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RESEARCH ARTICLE



The Catcher: Melbourne's 1960s discotheques and law and order

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ABSTRACT

By the middle of the 1960s, Australia's 'first wave' of rock and roll had been superseded by a maturing set of music-media industries, although significant differences remained between Australian cities and states in relation to live music circuits (venue trading hours, types of venues and their uses). The Catcher, a Flinders Lane music venue that operated from 1966 to 1971 as part of a flourishing inner Melbourne scene of blues, rock and rhythm and blues, is examined as part of a discotheque boom that granted the city the status of Australia's 'pop capital'. In examining the circumstances of the unlicensed discotheque period that emerged from the mid 1960s, the Catcher's relatively brief yet vivid tenure represented the expansion of Melbourne's live music sector derived from a distinctive combination of regulatory, industry and media contexts. At the same time, examination of subsequent media and bureaucratic attention placed venues such as the Catcher within wider local concerns about youth, sexuality and 'responsible' nightlife. This article situates the Catcher within moral panic cycles of media/governmental attention and its consequences for local youth and popular music scenes.

KEYWORDS

Popular music; 1960s
Melbourne; discotheques;
youth leisure

Introduction

While 1960s Australia invokes popular notions of local versions of the 'swinging sixties', an emerging 'counter-culture' and protests calling for the end of conscription and the Vietnam War, historians recognise that while this was a time of significant social change, it was also an era of contradiction, social tension and the emergence of a significant generation gap.¹ The 'counter-culture' was emerging within a context of social conservatism. With many young people embracing a more liberal lifestyle than that of the generation before, Melbourne remained socially conservative, with much of the radical social change associated with this era gaining momentum in the 1970s.²

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¹For example, see Michelle Arrow, *Friday on our Minds: Popular Culture in Australia Since 1945* (Kensington: University of NSW Press, 2009); Seamus O'Hanlon and Tania Luckins, eds., *Go! Melbourne in the Sixties* (Beaconsfield: Circa, 2005), Julie Ustinoff and Shirleene Robinson, eds., *The 1960s in Australia: People Power and Politics* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

²Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The Personal, the Political and the Making of Modern Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2019), 1–13.

Within the live music scene in Melbourne, this era of change provided an opportunity for expansion and experimentation. Offering teenagers and young adults an alternative option for live music and dancing to the town hall experience, a number of 'discotheques' emerged in the mid- to late 1960s (typically located within the Melbourne Central Business District (CBD)). Operating in a loose regulatory environment within converted CBD buildings, and uninhibited by noise complaints due to the lack of local residents, they offered audiences the chance to watch bands play highly charged live music sets into the early hours of the morning within highly stylised and unique venue settings.

Operating for a relatively small number of years from the late 1960s, the discotheques are not well recognised in public memory of Melbourne's live music past, wedged between the 1950s rock and roll dance hall period and the 1970s pub rock boom. We argue that, in spite of their brief existence, the discotheques played an important role in the evolution of the Melbourne music industries and deserve stronger attention within the historiography of Melbourne's live music past. We explore one of these discotheques – the Catcher – as a case study through which to explore tensions derived from expanding governmental and regulatory responses to both 'youth delinquency' and 'youth vulnerability' at a time when young people experienced growing autonomy as consumers of popular culture. Such venues operated largely under the radar of regulatory oversight, offering freedoms and opportunities for experimentation by venue owners and musicians. This in turn stimulated concern about the 'moral welfare' of young people attending these venues beyond the gaze of adults and authorities. We find, in the story of the Catcher, a preoccupation with the corruptibility of young people reminiscent of the 'moral panics' of the 1950s about young people and rock and roll.

The article draws on interviews and archival material that formed part of an Australian Research Council project from 2017 to 2020, *Interrogating the music city: pop and the cultural economy in Melbourne* (with fellow researchers Catherine Strong, Seamus O'Hanlon and John Tebbutt). Live music histories, with emphases upon central venues in different periods, formed one strand of research in the project in producing wider narratives about the development of Melbourne as a 'music city'. As we argue here, city histories of popular music (in this case a focus on the 1960s discotheques as popular music venues) can be sources of insight into historical understandings of youth as well as broader issues of policing, licensing and social policy.

1960s nightlife in Melbourne and the emergence of the discotheque

While prior live music settings remained on offer (town hall dances, cabaret shows and some jazz bars), the 60s saw the rise of the folk boom and the emergence of the discotheques. By the mid-to-late 1960s, those born in the early phase of the baby boomer generation were reaching their late teens or young adulthood.³ Not only were they

³The ABS reports that the baby boom generation, in an Australian context, 'generally relates to all Australian residents born in the years 1946 to 1965, including those who migrated to Australia from countries which did not experience a baby boom' and involved a fertility rate peak of 3.1 in 1947 (after a low of 2.1 in the Great Depression) as well as another peak in 1961 of 3.5, before declining 'as social and economic changes led to a wider acceptance and use of oral contraceptives' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Report 4102.0 Australian Social Trends*,

different from previous generations by virtue of their numbers; young people were more likely to stay in secondary school or attend university, have disposable income (provoking marketing to the ‘youth dollar’) and to travel overseas.⁴ The availability of the contraceptive Pill from 1961 and independent living options in flats or low-cost houses for rent in the increasingly ‘cosmopolitan’ inner city meant many young people were enjoying quite different lifestyles to those of their parents at the same age.⁵

The emerging ‘youth culture’ (as reflected in music, radio, television, new entertainment options and popular magazines) offered young people alternatives for spending their disposable time and money on leisure. By the early 1960s, ‘youth culture’ (centred around the teenager as consumer) had become a mainstream, middle class and ‘acceptable’ component of popular culture shifting from the more marginal youth culture of the 1940s and 1950s associated with ‘bodgies and widgies’ and working class young people.⁶ The mainstreaming of youth culture did not, however, mean the end of anxieties about the vulnerability of young people to ‘moral corruption’ through the influence of popular culture. As we discuss later, these concerns were reflected in both Victorian media and governmental decision-making, where music venues were at the centre of mainstream fears.

From 1957, emerging rock and rollers found a ready market as Melbourne’s venues became more integrated within a (loose) national circuit. Transitioning from local jazz venues, Melbourne’s first rock and roll dances could be found in council town halls, ballrooms and the older cinemas that possessed dance floors. These continued to be popular in providing forums for like-minded fans and musicians centred upon particular sites: ‘folkies’ (including the Seekers) attended venues such as the Treble Clef café; rock and rollers frequented the suburban town hall/ballroom circuit (e.g. Circle Ballroom at Preston; the Earls Court Ballroom at St Kilda; the Arcadia Ballroom, Thornbury; the Pascoe Vale Town Hall; and the Coburg Town Hall). Cabaret and the floor show experience was also provided through nightclubs such as Claridges and Ciro’s in the city.

