

Perth Music Interviews

Ben Stewart (Filmmaker)

Amber Flynn (Rabbit Island)

Sean O'Neill (Hang on Saint Christopher)

Bill Darby

David Craddock (Davey Craddock and the Spectacles)

Scott Tomlinson (Kill Teen Angst)

Thomas Mathieson (Mathas)

Joe Bludge (The Painkillers)

Tracey Read (The Wine Dark Sea)

Rob Schifferli (The Leap Year)

Chris Cobilis

Andy Blaikie

by Benedict Moleta

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This collection of interviews was put together over the course of 2011.
Some of these people have been involved in music for ten years or more, others not so long.
The idea was to discuss background and development, as well as current and long-term
musical projects.

Benedict Moleta

benedict@benedictmoleta.com

Ben Stewart (Filmmaker)

Were you born in Perth ?

Yeah, I was born in Mt Lawley.

You've been working on a music documentary for a while now, what's it about ?

I started shooting footage mid 2008. I'm making a feature documentary about a bunch of bands over a period of time, it's an unscientific longitudinal study of sorts. It's a long process because I want to make an observational documentary with the narrative structure of a fiction film. I'm trying to capture a coming of age cliché but character arcs take a lot longer in real life. I remember reading once that rites of passage are good things to structure narratives around, so that's what I'm going to do, who am I to argue with a text book?

Fair call. I guess one of the characteristics of bands developing or "coming of age" is that things can emerge, change, pass away and be reconfigured quickly.

I meant people coming of age rather than bands maturing and coming good. I see that as secondary, it always comes down to people or character for me. I think if I look at it as a collection of band bios then it will only appeal to fans of the bands. I'm trying to avoid that as much as possible, I want it to be much more about the individual's involved rather than the story of a particular band. It's about friendships, community small town culture etc.

I think it has an added element of interest to me because of the cultural backwater aspect that dominates Perth. We're a rich, drinking, mining, sport town which is generally hostile to cultural pursuits or at best indifferent. I think it's interesting to look at the people who go against that and try and make something here. Perth could be a great place so it's a shame we lose most of our creative people to Melbourne/Berlin/Anywhere But Here. It's interesting to see how long they can hold out and remain passionate.

Sounds like you really are getting close to the action, documenting the human aspects, which are most likely to be interesting regardless of taste or prior knowledge of the bands.

Exactly, that's the plan anyway.

Is this something which is destined to be screened in public or on the web ? Is there a way of following your progress online ?

The idea is that I complete the film and then try and get it into festivals. Hopefully through that I can get some sort of distribution deal and the prospect of making more films. And no, there's no way of tracking my progress, I'm not a blogger.

Has your choice of subjects been guided by any particular principles or themes or stylistic concerns - or just one thing leading to another ?

The choice of subjects has been pretty organic. Because I knew I'd be filming this for a long time I wanted to make it as easy on myself as possible, so I gravitated towards bands that I liked to go and watch. These bands tended to be on bills leading to other bands that I liked.

But it's more than just a preference for a type of music, I also wanted to focus on a “scene” of sorts so that various people's and bands’ stories would interact and converge and affect each other. That way I end up with an ensemble film more like *Short Cuts*, rather than one of those encyclopedic reports on something. I couldn't care less about being definitively comprehensive about Perth, it's much more about drama than journalism.

I guess apart from musical preferences I also find DIY endeavours interesting and I wanted to get bands at the start and at the end of their musical pursuits - i.e. first gigs and last ever gigs. So I started out with all of these elements in mind but it ends up coming down to who I get along with and who engages with the process and my success of capturing important things with them. Then in editing it's going to come down to what characters I have footage of that adds up to a good narrative/character arc in some way or another. Then it also depends on how the various characters’ stories work with the other characters. So in short, I cast my net wide initially and it's going to get narrower and narrower as I go along.

From memory, one of the interesting things about watching *Short Cuts* is the way you gradually become involved with the various characters, locales and events. It sounds like your approach is similar, and is bound to reveal some interesting aspects of the recent Perth music scene, without making grand claims for them.

Yeah exactly, I'm much more interested in character (personalities and place) than statements. I really find those report films boring, *Something in the Water* and the Melbourne equivalent *Sticky Carpet* were both pretty terrible. They have an inbuilt inferiority complex so are preoccupied with proving their town's music's worth. But everywhere makes interesting music. And even so, interesting music isn't enough to make an interesting film. It's got to be about people.

Have you seen the Perth-made 1996 video *Sitting down in Sticky Carpet* – coincidentally similar in title to the Melbourne video you mention above ? I've only seen it once, but from memory it's mostly just a collection of lots of indie bands playing live. It did have the heritage aspect of having documented a number of now-defunct venues.

Never heard of it, I'd be interested to see it but this sort of thing doesn't bother me. I don't feel like I'm treading on other docos' toes, or just rehashing their idea. It's not the same thing at all, I'm making a dramatic documentary, the first two we mentioned are making political documentaries and *Sitting down in Sticky Carpet* sounds like a performance film. I think if you don't focus on the human aspect you are really limiting the appeal of the film. Which is fine, it's just not what I want to do.

Have you been filming live music and venues, and also interviewing people, or just live footage ?

I've been filming all sorts of stuff. If I think it's interesting for whatever reason I'll be there with the camera. I'm not afraid to waste my time or tapes.

I'm guessing that if you are aiming for festival screenings and distribution, you probably believe in the experience of the cinema, or at least engaging with the work on the big screen in a social setting, rather than in the privatised environment of YouTube etc.

Yeah, I'm old enough to have been originally indoctrinated in the ways of the feature, I respect the conceptual purity of the unit of a film. I think a feature film is a bit like a meal and can be satisfying in that way, the internet is snackish and piecemeal. Having said that, I do realise that it's a bit antiquated and if I was trying to be more progressive with the format I should be doing some sort of blog with video and audio posts and maybe diary entries and forums and all sorts of shit but as I said before I'm a dinosaur, I work in a record shop!

I think if this project was a blog it could have been much more relevant and insightful. I don't mean in terms of drumming up anticipation for the final product but to actually have a blog as the product. As it stands, I'm making a film about people who aren't me, and they don't get to contribute to it in much of a meaningful way. The internet path could have been a much more democratic way of documenting what goes on, it could have produced a town's autobiography, and in that way could have been far more negotiated and accurate record and in a lot of ways more interesting.

But of course, by gaining in democracy of style, you run the risk of producing something ephemeral, and you risk losing the critical distance which allows your own methodology (even if it's intuitive) to shape a cohesive work, with its own internal logic or structure.

Sure, I guess that's the danger of that sort of thing. And it would more than likely disappear into in-jokes. But if it was guided and comprehensive enough I think it would be an interesting, multifaceted document. But having said that, I do believe in my approach, I think I can at least push a more single-minded agenda with a film. Film is great for creating a self-contained world where you completely give yourself to it for a couple of hours, I like that. But a film is pretty ephemeral, it only goes for two hours and then most people would probably forget it again just as quickly. But it's what I want to work with regardless of shortcomings and other possibilities, someone else can make the website.

The development of the work over time, and the process of editing the footage to make the final cut is a big difference from doing something online, where, the results are immediately apparent, and available for comment every step of the way.

Well, it's funny because I'm after immediacy in the film, but not necessarily in that it is consumed immediately after something happens. I really like documentary, but I kind of hate how it's always about something that happened thirty years ago. I wanted to make something that is filmed in the present. So that's the idea of making observational stuff, and then culling it make it become as like a fiction film as possible. Because, y'know, people have ridiculously short attention spans, and film is generally a spectacle, so you expect a lot to happen. So it's like trying to compress that enough so that it becomes interesting enough, so I could show it to my mum, and she's not just going to feign interest as if to say "Oh,

yeah, that was good".

Are you a tertiary film graduate ?

Yeah, I studied at ECU. I've got a double major in film and philosophy and I did my honours in film. Uni gave me basic tech competence but it mainly gave me licence to indulge in a spending a whole lot of time watching and reading about films. I tended to over-intellectualise things while I was there and that approach really didn't work for me. I'd prefer to make things a bit more intuitively, like this. But having said that I don't think I'm going to do something this sprawling again for a while.

I know something else you are involved in is the organisation of free Saturday evening gigs in the garage behind Dada records. I know that Dada has had some in-store shows over the years, but as far as I know it's been a long time since there's been anything regular on site. How long have you been running these shows ?

Alex (the old Dada cleaner) pestered Rob [owner of Dada records] for a while and managed to put on a Mink Mussel Creek show in May of 2008. Over the next two years she put on another three or four gigs. It was hard because we have no resources, getting bands to play for free is easy enough but getting a PA is a bit harder. She seemed to have lost interest at some stage and there was a bunch of shows that I wanted to put on, so she essentially stepped aside and I've been running them since April (or something like that) of 2010. Greg Taw loaned his PA indefinitely when he moved to Melbourne and ever since then it's been monthly.

I get the vibe that you try to put together a diverse bill for each show - ideally this means that all sorts of people have the opportunity to come together and see things they might not normally see. Do you feel this is what happens ?

Yeah, I try and make it a bit diverse for a couple of reasons. I find the way most bills are put together to be a bit boring, it seems like the three or four bands that sound the most similar play together. It just ends up sapping your attention and appreciation of what someone is doing if it just sounds like the band before them. The other reason about diverse line ups is more calculated, bands tend to have a small group of friends/fans and if you pick all bands that play together you're just drawing from that one pool of punters, if you get three different pools then you can theoretically produce an ocean. And yeah, that coming together of different people and them experiencing something new seems to create some sort of vibe. But I'd also put vibe down to the space, and the casualness of the setup (there's no door charge, and people can BYO so there's none of that feeling your being milked for all of your cash). So that's the ideal, but really it seems there's about one hundred people who turn up to most of the gigs, three quarters of them per gig. Plus a few randoms. Also, the diversity I'd like to book is a bit beyond what I've been able to achieve, bands I don't know personally are much harder to convince of the merits of playing for free with a shitty PA, no DI and no sound guy, in a shared garage that smells funny.

Here's something from your interview with Steph Kretowicz in Sunset Mag:

“It’s become about presenting a band to a social group they wouldn’t ordinarily reach, where it’s not in someone’s house and it’s not someone’s rehearsal studio but in a neutral space where everyone’s welcome.”

I think what I was trying to get at was that in that void before a band is big enough to play at a beer barn, especially now with the Hydey gone, is that a lot of shows seem to be pretty inaccessible for the general public, you essentially have to know the band to be able to see them play. That's a bit shit. But having said that, I don't think the word about the Dada shows gets out that wide. I've pestered a bunch of local music related media outlets about announcing gigs and what not to various levels of success. But I guess at least it is a "neutral space" that doesn't get confused for a private party.

Amber Flynn (Rabbit Island / Amber Fresh)

Were you born in Western Australia ?

Yes, in Kalgoorlie.

Have you lived here most of your life ?

Yes. I grew up at a place called Goode Beach, which is 20 minutes out of Albany. The house I lived in was between the ocean and a peninsula and Torndirrup national park.

I lived in Paris for a year, but apart from that I've been in WA.

Did you do any music while in Paris ?

None, apart from singing with friends.

When did you start playing shows ?

In 2007, because a band from New Zealand called Batrider heard my songs on the internet and asked me to play support for them when they came to Perth. They live in Adelaide now. Sarah (the singer/lead guitarist) came back to play at my launch which was very nice. She's amazing.

I didn't know what to do at the beginning, for that first show, because I didn't own an amp or any other equipment, and the songs I had made had lots of parts. So I talked to a few people about what I should do, and bought a couple of things. I don't usually buy expensive items because I prefer to give money away, so it was a strange experience.

The first show was at the Hydey, and then after that a few people just started asking me to play at other small shows.

Have you continued to write songs with lots of parts ?

Well, I guess most of my songs have lots of parts. But that doesn't necessarily translate into how the songs will be played live. When I make a song I just do it on the spot; play something, sing something, record it as I'm doing it, and then add more and more layers. The song is just whatever I made up on the spot the very first time. I don't plan anything, or write out chords or parts of songs and then construct something. I just make a song spontaneously. Then afterwards I have to learn how to play it, from the recording. If I've done lots of things over the main part of the song, I sometimes recreate parts with my loop pedal or with other people when I do it live, if it works that way, or sometimes I'll just play it in a different way.

Do you outline your ideas for different parts to your collaborators ?

It really depends on who I'm playing with, and what the show is. For a couple of shows I've done with Leonie and my friend Sheryn, who's a singer, I've been pretty bossy about what

everyone should sing and play, and how. I'm also pretty bossy with Matt Aitken when we play together. Nick Allbrook's been playing with me lately and he doesn't mind getting told what to do... It depends on the relationship/s with the people I'm playing with... Some people I'd like to boss around but don't feel it would go down well.

With Matt Maguire it's pretty much all or nothing, in that unless we're both happy with something, neither of us will play it. He does what he wants on drums, but there's certain songs of mine he doesn't like, so he just won't play on them, even if I want to do them in a show - so I respect that, and either don't play the song, or get someone else to do drums for that particular track. And there's stuff from the past he tries to get me to play that I just say no to, or bail on on the night.

In my mind I try to tell myself I've got to compromise, but I don't like doing things unless it feels right for everyone. But basically I let people try what they think will work and then either I like it or I say "let's just not play this one". I'm sure I'm annoying to play with because I'm kind of half the time in the camp of "follow your heart", and half the time ultra bossy and specific about how I want things to sound.

Did you begin playing shows on your own ?

Not really. The first show Matt Maguire offered to drum for me when I told him I'd been asked to play. I didn't know him but he'd listened to my music on the net also and had asked for a CD from me. Also I work (at my work) with a beautiful girl called Sheryn who can really sing, and so the three of us just had one practice the afternoon of the show and then played. After that I started playing some shows alone, some with them, and then started having other people along as well, depending on who wanted to do things and how I was feeling at the time.

Is the process of collaborating a mixture of invention, rehearsal and direction when you are working on new material for a show ?

I'd say yes, it's a mixture of both. But really I try to rehearse as little as possible (like, once at the most before a show, or not at all), because I just feel like it makes things less interesting for me. I just don't like when people work out "parts" to songs, and most people I play with can just improvise - sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but it's funner that way.

I get the impression your approach is different for each new collaborator, and is guided in part by the other person's style or inclinations.

Some things remain the same, some things change about the process. I guess with people I'm more comfortable with, I don't mind just saying that I want them to do x instead of y, but it's always hard telling people what to do, for me.

New people coming to play on songs makes the songs different. For example, Nick's been playing some guitar on a few things, but I'd NEVER want someone else to try and play the same stuff he does. Same for drums, same for cello, same for any other instruments.

