

# **Life in a Padded Cell: A Biography of Tony Cohen, Australian Sound Engineer**

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~ One ~

## **Satan has possessed your Soul!**

‘Tony is very devout in “God’s Lesson”. I cannot speak highly enough of Tony’s manners and behaviour. They are beyond reproach’. It was the sort of report card every parent liked to see. It was 1964. The Beatles were big and Tony Cohen was a Grade One student at St. Francis de Sales primary school, East Ringwood. The following year he took his first communion. The Beatles were still big and there seemed little to fear for the parents of this conscientious and attentive eight-year-old boy. The sisters who taught him at that early age would doubtless have been shocked at the life he would come to lead – a life that could hardly be described as devout.

Tony Cohen was born on 4 June 1957 in the maternity ward of the Jessie MacPherson hospital in Melbourne. Now a place specializing in the treatment of cancer patients it was a general hospital then. He was christened Anthony Lawrence Cohen. His parents Philip and Margaret Cohen had been living in James Street, Windsor, but had moved to the outer eastern suburb of East Ringwood prior to the birth of their son.

Philip Cohen was the son of Jewish immigrants who had left Manchester, England, and settled in Prahran, one of Melbourne’s inner eastern suburbs. Philip’s father had served in the First World War, survived and then migrated to Australia with his wife and infant son (Tony’s Uncle David). He was a plumber by trade and found work at the Williamstown dockyards.

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Tony's mother's family was of resolute Australian-Irish catholic stock, at least on her maternal side – her grandfather having arrived in 1857 as an eighteen-year-old from County Limerick. Margaret had met Philip at the Australian Film League which Philip used to attend with his best friend Lawrence Costen after whom Tony was partly named. The league was an acting school that also held social functions. The friendship between Philip and Lawrence would prove instrumental to Tony's career.

Tony was raised as a Catholic – his father had changed faith so that he could assuage the staunchly catholic leanings of his future mother-in-law's family. In 1965 the Cohen's moved to 14 Wakool Avenue, Mentone, a middle-class southern beach side suburb of Melbourne. By that time Tony had a younger brother, Martin. Martin's earliest memory of his older brother was of playing with a large Frankenstein toy and model Thunderbirds in the sandpit in their backyard. When the opening strains of the cult American science fiction television show *Lost in Space* drifted from the lounge-room the boys would race excitedly inside. *Doctor Who* was another favourite of Tony's and the influence of that show permeated through the doodles and sketches that decorated his work diaries of later years. The brothers would embark on widely different career paths with little shared interest beyond a love of animals. The older would spend much of his working life cosseted in a small room with dimmed lights that was the recording studio while the younger became a biologist with a love of the outdoors.

The twin loves of football and cricket that were an addiction for many Australian boys of the 1950s and 60s passed Tony by. He could not avoid some exposure to them as his father was an avid sports fan being a passionate supporter of both the St. Kilda and

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Prahran football clubs – it being common in those days to support two sides, one from the Victorian Football League and the other from the Victorian Football Association, the two competitions being quite separate. Philip Cohen regularly attended St. Kilda matches at Moorabbin, the home ground of the Saints, taking along both his sons. As Tony got older he began to attend matches at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to watch the Richmond Football Club which a number of his mates supported. His attendance, he said, was less about the football and more about the mischief he and his friends could get up to.

Although Tony inherited an interest in the St. Kilda Football Club and Australian Test cricket team from his father, he had no interest in playing sport whatsoever, in fact, he loathed the idea. His father recollected watching him play football at high school and remembered Tony being notable for being where the ball wasn't. It is with wounded resignation that brother Martin remembers a childhood spent playing football by himself in the backyard shunned by his older sibling who preferred to lock himself away in his black curtained bedroom smoking marijuana with his mates. 'I was not allowed into the inner sanctum of Tony's black bedroom.' says Martin with a laugh, adding 'He probably did me a favour by not letting me in and smoking joints at eight to ten [years old]'.

Dope had insinuated itself into Tony's life at a young age and it was that plus his dabbling in the hallucinogenic drug lysergic acid diethylamide, better know as LSD, that contributed largely to the neglect of his school studies as a teenager. Taking LSD did not help Tony's academic endeavours but he claimed it opened his eyes to other things. 'I'd drop it before school and the teachers would turn into monkeys and I'd bolt. By 11 o'clock I'd be out the door, I couldn't stand it. I'd just run out. I remember hiding behind

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trees that were probably three inches wide and thinking I was getting away with it and my friends told me later the teacher would be at the window saying “What’s wrong with Cohen? What’s he doing?” The funny thing was I always felt the smoking and tripping made me see the whole school thing at St. Bede’s and all that sort of thing in a different light and I didn’t like what I was seeing. Whether I was right or wrong that’s beside the point but at the time I just thought “No.” Because I don’t think if you talk to anyone who dropped real LSD, not this stuff what they have these days but actual lysergic acid, they would say that it awakened them to things. And that’s how I felt. I’m not saying this is right or wrong, I’m just saying that’s the impression it gave. It’s just that I saw the hypocrisy in the brothers. I saw one guy who was a disciplinarian and he seemed to enjoy what he did. And stories I heard from the boarders and things like that basically made me think “Nah, this isn’t what they’re preaching at all.” At the same time there was good and bad. You can’t judge everyone.’