However, unlike Sydney, the ‘sophistication’ of Melbourne circuits was constrained by local liquor laws. Through study trips to Europe and a two-year Phillips Royal Commission from 1963 to 1964, the Bolte State government had slowly amassed evidence that its liquor laws were outdated. The head of the Royal Commission believed that later hotel trading was one means to ensure that young people would drink at legal sites, rather than in public spaces or in their cars.⁷ Yet this was a view not uniformly shared by hotel owners. Six o’clock closing for hotels ceased in February 1966, with

2004. 19 October 2020. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/1020492cfcd63696ca2568a1002477b5/47f151c90ade4c73ca256e9e001f8973!OpenDocument>.

⁴For an analysis of the baby boom generation in Melbourne in the 1960s, see Tania Luckins and Seamus O’Hanlon, ‘Setting the Scene: The Idea of the Sixties’, in *Go! Melbourne in the Sixties*, eds. Seamus O’Hanlon and Tania Luckins (Melbourne, Vic: Melbourne Publishing Group), vii–xxii.

⁵Seamus O’Hanlon, ‘New People, New Ideas and New Attitudes: Melbourne’s Long Sixties’, *Victorian Historical Journal* 90, no. 1 (2019): 19–29.

⁶See: Michelle Arrow, *Friday on our Minds: Popular Culture in Australia Since 1945* (Kensington: University of NSW Press, 2009), 63–4. The ‘Social context’ discussion within Judith Bessant, ‘“Hanging around the street”: Australian rockers, sharpies and skinheads of the 1960s and early 1970s’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 19, no. 45 (1995) 15–31; and Judith Bessant, ‘Sex Pistols, Be-Bop, Boogie and Youth Cultures of the 1950s and 1960s’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 17, no. 36 (1993): 80–5.

⁷Q.C. - Late Hours May Lift Conduct’, *The Age*, 14 March 1964, 7.

pubs now allowed to operate till 10 pm. At this time, few publicans looked to rock and roll, preferring cabaret, talent quests and floor shows in seeking non-teenage audiences. Many chose to imitate cabaret settings, hiring floor show packages and dance bands to attract an older adult crowd. One co-owner of five pubs stated that bouncers would have to be employed to 'keep out the long-haired kids. Once we serve these kids we're stuck with them'.⁸ The intent of later trading in this respect was not what many hotel owners had in mind, providing discotheques with a clear run in providing entertainment to young people that matched the local rock scene apparent across radio, television and print media. Pubs were not to become central to performance circuits until further extensions of trading hours in the late 60 s and into the 1970s, when 1 am trading provoked the need to accompany drinking with entertainment.⁹

According to a *Four Corners* investigation of Melbourne youth culture, by 1966 the city possessed 'around 40 discotheques', providing it with the requisite economic and cultural capital to be the 'pop capital of Australia'.¹⁰ Amongst them were the T.F. Much Ballroom at Cathedral Hall in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy; Bertie's on the corner of Spring and Flinders Streets; and Sebastian's in Exhibition Street. This sub-set of venues – along with others such as the Thumpin' Tum (Little La Trobe Street), the Biting Eye (Little Bourke Street), Opus (Ormond Hall, South Yarra), Pinocchio's (Toorak) and the Mad Hatter (Little Lonsdale Street) – provided bands with an energetic circuit of different structures and ambitions, with groups often playing two to three sets per night across town. This cluster of venues was assisted by the growth of music media willing to take local performers seriously. *Go-Set* began publication in 1966 and gave voice to the full mix of fashion, music, politics and entertainment of Melbourne. From 1964 to 1967, *The Go!! Show* was an important program aired on Channel 0 (later known as Channel 10), sourcing its on air talent from the suburban circuits, and the increasing number of Melbourne recording labels (such as Astor, Fable, W&G). The program also established its own *Go!!* label. This mix of media and production sites, supplemented by increasing coverage of rock and pop in the mainstream newspapers, allowed Melbourne scenes to flourish as local industries distinct from Sydney structures.

Discotheques from the mid-1960s faced the same licensing constraints of the town halls, where fans and musicians either drank at pubs before gigs, or smuggled alcohol in; their unlicensed status had to be seen to be observed. Anthony Knight, the co-founder of a more upmarket CBD empire (Sebastian's on Exhibition Street and Bertie's on the corner of Spring and Flinders streets), believed that bureaucratic boundaries could be stretched since definitions had not been set in concrete:

On opening night [of Sebastian's], the queue went all the way around to Russell Street. The police came around, and asked what it was - we said 'discotheque' ... We didn't have any [permits], nobody knew what they were, legislation didn't cover that sort of thing.

⁸Night Life 1966', *The Herald*, 24 January 1966, 5.

⁹In May 1968, the Bolte Government's *Sunday Entertainment (Amendment) Act* extended licensed venues to operate to 1am if hosting a function.

¹⁰ABC TV, 'Four Corners' (1996) 'Go-Go Where?', YouTube video, 28:44, posted by 'kurvapicsa', 15 November 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkcXeUPQZrM>.

Knight recalls that his venues mainly ‘flew under the radar’ of city/State authorities.¹¹ The exception was a visit from the State Premier, Henry Bolte and the Police Commissioner to Sebastian’s, seeking to check for themselves potential breaches of the law; the venue’s unlicensed status proved useful in evading any further trouble with either authority.¹² Knight recollected that ‘... [our clientele were] nice people, nice girls from nice schools - Daddy would drive them in and drop them off, which attracted nice boys; it was a pickup place’.¹³ Catcher owner Graham Geddes described distinctive class elements to the discotheque scene, where his venue attracted clientele beyond the inner city suburbs:

We got them from Wattle Park, North Essendon, Carrum Downs. All the Bertie’s and Sebastian’s people, they all came from Toorak, Armadale. And when they came, they usually came later on [in the night], they had a different way of dancing, different airs and graces ... The people who went to Sebastian’s didn’t like the people who went to the Catcher, and the people who went to the Catcher didn’t like the people who went to the [Thumpin’] Tum.¹⁴

Geddes has emphasised a communal atmosphere to the Catcher, akin more to a club, where responsibilities were exchanged:

When my kids emptied out of the Catcher, they were exhausted. Waiting for the next tram home, we would feed them ham and cheese sandwiches. And we had a book - you could borrow [the fare] to go home. Or you could go and sleep upstairs. We would ring the bell at nine o’clock [in the morning] and if you didn’t have the money [to get home], you could help clean up downstairs.¹⁵

The discotheque circuit also expanded opportunities for gigs, enabling local bands to contemplate decent weekly wages. Singer Lyn Randell’s manager, Carol West, stated that her artist was earning ‘between \$300 and \$400 per week’.¹⁶ The mods, rockers and sharpies (along with university students) who attended the new Melbourne inner circuit of venues represented the ‘second wave’ of fans as scenes transferred from jazz clubs and town halls. In providing membership or quasi-memberships, imaginative decor, multi-purpose experiences and spaces, and mixing DJs playing international acts with local bands, they became spaces for a more diverse cohort of fans. Situated between the rock and roll scenes of the 1950s and the later pub rock venues that emerged in Melbourne in the mid-1970s, the discotheques represented a holding pattern in terms of the Victorian State properly planning and accounting for a night-time economy structure. Their unlicensed status meant that venue owners worked harder in attracting fans. Melbourne-Sydney rivalry is embedded within local histories of the Australian music industries. Lacking New South Wales’ much earlier move to 10 pm

¹¹Andrew Knight, interview, 12 May 2017.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018. It seems the feeling was mutual. For example, Sebastian’s early booking agent, Michael Browning, has stated that ‘The Catcher may have been Melbourne’s largest club, but it was at the bottom end of the market ... Unlike the Tum or Sebastian’s, the Catcher let everyone through their doors, including the local sharpies’. Browning began managing AC/DC in 1974. Michael Browning, *Dog Eat Dog: A story of survival, struggle and triumph by the man who put AC/DC on the world stage*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2014), 23.