You perform using at least two different artist names - Amber Fresh and Rabbit Island.

Yeah, but not on purpose...

These stage names don't refer to two different bodies of work or working methods ?

No, not at all. It's just for some reason some people started using my name (which isn't my real name) instead of my "band name". I don't really care, I just play as whatever I get billed as. My real name is Amber Flynn.

Anything you'd like to say about the name Amber Fresh ?

It's just a name I picked when I first made an email account, to have some anonymity. It has kind of come in handy, because I like to separate some parts of my life, so that I can be completely free creatively, with a good likelihood that the things I write and perform won't necessarily follow me round into my work life. Also I like Fresh because it reminds me of happy times being in love with a boy. "Fresh" is kind of a nice nickname to have too...

Any interesting roots or source for this ?

Nope.

Or for Rabbit Island ? I believe there are various small geographical islands around the world called Rabbit Island.

There are many islands around the world called Rabbit Island. The particular one I am connected to is just near where I grew up (Goode Beach). It's an island you can swim to. I don't know why I picked that name. At first on the internet my band name was "Liony Lane". I'd go back to that sometimes maybe for shows, but it's too close to Leonie's stage name and I wouldn't want to cramp her style.

I've seen you perform as Rabbit Island with other collaborators, once including Matt Maguire on percussion. Who else plays with you ?

This is a more accurate list of some occasional and regular collaborators :

Brad Prestipino (drums, guitar, vocals, cello), Sheryn Binks (vocals), Tristen Parr (cello), Jeremy Balius (talking), Chris Cobilis (drums), Dave Egan (vocals, guitar, noise), Matt Cunningham (piano), Leonie Brialey (drums, vocals, ukelele), Matt Aitken (bazooki, noise), Emlyn Johnson (guitar, whistling), Cameron Avery (drums, vocals, guitar), Nick Allbrook (guitar, vocals, drums).

I really like to play with lots of different people. People kind of come and go, and that's the way I like it. At the moment I've been doing quite a few shows with Matthew Aitken; him

playing in Rabbit Island and also us playing as our other band 'The Gulls' (a separate project), and also with Cam Avery (from The Growl) and Nick Allbrook (from Pond and Tame Impala and Mink Mussle Creek). I'm not playing music to make a career; it's just for enjoyment and creative outletting, so there's no point playing the same songs in the same way each time. I get bored very easily, and I would never want to play something I was bored with. It's much much more interesting to play with other people and see what they do to a song, and also to not be very practiced so that some of it's improvising live I guess, on a theme. With Rabbit Island it's always songs I've made up on my own, but I go with whatever the other person/people are doing to it on the night... Except I made a couple of songs with my friend Cameron Potts (from Cuba is Japan and Baseball) one time when he was here.

Makes sense to me, and I think there's always room for more music journalism, to document the changes and the variety. The street press can't be expected to cover everything, and self-promotion online can only really present the intentions of the musicians themselves, not really the same as a discussion or appreciation or review. Any thoughts on this kind of thing ?

Hmm... I don't really follow any kind of discussion of bands. I went online a few times to the discussion-type forums, but I read some negative stuff about myself and other people which made me feel unreasonably sad, as in, I cried in the shower, even though it's just strangers giving their opinions. And I tried to get in on a discussion about this or that once, but got out very quickly because I realised it's just people trying to win arguments and look good... Maybe that's unfair? But in terms of Perth bands, there's not much I'm interested in reading personally. If something is amazing, it's going to make an impact, of some kind or another. I guess if bands are *really* good enough, then somehow there'll be someone documenting and covering them in a lasting way... I have been surprised reading reviews where the person doesn't seem to have even Googled the band they're writing about, but I'm more conscientious than the average person, and I guess like you said people have limited time. If I were writing articles for street press, I think I'd try to get a bit of background about the bands, but that's just me... I think some of the amazing young bands, maybe like Astral Travel, who share members between other groups, will develop some sort of lasting notoriety if they stay around, and maybe get written about over east or overseas, or in music magazines or whatever. Yeah, I think if the music is good enough, someone will take notice and write it all up.

I guess also I'm the wrong person to ask about that, because I have a very hard time focussing on music for more than a short period of time because I get depressed easily, and there's something inherently meaningless in everything which seems to bleed through if I look too closely. That's why I couldn't even *listen* to any music for ages, let alone read about it. I do think it'd be kind of good if there was some more serious, constructive discussion

about bands in Perth. My mind does its own critical evaluation of everything about every band or artist I see play, but then I just let that run through me, and don't focus on it.

I kind of think it doesn't matter if people just know about the bands they're friends with - usually it seems the friendship comes because people like each other's music, then this moves on to having a smoke together, then this moves into deciding to have a jam together and then it becomes a new band. It's nice like that. I guess I assume many people wouldn't be interested in some of the outer music that's happening. For example, me and Matt Aitken just played a pretty terrible 20 minute set at our friend Clare's party, at 2am on Saturday night, and maybe one or two people would have really really liked it, but it's of no interest to the general public. It would just sound like shit to them. But I guess I'm totally small fry and you're talking about more important bands... But who are these? Maybe I'll start a blog.

Nah, not talking about anyone important. But I do think that as well as providing information in the present, good journalism has a personal heritage aspect to it, since the articles can be kept in a box and revisited later. Speaking of documenting the details, are there other entities or performing names I've missed ?

I played a few times with Dave Egan as Space Boy, with a set we made up based on the movie Flight of the Navigator. Also I had a project called The Gulls with Matt Aitken, which was just us recording on our own around the place, but we released a CD in December (at the Lake Monger gazebo) and have started playing a few shows. We play some very messed with covers and some versions of our improvisations.

David Egan and I also did a bunch of shows as "Triangles". This was all new material we wrote together, and the shows were partly improvised and partly composed. This was a very very enjoyable project.

I haven't seen most of these collaborative acts. Do you play a variety of instruments in these projects ? I'm guessing some of the improvised work is purely instrumental, no singing ?

Actually, Triangles and Gulls are mainly singing for me. In both I do lots of vocal looping and affected sounds with my voice, but with Gulls I also play some guitar and keyboard and whatever else is around. Matt Aitken mainly plays bazooki in Gulls, when we're doing shows, but it started out just as us making one-take improvised recorded songs on all kinds of instruments at our houses and Spectrum Project Space (RIP). But yes, some purely instrumental, and also lots of improvised "singing".

You seem to be a pretty good piano player. And do you have any formal musical training behind you ?

I learned piano through primary and high school, but have lost most of my skill. I can only play guitar as well as when I was in year nine, as I don't practice much, just once before a

show really. I think maybe from learning music early I can understand things, but my technique is super basic.

For some time now you have played shows in tandem with L'il Leonie Lionheart. In these shows you take turns to play songs one after another, like Andrew Ryan and Geoff Symons from adamsaidgalore used to do in 2002. I take it that you and Leonie are mates. These shows are interesting for the audience, because you are quite different artists who obviously appreciate one another on stage. Anything you would like to say about your working relationship with Leonie ?

Yes. Leonie and I met when I heard her play on RTR and emailed her to say I liked her music. Soon we met in the flesh through a mutual friend and somehow we started playing together. We've done a few really terrible shows together like that, and some good ones. It's mainly very very enjoyable because playing in front of people is such an intense thing for me, so it's so good to be able to sit back during the set and either just listen to Leonie and watch her, or play along a little bit on some of her songs. It's good in that people seem to ask us to do shows together at nice intervals; we wouldn't do it all the time, but every now and then it's a pleasure. We both love each other's songs and have a very strong friendship, and we also have a very straight forward and fun way to work out how to do those tandem shows.

I've seen a few of these shows, and always found them engaging. Your appreciation of one another's work is quite evident, and as a punter in the audience it's nice to be watching someone perform on stage while a friend of hers is also onstage, obviously enjoying it too. You have quite different styles and play different instruments; there's enough variety for it to be interesting, but not so much variation from song to song that the sense of performance or presentation starts to falter. I reckon an atypical or surprising performance style like this - especially when audiences are seeing it for the first time - is likely to stand or fall based on the strength of the material and the performers, but also on the flow between songs. You guys seem to have developed a sophisticated show, in which song follow song swiftly, and it's a pleasure to take each as it comes. Any thoughts ?

Well, especially at the beginning, we did put a lot of planning into the ordering of songs, especially because we didn't want the instrument swapping to be too painful. That's nice you think it's sophisticated. I think it's true, you know, when it all works out there can be a great flow and the songs are ordered to complement each other the best. And I think it's true that that enjoyment between us can help the audience to enjoy things too. I love playing with Nick and Cam these days because they're always grinning at me, and I'm either grinning or grimacing back, and they kiss me on the cheek when they leave the stage. People like it. I honestly used to always get told I look like I'm dying when I'm playing, like, really really worried. I know I still do sometimes, but I'm finding it easier just to laugh when things are going a bit shit, rather than cower away and cut things really short. It changes

each time. Umm... Leonie and I both really enjoy playing covers in new ways, so that's always fun too.

Your album was released in March 2011. What's it called ?

"Oh God, Come Quick". I'm happy to try and explain why, if you're interested.

Please do.

Hmmmm... So I guess it's that I'm at a point in life where honestly, if God doesn't come quick, I'm totally done for. I used to have a much stronger faith when I was younger, even though I have always been naturally sceptical of everything, and didn't grow up in a home where spiritual things were discussed much. But at the moment God seems a long way away. It really is a call to him/her to show up again so that I can do all the things I feel I'm meant to do in life. Also, just in general, there's so much suffering in the world, and it's all groaning under the weight of people trashing the place and not caring about one another, so I guess it's an apocalyptic call as well. And also it's to the man of my dreams, who I evidently haven't met yet, even though I sometimes think I have, to come quickly to me so that we can be together. Same as every now and again I feel that God has come. I realise I sound crazy. But that's what it's about. And I like that it has a sexual meaning to. God, Sex, Life, Apocalypse, Suicide etc. That's what it's roughly about.

Who plays on it ?

Me, Greg Taw, Brad Prestipino, Dave Egan, Matt Aitken, Leonie Brialey, Tristen Parr, Matt Maguire, and my parents on one track. Some people just play a tiny few things, others are on a few songs.

You mentioned that when you started playing shows your songs already tended to have lots of parts, which motivated you to work with other people in live shows. Have you been able to include more of these instrumental parts on your album, either playing them yourself or having other people play them ? Or are the other collaborators largely responsible for their own contributions ? Or bit of both ?

Well, I guess Matt Maguire, Tristen and Greg did whatever they wanted for drums, cello, and lap steel. They created their own parts. None of them had heard the song they all played on (*Creepers of Ages*) because I made it up one of the nights of the week we did recording. Leonie and Brad mainly sang, so they just sang along - Leonie and I recorded second vocals at the same time for one song, just improvising as we went. And yeah, Dave and Matt just did what they wanted. There wasn't much planning. And we added some various bits and pieces just on the days. Like, we recorded to tape, and so I recorded Jay (the man who did the recording) winding back the tape of one of the songs on a dictaphone, and played that as a track on another song. And for another song I took his phone because it had R2D2's sound, and then while he was recording I also went through all his audio files

and put those on as well, and it happened to be things like this choir of children in Papua New Guinea singing to him when he was doing a hike in the wilderness there sometime.

Some “parts” are things like, when I made the song *Space, Man* at home, I recorded water noises, like bong noises, and so in the studio recording I did some water sounds too. Not really “parts” like anything written down.

Is it thematically unified in any important or explicit ways ?

I feel as though my brain is thematically unified, so the songs all are too - they are about the things I obsess over constantly. But I guess the main unifying thing is the feeling. I don't know how it's going to turn out. I hope it will feel unified and be good, but it's hard to know.

Are the songs things you have played under your various stage names ?

Yes, as well as some new songs I made during recording, and one that I made a long long time ago but never played in public. And some are quite different versions to how I'd play them on stage.

Anything important about the way it was recorded / with whom / in a special place ?

Dave and Jess from Badminton Bandit picked my recording person and place for me, and I just trusted they would make a good choice. Jay Brandner did the recording at SAE where he works. I didn't meet him til a few days before, but I just talked to him about it and said that my main thing was to have an enjoyable time and mainly only do things in one take, rather than going over and over stuff to get it “right”; I wasn't sure how he'd respond but he was very happy to do things that way. It was a very pleasurable experience in the end, because Jay let me do everything how I wanted to, and respected me and my intentions, even though it wasn't always the usual way things are done. We recorded to two inch tape, which seemed more fun and... creamy I guess.

I would like to have been in a house by the ocean, with a grand piano, but I liked SAE and I felt as comfortable as I do in my room at home, which is the only place I've done recording before.

Fair call. I'm guessing this was SAE in East Perth ?

Yes

Can you tell me a bit about Badminton Bandit - how long it's been going, who else it has released etc. Are Dave and Jess mates of yours ? Do they operated an online store for selling the releases ?

Yes, Dave and Jess are my friends, through music. Dave and I somehow met and immediately decided to play music together. We were mutual fans and then became friends. They have a store at badmintonbandit.com and have released some amazing things,

including Mental Powers and Astral Travel. Tapes, CDRs, 7"s, 12"s. All interesting, all things they believe in. They put out a split 7" of me and Matt Aitken (as Rabbit Island/Gilbert Fawn) last year as well. They do it very independently and very professionally, and have great shows to release whatever they're putting out.

Is there any sort of touring planned following the album launch ?

Maybe. But I don't really believe in touring much, personally. I think if people are as good as Sufjan Stevens, they should tour their heart out if they like, but mainly it's too much pollution flying round to just show your music somewhere else. I realise that's a very weird idea for most people, but it's what I think. I go to Melbourne every now and then to see friends, and I will organise shows there if I do that again soon... I've been invited to play at something in Connecticut by some young creative collaborators... But it's hard to work out whether to or not. If I did tour, I'd just do it once. It's hard to work out the right thing to do... But probably the right thing for me is not to tour really. Cam and Nick are trying to convince me to join them at some point in their interstate/overseas adventures so we can play a couple of shows together, but we'll see.

Stu from New Weird Australia has asked Matt and I tentatively if we want to do a small national tour with them as Gulls. They would organise everything. So that's pretty tempting. What do you think? Do you think it's worth the atmospheric degradation? I'm not sure...

Dunno. You are also involved in the Cottonmouth publication and shows. Are you one of the key organisers, or just from time to time ?

I wasn't in the original committee, but several people left last year and I was asked to be part of the group. My role is choosing the music for each event, and also taking more responsibility for the collaborative event with Amnesty's youth arts festival, which happened in 2010 and 2009.

Anything else you'd like to say ?

Maybe the only other thing is that lots of film clips got made for my songs for the album...

Ok – we know where to start looking for them.