Tony’s memory was of having been expelled from school although his mother remembers him just flatly refusing to go back after either the May or August school holidays in 1973. His expulsion was probably a temporary one and due to a measure of bad luck, according to Tony, when some hashish was found in his locker. ‘They were searching for stolen books so it was not my lucky day! A few days later, my friend and I (Mick Butler) get called to the head Brother’s office for what I can only describe as an exorcism! He, Brother Peter (better known by the students as Poofta Pete, as he was keen on perving at the boys in the shower rooms, enough said) sat silent staring at us, bug-eyed with throbbing veins for what felt like an hour. All of a sudden, he yelled, “Satan, has

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possessed your souls!” Fuck man, it was only hash! (and a few amytal, some kind of heart pill that spun you out if you took enough). Anyhow he went quite red and freaked us out. Next thing it was pack up all your books and bugger off. Mum and Dad thought something wasn’t right. I got home around seven o’clock with a very full school bag. Bugger!’ Looking back on his schooldays Tony declared, ‘I just hated it.’ His mother says he was bored by it. His dabbling in drugs undoubtedly lay at the heart of his waning interest in his formal education. Progress reports for 1971 and 1972 indicate that he had been a co-operative, enthusiastic and capable student to that time.

A letter to his parents, brother and pets sent from a school trip to Mildura in August 1971 reveals a boy enjoying his friends and the adventure of being away from home. His only concerns were for his father’s health and his record collection which he hoped his brother hadn’t touched. It was written in neat connected writing as opposed to the printed script that characterised his letters and postcards in later years:

*10/8/71*

*Dear Mum and Dad and Martin and Katy and Biff and Mike and Fred and Freddy!  
I wrote this on a piece of paper because the postcard was too tiny. I’m having a great time, a real big stir. The Hotel Wintersun is fairly good and the foods great – especially the Roast Chicken.*

*There was a great stir on Monday night me and John and five other kids got trapped in the hotel’s elevator – it took them 20 minutes to get us out. Apparently it happened plenty of times before but we really had great fun. You should have heard us*

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when they opened the door we yelled and carried on till we got halfway across Mildura.

Mr Wilson thought it was very funny and so did we.

I'm having trouble with the camera the flashes won't work but I don't really care. Went to the winery today gee it ponged of grog, it's a great place but I didn't get any good photos because we were in a hurry.

I hope you like the postcard (I got it for free at the winery). I hope dads better I hope whats its name hasn't touched my records and...etc

See Ya      Tony

Music had become a major interest for Tony as he entered adolescence. As a young teenager most of Tony's musical diet was gleaned from the radio and his father's record collection. He listened to 3XY which in the early seventies was beginning to overtake 3AK as the preferred station of younger listeners. He loved the Beatles and particularly John Lennon's work afterward. 'I took John Lennon's music very, very seriously. When John Lennon did a few solo records, apart from one or two complete duds, he did some of the most amazing songs that just made me sit down and think. Once I went and bought a copy of the *Imagine* album and I took it home and I put it on and I went "Fuck! There's something wrong with this!" Then I read the cover and it said remixed by Yoko Ono and she'd used different vocals and it sounded completely different to the original. So I took it back to the shop in absolute horror and disgust because I just assumed it had been re-mastered which is a totally different thing.'

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Lennon's death was, not surprisingly, a bitter memory for such a fan. 'That was a terrible day. Martin told me. I went into the lounge-room at Cheltenham, Martin said "John Lennon's been killed." I said "Yeah, sure." I found out it was true. I reckon I made Martin suffer for a month after that, just for being the one who told me'.

It was at the family's new home at 22 Charles Street, Cheltenham that the first faltering and erratic steps of Tony's career in music began and where significant friendships were formed. His friendship with Chris Thompson who lived across the road proved a lifelong one. 'Tone and I grew up as kids together in the same suburb.' recalls Chris. 'His house on his side of the road had a garage and he had a set of drums and across the road at my house I had a set of drums and I'd come home from high school and hear a set of drums playing across the road and he'd hear the same so we got to be good mates at an early age. Neither of us were very good drummers I might admit but we shared a mutual love of music and playing the drums. We didn't go to the same High School but we'd meet up after school and we'd either play our drums or our favourite thing we used to do was we'd sit down and listen to records. We would just sit there, sometimes listening to the same record over and over or just playing all sorts of stuff from Stevie Wonder to Creedence Clearwater to King Crimson to you name it. We'd play jazz records. Both his father and my father were quite into big bands, swing music. So we loved Benny Goodman at an early age and Woody Herman and all that sort of stuff. We just loved it. That was sort of our pastime. We weren't into sport. We just loved sitting round listening to records. Probably the best study you could do to become a sound engineer.'

