

Interview with Johnny Volume – Guitarist/Songwriter in punk band The Scavengers (NZ)/The Marching Girls (Melbourne)

So, we are here with Johnny Volume from The Scavengers/The Marching Girls. So, I'm just wondering if you have any fond memories of that time – during 1979? You came from New Zealand, and you became entrenched in the Melbourne punk scene, and you became accepted with open arms by the other bands here? Is that the feeling that you got?

No. Not from the start. No.

No? What happened? What was the vibe that you felt when you came?

Um well, when we first came, we went to Sydney because we just wanted to get out of New Zealand...going to London was the idea to start with. Then just by pure fluke we ran into David Russell. He was in a band called **Ray Columbus & the Invaders** from the Sixties and he was in Sydney. He produced the record that we had done in New Zealand. He said what are you doing and we said that we're here to play some gigs, get the money together and go to London. He said, "go to Melbourne and I will set you up with a management contract." So, we jumped on the plane and came to Melbourne. He set us up with a management sort of deal.

Who was the management?

It was him and a guy called Wally Wilkinson who was the **Split Enz** first guitarist – he lived in Melbourne at that time too and another guy who was a silent partner – like a little business guy.

So, he got you your first gig?

Yes. It was like one of those booze barns in the suburbs. First time I had ever seen a pub like that with 17 pool tables.

Did you freak out?

Not really no. Just never seen anything that big. We were supporting **Jo Jo Zep and The Falcons**. We came on and the audience – it was just packed with all the people there and obviously they were there to see Jo Jo Zep and The Falcons. So, we started playing our stuff and they were yelling out at us – "Play some fucking Chise" or "Play some fucken Midnight Oil you fucks." So, we told them to "Get Fucked!" and they got really fucking angry and after that our manager goes "Don't you ever ever talk to the audience like that again in Australia! Don't do that ever again!" Then the next night we played at **Bananas** down in St Kilda, supporting some band from Perth, I can't remember who they were but

The Scientists maybe?

Mmm no. it was before that. The Scientists actually supported Marching Girls when they came out. So anyway, we played down at Bananas and the road crew turned up. We never had a road crew before; we always just carried our own PA cause it's just a small PA. They had this massive PA, and they said "Do you guys need the Foldback? Because we've got another gig tonight and we need the Foldback. We didn't know what a Foldback was, so we said "Nah – take it. We don't need it." So anyway, we came on. Our management invited like **3XY** and record people like **Frank Stivala**.

So, we came on and the PA didn't hit 1000watts and we couldn't hear – we had to read lips to know where we were and it was just fucken awful.

Oh, that's why you needed the Foldback

Yeah. So, the management sort of said "Well you're not ready" so we had to go away and rehearse for about a year or something. They just weren't really going to do anything with us. They were sort of we don't know where to place you, so we'll just ignore you even though they've signed us up. Then a guy. We were living in Carlton. This guy used to see us in a nightclub in Auckland came over. He and his girlfriend came over, and we sort of ran into him and he says, "What are you doing?" We said, "we're just rehearsing and writing new songs you know." He says, "will you play them?" So, we said, "you go and buy us a whole load of booze, and we'll give you a gig in our bedroom." So, he and his girlfriend came around with all this booze, and we played a set in our bedroom which was really fucking loud. His name was **Terry Rogers**, and he just couldn't believe that we weren't working. Do you remember **The Champion Hotel** in Fitzroy? He started that up so we could play there.

So that was Terry who used to run The Champion, and he started that up so you guys could play there?

Yeah.

And he became your manager?

Yeah, and he met Dolores and that's how we sort of got to play at The Tiger Lounge and the Seaview Ballroom.

What was the reception like at The Champion?

That was great. Everything just sort of took off then. Within a few weeks people came down the street to get in yeah. So, everything was kind of good and then he arranged for us to do some recording with **Keith Glass** and **Bruce Milne** from...[Missing Link](#).

So, you cut a record?

Ah yeah. That was the '**True Love**' 9" single. I think that was when Bruce Milne was a bit of a fan of the band and he had started working at Missing Link. Keith then financed it and it was Bruce's project.

So how many copies did you sell?

Ah...not sure. I think it sort of went into the second pressing. 500 in the first pressing had sold out and it actually got to number 39 in the Australian charts.

That's great!

Then an English label called Pop Oral picked up on it because I think the – what's the DJ's name? John Peel? John Peel got a copy of the Marching Girls – 'True Love' single and he played it on his radio show in London and Pop Oral asked us later if they can release it over there just the same as it is with a yellow stripe on the outside of it and that's the only difference.

So, what happened with the names? It was The Scavengers in NZ then you came to Melbourne, and you changed your name to The Marching Girls – what did the name change for? Why didn't you stay The Scavengers?

Well at the time, punk was becoming a bit fucking passe because everyone was into the rave you know or the power pop or whatever. The Scavengers was a pretty punk name, and we were a pretty current band from everywhere in Auckland. Towards the end of it, it was starting to get really violent and people got killed at gigs, there were a couple of deaths and a guy got thrown over a balcony and was paralysed and stuff like that. And people just didn't want to have anything to do with the scene even though it was nothing to do with it.

Des Truccion (the band's drummer) was telling me that he got punched in the face by...The La Femme guys...

Oh yeah, yeah

Were you there?

Yeah

What happened? What is your version of the story?

That was me that got bottled – glassed by the bass player. It was at the 475 club in Nth Melbourne. We were there you know in the crowd. There wasn't much of a crowd there though – about 10 people there and we were drunk, really fucking drunk. So, we thought we'd start dancing and we were sort of going around and bumping into each other...and the bass player's girlfriend took offence to it and turned around and smashed a glass in my face.

Oh, so it was his girlfriend that did that to you?

Yeah.

Right. So, what was your response to that?

Oh, I punched her back actually just sort of out of reaction. There was blood just pissing out of my face. I don't know what happened after that I was pretty much unconscious

So, I take it that you never went to another La Femme gig after that?

Oh nah. I never liked them anyway. We just happened to be over there.

Because all the bands were making music at the same time, everyone sort of got labelled 'punk' didn't they? – whether you were 'punk' or not.

Yeah. Pretty much if you had short hair, you were punk

So, any other stories you can remember?

What I can remember is when we first came here, we lived in Carlton. We didn't get out very much and I'd stay home all the time, but Des used to go out every night. He'd go see bands; he was like our public relations person and within a few months, everyone knew Des and Des knew everyone that was worth knowing.

Anyway, someone got the wrong idea and thought that we were some kind of radical thing and there was a piece of graffiti, this really big thing at the housing commission flats that said, "rise every young man and woman because The Marching Girls are here." it stayed there for years and years, like 10-15 years or something.

When we first got here and Sid Vicious died, there was a TV crew in Carlton, and they were from channel 7 and they were just walking around looking for anyone that looked like a punk and would film that. They interviewed Sean Kelly I think and they came up to Des, and I wasn't there, but Des and Ronny were there and they asked them if they had anything to say about Sid Vicious and you know because we were just a bit out of our depths in this big country at that point and our management told us off for saying anything to anyone so it was "oh no we're not talking to TV" and we missed out on getting some early publicity.