

Interview with Clinton Walker - Author of *Inner City Sound*, and *Stranded: The Secret History of Australian Independent Music 1977-1991*

How old were you when punk exploded in 1977?

I was 20. I was pretty much the perfect age. That was the age of so many of the bands that were around. I think I remember Johnny Rotten was barely a year older. All were around that age and if you looked up Billy Idol, The Ramones and all those American acts, they were a bit older, we all knew that.

And what was the pivotal moment for you? Was it watching Countdown, like it was for so many people?

No. It wasn't Countdown, though I do remember seeing the Sex Pistols doing "Anarchy in the UK", but the first time I'd actually seen a clip of them was on Mike Willesee's current affairs show on Channel 7 or 9 at 6.30pm. This was up in Brisbane, so you didn't see any of that stuff on Countdown. So as much as I enjoy the character of Molly as the Australian legend that he is, and I don't want to drag him down but there was an awful lot that Countdown didn't do, and this was one of those things. That's why Australian groups like the Saints and the Boys Next Door, and various others couldn't get a go on Countdown at all. That was just a symptom of the general attitude in the country towards this new music and these new bands, so that's why they had to go overseas. I suppose the very short story is this; I was somebody who was waiting for it to happen. I knew something had to happen. The whole litmus thing is the Stooges, right? If in 1972 or 1973 you knew who the Stooges were or you knew who the New York Dolls were, especially if you had their records, that meant you were tuned into some very esoteric secret knowledge and so did everyone in the scene around you.

Let me put it this way; I came out of glam-rock, and you find, once again, a lot of 1957 born, twenty-year-old - 1977 people who were into early '70s glam rock; David Bowie, Marc Bolan, Rod Stewart and the Faces, Lou Reed, all that sort of stock. Certainly, the Velvet Underground and Lou Reed that was known a little later. Most people were hippies, and most hippies hated that kind of stuff. Nowadays you'd use the expression; "it was a bit dark, a bit urbane and decadent". Decadent was a word that was used often to describe that kind of music, and it wasn't called punk rock at that time. Really that term first came in when Lenny Kaye used it on his *Nuggets* album compilation and that was a huge record for all of us in the scene because it isolated out all those trashy American garage bands which rock critically disdained as throwing trash, but trash was what it was all about so I was onto these pre-punk groups at that time. Also, Alice Cooper, everybody loved that sort of stuff but if you were really serious you actually knew who the Stooges were. I actually got my record sent via sea-mail from a record shop in San Francisco, as I did the with the MC5. The New York Dolls records were available in Australia briefly on first release so it was all these sort of things and all the influences that fed into everything that happened in the late 1970s. I guess I was someone who basically, for whatever reason, didn't pick up a guitar and form a band but I started to write about it, and I was waiting for it to happen.

You were a pivotal behind the scenes person?

Oh well, I sort of became so but if maybe things had been different, or I thought different, I might have become a musician because that's what most people did. It was pretty easy to pick up a guitar and do it, but I really don't know why I did what I did do. In retrospect, I suppose in one way I'm kind of thankful because soon enough you get to know what a musician's life is really like and even if you are successful, which is a life on the road. It's also a hypothetical. We read the **NME** and **Cream magazine** on import, we read **RAM magazine** in Australia. Anthony O'Grady was the editor of RAM magazine. I still know Anthony to this day and he's one of those guys who was generous to me when I started because Anthony was open-minded like a lot of people in the scene and at that time Anthony was able to understand, "Oh right, Cold Chisel and Midnight Oil, they're going to be big bands, we'll put them on the cover," and that's what helped make RAM the important magazine it was, but at the same time Anthony also understood and was a big supporter of the Saints and Radio Birdman when everybody else in the industry, who loved Cold Chisel and Midnight Oil, hated the Saints and Radio Birdman, but Anthony didn't and so RAM magazine was important because it gave the new music coverage, thanks to Anthony.

So, when the Saints emerged in '76 with I'm Stranded...?

I'd known them since 1974 or something like that because we all sort of went to the same school in the working-class suburbs of Brisbane and, yeah, I'd known them that long and I was watching their progress.

It must have been really exciting.

