

Interview with Joseph "Joe" Gaultieri (often spelled Gaultieri) - a legendary Australian music venue manager and promoter who played a pivotal role in shaping Melbourne's rock, punk, and reggae scenes during the 1970s and 1980s. Venues included Bombay Rock (Brunswick), The Venue, and Bananas (St Kilda).

The 'punk' label has been put onto bands, I suppose, posthumously. I think the problem with the word 'punk' is that it's so wrapped up in the cliché of mohawks and studded jackets. I'm trying to show people that the pre-hardcore scene is very different.

It was. It wasn't really 'punk'. It was like left of centre. It was like you know – Sean Kelly, James Frued. I mean they were all left of centre – they weren't all punks. Even Nick Cave you know – they were all left of centre. They were like expressionists in their music, in their lyrical content. You know what I mean?

I do know what you mean. Yes.

They weren't really punk, but punks follow them because they were so left of centre and they were wild. I managed **X** for a little while with Ian Rilen and Steve Lucas and Cathy Green – they were unmanageable because they lived it. But I just said I can't do this you know.

That would have been interesting...

It was. We filled the Crystal Ballroom you know, and we'd work anywhere in St Kilda and fill it.

Yeah, they were a top band.

Yeah, amazing band. I mean **Ian Rilen** was an amazing songwriter and a bass player. He was just an unbelievable guy.

Was he the glue that held the band together?

Yes, he was. He was like James Dean

So, you said to me on the phone that you're probably one of the oldest punks in Melbourne. Do you want to tell me a bit about that?

Well oldest punk in the sense of ah what I can say – not rebellious but what can I say? A bit of a rebel you know what I mean? I mean bands like Rose Tattoo, and Buffalo?

Okay. Not familiar with Buffalo.

Buffalo is this guy called Dave Tyes. See I booked bands that nobody wanted to book because they were too wild.

Okay. But you took a chance on them?

Yeah. Rose Tattoo played Bananas for me, and they packed it you know. People came to see them because they were fucking wild you know. All these guys with tatts and they just fucken pumped it out.

So, tell me about your experience with venues. So, it was Bananas first and then The Venue. Tell me about Bananas, how you got involved with that and what your experiences were with some of the punk/post punk bands playing there.

I mean most of those bands that played there ... what I did that year

So, when was that? '77 or '78?

Yeah. I did the Lorne follies at the community hall. And that year, I mean all the Mushroom acts played there, plus TMG, Hush, but you don't know these bands, do you?

Not really. I've heard of Hush

You've heard of AC/DC though?

Oh yeah!

Well, they played there as well with Bon Scott.

So, you organized the bands?

Yeah. Well, I booked them through Premiere Artists.

So, you were working for Premiere Artists?

No. I was working for myself. I was an independent promoter. I was an agent for **Premiere Artists** up in Wellington Street (St Kilda). They had an office there, where the terrace houses are on the left? Yeah, they used to be there, so I worked there for a little while, and **Nucleus** used to be just around the corner where the California Club is now on St Kilda Rd.

When did you start doing that?

In the early 1970s

Right. And what led you into that foray?

I was managing a band called Fat Daddy, and Muddy Farmer. I used to book AC/DC on the holidays and do like town hall gigs with them, like Collingwood Townhall, Preston Town Hall and I'd put my bands in for supports. We used to fill rooms in the western suburbs. You know Sunshine Heights Hotel? We couldn't get a gig in town because Premiere controlled it all. So, what I thought was – I know what I'll do – I'll go and work with these bands and get all the contacts you know what I mean? So, I'd go and work with them, but I just didn't like being an agent, and I still don't like it. I mean I'd book Nick Cave, but I'd do it under duress, I'm too...ah too honest. You know what I mean? I can't bullshit, not lying you know. I'm not a used car salesman. To be a booker you have to be a used car salesman and do that sort of shit.

Then I ran this club called **Bombay Bicycle Club** with a guy called Brian Goldsmith. He used to run **The Underground**. This disco crowd was the 'upmarket' crowd. So, we'd put bands in there from The Bombay Bicycle Club.

And where was this?

Bourke Street. In the mall just down from Swanston Street on the left and you went downstairs. It was a disco, but Brian would put bands in there towards the end of his lease. He said to us, “do you wanna run it?” So, we ran it towards the end of his lease and wed book bands there – and Blondie played there. We basically tour managed Blondie - their first trip, just in Victoria.

