

# “I FELT LIKE I WAS DYING” BARNSEY’S SHOCK CONFESSION

By Jeff Jenkins

The Aussie music icon revealed in his new book, "By lunchtime, I was in hospital in Sydney, and I was critical."

Just on a year ago, Jimmy Barnes opened the Mushroom 50 concert performing No Second Prize and Working Class Man at Melbourne’s Rod Laver Arena.

The singer, Mushroom Group’s biggest-selling artist in Australia, noted that he’d been part of the stable for 40 years. “It’s such an honour to be here,” he said.

What the fans didn’t know was that Barnesy feared the gig might be his last.

“I felt like I was dying,” he reveals in his Highways and Byways book. “My fever had gone through the roof, and the pain had gone way beyond being bearable. I had to fill myself with painkillers for the pain, and aspirin for the fever if I was going to have any chance of doing the show.”

Despite his performance earning widespread acclaim Barnes has no memory of the show. “I’ve seen it since, and I look like a corpse.”

## I Couldn’t Get Out Of Bed

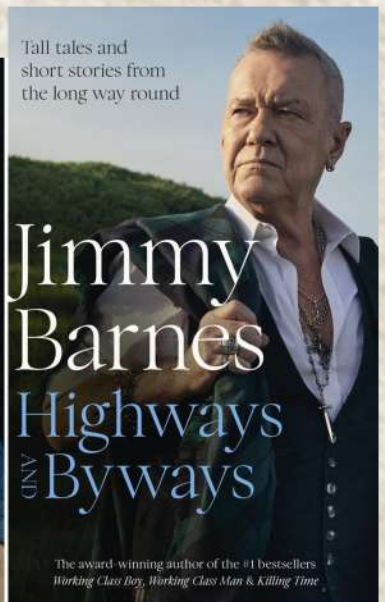
After the gig, he flew straight home to Sydney. The following morning, he was meant to fly to Noumea. “But I couldn’t get out of bed ... I couldn’t even stand up.” He had no idea what was going on. But he knew it was serious. “By lunchtime I was in hospital in Sydney, and I was critical.

“There’s a blood test that shows infection markers in your blood. The normal reading is under five ... mine was somewhere around 410. I wasn’t sure what that meant, but I knew it wasn’t good.”

After “every test known to medicine”, the doctors discovered that a staph infection had settled in his back, leading to sepsis, “an extremely dangerous condition where the body’s defences against infection start to turn on its organs and tissues”.

After surgery, but the bug remained, and soon it would spread to his heart.

“As good as being high as a kite and lying in bed sounds, the drugs were not my drugs of choice,” Barnesy quips. “At this stage of my life I was happy being drug-free, and the painkillers were making me sick.”



Barnesy cheekily asked the nurses if he could go to their Christmas party. “I think I’m feeling better,” he told his wife Jane, who replied: “You look like a ghost, Jimmy.”

He would soon be having open-heart surgery – and it did not go according to plan. “The whole procedure had been more complicated than a heart transplant and taken more than six hours.”

## See The Light At The End

Despite the near-death experience, Barnesy says he “felt nothing” “There was no light to head towards, and no relatives waiting to escort me to the next world. Maybe because it wasn’t my time.”

The singer survived and is now back fronting Cold Chisel on The Big Five-O tour, which finishes its Australian run in Sydney on December 4.

Jimmy Barnes is the biggest-selling rock star author in Australian history. Highways And Byways – a collection of stories about family and friends, music and memories – is his fourth memoir, following Working Class Boy, Working Class Man and Killing Time.

In his new book, Barnesy concludes: “We never have enough time. You think you have nothing but time on your side, then it suddenly catches up to you and runs you down.”

## SAM DANN



GoSet's Samantha Dann has an Aussie country backstory that begins in her early childhood, growing up in the heart of the Australian outback, Alice Springs. Country music was woven into those years, with her grandmother a singer, her father, Scott Dann, a successful country singer and entertainer, and her cousin, Troy Dann, a prominent television presenter with his worldwide hit series, *Outback Adventures*.

With the call to Nashville ringing in her head and offers pouring in, things truly took off. Despite having just given birth to a baby daughter, Samantha made the decision to travel to the U.S. to follow up on opportunities in Nashville, bringing her baby along. After meeting prominent Nashville producer Wayne Brayfield, she co-wrote with the songwriters behind Garth Brooks' hit "Friends In low places." This led to an invitation to perform at the Honkytonks on Nashville's legendary Music Row. Tragically, her Nashville journey faced a setback when Brayfield suffered a heart attack and passed away.

"Because of my connection with those guys, I was given the chance to record songs usually reserved for signed artists. One of those songs, "Don't stand in my face," was initially on hold for U.S. country icon Gretchen Wilson. Sam is now recording that song here in Australia with her producer, legendary U.S. guitarist Louie Shelton.