Sean O'Neill (Hang on Saint Christopher)

Were you born in Western Australia ?

Yes.

Have you lived here most of your life ?

All my life.

When did you start playing shows ?

Started playing real shows in Feb 2009.

Were they solo at first, or did you collaborate from the start ? / When did HOSC start playing shows ?

First shows were with HOSC. Only recently started playing solo shows.

Has the band gone through a number of incarnations, with a variety of players ?

Well, our drummer, Pete Evans, and myself are the only two remaining original members.

Can HOSC play with more or less members, or is the live show depend upon a certain fixed instrumental setup (bass, guitar, keys, drums etc ?)

Our songs rely heavily on vocal harmonies so it is important that there is always the full band on stage otherwise the potential and qualities of the songs are lost which is why I play a completely different repertoire when I play solo shows.

I believe some or all of your band-mates are tertiary trained musicians. Is this so ?

Well we all met studying music at the Con. I'm still deciding on whether that is a good or bad thing.

Have you had musical training yourself / are you a current student ?

Yes. two years of studying contemporary music at The Con.

Is Pete Evans involved in any other ongoing musical activities outside the band ?

Yeah he's actually just joined Fall Electric as their drummer. Plus he plays a variety of other gigs as a free-lance drummer.

What about you yourself - are you involved in any other musical projects, or have you worked with other people, in the band scene or in classical / contemporary / jazz areas ?

That's something that I do want to do in the future perhaps. Ever since I finished my studies I've kind of focused on my own thing. But I always enjoy collaborating with other musicians.

Are there any bands or artists in Perth to whom you have gravitated ? Anyone in particular who you like to play with ?

There's a couple. Umpire, Apricot Rail, Reverse Engine Ear, The Morning Night, The Growl.

Do you find yourself regularly playing shows with these bands ?

I've done gigs with all of these groups except for the Growl. I just really dig their sound.

What I've always enjoyed the most about playing shows is the feeling that people who know each other and appreciate each other get to organise something together, and hang out in an atmosphere that they have created together - regardless of their stylistic similarities or differences. Do you have a sense that you are part of a group of artists who share some kind of vibe like this ?

I wouldn't say I'm a part of a group of artists that hang out a lot. But there's definitely people I'm friendlier with than others. And the only reason for that is purely because I have done gigs with them. I don't think I've been around the town long enough to develop that kind of thing yet.

Do you feel like your background of training at the Con might limit this ? Or have any particular effect on it ?

If anything I think my experience at the Con has only given me more contacts. The good thing about it is that if I need a musician to fill in for the band, I'm able to get the best musicians to do it. But at the same time some of the best musicians are not interested in the original music scene. One of the most ridiculous things that I've realised about musicians from the Con is that they spend so much time working on their craft and becoming great musicians. Then after all the hard work they end up playing other people's music their whole lives in restaurants and clubs in cover bands. The issue I have with that is that there is nowhere to go from there.

Do these community / group / music scene things not really interest you - are you more just into making the songs ?

I think the community/ group scene things are great. But I'm not one of those people who is going to go way out of my way to network hard and be fake and friendly to the "important" people just so I can try and get a spot at the next awesome gig. If I get great gigs I want it to be because of my music and live performances.

On the same theme, do you have an idea of which acts you would like to support you at a CD launch ?

For our launch we have Shy Panther, Ben Witt (The Chemist) and Fall Electric. I chose these bands firstly because I know them well. A few of the guys in Shy Panther I know from High-school. Ben also went to my High-school (which was Sacred Heart College) and we were at the Con around the same time. So I know him quite well and also just really respect him as a

musician. I got Fall Electric on the bill basically because they're one of my favourite Perth bands and now that Pete's in the group I thought it would be quite fitting.

Would you go to the extent of bringing artists from outside the band scene to play ?

Seeing as it is at Amplifier Bar I probably wouldn't. Even though I really like classical and jazz music I don't think it would work in that environment. But hey, if you never try something, you'll never know how its gonna turn out....maybe one day.

Are there any current acts, local or otherwise, pop or otherwise that are exciting you at the moment ?

I saw Delta Spirit at the One Movement Festival and they really blew me away. I've been listening to a lot of Brian Eno recently. I also listen to a lot of world music on a regular basis especially tradition Irish, West African, Indian and Chinese music.

Any particular period or aspect of Brian Eno ?

Music for Airports is my favourite. But there is still a lot of his work that I am yet to hear. I recently bought his latest album, Small Craft on a Milk Sea, that is a very intense album and I think you need to be in a certain mood to listen to it. Just like you need to be in a certain mood to watch Deadwood.

And as for West African - do you dig Mali / Cape Verde artists, or people like Toumani Diabate, Ali Farka Toure, Amadou and Mariam, Cesaria Evora ?

Yeah I definitely dig Toumani Diabate and Ali Farka Toure a lot. It's the sort of music that comes in phases with me. I listen to it non-stop for a few weeks and then not listen to it again for like six months.

I pretty much like all traditional music due to the fact that I know the songs as styles have been passed down generations by people who have played purely for the passion and love rather than anything to do with money.

Tom Waits is an example of someone who has elements of a strong and recognisable tradition of performance (the bar fly piano guy, the crooner, Broadway etc) - but who has also gradually developed a distinctive musical language. Does this bear any resemblance to your work or approach ?

I guess because I listen to such a wide spectrum of music I think that mixture of pop and experimental comes into some of my tunes without realising. A group that I think that does this great is Wilco. I think that's mainly due to the fact that Nels Cline is in the band now. I really hope Jeff Tweedy keeps him on.

I believe the band is currently working on its debut ep. Who is this being recorded with ? Will it be a fixed lineup, or will you be joined by a range of different collaborators and guests on the album ?

Well we recorded the ep at Yo Yo Studios which is run by Malcolm Clarke. Jay Cortez recorded us, helped out a bit with some production elements and played bass on all the tracks. Pete played drums and I did all the other instruments except for trumpet and trombone which were played by Callum G'Froerer and Tilman Robinson.

Callum and Tilman are both from a jazz background, right ?

Yes, but they do a lot of classical work as well. In my opinion, the best jazz musicians are the ones that have checked out a lot of classical music as well. Same goes for classical musicians.

Are they mates of yours, or were they selected purely on professional / performance terms ?

Pete is friends with them plus they are pretty much the top musicians to get. In my opinion, Callum is the best trumpet player in W.A.

Were their contributions to the album written out ? By them or you ? Or jammed out, or some combination of composition and jamming ?

A combination of me telling them what to do and then at other times we just played the track for them and pressed record and those guys just played around.

Will they be joining you for any live shows, like the CD launch ?

Yes. Tilman will be playing at the launch. But unfortunately Callum will be in Melbourne at the time. June 4 is the date by the way. But we will be getting a trumpet player to replace him.

Anything remarkable or interesting planned or underway for the recording process ?

I don't think we did anything too interesting during recording. I used a harmonium for a tune called 'In the Arms' which gave the song a completely different feel to how we used to play it live.

Where do you think you would aim to launch the ep ?

Most likely Amplifier Bar.

I've seen you play one solo show, in which you played some songs of your own, apparently not ones that you would play with the band, as well as a Neil Young song. One of the things I liked about the show is that your use of loop and effects was well integrated into the songs and structures - quite different from some instrumental music which relies heavily on pedals, and in which the effects seem to take the place of any cohesive song structure. I imagine that since this solo music is fairly quiet and complex,

much of the sophistication would be lost if played through a shitty PA or in a noisy rock venue.

Yeah usually if I play at a big venue where the crowd has had a few drinks, it is always hard for me to keep their attention due to a number of my songs being fairly quiet. I always seem to get a better response from the audience when it is a smaller crowd rather than a large one due to the amount of noise I have to compete with. In terms of a shitty PA I guess some of the things I try to go for might get lost but at the same time I never blame a PA for my performance.

How would you say this compares with the band ? Does the band have elements of this ? I'm guessing that if you like the idea of playing Amplifier you operate at a high enough volume to get over the heaving spectacle of flesh in front of the stage.

Yeah our songs are definitely louder and more upbeat. We've been compared to on a number of occasions to bands like Arcade Fire, Fleet Foxes and The National. So I guess with all those acts there is definitely a mixture of soft and loud tunes. That goes for us as well. I'm sure at times it'll be hard to compete with the noisy crowd in the quieter moments of the set but I chose Amplifier Bar due to the quality of the on stage sound I have experienced on previous occasions. It is by far the best on stage sound in Perth for that type of gig.

Regardless of changing membership, I'm guessing the band is more dependent on group dynamics, especially if vocal harmonies are central. Is there any element of improvisation or experimentation in the composition of the band songs, or are the songs basically designed and directed by you ?

They are pretty much directed and designed by me but I always like to hear different opinions on things. We did try out a lot of things in the studio. If liked it we kept it in and if we didn't we took it out.

I believe Saint Christopher is the patron saint of travellers. When I was growing up we often took St Christopher medals with us on family holidays to keep us safe. Anything you would like to say about the band name ?

I like the whole notion of the St. Christopher medal and taking it on holidays to keep us safe. (My family did that as well). But to tell you the truth the band was just named after the Tom Waits song.

Bill Darby

Were you born in Western Australia ?

Yep.

What were your musical beginnings ? Did you play in bands in high school ? With whom ?

First band was with Geoff from O! and another friend Jason in high school. We had a range of names, including, I think "Acid Avenue"...

Geoff had an electric bass and a phaser pedal, we had a crappy acoustic and a dodgy keyboard with casio beats and used tapes and stuff I think.

What's the correct way for this band name to appear in print: 'O' ? or 'O!' ? Or is the exclamation mark meant to be inside the O ?

It's supposed to be with the ! in the middle but it's a little hard to do on a word processor. Funnily enough once we were referred to as "exclamation mark".

Who was in O! ?

Me, (electric guitar, amp, voice, occasional synth)

Tim Day (drums) who went onto play in Tucker B's and now plays in Sydney.

Nic Wu (electric bass and amplifier) who has two kids and still has a bass and a fondness for Swervedriver.

Geoff Symons (electric guitar, amplifier and vocals) who went onto Mukaizake and Umpire

Were there any lineup changes ?

We started as school friends in high school, with Tim on tupperware, and Ruth on bass.

Nic and Geoff were old family friends and he joined on bass in place of Ruth a bit later.

Nic's girlfriend Bec "Stinky" Lindsay joined us on vocals for the second album "Sporco" and on tour to China on keys/vocals.

What years was O! active ?

Geoff and Nic would know better than I, as virgos. I think 1991 for about 6 years.

Was O! a band with two songwriters ? It's before my time, but I believe you and Geoff Symons both wrote songs, and took turns singing at shows.

We all sang and wrote songs. Well more like parts of songs. It was a very long democratic process for writing. We basically smoked and drank and tried to make each other laugh and freak out playing stuff, and then play hacky sack. Then did it all again.

What happened when O split - did the other members soon engage in new musical pursuits ? Did you ?

Others listed above

Me:

Gadzooks - "junk" orchestra/multi media collective with my partner at the time Pugsley Buzzard Wateringcan, and a whole bunch of friends.

Played drums in a couple of things, including with Richard Easton (Perth born, Melbourne based singer/songwriter)

Nose goblins - experimental noise/grind with Pugsley and Horrie Gauze/Mark Fletcher

Gata Negra

harrysmith

Tears to Picketty - klezmer/folk trio

Lumbar - doomy beats, mucking around with portable technology and circuit bending.

Also done a few more art/theatre related things, electronic and live soundtrack stuff. Played onstage band for Festival of Perth, "Antigone" with Pete Guazzelli, Tristan and Rachel Dease from Schvendes. Rachel composed...

I'd like to play/compose in/for as many different styles and environments as possible. Seem to keep end up in pubs playing guitar and singing though.

What years was Harry Smith active ?

Roughly 2000 to 2006.

This was a three-piece, consisting of Peter Guazzelli, Anthony Gray, and you, correct ?

Yup.

Started as avant-garde outfit to play in a 'new music' competition on ABC. the other members were Pugsley and Mike (bassoon?).

Then morphed into pop/rock trio. In our later stages we were joined on bass by Leigh McGowan (who also played in Petanque), but unfortunately never released the recordings as a four piece.

From memory all three of the members of Harry Smith were songwriters, and took turns singing - correct ?

Yep. Unlike O! it was generally more we each said "I wrote this song, let's have a play".

Although I was usually the (lazy) one saying "I wrote some bits of a song, can you guys put it together?".

I believe that you have been involved in various non-rock n roll musical activities over the years, for example with Cat Hope's Gata Negra. Are there other composition / performance projects which you'd like to talk about ?

I guess the most different is Gadzooks and others mentioned above.

Cat Hope's band featured Pete Guazzelli too - a trained drummer who has worked in jazz and contemporary composition settings as well as pop, rock and electronica. And Cat

herself is partly from a trained and institutional background. Do you yourself have a background of musical training ? You seem to be a very virtuosic guitar player.

I was self taught until at 28 I decided to try playing jazz, as I was around some very skilled and unique musicians (Pete, Pugsley among them). I had always rejected training as limiting, even as a young kid. But decided it was short-sighted to not have a go and learn everything I could about music, become better able to communicate with other musicians and express my ideas more fluently, challenge myself and play wicked fast! I did a year of jazz at the con. I learned how to play scales quickly but not sure I'm any better at expressing myself musically.

It also meant I could pay my way through uni later as an instrumental teacher. Something I never would have been able to do otherwise (although I think some people manage it). It also gave me an understanding of harmonic extensions and words for the 'in between' notes that I'm always looking for.

Apart from these collaborative projects, I understand that you haven't been performing you own material in public for some years, but recently you began to play solo shows again in two guises - a guitar / songwriter show and an electronic show. When did you start doing these in public, and how are you finding it ?

First show as 10 bit was at Shedstock Boxing Day 2010 (Boxing Day party at Cat and Karl's). Since then I've done gigs at the Bird, the Den and the Velvet Lounge as 10 bit as Bill Darby at the Moon, at the Den and down in Freo. Apart from a year completely without playing, I've been fooling around with electronic stuff, writing, building equipment (and breaking it) the whole time.

It's challenging playing gigs on my own. I have never done it before. I really miss playing with others, but love the freedom to try new things out, rehearse in my own time etc. I think my boyfriend would sometimes prefer if I was going to a studio though...

It's a bit hard getting back into performing, both in terms of getting into the rhythm of performing, and being older and coming in to the 'scene' a bit fresh to things. Good and hard.

Is one of the guises occupying more of your attention / getting you more excited ?

I'm more interested in whichever one I didn't just do a gig in!

I'm always interested most in the next thing, the new song, the different project.

They are both experiments to see what I like doing, what is satisfying, what I can do on my own etc.

