

Dolores San Miguel (Mods)

I was 14 when I first started going to dances or 13 or 14, so I was probably around 14 when I was looking at English fashion, Mary Quant clothes. My mother was getting the patterns for me and making the crepe dress.

Mary Quant wasn't a mod per se, was she? She was The Queen of mod fashion?

Yes, she was in England and Mary Quant clothes came through to Australia and, of course, it was early Beatles.

Were they considered a mod band at the time?

Yes, they were, so Beatles, The Who, Rolling Stones, they were all followed by the mods...it was the fashion. It was the models of the time. Twiggy, Jean Shrimpton, and Patti [Boyd]...the mod thing was pretty much an English thing that the Australians took on.

So how did it transpire here? Was it because a lot of the English immigrants moved out to Adelaide and moved up to Melbourne or was it more about being influenced by the fashion magazines?

I'd say it was quite a few immigrants with things like the Easybeats and so forth. They were sort of a mod band etc, but it was probably the magazines that we'd get.

What magazines were you reading at the time?

I can't remember their names. It was too long ago. I can picture them.

Where would you get them? The newsagents?

Yes, the newsagents. It would take them a long time to arrive, but you'd get them regularly.

So, you would see the pictures of Mary Quant fashion and the bands, and did they talk about the mods?

Yeah, and it also called the girls in England dolly birds, and that was the false eyelashes top and bottom. So, yeah, you'd really follow the fashion and the look, and you'd go to the dances, and you'd listen to the music...There were some dances very early on where they didn't have live bands but the ones where they didn't have live bands would be playing the music, you know, the records.

What kind of dancing were you doing?

Oh, well, you've probably seen go-go girls, you were kind of doing go-go dancing.

And the Watutsi?

Yeah, all those kind of dances...You'd get an influence from America too, but the actual fashion was really the English thing, and the models were the English thing but then you'd see some stuff of American. There'd be Nancy Sinatra, 'These boots are made for walking'. It's not so much a mod song but she wore the mod fashion, the high boots and that look.

What was your hair like back then? Was it quite long.

Oh, yeah, long. It was always long...I never had a fringe back then that suited me...and then there was the Cilla Black look, the bob look. Vidal Sassoon sort of created that bob look and certain cuts but the mod girls mainly had that long look.

Did you follow the English fashion and look, or did you invent your own Australian version of mods?

There ended up being some really good Australian designers such as 'House of Merivale' so they created, in a way, a sort of Australian version of the mod English look. So, there were shops that you would buy Australian fashion, but I guess they were copying the English look as well.

**Established by John and Merivale Hemmes, the landmark House of Merivale and clothing designed by Merivale revolutionised the Australian fashion scene. John and Merivale Hemmes were mavericks in Australian fashion. Modelled on London's famous concept boutiques and catering to 18–25-year-olds, the House of Merivale was the first specialty fashion boutique in Australia.*

The House of Merivale was not just a shop; it was a phenomenon that significantly influenced a generation of young Australian's attitude to shopping and the fashion experience. The House of Merivale was the place to go to for the latest trends in music, fashion and make-up and was the first store in Australia to sell the mini. The popularity of the boutique was such that teenagers would be lined up outside the door.

<https://circavintageclothing.com.au/2009/07/21/the-house-of-merivale-and-a-dress-with-history/>

Apart from the House of Merivale, do you remember who else?

The House of Merivale was the biggest and there were a couple of smaller boutiques in the city and then there were a few of the department stores. There was the department store called Darrods. That was in Bourke Street. D A double R O D S...and they had a groovy shop. Myer Melbourne also had a groovy shop called the 'In Shop' so there were a few of the department stores got into it...but the House of Merivale was the biggest, had the best fashion.

And what about the shoes?

Usually, I'd buy them from a department store like Myer or something.

And what were they like?

I clearly remember one pair what I was wearing after I'd met the guy from the Cherokees, the band.

I was only 15. He'd given me his address. I went in the morning, they'd played the night before and I arrived at 9 o'clock, you see. I had the morning off because I was hairdressing, but I told mum I was working so I left home in my uniform but I had clothes to change into so I had this dress, actually which I think I got from Myer and it was like felt and it was purple and lime green and I had purple stockings because I don't think pantyhose had been introduced at that stage so it was still probably stockings and the shoes were patent leather and they were bright purple and they sort of had like a square, they weren't pointed, like a chunky heel.

Then you'd be going to venues. What were the main venues?

The one that was the best as far as the way they had been done out was 'Berties' and the 'Thumpin' Tum'...

You said that this Bertie's was really decked out...

Yes, it was all these different stories. I mean, why they pulled the building down, it was magnificent, it should have been heritage listed but back in the 60s they pulled things down all the time, but it was a magnificent really old building. What it was originally, I don't know, but it had all these, probably about four or five, floors and the family that owned it or started up Berties did it all up. So, there'd be one floor where the bands were playing, the next floor there'd be a coffee shop or a bar then there'd be another floor where they'd sell food then there'd be another something else. It was just stunning, stunning...

And was the whole place done decadently?

Yes, really in luxurious Edwardian type furniture and furnishings. All that sort of thing and the owner...the way he dressed, and his staff were always dressed beautifully as well.

So, you felt quite decadent going there?

Yes, yes, because it was in the city, and it was open late and stuff like that. It was a little different to going to your normal local dance.