Returning from Nashville with several songs in hand, Sam released a single, "Walk Like You Know," from her first EP. The song hit the national country charts, with her second single from the EP reaching number eight. Her next release, "Ain't No Easy Road," climbed to number three—a title that would later prove significant in Samantha's life.

Another single, "Who Do You Think I Am," was on the horizon when Sam faced a career dilemma. With her mother having passed away, Samantha no longer had reliable support for raising her daughter. Forced to choose between a blossoming music career and her family, she decided family should come first and stepped away from the music scene to focus on motherhood.

While raising her daughter, Sam kept singing wherever she could, performing live with her father Scott's band, Midnight Rodeo, and in solo gigs that kept her voice in shape. Now, with her daughter a self-sufficient adult, Samantha is once again ready to re-ignite her country music career.

Teaming up with producer Louie Shelton to record and release three Nashville-written songs, and backed by a strong management team, Sam is ready to return to the music life she loves. Her first single, titled "Whole Lotta Life," has garnered interest from Stella Parton, sister of Dolly Parton. Stella was so impressed with the Nashville demo of the song and with the anticipation of what Samantha's voice would bring, she insisted on adding her backing vocals to the finished track.

The backing tracks for this song and the next two releases, "Dr Radio" and "Don't stand in my face," have been completed by Louie Shelton at his Gold Coast studio in Australia with the first release due in early 2025.

With a crossover style blending pop and country rock, Samantha Dann stands at the forefront of the next generation of Australian female singers. With her unique voice and vibrant personality, all wrapped up in a feisty blonde bombshell image, 2025 is set to be her year to shine once again in the international world of country music.

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GoSet applauds the work of Love Your Sister (LYS). LYS's mission is to ensure precision treatment for all new cancer patients, whatever the cancer, regardless of location, age, income or status. It is LYS's vision that patients are offered the right treatment, first time, every time. And that, at the cusp of a post-genome revolution, Australia can show the world how Precision Medicine is done. Note: The GoSet committee intends to donate part of GoSet's entry fees (after expenses) to LYS. GoSet is a voluntary donor to LYS and is not associated with, governed by, or administered by Love Your Sister.



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# IT'S BECAUSE I LOVE YOU

## KARIN'S NEW BOOK

GoSet member Karin Keays was born and raised in Queensland, and grew up in Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast, only minutes' walk from one of the world's most beautiful surf beaches.

Karin attended Burleigh State School and graduated from Miami High School. Her weekends and school holidays were mostly spent at the beach or with her sister and cousins at the family's banana plantation, set amongst pristine rainforest and natural waterfalls in Currumbin Valley.

At 23, Karin travelled to Melbourne and fell in love with Australian music great, Jim Keays. Jim was singer-songwriter in the legendary Masters Apprentices, an influential band who consistently pushed boundaries in their art and performance, the quality of which earned their rightful place in the ARIA Hall of Fame.

Together, Karin and Jim were partners in life and in business for more than 25 years. As co-owner and administrator of Masters Apprentices Pty. Ltd., Karin acquired an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of the Australian music industry.

### Jim Keays The Artist

Jim Keays was a true artist in every sense. A prolific watercolour artist, he created over 150 paintings and drawings, which he bequeathed to Karin before his passing in 2014. In 2016, Karin laid the groundwork, preparing and carefully choosing Jim's art pieces in what was to be the first-ever gallery exhibition entitled 'The Secret Life of a Rock Legend'.

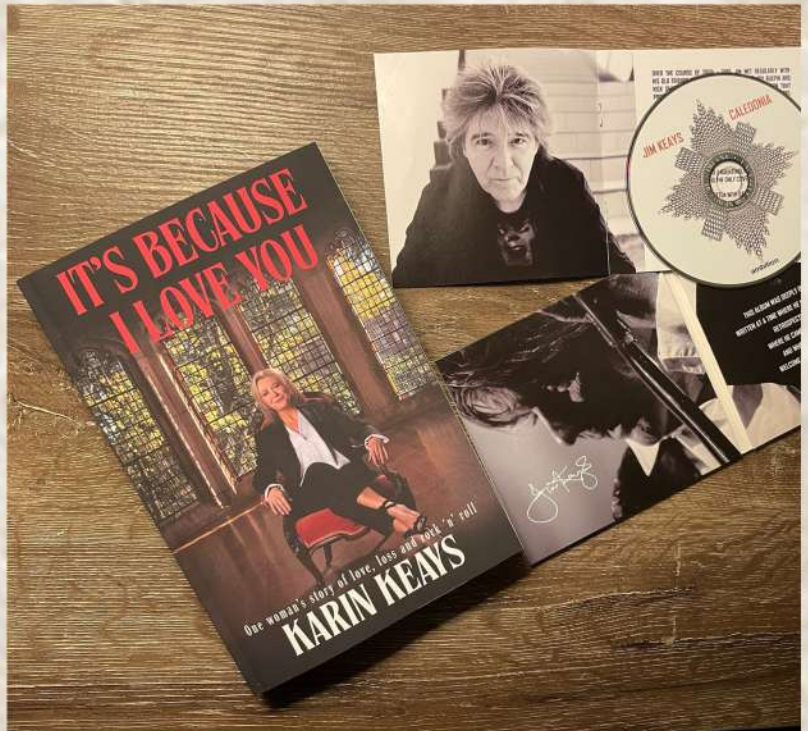
After Jim's passing, Karin resumed her career in Business and Logistics. In 2019, Karin was appointed Manager of the Estate of her late husband. As director of Masters Apprentices Pty. Ltd., she manages all aspects of Jim's career including his music and visual recordings, artwork, and Intellectual Property.