I like both in different ways. I like the scope of sounds I can play with as 10 bit. I love the immediacy and intimacy of playing and singing unaccompanied.

The 10 bit stuff is harder to perform live as there is a lot of technical bits and pieces. I'm most comfortable singing and/or playing guitar. Which is partly why I'm trying other stuff.

But I keep getting drawn back to those basic things as a writer and performer. I would love to perform more instrumental stuff, but it feels weird to the audience not to sing!

Are they two different bodies of work, or are they just different technical frontages ? I.e. do you have a deliberate strategy for making songs electronically and on guitar, or is it not formal in that way ?

When I first responded to this I said they are pretty different in some essential ways, but I'm more and more looking to bring the songwriting and the beats/sampled stuff together. The 10 bit stuff is mostly written on a laptop or using live looping and then transferred to a live setting. This approach enables me to explore a broad palette of sounds and is usually more layered, but based on evolving building through repetition. So the composition strategies, if they exist, are a reflection of the limitations and scope provided by the technology. It's more horizontal if that makes sense. The main challenge is working out how to perform stuff.

The other stuff is written as it's played. It's usually very quick for me to find guitar and vocal parts, so as I said there is an immediacy. There is also more of an opportunity to muck around with tempo dynamically, and to 'through compose' more, have different sections. So it's more vertical.

Having seen the guitar / songwriter show a couple of times, I'm struck by the complex guitar playing, which is sometimes angular and unpredictable, like certain indie rock of your earlier years, but is also relaxed and rhythmical. Unlike some solo acts who tend to bash away at the chords, using them just as a base for the vocal melody, your guitar playing is captivating. No doubt this musical ease issues in part from the considerable range of capacities in which you have performed over the years. It seems also to issue from a great deal of enjoyment found in playing the guitar. Do you play guitar a lot ?

You are very kind!

The complexity is a mix of my heritage - the maths rock thing, trying to find "out" notes and odd or poly rhythms that work. My heritage was also about not being flashy as a soloist, the punky/indie aesthetic was more about originality than virtuosity - something I totally still appreciate. I don't generally understand guitar solos that have more notes than the melody. For me it's not the number of notes but which notes.

I'm also wanting to see how far I can take fingerpicking. It's something I've always done, since learning *Needle and the damage done*. I love that it allows you to play more than one part, more like a pianist. And there are other things you can't do any other way, you can really make use of semi tones ringing against each other for example.

I love that I am getting more comfortable with playing and singing, and sounds cliched but always want to challenge myself. I think there is something important about struggle as a musician. I hate getting complacent. I never used to be perfectionist, quite the opposite. but the solo guitar/vocal set up sometimes feels a bit like juggling or something. Takes a lot of concentration, which means it takes a lot of time to get comfortable enough to enjoy

performing, to find the love of it etc not just going through a technical exercise. I hope it doesn't come across like that, which thankfully I think you've implied in the question.

I think I'm also self conscious about being solo. I often start off with very simple repetitive ideas, but worry that people will think I'm a loser or being self-indulgent.

I remember Amber (Rabbit Island) saying that she worried about this too, but that she likes it when other people just play guitar and sing. Some of my favourite music is very simple. Some of my most enjoyable moments writing and performing are playing very simple but effective things.

Regarding guitar solos with more notes than the melody - how do you feel about something like Mark Knopfler ? Obviously the guitar solos are flashy and complex there, but to me they always seem beautifully integrated into the songs. Maybe this is the magic of the way his easy virtuosity combines with his super mellow singing. Any thoughts ?

Benedict, I thought you were completely earnest about this Mark Knopfler comment. Now I realise you were only half joking... One of my early memories of wanting to be a rock star was playing the riff from *Money for nothing* on a tennis racket while standing on a table in class in primary school. I suspect the Knopfler had little other influence on my playing but who can say?

I haven't seen the electronic act live - how is it presented live ? Laptop and drum machines, or what ? From the recordings it seems that acoustic instruments are used (e.g. the track *Grumpy Army* seems almost like a guitar instrumental with added atmospheres, rather than an electronic track. On the other hand the track *Clickage* is quite electronic, and yet seems to be based on finger clicks, which have a tactile, organic sound). Can you tell me something about how the electronic tracks are put together when you are recording ?

I'm trying out different things live to see how it works, what's fun, what people respond to. So far I've used a laptop, play guitar and sing and a little synth and bits of percussion. I mostly use looping software (Super Looper or Abelton), which I trigger with a foot pedal, to start, stop, record, bring in a drum track etc. I play and sing bits use loops to build pieces, by adding, taking away, mangle, pitch shifting etc. Using a laptop rather than a loop pedal means that it's relatively cheap (depending on the computer) and opens a whole array of things that are really difficult, expensive or impossible with current looping pedals. You can also customise software to do pretty much whatever you want it to do. Although this is time consuming, it means you don't have to be stuck to a particular way of doing things. Technically, it also means I can have multiple inputs and outputs, so I can loop several different things, and give a sound engineer more scope to mix sounds etc.

Although since first writing this I've been looking to simplify things especially for the pub gigs. Just got a second hand MPC (sampler) to handle some beats and stuff. Also Andrew

(Sushalini, previously from 90's art/indie collective Squad Car) has started playing with me. I'd like to get into playing more with other people, maybe percussion, bass, other vocalists?

It's an ongoing fascination of mine to manipulate acoustic or organic sounds in subtle or extreme ways, and to find electronic sounds which have organic qualities. So many things can go wrong when you mix up electronic and 'real sounds', but you can also get these great, weird interplays between them. They kind of show more of the characters of each when you have both maybe?

I see you mention Severed Heads, Boards of Canada, The Residents, Magnetic Fields, Mouse on Mars, Talking Heads, Deerhoof, LKJ, Caribou, Low, The Orb, TV on the Radio, Old Lady Drivers, Limp Wrist, Aphex and Stravinsky as some of your interests. Is there any contemporary music, local or otherwise which is particularly exciting to you at the moment ?

Crikey, lists of influences always sound a bit wanky don't they...I'm always influenced by my peers, and bands I play shows with. Even if not directly in a musical sense, by their experiences, and so on. There are some great new interesting electronic and live looping acts in Perth. I'm really enjoying Salamander, Ghost Drums, Rabbit Island, Stina, Pex's stuff, Seven Weapons, Hang on St Christopher... there's some great bands, beat-makers and stuff popping up in the last couple of years.

Other than local stuff, also the Dodo's, Department of Eagles, Deep Sea Arcade all playing on my ipod...I'm going through a 'D' phase at the mo...also Jonsi, Tyondai Braxton (ex Battles), Cerebral Bore (new Scottish death metal with awesome female vocalist). Also Rone, Yelle, Buraka Som Sistema, who I just saw at Sonar... there is always some XTC, the La's, Future Heads, TV on the Radio on my ipod.

David Craddock (Davey Craddock and the Spectacles)

You have recently started performing with your new band, called The Spectacles. Who is in the band ?

Sean Pollard and Todd Pickett

Are they all mates of yours ?

Before we started playing music together I actually hadn't hung out with the guys at all. I've definitely been a fan of their respective projects though for the past few years though. I particularly liked watching Todd drum with Abbe May. Todd and I met at the RTR Winter Music Festival and exchanged some mutual backslapping and then the next weekend I met Sean at my good friend Stacy Goougoulis's *Moustache* EP Launch. Suddenly we were a band!

Does it feel like the lineup will stay as it is for a while ?

I hope so. Sean's band Split Seconds is going very well which is great news, Todd also plays in Split Seconds, so it's just a case of us all trying to fit it all in and being flexible with show / rehearsal times. The guys are both really generous with their time and it seems to be working out fine.

We thought about bringing in a lead guitarist but the simplicity of the trio seems to suit the songs. We play really close together with Todd drumming from the middle of the stage - right up front like a lead singer. Because we all sing harmonies on most songs we're enjoying keeping it small and compact.

And do you think you'll be playing shows in a variety of formats (not necessarily with all band members) or are you guys locked up there together ?

Sean was asked to support Sufjan Stevens earlier this month so Todd and I played as Davey Craddock And The Monocle (Todd's dad joke) at a recent gig which I thought was fun. He's a pretty charismatic drummer and sings on most of the songs so it's definitely something we'd do again next time Sean is wooed by the charms of an international heavyweight. I do think we'll be focussing on the trio though in the near future. The main thing really constricting the whole project at the moment is work - as I imagine it does for a lot of musicians. I'm still trying to work out a way where I can devote more time to song writing and developing the band while still working. It's a tricky juggle.

In April 2010 you released your first CD called *Introducing Davey Craddock*. I understand that the writing, development and recording of these songs happened in various places over some time. Can you tell me a bit about this ?

Sure, basically in 2004 I went to Gothenburg in Sweden to live for a year as an exchange student. Before then I had never written any songs but had always played guitar and strummed and wailed along to my favourite records as one does.

The exchange organisation I was with try to match you up with a family that might somehow suit your interests or future career plans. Because my paperwork indicated that I was going to study theatre the next year at uni, and that I had a keen interest in music, they paired me up with a well known Swedish opera singer called Hans Josefsson. It was a completely surreal but enjoyable experience. He was the full deal - cravat wearing, booming out scales in the showers etc.

Anyway, I had plenty of spare time on my hands and in this very musical family there were heaps of instruments around so I bought a great four track Tascam tape machine and started recording little demos. I was also enrolled at a music school- rather than a normal high school - which was great, so I was able to gradually polish them up and record them in the school studio. In true socialist Swedish style, the school studio was outrageously well appointed so I found myself - an absolutely clueless young songwriter with my first ever batch of songs - recording string sections through Neumann microphones in a room full of production majors, classical students, jazz students etc. Completely out of my league. With so much time on my hands and such great resources around it was just a very easy way to get hooked on songwriting and recording.

These songs became my first CD which was never really released. It was just a demo to sell at shows.

My second CD - *Introducing Davey Craddock* - was recorded in London with Oscar Cainer. He is the sound engineer at a great folk venue called the Green Note. He plays double bass and banjo on it and another guy Mark Stonell plays piano.

The vibe on it was completely different. The first one was made in a room full of pine, stainless steel and people very good at accuracy and clarity - this one was Earl Grey tea, cosy rugs and three jolly men in a Muswell Hill flat with an out of tune piano, a banjo and a guitar.

Introducing... is a mixture of songs written in Australia, Sweden and the UK.

You mention your "folk, blues and alt-country" leanings, and the *Introducing* EP does have elements like harmonica, drone finger-picking, a slightly honky piano, and a talking-blues style. Are these things you have simply gravitated towards of your own accord ?

Those styles just seem to appeal to me. I like Americana and the great American folk tradition and that is mainly the kind of music I listen to. I do however feel uneasy about artists who try and replicate that stuff and turn it into some kind of artificial, twangy, cartoony cowboy music. So I think my greatest inspiration would be songwriters like Pete Molinari, Howard Elliott Payne and Tim Rogers who take those sounds and traditions and apply them to their own cultures subtly.

I believe you also took a trip to Nashville - was this a purely musically inspired trip ?

I was traveling through the USA for about two months and it just seemed like somewhere I couldn't ignore. I love the mythology of towns like Memphis and Nashville so I strung

together an itinerary which basically took in all of those iconic southern towns where great artists have come from or that have songs written about them. The Ryman Auditorium and Country Music Hall Of Fame were basically just a chance for countless fantastic music nerd moments - "holy shit that's Hank Williams' guitar!, shit it's Johnny Cash's hat" etc etc. Musically though, I think Nashville has lost a bit of its youthful, exciting or groundbreaking edge. It'd very much a fame machine kind of town now. I found Austin or Brooklyn much more exciting musically in terms of new music. Nashville feels like more of a monument - and a worthy one at that - to times past.

What's changed since you released your first EP ? No doubt the lag between writing the songs and finally releasing it last year has left a lot of space for all sorts of developments and inclinations to emerge.

I've got a full time job! That means much less songwriting and rehearsing time . That's the biggest difference. Musically, I'm still listening to music from the same styles - particularly enjoying the new Justin Townes Earle album and the croony-ness of Elvis Costello's last album.

What's the vibe of the new band ?

Compact, spontaneous and with as many three-part harmonies as possible. Like an unhinged bluegrass trio who can't really play bluegrass.

What sort of local acts if any do you feel drawn to playing with now, in 2011 ?

I'd like to play a show with the Kill Devil Hills. I think our sloppy, compact little pocket-rocket trio would be a nice entree to their bigger, noisier beast.

Are there any particular venues at which you feel you would best perform in your outfit, whether for atmosphere, regular punters, or whatever else ?

Anywhere where people go to listen. I'm not a fan of big booze barns. Venues like Mojo's, The Bird and The Norfolk Basement are a good fit for us.

Is the new band recording ?

We're working on this at the moment. I hope to have a band recording ready for mid year.

Scott Tomlinson (Kill Teen Angst)

This interview is in two parts – the first was done by email, the second was recorded in conversation at Scott's house.

Part One:

How long have you and Brenton Bell known one another ?

I've known Brenton for around twenty years. He was new to Parkwood Primary in 1989 and we became buddies. He lived across the road from me, so that sorta forged our friendship.

Did you go to high school together ?

We did.

Did you start doing music together in high school ?

I got an electric guitar when I was sixteen and started playing in the music room at lunchtimes with a drummer who could play drums, but not with the kick drum. Brenton's mum was a bit reluctant to get him an electric, fearing that it might send him down the muso path. So he would play an old classical guitar and I'd find a suitable volume level on my 10 watt practice amp. We ended up finding a drummer who could play drums with a kick, but who also suffered from asthmatic episodes. When Brenton's mum and step father went on holidays, we would set up the drums in the house and record our jams on a 4 Track with the intention of "picking out the good bits" later, but there were never really that many good bits. When we were seventeen a girl we knew suggested that we have a jam with a friend of hers, Andrew, who was apparently an amazing drummer. I called him up and Brenton and I caught a bus to his place in Como to have a jam. Our friend was right, his drumming was amazing and he kicked our asses on guitar too. I remember jamming on *Leaving Home* by Jebediah with him. I was impressed that he knew how to use a double kick. Certainly took *Leaving Home* up a notch in the chorus. We also jammed on Jebediah's *Monument*. We wanted to cover it, because it was a pretty easy one to play, but Gyroscope beat us to the punch. Respect.