Yeah. Look, it's possible to retrospectively see it through those kind of rose-coloured glasses, but it's weird. At the time, say in 1975 or so, by which time the Saints were getting to be quite a good little garage band, but even at that time I do vividly remember that I thought "Man, this is incredible," you know. "This band is as good as anything I could think of" and that was just naïve wishful thinking on my part that maybe turned out to be accurate because they kinda were, and they were also laughed at. But I actually did have a feeling that it was actually significant. Maybe that was different for an Australian person in bands to feel at that time because there was definitely an inferiority complex at work in Australia. That was part of what always drove me, was to go; "Oh well, that's just bullshit. Why shouldn't this group be as radical and as good as every other group that I haven't read but have just heard about in the back pages of **Rock Scene magazine**?" And that was another highly important magazine that you would get on import because I saw photos of the Ramones, the first time I'd ever seen them, and they'd put Iggy Pop on the cover and that was really radical shit for those days.

So how did you meet Bruce Milne?

Bruce did **Plastered Press** down there in Melbourne. I'd done this other thing in Brisbane but perhaps even before that, "**This is it**" through RAM magazine, it had classified ads in the back in those days, before the internet people...I learnt later that Bruce was someone who had pen pals all over the world because he was a bloody stamp collector or a boy scout or whatever he was. I never had pen pals. I remember Bruce had put an ad in the back of RAM magazine, "Buy my magazine, Plastered Press, it features the Modern Lovers and the Stooges" or something.

That's what I mean, if you saw a signal like that you'd go "Shit. Wow. There's some guy down in Melbourne and he's heard about this shit," so I just wrote him a letter and he sent me his magazine, so we became pen pals. I originally had come from Melbourne, but I was up in Brisbane by that time so for a lot of the mid to late '70s I spent a lot of time hitch-hiking or catching the train up and down the East Coast to Melbourne to meet Bruce and some people down there and purely on the basis of "What's going on? Is there some new music happening next in Melbourne?" and dropping into Sydney and I started to know a couple of people and just started connecting with the one in a million person in each town and you learnt later that it happened all around the country. There was the scene over in Perth where Kim Salmon and Dave Faulkner were the only two people who had legendarily ever heard of the Stooges. I can't over-emphasise how important the Stooges were. It was really a mark or tipping point. If you were into to the Stooges that meant you were serious and you knew what you were on about, and if you didn't then you weren't even worth talking to.

I suppose you could say that Iggy Pop was the grandfather of punk.

Absolutely. There's no doubt to me that he and Lou Reed, they totally are, and David Bowie. I was moved quite a bit to see David go because many of us grew up with him, even after the punk scene, from Berlin, in that period and Melbourne in the late '70s and in all the hip punk households, you heard those records all the time even when Iggy made his comeback with *The Idiot* and all those things. They were the records that were totally around all the time. Iggy Pop was a legend in his own world, a 'Forgotten Boy' or whatever he called himself, and he sort of was.

He's still alive to tell the tale.

Yeah, well that's...It's one of those weird ironies that he's the one that's alive. Him, Keith Richards and Nick Cave, the three of them and its sort of unbelievable, but they are, but I'm still alive too and sometimes I behaved rather badly, but that's another story...

So, you and Bruce met up in late 1976?

Yeah, it would probably be then that we corresponded. We exchanged letters at that time. We probably met for the first-time face to face in early 1977. I went down to Melbourne with the express purpose of meeting Bruce and seeing what was going on down there.

Did you connect? Did you click as friends?

Yeah. It wouldn't have mattered if we were two of the most oppositional people in the world. The mere fact that we both shared the same vision, as this was a very small circle in those scenes at the time, and I remember Rowland S. Howard was around, as was Ollie Olsen and a couple of other people. We all had this vision that this new music was going to change things in the world.

Did you know it was punk at the time?

Well, by 1977 'punk' definitely was the name for this new modern music. When Lenny Kaye dubbed the bands 'punk bands' on *Nuggets* it had circulated around a bit. Lester Bangs had used the term a bit and it was in general use, and it was referring to those really white boy garage bands who sort of did rhythm and blues covers but you would never have called the early Stones and Pretty Things punk, or the early Kinks. You wouldn't call them punk although it's possible you can see them in that way nowadays. It certainly was aggressive, fast, loud, raw rock 'n' roll but basically after the Sex Pistols broke and they broke at the very end of 1976/start of 1977 because "Anarchy in the UK" came out and when that happened it didn't matter that the Ramones had had a record out for a while.

