

## **THE CRYSTAL REVIEWED**

**By Patrick Miles**

**A variety of senses motivate people to see a rock 'n' roll band. It is impossible to cater to everybody's whims and invariably someone is thoroughly peeved with the conditions in which they hear a band.**

**Animal involvement, casual observance and uninterrupted study swirl together in differing levels of audience participation and someone's night is a painful one.**

I have yet to visit all of Melbourne's venues however the Crystal Ballroom in St. Kilda, due mainly to its size and layout, provides a roomy cage for healthy co-habitation of different kinds of people.

The grandiose decor of the Crystal Ballroom initially seems incongruous with some of the human remnants that patronise the place.

I saw Man and Machine one night and Rose Tattoo another and all types attended.

There was perhaps, a predominance of people heavily drugged by something and wearing heavily-badged rain-coats, but there were always exceptions which made things a little more interesting for the bored indifferent..

The entrance seems royal-the glass door is opened from the inside and the foyer provides a gentle buffer between the street and the maelstrom

of the main room.

One may hover in the foyer and browse through a selection of records on a counter (not every night), play the decrepit pinball machine, or just rub badges with the punky-reggae-rich kids.

If you are in the animal involvement class, then the dancing area is adequate.

For the casual observer, unless the place is really crowded, there is room to stand at the side and wander back and forth from the bar to the raised carpeted area at the back.

If you're heavily into uninterrupted study you



can stand in this elevated area and watch the band in relative comfort and certainly hear well.

The stage is a good size, not too high, and if you like to stroke Eric Gradman's leg, as some girls do, you can.

The decor is that of an old theatre with opaque windows adorned by Roman soldiers astride rearing horses.

(Is this Symbolic?-Ed.)

The chandeliers, normally associated with opulence, give a furniture showroom effect.

The latrines are quite satisfactory. There was a complaint, though, about lack of paper in the women's lavatories.

A point in the Ballroom's favour is the availability of

refuges if the band is lousy or if the volume has become anus-clenching.

Wandering up and down the stairs is popular, as I mentioned before and on some nights there is another complete room downstairs where a different band plays.

*Of course as at any gig, it pays to keep all senses at maximum alertness for projectiles, flailing arms and legs and lighted cigarettes searing past the face in the grip of some disembodied hand.*

In conclusion, the Crystal Ballroom is a comfortable place to see a band, whatever you're involvement. The sound was good the times I went but if you're a roadie lifting equipment in and out it's worth double the money!

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Laurie Richards is one of the more colourful characters on the Melbourne venue scene.

He currently runs The Crystal Ballroom venue at the Seaview Hotel in downtown St. Kilda. It is arguably one of the few venues with a strongly individualistic character and image, which means that it has both a strong following as a venue in its own right as well as its fair share of people who hate it for the young, middle-class image-conscious crowds that regularly frequent the place.

Laurie's history goes back to Hamilton. Eight years ago, after reading an article in the local paper attacking the lack of entertainment for the young kids of Hamilton, Laurie, still at school, decided to do something drastic. He went to Melbourne, introduced himself around the agencies, and booked Daddy Cool for a big Town Hall show.

Setting the pattern for almost everything he's done since, he flew the band into Hamilton in a blaze of publicity that made it onto the front page of the local rag. 2000 kids turned up, and Laurie's future in the rock industry was set.

Laurie Richards is a chirpy, affable character whose eight years in the business has given

him a hand-edged business sense he probably never thought he'd develop. But he continues to operate in as spectacular a manner as possible.

"My trademark has always been spending money *on* something that I couldn't possibly make *out* of it," he says with a self-effacing smile in his office in the Seaview Hotel. "But I've always run my shows and venues at a standard or quality that I'd like to go along to myself."

When I ask him just how much of a music fan he is himself, he says it's taken him the full eight years to wear his interest in bands down to something approximating common (and business) sense. That



enthusiasm persists, however.

"I think I'm successful in the fact that I've got a real interest in it, that I've got a flair for it, and that I did things that were different and interesting."

Has Laurie Richards always operated as an independent?

