

## Interview with Bruce Milne (Fanzine creator, Missing Link Records, Au Go Go Records)

### Punk

It was certainly a rejection of everything that was going on at the time. In the mid-70s music had gotten very safe and stale, and I think, for people like me, in their late teens at the time, you felt cheated. Other people had the Elvis explosion, the Beatles and Stones and stuff and all we had was Rod Stewart doing disco songs. We were looking for things that were different, and largely that's what punk was; people put Devo under punk, or the Pistols, there's no comparison between the sounds, except that they were both definitely not of the singer-songwriter or prog-rock or the disco thing that had become so big and seemed so old to us. You're only talking about a couple of years, but 18 or 19-year-olds couldn't get gigs - all the reviews were always about how technically proficient the musicians were, we thought, we don't want that, we want excitement. I don't think it was just a musical thing either, it was something that affected all the arts and the music was the thing that led the charge, graphics, fashion, films, everything, was affected at the time, the label of punk...

I'd gone to London in 1975, and back via New York in early 76. I didn't see the Pistols in London, they'd done two gigs at that stage, God I wish I had known about that. There was excitement in the air. There was a magazine called 'Punk' that came out in New York, that was talking about the Ramones and Patti Smith and I got real excited by all of that, came back to Australia and had a lot of friends who were musicians who were also scrambling to find what they wanted to do and I put out a fanzine, this was mid-1976, at that stage there weren't even any overseas groups that released records yet, it was just largely talking about the Modern Lovers (Johnathan Richman) NY Dolls and the Stooges and bands that we were all excited by, and then records starting coming out, left right and centre.

My first Fanzine was called '**Plastered Press**', only one issue, and Clinton Walker in Brisbane put out a fanzine called '**Suicide Alley**' and it was largely talking about the Saints and Radio Birdman who were just starting, and we were hearing about them too and then they came down to Melbourne. Clinton and I joined forces and started a fanzine in late '76, early '77, called '**Pulp**' and we did six issues throughout 1977. That's when things were beyond an explosion, but there wasn't information, you couldn't find out about things, the English press would get over here but they came surface mail, so you'd get NME Sounds and Melody Maker 3 months late.

If you knew anyone who was going overseas, you'd give them lists of records, you'd mail order things and some of the record shops in Melbourne started to bring in some of the records. Readings in Carlton was really good for bringing in records, 'Missing Link' which was called 'Dr. Peppers' back in those days, Keith Glass was bringing stuff in. The fanzines were very successful because people needed the information and you couldn't get it anywhere else, so we were finding people overseas to write articles. Pulp was distributed all over Australian record shops. In early '78 Stuart Coupe and a bunch of other people started a magazine in Adelaide called '**Roadrunner**', not to be a fanzine, but to take on Ram and Juke, the two main rock mags at the time. Ram was pretty good, Juke was really straight, all Skyhooks and Sherbet and there was just such a gap because people weren't getting the information.

So, I moved to Adelaide. We all stopped our fanzines and put our energy into Roadrunner- it ran from about late '77 through to '82 or '83. I stayed in Adelaide for six months and then came back to Melbourne and Keith Glass offered me a job - I think the dole back then was about \$50 a week, Keith said I'll give you 50 a week to do what you do - I was distributing independent records, which was so disorganized. The Victims had put out an EP in Perth and they sent me 50 copies and I took them around to the shops here and I'd go round and collect the money a

month later and then send it back to them. Keith was distributing a few things too, the Radio Birdman EP and a few other things and he was planning to start a label – '**Missing Link**'. It was originally going to be a re-issue label, but there so many interesting things being recorded he decided to do some local groups as well. So, he changed the name of the shop, and we started up '**Missing Link Records**'. We were the only distributor for Australian punk records, so if you put out a record, you'd send us 200 copies and we'd send them out to all the shops around the country that wanted to stock that stuff, and that was a really exciting time, cos there were records coming out all over the place.

**3RRR** started up so I was doing a radio show with Clinton Walker, '**Know Your Product**', on Saturday mornings. It was trying to contextualize punk, showing that there were historical precedents, punk records didn't just appear out of nowhere, we might play a Velvet Underground song, and then play Wire, or something that might have ties to that. I was still writing for Roadrunner and working out of the back of the record shop, and I was doing a monthly Crystal Ballroom newsletter. I got 20 bucks a month to do that. For six months I ran a shop at the bottom of the stairs at the Crystal Ballroom, so people could get the records that the bands were putting out. It was terrible, because it's not a good idea to try to sell records to drunk punks at 1 am - I think I was having more records stolen than I sold.

Then I started '**Au Go Go**', as a side project, as a singles label, it wasn't supposed to be anything else, and really my energy was put into the Birthday Party, Go Betweens, and if I liked a band, I'd put out their single. We never had any big records, they were all fairly small pressings and then I started doing the 'Fast Forward' cassette, in '81. I was still writing for magazines, but writing about music is a really hard thing to do - you can write about it but if people can't hear what you're talking about, it's frustrating. Because I was doing 3RRR radio shows I'd been learning a lot about production there as well. I'd interview a band and then I'd sit there for a couple of hours and edit the interview.