Patti Smith and Modern Lovers, these were all important things I'm talking about at that time, but when the Sex Pistols happened the whole world was full of pieces, outraged by this thing called punk rock. By then it was definitely identified as punk rock which at that time, that early, I probably wasn't that ambivalent about it. I became so and I remain to have a love/ hate relationship with it. In 1977 most of us were pretty happy to say, "this is punk rock and we're out to eat your babies for breakfast". In terms of Melbourne punk, I know the fashion wasn't like in the UK where it was safety-pins and ripped shirts. Melbourne was more so, I mean it's a weird thing, I'd made a connection because I'd originally come from there. It was more than just that. It's not like I'd gone back to live in the late '70s and hooked up with old primary school mates, I never did. I don't know any of those people. I went into a world that was the Bruce and Rowland, Ollie and his band and that was the Melbourne punk scene. It was better dressed than Brisbane, I can tell you that. It was definitely a lot more Fey, there's no doubt about that, although the feyest band of all, the Go-Betweens, came from Brisbane and in many ways, whilst you couldn't describe them as punk, they sort of were ultimately in a way to me because they were just "do it yourself". They got up with a couple of songs, that's where they started, just so happened to be using a couple of acoustic guitars which I thought was great, really iconoclastic.

Melbourne had greater fashion but that's always the case in cooler climates. It's been observed before; I'm not the originator of this. It's pretty hard to get around Brisbane in leather pants. It's too hot. You just can't do it, so up in Brisbane we would wear winklepickers, tight jeans and a t-shirt. That's how you would dress. The big difference was not wearing flares, but that happened in Brisbane as it did around the world. You sort of wore high-heeled Cuban boots like R. M. Williams and you wore T-shirts. You just didn't wear all the flowing bullshit that hippies did. I don't know if anybody was actually gay. Maybe some people were in the closet at that time, in fact I'm pretty certain, but it was a pretty different world back then and being a punk was enough to get you in trouble, let alone being a gay punk. That was a double whammy, so it was socially volatile at the best of times.

So yeah, you get to Melbourne and there were definitely more arty influences, and it was better dressed. That's why I think it was weird because there was a connection between Brisbane and Melbourne which is still alive today to the point that Nick Cave gets Ed Kuepper to sit in with his band because he has always idolised him. He just loved the Saints and Melbourne connected to the Saints as Chris Bailey became friendly with people down there, like my friend Jeffery Wegener the drummer who was in the real old original Saints and later the Laughing Clowns. When I'd moved to Melbourne, Jeffery had just moved there too, to form the Young Charlatans with Rowland and Ollie, the late Janine Hall as well, so there were these connections made even though Brisbane was a lot more feral and crazier. Melbourne didn't connect to Sydney. There were aspects of Brisbane that connected with Sydney. There were musicians like Brad Shepherd who was in the Fun Things and then joined Hoodoo Gurus. Brett Myers of Died Pretty, that was more Sydney connected, but I connected with

Melbourne, I went to Melbourne and lived there for a while, and I moved here in 1980. So, I was only a couple of years in Melbourne in the late 1970s, but those were really good years.

How did you guys come up with the name Pulp? What was the story behind the name?

I can't claim credit for that. I would say that was Bruce's idea because I don't remember having the idea. If it was my idea, I'd tell you, but he had the right idea. He had his fanzine, and I had mine in Brisbane - I was doing this fanzine with the awful name **Suicide Alley** with a guy called Andrew MacMillan up in Darwin. He went on to become a writer as well and he was actually leaving Brisbane to go to RAM magazine. A lot of people went through RAM magazine. I wrote for them. I never had a job with them. Andrew was leaving town and I'd just met Bruce and he said or I said, I can't remember, "Let's join forces and you cover Brisbane and I'll cover Melbourne and we'll get someone for Sydney" and we did get someone to write a few things out of Sydney or I would drop in there and see things or do interviews and so we had this fanzine and it was Bruce's idea.