"Oh yes", he says almost defiantly, "always independent, fiercely independent."

Being an independent has its share of problems it seems.

"It's a small industry," explains Laurie, "and most people in it seem to have banded together — especially now when times are tough. A lot of the flash goes out of the biz and it gets more serious when times are tough."

How long have times been tough, and why should they be when there seems to be so much Australian music around?

"Just this year really," he answers, "from the point when the Sydney scene seemed to take off for the first time and Sydney bands started dominating the industry."

"I could have tied myself in with somebody, but I decided there was nothing worth tying myself in with, nothing that I thought was any good."

"If I worked for an agency and for a wage I'd lose interest in the whole thing."

The obvious question is: is the Melbourne scene really in a bad way?

"It's true that there aren't as

many exciting new Melbourne bands at the moment," replies Laurie after a moment's pause.

"I think the only prospects at the moment are maybe Eric Gradman's Man & Machine, Boys Next Door, Pop Gun Men, Tch Tch Tch . . . like, there are some prospects but not many compared to what's happening in Sydney."

(Laurie also mentioned Models, who just happened to break up soon after the interview.)

"But it's not just that," he continues. "When people keep saying 'Melbourne's down' it just snowballs and helps keep it that way. It's a psychological thing."

"I'm fortunate myself because the bands here are more off-beat, off the track a bit."

One of Laurie's pet subjects is the agency situation in Melbourne. The currently healthy situation in Sydney, he says, is partly due to the "maverick promoters and managers" who "move things along and make things happen".

He dislikes the combined roles that Melbourne agencies, in particular Premier Artists ("I really can't avoid mentioning them, I keep running into them like a brick wall"), play. They are, he says, not just agencies but also promoters who "play chess with the bands to fill their venues". **Cont. Overleaf.....**



### Music Makers Cont.....

"It's pretty bad", says Laurie "when gig guides tell you who's on where but still have to put a note down the bottom saying that bands are subject to change by the booking agency. That's how unreliable the whole thing is — you can't book a band and know they're going to be there almost until they arrive."

Laurie was always one for putting on special one-off gigs, but these have had a nasty habit, he says, of being undermined by the problems associated with unreliable bookings of bands.

"It can also fuck up the crowds for both bands and promoters", he adds, "as well as lowering consumer faith in

knowing where bands are playing".

Two recent examples of the above almost tempted him to quit the business, says Laurie, the first time that dastardly thought has come to him in his eight years as a venue promoter.

But the irrepressible Richards hasn't given up and has come up with a new idea yet again — giving away special limited edition singles of bands that play The Crystal Ballroom on certain well-promoted nights. The show goes on.

A lot of people criticise Laurie, his venues, his prices, his style, but the Melbourne scene would definitely but a lot more drab without him.





## Article about Graeme Richmond, 1984

# Tiger of the music scene

**MENTION** the name Graeme Richmond and people know you're talking football.

Richmond was vice president at Tigerland for several years, as well as being team manager and chief recruiting officer.

He brings to mind the black-and-yellow jumper, premiership wins, pies, beer and the MCG.

But there is a surprising side to this man, whose usual company is the likes of Kevin Sheedy, Francis Bourke, Kevin Bartlett and Dr Allen Aylett.

For the past six years Richmond has run the Seaview Ballroom in St. Kilda, one of Melbourne's best-known rock venues.

To some degree the ballroom was responsible for bolstering Melbourne's pub rock scene to what it is today.

Richmond said yesterday, on the eve of the ballroom's sixth anniversary celebrations, that he'd always had a keen interest in rock music.

"Over the six years I've hired a number of promoters to book the bands, but just before Christmas I took over doing this," he said.

"I believe without a doubt that the future of hotels lies in hosting live rock performances."

Richmond said there were few live-music hotels when he opened the venue with the Sports.

"At the time none of the big beer barns had even opened," he said.

It comes as a bit of a surprise to



● **GRAEME Richmond** ... six years at the Seaview Ballroom.

hear Richmond talking of the local rock scene with the knowledge you'd expect from a Molly Meldrum.

"By far the best band we have had here was Midnight Oil," he said.

