

Missing Link Records and the Emergence of Melbourne's Independent Music Scene

Abstract: The existence of independent music communities and culture within Australia's major cities today is largely attributed to the introduction of punk rock in the late 1970s. Among the inner city youth, a tiny subculture emerged around this sprawling, haphazard style of music that was quickly dismissed by the major players in the Australian music industry as bereft of commercial possibilities. Left to its own devices, punk was forced to rely solely on the strength of the independent network to release some of the more original music of the era and lay the foundations for a celebrated musical culture. This thesis examines the factors that contributed to and influenced the early Australian punk scenes, focusing in particular on Melbourne between 1976 and 1981. It shows that the emergence and characteristics of independent music communities within individual cities can be attributed to the existence of certain factors and institutions, both external and internal to the city. Lastly, it examines Melbourne's iconic record store and label Missing Link Records and the contributions and influence it had on the early years of the Melbourne independent music community.

Introduction

"I find this is the only country where success is not a benefit, it's a hassle. You become successful and everybody watches and waits for you to fall." (Billy Thorpe, *RAM* Vol.36. July 16, 1976. pp.29)

The Australian popular music industry had begun to shake off its cultural insecurities by the 1970s. The inferiority complex, the so-called 'cultural cringe' that pervaded the Australian music industry in the 1950s and 1960s had lessened but not fully disappeared. The token 'Oz rock' sound that has become synonymous with Australian popular music was beginning to attract a large audience within the country. At around the same time, we can begin to see the emergence of much smaller 'alternative' scenes focused on punk and

then post-punk music. While the communities devoted to this scene were small, they were fiercely loyal and a number of institutions developed in their respective cities that would nurture the emerging punk community, particularly within community radio, alternative press and independent record labels and stores. Many of these institutions still exist and are instrumental in catering to the needs of 'alternative' social niches.

Melbourne did not develop a sizeable punk following in the 1970s. None of Australia's major cities did. Yet within the small community that emerged, several institutions such as alternative radio stations 3RRR, 3PBS and 3CR, and independent labels Au Go Go and Missing Link Records supported the scene, and one another, to their mutual benefit. They provided information and outlets for members of the community. In my thesis I examine the characteristics of the punk community as it emerged in Melbourne in the late 1970s. I will focus on how Melbourne's independent music scene was influenced by certain factors, both national and local (with less emphasis on the international factors, which are discussed briefly below). One local factor that will be examined in greater detail will be the record store/ label Missing Link Records, whose reputation and contributions to the scene were considerably important in the early years of its development.

Background

Internationally, the 'back-to-basics' approach of punk music in the late Seventies was considered the natural conclusion to a decade of excess and refinement. Frith suggests that this cyclical trend has been prevalent throughout the history of popular music. It marks the introduction of new musical styles with a burst of independent label activity while the major recording companies initially struggle to catch up but eventually take over.¹ Rock had come to a point where the biggest bands of the time were all past

¹ Frith, S. 1990. 'Video Pop'. In Frith, S. (ed). *Facing the Music: Essays on Pop, Rock and Culture*.

their peak. Rock magazine *Juke* reported, “The newest records by the Rolling Stones, the Who, David Bowie and, of course, the Eagles, were outsold by compilation [Greatest Hits] albums. Their past was outselling their present.”² As renowned rock critic Lester Bangs wrote, “Professionalism equals competence equals mediocrity.”³

Punk marked a break between the baby boom generation – whose interests had previously been reflected by progressions in rock music⁴ – and the post-baby boomers. It reflected a minimalist, ‘do-it-yourself’ approach to rock music that emphasised energy and enthusiasm over professionalism and virtuosity. The amateurism that characterised early punk allowed for the emergence of a higher number of independent record labels and press than there had been since the 1950s. Hesmondhalgh notes that these labels de-mystified the process by which rock music was produced, and created an “alternative network of distribution which enabled not only the musicians signed to their labels, but also a string of other companies and musicians across the country, to reach a much wider public than would have otherwise been possible.”⁵ Punk’s DIY ethic was particularly ideal for Australian studios, which were still catching up with overseas technical standards in recording.

Kruse uses the word ‘scene’ to imply something “less historically rooted than a community.”⁶ O’Connor defines the punk scene as the “active creation of infrastructure to support punk bands and other forms of creative activity.”⁷ This could include performers, fans of performers and institutions involved in the playing, recording, promoting and supporting of independent bands and their music. In this thesis I refer, for the most part, to the alternative media outlets, predominantly radio and press (many of the bands in this scene were not commercially successful enough or did not have the financial means to

² Crabshaw, P.B. *Juke*, 22 January, 1977. Vol. 89. pp.13.

³ Quoted in *RAM*, 1 July, 1977. Vol. 62, pp.18.

⁴ Szatmary, D. 1991. *Rockin’ in Time*.

⁵ Hesmondhalgh, D. 1999. ‘Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre’. *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1. pp. 37.

⁶ Kruse, H. 1993. ‘Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture’. *Popular Music*, Vol. 12, No. 1. pp.38.

⁷ O’Connor, A. ‘Local Scenes and Dangerous Crossroads: Punk and Theories of Cultural Hybridity’. *Popular Music*, Vol. 21, No. 2. pp.226.

promote themselves through television), venues and agencies. The nature of independent music communities suggests that these categories often overlap and many involved in these institutions could also call themselves 'fans'.

Similarly, I use the term 'independent' as it refers to the less (or non) commercial sectors of the music industry. The idea of 'independence' has been romanticized since the first independent rock labels appeared in the 1950s. There is a myth of honesty and authenticity associated with early rock and punk, as opposed to the "plastic", commercial nature of pop music.⁸ In the 1970s in Australia, an independent label was 'independent' in the sense that it was not entirely driven by a desire for profit and chart hits (though few independent labels would deny that some profit was necessary and even desirable), but instead by a desire to support and record the music of artists they admired or were connected with on a social basis. Stafford writes of the independent community:

Those that didn't form their own bands, or last in them, instead formed record labels, partly to provide an outlet for groups the major labels had no interest in, partly as a way of immortalizing their friends on plastic, and partly, if they were lucky, to make some pocket money.⁹

Independent music fans probably enjoyed the underground status of their music and guarded it jealously, and have much less desire to see the artist become successful than the artist would themselves. An article written in 1950 by David Riesman shows that this phenomenon is not new to punk, or even to rock music, his observations showing the existence of a similar group of (often young) music lovers who preferred little-known bands as opposed to the 'name' bands of the time, but would often abandon their preferences once they gathered a larger following.¹⁰

⁸ Frith, S. 1981. 'The Magic That Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community'. *Popular Music*, Vol. 1. pp. 159-168.

⁹ Stafford, A. 2006. *Pig City: From the Saints to Savage Garden*. pp.128.

¹⁰ Riesman, D. 1950. 'The Lonely Crowd'. Republished in Frith, S. & Goodwin, A. (ed). 1990. *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*.

My thesis deals with the scene that surrounded the small number of underground bands that played and recorded punk/ post-punk music somewhere between 1976 and 1981 in Melbourne. Though the bands in this period are sometimes referenced to make certain points about the type of music played or the social attitude toward the scene, they were not the focus of my research. I suggest, following recent arguments such as that of Hayward¹¹ and Homan¹² that cities develop unique music ‘scenes’ rather than ‘sounds’, influenced by the character associated with the city itself and the institutions established there. The recently released compilation *The Missing Link Story*, which contains eighteen artists who had material released on the Missing Link label between 1978 and 1983,¹³ makes it obvious that there was no definitive ‘Melbourne sound’. The music included on the compilation ranges from the jazz-influenced punk rock of The Laughing Clowns to the delicate, melodic stylings of The Go-Betweens, from the electro-pop of Whirlywird to the pre-punk band The Bleeding Hearts, whom Missing Link founder Keith Glass describes as “a little bit Roxy Music mixed with Skyhooks”.¹⁴

My research consisted mostly of archival research and interviews with key figures of the Melbourne scene during this period, combined with reviews of literature on general popular and alternative culture and Australian music history, excluding unpublished theses or papers. There has been a recent burst of interest in Australian rock history. Some important publications in the last few years were Mark Phillips’ profile of 3RRR,¹⁵ accounts of emerging city scenes such as Andrew Stafford history of the Brisbane rock scene¹⁶ and Tara Brabazon’s collection of essays on Perth music culture and history,¹⁷ Stuart Coupe on promoting in the Australian rock industry,¹⁸ and Shane Homan and Tony Mitchell on various subcultures of popular music in

¹¹ Hayward, P. 1992. ‘Introduction’. In Hayward, P. (ed). *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*. pp. 4.

¹² Homan, S. 2000. ‘Losing the Local: Sydney and the Oz Rock Tradition’. *Popular Music*, Vol. 19, No. 1. pp. 32.

¹³ 2004. Missing Link Records.

¹⁴ Personal interview. 23 September, 2008.

¹⁵ Phillips, M. 2006. *Radio City: The First 30 Years of 3RRR*.

¹⁶ Stafford, A. 2006.

¹⁷ Brabazon, T. (ed). 2005. *Liverpool of the South Seas*.

¹⁸ Coupe, S. 2003. *The Promoters: Inside Stories from the Australian Rock Industry*.

Australia.¹⁹ The history of 3RRR bears particular importance to this topic, since 3RRR was a key factor in the emergence of Melbourne's independent music scene. This field has been well documented by Phillips' research and consequently, the interviews I conducted for this thesis are drawn from other sectors of the Melbourne scene such as those dealing with independent recording labels.

Clinton Walker's *Stranded: The Secret History of Independent Music in Australia, 1977-1991*²⁰ was a useful year-by-year account of the independent music scene. It provides something of a checklist of most of the major events and aspects of the Australian punk scene from someone who had experienced them first-hand. Also of some importance was Vikki Riley's account of the peak of the Melbourne punk scene, a highly descriptive first-hand account of her experience in the St Kilda scene from the perspective of a punk fan.²¹ However, her writing functions as more of a memoir than an examination of how this scene emerged in the first place. More recently, John Encarnacao's examination of Australian punk focuses on several key Australian punk bands and how they were able to identify punk with a sense of 'Australian-ness'.²² My research, in comparison, functions as a social history of a particular scene and its foundations.

In this thesis I make use of material from several of the rock magazines of the time, predominantly *RAM (Rock Australia Magazine)*, *Juke* and *Roadrunner*,²³ from about 1975 to 1981, except *Roadrunner*, which I read from 1978 to 1980. Much of the information I found in these magazines was taken from small gossip sections or news bites and hence did not have article titles. In an attempt to remain consistent, I have not provided titles of any of the articles, but simply provided the volume, date and page number of the magazine cited.

¹⁹ Homan, S. & Mitchell, T. (ed). 2008. *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now: Popular Music in Australia*.

²⁰ Walker, C. 1996.

²¹ Riley, V. 1992. 'Death Rockers of the World Unite! Melbourne 1978-80 – Punk Rock or no Punk Rock?'. In Hayward, P. *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*.