I went "Pulp, yeah, excellent" because even then we were pretty down with the idea of stuff like pulp fiction, trashy fiction that was really all part of the aesthetic. It never ever changed for me, that whole thing about being trashy and throwaway and lowbrow and all of that. We were totally into pop art, that kind of side of art and I found a lot more people in Melbourne who were into art. Now that might sound a bit...pretentious, but it's not pretentious because we were into it. I was into pop art. As a precocious teenager I saw Andy Warhol pictures happening real time and thought that's really cool. It was much cooler than the Mona Lisa who I learnt about at school. See, I went to art school, and once again, a lot of the English and American people, punk people of that generation, were art school dropouts because the art scene was turning into all that conceptual art and some people of my generation coming through were into that, but I totally wasn't and I was into pop art and so I wasn't satisfied by art school. It was rock 'n' roll that sort of took over and I thought that looked like a much better option.

Tell me about Roadrunner magazine.

Well Roadrunner was a similar mob over in Adelaide, though I can say Stuart Coupe had a beard, and I didn't...they're some of the things that happened back then. If you had bloody flared trousers or long hair and a beard, I don't know, or various other appalling sartorial transgressions, I just wouldn't be interested in you but Stuart Coupe did have a beard so there were some people coming out of hippiedom, but to their credit, him and Donald Robertson were maybe a lot older and had been through the hippy stuff, but had got into this new music too so they made a fanzine which they did one issue of, I think called **Street Fever**, which I can't totally remember. I would have seen it back in the day and I did have copies, but Bruce and I had been doing **Pulp**, and I don't know, if you look at say, Stuart and Donald, they were probably a lot more, could I say...professionally ambitious than either Bruce or I were.

We were just music tragics really, but they had the idea to make up this magazine and it would be a challenger to RAM. We thought that sounded good, so we'll throw our lot in there, but you see, the thing was, I was writing for RAM and so Roadrunner came along, and it just meant I wrote for both magazines which just did not happen in the UK. If you wrote for Melody Maker, NME wouldn't hire you and vice versa but Australia was a small enough scene with a small enough talent pool, but I wrote for everybody, all the time, non-stop, even despite a debilitating drug habit. If we go back to

that late 1970s generation of people I knew, hard core drugs went through it like salt, and it claimed a huge number of victims, whether they died of an overdose or they died way too young, only a few years ago or whatever else. Hard drugs were just really destructive, and for me, I was the sort of person who, I got up in the morning and sat down at the typewriter and did what I had to do and did it all day and went out all night and got up the next day and just kept working.

You were obviously very motivated.

I was. It was all just so very exciting. It was all new and you're a young person and you're meeting all sorts of new young people...so all of a sudden there am I doing it before I even knew it. Whether I thought I would go in this direction or that direction, it was a lot like that classic...life chose me before I chose it.

Tell me about Countdown magazine. What was all that about?

Oh well, Donald Robertson did that, so there's an indication. Donald's a lovely fella and I can look at people and see different career paths in the music game and I don't have a judgemental attitude, whether you go the low road or the high road or whatever you're going to do. Do what you do, do it well and that's fine. I have a problem with charlatans and rip-off artists and things like that, so Donald thought; "get this magazine and spin it off Countdown". You sort of go; "Dur, why didn't somebody think of that before when **Countdown** was a huge kind of TV show?" but all I really remember was maybe it started '82 or '83 after Roadrunner went down. Donald had moved Roadrunner up to Sydney from Adelaide.

This was the broad outline that I recall and Roadrunner sort of folded and it was probably hard for Roadrunner because I know for myself at that time, I just couldn't write for Roadrunner anymore because they didn't pay, and I had to earn a crust like everybody. I was on the dole. Everybody was on the dole. That's what happened in those days, everybody was on the dole, and you got 50 bucks a week and you probably needed 100 bucks to live so you had to get money additionally, so I wrote for RAM, and I wrote for newspapers for pay. I couldn't work for free; I couldn't justify it and so Roadrunner fizzled out and Donald got up Countdown and that **Countdown magazine**, it's not like it came out of the TV show office or anything like that. Donald ran that and he edited it accordingly. I guess they may have had some discussions or done a licensing deal with the ABC in order to use the title, there must have been some consultation between the Countdown TV producers and the magazine, but largely as I recall, it was just another magazine out of an office in Sydney which Donald was editing.

