

AUSTRALIAN MUSIC - A BLUFFER'S GUIDE

The success of artists and music, much like being a great surfer, comes from being able to ride waves that come in sets. Depending on what style is in vogue - or if your style will set the new trend - great music often relies on luck and timing to be successful. But that can apply to bad music being a success phenomenon too. Just look at 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport' as the first song most people overseas knew of being Australian!

Music sells overseas not because of where it comes from and not just because it's sung in English. Though we all celebrate when one of our own artists tops the chart in America, the UK or Zimbabwe, we know that just because one Australian artist makes it doesn't mean that it opens the door for others.

Though we wouldn't have known it, much of our exposure to Australian music in the 60s & 70s would have been the Bee Gees, The Seekers (remember 'Georgy Girl') and The Easybeats ('Friday On My Mind'). But most of us would have thought they were English. Even the biggest act to hit the touring circuit was not really identified as Australian - AC/DC.

It's been 24 years since I moved to Australia from Atlanta and over 20 years since I exchanged my American citizenship for an Australian passport. Coming from a live entertainment production background in the US, I'd already started to appreciate the drive, enthusiasm and professionalism of Australian artists and their crew or management when I worked on concerts in the late 70s/early 80s with AC/DC, Little River Band and Air Supply.

My Yank friends, whose only impression of Australia was from the films of the late 70s that portrayed the country in more historic terms - 'Walkabout', 'Picnic At Hanging Rock', 'We of the Never Never', 'My Brilliant Career', 'Breaker Moran', 'Gallipoli', 'The Last Wave', and the earlier 60s classic with Robert Mitchum, 'The Sundowners' - were appalled that I was moving to a country that appeared so primitive. I assured them it was just the movies and that there were cities with civilized venues and quite a vibrant music industry. Just like Aussies didn't believe America was all cops, cowboys and uber-rich 'Dallas' or 'Dynasty' babes.

When they challenged me to name some Australian acts, I did. But they believed that everything good came from the US - AC/DC were from Detroit, Little River Band were John Denver's backup band from Colorado, Air Supply were a California soft rock group, Olivia Newton John was maybe from as far West as Hawaii and wasn't Helen Reddy a Canadian and Peter Allen from Rio? Or the Bee Gees from Miami via the UK?

A series of cultural & sporting events put Australia firmly on the musical map though in the early to mid 80s. First was the introduction of MTV and that quirky \$4000 video clip about Vegemite sandwiches and chundering - Men At Work's 'Land Down Under' - which later became the national anthem for stealing the America's Cup from the Yanks.

Follow that with the Crocodile Dundee film (and 2 and 3...) with Paul Hogan offering another 'shrimp on the barbie' in the Australian tourism commercials. Of course there was the 'Mad Max' film franchise and later movies that modernized the view of Australia - 'Romper Stomper', 'Priscilla Queen of the Desert', or lampooned it like 'Young Einstein' 'Babe' and 'Finding Nemo'. And we can't leave out the 2000 Olympics as terrific exposure for our "Great Southern Land" globally.

Australia in the 80s was also at the forefront of video clips with the master Russell Mulcahy, seminal film maker Peter Clifton (whose epic was 'The Song Remains The Same' and other music films) and many other clip makers whose humor and vision gave Australian bands like Mental As Anything, Real Life, Nick Cave, Icehouse, Midnight Oil and INXS among others.

The Oils, Divinyls, Hoodoo Gurus, Go Between, and INXS blazed a new trail across America though as the type of riveting live act that epitomized the strength of Australian music - most of our bands are audience-slayers, developed in the grueling pub circuit of unforgiving fans. Crowded House and Mental As Anything certainly showed the quirky side of our music. Though Cold Chisel, The Angels, Baby Animals, Diesel, Rose Tattoo and other iconic bands missed their mark to make it big overseas, the early inroads forged by AC/DC redoubled as that band became the top grossing touring band in the world.

In the late 80s, the Federal Government stepped in and gave support to the music industry in both development of artists as well as the export initiatives by AUSTRADE in forming and empowering a Rock Music Committee of industry experts to come up with programs which included stands at New Music Seminar in New York, MIDEM in Cannes and showcase tours in the US and Japan. Where music exports accounted for a little over A\$5 million in 1985, they zoomed to A\$120 million annually in the early 90s and peaked at over A\$200 million in some recent years due to hits by individual artists (like Savage Garden's 20 million albums sold worldwide as one example), airplay and best-of back catalogue sales of previous hit songs and bands (LRB and Air Supply for instance) as well as the lucrative touring circuit of Europe for indie bands, the UK for dance acts and the US for more rock oriented artists.

And while the more visible bands are rock, pop acts like Kylie Minogue, jazz artists like James Morrison, blues acts such as Dave Hole and Jeff Lang or a classical piano master such as David Helfgott, Australia also has a 40,000 year history of indigenous music from the traditional didgeridoo and clapstick world music of Aboriginal Australia to modern artists who have touched the overseas market's hearts. These include Yothu Yindi from the Top End, The Pigram Brothers of Broome (formerly Scrap Metal), WA's Richard Whalley and the Tjapukai Dance Theatre from Queensland and Sydney's Bangarra Dance Theatre. There are more jewels in the mine though with artists like Christina Anu, Nokturnl, Saltwater Band, Frank Yamma, Archie Roach and Shakaya.

AUSTRADE has continued these initiatives with a refreshed foray into North America using South by Southwest as the nerve cen-

tre with over 150 attendees and 17 bands working from a massive stand and using this magazine in your hands as one aspect of a publicity and promotion invasion.

In the past two years, a major set of waves have been ridden by our industry as the English press - which used to revile Antipodean bands as crap from the colonies - suddenly embraced 'Oz Rawk' with a particular fetish for The Vines, followed by Jet and many more. With the 17 bands in Austin that are officially showcasing (and a couple of other artists guerilla marketing their talent), we hope this event proves to carry a new wave of Australian talent into our favored territories.

And just wait until we come back in 2006 to SxSW with more homegrown talent - it'll be another invasion of music!



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