¹⁵Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018.

¹⁶ABC TV, ‘Four Corners’ (1996) ‘Go-Go Where?’, YouTube video, 28:44, posted by ‘kurvapicsa’, 15 November 2011: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkcXeUPQZrM>.

closing in hotels in 1955 (and the State's wider registered club circuit), the discotheques that flourished from the mid-60s to the early 70s represent a distinctly Melburnian response to a State Government that continued to see nightlife policies (including youth entertainment) as primarily one of containment (and effective licensing and planning responses arguably did not emerge until the Cain Labour Government's licensing reforms derived from the Nieuwenhuysen report into licensing in 1986–1987).

The Catcher

After completing Teachers College and a stint overseas on a university scholarship, Graham Geddes returned home to look after his ill father. Thinking that his High School Headmaster's wage was not enough to look after his father/family, Geddes decided that a stint at venue management would provide the necessary funds.¹⁷ Noticing a disused warehouse in Flinders Lane, Geddes agreed to terms of \$140 weekly rent for the building. He persuaded his friend Peter Raphael to take on booking agent duties. Geddes re-painted the venue pink and installed a new floor. Its three-storey setup provided a diversity of uses: a ground floor with harlequin squares painted on the dance floor; a large stage that allowed bands to set up behind the scenes of those performing on the first floor; and a second floor lounge area. The venue operated Friday to Sunday, eventually adding Thursday nights, with a registered capacity of 400 people for the dance floor downstairs. The Saturday opening night in early 1967 attracted an astonishing '1,500 people; the next Saturday, it was 2,500'.¹⁸ Bands playing later (in the morning) were paid \$300, with more well-known acts (playing earlier in the night) paid around \$450; punters paid \$1 admission. Geddes and Raphael would audition bands on Sunday nights; the Chelsea Set (consisting of all British immigrants) became the resident band.

A review of newspaper articles, posters and assorted mentions in pop histories reveals that the Catcher was at the heart of a flow of interesting and famous acts of the period, including the Wild Cherries; Max Merritt and the Meteors; Running, Jumping, Standing Still; the Purple Hearts; the Masters' Apprentices; and Billy Thorpe. For the Wild Cherries' guitarist Lobby Loyde, the venue was a good example of being able to 'get down and dirty in the inner city':

We'd go on at the Catcher from about 2 am to 5 am and they'd have to shoot us to get us off stage. We'd have these notorious jams which would go on until they sent the bouncers in ... from 8 pm to 2 am it was chockers to the roof, you could barely breathe in the joint. After that it would thin out by about a third or so, you probably still had up to 1000 in there by 3 or 4 am. Of course, by the time we finished playing it would be down to a couple of people asleep on the floor and a few unconscious on the couches.¹⁹

¹⁷Geddes had already dabbled in organising dances among the town hall circuit, including use of the Malvern, Bairnsdale and Kew town halls.

¹⁸Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018.

¹⁹Lobby Loyde cited in Iain McIntyre, ed., *Tomorrow is Today: Australia in the Psychedelic Era 1966 – 1970* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2006), 70.

The venue was almost unique in its trading hours, allowing bands to do extended sets often after they had completed gigs elsewhere around the city. The venue's consistent booking policy might have been 'pretty wild',²⁰ yet it also experimented with other activities. It linked some nights to a series of 3XY 'Happenings' and also conducted film nights, seminars, jazz and poetry readings upstairs on Sunday nights. If patrons could accurately recite poetry discussed from the week before, they could be granted free admission as a prize. Geddes argues that he was consciously seeking to avoid the 'pretentious' trappings of the other discotheque venues: 'Sebastian's was for disillusioned academics'.²¹ These comments probably allude to the comfortable interiors of venues such as Sebastian's (leather chesterfields, antique tables, nineteenth century paintings).

The Catcher carved a niche in Motown, rhythm and blues and heavier rock, no doubt enhanced and enabled by its late night/early morning ambience. Geddes described the venue as 'pretty wild', and smoked a pipe filled with hash at the venue.²² He also experimented with lighting for performances, with large images (sometimes famous bands such as the Rolling Stones) thrown on to the walls, with a double-strobe effect for the dance floor. In terms of promotion, it helped that booker Peter Raphael knew *Go-Set* magazine staff; Geddes would also take full page ads in the magazine. The venue also placed ads with 3AK and 3XY.²³

After relocating from New Zealand, musician/songwriter Mike Rudd remembers that the venue provided a space for emerging acts to experiment; of equal importance, it allowed local musicians to experience a wider set of parameters than was to be found at more commercial sites:

And we did the Catcher a few times. That was interesting. A kind of big place ... Graham Geddes had made it into a club so he could actually stay open later and so there was a graveyard shift you could play from midnight till whenever, which I think the Chelsea Set seemed to do a lot ... The Purple Hearts and so forth, Jeff St John and the Id ... Chants R&B, as we were then, certainly weren't progressive and were never labelled as such. We were kind of wild - we were trying to do the Pretty Things thing, if you like, just be a little wild, but our repertoire was a bit wide to actually make that convincing ... I know Broderick Smith [The Dingoes, Carson, Broderick Smith's Big Combo] mentioned that he used to see us at the Catcher and we used to do a lot of John Mayall stuff, and his particular favourite was 'Life Is Just a Slow Train Crawling Up a Hill'.²⁴

This recollection is useful for thinking about the intersections at play. Rudd's own band at the time, Chants R&B, were one of several local acts mining the rhythm and blues sounds emerging from Britain that in turn produced a wave of Australian acts writing their own rhythm and blues material (such as Jeff St John). In this sense, Catcher performances influenced later 1970s blues musicians (such as Broderick Smith). The alignment of Chants R&B to local imitations of UK act the Pretty Things

²⁰Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³For example, an August 1971 advertisement in *The Age* advertises the Catcher as one of 3XY's 'Lucky Black Cat' venues where 3XY listeners can obtain Tatt's Lotto tickets dispensed by radio host Ric Melbourne and artist Johnny Young: 'Today is Friday 13th', *The Age*, 13 August 1971, 2.

²⁴Mike Rudd, interview, 7 October 2018.