When we dropped our guitars into D tuning we would play Korn and various other metal tunes. We jammed a few times with Andrew and on one occasion his friend Ian Kenny came along, who had a 100 watt solid state Marshall amp, which made our practice amps look a bit sad. Ian had a great voice and was obviously a more advanced player than we were, he could play guitar and sing at the same time! Ian and Andrew had a band called Jeradine or something and played mostly covers (Nirvana/Stone Temple Pilots), but a few originals. They lent us a tape of them playing at a party, which I listened to quite a few times. After a few jams it became pretty obvious they were headed in a heavier direction musically than us, so our jams became less frequent. Ian and Andrew ended up forming Karnivool and Ian later became the singer in Birds of Tokyo. During high school we also jammed with a bass

player called Ren, she'd just moved to Perth from Adelaide and was looking to start a band here. She'd just had a baby and was big into Ugly Kid Joe, so we never really meshed with her. I remember her collection of empty bottles which she proudly displayed. She told us about each bottle and all the associated memories - mostly involving vomit and passing out.

How did Ten Speed Racer come together ?

In 1998 I found a free program on the internet called N-Track - it pretty much revolutionised my world of music. Instead of messing around with crappy cassettes and dodgy 4 Tracks - I could record straight to my computer's hard drive. The multi-track possibilities were endless! Apart from the odd computer crash, N-Track allowed me to record my first EP, called *What colour is Pain?* It was a real DIY affair and I did all the artwork myself and sent off about fifteen discs to people I thought would be interested. I received fairly limited feedback, but the general gist of people's feedback was "don't give up and keep writing". At the time I was sharing my songs with other musicians I could find on MIRC (chat rooms) and ICQ (instant messenger). About six months later I upgraded my computer and recorded my second EP. I decided not to give it a name, because I quickly fell out of love with my first EP's title, so I didn't want to deal with that again. My second EP was definitely a step up, but by anyone's standards it still sounded like a demo. I ended up selling about ten copies online. People would send envelopes with \$10 notes in them, it was nice. A friend from ICQ did one of RTR's drivetime shows and after a bit of convincing she said she would play my track *Midnight on the Overpass* on her show. Got special permission from the boys at work to listen to RTR and heard my track as I was packing stringless beans into plastic. It was an amazing feeling for me at the time. I felt like what I was creating was actually passing for music. The next obvious thing to do was to play the songs live. I met a guy online (Matt Knight) who was doing a zine called *Apparently Untitled*. He was writing about and interviewing a lot of Australian indie bands and I starting talking to him about my music and playing live.

He knew how gigs were booked, so he agreed to help me out. I liked the idea of being a solo acoustic artist, but Matt was pushing the idea of being a band. I spoke to Brenton and another friend Graham about it and they were both keen. We started jamming as a 3 piece (two guitars and bass) in my parents living room - playing songs from my second EP and a few new ones. Once we had achieved some degree of tightness, Matt asked us to play for him at his house. Matt got us our first gig at Coakley's in Freo. We were accidentally billed as 'ten cent racer' and we played a set of about eight songs to a crowd mainly made up of friends.

In the first few years there were a few changes in the lineup. Who were some of the players ?

1999 Scott Tomlinson, Brenton Bell, Graham Clancy.

2000 Scott Tomlinson, Brenton Bell, Graham Clancy, Jordana Amalia.

2000 Scott Tomlinson, Brenton Bell, Jason Van Poelgeest, Gosia Basinska.

When did you start playing regular shows ?

Around 2000.

Initial responses from your audience ?

We had a little bit of a buzz, but our inconsistency live would always let us down. We were still learning our instruments and learning to deal with being in front of an audience.

What happened between Gosia leaving the band and the new lineup with Dayvid (drums) and Alex (bass) circa late 2001 ?

Gosia Basinska and Jason Van Poelgeest were a couple and after they broke up, they both decided they didn't want to play in the band anymore. Brenton and I played a few acoustic shows while on the look out for new band members.

And then Greg replaced Alex on bass somewhere around 2004 ?

Greg started in late 2004 I think.

When did the name change from Ten Speed Racer to Kill Teen Angst ?

Late 2004.

Was the name change significant ? Anything interesting or funny motivating it ?

After Greg joined the band it felt like a new chapter, so we wanted a new name. The name was taken from Dan Grant, who was using Kill Teen Angst as his Livejournal name. I liked the name and how it looked, so we asked him if we could use it and got his blessing. He said he preferred Ten Speed Racer though.

And when did the current lineup lock in, with Travis Betts on bass and Nathan Sproule on drums ?

We started playing with Nathan and Travis around March/April 2010.

I recall around 2007 seeing that you were touring with Jebediah. When was this ?

This was November 2007.

I also recall seeing that you were playing with Shihad, and I saw you play with some kind of spunout teenage emo band at the Rosemount a couple of years ago. These larger shows/supports/ seemed to indicate a growing audience. Anything you want to say about this ?

It was great playing to larger audiences, but our tours and big shows have always been so sporadic that we've never really had a good solid run which we could build upon.

I remember you telling me at the Hyde Park one night that having played in "tin sheds up north" you felt like the band could handle playing anywhere now.

I remember feeling very matey around this time. Everyone was a top bloke !

Have these larger shows and periods of higher exposure had any impact on your basic enjoyment of playing music ?

I think we've had enough of a taste to realise that if we work hard enough - we might actually get somewhere with this.

How is your album being released ?

Gun Fever (Greg's label) and distro through Firestarter (Adam Weston - Birds of Tokyo).

Where did you record ?

Recorded and mixed by Dave Parkin - Blackbird studios.

Is there a mixture of personnel on the album (more than one drummer etc) ?

Only Dayvid on drums. Rachel Dease and Meike Scantlebury on vox.

I know that you have been writing and recording solo material separate from the band for about ten years now. You're not interested in playing these songs live ?

The thought has crossed my mind, but it would take a lot of work I think.

Are they not the kinds of things you can really present properly live (i.e. for technical reasons of sampling/multi-instrumental elements etc) ?

I think they could be presented live, but I need my tech-savvy DJ/Producer friend to help it all happen.

Sounds good.

Part two: recorded in Scott's backyard:

Can you tell me something about what Travis Betts (bass) and Nathan Sproule (drums) are involved in outside Kill Teen Angst, or what they did before joining the band ?

Travis is sort of famous for his work at the Hydey as a sound guy. I think he'd been doing that for a long time – that's where I first met him anyway, in 2000 or something like that. I've known him for a long time. He's one of the people who used to go to the Amplifier a lot when it first opened. I remember him really liking Deftones – you know, bands which were a bit heavy for my taste, but he was into that sort of crushing guitars sort of thing. I think he's played in a few bands – early on in a few punkish bands, and then in Belinda-Lee and the Silver Scene. Belinda's from Lash. So he was doing a bit of pop stuff. I think that's the last band he played in before we hooked up with him.

And Nathan went to school in Bunbury and was one of those guys that just loves the drums. He left school when he was about fifteen to do a scholarship at WAAPA, but I think he got sick of that. He played with a guy called Simon Kelly, who's sort of a rootsy guy, and playing around the place as a session muso and a touring muso as well, so a lot of bands have used him for those purposes. The Spitfires did, and he's also done a few tours like that. But he hasn't really been in a band for an extended period of time. But he's also in Chainsaw Hookers as well now.

He's obviously a really good player, and I don't get the vibe that he's a session player at all.

That's what attracted us to him. At first when we heard what he'd done we wondered if he'd gel as a person. But straight away as a band we spoke about it, and sort of thought "we've gotta be careful not to just go for the first guy that we audition, because that's a trap we're gonna fall into, blah blah blah, but you know, he was the first person we auditioned and straight away we were like "fuck yeah this is the guy.". He pretty much tabbed out the whole album in less than a week, so when we rehearsed with him we were like "fuck, you already know everything." So it was kind of hard to imagine anyone else being that dedicated to it.

I've heard at least one song that's subsequent to the album, which is called *Heart of the Sun*. Are both Nathan and Travis playing on that song ?

No that's Greg [Sanders, previous bass player] and Tristan [Dudley]. That was kind of at a funny stage of the band. We demoed the song with Tristan. He's a studio engineer and just enjoys doing it, so we demoed a couple of songs with him and gave it to our management at the time and they were just like blown away by it, and thought it was really anthemic, and that it could be a really big song. So we recorded the demo, and it was one of those demos that has all the right feeling about it, or right vibe or whatever. And then when our management liked it we decided to go record it with Dave Parkin, and it was kind of at a time when we felt like the band was kind financially choking us, so we recorded the song with Greg and Tristan, but maybe our drive had been a bit disrupted or something, because we were kind of all getting a bit tense and nervous, and we didn't really get a recording that we were happy with, even though we spent quite a bit of time and money on it. Just didn't have the vibe we wanted – just felt too sterile. So now we're recording an EP, starting in May. So we'll redo that song and hopefully get the proper vibe.

So was Tristan a band member for a while, or was he just filling in ?

Well our management was seeing us on big stages playing through big PAs, and when the drums are the driving force I guess they felt Dayvid [Clark, previous drummer] had a bit of a

way to go. So we were in the situation where we sort of had to get a new drummer and Tristan was a guy we'd seen in The Wednesday Society. His playing is really incredible. I remember the first time I saw him playing he had a handlebar moustache, and The Wednesday Society were all dressed up as butchers, and there was blood everywhere. So he was this guy dressed as a butcher playing drums, and I thought "This guy would be perfect for the sort of thing we want". He never wore that again !

He was also quite involved with sound engineering, and I guess he was kind of torn between his passions, you know, music and recording. Obviously he wanted something that was going to give him an income as well, so he could forget about everything else and focus on the one thing, and I don't think we were in the position to make that opportunity available to him. That's a tough thing. When you're at the point that we think we're at, where you just need a tiny push to sort of get onto the radar – you know we're still under the radar, and we just want to poke our heads up. It's hard to find people who feel the same way, when it comes to things like putting a bit of money in and that sort of stuff.

I guess you kind of need someone who's keen, but also mature

That's right. I don't know exactly what the cocktail is, but I guess at the time we just felt we had to believe in the album so much, and at the time Tristan wasn't part of the album [Dayvid Clark plays drums on all tracks on Kill Teen Angst's album], he was just kind of "well, what am I going to do ? It's not really my work", which is kind of the same thing we're up against with Nathan and Travis – they weren't part of the album, so with us we just have to be a band moving forward, which is what we can finally do now after the album, which is why we're going straight into the studio to try and knock out some of the new songs we've been jamming with those guys. It's the new phase for us. That's what's difficult – making that transition smoothly.

To us it seems like the album is kind of caught up in everything that happened, all the hope and this kind of stuff, and to finally get it out has been a release, because finally we don't have to be sitting on so much. We always want to put out stuff as quickly as we can – sometimes at rehearsal we'll write a song at rehearsal, and we'll want to play it live straight away, so I'll just sing my vocal melody without words or whatever. That's all good for being spontaneous or whatever, but I think it's one of the things that separated us from bands which were a bit more pro. But it's just one of those things – Brenton and I have just been so excited to get something out there.

Anything you want to say about Gun Fever – the label run by Greg Sanders, Adam James and Zoe James [of Emperors] – which has released *No Walls in the Sky* ?

It will be interesting. There's been a lot of hype about Emperors, and we're kind of excited about that because it means we'll be part of a label with a band that's exciting at the

moment. It really just came to the point where we just didn't think the album was going to come out. We were just getting so lazy and thinking "what are we going to do?". And then Greg just came in at the right time, and injected us with a bit of drive to pick things up and take things seriously again, and I think that's what the label means to us – something that just helped us, I guess. Whenever we've worked with Greg he's always been interested in the numbers, and that sort of thing. And I think it's important to have someone in the band like that, because more often than not more people in the band are going to be less interested in that. Greg really helped us, because he has great organisational skills, and he's always really on it – it's a really good quality about him. So when it came to wondering whether we could trust him with the album or whatever, I just thought "well, why not?" because I've always found him to be one of those guys that you're always envious of their motivation, and how much they've got to put into things.

I'd never heard of any of the bands who supported you at the CD launch. Who were they?

Kind of a mixture of connections. The first band, Ten Points for Glenroy, were just a band I came across through a guy who's done some poster artwork for us. He told us about his band. So we had a listen to their Myspace and like their stuff – kind of grunty or punky or whatever, so we thought we'd just give them a gig. And then Covalski, a friend of ours Adrian is the guitarist in that band. He was in a band called Time's Up before, who were punky or new punk or whatever. And the other band was Celebrator. That's one of the guys from Grim Fandango – Tom. I think he's one of the best guitarists for that sort of genre, and Celebrator is his band. They'd seen us a few times and vice versa. So that's how that happened.

Even though I wasn't familiar with any of the bands, I got a good vibe off it. It's nice to see new people coming into the picture.

Yeah well it's good for us. There is a kind of scene going on there, based on bands like Hot Snakes – sort post-punk bands; that driving sound. I think Grim Fandango are big fans of this band called Hot Water Music. That was kind of a scene that we thought would work with us when we started getting back on the scene. We did a few gigs with Grim Fandango, and it just went from there. We've been pretty lucky to be embraced by these bands.

A lot of the songs on the album seem to be about living here, in Western Australia. I wonder if we'll get to see a sensible engagement with those themes in the critical reception of the album, or if most reviews are just bound to stick to commenting on the heavy sound of the music etc.

I know what you mean, and that's obviously what I want too – for them to break down the song, to say “he's trying to talk about this or that” - that's the kind of review I'd like to read of the album. I was kind of happy that it was given pretty general overviews.

But from a creative point of view I'm just really interested to know what people feel, and how they interpret it, what kind of feelings it conjures up. But generally you're pretty much denied that, because no-one really gives you much feedback, which can be frustrating. You know, I'm a feedback junkie – I've always found that if I get a bit of feedback it goes a long way to helping me guide myself or whatever. I guess the reviews can tend to stay with what it sounds like, rather than what it feels like – which is what I'm a little bit more interested in.

So for the new ep you'll go back to Blackbird to work with Dave Parkin again ?

No actually we're going somewhere different this time – with Laurie from Sumo studios in Osborne Park. He's been doing some good stuff. He used to play in a band called Flagship. He's been doing some good stuff, and basically we like the volume of his recordings. I think it will be good for us trying something different, and I think we need to be in a different environment for a different era of the band.

On the album a lot of thought seems to have gone into the transitions from song to song. There's a lot of atmospheric detail in the intros and the gaps between songs, there's a bit of keyboards, and some backing vocals from Meike Scantlebury [formerly of Alaska, nowadays of American Novelist] and Rachael Dease [of Schvendes]. There's still a very driving sound to the album, but I think it's great that you've combined this with a lot of atmospheric extras, which you might not integrate in live shows, but which give the album a great vibe when you're listening through from beginning to end. Are all those things due to you guys, or was there some guidance from Dave Parkin ?