²² Encarnacao, J. 2008. 'Bastard Country, Bastard Music'. In Homan, S. & Mitchell, T. *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now*.

²³ The Australian edition of *Rolling Stone* was also available during this period, but was similar to *RAM* in its approach to independent music. I intended to cover a range of music press, from the very alternative to the very commercial. *RAM* and *Rolling Stone* were often somewhere in the middle.

In the following chapters, I will describe the state of the Australian music industry in the middle of the 1970s and those factors that allowed for a burst of interest and confidence in locally-produced music. I will note the effects of this transition on independent music culture, which was beginning to emerge in the inner city several years after the Australian commercial industry began to expand. I will examine this in relation to Melbourne, the factors that cultivated a punk music scene and those that divided or suppressed it. I suggest that key institutions such as Melbourne's famous import store, Missing Link Records, supported the scene to their mutual benefit, and indeed from necessity, since the scene was so small.

I hope to avoid being overly romantic and idealistic about independent communities, which clearly gain something from their efforts, though perhaps not often in a financial sense. Similarly, the end that this kind of music often comes to, unsupported and forgotten by all but the tiny portion of the population that supported it in the first place, can give the research a bitter tinge. I wish to point out that while most of the music presented in this period will never make it onto a Greatest Hits album, it allowed for a vibrant local music scene to grow and thrive. The renewed interest in this period shows that it was in many ways important Australian musical and cultural history, as an example of a significant subculture and as a precursor to the kind of independent music scenes that exist in the major cities today.

Sunbury '75: The Australian Music Industry in Transition

RAM's first cover story in 1975 explains much about the Australian music industry at that time. The Sunbury '75 line-up set twenty or so local groups of varying popularity against one international headliner, heavy metal group Deep Purple. With the weather cold and depressing and the turnout ten thousand less than that of Sunbury '74, the crowd awaited anxiously for the international superstars to make the day worthwhile. The Americans played a decent set, but were reportedly blown off the stage by the next act, local group Skyhooks. *RAM* magazine editor Anthony O'Grady wrote, "Part of the reason Deep Purple didn't have the impact expected was the closing gap between Australian and overseas bands. There are now quite a few musicians in Australia who can put together a string of quality rock and roll sounds. So when the Deeps came out with *their* collection, the difference was not so great at all."¹

Juke marked the year as something of a turning point. "At Sunbury 1974 Skyhooks were booed," wrote Al Webb. "At Sunbury 1975 they were, alongside Deep Purple, the highlight."² The international band was paid over \$100,000 for their performance. The Australian performers were not paid at all.

The event highlights something of a transition that was occurring within the local industry. Australian rock audiences, *RAM* argues, were beginning to lose their conviction that Australian music was inferior. O'Grady announced in the Editor's Letter, "Overseas acts are no longer the awesome, remote figures they appeared to be just a few years ago."³

¹ *RAM*, 8 March, 1975. Vol.1, pp.8.

² *Juke*, 9 April, 1977. Vol.100. pp.6.

³ *RAM*, 8 March, 1975. Vol.1, pp.3.

In rock group Skyhooks, Australia had found a band they could adore for their unashamed Australianness.⁴ That year, they had become the second Australian band to sell a million dollars worth of records (Sherbet had become the first only several months earlier). This success was probably due in part to the effectiveness of their promotion by their manager, Mushroom Records founder Michael Gudinski. By 1975, Gudinski's entrepreneurial skills and ability to spot the next big hit were already becoming legendary. *Juke* would go as far as to claim that the national rock media that sprung up in 1975 were riding on the wave that accompanied Skyhooks' success.⁵ Other writers have claimed that Gudinski himself (or more precisely, Mushroom) was responsible for the increased activity in the industry, which will be discussed in more detail later.

1975 was an important year for the Australian rock media. *Juke* and *RAM* began in Melbourne and Sydney respectively. Both would gain strong readerships and would last at least twelve years (*RAM* collapsed in 1988, *Juke* became a monthly magazine which lasted until the early Nineties). Rock television show *Countdown* also began in 1975. The year also marked the birth of many new public radio stations, including the influential alternative stations 2JJ, 3RRR and 4ZZZ. That the industry felt the country could sustain the introduction of so many new vehicles for local music, suggests perhaps that it was beginning to lose its inferiority complex. Or even that Australian music could be considered profitable.

The payment situation at Sunbury suggests that Australian musicians were still very much undervalued by the industry. Fans wrote to *RAM* to complain about Australian audiences' lack of faith in their local bands. "Comments about Australian bands are extremely derogatory, and most people stay outside while the Australian groups perform. It appears the only reason an Australian band is there is to satisfy some Musician Union ruling," wrote one

⁴ Douglas, L. & Greeves, R. 1992. 'Music, Counter Culture and the Vietnam Era'. In Hayward, P. (ed). *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism: Popular Culture and Australian Culture from the 1960s to the 1990s*.

⁵ *Juke*, 9 April, 1977. Vol. 100, pp.6.

angry reader. “Why the hell don’t Australian people support their local talent?”⁶

Australian popular music as social culture was only beginning to develop a certain confidence in the mid 1970s that it had lacked in previous decades. The general conclusion drawn from Australian popular music in the 1950s and 1960s is that it was, at best, derivative or imitative of international trends, with little local context.⁷ Even successful local performers like Johnny O’Keefe, who drew the largest audiences of any Australian performer in the decade, automatically fell back to a supporting role whenever an international artist toured the country.⁸

The situation was not helped by the international trends of the era. Popular music in the Seventies was often intentionally excessive, highly professional, corporate and decadent.⁹ This did not suit Australia’s production facilities, which were still below the standard of the larger international companies. Nor were they operating on the same budget. Anthony O’Grady wrote:

The studios’ job is simple and plainly stated. They have to come up with an international sound on one third to one half of comparable overseas production budgets. Session musicians, tape costs and operational costs by the way are often the same or higher than overseas. And you wondered why the bass drum on your last Oz record sounded a bit muffled?¹⁰

By 1975 the industry was beginning to look more promising. I suggest that the introduction of a number of commercial and alternative music media, the influence of key institutions and individuals, a change in the direction of Government policies in regard to the arts, and even a resurgence of cultural

⁶ *RAM*, 22 March 1975. Vol. 2, pp.30.

⁷ McGregor, C. 1992. ‘Growing Up (Uncool): Pop Music and Youth Culture in the ‘50s and ‘60s’. In Hayward, P. (ed). *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*.

⁸ Zion, L. 1989. ‘Disposable Icons: Pop Music in Australia 1955-63’. *Popular Music*, Vol. 8, No. 2.

⁹ Szatmary, D. 1991. *Rockin’ in Time*.

¹⁰ O’Grady, A. *RAM*, 13 September, 1977. Vol. 67, pp.3.

nationalism were all factors in the growing confidence and support for Australian music, both by the public and the industry.

This is not to say that the artists who became successful in this period were not themselves an influence on the industry, for no doubt some of them were. But it is difficult to suggest that they were of any higher quality than those before them. Given that my research deals largely with independent music and alternative culture, which gives little regard to chart rankings and commercial success, it is difficult to measure the musical 'quality' of a performer in these terms. Nor can I suggest that Australian music had completely recovered from its inferiority complex. I can only point out that in the period examined in my research, Australian music culture became more progressive, more open to originality and more confident in its performers than it had been in the past. This, in turn, can be linked to the emergence of independent music communities that went by largely unnoticed and sometimes stifled by the commercial music industry.

Change within the Australian Music Industry

Many of the changes to the industry that occurred during this period can be attributed in part to the attempts to develop the local arts sector throughout the 1970s. In a sense, the token 'Oz Rock' that emerged and characterised this period was as much a product of this new sense of cultural nationalism as it was derived from a historical musical tradition.¹¹

Coinciding with the election of the Whitlam Labor Government in December 1972 was a marked period of renewed social and cultural nationalism in Australia. This burst of interest in the Australian arts and cultural sector did not align exactly with Whitlam's period in office – Horne writes that this period of aspiration was brought about by new movements and thought amongst the

¹¹ Homan, S. 2000. 'Losing the Local: Sydney and the Oz Rock Tradition'.

Australian middle-class, rather than politicians, in the seven years prior to the election of the Labor Government in 1972¹² – but was prominent throughout the Seventies.

Certainly the most important development made in this decade regarding independent local music was the establishment of experimental radio stations across the country, which would provide outlets for non-commercial music and programming (to be discussed in more detail later). This aside, a number of inquiries into the growth of the local arts and cultural sectors were initiated throughout the 1970s. In 1972 the Government elected the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, which encouraged a “climate for change in broadcasting which gathered momentum throughout the 70s”.¹³ The Australian Broadcasting Control Board’s 1976 Committee on Program Standards and the “Green Report” both followed along these lines by encouraging greater diversity and local content on radio and television. Also amended was the quota for local music on radio. The Australian music quota stated that all commercial stations must play a minimum of 15% Australian-performed material, and in 1973 this was amended to include 5% from Australian composers rather than just performers.¹⁴ Commercial radio had in the past been able to satisfy the demands of the quota by including cover performances of international hits by Australian groups.

Whether the quota was effective in raising the status of Australian performers was debatable. It was argued that the quota simply encouraged broadcasters to be repetitious with their “gold” Australian content rather than take a chance on a less successful Australian performer.¹⁵ Stations found discreet ways of minimizing local content. Sydney commercial rock station 2SM developed the practice of placing all new Australian tracks on ‘D’ (low) rotation for several weeks. If, in that time, the track had not made any progress on the charts, it

¹² Horne, D. 1980. *Time of Hope*.

¹³ Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. 1986. *Australian Music on Radio*. pp.18.

¹⁴ Australian Broadcasting Control Board, 27th Annual Report. 1974 – 1975. pp.63.

¹⁵ Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. 1986. *Australian Music on Radio*. pp.7.

was quietly dropped from the playlist, thereby allowing the station to claim that they had supported new Australian talent but it had not taken off.¹⁶

The Commercial Music Media

As I mentioned previously, the band Skyhooks were the first band to achieve the kind of support from their Australian audience that had usually been reserved for international performers. Though the band were undoubtedly talented and their outrageous brand of cultural pride new to Australian commercial music, they also had a manager who was fast becoming one of the most talented entrepreneurs in Australia's music industry.¹⁷

By 1975 Michael Gudinski's Mushroom Records was already one of Australia's most successful independent labels. Mushroom signed Skyhooks, as well as most other Australian bands that would achieve chart success in that decade. Music historian Glenn A. Baker wrote that Mushroom Records "created a commendable new standard for Oz albums – lavish covers, total artistic control and strong back up in the areas of live work and creative PR".¹⁸ Gudinski had previously managed several of Australia's key rock acts in the early 1970s – Healing Force and Chain – and he had already established himself in the promoting business under the label Premier Artists. He was certainly an important figure within the Australian industry, particularly the Melbourne scene, where Mushroom was based.