With your first book you just kept basically writing and then all these jobs would pop up. What happened after Countdown magazine? Where did you go from there?

Well, this is the mid-1980s now, and if we talk about my first book *Inner City Sound* that came along before then and that was sort of, I mean honestly, it was when Pulp magazine fizzled out, we had a half-finished issue, and I'd always had those art boards because I'd done a bit of commercial art. I had the odd little job occasionally. Back in those days I'd get a job as a paste up artist in an art studio, so I was doing that and I had those art boards which were never used for the very last **Pulp** so they'd already hung around for a year or so and kind of haunted me and I was definitely inspired by the

Sniffing Glue collection, and a few of those collections of fanzines, and I thought I'll just do this one and maybe initially I'll do a collection of Pulp fanzines but then I thought that's not going to cover everything that should be covered, so it just expanded out from there and perhaps I can get some pages off the other fanzines.

I could get some reprinted articles, mainly from RAM and Roadrunner, but virtually nothing from Juke or Rolling Stone, and then I'd chase around and get every photo that I needed, so I was living in a big share-house and people were answering the phone and taking messages for me and I was running around getting photos. I had all the magazines and decided I'll reprint this article, and I'll get these photos and put it all together. That time in the share-house there was a woman called Marjorie McIntosh who did a little bit of lay out after RAM magazine and so, if you look at the **Inner-City Sound** book, it's the same font that RAM always used because that's what Marjorie was used to using, and we put it together, and pasted it up on art boards just like we always did in fanzines. Anyway, remarkably, I found a publisher who was willing to put it out. I don't remember exactly all the details of how that happened. When I think back on it now, I think "Wow. How did that happen?" I mean honestly, I have to tell you half the things I reflect on. "How did this happen?" "How did I do that?" And very often I can't remember because I have fried a few brain cells. I marvel on some of the things we did just running on piss and vinegar and youthful energy and lots of beer and cigarettes.

And enthusiasm...

That was the overriding thing. If it had been something else that I was enthusiastic about I would have done that, but it was that absolute drive and it wasn't careerist, and I think that's probably a real point. It wasn't...I can't deny that when you do that, your ego is satisfied. "Oh wow", you know, like; "I do this and aren't I good?" But I'm pretty sure I know this was no career path to become successful and rich. I knew that. I must have. The intentions were kind of pure in that way.

So, you put it out as an extended fanzine in a sense?

That's what **Inner City Sound** was basically. It was a compendium of some of those fanzines with an emphasis on the **Pulp** stuff and the stuff that **Pulp** had never published and stuff that I'd written for magazines, and a few of the other usual suspects that had written for magazines, by the time the magazines had come to the fore and RAM and Roadrunner especially, because by 1980 or so the whole music scene really was quite different by then so the magazines were going **New Wave** so there was a huge explosion of all sorts of bands, and that gave the magazines tons of things they could cover and they needed people to cover it.

This book became a go-to, but you didn't realise that's what you were doing at the time?

No, not at all. You don't sort of think that, but you know probably my inspirations were things that became that. Whether it was **Nuggets** by Lenny Kaye, and that's a record that totally channelled in all sorts of history. I love the 'Rhino' edition with 6 CDs worth of it and its one of those expanded ones that's really justified. I love it and really play it a lot. So, when I heard that in real time I thought, "Wow, this is really significant and it's really important" and without overstating it, I just really enjoyed it, so approaching **Inner City Sound** was perhaps not dissimilar.

I've got to nail down what's been happening here for the past several years. That was all my objective was. Maybe I set the parameters too limitedly in some ways but on another hand, I can see the kind of logic I was thinking.

You went for ten years which was quite a big timeframe.

