

Hotel Esplanade (The Espy)

Fred Negro

"I moved from Richmond to St Kilda in 1975. The flat was on the corner of Robe Street and the Upper Esplanade. (It used to be a hotel too!) Anyway, that night, I wandered down to my local for the first time. As I approached, I noticed an ambulance parked on the footpath. Instead of a sign that said 'Ambulance' it had 'Dead Livers' in the same writing. Normally I never went into pubs, but curiosity killed the liver, and I summoned up my courage and entered The Espy for the first time.

It was love at first pot. I knew as soon as I walked in, I was never going to leave. Outlaw Country Rock band, the Dead Livers were on stage singing songs about St Kilda and Warnambool. The audience comprised drug-fucked and drunk tattooed bikies, transvestites, and gays with flowers in their hair, blokes named 'Lucky' without arms or limbs (who were usually good pool players) and the typical St Kilda tourists. I couldn't bring myself to tell the young tourists from the suburbs that the sweet honey they were dancing with had one more appendage than they were expecting. Everyone was having a good time.

Not long after I joined The Editions I bumped into Marty Atchison, singer of the Dead Livers, in the Espy toilets. I asked him if we could cover their song 'Holy Mary' - a great song about dropping acid in Warnambool. His response was to give me advice on urination and excretion, "Don't force it son." We became great mates even though he barracked for Hawthorn (luckily most of the band barracked for the Pies).

The only other entertainment at The Espy in this era was various cover bands and the legendary Ted and Grace. Ted was 80-something and Grace was 20-something and neither of them could speak English. Ted played a Hammond organ with a drum machine and Grace, who was gorgeous, sang. On Sunday they'd sing songs like Stevie Wonder's 'I Just Called to Say I Luff You' to an appreciative audience of punks, bikies, trannies, and families who'd come for the "Famous Sunday \$5 Smorgasbord - all you can eat". A lot of families would walk in and turn around and leave when they saw the clientele - especially the bloke called 'Lucky' with no head, and just a hook out of his neck."

Source: St Kilda Music Walking Tour