

The Venue

Joe Gaultieri

“Earl's Court was being run as a Greek Reception centre. I went and talked to them; it would have been the early '80s. They weren't making money. I said I wanted to be a partner and I wanted to have first option if they decided to sell the place. So, we signed contracts, and I borrowed 20 grand. I put it into the account, and it disappeared straight away. They were so far in debt. I said, "Fuck! I've gotta work my way outta here.”

I was talking to Michael Roberts. He said, “There's this great venue in London called The Venue.” And he showed me the logo. It was great. So, I added the Southern Cross stars to the 'Venue' and made it Australian. I did a deal with a new touring company, Dirty Pool. They had Cold Chisel, Divinyls, Mental as Anything and INXS. So, bang, the first 4 Saturday nights I had 2,000 people a night. In fact, the first night I had 2 and half thousand but it was too many. As soon as Premier Artists heard we were pulling 2,000 people a night they said, “We'll give you bands!” Then they tried to come in and take it over. They tried to heavy me. But I'm a Fitzroy boy. I stood up to them and they knew I meant it. So, they backed off.

I fixed the place up a bit. I built a 6-foot stage in there, dressing rooms, and I started living at the top. We were running Wednesday to Sundays. But the federal government bought it from under us and turned it into cheap housing. The owner didn't find out until there was nothing we could do about it. I mean Tina Turner played there, The Cult, Echo and the Bunnymen. John Mayer played there, INXS, Style Council, Human League. I started a petition, but it was too late. You don't have a chance against the Federal government.”

Source: St Kilda Music Walking Tour

Fred Negro discussing The Gong Show

“We started doing the Gong Show at The Venue which we'd started at Macy's in South Yarra, but it had gotten too big. The first night we put it on the Gravy's were the panel of judges. Brian Mannix was in the audience, a total dick. He was throwing coins at our faces. I had a big bag of props out the back included motorcycle helmets, so we put them on and the coins bounced off our 3 bonces. The bouncers loved Brian Mannix for some unfathomable reason and did nothing.

The Gong Show always had a really good band on first: *The Corpse Grinders*, *The Johnnys*, *Painters and Dockers*, *The Gravy's* or a touring band doing a Monday gig. It was \$1.92 - \$3.92 to get in and it was always packed. The actual Gong Show was the most ridiculous show ever put on a stage. We should have been paying people to come in. It was rubbish.

There was the human vacuum cleaner. A bloke would stick a plug in his arse, pick him up by the feet, they'd play the sound of a vacuum cleaner, and he'd be pushed around and gobbling up a trail of Twisties he'd put on the stage. (OK that was me.) A favourite act was a guy with a fish tied to his cock who would sing the theme to popular TV shows such as *The Love Boat*. (OK that was me too.) Other times a bloke would say “This was my impression of Fred Astaire” and stare at the audience until he was Gonged. (OK that was me too.) Sometimes a dozen guys would get up and form the Muck Muck Tabernacle Choir and sing “Muck, muck, muck, muck” to the tune of something classical interrupted by the occasional “Can I have a rubber biscuit?” It was surreal. (I wasn't in this act.)

The Salada Sisters made regular appearances with a variety of acts including the famous 'Dying Blowfly' which always got a standing ovation. Robby Rocket came out with a piano accordion wearing roller skates and his *Residents* eyeball mask and played 'Pop Goes the Weasel' and tap danced till he fell over. That was probably the height of the artistic quality of the Gong Show. Chad Morgan appeared once. He stood on the side of stage and said "for fuck's sake." between every act. He was still drinking back then. If things got dull Paul Elliot would put a TV or something stage and blow it up. It was dangerous, the whole show was dangerous, and it was probably criminal, but it was amusing."

Source: St Kilda Music Walking Tour