My idea was that I wanted the album to sound like it was living, not just straight ahead, but that there was something living inside the album. I was imagining a lot of sounds on the album, so Brenton and I just went sample hunting really, pulling together a lot of samples. There were a lot that didn't make it onto the album because they weren't appropriate even though we felt like they were – and Parko made the call there – you know, like a knife slashing, that sort of thing. A lot of the keyboard sounds and things like that were sparked by Parko, mainly because we'd feel “ok this bit's cool, but it just doesn't feel fat enough, it need something else in there” or whatever. In a lot of the choruses Greg had a foot pedal for bass notes, beefing up the choruses. And other bits we just improvised really. There's some piano at the end that Brenton just played on the spot, which I liked. It fell together pretty well, even though we hadn't been working on those parts for very long. I wanted the album to work on two levels; a living entity, and also just a rock album – a merging of those two things. I didn't want it to be just straight ahead and punky. That was the original idea – to keep it pretty dry, no samples, just you know, really rocking. But I guess the lyrics I wrote

for it brought out different feelings for me, so I wanted to add more in there. To make it feel like it had a heartbeat or something.

I guess those things are part of the magic of recording – when you can combine well-rehearsed material with some degree of spontaneity or whatever. It's risky, but can be very cool.

Well Brenton's very conscious of that – he never likes to go too overboard; likes to keep it pretty simple. That works well with me, because I'm always ready to do too much, and he tends to bring me back. The song *Small Town Small Children*, with the piano arpeggio thing going on – that was one we'd been playing live, which didn't have a chorus or lyrics – didn't really have anything. It was kind of an instrumental song with a big heavy part in the middle. We'd been playing it live like that for ages. Then when the time came to record it I felt like it was just kind of flat and empty, didn't really feel like a song. So then I started writing lyrics for it, and it turned into a fun song, because we thought "Ok, so if we're going to have lyrics here, then we've gotta have lyrics there in the chorus too, so maybe we should do a sort of call and response thing. So then we wrote the middle part in the studio. It was fun. Maybe that's why that song feels a bit fresher than anything else on the album.

Thomas Mathieson (Mathas)

Your first album 10lb Hairless Sasquatch was released in 2009, through The Community and its affiliate Paper Chain - local production / label / events entities of which you are a prime mover. You've mentioned that the songs on your album were written over a period of eight years. I'm guessing this goes back to your very early twenties, or even late teens. There are lots of collaborators on your album, both emcees and DJs. Was this a body of lyrical work which developed over a long period of time, and which then found its final form in the collaborative production of the album ?

The album was quite solo and personal in its process. I suppose it is a written testament of my life from late teens to mid 20s, if you listen to the song Lifestory I say "25 years without a broke bone or crack" that line was originally 22 years ha. Generally in this vein of music, a large part of it is about collaboration, most producers don't rap and most rappers don't produce, so you connect by trading skills. Most of this album however, I produced hiding in a room surrounded by black mould in old beer bottles and piles of cigarette butts. Even the songs I didn't produce were beats given to me by friends that I made whole songs over in the same bedroom.

With so many co-creators it seems that perhaps each song was treated like a project in itself.

Yes.

And yet it all hangs together nicely, in term of sonic cohesion and groove.

That was most likely accidental but I do however think my body tends to gravitate towards a certain resonance and key. I'm attracted to a certain sound.

Do you record at home ?

I record the original concept versions at home but my set-up consists of a microphone in a glass jar with shirts stuffed in it, a coathanger with a stocking over it and a laptop on four cans of lentils with a fan pointed at it so it doesn't overheat.

So this album was recorded and mixed by DOS4GW at his old house in Scarborough. He had a fancy pre-amp and decent microphone, a beautiful ear and solid conversation.

There are various organic instrumental sounds throughout the album - are you playing some of these ?

Yeh, there's a few drum hits and chopped samples that were played live. The guitar parts to the song *Skyhawks* I played live. I also don't often use synths that sound particularly digital, I try to effect them into a more organic/warm feel.

Tell me something about the conception / production / recording of the album.

It is a little bit of a mish-mash of ideas due to the stretch of time in which the songs were

written. I was still growing into a human. But generally the main theme throughout I guess is the gentrification of our nation, desensitisation of today's people especially children and the little positivities: escapism, spiritual exploration, toxins? The tone is never intended to be preachy though I'm sure it comes across as such at times, its generally a pretty positive pisstake "begrudgingly optimistic" I like to call it.

Doesn't seem preachy to me. Considering the overhaul Perth has had during the recent mineral splurge, it seems very timely to discuss gentrification and its discontents in an intelligent and artistic way. I guess this is most explicit in your track *Plasticate*. Do you feel this mixture of autobiobiography and social observation in your lyrics sets you apart, or is there a bit of this in the work of your fellow emcees around town ?

I suppose "autobiography and social observation" is what all good rap should be ideally ? The emcees I like and collaborate with are thinking people on the same page as myself, though of course with different styles and perspectives. If you have nothing to say you're music probably won't say anything. I suppose with my music I would hope it is more about the presentation and poetic nature of the content as opposed to just blurting out the content without distortion or caricature.

As for the recording process, it consisted of many nights heading to the coast to DOS's house with a bottle of scotch or a six pack to pay the poor bastard for the work he was putting in. He is one of those rare people that manages to be an absolute data nerd at the same time as having actual taste and an extremely personable character. We didn't fight once, drank a lot, garbaged on about the world, watched silly youtube clips over and over and layed down some songs. Actually the song *Plasticate* is his remix, it absolutely shat on the original version I had made. He is the king of lo-fi crusty bass tones which appear in that track and in *Lifestory*.

I've seen you perform live with your own beats via laptop, and I've also seen you perform a cappella. Newcomers might think that hip hop has clear stylistic or formal boundaries, but a cappella is one of those things which can remove the armature and dissolve the preconceptions. Hence I've seen you rap a cappella at a poetry reading event, to an audience which probably wouldn't normally turn up to see live hip hop - and they seemed to find your work fully engaging. Does this aspect of performance appeal to you - engaging with new / foreign audiences ?

Most definitely, there is nothing so intense and rewarding as having a room full of people intensely watching and really listening. It's also that funny thing where you may have performed on stage for years without a hint of nervousness. Then you get up in front of a silent room with no beats to hide behind and you are absolutely bare, candid and your words are naked. When you see the look on someone's face that understands a line of your code for the first time, it's quite a connection between you and them. As for wanting to play to new audiences. If I only played to an "aussiehiphop" crowd all the time I'd go fucking

mental.

Do you ever perform with live instruments or a band ?

Not for my solo stuff as yet, though I do front an improv band called The Co-Lab Jam Band. The band improvises live jams while a couple of us freestyle and sing, then we pull people out of the crowd to have a crack at it. I am most definitely interested at doing something a bit more personal with a live band at some stage.

You also work with DJ Sibilance and Deph One, under the name Math&Balance. Does this entity perform frequently ? Are you working on any recordings ?

Math&Balance was the first project I began to rap in, we recorded a bunch of songs many years ago and never released them. I'm not sure why now. I listen to them sometimes and they're quite good. They were made in a time when I don't think anyone in Australia was doing the same thing, we really should have tried to put them out. But I suppose it led me to where I am now in my own music and after a long hiatus we plan to release a bunch of new material later this year. Perhaps we'll put out the old ones after that as a freebie or something, part of history.

You are one of the prime movers in The Community, a group of artists, producers and others, focused around hip hop, but reaching out to various other artistic spheres. What are some of the things you do in The Community ?

Basically DigerRokwell and I front the collective, we handle most of the organization of gigs, design of posters and marketing materials. I designed the website. I use the name Sasquatch for my design work. It's basically just a crew of friends working towards the same things, all working under one umbrella and branding. It's our family. We are blood.

The Community organises live shows, at the available live venues around Perth. What do you think of the venues currently available for hip hop - both local shows and larger / touring acts ?

The venues we frequent, I love. There is a lot of support from particular venues and their coordinators. Namely The Bird, The Bakery, Mojos... We do need more little 200ppl maximum venues like The Bird to pop up but I do feel proud of lil old Perth finally clawing its way into the existence of a thriving music scene. I really do appreciate the efforts of the ones that stayed here and made something of it.

What do you think of the venues available in Perth for large touring hip-hop acts ? Is it fun watching MosDef or De La Soul at Metro City or Burswood ?

I'll be pretty candid here. I fucking HATE Metro City, I haven't been to a gig I enjoyed there since I was a little 18 yr old raver hopped up on disco biscuits, puffing medic spray out of a gas mask by the side of stage hahaha. The place has a shit soundsystem that no one seems to be able to mix on, a terrible floor plan and an after-gig Shit Music Time policy. If I never

had to see another gig there in my life I would be happy. MosDef deserves better.

What are you working on currently ?

I'm launching two singles with film-clips over the next few months. A song called White Sugar is intended for release in late April. The filmclip features an army of confectionary attacking me until im a mummified pile of sugary sludge. It was a pleasure to film! Also the Math&Balance release at the end of the year.

A concluding note from Tom, Septemly 2011:

The video-clip for my song *White Sugar* is finished, directed by myself with visual effects by Dominic Pearce. I basically spend the whole filmclip getting attacked by confectionary until I'm completely zombified. The song is a little study of personal flaws, habitual behaviour and the extreme consumption of heavily refined and processed foods in the western world. I'm currently planning a launch for the beginning of October, its not all finalised yet though. Check out thecommunity.com.au/events for further details.

Joe Bludge (The Painkillers)

The Painkillers have released two albums (Drunk on a Train in 2006 / Love Cancer in 2008) and have played a number of nice shows, including supporting Nick Cave at Belvoir in 2009. What are you doing in 2011 ?

The next step in the rise and the rise of The Painkillers is the release of album number three. We will keep playing gigs in Perth and do some in Melbourne, and we would love to go to Sydney, Brisbane and even Adelaide. We are also getting songs together for the fourth album, since it seems to take us about two years to get an album out.

Various additional players have appeared on your recordings, including singer Abbe May and guitarist KT Rumble. Are there any additional Painkillers on your forthcoming third album ?

Yes, we have Stu Loasby playing organ on two tracks. He lives next door to the studio we record at so it was highly convenient and came out quite well. We really love to have guests on recordings.

I once saw you play at The Rosemount with the addition of Luke Dux on electric guitar. I thought this sounded awesome. But I'm guessing you have no plans to turn the band into a three-piece or a four-piece. Right ?

Luke Dux is a marvel and a gentleman and can pretty much blow in and out as he pleases so far as we are concerned, but we have no plans to extend the lineup. We have never actually jammed with Luke Dux and we rarely have a setlist, so when you see him play a set with us it is totally off the hip.

I first remember seeing you play solo shows in 2005. You seemed to play quite a lot of them, under the name Joe Bludge, and then reappeared with James Baker on drums. Obviously you were already a fully-grown man in 2005. Is this when you first started playing live, or had I just not seen you before this ? And is there anything interesting to tell about your musical marriage to James Baker (ex-Hoodoo Gurus, Scientists etc), other than the fact that James apparently approached you to say that "Your songs need my drums" ?

I had a band called Mrs Henry before then and that's how I met James, he came to see us a bit; in fact, he was our only fan. We played at the Hydey and this really drunk guy accosted us as soon as we finished and kept saying, "Hey man, I like your band, it's rock n roll."

I saw him play with The Rockin' Hendy and I loved that. At this stage we were friendly but I didn't know him very well. Then Mrs Henry stopped playing, mainly because I didn't really enjoy dealing with the other band members, and I didn't see James at all after that. Then 2005 rolled around and I started to play solo as Joe Bludge. I was pretty much playing whatever gig I could get and trying to get known around town. After playing for a few months, I learnt that James played every Sunday afternoon at The Castle with The Blow Up

Dolls. I hadn't seen him for a few years, so I went one Sunday, and there was James. He asked me to play a set but I didn't have my guitar, so he borrowed an electric guitar for me. I don't think that sounded very good, but he gave me another spot on the next Sunday and that went a bit better with my guitar. James called me during the week and put forward the idea of starting a two-piece, just trying it out and if we didn't like it, we wouldn't do it. This was pretty weird because I had set out to do the solo thing and wasn't really looking for a band. But I thought it was worth trying if James thought it was a good idea. So on the next Sunday at The Castle we played together. I wouldn't say we clicked right away musically, and no-one else really liked it, but we thought it was a good thing, and that's how we got The Painkillers together.

The Painkillers can make a hell of a racket, and yet the lyrical content is often detailed and sometimes highly amusing. Sometimes you cast your beady eye around the room and incorporate the names of fellow musicians in your songs, if you can spot them in the crowd, or even incorporate a few of their lyrics into your songs. I know that your own musical tastes are broad, and the local artists you dig are of many and varied kinds. Are The Painkillers able to play shows with a range of these varied acts ? Or do you find that just because you play loud, you tend to get grouped with a certain limited range of noisy bands ?

We really are a crossover act pretty much by design. In terms of other bands, what we like are songs and classy people, genre is not that interesting to us.

One thing we have noticed is that there are very few line-ups currently with different sorts of acts, and also that bands seem very concerned right now to be part of some card-carrying scene. That doesn't really work for us!

So we definitely are able to play with lots of different bands and if we book a line-up that is what you will see to a greater extent, but lately we have been playing a lot with punk bands because there is a little bit going on in that scene. In terms of other genres, a lot of the more established bands are hardly playing any gigs and the good new bands aren't getting the chance to put on a lot of shows.

A few more questions for Joe Bludge, a few months later:

How was the CD launch ?

Completely underwhelming, where the fuck was everybody?

What's new in the new album ?

There's eleven new songs and really only one is plagiarised, and only two are covers, so that leaves (I actually had to pause and calculate!) seven bright and shiny new beings. Played and mixed like before!

Any plans for the immediate future ?

Well, we are going to take it pretty easy in Perth. We went to Melbourne to promote the new album and that was incredibly good, so we may go back there again before the end of the year and maybe try our luck in Sydney and Brisbane, too. I want us to turn out another album as soon as possible so we will be concentrating on that.

Thanks boss.

Tracey Read (The Wine Dark Sea)

You've been playing in various formats for quite a while now. Did you start as a solo artist, or with a band? When was this?

I started out learning a few guitar chords, which led to writing songs in 1994, with no real intentions. I found that when practicing chords these very simple songs would start to flow out, and I really enjoyed singing them. At the time I was hanging out with Guy Blackman (Chapter Music) and the guys from a Perth band called Molasses. Mia Schoen (Sleepy Township, Huon, New Estates) was in Molasses and ended up being possibly the biggest influence on me musically and one of my strongest supporters. At parties, people would pass around a guitar and play their latest songs. Eventually I would start playing my songs too. Occasionally Guy would record some of these songs and they ended up on various compilations that he was making at the time.