– deemed at the time to be ‘wilder’ than the Rolling Stones – accords with the venue’s reputation in encouraging ‘excitingly frenetic version[s]’ of UK blues.²⁵ By Geddes’ own account, he was not driven by trends of the time in developing the venue:

I’ve never been one to follow, and I’ve never been one to imitate ... I took no notice of the Thumping Tum, or Sebastian’s, or the other place that there was ... What I was running was reality, you know for dancing, for having fun.²⁶

The venue formed an important component of the Melbourne music industries’ ‘R&D’, especially in preparing local bands for wider Australian touring and exposure. While musicians complained about the repetition involved in playing shorter 30-minute sets across two to three discotheques in the one night, bands did enjoy the late-night latitude granted for experimentation. Without pretensions to national exposure, local bands could comfortably exist within a Melbourne circuit that paid relatively well.

‘Continual surveillance’²⁷

From its inception, the Catcher battled policing and licensing issues in parallel with adverse media reportage. When complaints were received by the Melbourne City Council in response to the Catcher’s application for land permits, the council’s building committee recommended that applications from both the Catcher and the Thumpin’ Tum be refused, threatening the immediate closure of both venues. The building committee were persuaded to change their recommendation on the basis of letters received in support of the venues, including one from a Mrs Frost (past President of the National Council of Women of Victoria, member of the Youth Advisory Council of Australia and a probation officer of the Children’s Court), who had argued that the Catcher was offering an activity to young people who ‘would not be interested in the normal youth club programmes’.²⁸

In early 1967, the State’s Public Health Commission Secretary provided a report to the Police Chief Commissioner ‘on a number of discotheques in the city area’, assuring him that the Catcher had registered and complied with public building regulations on 9 January 1967.²⁹ Four months later, Melbourne tabloid newspaper *Truth* began to take a strong interest in the venue. On 28 May, the newspaper had sent two journalists and a photographer to the Catcher. Their report in the next edition of the weekly paper detailed the detaining and assault of one of the reporters by bouncers, after Geddes objected to photographs being taken of patrons asleep at tables.³⁰ Geddes’ concerns that the *Truth* reporter was seeking to plant an empty hypodermic syringe at the venue

²⁵See, for example, Alexis Petridis, ‘“We Were Reprobates”: the Pretty Things on being loved by Bowie – and Smoking a Spliff with Norman Wisdom’, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/oct/25/we-were-reprobates-the-pretty-things-on-being-loved-by-bowie-and-smoking-a-spliff-with-norman-wisdom>.

David Johnston, *The music goes around my head: Australian pop 1964-69: Imitation ... Inspiration ... Innovation* (Warburton: Independent Publications, 2010), 108.

²⁶Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018.

²⁷In response to a letter of complaint, the Minister of Health stated that the Catcher is ‘under continual surveillance by my officers and the Police Department.’ Letter from V. Dickie, Minister of Health to D.J. Geddes, 5 July 1967, The Catcher, General Health Branch, VPRS 7882/P0001, Unit 00179, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), Melbourne.

²⁸‘Discotheques reprieved’, *The Age*, 20 December 1966, 7.

²⁹A.T. Gardner, Letter from the Secretary, Commission of Public Health to the Victorian Chief Commissioner of Police, n.d. 1967, The Catcher, General Health Branch, PROV, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 001179.

³⁰‘Bashed by Bouncers’, *Melbourne Truth*, 3 June 1967, 2.

was reported later in the same month in *The Age*.³¹ Of greater concern was Geddes' status as a Headmaster, with the *Truth* front page headline announcing 'Teacher runs disco with 4 a.m. petting' followed by an article on page 3 titled 'Headmaster Graham – disco boss'.³²

On 1 June the *Truth* wrote to the Public Health Secretary, asking for details of the Registration of the Public Building for the Catcher which they referred to in their 10 June edition to assert that the venue was registered to allow only 400 patrons.³³ The 'discotheque management told *Truth* that 1400 to 2000 teenagers attended on busy nights'.³⁴ This, reported *Truth*, had sparked Health Minister Vance Dickie to call for a report on the venue. A report provided to the Chief Health Officer from the Chief Engineer of the General Health Branch dated 6 June explained that the Public Building section of the venue was the ground floor only and that a recent Departmental inspection found 'the Public Building was filled to the capacity permitted by the Commission ... [as such] there was no overcrowding of the Public Building'.³⁵ In the same article, *Truth* claimed that their reporting on the Catcher had sparked the interest of Melbourne City Council and the Minister for Education, Lindsay Thompson; and that detectives had made 'a lengthy report to the Chief Commissioner of Police' following a recent visit. A decision made by the Melbourne City Council Building and Planning Committee to gather further information was announced on the front page of the next edition of *Truth* with the headline 'The big probe starts'.³⁶

On 27 June, the Licensing Court held a session to consider applications lodged by the Catcher for liquor licences for a University of Melbourne function on 5 July; a Mercer House Teaching College function on 12 July; and a Young Labor Association function on 9 August. Police evidence provided at the session reported by a number of newspapers included accusations of the venue harbouring state ward escapees, drugs being 'readily available from people frequenting the place', attendees as young as 12, 'heavy petting' and 'evidence of love making in dark spots'.³⁷ The Licensing Court refused all three applications on the grounds of observable over-crowding and accompanying fire risks (Figure 1).

The *Truth* newspaper continued its campaign, sending a letter from the editor on 28 June to the Police Commissioner containing six questions, including why the police didn't exercise their power to close the venue.³⁸ The same day, the *Herald* editorialised

³¹'Drugs, escapees at discotheque', *The Age*, 28 June 1967, 7.

³²'Teacher runs disco with 4 a.m. petting', *Melbourne Truth*, 3 June 1967, 1; and 'Headmaster Graham – disco boss', 2.

³³L. Teese, Melbourne Truth newspaper editor letter to Secretary, Department of Health, 1 June 1967, The Catcher, General Health Branch, PROV, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 001179.

³⁴'Police report on the Catcher Disco', *Melbourne Truth*, 10 June 1967, 3.

³⁵J.F. McDonnell, Chief Engineer General Health Branch memorandum to Chief Health Officer, 6 June 1967, The Catcher, General Health Branch, PROV, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 001779.

³⁶'The Big Probe Starts', *Melbourne Truth*, 24 June 1967, 1.

³⁷See: 'Drugs, Escapees at Discotheque', *The Age*, 28 June 1967, 7; 'Night Spot 'A Den for Drug Addicts, *Canberra Times*, 28 June 1967, 3; 'Who's Got Any Guts in These Parts?', *Melbourne Truth*, 1 July 1967, 1; and 'Discotheques Need Control', *The Herald*, 28 June 1967, 4. 'Disco Cannot Serve Liquor', *The Herald*, 27 June 1967, 3.