I was doing the demo show as well, it might come in on reel to reel or cassette and the guy I was doing it with, Andrew Maine and I were just talking one day and came up with this idea; a cassette magazine would get information out quicker. It just exploded, I wasn't ready for the success that **Fast Forward** had, and it was the time when cassettes were becoming a big deal, Bow Wow Wow had just done their cassette-only release and the Walkman had just been introduced. That was just at the time that Keith sold Missing Link and I left to manage Gaslight Records, but I was working on Fast Forward night and day. We stopped it because our musical tastes diverged to the point where we couldn't keep it together. The whole New Romantic thing had come along, plus a lot of the funk influenced music, bands coming out of England like ABC and Andrew loved that stuff with a passion and my taste was more towards the raw rock'n'roll thing. So, we stopped it, in some ways at a ridiculous point because we were selling about 5000 copies worldwide, more than half our sales were overseas. I don't know how I lived in those days, because I was working all day and all night long. Sales were increasing all the time, people were writing articles about us, NME did a big spread on us, other cassette magazines started up around the world too. The mail every day would be incredible, there'd be records arriving from all over the world, tapes, people wanting to write for us, that was really great.

**Greville Records** offered me a job managing that store, so I moved in above Greville Records (Greville St Prahran) and re-jigged AuGoGo. At that stage I'd done about 25 singles, then mini albums by the Moodists and the Scientists.

## **The Tote Hotel**

The Tote was the right size for the bands I was doing. I launched the Moodists mini-album there and the Scientists' 'Swampland' single. I was coming to the Tote right from when it started having bands. It was a rough and tumble rock'n'roll place. Michael Lynch started booking it in 1981 and he was largely putting on rootsy, rockabilly style bands - he started managing some punkabilly style bands and that's when it started to get a lot more rock'n'roll orientated, probably '82 or '83. I didn't have much involvement with the hardcore scene, except the shops and things - by that stage Phil MacDougall had his record label 'Reactor' and I distributed for him too. I've never really seen other labels as competition because there's so much music around, it's much better all working together rather than fighting, it's silly.

## **3RRR and 3PBS – Independent Radio**

3PBS in those days was largely a roots station and they had an hour of soul music, an hour of reggae, an hour of jazz, not a lot different from what it is now. Paul Elliot would have done the first punk show, I think he might have done a show on 3CR before that and if it wasn't Paul, then it was Jeff Rule. *(yes it was-j)* You've gotta remember both RRR and PBS in those days had very low wattage so PBS was a station for people who lived around St Kilda, and RRR was a radio station for people who lived around Fitzroy and Carlton.

I think it was incredibly important - there were no other radio stations playing my records and it wasn't until well into the '90's that JJJ started playing things that I released. JJJ wasn't playing Sonic Youth, or the Scientists, so Melbourne radio was incredibly important, and tremendously supportive too.

## **Fitzroy/St Kilda divisions**

It was going on right from the start, but that always seemed ridiculous, people back in the '70s would say, we won't play over the river, they're all arty, in those days there were only 30 or 40 of us, I think you should play wherever you can. I was less aware of it because I didn't want to recognize those divisions, people still refer to a "south of the river" band, it's just silly.

The Ballroom started up having gigs upstairs in the actual Ballroom and it seemed like every week it got a bit bigger, then they started having gigs downstairs, they expanded the downstairs, so there were two different areas and they started having gigs in both of those, so you'd go down there and you could see a band upstairs and then run down and catch another one, and there was another room where they had bands as well, The Boys Next Door (BND) did a residency there on Tuesday nights - it got to the stage where they were getting about 400 people on a Tuesday night, which for a band that was fairly unknown and not very commercial, was just incredible.

Hearts and Martinis were both very important. Martinis was where I first saw Radio Birdman, I remember the BND and a lot of different groups at Hearts and that was on Nicholson St, and Martinis was on Rathdowne St in Carlton.

## **The Tiger Lounge**

The Keith Glass band would play there on a Tuesday night. Keith really loved the energy of all the new bands, which was completely different from all his contemporaries who didn't want to know about this non-musical crap, it was really like that in those days, he started giving supports to bands so we started going over to the Tiger Room on a Tuesday night because it would be the BND, or JAB, supporting the Keith Glass band. That was the first time that a lot of the younger bands got to play at a rock venue. It started to grow so they put on bands on

other nights. The room was about the same size as the Tote. It went for about a year and a half then Laurie moved over to the Ballroom, then Dolores opened the Exford in the city (Russell St).