The original edition probably covered...it's hard to know when it starts. It starts with the Saints and Radio Birdman forming and they were both formed about 1974/75. The original edition was published in 1981, so it just went up to there. With the second edition I thought the real ending point was more like a mid-80s point so I extended it through there and felt that I needed to offer something different for a new edition, that was the logic there. What I was originally doing, it was just putting together a fanzine like I always had. Marjorie was doing the artwork on the boards, and I'd ring up people and extract a promise out of them to give me something and I did that to hundreds of people. I made them give me stuff and that's what happened.

The second edition was with the family tree?

The family tree, that was in the CD, that's where the family tree came out. I should actually put that into context because I originally did that family tree as a poster in about 1980, to look at the family tree that went in the CD, we could never fit it into the book but that was part of the inspiration way back when in the early '80s, thinking I'd done the family tree and people seemed to enjoy that and that fed into "Oh, why don't we do a best of for the fanzines?" But I couldn't fit that in there, but then when the CD came out with the family tree in it again, once again I extended that up to more like the mid-1980s period so on that fold-out version or the current version of the tree there's a bunch of stuff that has been added beyond 1980 up to the frame of the book's mid-80s ending. It was a big job to do too. It was one thing to do the family tree in the first place and you only do that by cutting and pasting and moving things around like a jigsaw puzzle. I started out on a computer, and I said "You know what? This is a bridge too far." It's easier to cut out bits of paper and move them around... I had the stuff pasted down and then just scanned in the stuff, put all the smaller scans together.

With the CD, how difficult was that? Getting approval.

Those things are a nightmare and it's a lot easier doing, say **Buried Country** which I did with old Aboriginal people in the bush, that can be pretty difficult. It has its own difficulties when I'm getting on to people of my own generation who might just live down the road but with whom I haven't spoken for 20 years or whatever, so it was a bit like that. **Laughing Outlaw records** was in good shape at that time and very helpful in getting some of those deals together. To be honest, in many ways, I'm not sure of dotting the I's and crossing the T's and all that happened at that time. I negotiated on an executive level with all the arts people involved. "We'll use this track. Get us the master and you can do some paperwork with Laughing Outlaw," and whenever anyone said "yes" I'd put a tick and we're right there. I was pretty pleased with the CD. I think most people were. It was up against **Tales of the Underground** and Guy Blackman did **Can't Stop It**. There were a whole bunch at that time, and they were all good for what they were at that time I thought. Because of the rights on that CD, if and when it goes out of print then that would probably be the end of it.

How did *Stranded* come about?

I used the tag from Sonic Youth, **1991: *The Year Punk Broke***, and I thought that was really appropriate but I guess at that time, the late '80s/early '90s, there was quite a bit of retrospection, I suppose you could call it, going on and there had been some good books and again, I can't help being inspired by John Savage's ***England's Dreaming***. I think it was a fantastic book and ***Please Kill Me*** was a fantastic book. Maybe that came out after ***Stranded***, but I'd thought ***Inner City Sound*** was more of an editing job so I thought I would do ***Stranded*** from a more personal angle. There's an aspect of memoir about which I thought I wanted to do because I was there, and it wouldn't have been quite so frank if I didn't put myself in the middle of things because I sort of was. I was keen to do it that way and follow through some of the major acts who by that time, the 1990's had been make or break, there was by that time a recognition for those people who had come through. It's happened a lot, more so for other people since then if you talk about your Nick Caves and the Go-Betweens and your Triffids and those sort of people and there's others like Ed Kuepper sort of, but by the 90s they were, well put it this way, they were starting to be given ARIA awards twenty years after they'd started so I guess I thought maybe people now would be interested in hearing. Maybe that also came about because I had been asked; "Would I be interested in writing a Nick Cave biography?" which I said "no" to. I wasn't interested in doing nor was I interested in writing a biography of the Saints as such, you know, Ed Kuepper and Chris Bailey, but my thinking went, I don't want to do something that specific, but it became ***Stranded*** which was just a much more fleshed-out, personalised version of ***Inner-City Sound*** in a way.

But you did *Highway to Hell*. So, you said no to writing a book about Nick Cave and The Saints, but you went on to write about the life and death of Bon Scott, so how did that come about?