While it seems unrealistic to attribute the development of a new era of Australian popular music to one person, it is undeniable that Gudinski's label was a major driving force behind the new commercial possibilities of the local industry, and is associated with the upgrade of Australia's recording

¹⁶ *Juke*, 7 January, 1978. Vol. 139. pp.2.

¹⁷ Milsom, W. & Thomas, H. 1986. *Pay to Play: The Australian Rock Music Industry*.

¹⁸ *RAM*, 13 January, 1978. Vol. 175. pp.19.

technologies and the success of Australia's new music media.¹⁹ In particular, I refer to the enormously popular music program, *Countdown*, and two of Australia's major music magazines, *RAM* and *Juke*. These magazines would greatly enhance the reputations and status of the performers they reported on regularly, though I will point out that they did little to boost the independent music scene.

From the outset, *RAM* Editor Anthony O'Grady expressed his interest in promoting Australian music. He wrote in the first editorial, "Australia is now part of the international rock scene. So we'll be covering the top international groups with the same familiarity as Australian groups. Overseas bands are no longer the awesome, remote figures they appeared to be just a few years ago. They're now frequent visitors to our shores because they recognize Australia is a big part of the musical world. It's time Australians recognized the same."²⁰ Similarly, *Juke's* promise in their opening issue was to "make good Australian music as accessible as good overseas music is".²¹ However, what they categorized as "good" Australian music was rather limited, with both magazines concentrating almost solely on performers that already had hit singles, rather than supporting groups before their potential had been recognised by a well-known record label.

Countdown went to air on the ABC sometime in 1975. The show was intended to be a "visual Top 40". "One of our aims," said Ian Meldrum, "is to present our own artists on a star level. By doing this we feel that kids will accept them more."²² Coinciding with the introduction of colour TV in Australia, the show soon proved it had the power to break artists nationally, and was particularly important for the fact that it was broadcast to rural areas. The early years of the show consisted of live performances of Australian bands interspersed with commentary. Stockbridge argues that the early years were the most beneficial for local bands because overseas film clips were not readily accessible. The

¹⁹ Turner, G. 1992. 'Australian Popular Music and its Contexts'. In Hayward, P. (ed). *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*.

²⁰ *RAM*, 8 March, 1975. Vol. 1, pp.1.

²¹ Nimmervoll, E. *Juke*, 14 May 1975. Vol. 1, pp.4.

²² Quoted in *Juke*, Vol. 1. pp.22.

show's impact on Australian music became less significant in the Eighties when overseas clips became more readily available.²³ Promoter Michael Chugg argued that as Countdown became more pop-orientated, it began to damage the live reputations of the more successful Australian bands, who appeared on it regularly:

What's happening now, is that the TV pop shows are getting more lightweight and more pop-orientated, they're repeating film clips of the same few people far too often, and the punters are getting bored by it. When the act comes to town, they're staying away – they've seen it far too many times on TV.²⁴

Stockbridge suggests that shows like Countdown did little for independent bands, who could not afford to provide sound recordings of an acceptable standard for broadcast on television.²⁵ One *Juke* reader argued that smaller bands were disadvantaged by the regular appearances of larger, more successful Australian acts on the show:

This is shown in the case of those Teeny Boppers on the stages of Countdown, whose stupid little self-centred girls scream for Sherbet, TMG and Skyhooks while a young up and coming group try to put across their ideals of music.²⁶

As I have suggested, the commercial nature of the new media restricted them in many ways from accessing and reporting on the independent music scene, though some attempts were made. *RAM*'s early issues would contain attempts to include the underground scene, such as a small section called 'Grassroots' which focused on a different unsigned band in every issue. A column on the Melbourne music scene was contributed by popular commercial station 3XY, which discussed trends in Melbourne music,

²³ Stockbridge, S. 1992. 'From *Bandstand* and *Six O'Clock Rock* to *MTV* and *Rage*: Rock Music on Australian Television'. In Hayward, P. (ed). *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*.

²⁴ Quoted in *RAM*, 18 June, 1976. Vol. 34. pp.3.

²⁵ Stockbridge, S. 1992. pp.76.

²⁶ *Juke*, 15 January, 1977. Vol. 88. pp.14.

changes to Melbourne venues and the movements of popular touring bands, but being a high-rating commercial rock station, 3XY could not be counted upon to provide news of interest to supporters of the independent scene. A column on smaller local scenes (such as Adelaide or Brisbane) was provided occasionally but with much less regularity than the Melbourne column, showing that the industry was predominantly Sydney and Melbourne focused. *Juke* took little interest in punk or underground music. *RAM* and *Rolling Stone*, on the other hand, would be able to report more easily on the underground after the punk explosion hit Australia in 1977.

The Independent Music Community in the Mid 1970s

Clinton Walker writes that the rise of alternative radio in Australia went “hand-in-hand with the emergence of independent music”.²⁷ Near the end of the Whitlam Government in the mid 1970s, in a move that acknowledged the inadequacy of the current range of commercial stations,²⁸ twelve experimental licenses were handed out to various public stations across the country, including 3RRR in Melbourne, 4ZZZ in Brisbane, 2XX in Canberra and 5MMM in Adelaide.

Many of these stations used this opportunity to broadcast material that could not be heard anywhere else, particularly educational topic matter and non-commercial music. Often this meant playing album tracks rather than singles, or playing songs that were banned on other stations. In several cases the stations took an interest in broadcasting local independent music. Phillips wrote that the fact that these stations appeared (and developed such loyal followings) is indicative of the fact that Australia was “less homogeneous” than it was in the 1950s.²⁹ Stafford wrote that 4ZZZ was initiated for two reasons: “to provide an alternative source of information in a state poorly served by a

²⁷ Walker, C. 1996. *Stranded: The Secret History of Australian Independent Music 1977-1991*. pp.54.

²⁸ Potts, J. 1992. ‘Heritage Rock’. In Hayward, P. (ed). *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*.

²⁹ Phillips, M. 2006. *Radio City: The First 30 Years of 3RRR*. pp.53.

docile media, and to cater for the large number of radio listeners equally disenfranchised by the anaemic musical fare dished up by commercial AM radio.”³⁰ Government-funded Sydney station 2JJ was created to cater to a less commercial market, though it was officially a ‘youth’ station rather than a ‘community’ or ‘alternative’ one. RAM wrote in 1976:

As well as playing music commercial stations don’t, Doublejay has told its listeners about the occult, explored living in the seventies, given over programs to freeloading and the intricacies of payola, how to get a bit of what you fancy and opened up their lines for people to discuss (shock, horror!) how they lost their virginity.³¹

Much more so than the commercial media, these new stations made room for an alternative market. Independent music was often ignored and sometimes stifled by the commercial industry, whose audience seemed to develop little patience for groups that were not given the star treatment in Australia’s rock magazines. Nevertheless, the mere existence of a profitable commercial mainstream industry provided the means and perhaps even the need to establish some form of community devoted to the independent groups. At the same time, local institutions such as record labels, stores and the amateur music press would emerge as the centres for the independent community in their respective cities.

What Punk Meant for Australia

An interviewee in Hutchinson’s account of Australian music suggested that Australia’s distance from the rest of the world worked to its advantage at the end of the 1970s. Punk had almost completely burnt out in the US and UK before it began to be noticed by the commercial mainstream in Australia,

³⁰ Stafford, A. 2006. *Pig City: From the Saints to Savage Garden*. pp. 38.

³¹ *RAM*, 13 February, 1976. Vol. 24. pp. 6-7.

allowing Australian performers and audiences to filter and experiment with the ideas in the brief but revolutionary movement.³²

It is almost impossible to mention the history of Australian punk, or even Australian independent music in general, without mentioning The Saints. It is significant that The Saints were formed around 1975, before punk was gathering momentum in Britain and America. At that time, none of the media in Australia had yet used the term 'Punk Rock'. It would be several years before magazines like *Juke* would report with amusement on the media antics of the Sex Pistols, or *RAM* would mistakenly label AC/DC and Rose Tattoo as "Punk Rock". And yet, in Queensland The Saints were recording songs that could be described as the closest Australia would come to American-style Punk. Walker suggests that, perhaps for the first time in Australian musical history, a style had arrived at the same time here as it had in the major musical centres of the world.³³ Australia's growing number of import stores were always ahead of the commercial industry, often receiving the latest underground hits months before they appeared in major record stores (if at all).

Perhaps, prior to punk rock, Australia had already begun to develop its own musical trends without interference. Baker argues that the significance of the success of the blues-influenced rock groups of the early 1970s such as Daddy Cool, Chain and Healing Force was the "lack of direct relation to an overseas trend"³⁴ Perhaps it was simply that punk was given very little commercial attention by Australia's major labels, so there was no rush to go out and find a similar sound locally in order to cash in on the trend. Ill-fated Mushroom offshoot Suicide Records in 1978 signalled the only real attempt of the majors to cash in on punk. Its collapse six months after its inception acted as a warning to other major labels that there was little commercial gain to be had in punk music.

³² Hutchison, T. 1992. *Your Name's on the Door*. pp.9.

³³ Walker, C. 1996.

³⁴ Quoted in *RAM*, Vol. 75. pp.19.

The popularisation of punk in Britain and America gave the major magazines reason to focus on it. *RAM* began to incorporate the local underground scene much more smoothly, though for the most part focusing on the key underground bands such as The Saints and Radio Birdman, whom Editor Anthony O'Grady took an immediate liking to. At the end of the decade the magazine became a somewhat more even mix of international music (The Police, The Romantics, The Cure), popular Australian music (Mondo Rock, The Angels, Cold Chisel, The Models) and the independent Australian music (No Fixed Address, The Reels, Tactics).

Keith Glass, founder of Missing Link Records, described *Juke's* approach to punk music as reactionary: "It's like anything that builds up, the entrenched people are resistant to what's going to happen, and that's exactly what happens. They were protecting their turf. The booking agents, Gudinski's Premier Artists, they would still be booking older style bands and that sort of stuff... they saw no value in this new amateurish shambolic stuff that was coming along."³⁵

It seemed that *Juke* made attempts during this first year or so to incorporate Punk Rock into their content. The magazine would include reports on the punk scene and on influential Australian punk bands, though rarely venturing beyond the key names like The Saints and Radio Birdman. Several writers admitted having a lack of interest in the youthful new style of music, though they supported the idea of a younger rock industry. P.B. Crabshaw writes, "The only reason something as banal generally as punk rock is having any sort of impact in music is because of the youth of its creators. There are so few young rock stars in the 'legit' rock scene. All the acts are old and getting older."³⁶ Some reports on the local punk scene were scathing, such as a gig review of early Melbourne punk band The News, which concluded with: "The whole thing was a vacuous spectacle with the pretensions of band and audience as the only justification for it all. Pretty vacant."³⁷

³⁵ Personal interview. 23 September, 2008.

³⁶ *Juke*, 19 Feb, 1977. Vol. 91, pp.18.

³⁷ *Juke*, 4 March, 1978. Vol. 147. pp.4.