Then when that stopped. I did Lorne that summer and then I came back and there was nothing to do. I thought – “what I am going to do?” So, I went looking for a place to open. The Copacabana – which was an old Greek night club in Sydney Road. They were going broke so I said, “can I put bands in here?” They said, “yeah.” So that was the start of **Bombay Rock**. And I grew up in Fitzroy – I grew up around Greeks. I’m a Fitzroy boy you know. and well the rest is history.

Was Bombay Rock first?

No, I think **Bananas** was before that – before I went to Lorne. And then when I started Bombay Rock, I had stopped doing Bananas. It was the opposite side of town to Bombay, it was big and it needed my personal attention you know.

So how many bands would you have booked at Bananas do you reckon?

You know Laurie Richards? I mean he’d say to me come down and I will buy you drinks. You get down there and then he’d say Ive only got a plastic card so you will have to buy **me** drinks (laughs). Anyway, I think Laurie put more punk bands in there than I did. Bombay Rock was happening while **The Crystal Ballroom** was happening...1979/1980...

So, you would have been competing with the Ballroom in a sense?

Not really. I mean the Ballroom was a small punk room, right. Bombay Rock had more of the commercial bands. I mean your **Aussie Crawl**, your **Jo Jo Zep**. I mean **Midnight Oil** played there, **Rose Tattoo** played there – most of the Premiere Artist’s acts.

Would the people form the Ballroom come over and see those bands?

Only if they were the bands that they wanted to see. I think a lot came over when Ian Dury played. The owners wouldn’t renovate Bombay Rock. And they said oh the bands are pulling people, so I said when there’s no bands, what are they going to do – jerk off? I said you gotta put bands in, you gotta keep running. People aren’t going to come if you stick to the floor you know – stick to the carpet! I said you know you gotta clean this place up! I wanted to give it a bit of a face lift for the past two or three years. I ran it for about three years and I said – if you aren’t going to clean it then I’m leaving – they didn’t – so I walked out then I started managing **The Cheks** (a power pop band active in 1980–1982 who were based in Melbourne. They are notable for having **Paul Hester** on drums).

John Clifforth – he ends up as Deckchair Overboard with **Cathy McQuade** from **The Ears** on bass. I was managing The Checks, and I lived on the corner just on the hill there (St Kilda). See that white building that white towers back there? We rented the house there and we all lived in that house, and I used to spend a lot of time at The Ballroom because the guys in The Checks were friends with **Michael Hutchens** and all those people – Hugo Race and...yeah, they were all mates you know. But The Checks were sort of punk/poppy if you know what I mean? Like the really good pop punk songs.

And then we went to Sydney and I signed them to **Regular Records – Martin Fabinyi**. **Mental as Anything** were on there, **Icehouse**, and **The Cockroaches** were on that Label at that time. There was this guy there called **Cameron Allan** who did the Icehouse album, and he tried to turn The Checks into another Icehouse, and he took them into the studio and fucked with them, screwed them over, you know what I mean. And I said, “well, this is not the band I was managing”, so I left. They believed him. But he fucked the band over. Because they had a great bunch of songs, they had a fantastic bunch of songs, but they believed him. They were young and naïve. So, I left and I came back to Melbourne, and I was looking for something to do. And those guys found out – I don’t know what I was doing Bananas or I can’t remember because it was all fuzzy and you know It was like 30 years ago.

Yeah, I founded **The Venue** in the early 1980s? I can’t remember the year. It was called Earls Court. So, Bananas was in St Moritz and Earls Court was The Venue. I was the promoter and The Venue actually catered for everybody in Melbourne, and you could fit 500 up to 2,000 people in The Venue.

I mean the ballroom upstairs could fit 2,000 people and with the guests it was more like 2200, so yeah, it was huge and it was the first venue that size in Melbourne. In the first week I had **INXS**, **Divinyls** and **Cold Chisel** every Saturday nights for four weeks. I did that to establish it – to say – right here I am. I didn’t care if I didn’t make money for the first four weeks as long as I establish it you know. I mean there were no other venues that they could make that sort of money – everywhere else was too small.

