

## Interview with Michael (Mike) Chrystal – Guitarist in groups: Virgins, White Elephants, Gas Babies

First there was the **Young Savages**, in 1978 but we never played in pubs. Then it was the **Virgins** in 1979. We played in pubs from about September onward and then there was this huge car accident in 1980. We used to play at the Champion Hotel in Fitzroy, it was a huge punk venue, there were heaps of punk bands - this guy named Terry Rogers ran it. All the Little Bands, International Exiles, Primitive Calculators, The Editions; Fred Negro's first band, us, bands like Little Murders, all played at The Champion Hotel. That was late 1979.

We weren't a hardcore punk band, but we weren't an arty punk band, as well, cos there were a few arty type bands – we were somewhere in the middle, we probably became that, we were just more of our own style. We sort of followed the sex pistols; it was a little bit violent, a bit like that. The fans were a bit like that...We'd go to parties and we'd play, and there were more of the artier sort of people there and there'd be a clash... things would just get wrecked, but it wasn't just us, it was all sorts of people. But we burned our bridges...

The Virgins consisted of bass player Steve Fusezi, who later joined Little Murders, Simon Smith on drums, me on guitar and Mark Ivey on vocals - that was the original Virgins lineup. Geoff Sick was our manager - we met Geoff in September of 1979 at the first gig we played at the Champion Hotel. I met Geoff, Dugald McKenzie and Peter Atwell, those three guys. They just came to see the gig and they became our fans and they followed us around and Geoff became our manager. Geoff used to be a bit of a hothead... he was cantankerous, he'd lose it.

Then we had a huge car accident, that's when we went off the scene...  
In 1980 Mark Ivey & Geoff Sick were nearly burnt to death.

Geoff ran gigs at the Duke of York Hotel (Edwards Tavern) Thurs – Sat nights, early in 1980. It was a Saturday night, we were at the Duke of York, Geoff was running the gig, and we were watching the **Z-Cars** - they put out one of the first records on Au Go Go records - and Simon left the band, and he was gonna roadie for this band called The Aliens, a Countdown band. It was getting rough for us because we got banned from every venue in town. So, Mark said he was going to drum for the Z-Cars, and I got a call Sunday night from Mark's Girlfriend at the time and she said Mark and Geoff and the Z-Cars had been in an accident and Mark was in hospital fighting for his life.

What happened was they got pissed and they had 2 cars and one ran out of petrol and so they went to a petrol station and filled it with petrol and it was in the front seat of the car and the windows were wound up and Geoff was playing with a lighter and the whole thing exploded, and the worst part is someone tried to throw the bucket out the window but the windows were down and it splashed back on Mark... people witnessed it and Craig Russell from the Z-Cars (who also played for the Zorros) he saw the whole thing – Mark got out and rolled on the ground and put himself out and he knocked on the door in a suburban street and walked straight to the bathroom, got a glass of water, lit a cigarette, waited for the ambulance to come and passed out.

Mark nearly died twice. Geoff wasn't burn as badly as Mark. I went to the hospital the next morning and it was terrible. Geoff was on the phone eating a roast dinner... it was a foolish accident... I can remember Geoff booking bands while he was in hospital, recovering from burns, then he continued this after he got out of hospital.

Anyway, we waited until Mark recovered and we got Rick Ferrara as the drummer. In 1981 Mark's heart collapsed and he had to have a valve replaced. So were on and off the road in late 1980/81 –Then Rick Ferrara joined on drums and we changed the name to **White Elephants**....Neil Rogers from 3RRR managed us and there was a lot of trauma; Mark drank a lot after that... We should have recorded, but we didn't do it properly, we put out cassettes. Geoff and Dugald formed a band called **Sick Things**, but that was after the accident.

### **Did people blame Geoff for the accident?**

Yeah, but it was an accident- it was foolish sans d silly, he was drunk, and he shouldn't have done it and he should have known better but he just didn't know...

### **Did you ever see *Dogs in Space*?**

The one thing i found to be the truth in that film is the mess; you'd go to parties like that, people were vomiting and stuff. Things would get wrecked at parties

Rowland S. Howard vomited in the punch bowl (late 1979) at a party. We were in this kitchen...we played at a party in the lounge, and Boys Next Door members were there – I remember going into a room and Nick Cave was in a room, and there were about 30 followers, even then he commanded that. He said he wanted to play and I said it was fine but nobody else from the band wanted to lend him any instruments and then there was a bit of an argument and he said "we used to be like you guys" ... he was about to go to the UK... @you remind me of us and you should change and see things differently" .... We had this argument but it got smoothed over and in the kitchen there was a huge punch bowl and Rowland S. Howard vomited in it.... That party Nick Cave got punched and the whole party got wrecked...Peter Hatwell invited us....

I'll never forget the party though, cos the whole place got wrecked; i don't know whose place it was, you'd just get invited to these things. I'll never forget the sight, when i walked out the front Mark was jumping on the top of the roof of a range rover and Simon was bashing down a tree and Steve was kicking a fence....artwork got wrecked and we had to get out of there quickly and I had to get my equipment. The next time we went to the Champion Hotel, Terry pulled us aside and said we couldn't play anymore, "the Richmond Criminal Investigation Branch are after you", and that was it, we could hardly play anymore...we ended up playing at the London Tavern in Caulfield... we got banned every gig we played, they wouldn't let us play at the Crystal Ballroom either. Dolores banned us form the 475 Club at the Exford Hotel... she was managing **The Ears**, Sam Sejavka's band, and our fans would come and it was just a clash cos we were more sort of a punk band (punk rock, Sex pistols), and they were one of the sort of an arty keyboard band..... Dolores gave us heaps of gigs later when we changed our name to **The White Elephants**, she was all right then, and she booked bands at the Mt Erica hotel and we got heaps of gigs there.