Karin is also a qualified facilitator of Mindfulness Meditation, professional speaker and an advocate for holistic health and wellbeing. Karin feels privileged to be able to share the knowledge gained from her depth of experience, in the hope that doing so may help other women and families navigate their way through the overwhelm of grief after the death of a loved one and, ultimately, find their own path to reclaiming the joy of life.

### Gold Coast

Encouraged by friends and colleagues, Karin is once again based on the beautiful Gold Coast and is delighted to be part of the burgeoning arts and entertainment industry of her hometown. As a talented writer, Karin has returned to her passion and love of words.

She is a published author and travel writer. In 2023, she completed her first book, a memoir titled, 'It's Because I Love You ~ A Real-Life Rock 'n Roll Love Story' which has just been launched.



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## WORST ALBUM COVERS



**ONCE UPON A TIME  
THERE WAS A BOY**



**WHO REALLY LOVED  
VINYL RECORDS.  
THAT WAS ME. THE END.**

## GREATEST OF ALL TIME

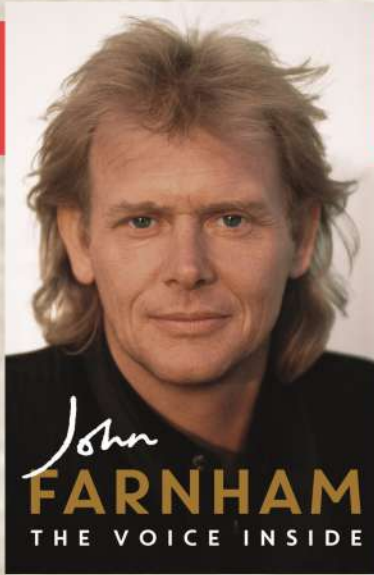


The Caprettos. If you get the chance to see them, take it!

The group, Russell Morris, Jack Jones and Ray Thistlewayte recently performed at Coolangatta's Twin Towns to launch their national tour. And the new kid on the block is Dave Gleeson Angels and Screaming Jets front man for the past 35 years, who replaced Darryl Braithwaite has added a new, vibrant and most refreshing energy to the group.

This is not a show of each performer's rely on their greatest hits to win the audience over. Russell Morris and Southern Son's Jack Jones shine on and Thistlewayte's new age solos connect directly with a most appreciative audience. Gleeson's on-stage banter is surpassed only when he belts out some of his great solos.

Capretto, meaning a young goat but for us is an acronym for GOAT- Greatest Of All Time. And that they are.



**"The Voice Inside charts John Farnham's very personal and public journey, told in his own words and with his inimitable humour, insight, and humility,"**

**In his new memoir, John Farnham has discussed his entry into the music industry as an innocent teenager, stating "it is a very predatory industry."**

John detailed the abuse he suffered at the hands of his first manager, Darryl Sambell, who gave him amphetamines to boost his energy before performances and snuck him sleeping pills in the morning.

"He drugged me for years and I had no fucking idea,"

"I caught him one day. I was drinking from a cup of coffee and there was a pill only half-dissolved in the bottom. When I asked him what it was, Darryl replied, 'That's just to keep you awake.'

"For years, Darryl controlled where and when I worked, what I sang, what I wore, what I ate. He isolated me from friends and family, he tried to keep me away from Jill [Billman, John's wife], he drugged me, and he made me believe that all my success, everything I had, was because of him."

John further revealed that he never questioned any of it and instead told himself it was because he was young, stressed, tired, and unsure about his own instincts.

John further touched on the abuse he endured from his first manager, revealing that he was "aggressively sexual" towards him.

"I said it often enough that I can see now that this rejection turned his attraction into jealousy, hatred and a desire for control," He revealed that he would constantly find himself having to fend off his advances.

"I feel so ashamed of myself for not realising what Darryl was up to or speaking up more often to put him back in his place," he wrote.