³⁸R.S.E. Chandler, Letter from *Truth* newspaper editor to Victorian Police Commissioner, 28 June 1967, The Catcher, General Health Branch, PROV, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 001179. The Chief Engineer wrote back to the *Truth* editor on the same day, stating that recent inspections had produced nothing of concern: J.F. McDonnell, 'The Catcher Discotheque', Letter from Victorian Chief Engineer to the Chief Health Officer, 29 June 1967, The Catcher, General Health Branch, PROV, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 001179.

Disco owner resigns as headmaster

Schoolteacher Mr. Graham Geddes, under fire over his City discotheque, The Catcher, yesterday resigned from the Education Department.

"I don't want to resign, but it's obvious I'm under pressure," Mr. Geddes said. "The Minister for Education (Mr. Thompson) says in this morning's paper he is waiting for me to go.

"I was most definitely happy teaching school. I'm not interested in being anything else, but it's quite obvious I have to give it up."

Mr. Geddes, 29, the father of three children under four, has been running The Catcher discotheque at weekends while serving during the week as head master to 50 children at Macclesfield State school, near Emerald, 36 miles east of Melbourne.

The Catcher, in Flinders Lane, was described by police in the Licensing Court on Tuesday as a place where girls took drugs and couples "kissed and fondled" in the dark.

Judge Fraser refused The Catcher liquor permits.

"The licences were intended purely for private functions," Mr. Geddes said yesterday. "We hire out on other nights of the week to adult groups."

Off the streets

Mr. Geddes runs The Catcher with Graeme William Gow, another school teacher, handling his finances.

Mr. Geddes said: "In opening The Catcher we wanted not only to supplement our incomes but to give the kids a big, clean, well supervised place, so they could be safe off the streets after the other discos close at 2 a.m."

"My attendants were recruited from an organisation called Dance Supervision run by a competent, young fellow, Bob Johnson."

The Catcher employs eight bands and draws 1000 young people on Saturday nights.

Mr. Geddes said his staff discouraged misconduct but in any dance anywhere "one

or two will kiss and cuddle." "As a teacher of 12-year-olds I can recognise those under age and I wouldn't consider letting them in," he said.

"It is unlikely a kid of 13, 14 or 15 is mature enough to cope with being out so late."

Mr. Geddes said he watched the door and barred entry to "anyone I see who's too young."

Of these rival halls whose customers have been flowing to The Catcher, Mr. Geddes said: "All are run exceedingly well."

The ex-schoolmaster added: "That's about it—the end of my career. I've nothing more to say."

Would he launch more discotheques now he's stopped teaching? "There's no security in it," Mr. Geddes said.

Minister's view

Other city discotheques include the Thumping Tum, The Chateau, run by a Frenchman, the Prince Albert Sebastian and the The Garrison.

The Minister for Education (Mr. Thompson) said last night he knew nothing of suggestions that any official of the Education Department had suggested that Mr. Geddes resign.

"I got the idea he decided to resign himself," he said. "A teacher is supposed to get permission before he takes any other job. Then the question arises if this is suitable employment for a teacher."

"This is not the sort of thing I would expect a teacher to do."

"I don't think a teacher in charge of young children should be in this type of business."

Mr. Geddes' resignation arrived at Mr. Thompson's office late yesterday.

The officer in charge of the city police district (Superintendent Hickey) said last night police included "all city discotheques

in their regular patrols.

"We are quite aware of their activities and the need for supervision," he said.

The Director of Primary Education (Mr. John Cole) said Mr. Geddes' resignation would take effect from today. A relief teacher would go to Macclesfield today to replace him.

Wheat farmers need rains

CANBERRA.—Wheat planting in Victoria for next season's crop was in "quite a threatening position," the Australian Wheat Board chairman (Dr. A. R. Callaghan) said yesterday.

Victorian wheatgrowers needed rain badly, Dr. Callaghan said, but South Australian wheat farmers were in "an even worse position."

However, good crops were expected in New South Wales—apart from some dry southern areas—Queensland and Western Australia.

"Sales made last week by the board brought the total overseas sales for the season to 277 million bushels," he said.

"With another five months to go before the end of the crop year on November 30, and with prospects for further sales quite promising, the board is now confident the season's carryover will not be excessive, but of reasonable and manageable proportions, except in NSW."

SMORGASBORD
For 65c at the
MELBOURNE
272 Lx Collins St. (Next to Cole's)
Continues 11.30 a.m. to 11.30 p.m.
(Adv.)

STAFF PROBLEMS
Permanent or Temporary Staff
Immediately Available Through
MELBOURNE PERSONNEL (Adv.)

Figure 1. 'Disco owner resigns as headmaster', *The Age*, 29 June 1967. Fairfax/Nine.

that ‘Discotheques Need Control’, commenting on the proceedings of the Licensing Court in relation to the Catcher to say that ‘parents and others interested in the welfare of young people will endorse the decision’ of the court not to grant the liquor permits; and noting that the status of Geddes as a ‘head-teacher’ would ‘in itself cause many eye-brows to rise questioningly’.³⁹ On 29 June it was reported that Geddes had tendered his resignation from the Education Department following, Geddes recalls, ‘a phone call from (Minister for Education) Lindsay Thompson’.⁴⁰ Thompson told *The Age* that ‘Geddes decided to resign himself’ and offered his perspective on why this was appropriate:

A teacher is supposed to get permission before he takes any other job. The question arises if this is suitable employment for a teacher. This is not the sort of thing I would expect a teacher to do.⁴¹

In the same article, Geddes defended his management of the Catcher, claiming:

In opening the Catcher we wanted not only to supplement our incomes but to give the kids a big, clean well supervised place so they could be safe off the streets after the other discos closed at 2 a.m. ... As a teacher of 12 year olds I can recognise those under age and I wouldn’t consider letting them in. It is unlikely a kid of 13,14 or 15 is mature enough to cope with being out so late.⁴²

In July, a City Court judge found Geddes guilty of assault (having detained the *Truth* reporter on his premises in May) and Geddes was placed on a good behaviour bond.⁴³ The judge recognised that Geddes had been the target of sustained negative media reporting and harassment, stating:

Since May 28, he has been subjected to a campaign in Truth, most critical of himself and his establishment, the Catcher. There has been a flood of adverse publicity. He has lost his job as a teacher with the Education Department. His family, who were living in a schoolhouse at Macclesfield have been subjected to harassment by reporters and photographers. He has suffered severely as a result of this adverse publicity. He has been reduced to a state of nervous tension.⁴⁴

Later the same month, charges against a patron for reportedly ‘assaulting an attendant at the discotheque with an air gun’ on 25 June were dismissed from court.⁴⁵ Geddes continued to run the Catcher into the following year, until he eventually became disillusioned by what he observed to be a change in the crowd:

... as the Catcher got older, then the bad elements started to move in as we were still open till 4:30 in the morning. And when I started to notice that I really didn’t want to be part of it. So, I didn’t sell my part or anything, someone wanted to buy it, I just gave it to them and walked out.⁴⁶

Geddes went overseas ‘in search of antiquities’, beginning a long career in antiquities dealing.

³⁹‘Discotheques need control’, *The Herald*, 28 June 1967, 4.

