

Interview with John Harley – Brother of Michael Harley from Seminal Rats

What got you involved in punk?

The Sex Pistols, seeing them on **Countdown**, in **1976**. There were some guys who lived around the corner who had a big record collection and listened to The Stooges and they were going to gigs and we just tagged along. I used to get an under-16 train ticket to St Kilda and then sign the book at the Ballroom. If you didn't have ID, you'd get a Stat-Dec saying you're 18, you'd use the school captain's name. That was when Dolores was on the door. I was 14 or 15. I was seeing bands at Melbourne Uni, unlicensed gigs. International bands played there like The Stranglers.

The Seminal Rats - that's my brother's band. I saw La Femme in 1980 and The Zorros. I loved La Femme, they used to play either Friday or Saturday every week at Martinis or The Champion or The Ballroom. The vibe at The Tiger Room was a lot like The Ballroom, you always knew everybody in a leather jacket, you'd see them in the street, if not by name, you would have seen them at gigs. It was a small community, there was an energy there, we thought it was our music...we wanted to keep it that way.

What about the Zorros?

Wonderful. I got their single...Nic Chancellor was the singer; they were more Ramones-y. There was that Boys Next Door crowd, and there were the leather jackets and they all looked like Sid. By the end of 1981, when **Sick Things** were around, it was an anti-fashion movement then, or anti-punk fashion. Everyone just dressed in old raincoats from the op shop, like flasher coats. Because we weren't British, we were making our own little statement; there'd be guys turning up with the safety pin through the nose and we used to laugh at them, they'd have union jacks all over them, you're in Australia, you know?

By the time Depression came along, they were like fashion punks, that's what you called them. There was a big blue at a **White Elephants/Brady Bunch** gig at the Duke of York Hotel in Prahran. It had pool tables and on Saturday arvo; they'd move them and set the band up in one corner, they had a stage at one end of the bar. So, **Depression** were playing and their crowd is in one corner, and then there's the older sort of non-fashion guys there as well, and one of the Depression crew came in and threw a pot of beer and hit our bass player Vicki in the chest and her boyfriend was in the crowd and those two started bluing and the other guys in the room came in, and it ended up like a Western, I've never seen a punch up like it.

Then there was the drug scene; It started with amphetamines, downers, Rohypnol; everyone was pillled, or taking cough medicine, drinking cask wine; that was the diet back in the day. All those gutter drugs were all we could afford. Heroin came in after that. People just wanted to get out of it, and it wasn't a taboo among that circle, all those anti-heroes, Johnny Thunders, Sid Vicious, everyone started dabbling, I don't think anyone realized how addictive it was. No one thought they would make it to 25. People were dropping off at about one a month, there was a spate, that varied between suicides and ODs. But I think those people would have used heroin anyway...

The Brady Bunch was you on vocals, Paul Valium on drums, Vicki on bass and Liam on guitar?

We formed in 1981- we just did covers, Discharge songs, Virgins songs - "When you're a wog."

How long did you stay in that circle of the punk scene?

I think I'm still in it!

Tim Hemensley?

He lived here. I saw him at gigs, him and his mum Loretta. What a cool mum bringing him to see Sick Things. Dugald Mackenzie ran gigs at the Builders Arms on Saturday afternoons, it was 2 bucks entry... GOD played one of those shows, sneaking jugs behind the P.A. because their mums and dads were outside waiting to come and pick them up, they were 15 or 16. After every song they'd rotate, they could play every instrument, real show offs, they were great.

Tim Hemensley at 2nd Big Day Out.

The **Powder Monkeys** were playing and this bouncer was pointing at the clock, "get off" you know, so Tim got the clock and smashed it on the stage and the bouncer said "I'm gonna kill him!" The crowd loved it. Playing with Wayne Kramer and Birdman, they pulled the curtains on them and the fans pulled down the curtains and they kept on playing. Deniz Tek said they had the energy of the MC5, the closest he'd ever seen. When they got their pay there was a minus \$4.50 or something, for the clock! The next year they played, the same bouncer walked up and said "don't fucking touch the clock." Sure enough, they're playing again, the same guy is pointing at the clock, so Tim just walks up and with the head of his bass (*thumping noise*); "I didn't touch it!" So, they got another \$4.50 deduction.

There were so many times we had to sneak him out of gigs; the bouncers at the Espy-"Where is he, where is he" He'd seen them smack somebody and he'd say, "ahh big tough guys, look at the size of ya". He was fearless. At the Barwon Club in Geelong, after Geelong had just lost the Grand Final, he gets up and says; "Ablett's not a cat he's a pussy." Some guy at the front knocked him out. Then he got up and played the rest of the show.

Dugald Mackenzie?

He got expelled from Scotch College, which backs onto the freeway - he climbed a freeway pole and a group of kids were standing underneath, cheering him on, so he dropped his daks and shat from a great height - by this time the teachers came out to see what all the ruckus was about, so he was expelled. Then he went to Yarra Valley and his nickname there was "walking bird-shit" because he used to drip candle wax in his hair and all over his blazer and stuff. He didn't need safety pins, why do you need safety pins when you're fucking covered in wax? That was his little statement. He died of lung cancer. He was 42. Everyone thought he would have OD'd; he was amazing, he was a laboratory, no one could take drugs like Dugald, not saying that in a glamorous way, he was just phenomenal. I was with him on his 21st and no one thought he'd make it to 22, let alone 42.

Clash gig at Festival Hall (1981?)

We all got on the tram, with Paul Valium, Ron Murder, Tim Bowling-ball-head, none of us even knew each other it was the first time I'd met all these guys, "are you going to the clash? Yeah!" It was one of those old red rattler trams, and we were unscrewing the lights and throwing them down into the traffic. Then we get to North Melbourne station - "who's got a ticket?" By this stage there's about a dozen of us and no one had a ticket, and we just go "fuck it, there's just one little conductor there" and there was a couple of tomahawks and lots of leather, we just bumrushed it, and we get to the venue and it's the same thing, "who's got a ticket"? Not one person, so we did the same thing, said, "rightoh, that door", and we sprinted, and we all got in, and we were all up the front. The Clash changed the lyrics to "Melbourne's burning".