JOHN FARNHAM is an Australian national treasure, one of Australia's top performing artists and the greatest singer Australia has ever produced. His career spans more than five decades.

Born in London, John immigrated to Australia with his family in 1959 at the age of ten. From high school he played in local bands around Melbourne and in 1967 John left a plumbing apprenticeship to pursue a full-time career in entertainment. And what a career it has been.

For five years, from 1969 to 1973, John was voted the King of Pop, and his success brought him screaming fans and recording contracts, won him starring roles in stage shows and musicals and delivered twelve singles and six albums that all achieved gold status. The fickle nature of pop saw his pop career wane in the late seventies, but John's talent continued to develop. In 1980 he formed his own band and with them he performed the Beatles classic 'Help' to critical acclaim.

# FARNHAM

In 1982, he was invited to front the Little River Band and he toured extensively with the band in the US. But it was after leaving LRB that John truly came into his own. In 1986 he released his first solo album in six years, called Whispering Jack.

This phenomenal album was No. 1 on the Australian music charts for 25 weeks and topped the charts throughout Europe, England and Canada. It is still Australia's highest-selling album of all time by a local artist and the album won John numerous ARIA awards. More chart-topping albums would follow.

Throughout his career John has regularly toured both Australian and overseas markets. At home, his tours are renowned for breaking attendance records at major entertainment venues.

There are so many accolades to list so here are just a few. In 1987 John Farnham was named Australian of the Year and on Australia Day in 1996 he was honoured with the Order of Australia for Services to Music and Charity. In 1997 he was recognised as the Most Broadcast Australian Recording Artist of all time. In 1999, he toured East Timor for the 'Tour of Duty concert. In 2000, John performed with Olivia Newton-John for the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games.

In 2003, John was inducted into the Australian music industry's ARIA Hall of Fame. John continued to record and tour and has collaborated and toured with some of Australia's and the world's best performers. He is acknowledged by artists like Celine Dion, Tom Jones, Chris Martin and Jimmy Barnes as 'the Voice'.

In August 2022, John was diagnosed with mouth cancer and retreated with his wife of over fifty years, Jill, to fight this cancer battle. In 2023 the documentary called Finding the Voice, that looked at John's career and the creation of Whispering Jack, was released. It became the highest grossing Australian-made film in 2023. The soundtrack received an ARIA Award, and it was awarded an ACCTA Award for Best Documentary.

Following the release of the documentary John had three albums in the ARIA Charts. Over his career he has won twenty ARIA Awards. Twelve months on from his diagnosis and subsequent surgery John remains cancer free.

Co-author Poppy Stockwell, an award-winning writer, director and producer who has written and directed for all the major networks and her independent projects have played to big audiences at the world's most prestigious festivals including SXSW, Hot Docs, Sheffield Doc/Fest, New Orleans Film Festival, and the Sydney Film Festival. Her work has been recognised by an AACTA, a Walkley Award, a UN Media Peace Prize, two Logie nominations and the Audience Award at the Sydney Film Festival. Poppy's debut feature, John Farnham Finding the Voice, recently became the highest box office grossing Australian documentary of all time.