⁴⁰Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018.

⁴¹‘Disco Owner Resigns as Headmaster’, *The Age*, 29 June 1967, 3.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³‘Catcher Owner Gets Year Bond’, *The Sun News Pictorial*, 13 July 1967, 9.

⁴⁴‘Reporter Hit in Face by Bouncer’, *Melbourne Truth*, 15 July 1967, 5.

⁴⁵‘Disco Patron Not Guilty of Assault’, *The Age*, 20 July 1967, 21.

⁴⁶Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018.

Youth culture, delinquency and welfare

As described earlier, while many young people in the 1960s were embracing more liberal lifestyles than their parents' generation, much of the radical social change associated with this era actually gained momentum in the 1970s.⁴⁷ However, distinctions need to be made in making larger claims for more sweeping change, where differences occurred in micro-local contexts. For example, in her analysis of the policing of coffee clubs in Manchester, Louise Jackson identifies 'the continued operation at a local level of the technologies of moral regulation despite the wider context of "Permissiveness" that has been associated with the 1960s'.⁴⁸ Traditional notions of the role of young people in both community and family contexts were also at odds with the individualism of a consumer-driven youth culture. Young people's ability to participate in the economy as consumers of 'youth culture' goods and services meant that, as Michelle Arrow notes, the power relationships between young people and adults were shifting:

[p]articipation in the new consumer culture offered new identities to young people who found their roles circumscribed by school and family ... The teenager as consumer undermined notions of teenagers as vulnerable or dependent.⁴⁹

This did not, however, mark the end of anxieties about the negative influence of popular culture on the 'moral welfare' of young people. Popular Culture was seen to have an increasing grasp on young people as their exposure to commercial influences was increased through the mass popularity of television and other media influences.

The 1960s were also a time of significant expansion and change in the realms of education and 'youth welfare', reflecting shifting expectations, understandings and responsibilities of the state to them as citizens. Young people as a cohort were under intense scrutiny in the realms of public debate and evolving 'youth welfare/youth work' practice. Through her historical analysis of youth work in Australia, Judith Bessant highlights the influence in the 1960s of American sociologists, criminologists and psychologists in 'writing on 'youth culture', delinquency, gangs and youth development'.⁵⁰ In addition, the well accepted notion of modern adolescence as 'a troubled, troublesome and high-risk stage in the human life-course that required very close monitoring'⁵¹ would prevail relatively unchallenged until revisionist scholarship 'produced a new picture of youth welfare' in the 1980s.⁵² It is unsurprising then, that the advent of youth culture and mass media marketing to young people, sparked fresh concerns about the 'corruptibility' of young people through alcohol, drugs, violence and exposure to popular culture.

These concerns were reflected in both Victorian public policy and social commentary, particularly in the media. Preventing and responding to 'delinquency' was a strong focus of the Youth Welfare Division of the new Social Welfare Branch (of the Chief Secretary's Department) established in 1960. By 1965, in an effort to develop the

⁴⁷Arrow, *The Seventies*, 1–13.

⁴⁸Louise A. Jackson, 'The Coffee Club Menace', *Cultural and Social History* 5, no. 3 (2008): 292.

⁴⁹Arrow, *Friday on our Mind*, 64.

⁵⁰Judith Bessant, 'Australian Youth Work and Education', in *Facing the Tensions: Field Building in Support of Quality Youth Practice*, ed. Dana Fusco (London: Routledge 2011), 52–68.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

‘youth welfare’ workforce, the Department launched a two-year Diploma course in ‘Youth Leadership’ delivered from its Hawthorn office, reportedly the ‘first of its kind run by a Government Department in Australia’.⁵³ After a decade of work toward the development of ‘youth welfare’ responses in Victoria, reporting from the Department reflected significant concerns that the era brought novel threats to the welfare of young people. The Director General of Social Welfare reported to Parliament in 1969 that:

The accent of materialism, the hypnotic effect of the mass media, higher density living, the increasing affluence of many, the hard-core poverty of others, the serious impact of social drinking on young people’s habits and behaviour and the confusion of ideas on morals and behaviour generally are among the many causative factors identified overseas and now being felt here.⁵⁴

The report, which influenced a reshaping of governmental responsibilities in welfare provision (including the introduction of a Ministry of Social Welfare in Victoria and establishment of a Social Welfare Department) reflected an anxiety that exposure to mass media (particularly the influence of popular culture from the UK and the US) was leading local young people into a state of moral degradation experienced in western contexts at an international level.⁵⁵ Without further action to boost and train the youth welfare workforce and fast-track the development of preventative work with adolescents, the report warned ‘... it seems inevitable that Victoria, and especially the city of Melbourne, will see a rise in the incidence of juvenile crime like that already experienced in the great cities of the USA and the UK’.⁵⁶

Alongside these developments in youth welfare, the changing role of education reflected shifts in both community and government expectations. In 1966, the school-leaving age was raised from 14 to 15 years. The 1960s also saw significant Victorian Government investment in education, in an attempt to meet dramatic rises in demand (fuelled by the baby boom and the success of the post-war migration program) for student places and trained teachers.⁵⁷ Over the course of the 1960s, the number of students in secondary schooling almost doubled and the number of high schools rose from 150 in 1960 to 242 in 1969.⁵⁸ As Isobelle Barrett Meyering notes, while ‘the expansion of secondary schooling was driven by a range of factors ... it was not simply an emphasis on economic growth but the confluence of this paradigm with a liberal discourse of opportunity and individual self-improvement that drove the expansion of education in the post-war era’. Education had come to be seen as a right and as a social service (rather than the privilege of those that could afford it).⁵⁹ This reflected changing notions of the responsibilities of schools to the welfare of young people.

⁵³‘Youth Leaders in New Course’, *The Age*, 23 March 1965, 14.

⁵⁴‘State Faces Teenage Crime Wave: Report’, *The Age*, 29 October 1969, 3.

⁵⁵The Department and Ministry were established through the Victorian Social Welfare Act of 1970.

⁵⁶‘State faces teenage crime wave: report’, *The Age*, 29 October 1969, 3.

⁵⁷John Andrews and Deborah Towns, *‘A Secondary Education for All?’ A History of State Secondary Schooling in Victoria* (Kew: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2017), 285.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 287.