The Independent Music Media

The little attention given to the emerging punk and new wave scene meant that fans had to get their information elsewhere. Following overseas examples of amateur publications like Britain's *Sniffin' Glue* and America's *Punk*, Australian punk fans began to produce and distribute their own fanzines in their respective major cities. Brisbane's *Suicide Alley* is recorded to be the first, put together by Clinton Walker and Andrew McMillan. Melbourne's first local fanzine, *Plastered Press*, was created by Bruce Milne though it only lasted for one issue. Walker and Milne began to correspond and agreed to work together on a new fanzine, *Pulp*, that split the focus between Melbourne and Brisbane. Copies were sold through punk/ new wave import stores, which were springing up in each capital city at around this time.

Milne: Because there wasn't really information about what was going on in Australia at the time, we started selling a lot of copies. I think by the end we were selling over a thousand copies an issue.³⁸

Other fanzines were springing up around the country. Melbourne had *Alive and Pumping*; Brisbane had *The Rat*; Adelaide had *Street Fever*; Sydney had *Self Abuse* and *Spurt*, among others. McMillan described the basic tasks involved in writing an amateur fanzine to consist of "a bitchy/positive/negative/optimistic editorial, review the latest punk releases, transcribe question - answer interviews with the local bands, rubbish the Queen and get some photos."³⁹ Fanzines seldom lasted beyond the first year or two. *Street Fever* editor Donald Robertson noted, "[The writers'] enthusiasm for music far outweighed their ability to produce a magazine."⁴⁰

³⁸ Personal interview.

³⁹ *RAM*, 24 February, 1978. Vol. 77. pp.8.

⁴⁰ *Roadrunner*, March 1979. Vol. 2, No. 2. pp.2.

Around the time *Pulp* collapsed, before their fifth issue, a new magazine with national coverage called *Roadrunner* had appeared to “take on *RAM* and *Juke*”, according to Milne: “Basically all the fanzine writers around the country sort of started working for *Roadrunner*.”⁴¹ Milne himself began writing reviews and articles for the paper, as did Walker and Stuart Coupe. Robertson became the magazine’s first editor. *Roadrunner* set itself up as ‘Australia’s Independent Music Paper’. Donald Robertson wrote in the Editor’s Letter, “the important thing to me about *Roadrunner* is that it is conceived and put together by music enthusiasts for music enthusiasts. That description is probably as good a definition of the term ‘fanzine’ as I can think of.”⁴²

As Robertson noted, the emphasis was on an enthusiasm for music, rather than a desire to produce something professional that they could profit from. The writers were unpaid and often struggled to keep the magazine running. It ran from 1978 to around 1982. Based in Adelaide, *Roadrunner* notably attempted to provide a more balanced report on the independent music across the country, rather than focusing on Sydney and Melbourne. An examination of the types of records they reviewed suggested that the paper was aimed at a different audience to that of *RAM* and *Juke*. *Roadrunner* aimed at the alternative-radio listening, import record store frequenting, underground fan, who may not have necessarily classed themselves as ‘New Wave’.

Walker: I’m sure all of us hated that term, ‘new wave’... It equated to bands like the Cars, old farts getting haircuts and doing short pop songs, skinny leather ties and all that.⁴³

The reviews page often included records not yet available in Australia except through import stores, including the occasional bootleg recording. The May 1979 issue included a review of a live performance of Melbourne electronic band Man and Machine, recorded live at 3RRR. The early 1980s would

⁴¹ Personal interview.

⁴² *Roadrunner*, Vol. 2. No. 2. pp.2.

⁴³ Personal interview. 13 October, 2008.

provide another boom in music media that focused on the underground scene, with publications such as *Vox*, *Tension*, avant-garde music/ art magazine *The Virgin Press*, and cassette magazine *Fast Forward*.

The Independent Music Community

Milne remarks that aside from the occasional breakthrough act, there was little overlap between the underground community and the mainstream. “There was no real crossover between what the big record stores stocked and what the independents stocked,” he said.⁴⁴ The alternative audience were typically characterised by a fierce loyalty to their bands and the accompanying industry. They may have enjoyed the bands’ underground status much more than the bands did themselves. One underground fan wrote in to *RAM*, “there is a tiny feeling of satisfaction that one feels for supporting a band that is ‘criminally ignored’ by the music establishment.”⁴⁵

The loyalty and sense of community that characterised the independent scene moved many fans to undertake various roles within the community, such as contributing to fanzines, volunteering as announcers on community stations or simply calling up the stations and making requests. Kruse’s suggestion that among the alternative community, the role of artist and audience are “virtually interchangeable”⁴⁶ is supported in the sense that many who could not play in a band would instead form a label, manage or promote the underground artists they loved. Milne, who was a major force within the Melbourne independent community, noted that he had “always wanted to be a musician but was just always the worst amongst all my friends.”⁴⁷ Many of the fanzine writers such as Milne, Walker, Coupe and Robertson “graduated”, Walker’s words, to the commercial (but more alternative-friendly) rock press such as

⁴⁴ Personal interview.

⁴⁵ *RAM*, 21 March, 1980. Vol. 130. pp.2.

⁴⁶ Kruse, H. 1993. ‘Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture’. *Popular Music*, Vol. 12, No. 1. pp.39.

⁴⁷ Personal interview.

RAM and *Rolling Stone*.⁴⁸ This began to set these magazines apart from *Juke*. The new magazines that would emerge in the early 1980s would take over where *Roadrunner* left off.

By this period, the larger cities of Australia had already established quite different characteristics and institutions that would influence the music that emerged from them. My next chapter examines the characteristics of Melbourne's punk and postpunk scene and the ways in which it was considered to differ from other musical centres in Australia. I will discuss the key institutions and forces behind Melbourne independent music and how they interacted, with particular reference to Missing Link Records, one of Melbourne's first independent labels and import stores.

⁴⁸ Personal interview.

Melbourne and the Independent Music Scene

In 1986, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal published an inquiry into the importance of the broadcasting quota for local content. Throughout it, investigations are made into the existence of a distinctly Australian sound.¹ Turner's argument against the existence of such a sound, makes an important point: "Contemporary rock and pop music is a particularly globalised form, produced and distributed by a handful of multinational companies – but sung with an American accent."² He goes on to argue:

To look for 'the Australian' element is to look for a local inflection, the distinctive modification of an already internationally established musical style. It would not be difficult to argue that the work of The Divinyls, or The Church, or The Saints, or even The Black Sorrows, is distinctive but it would be very difficult to describe that distinctiveness, or indeed the stylistic conventions which frame their music, as Australian.³

Following this argument, it is problematic to suggest that any Australian city has generated a specific sound, though Homan argues that certain trends in Australian music had stronger followings in certain cities.⁴ Hayward suggests the main difference tends to be in the "character of independent music scenes associated with metropolitan centres" rather than a specific sound⁵ and indeed, attaching a particular sound to a city appears to function as a marketing technique, above anything else.⁶

¹ Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. 1986. *Australian Music on Radio*.

² Turner, G. 1992. 'Australian Popular Music and its Contexts'. In Hayward, P. (ed). *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*. pp.12.

³ Ibid. pp.13.

⁴ Homan, S. 2000. 'Losing the Local: Sydney and the Oz Rock Tradition'. *Popular Music*, Vol. 19, No.1.

⁵ Hayward, P. 1992. pp.5.

⁶ Brabazon, T. 2005. 'You've Got About A Year: An Introduction'. In Brabazon, T (ed). *Liverpool of the South Seas*.

My previous chapter provided a background into the more commercial aspects of the music industry and the external factors involved in the development of independent music scenes of Australian cities. This chapter examines the independent music scene in Melbourne and the internal factors that may have affected or contributed to its emergence. Though this scene very quickly split into unnecessary divisions, it was held together by the institutions that supported it – namely the radio stations, independent press, venues, labels and record stores that allowed a band to enter the independent music scene and gather a following.

The music scene in a particular city is differentiated by the general historical ‘character’ assumed by the city and by the nature of institutions and even individuals that emerge to cultivate the developing scene. Phillips suggests that Melburnians have always had the tendency to view their city as having a “distinctly European culture and sophistication”⁷. This may affect the sound a band generates for itself and certainly the art-focused aspects of punk and post-punk music gathered more of a following there than in other capitals. The magazine *Virgin Press*, which began in 1981, indicates the presence of this art-punk following. It contained a roughly even mix of art and popular culture articles with punk and avant-garde rock.

Sydney is noted to have been “brash and hedonistic” and more willing to adopt North American styles.⁸ Homan’s work on the emergence of the ‘Oz Rock’ sound and cultural codes suggests that Sydney was the centre for this commercial style.⁹ Clinton Walker notes his experience of the punk scene in Melbourne, which differed to that of Brisbane, which at that time was tightly controlled by the Bjelke-Petersen Government.

Walker: [The Melbourne scene] was less politicised, for obvious reasons since I come from Brisbane. I was an art school dropout. And so was Nick Cave and that whole scene. A lot of people were really

⁷ Phillips, M. 2006. *Radio City: The First 30 Years of 3RRR*. pp. 20.

⁸ Homan, S. 2000.

⁹ Ibid.

interested in art and that's where I come from, from art school, as well... Sydney was much more American-style in the music that prevailed there, you had the Radio Birdman scene and that whole Detroit sound, that was really dominant in Sydney. Melbourne was much artier, let's put it that way. Brisbane was kind of primal and what I call 'avant-primitive' ... One thing that a lot of people did listen to in Melbourne was a lot of that German stuff like Kraftwerk, stuff like Eno, early Roxy Music we all loved. So there was more of a Euro-artistic kind of influence in Melbourne.¹⁰

Melbourne punk often had little in common with what was coming out of Britain at the time. While British punk was predominantly working class (or at least portrayed as such by the British and Australian press) and highly politicised, Riley suggests that Melbourne punk gathered more of a private school following.

There was even a person who called himself Pierre Voltaire, and some people carried around Dostoevsky and Kafka paperbacks as proof of the depth of their pose.¹¹

This is not to say that the Melbourne scene did not have British-influenced punk bands, but that it also developed a base for darker, avant-garde rock and electronica.

Milne: When the whole punk thing started here, it was really just great interesting young bands who didn't want to sound like Rod Stewart or they didn't want to sound like the big Australian bands.

Langdon: It wasn't just 'three-chord' rock?

Milne: No. I mean, there was certainly a lot of that. It was mainly after the newspapers, a year or so in to it, got on to it, and would scour the

¹⁰ Personal interview. 13 October, 2008.

