

# BANDS

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WHIRLYWIRD.

It's been several months now since the "Little Bands" nights were brought to a close, ending a year of performances by a diverse and supposedly disinformed group of musicians, which makes one ask, "why bother about something that is now defunct?"

Perhaps the most striking attribute the Little Bands achieved was, at the beginning, the ability to create a totally anonymous low profile approach to presenting music, making it a subject well worth documenting from a retrospective view.

The Little Bands, for want of a label, began late 1979, centring around two groups of musicians with strong ideas of how to present experimental music, both on a musical and social scale. Their names? Whirlywird and The Primitive Calculators. Both bands had their own small following and were respected in those circles, and it could be said that between the two of them, some of the most inspiring and creative music was produced from Melbourne in such a short time. However around the beginning of the new year Whirlywird (or what was left of them) had left for England, and shortly afterwards The Primitive Calculators followed in their footsteps. Whirlywird left behind them two singles and a twelve inch EP and The Primitive Calculators a single, all of which received minimal airplay and promotion.

The Little Bands "scene" that developed around the time the two bands were at their peak, stemmed from a basic dissatisfaction with the restricted opportunities and established conventions of spending huge amounts of money and time on local bands who in essence, were just as capable as the next person of producing entertaining and gratifying forms of music. The Little Bands had a venue, the Champion Hotel in Fitzroy whose management allowed the performances to be staged in its rawest form, thus the "scene" developed.

Little Band nights were a "happening" more than anything else. Things tended to happen in an unorthodox fashion, almost blindly ritualistic to the point of non-event status. The inevitable "scene" that developed ignored pretension and hierarchy normally associated with going to see a band; and weren't so much a musical

phenomena but as a social catalyst in propagating an alternative mode of expressing ideas and views, and in the long term, more profitable.

By adopting the idea of having an audience who also played in bands and participated in the whole process the music could easily be described on a superficial level as disposable trash. The Little Bands were either overtly criticised as floundering musicians or praised as floundering artists, but what many people didn't realise was that they represented more than what they attempted to personify; a group of people possessing the ability to remove the barrier between stage and audience. They made the risk of getting up there and making a fool of yourself totally probable and acceptable to the extent of becoming appealing.

As time went on and with the closing of the Champion, things became far more defined in terms of organisation. Most of the venues attracting that type of audience were used, and nights were staged at alternative venues such as The Pram Factory.

Other factors entered the progress of the Little Bands. A single was made though sales didn't peak to soaring heights and a radio show on 3RRR attempted to expose the public to what was happening in the "garagelands". Running the show was a person named Alan Bamford who would attend almost every performance and tape the proceedings. As a result of the recordings, two albums will appear shortly on the market which will best document The Little Bands more than any other form of expression. I spoke to Alan about his experiences and ideas on The Little Bands, as an alternative opinion rather than fact, as the Little Bands have become a rather controversial subject.

**How did you first become involved in the Little Bands?**

I had a radio program and taped Whirlywird one night - around Christmas 1979 - then it occurred to me that I could use the tapes on radio, so I just went along to Little Band nights with tape recorders. At the time, it revolved entirely around The Primitive Calculators, and until they went away, their equipment and organising was the common base; their assistance in

helping their friends in Little Bands was one of the prime factors in starting the whole thing.

In the beginning it was very socially determined, but people who came into it over the last year generally got to know everybody else. Musically it diversified and in my personal opinion it went downhill after the second half of last year. Bands getting up there and not declaring themselves was largely in response to the fact that they were playing to people who knew them anyway. Little Band nights, more so in the beginning, were quite a strain on just your capabilities of taking in a whole lot of stuff that was usually quite different. That broke down fairly quickly when there emerged a number of groups who would appear every time and just play the same material plus one new one they had written since last time. But if it is true that people felt badly about going to Little Band nights

because it appeared to them as a whole lot of noise, then those people were probably shortsighted, simply because some of it was very successful music.

**What about bands like the Lunatic Fringe who played very undisciplined, unplanned music?**

The Lunatic Fringe are a band you have to take on face value, which is just an idea for playing music and also it is interesting that the group doesn't exist any more, largely due to the fact that it is a shallow way of approaching things. The Incredibly Strange Creatures are a better example because some of their music is absolutely vile.

**Do you think there were a number of bands who were successful because they were instantly liked - for instance The Pastel Bats?**

The Pastel Bats were good. They challenged a lot of the accepted things about Little Bands of breaking down the barrier between audience and band because they emphasised it by hamming it up. They also challenged the idea of being trashy - they had songs, good songs. They demonstrated that the Little Bands audience was theoretically in the ground with all these notions of trashiness and low profile, but in reality really enjoyed a band who got up there and forgot about all of that. There was a group called The Clue who did one song that I got requests for, and a lot of people liked the things they did. The Incredibly Strange Creatures very few people liked, but then very few people liked the Primitive Calculators either, and their music is extremely different.

**Well what are the major ideas behind the two records you have produced?**

The idea behind making the two records is so it will get played on radio, because radio stations won't accept anything else. The Little Bands album is a double album called No Sin like Dancing and the Primitive Calculators album is just called The Primitive Calculators. It goes back to the first champion gig and the Calculators is from one night at Hearts. Unfortunately the Little Bands one doesn't go to the end of the Little Bands nights but is more representative than anything else covering roughly twenty one bands. When you went to a Little Bands night you saw as many different kinds of music as there were groups, and that is what the record's like. Those ideas about getting it on radio stations mainly emanate from a desire for the Primitive Calculators to be a bit more well-known.

It occurs to me after the event that it was a sensible effective way of getting things done, to work with your friends and have mutual equipment rather than try to set up something that is completely independent from each other and everybody racing for the same thing.

The Little Bands folded after a year of extremely hard work and initial excitement dwindled to more routine organisation, many people becoming disillusioned with the whole scene. However it would be a mistake to say that they will not be heard of again as it is inevitable that something will start up again. Everyone has star potential. Did you hear the pin drop? Well, I suppose you had to be there.

