to the Kilgour boys. Their father, MacGregor Kilgour, worked as a stock agent, and mother Helen Kilgour (née Auld) was a nurse.	
David Kilgour	My father left school and worked on a large sheep farm and became a stock agent, and that’s when he met our mother. He was a quiet sort of guy. He’d fought in the war in the Solomon Islands when he was eighteen. He came back pretty damaged mentally from that, we think. He was a pretty typical farmer dad from the ’50s and ’60s, the woman brings up the children and the man does the man stuff.
By late 1968, when Hamish was eleven and David seven, the family shifted to a farm owned by their grandmother near Cheviot, a small settlement in North Canterbury.	
Hamish Kilgour	We would go down to Christchurch for fixes of music and books and street fashion and always come back with some new thing. Christchurch seemed way more vibrant to my young eyes then; it was a different place. It seemed much more urbane and urban before they started tearing down all the Victorian and Edwardian buildings, but most importantly fun and free and easy, full of small cool shops, alleyways and alcoves.
David Kilgour	We always got a shot of youth culture there, especially on the streets, the Square. I became fully aware of the hippies and alternatives and what I came to learn was counterculture. Hamish was a full-blown teenager by this time and did the fifth form at Rangiora High School as a boarder.
Hamish Kilgour	I had radical young schoolteachers in this small country high school. We had a cool art teacher, we did photography, and sculptures for a small ceramic kiln, and we’d be listening to socialist schoolteachers talking about Malthus, playing us ‘Revolution 9’, digging Hendrix, Joe Cocker, The Who, the Stones, Led Zeppelin, The Byrds, Jim Morrison’s lyrics. There was a secondary school magazine called <i>Affairs</i> which was full of progressive stuff, <i>The Little Red Schoolbook</i> and wild Canterbury University capping magazines.
The family shifted to Dunedin in September 1972, when Hamish was fifteen and David was about to enter his teens. Their father managed the Captain Cook Hotel; their mother oversaw activity in the hotel kitchen. Hamish became aware of a sound often heard in this Scottish-settled city, the drone and skirl of the bagpipes.	
Hamish Kilgour	I really dug Highland pipe bands. Our mother was also a musician and a piano player, she did shows and things. She had an operatic voice. I have never been a Christian, but my mother liked to take me to church, and she’d make me stand in front of her and she’d sing all the songs the loudest, she dominated the room – and I’d be there cringing, why are you doing this to me? She just liked any opportunity to sing. She was known as the fast Auld girl in the country, she used to play all these country dances, she and her sister. Her cousins had a dance band. They had a country ballroom in their house, and they had a drum kit set up in it. This is the first kit I played on.

David Kilgour

Our mother played piano and did a little bit of theatre when we lived in Ranfurly. She was quite a cool artist, a good drawer. She was made to be a creative person, but it wasn't the times for it, being a female artist post-war. She really encouraged us with art and a little bit with me in music.

Helen Kilgour was not only an early guide to art and music; once the family was living in Dunedin much of the responsibility as a parent fell to her as MacGregor Kilgour's health deteriorated.

David Kilgour

Dad never talked to me about the war, but he talked a bit to Hamish, and he saw atrocities on both sides. When he came to Dunedin he got very ill and was misdiagnosed with high blood pressure. He had two strokes. He got a part-time job at Cadbury's [chocolate factory] and he hated it, and he came home drunk one night and said to Hamish, 'Take me to Cherry Farm [psychiatric hospital].' He was a voluntary patient and he never left. Funnily enough I had a neighbour years ago who nursed him, and he said Mac was in the right place. He'd said to Mum, 'I give up.' He was in the right place.

Hamish Kilgour

Mac would come to town on the bus from Cherry Farm and I would take him for haircuts. I remember that.