¹¹ Riley, V. 1992. pp. 120.

streets of London trying to find outrageous looking kids, that people like that started turning up to gigs in Melbourne.¹²

Walker: A big record for all of us was The Saints' third album, *Prehistoric Sounds*. It was built around horns and acoustic guitars. But I loved that. I don't know if any of us were prepared to wear that label of punk, I certainly never had a safety pin near me, and I had good hair.¹³

A different struggle went on in the smaller state capitals. While Sydney and Melbourne bands struggled for international recognition, many interstate bands aimed for such recognition in Sydney and Melbourne. Adelaide-based *Roadrunner* magazine took particular issue with the Sydney and Melbourne centred network. An article in an early issue complained of Adelaide's lack of interest in their own performers, who often would not receive recognition in their home city until they had moved to Melbourne or Sydney. Brian Johnstone wrote for *Roadrunner*:

Interstate bands, many who have originated in Adelaide, are demanding and obtaining anywhere from three to ten thousand dollars a week while local bands struggle for a gig and are then paid \$100 to \$200 between as many as 10 musicians while shoring up memories of broken dreams and promises.¹⁴

This trend can be seen on a larger scale when Australian bands relocate overseas and achieve success, to come home and automatically draw much larger audiences. Nick Cave's band, The Birthday Party, were themselves the focus of this kind of attention after achieving cult success in London. Cave told *The Virgin Press*:

¹² Personal interview, 18 August, 2008.

¹³ Personal interview.

¹⁴ Johnstone, B. *Roadrunner*, Dec 1978 - Jan 1979. pp.10.

We were just a little embarrassed, we're the same group we were when we left. Just because London, in a sense, patted us on the back, and the papers said we were good, people come to see us in swarms, where they could have worked that out for themselves.¹⁵

Melbourne was, by the late 1970s, a well-established commercial centre of Australian popular music. *RAM* describes the Melbourne pub circuit as “booming”¹⁶, particularly because there were few other places that bands could find work besides pubs. In 1976 Melbourne’s Hard Rock Café closed, as did the rock festival, Reefer Cabaret.

Though all of the major labels were Sydney-based, Melbourne did have Gudinski’s well-established independent label Mushroom Records. Mushroom, as well as Gudinski’s other enterprises, had a significant impact on the way the music scene operated in Melbourne. Missing Link’s Keith Glass complained about the struggle with Mushroom Records, whose reputation for finding successful artists was so strong that the major labels took little interest in bands that were not signed to Mushroom. “To the Sydney labels, if Mushroom hadn’t picked it up, it was useless,” he says.¹⁷ Gudinski owned the booking agency Premier Artists, which alongside rival company Nucleus, had a stranglehold on the industry and very much dictated which bands would be able to play enough shows to generate a large following.¹⁸

Gudinski also owned Bombay Rock, which opened in March 1978 and became one of Melbourne’s premier rock clubs. Gudinski’s empire is important in examining the effect of boutique label Suicide on the punk scene in Melbourne.

The Case of Suicide Records

¹⁵ Quoted in *The Virgin Press*. March 1981. Vol. 1, pp.11.

¹⁶ *RAM*, 17 May, 1975. Vol. 6. pp. 8.

¹⁷ Personal interview. 23 September, 2008.

¹⁸ Hutchison, T. 1992. *Your Name’s on the Door*. pp.98.

One anonymous record dealer told *RAM* that Suicide Records was “like trying make General Motors out of a bicycle.”¹⁹ It was the only case of Australia’s major labels attempting to cash in on the independent market for at least a decade, and it struck the market while punk was still very much in its infancy in Australia. Suicide rounded up seven new wave acts: The Boys Next Door, the Negatives and the Teenage Radio Stars from Melbourne, JAB and X-Ray-Z from Adelaide (both of whom relocated to Melbourne during the Suicide period), the Survivors from Brisbane and Wasted Daze from Sydney.

From the beginning, Suicide looked like the antithesis of everything that punk had intended to stand for. Advertisements for the label were slapped all over the rock papers of the time. *Juke* reported that at least \$20,000 went into the promotion of the label’s first (and only) compilation CD, *Lethal Weapons*, comprising the cost of “three film clips, radio and press ads, promotional devices such as windcheaters, T-shirts, replicas of guns and confectionery.”²⁰ Suicide’s first press release stated, “new wave’s attitude is simple: to build a new foundation you first have to destroy the old.”²¹ The irony of this statement was not lost on those who reported on the label’s collapse.

The bands were always portrayed as a package. They were interviewed together as the “Suicide Set”, with little reference to their individual sound.²² It seemed as if the label intended to gather more recognition than any of the bands signed to it. Boys Next Door drummer Phill Calvert later told *RAM*, “We lost a lot of our audience because we were thrown in a package deal. People used one band to judge us all.”²³

The compilation sold 7,000 copies but was not enough to keep the label going. By the time it collapsed, less than a year after its inception, three of the bands signed to it had disintegrated. Several had undergone massive

¹⁹ *RAM*, 16 October, 1978. Vol. 94, pp.32.

²⁰ *Juke*, 13 May, 1978. Vol. 157. pp.10

²¹ Quoted in *RAM*, 2 June, 1978. Vol. 85. pp.9.

²² *Juke*, 13 May, 1978. pp.10.

²³ Quoted in *RAM*, 6 October, 1978. Vol. 94. pp.32.

upheavals in line-up and style. Out of several of the Suicide bands – members of X-Ray-Z, Teenage Radio Stars and JAB - came the Models, who would, with a completely different sound, generate considerable commercial success.

Of the factors that could have led to Suicide's collapse, Director Barrie Earl blamed the Australian market and the bands themselves. *RAM* writer Miranda Brown compared his attitude to that of the "spurned parent". She suggested that many of the bands had been prematurely thrust into the limelight (of the seven bands, only X-Ray-Z had been together more than a year) and the Suicide attention "stultified, rather than enhanced their development."²⁴ One punk fan wrote in to *RAM*, "The obvious emphasis was on bands which looked like J. Rotten et al and SFA (sic) was given to musical credibility. The next big error was attempting to corner all the bands on one label, and give them the same hype that all the BOFs (sic) got – no wonder they all developed super star syndromes and fucked up attitudes."²⁵

The case of Suicide Records shows that the commercial music industry and media had very little understanding of punk and independent culture. It would take them at least a decade to learn how to approach the alternative audience (see Mathieson's *The Sell-in* for details of the commercial industry's courting of the Australian alternative market in the 1990s).²⁶ Suicide's collapse confirmed for Gudinski that there was no money in punk. From then on, the punk scene had to rely financially on its own institutions, but retained a sense of authenticity in keeping to 'punk' ideals.

The Melbourne Independent Music Scene

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ 'Letters', *RAM*, December 1, 1978. Vol. 98, pp.2.

²⁶ Mathieson, C. 2000. *The Sell-in: How the Music Business Seduced Alternative Rock*.

Clinton Walker jokes of the Melbourne independent scene in the 1970s, “There was me and about fifty-nine other people”. He notes that most of the scene at that time was around the same age – mostly in their early twenties.²⁷

Bruce Milne said of being a part of the independent music scene, “it felt fantastic because if you loved music, you were just so far ahead of the loop.”²⁸ By 1977, while Australia’s national rock press remained oblivious to the wave of younger bands springing up all over the country, Missing Link founder Keith Glass was planning to make his way to Brisbane to see The Saints perform at their private venue and offer to release their material through his label. He never got the chance. The Saints received rave reviews in the English rock press with their first single ‘(I’m) Stranded’, were signed to EMI and left the country almost immediately. Australia’s music papers were left scratching their heads. How could this unknown group from Australia’s Deep North make a dent on the international music scene with a self-released single, no commercial airplay and without playing more than a handful of gigs in a legitimate venue? *Juke* was completely baffled, suspecting that The Saints were an English or American band pretending to be Australian in the hope of getting publicity. They were less than enthusiastic about the group, almost taking it as a personal insult that The Saints had bypassed all the major checkpoints for success and succeeded where all the bands *they’d* marked for overseas success had failed. *Juke* devoted more of their introductory article on the Saints to grumbling about a lack of cohesion in Australia’s national music industry than a report on the band or their music.²⁹

The commercial media in Sydney, particularly *RAM* and Australian *Rolling Stone* were considerably more open to the new music, willingly accepting articles and reviews of independent bands. Melbourne, however, only had *Juke*. Walker suggests that “Melbourne started to perceive a gulf there that

²⁷ Personal interview.

²⁸ Personal interview.

²⁹ *Juke*, 8 January, 1977. Vol. 87. pp. 13.

Sydney media wasn't giving Melbourne all the due coverage it should've got."³⁰

Geographically, Melbourne punk developed its strongest followings in St Kilda and among the northern inner city, particularly in Fitzroy and Carlton. In the early years, punk's tiny following watched live performances at private parties or little church halls. Milne was known to hold functions at Swinburne Tech, where he was studying at the time.

By around 1978, punk had a few select venues. North of the river, there was the Champion Hotel in Fitzroy and the Tiger Lounge in Richmond. When the Keith Glass Band gained a residency at the Tiger Lounge, Glass was known to have opened up the scene for independent music, offering the supporting slot to various punk and new wave bands.

Glass: We started to have various groups on each week and within about three months we were just the old guys and all the new crowd was coming along, so we actually did ourselves out of a job but that was okay. That was when bands such as the Boys Next Door and JAB and Young Modern from Adelaide all came over and played that, that was their introduction, probably the first real venue that most of those bands played.³¹

The scene in St Kilda was focused around the George Hotel, which in 1978 became the Crystal Ballroom, run by Dolores San Miguela and later Laurie Richards, who also ran the Tiger Lounge. The Crystal Ballroom portrayed the gothic, cabaret-influenced, sexually ambiguous character of the Melbourne punk scene. Riley wrote:

In the early days of new wave in Australia it was not uncommon to hear interstate people refer to the (then) Boys Next Door/ Crystal Ballroom scene in Melbourne as a 'funeral party' because of the preponderance

³⁰ Personal interview.

³¹ Personal interview.

of black makeup, black clothes, dim lighting and morose facial expressions (what is now described as 'gothic')." ³²

Milne admits that there was "a bit of a uniform" among the inner city scene, often avoiding blue jeans and other popular fashions of the outer suburbs. "So it was largely that we'd wear black." He says. ³³

During that period from the late Seventies to the early Eighties, independent music would be contained to the inner city. As in the other major centres of Australia, there was something of a rift between the inner and outer suburban. Glass says that rock in the outer suburbs was indicative of the more commercial pop and 'pub rock' sounds of *Countdown* and the rest of the commercial media.

Glass: That reflected really what was going on in the outer suburban hotels, the 'beer barns' as they were called. That's where groups such as TMG or Hush or Sherbet or whatever, ruled. But the inner city was always a little bit inclined to want to go with something new. ³⁴

Walker: The inner city bands didn't go and play in the suburbs, and if they did, they got bottled. ³⁵

While both scenes were against the culture and musical tastes of the outer suburban areas, there developed a rivalry between groups on the opposite sides of the Yarra river, particularly as the independent scene began to expand at the end of the Seventies.

Melbourne was still somewhat divided by Suicide as well. The Suicide period had split the punk scene between those bands who were signed to Suicide and those who were not. Suicide bands received the benefits of being part of the Gudinski network – they were in the Premier Artists stable and were

³² Riley, V. 1992. pp. 116.