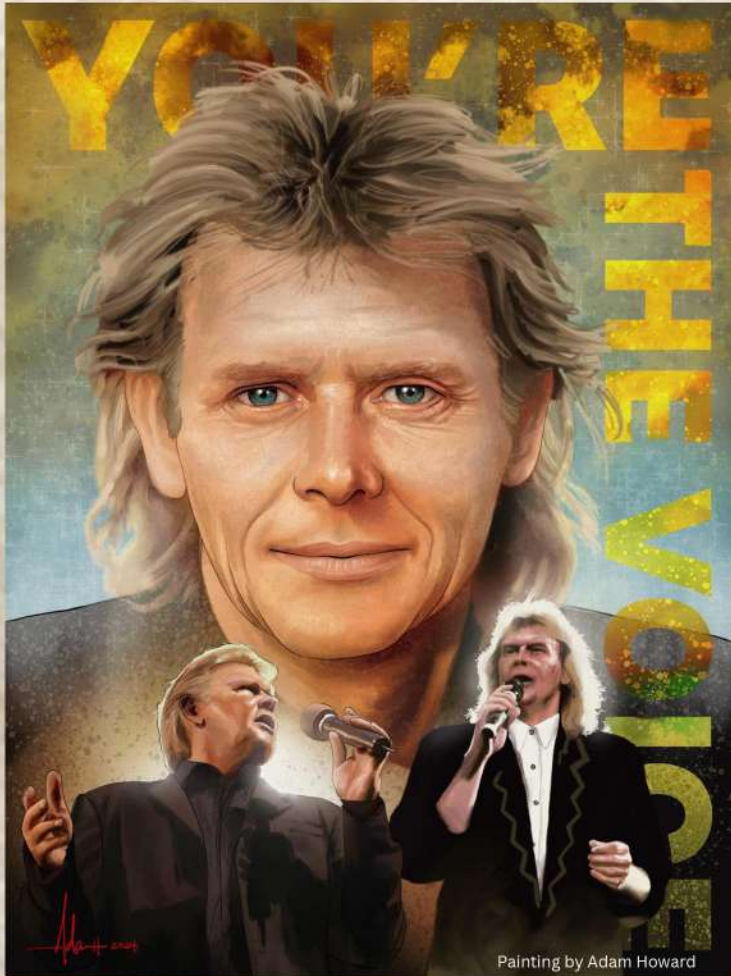


# RAISING HIS VOICE

## John Farnham Settles Some Old Scores in His New Book

Here are 18 things we learned from John Farnham's new book, 'The Voice Inside.'

**JOHN FARNHAM** is an Australian national treasure, one of Australia's top performing artists and the greatest singer Australia has ever produced. His career spans more than five decades.



Painting by Adam Howard

### Raquel Welch hit on him

Farnham sat next to American actress Raquel Welch at the Logies. "As the night wore on, Raquel took quite a shine to me. She let me know in no uncertain terms that she wanted to become friends. And I mean – nudge, nudge, wink, wink – friends." Farnham turned to the other person next to him – his wife. "Just a minute, Raquel, let me ask Jill." Then he told her, "Sorry, my wife said no."

### He owns the contracts to the Beatles' Australian tour

Farnham's second manager was the legendary promoter Kenn Brodziak, who brought The Beatles to Australia. He showed the singer the contract and tour papers. On one hotel bill, Paul McCartney's name was written as Paul McCarthy. "I was spellbound. I asked Kenn if he would leave the contract and papers to me in his will. 'No, but you can buy them off me,' he said. So I did."

### A Beatles cover brought him back

"People always talk about Whispering Jack and You're The Voice, but I think what changed things was the single Help ... that's what really got me started again. And it's ironic because at that time, what I needed more than anything was help. Someone once told me that Paul McCartney heard my version of Help and said he liked it. I never heard definitively whether this was true or not, but I hope he liked it."

### Did Tina Turner rip off his arrangement of Help?

When Farnham was trying to resurrect his career, he visited Roger Davies, an Aussie who was becoming a big manager in LA. "When I walked into his office, he took one look at me, put his boots up on the desk, got out a toothpick and then started cleaning his teeth. I played him my demo tape, including my version of Help. Afterward, he said, 'Now, what can we do about making you a star?' He made me feel even smaller than I already felt. I looked at him, thought about his question for a moment then responded, 'Nah, nothing. I don't think you can help me.'"

Four years later, Davies' client Tina Turner released her version of Help, which was issued as a single and featured on the international edition of the Private Dancer album. "I heard she was interviewed on radio and asked whether she got her inspiration from my version. She denied ever hearing it."

### He is not mates with Graeham Goble and Beeb Birtles

Little River Band's Graeham Goble produced Farnham's 1980 comeback, Uncovered. Farnham became LRB's new lead singer two years later. He stayed for four years, but it wasn't an enjoyable experience.

"Later, it would seem to me that he [Graeham] wanted a puppet out the front of the band, not a true entertaining front man ... we certainly weren't mates when I joined, and we didn't become friends – Graeham and I didn't gel that way. As it stands, I haven't spoken to Graeham for over 30 years."

Farnham also didn't bond with LRB's other key member, Beeb Birtles. "Beeb and I irritated each other – he's not my cup of tea and I wasn't his." Farnham channelled his frustrations into Playing To Win, the title track of LRB's 1985 album. "I wanted to get out of the chains I felt I was in."

### Hey Hey was no payday

"I don't think anyone got paid for doing Countdown; I certainly didn't. Same as Hey Hey It's Saturday, the variety show on Channel 9. But Hey Hey was commercial, so they should have paid, whereas Countdown was on the public broadcaster, so they had some excuse."

### Glad Quincy Jones didn't produce Whispering Jack

Glenn Wheatley tried to get Quincy Jones to produce Whispering Jack. The American legend – who produced Michael Jackson's Thriller – was keen, "but could only give the project a small amount of his time. It wasn't enough. To be honest, the thought of working with such a big name got me worried. I felt that I was going to be right back in the same situation I had always been in, where the producer would call the shots. With someone like Quincy Jones, how could I disagree if he wanted to do something a different way to me?"

### He doesn't regret rejecting We Built This City

When Farnham was sorting through potential songs for Whispering Jack, he came across a song called We Built This City, co-written by Bernie Taupin. "The demo was amazing, and it definitely grabbed Ross [Fraser] and David [Hirschfelder], but it wasn't one for me. If your heart's not in it, then you're not going to do it properly, and after a career of forcing myself to sing songs that weren't really me, I didn't want to do that anymore." We Built This City was later recorded by Starship, and it hit #1 in the US.