In 1995 I was spent six months in the Greece, that summer I was living on a small Greek Island in the Aegean Sea. One day I received a letter from someone I didn't know at the time, but later became great friends with, Andrew BernSousa. He had been contacted by a guy name Richard Vogt from Sydney, who ran a small independent label called 'H Records'. Richard had heard a couple of my songs on one of Guy's compilations and wanted to know if he could release them on his label as a single. I wrote to Richard saying, "Yes absolutely!" but could he wait for me to record some more songs when I got home?

By this time I had a bunch of new songs I wanted to share. So eventually, when I got home from Greece a few months later, I bought a 4 track and recorded 12 songs. Richard loved them all and decided to release them as an LP. Which became my first solo release in 1996. I started playing solo shows immediately after coming home from Greece. The first solo show I ever played was at The Lone Star with Molasses and The Tucker B's and it felt scary and wonderful!!

(The island of Tilos had been very inspirational and I think will forever be part of my songwriting. The band name "Those Tiny Lights" refers to seeing the lights of Tilos from boats in the harbor and my current band name is reference to the ancient Greek poet Homer who describes the beautiful Aegean as "the wine-dark sea")

Was Those Tiny Lights your first band lineup? Who was in it? When was this band active?

Those Tiny Lights were active around 1999-2000. It was a brief but beautiful band, and it formed rather organically. I remember being at a party after a gig and chatting to Josh and Paul from the Sitckfigures. I think it may have been the first time we had met. Josh and Paul said they liked my music and would like to play music with me. I was very excited of course and I remember turning around to tell Andrew and Matt (Tucker B's) and they both said, "Oh, we want to play too" so there it was, we enlisted the help of Tim Day who at the time was also in the Tucker B's and formerly from O! We really didn't play too many gigs and I

think because of different commitments we weren't able to sustain it, but it was a lot of fun while it lasted.

Those Tiny Lights weren't my first band. I had a band called The Jr Read Experience (ummm, I didn't make up that name!) in the late 90s, which later changed its name to Uphiki (also a Greek word meaning "cute little UFO"). That band consisted of Andrew Houston (Tucker B's) and Andrew BernSousa (Squadcar 96).

I first saw you play solo shows during the early heyday of the Going Solo shows at the Hyde Park and the Grosvenor. There seemed to be a period in 2002 when the Going Solo shows at the Hyde Park attracted a regular and dedicated audience, which in my experience is rare for quiet solo music shows in Perth.

Yes, I did sometimes find it difficult. I was a very quiet performer early on and sometimes the chatter and banging and crashing behind the bar did rattle me quite a bit. Still now while playing at The Moon Café "Going Solo" shows it is the same, except I am quite a bit louder and less worried about the noises, I just sing for those who are listening. I found I had very different experiences in other cities. Melbourne audiences in particular are very respectful of solo performers and are generally a very quiet and appreciative and I found that quite lovely. But my favorite shows of all time happened in New York.

Considering how quiet your solo shows were, I'm guessing you've found them difficult at times. Anything to say about especially nice or memorable solo shows over the years? I know that you spent some time touring the States in 2005.

Yes, I was in the States in 2005 touring with Mia Schoen and an American band called Boyracer. We were booked for about 17 shows all over the country, over a 6-week period. Our regular line up consisted of- me first, Mia playing solo second and Boyracer headlining. We were a couple of weeks into the tour when we got to New York. We were playing two shows a few days apart. I joked as we drove into New York that was going to start my set in this intimate little venue called The Cake Shop with, "Hello New York!" everyone else in the van was like "yeah, yeah, you do that Reado". But I thought it was funny. That night we are getting ready to play and I am so, so, so scared. I'm first up. Nervously I introduce myself and start playing my first song and whamo, of course, I stuff it up. Awful. I stop playing, take a breath, step up to the mike and say, "HELLO NEW YORK!!" everyone in the audience laughs and the nervousness is gone. The rest of the set went really well and I sold out of CDs that night.

It was only after I finished my set that we noticed that Mike Myers was in the audience. That night Mike stayed back after the gig and had a few beers and a chat with us. We asked him what he was doing there and he replied, "I came to watch the girls play", it was a huge highlight of the tour.

A couple of days later we were playing in a studio loft that was used for exhibitions and gigs. It was a smallish space but it there must have been about 150 to 200 people there, spilling out onto the neighboring rooftop. Again I was up first. Not quite so nervous this time because of the very relaxed atmosphere. Just as I strummed my first chord an amazing thing happened. Every single person in the room sat down on the floor, went completely silent and watched me intently. They stayed that way for the whole show. At the end of every song they would clap enthusiastically then wait for the next. It was wonderful. Because of their undivided attention I put my heart and soul into the set. When it came to an end, the audience burst in to loud applause. I said thank you, and began to pack up my things. It wasn't until I had gathered my lead and put my guitar away that I realized they were still clapping. I was shocked and flattered. I walked back up to the microphone and said, "Wow, thank you so much!" And they clapped even louder! I was overwhelmed by their response, I felt that no other audience has heard me the way that audience had. When I walked off the stage I my friend Chuck from Boyracer came up to me and said, "I have lived here most of my life... and I've never seen a New York audience do that!"

That was definitely the best gig of my life.

You released one album, called *Everything is Real*, on the Chapter Music label. When was this? More recently you have put together a new band, featuring Dayvid Clark (ex-Kill Teen Angst) and Jerome and Mike (ex-Stickfigures). How are things developing with this new lineup? Are you planning to record?

Everything Is Real came out in 2000. So long ago! I have recorded another solo album with help from Andrew BernSousa, which is mastered and ready to go, but sadly the label that was going to put it out has all but disappeared, so I've decided to do a small run release myself, just so that the music gets an opportunity to be heard. Yes, I have a new band!! And I'm very excited about it. The Wine-Dark Sea also has Wil Barquero (from Verona) on lead guitar. Things are developing really well. The songs have taken on a whole new dynamic and it's completely different to the sounds of any other bands I've been in before. We are recording at the moment, really just to get a bit of a demo so people can hear what we are about and hopefully come along to some gigs. We are having a lot of fun with it.

Is there anything substantially or deliberately new in the songwriting or the music in The Wine Dark Sea? Since you're all experienced players, I'm guessing there's a certain amount of enjoyable, natural development of the songs.

So far the basic song writing process has stayed the same. I think after writing songs by myself for 16 years, I don't find "jamming" to create new songs very easy. I tend to write the songs and then bring them to the band and then we work on them together. As you say, everyone has had a lot of experience and great ideas. Everyone has something different to bring to the band. I've had to learn how to release some of my own perceptions of how the song should sound too, which I don't always find very easy because every song is like a little

piece of my heart. But really, it's in the giving it away that allows it to become something better than it was to start with.

I have a lot of trust in the other guys that allows me to be able to hand it over and see what happens, which strangely can be scary, but they keep proving to me they can be trusted. Phew!

Your bandmates in The Wine-Dark Sea are all long-termers. Mike used to play theramin and keys in The Stickfigures. I'm guessing he plays keys with you?

Yes, Mike is playing keys, amongst other things, some harmonica, tambourine, shakers. Usually whatever he can get his hands on.

Jerome Kennedy played bass The Stickfigures, but has also been a singer, in his former band Rickety, and now with Daniel Marano in Colourvision. There's a bit of harmony singing going on with Jerome. Is this fun to work on ?

I'm still finding my feet with the whole harmony thing, and I'm still trying to get comfortable with it. So we keep it pretty spare, just when we feel the song needs that little bit extra, to give the chorus a kick or add a new layer to the vocals.

Wil Barquero has played in some fairly sonic guitar bands, including Verona and The Yeah Nahs. Anything you'd like to say about Wil Barquero or drummer Dayvid Clark ?

I can tell you they are both really great guys. I didn't know either of them until they turned up to start the band. They both bring a lot of experience from bands that were pretty different to this one. Wil is a fantastic guitar player and he adds a lot of depth and interesting facets to the music. My song writing is very simple and he has a way of taking it musically to another level, which is great. Dayvid has a really great feel for what the songs need rhythmically, and he's showing great restraint and understanding for the gentle, more fragile parts of our songs. But then can create a great build up and strength to the songs when needed.

You and your bandmates have all been doing music for many years. Do you feel your new band is finding a place for itself among any younger acts?

It's still very early days for our band, and I'm still not sure where we sit amongst other bands. The music is variable, at times sparse and emotive and others, very loud and upbeat. The band has really allowed me to use my voice to its capacity, and I really love it! In several songs I just let go and make a massive sound that kinda shocks people who are expecting me to be all soft all of the time.

Some of the bands we have played with recently, I really love and I like to think we fit really well with them, like Umpire, Simone and Girlfunkle and Split Seconds. Of course I could be wrong! We still have all our cards up in the air, and we're waiting to see where they fall.

Any bands or other acts in Perth at the moment that particularly turn you on?

The bands I've just mentioned rate very highly with me, Umpire and Split Seconds. As well as 6s & 7s of course, as an occasional member I get to have so much fun in that band. I played with a band a couple of weeks ago called Mayor Dardy, they were amazing, but I haven't been able to find out anything else about them, they are a bit of a mystery.

Rob Schifferli (The Leap Year)

The Leap Year released a seven track mini album in 2008, called *With a Little Push a Pattern Appears*. You were killing it regularly for a while there, but don't seem to have been playing as many shows lately. However, I believe work is now well underway for your next album. So what has the band been up to in the last year or two ? Memorable shows ?

Kids, travel and work took over and the band is now a great way to sweep a bit of mind dust. It also gave us the time to follow up on some of the positive foundations laid from the first release. The new recording has been very slow and well measured. I think the results will divide a few people. It's a far bolder recording in many ways, yet extremely varied in overall flavour. "Little Push" was supposed to sound like a complete album. There were no outrageous overdubs, no percussion and no keyboards. This second one is designed to cover a lot more territory both musically and lyrically. Memorable shows? The Swervedriver support was the greatest show that we will ever play. Everything fell into place that night. We were a very proud band that night. The Umpire cd launch at The Rosemount was also pretty solid.

You and drummer Chris Reimer are childhood buddies, and guitarist Martin Allcock was in *Braving the Seabed* (and *Minor Ache* ?) with you in earlier years. So there are long-term personal bonds behind the music. Bass player Paul Haimes played in *The Stickfigures* and *Airport City Shuffle* before joining *The Leap Year*, and I remember him telling me once several years ago that he now felt he was really playing in the kind of band he wanted to be part of. There always seems to be a good vibe among you guys when you play. You have all been playing in rock bands for ten years or more. Are you still having a good time ?

Very much so! This year (2011) has been absolutely fantastic. Our bond is ever strong and our minds are clear. Also, most importantly our playing has improved and our love of performing is far stronger than in years gone by. We often have a lot of people wishing us well at the end of most of our shows these days. We enjoy that generosity of spirit very much.

Can you tell me a bit more about the development of the band, and some of your previous activities ?

Chris and I started out (as teens) playing our own stuff. I was a bassist and songwriter then. We eventually became the rhythm section for *Caterpillar Now*. That then changed into *Glimmer* and Chris quit, opening the door for Martin to join us as the drummer. Chris went on to play with *Misery Tom* and is still the drummer for *Tokyo 5*. Not long after Martin joined, *Glimmer* became *Braving the Seabed* and our direction became slower and more intense. We played a lot in Perth, mostly at *The Hydey* and eventually moved to Melbourne.

What musical activities were you involved in while living in Melbourne ?

Braving did very few gigs on the east coast and it was decided that we all needed to do other things. Two of the members moved back to Perth, so Martin and I began writing new stuff under the name Minor Ache. The core of the band was the two of us. Now with me handling the guitars and Martin on drums. We had a few different members to fill the bass and other guitar duties. All were Victorians until eventually we settled on a couple of Perth fellows, Lorne Clements (guitar) and Howard Healy on bass. We recorded an album, but sliced it down by a few songs to make it a tight little EP (*Black Hours Surround You*). The band was slowly gaining momentum in 2005 when Martin and I thought it would be a good idea to move back to Perth. Howard followed a year later and Lorne remains in Melbourne. Martin and I never really broke this band up and we have recently started writing new material with the hope of releasing an album next year. This time Paul Haines is on bass and a Queenslander, Errol Hoffmann (to the north) on second guitar. This makes it an online project.

You came back to Perth in 2005 or 2006 right ? And did The Leap Year coalesce slowly thereafter ? I know that Martin Allcock was a wiz drummer in previous years – did he only pick up guitar for The Leap Year ?

Upon moving back to Perth I began writing some songs by myself. I wasn't sure what to do with them. So Martin decided that we should become an acoustic duo with him on guitar, as he was pretty bored with drumming. This never eventuated and we decided to have a jam with Chris on drums. We both used electric guitars. The songs instantly worked and we started playing shows as a 3 piece. Paul saw us play a show at the Velvet Lounge and offered us his bass playing services. At that point he didn't have any experience on bass or a bass guitar to play. Naturally, we accepted.

XPress Magazine once remarked that *“unlike a lot of bands that play a similar style of indie post rock-ish stuff, (or whatever you want to call it), these guys do it solidly and powerfully rather than playing like pansies – in other words they really do their songs justice.”* The Leap Year certainly plays loud. Do you feel you are grouped with with certain other acts simply based on this volume aspect (eg Kill Teen Angst or Grim Fandango) regardless of more important stylistic differences ? Do you feel at home among any particular group of bands ?

We are a band that has punk, prog, post rock, metal and indie pop elements. It is not surprising that we fit in with a lot of bands from other genres. With that however, comes a feeling of homelessness. We are a band with no home. That said, most people just think that we are stuck in the 90s. It cheapens it a little for me. Sure, I love 90s music, but I think our music is still somewhat relevant now.

Being branded as “stuck in the nineties” sounds like an unfortunate result of one or two reviews standing as the critical consensus. Probably the thing I like most about seeing The

Leap Year play live is that when I stand in the middle of the room, the massive guitar and bass sound seems goes straight through my chest, filling me with a deep-fried glow. I think it has something to do with the magic way the two guitars blend, the fact that the drums are locked into the songs, but still retain some unusual counter-rhythms, and also the huge sound of the bass. The fact that the vocal melodies are usually quite simple and often repeated gives it a chant vibe, making the live experience mesmerising. Do you guys work on this unitary cohesive power by rehearsing in a totemic / tribal / special way ? And is there anything new or different going on in the rehearsal room which might surface on the forthcoming album ?

Martin has an Ebow now, so most of the new stuff is a bit more atmospheric. Chris has a lovely new kit and Paul and I are far more competent on our instruments. Paul has also taken to playing keys. It's great! Most importantly our sense of humour about ourselves and our music is at an all time high. It often makes for some interesting stage banter and antics. Also re: "deepfried". That's the whole reason that any of us play music. We all love that big noise crossed with the quiet feel. Dynamic response is a wonderful thing, if done properly.