³³ Personal interview.

³⁴ Personal interview.

³⁵ Personal interview.

showcased at Gudinski's Bombay Rock club on 'Punk Nights'. Non-Suicide bands such as the News and the Young Charlatans struggled to get gigs. Milne wrote in *Roadrunner* that the label had grave consequences for the Melbourne scene:

They managed to split the punk scene down the middle. Before Suicide came along all the bands used to get on well together because unity was vital if punk – new wave was to properly establish itself as a musical alternative. After the arrival of Suicide, the two different factions – Suicide and non-Suicide bands – didn't talk to one another. There was a mutual suspicion and antagonism that didn't exist before.³⁶

It seems that very early in Melbourne punk, there existed little sense of a citywide community. Walker notes that the rivalries rarely extended to the media that covered the scene, such as the radio stations, fanzines and labels that supported independent punk and new wave music. "The media was grateful to try and give coverage to this inner city stuff because it was starting to break out. So they were eager to have new content, I think."³⁷ The sense of rivalry between communities, between cultures and between cities, as documented by Cohen in her ethnography of independent rock bands,³⁸ seems important in establishing a punk scene's 'difference' from the commercial or the mainstream.

Walker: Very quickly in that scene, little networks spring up and those networks are due to proximity, people who lived near each other, people who shared the same sort of ideals, and I hate to have to admit, people who wanted to share needles and people who didn't want to share needles.³⁹

³⁶ Quoted in *Roadrunner*, 15 May 1979. pp.11.

³⁷ Personal interview.

³⁸ See 'Conclusion' in Cohen, S. 1991. *Rock Culture in Liverpool*.

³⁹ Personal interview.

The drug situation in Melbourne had a significant impact on the scene in a short amount of time. Smoking marijuana was strongly associated with hippie culture and hence frowned upon. Walker notes that heroin and amphetamines were common, particularly heroin and speed taken together in a combination known as a “speedball”. Very quickly the scene moved from alcohol to narcotics and amphetamines, which were cheap, strong and readily available.

Walker: It did start, straight away, really early when we figured, Oh, you can just go down to Fitzroy Street and score, and wow. So many people were immediately sucked into it.⁴⁰

The Institutions of Melbourne Punk

The emergence of Melbourne’s independent music community was driven by several main forces. The most obvious of which was the emergence of community radio, including rock stations 3RRR, 3PBS and 3CR, virtually the only media outlets in the city to include local new wave music. Attempts to set up a 3JJ – to relay Sydney station 2JJ – were made in 1976, but were unsuccessful until the station went national in the 1990s. 3RRR in particular, quickly became identifiable with punk and new wave music⁴¹ when really, probably little of the station’s programming time was given to local independent rock music.

Walker: To myself and the people that I was hanging out with, Triple R was way too conservative for our taste anyway. But, in retrospect, I look back and think actually, I had a pretty narrow focus on what I wanted to do and what I wanted to hear – and that probably fitted in fine to let me do a shift at RRR – but really, RRR needed to be playing

⁴⁰ Personal interview.

⁴¹ Phillips, M. *Radio City: The First 30 Years of 3RRR*. pp. 16.

all different kinds of stuff, which it was doing even then. But militants like me at that time just went, Oh I hate that shit.⁴²

The station had several regular new wave programs. Martin Armiger of The Bleeding Hearts and later, Sports, hosted the *New Wave Breakfast Show* in 1978, which played music “ranging from Ultravox and Graham Parker and the Rumour, to the Blue Oyster Cult and Linda Ronstadt.”⁴³ At the same time, former JAB member, Bohdan X began broadcasting his own show, *Punk With Bohdan X*. His mix of punk and new wave music, along with his unprofessional, shambolic style of announcing, quickly brought him to cult status among the station’s presenters.⁴⁴ Bruce Milne, who became 3RRR’s “token punk”⁴⁵ created programs that introduced and contextualised the new music to the Melbourne audience. Milne claims his best show was done with Clinton Walker, called *Know Your Product* after the brilliant but unsuccessful Saints single.

Milne: A lot of people were reading about punk rock in the newspapers as being just this loud noisy mess and we were trying to show that it was all part of a musical history. So you might play a current release by an American band and then play a Sixties record that somehow referenced it, even if it was just that they were both a simple chord progression or something, or a Fifties song. It wasn’t just, ‘these are all the new records that have come out around the world this week’, it was trying to put them into some sort of context so that people could see that, despite what they were reading in the newspaper about safety pins and people smashing each other up, that there was a musical revolution going on.⁴⁶

Keith Glass and Bruce Milne founded the two key labels of the late Seventies Melbourne punk movement – Missing Link Records and Au Go Go Records

⁴² Personal interview.

⁴³ Phillips, M. 2006. pp. 43

⁴⁴ Phillips, M. 2006. pp. 39

⁴⁵ *The Virgin Press*, June 1981. Vol. 4, pp. 8.

⁴⁶ Personal interview.

respectively. Both were, Walker notes, the “fulcrum” of the Melbourne scene. Glass and Milne often worked together, releasing, between the two of them, most of the material from that period in Melbourne. Au Go Go officially began in 1979 as a label that dealt mostly with 7-inch singles, and would press up a standard 500 copies of most releases. From the beginning, it was clear that there was little money to be made in the kind of music he intended to release.

Milne: There was definitely some profit although because it was 7-inch singles it was... you're talking about 20 cents a record or something. But that became significant when it became three or four thousand records that you were selling.

Langdon: Would you get that often? Sell three or four thousand records?

Milne: No no, most things were much, much smaller than that. A lot of them didn't even sell the 500.⁴⁷

Both labels operated on a small budget, with many financial struggles throughout their history. The punk scene expanded in the early Eighties and several other labels would appear such as Monash Records and MusicLand, which dealt predominantly with importing and distribution. Missing Link, which also operated as an import record store, was central to Melbourne's punk and postpunk scene from the late Seventies to the early Eighties. It was one of only several places to buy many new wave imports – Riley mentions other import stores such as Readings in Carlton, and Pipe, which specialised in European experimental music.⁴⁸ Phillips mentions a small punk record store called Climax Records, though no mention of it is made elsewhere.⁴⁹ The Missing Link store contained releases by local new wave bands, as well as the fanzines and imported punk magazines. Its reputation, and the enthusiasm of founder Keith Glass for the independent scene, made it a

⁴⁷ Personal interview.

⁴⁸ Riley, V. 1992.

⁴⁹ Phillips, M. 2006. pp. 37.

significant force within the community, one that will be explored further in the following chapter.

The city had several punk fanzines, such as *Pulp* (which became more Melbourne-focused when Clinton Walker moved from Brisbane in 1977) and *Alive and Pumping*. Many of the writers on this wave of fanzines would move to writing articles on independent music for the professional rock magazines such as *RAM* and *Rolling Stone* by the end of the Seventies, and a new, younger wave of fanzine writers sprung up. In 1980, Bruce Milne and fellow 3RRR volunteer Andrew Maine used the station's studios to produce the cassette magazine *Fast Forward*, which contained a mix of spoken word with a playlist of independent demo tapes they had taken from the program *Demo Derby* (which they both presented at the time), or records borrowed from Missing Link, where Milne was working. Melbourne magazines in the early Eighties such as *Vox* and *The Virgin Press* were more focused on the inner city scene, which began to gather a stronger following and would continue to do so for the rest of the decade.

Sense of Community within the Melbourne Independent Scene

Particularly in the early years of Melbourne punk, it was unavoidable that different players in the scene supported one another, even unintentionally. How could 3RRR play a local independent release without referencing Missing Link, which was often the only way a listener could purchase it? Similarly, a fanzine profiling an independent band was well aware that the only way their readers would hear them would be through the city's few alternative stations, or to see them live at a specifically punk-themed venue. That the network was on such a small scale meant that it was impossible not to rely to some extent on the other central forces of the scene. At this point many of the key figures in the Melbourne punk community were often part of the same social circles anyway.

The scene was characterised by this closeknit nature, as well as a lack of strong financial backing. Alternative radio constantly struggled to raise the funds to continue broadcasting, often relying on donations and benefits. Those who wanted to support the independent scene would do so with little expectation of making a profit, well aware that much of the work to be done was unpaid (working a shift at 3RRR) or paid very little (starting a fanzine or a record label). Milne recalls that his attitude to operating the label was to put out the records that he believed were important, and “hope that other people agreed. Sometimes they did.”⁵⁰ A common theme of Coupe’s account of the promoting side of the industry was that, for a promoter, even touring an artist that had a large following could still lose them a large amount of money.⁵¹ Perhaps it was to be thought of as a membership fee for joining this elite circle of music lovers, that inevitably to keep the scene going its supporters had to pitch in somehow, whether it was simply buying records, paying a door charge to see live performances, or sending money to their favourite community station. My next chapter profiles Missing Link Records, which built up a reputation as the centre for imports as well as local releases. The presence of Missing Link characterised and supported the developing scene over its most important years – 1977-1983, when it operated as an important independent label as well as a record store.

⁵⁰ Personal interview.

⁵¹ Coupe, S. 2003. *The Promoters: Inside Stories from the Australian Rock Industry*.

Case Study: A Profile of Missing Link Records 1971 – 1983

The booklet of the recently released compilation, *The Missing Link Story*, contains a photo of the store. A large group of people stand at the front, including two policemen. Keith Glass, the first owner of Missing Link Records, explains what the fuss was about:

Glass: That was in Flinders Lane. And the reason they're all standing outside is because there's a guy in there called Ron Rude, who had a self-recorded, self-pressed album that he put out and he said, How can I publicise it? And I looked at him, at the time he was so scrawny and skinny, he looked like an Auschwitz victim. So I said, Why don't you go on a hunger strike until commercial radio plays your record. So we put him in the window and people would be stopping and going, What's going on here? And he looked like he'd been on a hunger strike for about a month anyway. When in fact he was sneaking hamburgers. We had him in there for a week until the police made us take him out because it was stopping traffic!¹

Rude's LP may not have gone down in history as the peak of Melbourne recordings at this time. But the incident highlights the store's determined and sometimes outrageous efforts to publicise itself and the music it supported. Like many key figures in the Melbourne independent scene, Glass has been involved in many different aspects of the community throughout the 1970s and 1980s. He is most strongly associated with the opening of an import record store in Flinders Lane in 1971 with then business partner David Pepperell (who was known in the local community as a contributor to *Juke* under the name "Dr Pepper"). The name of the store was Archie and Jugheads. It would be renamed Missing Link some five years later, becoming one of Australia's first and most successful independent record stores and earning itself an important place in Melbourne's independent music history.

¹ Personal interview. 23 September, 2008.