⁵⁹Isobelle Barrett Meyering, ‘The Margaret Bailey case: High school activism, the right to education and modern citizenship in late 1960s Australia’, *History of Education Review* 48, no. 2 (2019): 186. Barrett Meyering credits Simon Marginson, *Education Australia: Government, Economy and Citizen Since 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Youth delinquency: promiscuity and gang violence in media reporting

The heightened focus on the welfare of young people within the social policy and services spaces of welfare and education was accompanied by greater media reporting on the themes of vulnerability and moral corruptibility (often linked to the influence of commercial/popular youth culture) and juvenile delinquency. Sinclair notes that the Melbourne *Herald* ‘embarked on something of a crusade against Drugs over the period [late 1960s]’, although coupled with ‘a reluctant accommodation of serious popular music within acceptable normative boundaries’.⁶⁰ Reporting on youth crime and delinquency placed a focus on violence (of young men primarily) and promiscuity (typically of young women). With regard to promiscuity, journalists drew on social welfare ‘expert’ perspectives to make particular assertions offered as a ‘warning to parents’: ‘A number of Melbourne workers in the social field believe that while youthful promiscuity in the later age groups might not be increasing very much, it is increasing disastrously in the 12 to 14 group, particularly among girls’.⁶¹

Newspapers featured regular reporting on the threat of ‘youth gangs’ to public safety in 1966. Incidents of violence involving ‘Mods’ and ‘Sharpies’ made front page reports, including comparisons with police responses to the ‘Bodgies’ of the 1950s, with *The Age* reporting that ‘Police will not reform the special “bodgie squad” of 10 years ago to deal with recent outbreaks of teenage violence’.⁶² Some reportedly more serious incidents, including ‘200 youths in city gang brawl’ in August for a ‘fight to the finish’⁶³ through the city streets and a November shooting in the city following confrontations involving ‘groups of Sharpies’⁶⁴ culminated in a crackdown from police. ‘From now on’, *The Age* reported on its front page, ‘police would charge teenage hooligans with the gravest offences their behaviour merited and leave it to the courts’.⁶⁵ The following week, the front page of *The Age* reported that a ‘specially selected five-man “street team” has been formed by the Victoria Police force ... to stamp out the increasing number of brawls involving “sharpies” and mods’.⁶⁶ The article provided the average height (6 foot) and weight (13 stone) of the team members painting a picture of large, burly men patrolling the city in plain clothes, who ‘will not hesitate to show people we mean business’ if violence breaks out.⁶⁶ It was in this broader context of heightened focus on the ‘vulnerability’ of youth; accountability for their needs in the realms of welfare and education; and the need to curb delinquent behaviours (primarily sexual promiscuity, gang violence and ‘marauding groups of young people’) that the Catcher opened its doors.

The Catcher: a minor ‘moral panic’?

In 1972 Stanley Cohen introduced the concept of the ‘moral panic’ in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* to appraise the mods/rockers clashes in Brighton over the English Bank

⁶⁰John Sinclair, ‘Mass Media and the Dialectics of Social Change: The Melbourne Herald and the Counter-Culture in the Late “Sixties”’, *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 2 (1975): 46–9.

⁶¹Alan Nicholls, ‘A Warning to Parents’, *The Age*, 27 January 1966, 2.

⁶²“Bodgie Squad” Not Being Reformed’, *The Age*, 9 August 1966, 3.

⁶³‘200 Youths in City Gang Brawl’, *The Age*, 1 August 1966, 1.

⁶⁴‘City Shooting Followed by Wild Chase: Teenage Violence’, *The Age*, 28 November 1966, 1.

⁶⁵‘No Police Mercy to Larrikins’, *The Age*, 30 November 1966, 1.

⁶⁶‘Police Set Up Team to Combat City Louts’, *The Age*, 3 December 1966, 1.

Holiday in May 1964. Cohen defined a moral panic as a process where ‘a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests’.⁶⁷ The panic may pass without significant implication, or may have more significant ramifications, at for example a social policy or law-reform level. In some cases, moral panics might re-surface after lying dormant for some time or present as variations on old themes of concern. Borrowing from the work of fellow sociologist Leslie Wilkins, Cohen described a spiralling process of ‘deviancy amplification’ achieved through cycles of dramatic media coverage, media sermonising and administrative/judicial responses.⁶⁸ While we may now be more likely to identify a range of influences on public perceptions (and readings) of deviance, could the Catcher have been perceived as a ‘threat to societal values and interests’?

In 1978, Braithwaite and Barker published their study of bodgies and widgees in 1950s Australia as ‘an indigenous variety of Australian folk devil which is now extinct’.⁶⁹ Braithwaite and Barker argue that by the late 70s, there was ‘an internationalisation of folk devils’, the product, in their view, of ‘the internationalisation of capital, mass communications and the popular music industry’.⁷⁰ There are also examples of media reporting that sought to find likeness across international examples of ‘teenage delinquency’, for example when Sydney beaches experienced their own surfies and rockers clashes in March 1963 (which exposed significant differences between youth music genres, and the older adult surfing community). The *Sun-Herald* drew comparisons between the ‘teenage tyrant’ of America and the ‘hoodlums’ in ‘feuding youth cults’ in Sydney.⁷¹

It is interesting to note similarities between the Catcher and Louise Jackson’s observations about ‘The Coffee Club Menace’— a moral panic about the Manchester Coffee Clubs during a period of targeted media and police activity from 1964 to 1968.⁷² Both the Manchester Coffee Clubs and the discotheques were operating in relatively unregulated contexts, as ‘dry’ unlicensed venues. In targeting young people as patrons, the Catcher and the Manchester Coffee clubs were, as Jackson describes, ‘spaces removed from the normative effect of the adult gaze’.⁷³ In both cases, authorities were concerned with gendered notions of ‘moral danger’ (concerns around ‘sexual immorality’ in the case of girls and violence in the case of boys) and that the venues attracted runaways/state wards. While reporting placed a focus on these ‘vulnerable’ cohorts of young people, in both cases the venues were primarily attended by a cross-section of young people. Policing of both spaces was concerned with the ‘new danger’ of drugs, particularly the amphetamine ‘Drinamyl’, colloquially called ‘Purple Hearts’ after their shape and colour (and name-sake of the popular Australian band featuring Lobby Loyde, which featured on the Melbourne discotheque circuit including at the Catcher).⁷⁴

⁶⁷Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Key, 1972/1987), 9.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, xxviii–xxx.

⁶⁹John Braithwaite and Michelle Barker, *Bodgies and Widgees: Folk Devils of the Fifties in Two Faces of Deviance*, eds. Paul Wilson and John Braithwaite (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 27.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹David Willis and Bob Johnson, ‘Youth: A Problem of Two Countries’, *The Sun Herald*, 10 March 1963, 74.

⁷²Jackson, *The Coffee Club Menace*, 289–308.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 290.

⁷⁴Ian MacFarlane, *Encyclopedia of Australian Rock and Pop* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 500-1.

The Catcher was identified as a threat to societal values in several ways. In attracting a large youth cohort to congregate in a city location, the venue was seen to be contributing to a larger problem of 'youth/gang violence' in the city, the target of a police crackdown from late 1966. In creating a space for them to gather beyond the gaze of parental control, the Catcher sparked fears of young people's 'moral degradation'. And, as we have seen in relation to other rivals such as Sebastian's, regulatory monitoring did not extend to the more 'well to do' clientele of other discotheques. Geddes certainly felt that the media treated young people who patronised the Catcher differently from those attending other venues. In response to a journalists' questions following his resignation from the Education Department, Geddes declared: 'The kids at the Catcher aren't any better or any worse than the kids at any other dance, and the police know it ... How can you tell just by looking at kids if they're intent on immorality ...?'.⁷⁵ A major breach is also to be found in a venue managed by a school headmaster ('Teacher runs disco with 4 a.m. petting'; 'Headmaster Graham, disco boss'; 'Disco owner resigns as headmaster'; 'Now disco boss quits his job as teacher'). This media fascination with Geddes' status was central in ensuring the narrative could only end with one outcome; once his resignation was secured from the Education Department, media interest in the venue (aside from a few articles in *Truth*) petered out.