I guess I became aware of what a great story it was. I'd been a fan of the very early AC/DC. I guess for me they got swept aside by a lot of that punk stuff which happened for a lot of people. sort of swept aside from what had gone before and in a lot of instances you could go back later and go "Well, that was good anyway," but you just went down a different path at that time, but I was aware of the significance and success of AC/DC and all of that, but I don't know. It started as a film which a friend and I started to write.; "Wouldn't a film about Bon Scott be just bloody brilliant?" and we went "Yeah". We started to write this film and then I realised, or we found out because we were getting some interest, but we realised that there was no way we were going to make a film without the support of **Alberts Music** and that wasn't going to happen, and I held on to this idea and said I'm going to write a book. I can write a book if I can't write a film, so I reversed that which I've really done ever since. I had the feeling of any book I'd done; it could be a film and written a little mindfully of that, which was a lot like when that documentary ***Stranded*** came along and was annoying because I had proposed a documentary called ***Stranded*** which was very much the same story as the book and even going back to when it first came out, it was pitched around by two different TV producers but it didn't get anywhere.

It's a shame they couldn't consult more with you in the making of that documentary.

There was no consultation whatsoever. There's a legal term for it called 'passing off' when, there's no percentage in getting lawyers in anything when it comes to these intellectual property disputes. There's no winning for anybody and it pretty much was a 'passing off' case if you're doing that story under that title. Now, okay, that was a title from a song by **The Saints**, but titles are fixed at different mediums, and can take on different meanings, so I've always done everything I do with a, "if not me then somebody else can make films out of the stuff." I've made films from some of my stuff and I've been royally fucked over on a couple other of my books but certainly Bon Scott started as a movie, but I'd written a book instead and ever since it's been out I've had a steady stream of film producers come to me saying "Well I'd like to" and I just go "Oh, good luck" and it's still happening, people are still trying and I say to them "It's not going to happen unless you can get the support of Albert's Music" and I don't know how you can do that.

What's the problem? Why wouldn't Albert's Music...?

It's just their nature. They are so protective of their property which is AC/DC and their songs. They're very protective of the image that they have of what AC/DC is and it's very different now because they're licencing things out. They'll licence a song out to a movie or something like that but I'm pretty certain that Angus and Malcolm did not want to see themselves up on screen as second fiddle to their former comrade who I think they probably feared may have been portrayed in a less than favourable light which isn't the case. **Highway to Hell** for me was driven by a huge love of Bon. I love Bon but I told the truth about the warts and all and that's not the worst of it either. If you said Malcolm and Angus were control freaks it wouldn't be far from the truth and you can put yourself in their position "I don't want a movie up there about Bon", all those sort of reasons, and that's why Alberts, which is really bankrolled by the Young family, would go "no" and it's the position they've maintained strongly to this day and as I say, they're now doing a few more licencing deals around the place, no doubt because every time they do one it's worth millions and millions and millions of dollars.

You basically by default, in a sense, became a rock music historian/journalist simply because you started a fanzine in 1977.

I guess I sort of realised I was set on that trajectory without perhaps thinking about it or analysing it and just doing it, and I had admitted some rock writers among other writers and artists, as in art, who I admired and would have liked to because I was really into and still doing more of comic book illustration graphic art and still like that and so, yes, I did. I became this thing and to be quite honest in a hey day I was turning out lots of words for lots of newspapers and magazines and then I started doing books, but I don't really do journalism anymore. I could put it this way, *geez; the field was pretty weak for me to streak so far into the lead because the other horses were crippled, or I don't know what was wrong with them.* You could presume me as being a bit arrogant or something, but I do look at some of my peers. I dunno, just doing Bon Scott's story, I mean that was ten years after he's gone when I cottoned on and thought I would write this book. I thought "Wow, how come nobody else has done this?" and that's what happened to me. I get onto it and go "Wow, how come nobody else has done it. You better shut up or else they'll come and gazump me." So, I find those things. I guess that's what I'm saying, "Am I the only guy who can see this going on?"

What's wrong with the rest of you?" I do feel that with some of the music writers of my vintage that they were, I don't know, maybe they were careerists or wanted to be band managers or maybe they wanted to be publishers and have a publishing house or all those other things. I just wanted to find the good stories and somehow, occasionally, they seemed to be there for the taking.

You were a pivotal behind the scenes person?