Like Premiere saw what I was doing so they were giving me bands. I’m a street promoter. I mean I knew what was hot on the street, and I’d promote them whether they were Premiere act or not. Whether they were a punk act, a pop act, a soul act, a funk act... it doesn’t matter. Whenever I had a good act of that calibre, I’d promote them and I’d put my bands on as support – independent acts – I’m an independent promoter – I’m not affiliated with anybody you know so yeah. I mean **The Cramps** played there, **The Cult** played there.

Yeah, back when I was on the streets for Premiere Artists, I mean I was one of them, Laurie Richards was one of them, Nathan Brenna, Angry Anderson, a guy called Adrian Barker. I mean there were a whole heap of guys, but they’ve just disappeared off the face of the earth.

If you’re running a gig and you’re doing it properly, I mean you wanna be paid, say you get \$1 a head that’s pretty good. I mean you do all the posters, ads, flyers and all that shit, you know what I mean? And you’re making your way for the night and that’s alright, but they got greedy. They killed all the people that were doing that. Now there’s no people who are doing that. All there is are kids filling holes. There are actually no promoters – they are all bookers.

So, the promoters were the people who were getting out on the streets, putting posters up and handing out the flyers and telling people to come down to the gig yeah?

Yep.

Do they even still exist? Premiere

Well, they do. They do exist. They do all the heritage acts. Most of the young acts most agents, they sort of worked through them then go off on their own and they take their acts with them. The real people in the business know what they did. They let the pokies happen in this town and they didn't stand up for local musicians because they were bringing these acts from overseas you know. They couldn't give a fuck; they will make money anyway – they couldn't give a fuck about their own backyard. And they were the first people to start free gigs.

Why?

So, they can control the town because they had the bands. So, they did free gigs with major acts. They wanted control and they'd get paid from the bands that get paid from the bar. Like, I went to one of those gigs at the Chevron and the band kicked ass, but people didn't react because they didn't pay for it.

Right. So, they didn't appreciate it...

That's exactly right and I'd advise any bands that are starting to charge something. Whether its two dollars, five dollars, charge something so that people would appreciate your talent. You're not giving away your talents for nothing you know – just to do a gig. If you wanna do that just go into the fucking rehearsal studio and play. But if you're playing in public – make them pay something. It doesn't matter it's \$2, \$3, \$4; it doesn't fucking matter. And that's why every gig in town is hit and miss and the people at the bar have got control right. They can pay the bands what \$50, \$100, right. And I've seen bands fill rooms and they get fuck all for it! The Mercy Kills is one of them, and they don't get big money and they fill it right. Because that business of the free door. And they don't make big money. They actually changed the system where it works against the artists if you know what I mean?

Mmm it sucks for the artists, doesn't it?

Yeah, it sucks!

So do you think as a whole punk/post punk movement. How important do you think Laurie Richards was to the whole scene in creating a lot of hype around that?

Laurie is a great hyper. I mean he was a really good hyper. I mean Laurie was uncontrollable, but he was good at it. He's like an artist do you understand. He's like a crazy artist that's good at what they do.

Would you say in terms of what Laurie did, he gave a lot of people the opportunity to play and he promoted the movement. I know he booked a lot of mainstream bands as well.

Yeah. Well, I did as well. When I was in St Kilda, I booked everything. I mean **Nick Cave** played The Ballroom, Earls Court, The Venue. Most of the local bands would work there during the week.

Adrian Barker managed **The Models**, and he ran a lot of venues as well. He ran **Hearts** and he ran **Martinis** in Carlton. Everyone was doing their own thing you know. I mean we were street promoters. We'd go out and see bands and then we would book them you know what I mean? I

mean no one goes out and sees bands now. It's all about Reverb Nation and YouTube and you don't know if they are good or not live, and most of them are a bag of shit.

How important do you think the punk scene was to the music industry?

Well, **INXS** came out of it, **Nick Cave** came out of it, and The Models came out of it. I mean there was a lot of really good other bands, but they never sort of made it. Remember **Hunters and Collectors**? They came out of that scene. But major record companies didn't sign local acts – they were really commercial.

Suicide Records was a subsidiary of Mushroom. The Models were signed to Mushroom, and they tried hard to make them commercial, but they hung onto their roots; they didn't go over the fence.

You know when bands couldn't get a deal, the smart ones started making their own label and distributing it themselves. And **Paul Elliot** used to distribute a lot of the independent stuff via **Polyester Records**.