Continued next page

# AND THAT'S WHY WE LOVE HIM.

Continued:

## What if You're The Voice hadn't come along?

"I don't often think about sliding-door moments, but this song changed so many lives in such positive ways ... it helped Glenn [Wheatley] through all his monetary problems, it helped me through mine, it put our kids through school. All sorts of wonderful things happened because of that song." Until Farnham heard the You're The Voice demo, "Pressure Down was the strongest song we had". Would Whispering Jack have roared if that was the lead single?

## He's no fan of one of the You're The Voice co-writers

Manfred Mann's Chris Thompson co-wrote You're The Voice, and he didn't want Farnham to record it. "He said some things that felt pretty mean to me early in the piece, and apparently he didn't want me to record the song because he had doubts about my credibility."

For the Whispering Jack follow-up, Age of Reason, Farnham recorded two more songs Thompson had co-written, Don't Tell Me It Can't Be Done and The Fire. Thompson phoned Farnham to tell him he didn't like the way he sang Don't Tell Me It Can't Be Done. "I picked up the phone and without much lead-in, he said, 'You didn't sing it very well.' I was taken aback and angry, and I replied with, 'Fuck off, never ring this number again.'"

## He's signed all parts of the anatomy

"It's a bit disconcerting when a young lady comes up to you, flashes one of her boobs and says, 'Here, sign it, please.' It's awkward, because usually you've got to hold onto something in order to sign it, but a bare breast made that problematic. I was always very careful where my hands went on those occasions, but I did always sign my full name: Johnny Peter Farnham."

## He might have created the Kylie "Showgirl"

Farnham was playing Scrabble with Michael Gudinski on holidays in Queensland. "Michael, can I just say something that I think would really work for Kylie? She is so pretty and so gorgeous and so tiny, I reckon you should get her to dress up as a showgirl. Get her in feathers and high heels, you know, the whole outfit."

"The next thing I know Kylie is touring Showgirl: The Greatest Hits Tour. I never managed to ask Michael if that idea came from our Scrabble chat, and now I never will have the chance. We miss you, Gudinski."

## He smoked too much

"I started smoking when I was about 14. Smoking a hundred cigarettes a day didn't help ... I'd be in the studio puffing away while I laid down vocals. It's just crazy to think back, absolutely stupid, but we never knew how bad it was for us. When I quit cigarettes, I took up cigars. If I was awake, I had a cigar or cigarette in my mouth 99 per cent of the time."

## He's pretty much deaf

"I did a fair bit of damage to my hearing over the years, right from day one, and now I can barely hear. Industrial deafness, if you like. It's shocking."

## He had fun with Whitney

When Farnham did shows with Whitney Houston, her manager issued some strict instructions. "We all got the message from him that if we came across Whitney in the corridors at the Entertainment Centre, we had to look away. Under no circumstances were we to look directly at Whitney. Of course, I couldn't wait to come across her. I left my dressing-room door open, and I was constantly looking out to see if she was coming. Then as soon as I saw her, I yelled out, 'G'day Whitney, how are you going?'"

And that's why we love him. John Farnham is an Aussie legend.

# GOLD COAST



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# THE RECORD THAT CHANGED AUSTRALIAN MUSIC FOREVER

**"We legitimised the idea of being an Australian band," says Skyhooks' Red Symons.**

By Jeff Jenkins



It's October 11, 1974, and the fledgling Mushroom Records is launching the debut album by its latest signing, Skyhooks. The vibe is good, but Michael Gudinski is worried. He's yet to pay the recording bill for the album – \$13,000 – and the label isn't flush with funds, with its biggest success so far being Madder Lake's debut album, which sold 15,000 copies.

Mushroom desperately needs a hit, otherwise the company might be closing its doors.

The album, *Living In The 70's*, gets off to a good start, entering the 3XY charts at number 18. Three months later, it will knock off Suzi Quatro's *Quatro* album to take the top spot on the XY chart. The following month, it becomes the nation's number one album, a place it will occupy for 16 weeks.

Skyhooks are the biggest local band we've ever seen.

Until the Hooks came along, the highest-selling Aussie album – Daddy Cool's *Daddy Who? Daddy Cool* – had sold 60,000 copies. *Living In The 70's* sold more than four times that amount.

As Ian "Molly" Meldrum reflects, "Skyhooks made news – they put rock [music] on the front page."

*Living In The 70's* is an irresistible tale of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Five decades later, we're reliving the album that changed Australian music forever.

## Was Shirl the luckiest guy in Australian music?

Graeme "Shirley" Strachan became Skyhooks' lead singer in March 1974, replacing the original lead singer, Steve Hill, who quit after the band's ill-fated appearance at the Sunbury Festival in 1974.