Glass denies being the first import store to open in Melbourne. “We were the first to do it the way we did it.” He offers instead. “There were other shops around that had imported records. There was a jazz-classical store called Thomas’s. There was a folk store called Discurio and I think Discurio might still be going.”²

Glass was briefly involved with promoting. In the Missing Link years he brought several overseas performers to Australia, which attracted small audiences and were moderately profitable, such as Snakefinger (who had a heart attack after a show at Melbourne University) and the Legendary Stardust Cowboy (“He’d made the world’s worst record so it was also the world’s worst stage show,” Glass told Stuart Coupe).³ He would later promote several country performers and made “serious money” bringing Irish comedian Hal Roach to Australia for several years.⁴

While running the Missing Link record store and label, Glass managed Nick Cave’s early Melbourne punk band The Boys Next Door (later the Birthday Party) and performed himself in several underground bands in Melbourne, including the Keith Glass Band (a Sixties-style group who later reformed as the Living Legends), Hans Poulsen (the band were the only act to record on the Go! label and not actually appear on the accompanying television program), Sundown, and Cam-Pact, who had several chart hits.⁵

Glass and Pepperell began Archie and Jugheads on a budget of around “two thousand bucks in loose change”, in a tiny room in the now-defunct Metropole Arcade in Melbourne’s CBD. Glass estimates their rent to have been around five dollars a week. The store kicked off to a promising start when an article published in the *Sun* on their first day of business enabled them to sell all of their newly imported stock in the first few days. Mail order was particularly important to their business, since there were so few import stores in Australia

² Personal interview.

³ Coupe, S. 2003. *The Promoters*. pp.18

⁴ Ibid. pp.23

⁵ *Juke*, 22 October, 1977. Vol. 127.

in the first half of the decade. Bruce Milne, who worked at the store in the latter half of the Seventies, complained about the thousands of record covers he had to fold that would be sent out across the country.⁶

Even in the very early years, the store was known for providing information on underground music. Glass recalled that Chris Winter, who hosted the ABC's non-commercial music program 'Room to Move' in the years before community radio, was a regular customer:

He used to come into the shop and we used to spend about two hours with him drilling him up about this, that and the other... It sort of worked both ways; we influenced him and in turn, because that was the only program of its kind that was going at the time, it started to influence what we were selling.⁷

Glass and Pepperell involved themselves in distribution for international independent labels, particularly Europe and America, such as Transatlantic, ECM and Kicking Mule, who dealt with folk, jazz and country respectively: "We didn't really know what we were doing," Glass admits. "We just rang up other stores and said, Hey, do you want this?"⁸ The store's accompanying label, Lamington Records, had several chart hits, which included Norman Gunston's 'Salute to ABBA', a comedy recording of Gunston performing an ABBA medley. Glass describes this as a disaster for the business.

Glass: If you read any books on music you'll find out that all the independent labels that operated in the US in the Fifties, they would invariably say that if you had one hit record, you were going to be in trouble because you'd press up all these records, send them out to the distributors, they would then not pay you unless you had other stuff they wanted. And that's more or less what happened to us.⁹

⁶ Personal interview.

⁷ Quoted in 'Let's Face it – It's a Dirty Business'. *Waves*, Vol. 73. August – September 1985. pp. 21.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Personal interview.

Archie and Jugheads continued to be, according to Glass, relatively successful for the first half of the Seventies, despite being under constant threat of legal action by Australia's major labels.

Glass: At the time the record companies in Australia had a stranglehold and if you wanted to set up a business, they would make you buy a certain amount of stock – I'm going to say \$3000 or \$4000 per company – and you would have to take more or less what they wanted to give you... Within two days of opening we had three representatives from various companies came down to see us and said, You didn't ask our permission, we're going to sue you. So for the first few years we operated we were under constant threat of legal action from EMI, Festival, Sony, Polygram, Astor and one or two others.¹⁰

Dave Robinson of Stiff Records in Britain noted that Punk and New Wave changed the way that the major companies saw record retail. "There was a belief in major record companies that if someone went into a shop and wanted a Patti Smith album and they couldn't get it then they might buy an Eagles album," he told *Roadrunner*, "Now the New Wave proved that people go in with a very firm idea of what they want. They were prepared to go to five or six record shops to find that one record that they wanted. Suddenly you had an audience who knew what they wanted."¹¹

The major megastores such as Brashes, had begun to catch on to more effective ways of marketing to young music fans. Before this, Glass says, "the records were in the same section as where they sold toasters, and they'd have displays up for the Sound of Music... But by the mid to late Seventies they had worked out what they were doing wrong."¹²

¹⁰ Personal interview.

¹¹ Quoted in *Roadrunner*, March 1979, pp.11.

¹² Personal interview.

For Archie and Jugheads, business began to suffer in the mid 1970s. They were losing money in distribution. “There was no ‘fringe’ music. We tried reggae, even tried salsa at one time – just couldn’t move it.”¹³ The store was still constantly under threat of being sued. Pepperell split from the business in around 1976, thinking it doomed. Glass renamed the store Missing Link after the Sixties band from Sydney, the Missing Links, and started an accompanying record label. As the name indicates, the label intended to deal with retrospective releases, “filling in the gaps”, as Glass notes.

Glass: The first couple of EPs that came out were in fact just straight reissues of my old band [Cam-Pact] and [Pepperell’s] old Sixties band [The Union]. That was just a fun thing to put out so we put out 500 copies of each of those. And then the first album we did was a whole bunch of ‘ocker-billy’ rockabilly bands that were around in the mid-Seventies.¹⁴

The release he refers to was a compilation of rockabilly bands including The Pelaco Brothers, Autodrifters and The Fabulous Nudes. He did several more retrospective releases, rumoured to have included Ross Wilson’s early bands Party Machine and The Pink Finks.¹⁵ The label finally found a contemporary focus in the burst of punk/ new wave groups making themselves known in the alternative media throughout the country. Glass was approached by Ollie Olsen and John Murphy from local electronic band, Whirlywird of the Fitzroy ‘little bands’ scene (as portrayed in Richard Lowenstein’s 1987 movie *Dogs in Space*). Their single was Missing Link’s first new wave release.

Missing Link became known for its punk releases and developed a reputation as a “progressive” record store. New wave triggered a renewed interest in imported records, particularly singles, that revitalized the business. Glass notes that he was working up to 90 hours a week.

¹³ Quoted in *Waves*, August – September, 1985. pp. 27.

¹⁴ Personal interview.

¹⁵ *Juke*, 25 March, 1978. Vol. 150. pp.5.

Glass: That shop was rocking from the moment we opened the door in the morning, I think it might've been 9 o'clock until 6pm. We would have twenty or thirty people in the shop at all times, some stealing as many records as they possibly could. People wearing huge coats in the middle of summer and you're going, Hmm, okay... But we were still making lots of money.¹⁶

Missing Link had, in Glass's words, "opened the floodgates" for import stores in Australia.¹⁷ Similar stores were appearing throughout the country. Brisbane had had Rocking Horse Records since around 1975, Sydney had White Light Records and later Phantom Records, which would become, in Walker's words, the "archetypal Sydney indy label" in the early Eighties.¹⁸ Soon there would be several in each capital city. This expansion of the Australian independent network, as well as the increasing number of labels and distributors in the country meant that Missing Link dealt with much less mail order than in the early years.

Missing Link's association solely with punk and new wave music, Glass notes, was unintended and somewhat frustrating at first:

Glass: That had some repercussions for me, because I also liked a lot of other sorts of music, and once the shop had become so associated with the punk/ new wave thing, I wasn't getting anybody else through the door. So I'd have jazz sections and all sorts of different types of music that I just couldn't sell. I found that a little bit distressing.

Langdon: Did you focus on punk music after that?

¹⁶ Personal interview.

¹⁷ Personal interview.

¹⁸ Walker, C. 1996. *Stranded: The Secret History of Australian Independent Music 1977-1991*. pp.81.

Glass: Oh yeah I had to! I had great other sections in the shop but if you had a shop full of punks and some jazz guys come in through the door, he just looks at it and goes, Whoa, I'm getting outta here!¹⁹

By 1979, Walker would claim that the Missing Link label was “the most important indy label in the country.”²⁰ As well as Whirlywird, Glass would sign The Boys Next Door (later The Birthday Party), for whom he was also manager and moved with them to London for several months. Like Whirlywird, Glass found the Boys Next Door completely by accident.

Glass: I had a girl called Jenny Bakes was working at the store and she used to get her hair done next door at John and Merryvale's hairdressing salon, which was part of this clothing department store they had, and Phill Calvert, the drummer for The Boys Next Door at the time, was one of the hairdressers there and she brought Phill down and said, Phill's got a band and they're really good and you should put out their record!²¹

Glass also released the later Go-Betweens records (after licensing the first from Scottish indy label, Postcard) and Ed Kuepper's post-Saints group, The Laughing Clowns. Missing Link's agreements with performers began very informally at first, which was not unusual for independent labels. Bruce Milne notes that his own label, Au Go Go Records, operated for the first twenty-five releases with very few formal contracts.

Milne: I don't think there would have been an agreement. If there was it was something that we scribbled on the back of a napkin or something.²²

The link with Au Go Go was strong enough that Walker would suggest that Missing Link and Au Go Go were “basically the same thing.”²³ Glass and

¹⁹ Personal interview.

²⁰ Walker, C. 1996. pp.59.

²¹ Personal interview.

²² Personal interview.

Milne worked out of the same office and the records were made at the same pressing plant. Both maintain that there was little rivalry between the labels, or with any of their other contemporaries, for that matter. “It was very seldom that we had run-ins over bands,” Milne says. “There were certainly bands that I wanted to sign that those labels ended up signing, but I still got to sell them in the store, and I didn’t have to deal with their phone calls and all the other hassle that goes with it, so it didn’t really matter.”²⁴ In some cases one would feel that a band on their label may be better suited to the other and pass them on accordingly.

Glass: [On] occasion there would be something that I would feel was more likely to suit what [Milne] was doing and it would come out on Au Go Go and then it might even switch back to Missing Link later on. It was The Crackajacks, a sort of rockabilly band, that was the case in point with that one.²⁵

Glass maintains that, aside from Au Go Go, there were few other independent labels in Melbourne working with similar music when Missing Link started out. Milne notes that the labels in other cities kept in contact because “we used to distribute each other’s records”.²⁶

When asked about his connections with other indie labels, Glass mentions the licensing deals he did with several international labels, including certain records by Rough Trade in England, Postcard in Scotland and Ralph Records in San Francisco. Missing Link’s reputation was such that “we were getting offered stuff from everywhere and simply picked what we wanted,” says Glass.²⁷ He did various one-off licensing deals with interstate labels. He maintained contact with Sydney labels Regular and Trafalgar. He also had contacts in Australian major label Festival, from when he was part of their

²³ Personal interview.

²⁴ Personal interview.

²⁵ Personal interview.

²⁶ Personal interview.

²⁷ Email correspondence. 17 October, 2008.

roster as an artist, though they refused to distribute Missing Link because of obligations to Mushroom Records.