"Their front man Peter Garrett is a very charismatic figure, a real showman."

Richmond said the wildest shows at the ballroom were probably by the Birthday Party.

"Nick has a tremendous amount of support from the patrons here," he said.

"I think he could fill the place up if he just got up and played a gum leaf.

"We had some full-on nights when Rose Tattoo first appeared here as well. You'd just stand there wondering what they'd do next.

"Another night which was over the top was when the Johnnys appeared and threw hay over the audience.

"There have been a few punk bands who have been able to whip the audience up into a total frenzy, like I Spit On Your Gravy."

Richmond said local bands who had gone on to bigger things after starting at the ballroom included the Models, Serious Young Insects and the Boys Next Door, who became Birthday Party.

As part of their sixth birthday celebrations today, the ballroom will feature top reggae outfit Man Friday this afternoon.

Tonight it's Chris Bailey, formerly of the Saints, Sydney psychedelic punk outfit the Wet Taxis and the unforgettable Crushed Buzzards.



## Holly's fame grows

**YESTERDAY** was the 25th anniversary of "the day the music died."

On February 3, 1959, young American performer Buddy Holly, the inspiration for Don Maclean's "American Pie," died in a plane crash with J.P. Richardson, known as the Big Bopper, and Richie Valens.

Though he had only a short career, Buddy's effect on music is staggering.

Paul McCartney has said the bespectacled rocker's music is "timeless."

"One of the original influences on the Beatles, he gave every boy next door confidence," he said.

● **DUE** to a mix up, Sydney band the Church won't appear on the national Olympic telethon as advertised.



● **BUDDY HOLLY**



## Text by Laurie Richards, 2000

My stewardship of the Crystal Ballroom commenced in September 1979. Graham Richmond at that time was the president of the Richmond Football Club and was in partnership with Francis Burke. Francis was the Captain of the Richmond Football Club and the Licensee of the Royal Oak Hotel which I had named and ran as "The Tiger Lounge". Graham had been hounding me for a over a year to come and have a look at the "Seaview Hotel" in fact as early as 1978 I had arranged a couple of Band residency's for the hotel in the room that now houses the George Art Gallery. It was after I closed the Tiger Lounge, that I promised to have a good look "to get him off my back".

I will always remember that day, I had never been in the place only driven by, at the time the hotel had the reputation as possible the worst in Australia. Firstly I noticed the grand entrance way and more importantly that this part of the hotel could be isolated from the rest of the Hotel, next thing that caught my eye was the marble staircase half way up on the first landing I noticed a large window bordered up, after prizing it open I found a 10ft lead glass of St. George slaying the dragon, now I was getting excited, finding the ballroom I noticed all the windows where papered over and after peeling back the wallpaper discovered etched in the glass by sandblasting St. George and the Dragon, climbing up to the giant chandeliers, yes They where real crystal, well that settled the name "Crystal Ballroom" I named it not realising any past names or the Hotels history. The deal with Graham Richmond was "yes I'll run this place but only if he will clean it up and renovated to my specifications", he later claimed that cost him 10,000 1979 \$dollars I found out from his two man builder team he bartered the cost away by letting them help themselves to the marble fireplaces and classic cedar doors on the two derelict floors above, what a shame all these things have disappeared when the hotel became derelict although Donleavy made a valiant effort in tracking them down and attempting to buy them back, most who now posses them, wanted far to much, you and unfortunately the statue of limitations on stolen goods was well over the 7 years limit. HAVE