Like Brian Johnson six years later, Shirl walked into an Aussie band that was primed for greatness. Seven months after Shirl joined, the band released *Living In The 70's*.

"I was pretty interested already," Michael Gudinski explained. "But I don't think they would ever have had the commercial success with Steve Hill as the singer. Shirley was an integral part. Once he joined the band, things moved pretty quickly."

Soon after Shirl joined, Skyhooks did some demos for EMI. But the major label passed on the chance to sign the band. In April 1974, the Hooks inked a deal with Mushroom Records.

Gudinski suggested some changes, wanting Shirl to revert to his real name of Graeme, telling the singer: "This is a rock 'n' roll band!" But the band's bass player and main songwriter, Greg Macainsh, insisted that 'Shirley' stayed.

The band's first record company bio, written by Greg Macainsh's then-girlfriend Jenny Brown, called them "the horniest-looking and most remarkable band to hit the public eye in years. The aim is not to soothe, but to invigorate, activate, instigate ... to laugh is not the worst thing you can do when you listen to a lyric, to think may not be such a pain either."

Guitarist Red Symons remarked, "Skyhooks are the sputum thrown from the death-throes of a decadent culture."

"I can't remember why that phrase, but I guess I wanted to capture a mood," Greg Macainsh said when I asked why he called the album *Living In The 70's*. "It could have been 'Living In Melbourne', but I wanted to get a larger thing. I didn't want to say 'Living In The Universe' or 'Living In Eternity', but I also didn't want to say 'Living In St Kilda'."

## Shockin' me right outta my brain

Christie Eliezer wrote about how the concert hall hysteria represented an escape "of the kind of emotions which the forces of puritanism, morality and authority – both societal and parental – normally seek to contain".

Those forces conspired to contain Skyhooks – or, at least, they tried to. *Living In The 70's* features ten tracks; six of them weren't allowed to be played on the radio. The Federation of Australian Commercial Broadcasters unanimously voted to ban more than half of the album due to its references to sex and drugs.

The ban didn't surprise producer Ross Wilson. "I expected it. It had happened to me with Daddy Cool's *Sex, Dope, Rock 'n' Roll* album [in 1972]. It didn't matter if you had certain tracks that were the obvious singles – I knew that you had to have a single that would get by."

## To get past the censors

The ban actually pleased Gudinski. "Any other record company would have been panicking about this, but when all the songs got banned, I thought, 'This is fantastic! If they want the record, they're gonna have to buy it; they're not gonna hear it all over the radio.'"

## And I get paid for just being a freak

Before the success of Skyhooks, music in Australia was like a glorified hobby. But as Red Symons reflects, "We legitimised the idea of being an Australian band."

Continued:

# LIVING IN THE 70'S

## The revolution started 50 years ago

**Continued:** Before the Hooks landed, very few acts made a living from making music. Shirl, a carpenter, hedged his bets and continued working for his dad for three months before committing to the band full-time. Red Symons was a schoolteacher for a couple of days a week. Drummer Freddy Strauks had a job at Telecom as a maintenance computer programmer. He committed to the band only when Gudinski guaranteed he would make \$80 a week. Even when the Hooks hit number one, Shirl was still living at home with his mum and dad.

### Hey boy, it's Balwyn calling

Skyhooks' songs exploded the cultural cringe, opening ears to truly Australian material. Greg Macainsh wrote about his natural habitat – the suburbs – with the album featuring references to Carlton, Toorak, Balwyn and South Yarra.

"He actually mentioned Australian suburbs without a hint of national inferiority," wrote The Music's Christie Eliezer, who was one of the first rock writers to analyse Macainsh's lyrics. "His style can be intellectual without being pseudo-poetical or pretentious, and basic without being moronic."

Sammy Clyde provided a vivid description of Macainsh's songwriting in The Nation Review: "At last it's happened: a view of Australia from behind the bars, from the inside. No more Goondiwindi Greys, Brisbane to Beechworths, Redbacks on toilet seats, or Highway 31s. This is urban Melbourne in the flesh, minus exterior gloss. To listen to Skyhooks bite their way through Living In The 70's is to justify the existence of Valium."

### I need another pill to calm me down

Was this the greatest time ever for Australian music? Living In The 70's emerged one month before Countdown started. Skyhooks performed the title track on the show's first episode. Three months after the album was released, 2JJ started broadcasting in Sydney, with Skyhooks' You Just Like Me 'Cos I'm Good In Bed, the first song played on the station.

In March 1975, colour TV was officially launched in Australia – with Johnny Farnham introducing Skyhooks on Countdown. RAM (Rock Australia Magazine) hit the newsstands in March 1975, with Skyhooks as its first local cover. And Juke followed in May 1975, with Shirley Strachan on the first cover.