Look, and again I can say about my erstwhile colleagues and peers, and I can feel more comfortable in saying this because it might not seem so arrogant but when it comes to research, no one can touch me and I'm just obsessive. I dig and I dig and I dig. I've been a record collector forever and I love libraries and all that, so yeah, I just take that as one of the fundamental mechanical things that you've got to do, so to this day there's people talking in my biography of Bon who have never spoken to anybody in his last days before there was an internet. I got to know Mary [Renshaw]. I knew Mary through people anyway and she was really helpful and introduced me to a few people like Irene, Bon's ex-wife, and Vince Lovegrove, the late Vince Lovegrove, he was still alive at that time, and he was a great help to me too. But those in particular that I'm talking about are Bon's last days, his girlfriend Ana Baba, the Japanese girl, and a couple of other people. Nobody even tried to speak to them. Alastair Kay at that time, he was well hidden as we found, so I couldn't find him. Yeah, I did the leg work and that's what you've got to do and I think there are just too many writers who aren't prepared to do the legwork and I think it just shows in the results, but it is time consuming and it's amazing even to this day what is not on the internet and it's amazing what you can find but that's time consuming too. Not everything pops up at the top of the first page and I'm especially flattered when many of these musicians, who are younger than me, will say something praising.

The Hard Ons used to say to me and Simon from the **Hummingbirds** "Oh, we just got that book, and it became our roadmap, and we worked everything out by going through that book". So, I felt it's really flattering to think that for musicians that was a place and that's what I mean by "Be careful what you wish for" because Lenny Kaye's **Nuggets** album was like that for me. I got that and went "Wow", and I listened to that record and said, "I've just got to get all those bands" and then there's all the other bands as well and that's what did that for me, and **Inner-City Sound** became that for other people. By being young and naïve and not thinking about it I was totally enacting a sort of tradition there. Those were the people that I really admired that did those things. There was Lenny Kaye and that. There was Nik Cohn who wrote **Awopbopaloobop alopbamboom** and wrote **Rock Dreams** and I'm still working on a homage to Nik Cohn and **Rock Dreams** and other writers. Lester Bangs and Mick Canton and those sorts of people also really turned me on and then came Peter Guralnick who, I started to read him and that's when I went into more hardcore, and onto rhythm and blues. I was always into blues but rhythm and blues, soul, and country music, so in many ways **Buried Country** is not much different to **Lost Highway** which Peter Guralnick wrote too, so I can peg myself back to all those aspirations very easily even if I didn't know it at the time.

To finish off with, how important do you think punk was as a historical music movement?

I honestly believe it was hugely important because it did level the playing field and I've been given pause to reflect it's mainly about white boys and it sort of was. There were a few white girls but more white boys, but they were just starting to kick down the doors and as it continued on more and more and so it just took music, and I think popular culture away from this Hollywood glamour paradigm that was totally in place by the 1970s. I've got no doubt that in the 1950s, rock'n'roll was a radical thing; Elvis, bloody Chuck Berry and all that and it was multi-racial for one thing and it was really just blues, and the Beatles and Rolling Stones and then rock'n'roll just settled into this big glamorous moneymaking machine and some of that music was good but a lot of it wasn't.

I think the idea that punk had, to me, to see the most important thing about it was not a generic sound but more that attitude of just, well, do it yourself and if you were just some scrungy kid from some scrungy suburb then all the more reason that you should be the one doing something and just because you're some scrungy kid from some scrungy suburb doesn't mean to say that you've got no right, that you're not some glamorous Hollywood superstar. Well fuck that! And I think ever since then, that has been a really big legitimate part of not just music but pop culture generally, because independent filmmaking had always gone along, but after that a lot of people got the whole idea and it may have coincided with the early '80s and the immediate aftermath of the late '70s thing, it was all about capitalism and big money. It was. All that 'greed is good' era would have set in encouraging the idea that there's got to be an alternative to that, so I think reclaiming the barricade, do it yourself attitude that the punk scene sparked in the late '70s, that totally underpinned a whole cultural change that happened in the 1980s that happened through film making, to art making as well as music and literature too. There's a whole literary scene, style, it's a language that was much more about urban realities. I'm still doing it. Do it yourself, no one else is going to do it.