Well the work was done, the Bands booked, the P.R. went out and on opening night Sat 1500 kids lined up around the block. I was well aware of the next generation of music & art emerging on the world scene having already experimented at "The Tiger Lounge" by nominating an early in the week night to the new generation of bands such as the "Boys next Door" and early versions of the models "The teenage Radio Stars" etc. It was obvious to me that the new generation was about to sweep away the older, complacent bands of the previous era. But to me it was not only the music It was also the graphic artists such as Phil Brophy and Maria Kocic, the theatre, and Fanzines etc( we produced our own fanzine edited by Bruce Milne who probably started Australia's first. Bruce went on to start Au-Go-Go records and now is A&R for Virgin EMI) and the Emerging new technology especially Video. This was pre-domestic VHS, which did not exist yet, I had already been experimenting with Big screens, video camera's and 3/4 inch U-matic recording tape machines at the "Tiger Lounge" At the Ballroom I had up to 2 camera on the stage and a video feed to other rooms with big screens and TV;s scattered around over two floors floors in 5 rooms as well as the foyer, I hired students from R.M.I.T film school to run the camera's many going on to become well known video clip makers e.g "The Rich Kids, we gave the overseas bands copies of there performance's (this lead to reciprocal gifts such as the rare video of the Sex Pistols "live" in Amsterdam given to me by Melbourne boy and then heads of Virgin Records in London Laurie Dunn). Bands such as The Cure, Wreckless Eric, U.K. Squeeze all said that they had just toured England, Europe & The States but had never seen anything in the World, Like or as good as the Crystal Ballroom". Needless to say it also caused much talk around the country as evident by the visit from promoters of major venues as far away as Perth, Sydney, Queensland and one from London, not to mention locals whom you would never expect to see in such a place, such as a certain Restaurantuer from Middle park and the rather corpulent promoter of the last laugh. Legends of the Ballroom abounded, one that comes to mind I naively created. It's Impact and obvious "credibility" promotional effect was relayed to me years later, at one stage I decided I needed to get fit and not liking conventional ways such as gyms or jogging I thought If I helped the crews lug out the gear at the end of the night that might improve my fitness, never realising for a moment the incredulous road crews and the effect, apparently word went around the country of the promoter of the then best live venue in Australia helping the crews load out. My vision, realised, was for far more than just a great music venue but an arts precinct, a community of artistic souls. yes many came just to see the audience. We created posters that where limited edition hand screen nrinted and together with Keith Glass then the owner of Missing Link



.Paradoxically for a hotel and area at the time with such a rough image I deliberately had women only run the door and the security(Although Paula was a pretty daunting white version of Grace Jones with a razor sharp tongue, probably the original archetype club door bitch) in the 12 to 18 months I was there I only remember two incidents, one I sorted out in 20 seconds(a domestic between girlfriend & boyfriend) and the other the audience "corrected" as the gentlemen who caused the "incident" was being carried out by his two "Model" girlfriends, one girlfriend was overheard to say to the doorgirl "that he deserved it" all which went to show the sense of family and community that existed there, Something that many promoters today who's only eye is on the bottom line could learn from. All this came to an end when one of the graphic Artists I used, came to me with bruising and black eyes and related how when being "Artistic" on one of the toilet walls (the practice I encouraged and Graham had to endure) he had been grabbed by one of Graham's big Maori bouncers, who should not have been in my side of the building anyway, we had agreed that his "Hells Kitchen" security would stay in there side of the building and never interfere in the Ballroom side, but graham could not resist "fully utilising staff" so whilst this gentlemen should only have been collecting glasses he manhandled John into the back of the bar where Graham proceeded to bash him senseless after which he was dumped unconscious in the back alley. On hearing this I was horrified and incensed, on making discreet inquiries I was even more dismayed to discover from his staff that this was a regular occurrence, the way Graham relieved his stress, even more so at this period as Richmond where into the Grand final, even a discreet enquiry through the wife of the then, secretary of the Liquor Control Commission, came back with the reply "yes we know about Graham and many such incidents but until he either seriously injures someone who will take him to court or kills someone our hands are tied" at this stage my discreet inquiries had got back to Mr. Richmond and after a very curt meeting I walked out of the Crystal Ballroom forever taking the name "crystal" with me, thereafter it was only legally allowed to be known as the "Ballroom". As one could imagine there was a queue of would be promoters waiting to take my place and fully exploit all that had been created.

Laurence J. Richards October 1st 2000.

p.s. I should also mention my partner at the time, Marie Collins," behind every "great" man is a great women"  
she added a lot of the style, especially at the front door. Being a Toorak Hairdresser from Port Melbourne she possessed the right combination of tolerance and class.