### A dog named Skyhooks

The cultural impact of Living In The 70's was immense. It became the first local album to top the national charts since Daddy Cool's debut in 1971.

Current affairs legend Mike Willesee took a moral stance when Skyhooks appeared on his TV show in 1975. "They sing about going to bed together, masturbation, smut and orgasms," Willesee stated. "Many parents are disturbed."

When the TV presenter asked, "Would it bother you if you thought that you did lead youngsters astray?" Shirl laughed, and Red replied with his own question: "Is orgasm and masturbation necessarily astray?"

"I mean, we all do it, don't we?" Greg added.

"Come on," Shirl challenged Willesee, "tell the people out there. Go on, do ya?"

### Sexist? What's wrong with being sexy?

"The Hooks album just sold and sold and sold and sold," Ross Wilson smiles. "It was the start of the whole acceptance of Australian music that did have a local identity."

But the sales success presented its own set of problems. In 1975, RAM editor Anthony O'Grady wrote about a conversation he had with a Mushroom staffer. "I don't think it's wise for them to make a second album," the staffer said. "It's just gonna get slagged."

As the band was becoming over-exposed in Australia, Gudinski trumpeted a "\$1.5 million deal" with Mercury Records in the US, a contract covering ten albums in five years.

Even Elton John was on board. "In my opinion, Skyhooks are most definitely 'living in the 70s'," he said on LA radio. "Like in the early '60s when a place called Liverpool turned the eyes and ears of the world with the Beatles, the '70s could very well see Melbourne become the city of tomorrow's music world."

Skyhooks did 37 shows in the US in 1976. Mercury released the band's second album, Ego Is Not A Dirty Word, as the Hooks' US debut But the critics saw them as a pale imitation of KISS – a band the Hooks had never seen.

"Skyhooks, to be blunt, is without a single redeeming quality," the Philadelphia Inquirer's Jack Lloyd wrote in a piece headed 'Skyhooks Can Go Back Home'. Paul Westmore, of the Niagara Falls Gazette, believed the band "came off with a tired cacophonous sound that went nowhere". While The Tribune's Joe Raymond reviewed the band's show with Uriah Heep: "Leading off was Skyhooks, Australia's greatest disaster since Frank Sinatra made his last tour."

Skyhooks never did get to release those ten albums in America. Mercury released their third album, Straight In A Gay Gay World, retitling it Living In The 70's, but it failed to crack the US charts.

The Hooks limped home from America, more than \$90,000 in the red. Red Symons exited the band after the Straight album, while Shirley Strachan departed after the fourth album. The band enjoyed some successful re-formations before Shirl died in a helicopter crash in 2001. He was 49.



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# AROUND TOWN



The Master Class...Chris, Wendy, Tony, Shannyn, Anne and Loretta

## NEW CHEFS ON THE BLOCK

Master chef Samantha Gowing and her Sous Chef Norman Rowe teamed up to host the inaugural GoSet cooking class. Held at their Banora Point home the three hours session, then onto to imbibing and devouring our own gourmet dishes made it a day most wonderful day.

Limited to six students GoSet members were Loretta Rymer, Anne Pritchard, Chris and Wendy Dobbie and Shannyn Asmar and Tony Healey. To find out more contact Samantha at [sam@foodhealthwealth.com](mailto:sam@foodhealthwealth.com).

Pics by: Shannyn Asmar



Tony with Sous Chef Norman



Proud as punch . . . Anne Pritchard, Wendy Dobbie and Chef Samantha

## SNEAKY LUNCH AT SOUTHPORT YACHT CLUB



Taking time out with a lazy lunch at our sponsor, Southport Yacht Club's Waterfront restaurant. Cadd, Morris and master guitarist Pete Robinson were there. So too was Donna Morris, Anne Wright, John Beecroft, Rosie Adsett, Shannyn Asmar and Tony Healey. It's a club well worth joining.

## OUR FILM MEMBERS GET AROUND

Pics by: Iris Snapwell



Michael Rymer greeted by actor Edward James Olmos as he presented at the Chicago 20th Anniversary of Battlestar Galactica while his business partners Barry and Shirley Pierce met with film distributors and theatre owners at the Australian International Movie Convention at the GC Star.

# OCTOBER LUNCH

All the way from the Deep South came our special guest The Music Man, Bill Duff. Like most old rockers Bill's behind-the-scenes stories that should have stayed on the road made his interview with Normie Rowe more than specials

Pics by: Shany Asmar



Normie and Bill talk about Old Times



Hans, Wendy, Chris and Square Pants Bob



Best Dressed Award to Charli with Sandi Frost



Raelene, Rosscoe and photobomber Ian



Anne and Sam working the camera



Ted and Shan



Normie, El Presidente and First Lady Rosie



Lissa and Sue



The Spunkettes: Gael, Donna, and Marie



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