The media treatment of the Catcher involved inflammatory claims and exaggerated portrayals of the dangers (moral and physical) of attending the venue. While reporting crowds of around 1,500 young people on a Saturday night, headlines highlighted police claims that related to only a few young people, such as the venue being 'a refuge for many teenage escapees from State institutions' and claims that 'girls missing from home were working there as waitresses and go-go dancers'.⁷⁶ Perhaps the most exaggerated reporting was featured on the front page of *Truth* newspaper, claiming 'Girl Age 15 vanishes from the Catcher'.⁷⁷ Reporting on 24 June that after telling a friend she was leaving the venue, the girl vanished, as 'there has been no trace of her since'. In the following edition, the newspaper admitted that the girl had actually decided to leave home and had been safely staying at a girlfriends' flat since.⁷⁸ After the peak of the media storm, once Geddes had tendered his resignation with the Education Department, *Age* reporter Dick Shepherd wrote that despite claims from police to the Licensing Court that the Catcher was 'frequented by escapees from institutions, youths with criminal records, girls of easy morals and teenage drug-takers', his observation was that 'there were no glassy eyes, no brawls, no overt vice'.⁷⁹

While we might be able to say that the Catcher would have made a suitable case study in 'moral panic', we now appreciate that an application of Cohen's framework is limited in what it can offer our understanding of the venue. In the latest edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Cohen asserts that '(m)odels such as deviation amplification deal well enough with what happened in the machine (the feedback and

⁷⁵Owner of 'Disco' Quits Teaching', *The Sun*, 29 June 1967, 3.

⁷⁶Drugs, Escapees at Discotheque', *The Age*, 28 June 1967, 7. 'Disco Cannot Serve Liquor Judge Rules', *The Herald*, 27 June 1967, 3.

⁷⁷'Girl Age 15 Vanishes from the Catcher', *Melbourne Truth*, 24 June 1967, 1.

⁷⁸'Catcher Girl is Found in Flat', *Melbourne Truth*, 1 July 1967, 2.

⁷⁹Dick Shepherd, 'None Caught Out at 'The Catcher'', 1967, 'Newspaper Clippings Related to the Liquor Industry 1955-1977', Victorian Licensing Court, PROV, VPRS 7733/P0001 Unit 4.

snowballing effects during the reaction sequence) but inadequately with why the initial reaction takes place and even less adequately with why the whole sequence itself might come to an end'.⁸⁰ Hence, in making sense of episodes of 'moral panic', historical analysis is required to provide vital contextualising information. In our case, a historical analysis has enabled us to see the Catcher case study within a complex social context - one that was mired by tensions between new forms of social permissiveness and established conservatism at a time when the relationship between young people and state authorities was changing and young people were understood in dual terms as both a threat (in their growing social autonomy and economic empowerment) and increasingly vulnerable and in need of support.

Conclusion

Music venues played an important role in the expansion of Melbourne popular music, as part of the 'Long Sixties' period of Australia that reflected often delayed inflections of broader international trends.⁸¹ The Catcher was a distinctive venue in a live music landscape where a relative lack of regulation for unlicensed venues enabled experimentation by venue owners. Equally, the late-night live music sessions (and attitude of Geddes) at the Catcher encouraged experimentation by musicians, with both these factors supporting the development of a viable live music sector beyond the fading town hall scenes.

The story of the Catcher sits within a broader historical narrative of 'the 60s' in Australia of contradictions and complexities. While the discotheques reflected the new 'permissiveness' of the era, they were operating in a broader conservative social context. Their presence exposed the contradiction of venues operating largely 'under the radar' of regulatory oversight, at a time when the approach of State Government to nightlife regulation was more about social control than economic or sector development. We suggest that the intense media scrutiny of the Catcher (and responses of authorities) constituted a minor moral panic, where societal anxieties about youth as both delinquent and vulnerable were accompanied by specific combinations of responses to narratives of a 'troublesome' venue. While some aspects were observable in 1950s panics about 'bodgies and widgies', the 1960s gave rise to new concerns about the increasing influence of commercial mass media culture on young people and an intensifying gaze on 'youth welfare' as reflected in governmental responses in social services and education. For several months in 1967, the Catcher was certainly subject to a cycle of media condemnation, greater policing and State Government scrutiny.

Yet as Sarah Thornton has noted in relation to panics, 'mass media misunderstanding is often a goal, not just an effect of youth cultural pursuits'.⁸² In this respect, Geddes obliquely referred to the venues' troubles in his advertising. In a *Go-Set* advertisement of 12 July 1967, a full page for the Catcher includes: 'what great piles of rubbish have been written during the last weeks!'. At the bottom of the ad, above the listed

⁸⁰Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 2002), 202.

⁸¹O'Hanlon, 'New People, New Ideas and New Attitudes,'19–29.

⁸²Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), 120.

bands for the week, readers/patrons are reassured that the Catcher is ‘the wildest discotheque on the scene’.⁸³ On 14 July 1967, another advertisement states that ‘Catcher tells the TRUTH’:

Well, swingers – Sorry you missed the big deal operators but we didn’t! Harold still loves you baby, so he’s got the Loved Ones. So spear down this weekend just for kicks.⁸⁴

This poses the possibility of a very different narrative for patrons’ and music industry consumption to the defences launched by Geddes in the mainstream and tabloid press.

As we have argued, Geddes’ status as a school headmaster was a central feature. Yet it seems that the owner’s daytime occupation provided the foundations for what the venue should be (at least in its idealised form). Geddes’ acknowledgement of good musicianship, seeing a line through his earlier days watching hot jazz groups to the more experimental rock/blues outfits at the Catcher, was equally matched by a desire to broaden his punters’ ideas of entertainment to include poetry, debates and films. While the Catcher was a short-lived venture, unable to ‘fly under the radar’ in the way some other venues did, given the tabloid media attention it (and its owner) received, this is not a point of regret for Geddes:

The aftermath of the Catcher was – it sort of went, it disappeared very quickly. In fact, I think with the exception of a few *Go-Set* papers that you might find an advert in, or the *Truth* – besides that, I think that there’s nothing, nothing left. It was something like in summer, when one’s sitting outside having a meal of something and you had maybe a glass of wine and a gentle breeze blows through, and it’s gone. It’s like a slow mistral on a mountain, you can see it in the distance. It comes and rolls up to the mountain, over the top, and the magic’s gone.⁸⁵

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⁸³*Go-Set*, 12 July 1967, 21.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁵Graham Geddes, interview, 10 July 2018.