**JAB** was an interesting band, very theatrical, maybe a little over-theatrical, (laughs) but they were interesting. La Femme to me weren't so much of a punk band, as a glammy outer suburban band. I think some people were afraid of those guys cos they came from a sharpie background; they were tough kids. I can't remember the difference between the **Spred**, the **Teenage Radio Stars** and **La Femme**, it's all a bit of a blur to me, except that I think that if you look through all the members, you'll find the reason a lot of those lineup changes happened was because half of them were going in and out of jail.

Lobby Loyde was living in England in the '70s, so he had disappeared from the Australian music scene, and then he came back, and he started producing. First, he was in Sydney, he did the Sunnyboys and Machinations. Then he moved to Melbourne and set up a production thing at 'Richmond Recorders' and took a whole lot of bands under his wing, then started producing a whole bunch of things.

### **Sharpie/skinhead thing**

It was kind of a pre-cursor, because it was a tough rock'n'roll scene, they loved their Quatro and Slade, not necessarily things people think of as punk records, but they were fans of big tough rock'n'roll records that were coming out in the early 70s and there weren't that many in those days.

### **Punk now?**

I guess I'm in two minds about it - part of the reason why we say punk died in '79 was because some of us felt like the whole idea of punk was to break down the bullshit that was going on, but it was also to be a spring board for taking things in new directions- someone like Ollie (Olsen) who was playing in punk bands (Young Charlatans) took it in an electronic direction, but incorporated some of that DIY aggression, then he went on to make music that I'm not familiar with - I put out the NO record, but after that he went on to do sort of trance, I'm not even sure what sort of music it is, psychedelic trance music or something like that...

Some people just caught on to the fashion elements of it and tried to keep it like that which it should really never have been. On the other hand the good fun with movements is that they're all about when you're searching for identity and things, and they helped you set up the signposts of what you are and what you aren't and part of what you are when you're young, always defining yourself by what you're not, I'm not a hippie, I'm not a this or a that.

So, it's great that there are people who weren't even born when I started putting out records or going to those gigs, who somehow see an affinity and an interest in things that I was involved in back then. From my own point of view, with my label, I love punk, but I put out a lot of quiet music and I still put out a lot of fucked up noisy records that don't sell fucking anything but just because they excite me in the sort of ways I was excited back then. Mainly when I see groups of young people like that, 'I was doing that when I was your age and I'm still doing it now' but I look at most of you and I know that you're doing it till you finish your Uni degree and then you're gonna be a lawyer and no one will ever recognize you! (laughs) But that's just my way of justifying my long-term involvement.

## Heroin

The heroin thing sort of crept up so slowly and it was sort of shocking because, the trouble with heroin is that once people get into it, they become addicted and once they're addicted they become a different person, you can't ever really have an honest conversation, because you know they need to have a certain amount of money each day and they'll do anything to get that, and it was really shocking to me. A lot of it happened with the bands going to England and I was such a part of working with the BND, and the Go-Betweens and the Laughing Clowns - all of those people going over to England, and that's where heroin was cheap and easily available - that shocked me when I started to discover that they were all becoming junkies - I just couldn't believe it; I could understand with the BND/BP, that was part of their persona, but when you had these other much more melodic or wimpy (laughs) groups, who were getting into it too and they came back to Australia and people started dying - it really ruined things for a while there. I was quite anti-heroin in those days because I was watching something I'd been a part of building up and being so excited about, experimentation and taking risks and things, and then suddenly it felt like it was all collapsing, for something non-musical, because everyone needed \$100 a day or whatever to survive. And it still pisses me off- it crept into the grunge thing that I was closely involved in, it crept into the Geelong scene- at AuGoGo I was putting out a lot of those Geelong bands and really trying to support the scene and just to watch people screwing up on drugs, it was like, why do I try and help you when this is what you wanna do, sit in the corner with a blanket over your head and vegetate...

## Tell me a Story

I presume it still happens but I'm not aware of it now, but in the 1970s when there weren't venues to play at, you organized parties, and those parties were, in some ways, more important in my mind than the Crystal Ballroom, especially when it was starting to happen - you'd have a party and have 30 people come to it and there'd be 10 people you'd never met before, that building of the tribe, it was lot of fun at the time. As people formed bands there was competition, but they'd all go to the same parties, maybe sit down on other sides of the room and put shit on each other, but there wasn't really enough of us to form rival gangs or anything.

There's a funny story where Tracy Pew (bass-BND/Birthday Party) got picked up for drunk driving maybe, or maybe he just got picked up by the cops late one night and he didn't have his license so he told the cops he was Peter Sutcliffe (aka Mr. Pierre, aka Pierre Voltaire - bass player in Models) but the trouble was that one of the biggest news stories at the time was about the Yorkshire Ripper who was a notorious rapist/murderer in England whose name just happened to be Peter Sutcliffe. There was a paper called The Truth in Melbourne at the time, and I remember going to work on the Monday morning and seeing the headlines- "I am the Ripper! says drunk punk" which I thought was one of the best headlines I've ever seen! (laughs)