What was it about the mod sub-culture that attracted you to it?

The look, the fashion, the boys because they all had the look of the Beatles, Rolling Stones or The Who or something like that and they dressed nicely, suits, whereas the sharpies were just kind of, like rough as can be and all they wanted to do was fight and they kind of like, they always went around in packs...they were bogans but they had, actually, they didn't have any guts because they wouldn't go out by themselves ever, the girls and the boys, just went around in packs and they'd always try and attack the mods because the mods didn't go around in packs.

So why do you think, obviously there was fighting between mods and the rockers in London and then the mods and sharpies here, what do you think of that gang or sub-culture rivalry?

Well, the mods didn't want to fight. They didn't want to have anything to do with it, but they had to stick up for themselves or for their girlfriends. What the sharpies would do, you see, there was another place in the city that we'd go to in the city at lunch time, '10th Avenue', that was in Bourke Street, a very small dark little place and they had live bands on every lunch time. There was another place in the city called 'The Bowl'. There were quite a few places in the city open at lunch time...and also the 'Biting Eye' was open on Sunday afternoon, you'd go up a little staircase. Then the big place like 'The Catcher' which was open until 5am in the morning and stuff...A lot of the smaller venues such as 10th Avenue and the Bowl etc wouldn't allow the sharpies in whereas The Catcher, because it was such a huge thing, and quite often Lobby Loyde's band, the Coloured Balls, would play there so quite often they would let sharpies in but what the sharpies would do, they'd hang outside, all of those different venues and just wait for the mods to come out and they'd be sitting there with beer bottles and stuff and knives and all they were there for was to bash up the mods really. So, the mods never wanted to have anything to do with fighting.

You mention Lobby Loyde before and you said, what was the band the mods loved that he was in?

Purple Hearts.

Why were the mods into that band in particular? Because then he became the sharpies' hero really.

Yeah, but that was more the 70s, early 70s. They were sort of a mod band, the Purple Hearts, sort of more, the way the lead singer was blonde and good looking, mod haircut and so on and so forth.

What local bands would you say were mods? Purple Hearts were one.

The Easybeats were, even though they were a Sydney band. Ray Columbus and the Invaders. I think he was originally from New Zealand, but his band had the hit 'She's a Mod'...

Mods were really a 60s sub-culture, I know, and it was revived a bit in the late '70s with bands like Little Murders but how, from your perspective in the '60s, how there was an early 60s sharpies sub-culture as well that kind of revived in the 70s but were the 60s sharpies as full on as the '70s sharpies because I thought there was a bit of...they were nicer dressed than the '70s sharpies.

They still dressed in their own way in the '60s and the fashion didn't change much really. They still had the same fashion outlets.

So, from your perspective, how long did the mod scene, before its revival in the 70s, how long did the scene stick around?

I suppose by the late '60s, I think it was 68 or 69 when The Beatles went to India and they got into all that Indian music and so that's when the hippy thing sort of crept in and you've got the American side, the hippies there, the Summer of '69 or whatever it was, so that was kind of the end of the mod scene.

Would you say it was from 64 to 69?

Yes, probably. 68 maybe.

What happened to a lot of those mods in terms of fashion?

I think they all became hippies because there was such a big influence. A lot of them got into Hare Krishna and that. A lot of them travelled because back then that was when everybody was starting to travel overseas. Quite often people would go on their way to London, they'd go to Afghanistan or somewhere like that and quite often they might also go and join an ashram or stay at a kibbutz, so yeah, that whole hippy thing came in.

So a lot of people went hippy and you went punk?

No, at the end of '71 I went to London, followed the boyfriend...I wasn't actually a mod then because the mod thing had passed but I wasn't a hippy either but then we travelled, eventually in '73 when I was in London. The early 70s was very much vintage clothing and so I got into that. You'd dress to be very 1940 or 1930s and stuff like that and that was huge in England.

Did it have a name, like a sub-culture name?

No, not at all.

So, you were just shopping at a lot of op shops?

Well, the op shops but they also had stores that carried clothes from the 30s and 40s.

Were they still affordable or did they bump the price up?

Oh, they bumped the prices up for sure.

Did you know much about the whole mod revival with Little Murders because you were sort of around?

Oh, yes. I booked them quite often.

So, what was your take on that? The whole 70s mod thing?

I thought it was great.

So, were people reembracing the whole mod sub-culture?

Yeah, but some of them thought it was quite new because they were all 10, 11, 12 years younger than me.

Were they dressing in the same gear as you guys in the 1960s?

A little bit different, yeah, no, a bit different.

You guys weren't riding scooters and stuff, were you?

No...Lynne Randell, she was like Australia's, especially Melbourne's mod. She was called 'Little Miss Mod'...she and her manager used to come in and used to have their hair done at 'Moore's Hair Salon' where I worked...Also around that time of the mods there was the surfies so if you went to the beach and you were a mod you became a surfie to a certain degree, they were close together...There were dances all over the place in suburbs like Mentone or Balwyn.

So, were these mod dances?

Yes, yes.

What's the Odd Mod?

That's where I used to go in Kew. So, the dances at Kew had all these different names. It was called 'Odd Mod', 'Kew Club', it had different names but during the mod period it was called Odd Mod...Dinah Lee. She was the New Zealand mod and she was big in Australia.

Text in **italics and link added by Punk Journey*