David Kilgour

Hamish and I were both young; I was about twelve or thirteen and Hamish would be about seventeen. It kind of pulled me and Hamish and Mother closer together in a lot of ways. It wasn't easy negotiating teenage life with a father in psychiatric care. Mum went back nursing to support us. She worked night shift for many years and then became a matron at Hill Jack Hospital.

Whatever difficulties the Kilgour brothers faced, music was always there to be discovered. They were able to see some of their favourite international artists, including US blues artists and the punk icon Lou Reed who played the Regent Theatre in Dunedin in August of 1975.

David won tickets for Lou Reed – got dressed up in gear – Lou Reed was alright – yea yea.

— Hamish Kilgour, diary entry, 2 August 1975

Hamish Kilgour

Lou Reed was the loudest thing I'd ever heard in my life. He started off with 'Sweet Jane'. I felt like I was going to be crushed into my seat.

David Kilgour

Lou Reed was just fantastic – a wall of sound. Brownie McGhee blew my mind as well; I'd never heard a guitar like that before. All the '60s dudes say Elvis was the start for them; well, Lou was probably my Elvis Presley. In the same way that punk did, he showed a way to make music and not be that proficient at our instruments. I was attracted to the minimalism of it.

Got hair cut SHORT.

— Hamish Kilgour, diary entry, 6 August 1975

Hamish Kilgour

Split Enz were incredibly influential to me. I saw them in '75 and I couldn't believe it. Their light show, their costumes, it was like nothing



Helen and MacGregor Kilgour, 1955.
Collection of David Kilgour



From left: Helen Kilgour holding David, unidentified cousin, Hamish, uncle Jack Auld and unidentified cousin, early 1960s.
Collection of David Kilgour



Helen and David Kilgour,
Christchurch, 1970.
Collection of David Kilgour

else in the world. It was very creative. These guys were walking down Dunedin’s main street with shaved heads, hair sticking up and weird coats, and this is 1975. It’s kind of radical. I’d never seen a human being looking like that walk down the street. John Lydon was awful about Split Enz, he said he hated them, but I’ll tell you they were experimental and strange. There were pre-punk bands like the La De Da’s, who covered the song ‘How is the Air Up There?’ In each town, in each city, there was an R’n’B scene with bands playing, in the ‘60s, into the ‘70s. Al Park was in a band called The Roadrunners. There was a lot of garage-psych happening here. In the ‘70s you had prog and hippie bands; Space Waltz were fantastic.

David Kilgour

Some people might always say New Zealand is a backward sort of place, and it was, but we did always put up with the freaks, let the freaks do their thing as long as they didn’t get out of hand [laughs].

Hamish Kilgour

I went to Otago University from ’75 to ’77. I got a BA with a double major in English and history. I also delved into political science, experimental American fiction, and medieval history and literature, including Old English and medieval passion plays. I also dove into decadent French literature and esoteric thinkers and philosophers. In 1975 I had my first acid trip with Chris Knox as my guide, and he said, you’ve got to listen to the Stooges’ first album and then we’ll follow that with the Velvet Underground’s first album. Oh boy, okay, kind of amazing.

Played the drums. Cut my hair again at night – rang up about \$50 drum kit . . . Went to English lecture walked home – went to Roy’s scored Albert Hall Dylan – alright – yeah yeah . . . Went to Cook [the Captain Cook Hotel] at night with Chris – band at Cook lousy.

– Hamish Kilgour, diary entries, June/July 1977

David Kilgour

One thing we realised when we got going, punk was over, we are post-punk. We’re not going to be a punk band; we’re taking all the stuff from it, but that’s over, whatever that was.

Hamish Kilgour

We related to the punk scene. But The Clean, right from the start, had a pop element. We deliberately created pop music because it made us happy and we tried to make people happy.



**STEAK
AND
EGGS**
AND CHIPS
To take away

MEALS
take a
eat her
78-771

Hamish Kilgour, David Kilgour
and Robert Scott outside Joe Tui's
takeaways, North Dunedin, 1980.
Photograph: Craig McNab,
pufferfish-photography