Chris Cobilis (The Tigers)

I believe you've been making music since you were in your teens - I'm guessing you started out with your mates at school, who became the Tigers, and then later in increasingly malleable and variegated forms, singing, talking, shouting, instructing, and using various guitars, machines, drifting out of rock n roll into experimental and unpredictable forms of music. I'm guessing this has been a gradual process, and has been influenced both by changing circumstances and by the fact that you have broad musical interests. Can you tell me about some of the best or most enjoyable musical experiences you've had over the years ?

The most significant thing I have noticed over the years, playing with The Tigers and with others, is a sense of placement in the world and that actually took some time to achieve. I didn't know that I was working towards that sense until I had been there for a significant length of time. Initially I seemed to simply want to 'make a sound' and 'say something' but I didn't know what exactly, the mere 'doing' was the important part. My first two gigs were in the same month- May 1997, just before I turned 18. There were two separate jump-off points, the first was responding to a call for participants in a one-off show at PICA called Putting On A Noise (most WA locals in the arts would be familiar with PICA's annual Putting on An Act). I submitted an application loosely based on improvisation with electronic toys. The piece was called Wall of Toys, Addicted to Toys.

The second was a gig booked by Chris Hudson at Planet Nightclub featuring The Tigers, probably 4 months prior to having any solid material. He bugged off overseas and the rest of us did a mad dash to complete a set of songs. He returned and at the last minute we pulled it all together to make something that looked and sounded like a band. Both examples of these first gigs were really throwing yourself/ourselves in the deep-end. Again, and in retrospect I don't know if I agree with it so much, but this seemed to be more about the 'doing' and 'getting involved' than actually having anything to say. I suppose that is pretty typical behavior for young men. I should mention that at this point we were all obsessed with music, but in very different ways. The fact that it has led me to a sense of belonging is either coincidental, accidental or stemming from the same spark; acceptance. If I had to pin-point an enjoyable experience, it would be this, the realisation that I was working towards an enjoyable life for myself.

The relationship was as such: Guy Howlett (Tigers guitarist) and myself have been friends since pre-primary. Ben Basell, Chris Hudson and Oliver Nelson had attended the same primary school, and met Guy at the same high school. I went to a different high school in Fremantle, but stayed friends with Guy, hanging out on weekends. Guy and I had some tastes in common, as with Chris Hudson. Oliver and Ben had their own tastes, and had received jazz training in high school. Their residual jazziness had come across in our early songs, noticeably in Oli's busy drumming style and Ben's trumpet phrasing. Chris Hudson

had much more exposure to local Perth bands at this point and had seen indie bands like Bucket and Worm Farm, while the rest of us were still listening at home. Guy and Chris H started jamming around year 9 or 10, Oli joined in a little later I think. I sat in on a few jams, pretended to play guitar and sing- eventually after a year or so things were taking shape, but really Guy was driving the whole thing.

The Tigers haven't toured Australia regularly or comprehensively, but you have made a number of international trips to perform on your own. I believe there was a big trip in 2004 or 2005, including London, and then later trips to Japan and China. Could you tell me about some of these trips and the shows they included ?

In 2006 I went overseas to see my girlfriend who was working in London, and attempted to book as many shows as I could before I left. The first gig was at an electronic music night in London called Sprawl. I played a few other shows in London and two awesome ones in Brighton, went to Glasgow, couldn't get a gig but ended up guesting in the US band Awesome Color. From there I went to Athens and Thessaloniki, playing in both places, headed to New York, played a bit there, then to Tokyo, played there. Basically I would play anywhere, with anyone. It was easier to get gigs in the experimental circuit because that scene is small. But I can fit in almost anywhere, so I played with metal bands in Brighton, some indie bands in London, NY and Tokyo. It was a really wonderful adventure but I racked up heaps of debt in the process. It's a very unrealistic economic path, unless you are getting paid decent money, which I wasn't.

Since then I have been to Japan a couple more times and built friendships there. At one point I was co-operating Meupe records with Traianos Pakioufakis and we were invited to attend a music award ceremony in Paris in 2009, so naturally I booked a gig there too. Lastly I befriended a Taiwanese composer named Kueiju Lin who was doing a residency in Perth a few years back. She subsequently invited me to collaborate with her on a few dance and theatre projects and that has taken me to Taiwan twice and hopefully again in 2012.

While your own solo shows have become stranger and more uncompromising in recent years, you have also joined a band called smRts, playing drums. smRts is described as "Feelies meet Glenn Branca meet Serbian Folk meets Dick Dale." It's a band with two drummers. Do you dig playing in this band ?

I enjoy drumming in smRts. I really like the songs and I think that's because I don't have a whole lot of compositional input in to the group. The whole thing is really driven by Predrag Delibasich, who has very carefully adapted the Balkan influences into the surf and indie contexts. The history can be told better by Predrag, but the Shadows were huge in Serbia when he was a kid, and the 'guitar band' sound gradually melded with traditional modes. SmRts (or смрти as I would prefer!) is a bastard version, having been exposed in the 21st century to the new wave of re-issued folk rock like Selda etc.

In Perth you've worked in a broad range of settings, from rock shows, to Serious New Music events, to DJing in support of The Necks, to filling the backroom of the Rosemount with heavy abrasive static. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't imagine there is a lot of crossover in audiences between these spheres. In 2011 do you feel like you are part of any particular music community in Perth, playing shows with some regularity among people who are keen to hear new things ? Or do you feel a bit like a lone wolf each time you set up your pedals, laptop and mini-guitar in a new venue, plying your trade as if for the first time ?

I feel like working across disciplines is pretty pointless sometimes. I'm certain that some people only know me as either the guy who plays weird music or the guy who plays in a few bands. I also meet people frequently who know my name but have no idea what I do, which is sickening actually. So I'm this man about town who does things with music, and a few people care about it, and I'm on a first name basis with anyone who does. People in the (for want of a better term) Experimental Music scene won't necessarily bother coming to rock shows and vice versa. However there's a small group of people who do, and that's an emerging thing. I feel like these days I only want to play to people who want to hear what I do. I'm not in the business of shocking or pissing people off anymore. I'm not really into trying things on new audiences either. Occasionally some magic will happen on the uninitiated, and someone will see the light, but usually it's just a drag for the poor person serving drinks at the bar, the people trying to socialise, the young people on the dance floor etc.

I know that you have been part of a number of the experimental music shows at Scitech in City West. What goes on at these shows ?

I have only played one so far, it was a little awkward. I tried to contextualise it by discussing my processes beforehand but I fell short because I'm a terrible public speaker. The night is curated by Claire Panell aka Fur Chick, whom I have been friends with for over 10 years. We had a group together called Sexy Band (with Chris Hudson) and we played around in the early 00s. The 'songs' were of an improvisational nature.

Claire is a science communicator at Scitech and part of their/her outreach it to engage adults in some way. Music seems like a good excuse to discuss electronics, physics etc and if you go to a gig there you're able to play with all the Scitech exhibits.

What are your current projects, ongoing or new ? Are you continuing to play with smRts this year ? Are you intending to make any music trips this year ?

No plans at the moment, just cruising. Smrts will have a second album by the end of the year. I really would like The Tigers to play more and write more but it's mega difficult with everyone going away all the time, working too much etc.

Andy Blaikie

You were in a band called Hazel Bionic in Perth in the mid to late nineties. Could you give me a brief rundown of when and how Hazel Bionic came together and who was in the band ?

Hazel Bionic was a three piece with myself on guitar and vocals, Greg Hosking on drums and Scott Simms on Bass. Greg and Scott are from Bunbury, I'm from Perth. I had returned to Perth after six years away and I met Greg straight off. We were both working for a publishing company. Our boss, took us to the pub for lunch on Fridays. There was five or six of us and we all happen to play guitar or drums and thought it would be a laugh to set up some gear in a spare room back at work, so we could jam after lunch on Friday. The boss loved the idea and granted us the available room. And it was just that, a laugh. None of us were any good, or maybe that was just me. There were two guitar players and three drummers and between the lot of us I don't think we managed to play one song completely.

Anyway, the novelty passed and soon Greg and I were the only people hanging around after work. We started jamming. I had a couple of songs I'd written and Greg was keen to give them a go, which was very exciting for me at the time. So he and I got really enthusiastic and committed to developing tunes. We soon moved rehearsal to his house in Victoria Park. Scott was a friend of Gregs from Bunbury. I think they met through working at Collin's Music there and they had done the band thing down there for a while. I don't know too much about that. So Scott had a listen to the ideas and was into it and that was that. We were going to get a vocalist. I was writing and singing in the meantime and it just stayed that way. We moved into a house in Maylands and became completely submerged in our music for the next few years.

How long was Hazel Bionic active ? I believe you did one ep, and one album, recorded live at the Princess May theatre in Fremantle. Or is the ep I've seen just a demo ? Recording an album live in a theatre is rather unusual. What sort of experience was this ?

I think it was '96 to 2000. The Princess May was an EP and yes, the thing you saw at Scott's must have been the demo. In my opinion the demo is much better than the EP. There was also a two track demo of our acoustic/sampler set which I like. We were approached by a few local recording artists who were into our gigs. In retrospect, we should have just gone with one of them. Greg and Scott were really into the technical aspect, particularly the recording side of things. I just went with it, it was all pretty interesting but I think the essence of the songs got lost. I'd rather listen to a poor quality recording with spirit than an immaculate production of fridge noise any day. I don't think we achieved either.

Anyway the EP was a huge disappointment to me, and we let ourselves down because we really loved playing the songs. Somehow it all became so complicated and difficult, and it wasn't even funny. I can't really remember why we chose to record in that theatre. Those

Hazel Bionic days are all a bit vague. I really like the title though, The Princess May.

I believe that the band split up not long after this album was made, that you were keen to move into new areas of songwriting, and that you then moved to Dublin, where you then remained for ten years. Can you tell me about this shift ? I believe you then became very musically active in Dublin, alongside training in theatre and acting.

My brother was living in Dublin after a couple of years in Edinburgh so I was just going over there for a couple of months to hang out with him and see Ireland and Scotland. Once I was on the other side of the world, I could see how depressing my situation back here was. So whilst gregariously compensating for the last few years wasted in self indulgence, it seemed so easy just to shrug it off and forget about it. So I stayed.

I was completely free to do what ever I wanted. I didn't feel like some wanker in a pretentious band anymore and I was living in a city where thousands of people want to hear live new songs, in the pub, on a regular basis, and I love going to the pub. So anyway for the first few months I didn't even have a guitar and when I got one and my girlfriend heard me playing some tunes, she lined up a support slot with her friend's band. I was terrified as I hadn't performed solo before, so I went and practiced at some open mic nights and started meeting other musicians that way. I was really inspired by the quality of songs at these nights and by the attitude of musicians in Dublin. I mean, there are some people over there writing the most beautiful songs and they are content enough just to have written them, and occasionally play them in the pub when they feel like it. It really put it into perspective for me. You write songs because you can, because it feels good, that's it. And you play them to people when and where they want to hear them, easy. Then if people start asking where they can get a recording of some of your songs, you record them, piece of piss. Only, I have a problem with recording, that is, I'm shit at it. That's why I didn't release any of the three albums I recorded in Dublin.

The first one, *Striptease with Tambourine*, was recorded on an MBox in my bedroom. It's the epitome of bedroom recording and it's pretty nice but a few of the vocal takes make my stomach churn. So after a fairly successful launch, in a great little venue, with about fifty to sixty people, which isn't bad for an Aussie blow in, I withdrew from pushing it. It's just a nice demo really. Then I made a kind of rambunctious, rockin' country record with a band of old school musos. *Skip Off and Sway*. It was recorded in the house of the producer and drummer. It sounds great and a lot of people liked it over there, it even got airplay, but it was just for fun and it's not really me. I just wanted to make this blokey, tongue-in-cheek record. Also, I was delighted that these fellas, who had been professional musicians all their lives, were into it. Lyrically, the songs don't mean that much to me and that is something that has become essential in being able to commit to performing the songs. So I didn't push that either. I was also training to be an actor at this time and didn't have the time or interest in trying to promote music. Actually, I'm just not interested in the promoting/selling thing

period. The third album, a studio album called *Caught in the Breeze*, was in the final mixing stages and almost ready to master when luck decided it was time for its perennial piss all over Andy. The studio went into liquidation and we couldn't finish it there, which wouldn't have been a problem, but their system crashed when backing up onto my hard drive and it's all lost. Apparently a third level retrieval may get the files off my hard drive, which is in my fridge. Apparently that's where you keep it until you have the money to get it fixed. Anyway, I don't care because I want to go back to basics, like Mississippi John Hurt. A live solo recording with no click tracks, no headphones, and a few beers. That oughta do it.

Yes, I played a lot in Dublin and have many many wonderful memories of those times. But I suppose I'll forget them because I'm getting old and Alzheimer's runs in my family.

You recently moved back to Perth and are undertaking post-graduate theatre studies. I'm guessing you have amassed a large amount of material over the years. Would you like to play solo shows here, or do you intend to start working with collaborators or a band ?

Yes, I'm playing a gig with you in May. Hopefully there'll be more and that may lead to collaborations and perhaps a band. I have a really diverse repertoire and I love the honesty of a solo gig. There are certain songs that I would only play in a solo performance and I want to play those songs. There are also kind of flashy songs, all about technique and style, chords, structure and melody. Although I think they're quite poetic and I really get a kick out of playing them. Anyway, demographically speaking, it will be interesting to see if there's a place for my music in Perth. Making a fresh start back in my home town is strange and exciting. I've got a pretty good feeling about it.

- A couple more questions for Andy, later in the year:

Having now been back in Perth for a while I believe you've been snooping around a couple of the local open mic nights, at Rosemount and the Indi Bar. What's it like playing at these nights, as a fully grown man ?

I prefer not to consider such things from a fully grown mans point of view, in case it makes me cry. In saying that, the open mic thing was a bit of a laugh and a useful exercise but not exactly addictive. It's OK for practice and getting re-acquainted with singing in front of an audience again but that's it. Because you're not really putting your music out there your just proving you've got the balls to do it, but nobody cares about your balls. Now I know there's no point writing a song about my balls. Valuable lesson.

And how did you find your first "proper" show back in town, at Mojo's in May ?

Although I made a few mistakes which nobody seemed to notice, it was satisfying. I was able to play a very intimate set, which seemed to go down quite well with the small but attentive audience. I also felt my set was conducive to the atmosphere already present in that bar. It

was great being in the line up with; Little Ships, Davey Craddock and your good self (Benedict Moleta), as the standard was high but the different styles made a nice contrast. I think I would just like to continue doing gigs like this and see where it goes.