Riley writes that by 1980, the store had “reached its full capacity. The casual visitor was confronted with the choices of spanking new British imports (singles, LPs, cassettes, magazines), or a whole wall of second hand records often barely a year old.”²⁸ Missing Link was famous within the Australian independent network. *Roadrunner* magazine would refer to the store in article after article, since there were few other places music fans could go to buy the records they were reviewing. It is a mark of both the success of Missing Link and of the strength of the independent network that information about the store was spread almost completely by word-of-mouth.

Glass: We were famous all over Australia. People would come from interstate to come to the record store. We didn't have to do any advertising. It was all either word-of-mouth or just reputation. Certainly in the early days when it was Archie and Jugheads we used to do some weird, ridiculous advertising. We had a slide running at the local movie theatre. They used to have slide advertising before movies, where some guy would be sitting up there with a little glass slide that you'd run through a projector, and then it would disappear. And we thought that was a funny thing to do.²⁹

Within Melbourne, Glass would not say that he had particular ties with the other sectors of the independent community, but notes that they were all supportive of one another. He stocked fanzines at the store, particularly since Milne worked on several of them himself, such as Australia's “premier fanzine”³⁰ *Pulp*, with Clinton Walker, and *Fast Forward* with Andrew Maine. Glass notes that 3RRR was supportive of the business and that he had done shows with the station in the mid 1970s when it was 3RMT.FM.

²⁸ Riley, V. 1992. pp. 117.

²⁹ Personal interview.

³⁰ *Roadrunner*. March, 1979. Vol. 2, No. 2. pp.2,

Glass's enthusiasm for the business began to falter when he moved back into distribution with an independent label, despite the financial losses he had suffered in his previous experiences with distribution. "I was pretty wary of all that stuff by the time I did the Missing Link thing," he says. Circumstances changed when he got a call from Virgin Records in England, who offered him a song called 'Money' by The Flying Lizards. The song, he was told, was a guaranteed hit. Glass agreed before he had even heard it.

Glass: We pressed it up and it started to sell like crazy. And I was forced to find a distributor for it, because we just couldn't keep up with the demand. So I did a really bad deal, the company at least had their own pressing facilities in Sydney, called 7 Records – it was connected to the Seven Network. And the record sold a lot of copies, I think about 40 or 50 thousand copies. We then got it on a compilation which sold over 350,000 albums. So suddenly we were in a different league in terms of sales. And then I somewhat stupidly thought, well we're in with this thing, we might as well put the rest of our stuff through 7, and that's a decision that I will always regret.³¹

Glass notes that by this time he was beginning to burn out. The final straw was in 1982 when Glass was taken to court for selling an obscene record – The Dead Kennedys' 'Too Drunk To Fuck' single, a Top Ten hit in Britain at the time. He was fined \$1500 and given a three-month suspended criminal sentence.

Glass: I was really pissed off, it was completely ridiculous. Walked out of there, I did radio interviews all day, with people saying, you've got to contest this, it's ridiculous. It was in the paper. And I think I was just so disgusted, my wife said, Do you want to sell the shop and get out, and maybe just run the record label? And I decided to do it. That was the sort of turning point.³²

³¹ Personal interview.

³² Personal interview.

Glass sold the store to Nigel Renard in 1983, another member of the Melbourne independent crowd. Glass attempted to continue the Missing Link label but was overrun with financial difficulties. Milne, who ran the Au Go Go label for about ten years before opening the record store of the same name, notes that having secure cash flow was the most important thing about owning a record store.

Milne: If I put out a record by a band, the day I got the records, I could have them stacked on the counter and be getting back cash for it straight away whereas [before the store opened] I had to wait for money to come from the distributors, it'd be like six months before I'd see a cent.³³

Walker cites The Birthday Party's *Junkyard* album as the reason for the collapse of the Missing Link label, after Glass signed a CBS distribution deal in anticipation of its success. The \$50,000 Glass had put into the album "destroyed Missing Link". He later told Walker, "the majors didn't understand the product, it was totally alien to the suburban shopping centre stores, and it wasn't going to the independent city stores it should have been getting to."³⁴

Renard still runs the Missing Link record store, twenty-five years later. Missing Link continues to be an icon of the early years of independent music in Melbourne. Glass moved to Nashville for several months and lived off his own compositions, one of which made it into the US country charts.³⁵ He returned to Australia and opened a country record store in Melbourne called Deep South for several years in the 1980s. He now lives in Mobile, Alabama and spends much of his time collecting old records.

Glass: There was a thing called the Melbourne Music Festival which was done, maybe about '87. Ken West was the one organizing that. And he wanted to do a facsimile of the Missing Link record store, which

³³ Personal interview.

³⁴ Quoted in Walker, C. 1996. pp.103.

³⁵ 'Let's Face it – It's a Dirty Business'. *Waves*. Vol. 75. pp. 34.

I was quite touched by actually. We did a whole lot of stuff and we put it all together. And I don't know what people thought of it but it was a little representation of the store as being sort of a major icon. The Melbourne Music Festival was an absolute disaster! But at least Ken's heart was in the right place.³⁶

³⁶ Personal interview.

Conclusion: The Aftermath of Punk

Tracee Hutchison writes that internationally, “the music industry had been tipped on its head by the effects of punk, and new musical ethics were now on the agenda.”¹ In Australia, I have argued that these effects were not so visible, for they remained confined to the few inner city venues that housed punk and post-punk music, the import record stores and the non-commercial or youth-oriented programming of a few alternative stations. By 1977, punk had already been pronounced dead by the commercial media, who had always given more attention to that other offshoot of the growth of the Australian music industry in the mid-Seventies which would dominate Australian popular music – Pub Rock.

The initial burst of punk in Australia was shortlived. Few groups of that era lasted beyond the decade. Those that did invariably had to move beyond punk’s limited musical format, or else they had never conformed to it in the first place.² Ideally, the emphasis on low-budget technical facilities and the unrefined sound of punk should have encouraged a burst of new Australian musical talent. Only Missing Link, and several other independent labels around the country took advantage of this. Perhaps this was the reasoning behind Gudinski and Earl’s attempt to harness punk music. Stuart Coupe wrote of Suicide’s collapse:

Their major failing was to assume too close a connection between Britain and Australia. What was a widely supported and popular movement overseas was destined to remain an elite fashion in Australia.³

¹ Hutchison, T. 1992. *Your Name’s on the Door*. pp.2

² Walker often makes reference to The Go-Betweens and The Birthday Party as the groups that defined and headlined the punk and post-punk era, neither of which share punk’s typical “three-chord” sound.

³ *RAM*, 29 December, 1978. Vol. 100, pp.29.

On the one hand, Australia's refusal to follow the British punk trend was disastrous for mainstream acceptance of the genre. And yet somehow, it seems like a step forward for Australia for the fact that audiences (for the most part) hadn't caught on to punk simply because it was popular overseas. Moreover, had punk taken off the way Gudinski and Earl had predicted, it would quickly have developed into that which it stood against – heavily commercialized, “popular” music.

Punk clearly was not as liberating as it should have been. At first, only a tiny number of bands grew from this movement, few of which outlasting a debut release. The scene would gather more supporters over the decade, culminating (in terms of commercial possibilities) in the early Nineties. Seattle group Nirvana and the grunge phenomenon made ‘alternative’ the industry's newest marketing buzzword. During this period, every major recording label sought out token ‘underground’ bands to add to their roster, and ‘alternative’ simply became another subsection within the mainstream. Bruce Milne notes that the scene “changed dramatically” during the alternative craze of the early Nineties:

Milne: It was great fun when suddenly everyone wanted the records that [the independent labels] were putting out, but it wasn't so much fun when I'd see a great band and I'd be standing with someone from Sony and EMI, or the bands that I had signed would turn around and go, Our best friends have just signed to some supposedly independent label – but it's totally financed by Sony or whatever – and they're getting \$30,000 to make two film clips, are you gonna do the same for us? And I'd be like, Get real!⁴

Punk gave rise to several new musical cultures such as electronica, rap and hip hop, which differed significantly from the punk sound but shared the genre's ‘do-it-yourself’ musical ethic. Harley and Murphie wrote on the beginnings of electronica and hip hop: “They shared an ethic of DIY

⁴ Personal interview. 18 August, 2008.

production that could be turned towards musical experimentation by those able to create their own electronic devices and sounds in a manner not premised on traditional musical abilities.”⁵

I mentioned briefly the idea that during the 1970s, the Australian music industry made some progress in abandoning the insecurities it had about its local performers. This did not mean that Australia ceased to follow English and American trends, which it does to this day – the success of recent local exports Jet and Wolfmother are the most notable suggestion that the legendary ‘Australian sound’ does not exist and probably never did. Nor do I suggest that this sense of insecurity disappeared completely. In the years following the initial emergence of Melbourne punk, many of the city’s more influential punk bands left the city in search of a larger audience overseas. Walker notes that the loss of groups such as The Birthday Party, The Go-Betweens (who had settled briefly in Melbourne in the late 1970s) and the Primitive Calculators (all within months of each other in the early Eighties) detracted from the creative energy of the Melbourne scene, which he argues became heavily into synth-pop – “nightclubs and haircuts and dinky boys with synthesizers and skinny leather ties”.⁶ At this point, Sydney would emerge as the Pub Rock capital, with groups like Cold Chisel and Midnight Oil.

Research on the current state of Australian rock often makes quick reference to punk rock’s beginnings as being important for independent music, and leaves it at that. Statements such as Hutchison’s claim about the revolutionary effects of punk on the music industry (referenced at the beginning of this chapter), often fail to mention the specifics of the genre’s beginnings. Much of punk and independent music was ignored, sometimes actively stifled by the mainstream industry. And even within the tiny circles of supporters there were unnecessary divisions and rivalry, loosely held together by the punk institutions of the scene.

⁵ Harley, R. & Murphie, A. ‘Australian Electronica: A Brief History’. In Homan, S. & Mitchell, T. (ed). *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now*. pp. 99.

⁶ Personal interview.

My research documents a fragment of Australia's rock scene, the roots of what is now a widely accepted and celebrated aspect of inner city culture. A Melbourne-focused "rockumentary" was produced in 2006 to showcase the current state of this scene. The documentary was called *Sticky Carpet*, and showed the independent rock culture as a raw, sweaty, sometimes outrageous or fiercely political, inner city scene still devoted to the punk ethic, in the methods of production and dissemination as well as (but not limited to) stylistically. Emphasis is placed on the city's many venues, devoted to the many independent bands that inhabit them. Many follow the DIY ethics encouraged by punk, creating their own recordings, venues and even instruments. One interviewee compared the city's live scene to that of American grunge capital Seattle, which is proof enough of Australia's continuing inferiority complex about its music.

In this thesis I have used Missing Link Records as a case study to show how the Melbourne independent scene functioned from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Missing Link, alongside Au Go Go, was one of several driving forces behind the emergence of the local scene, and was arguably the first to establish a trend for an independent musical ethic that was copied across the country. The Melbourne scene itself was by no means completely unique or recognized internationally for its contributions to the independent scene, but my research marks the beginnings of a subculture that would develop to become an important part of the character and image that Melbourne holds of itself.

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