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Such was Tony's liking for swing and jazz that one of the first concerts he ever attended was with his father to see the legendary Benny Goodman Sextet and Lionel Hampton at Festival Hall in 1973. It was as unlikely a gig as one could imagine for a future luminary of the punk and independent music genres to attend. His father remembered Tony's most memorable observation of the crowd. 'I've never seen so many bald heads in one place before'. Tony remembered Lionel Hampton being a charismatic performer, 'He was grunting over the band! What a fucking gas, man, grunting and they reckon punk rock. Fuck Sid Vicious and all those jokers. These old boys had it long before.'

Another neighborhood friend was Peter Hatwell whose mother was good friends with Tony's mum. Peter attended a different school, Mentone Grammar. He was a couple of years older than Tony and the two boys smoked dope regularly. Peter would be one of the early casualties of Tony's drug buddies. He was a drummer and played briefly in a few Melbourne bands - the little remembered punk outfit the Z-Cars being one - before he moved to Sydney to live with his girlfriend. 'The story goes that he died listening to the Birthday Party on his headphones.' said Tony. 'He was found dead in his seat. It wasn't apparently drug related or I've never been told it was. That was very sad.'

Tony's mother knew her eldest son was smoking pot as the smell used to waft through the house. She suspected Tony and his friends were obtaining their drugs from a record shop in Mentone around which they used to hang. The source was elsewhere according to Tony. Although aware of the drug taking his parents felt impotent and unable to meaningfully intervene. They would talk to him sometimes and beyond that



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tried to prick his awareness of the dangers by slipping health warning brochures under his bedroom door.

Later, the boys began to obtain LSD from a local tout who was also a musician. 'He was older than us' remembered Tony, 'quite a bit older, ten or twelve years, and he had a proper band that played each weekend at the Croydon Hotel, of all places, which on a regular basis would erupt into a huge brawl. Bizarre. I was very young then, this was before I had a job. I used to hang around because I thought it was fascinating. I liked the whole thing.'

Tony's experience of watching the tout's band Concrete Overcoat or Concrete Underpants, as he used to juvenily refer to them, had whetted his appetite for a rock and roll lifestyle. Peter Hatwell was also friends with some of the members of a band called Epitaph and it was not long before Tony was pulled into their orbit. He convinced his parents to allow the band to practice in their lounge-room. When the drummer failed to turn up one day the mantle fell to the band's young supporter. This meant Tony had to acquire a drum kit which his parents agreed to buy him. His father drove him to Essendon where they purchased a cheap second-hand kit from an Italian family. After that, it was just 'racket, racket, racket' recalled his father.

The garage at Charles Street was converted into a bedroom for Tony and soon became a popular haunt for the band whose members were all a few years older than their drummer. The group covered songs such as 'Paint It Black' by the Rolling Stones and 'Paranoid' by Black Sabbath. They played locally at parties and even scored a gig doing a Rock Mass at the local church. Tony remembered their finest moment being when they

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played support for Skyhooks at the school social, 'They came out with smoke bombs and make up but the crowd had half left by the time they came on to play because they had all come to see us, all our school friends. I was always very proud of that.'

Martin Cohen remembers Tony being keener about the band than the others and that he designed a logo for them as well as recording them. Tony claimed not to have been avidly interested in the band. 'I was never really dedicated to doing it. I found it really hard work.' He was hazy as to the exact names of all the other members. He remembered the guitar player being quite an accomplished musician compared to the rest of the band who, he says, could hardly play. 'We had this strange fellow who used to hang around with us and play bongos, Charlie his name was. I don't know whatever happened to him, he was a very strange guy.' The rhythm guitar player was Arthur Brooks, whose sister Gwendolyn had died in tragic circumstances just prior to him joining the band. She had been raped and murdered.

As was the norm in that musical period the band dabbled with the glam rock look. Epitaph's foray into such glitz proved something of a failure, at least from Tony's point of view. 'Ian was the guitarist and he had a girlfriend who one day decided to make these satin shirts for us. And under the lights, belting the drums, doing twelve bar blues for twenty minutes at a time, all I remember is blacking out and falling off the stool because the satin shirt was basically like putting a parachute over your head.'

For teenagers without much financial support, cheap ways had to be found to purchase necessary equipment. 'We used to make our own amplifiers called play masters and you used to get the components from Radio Parts because if you didn't have the

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money Radio Parts was the sort of place based on trust and you used to have a little tray which you would fill up with all the bits and pieces you'd get by reading magazines and, of course, the tray would have three or four components and your pockets would have thirty or forty and they used to blow up regularly, of course, because they were made by hand.'

Tony had taught himself to play the drums and considered himself to be just an average drummer. He was fifteen going on sixteen and could bang out a basic beat to keep time. That was about all, at least according to his assessment. Charlie Owen, with whom Tony would come to work on eleven albums, would sometimes hear Tony play briefly during set ups and thought him competent enough to suggest that he play drums on some tracks – an offer always declined with one notable exception. 'We got him to play hand drums on a track ('All You Need Is Sleep') on the *Dark Horses* album.' recounts Charlie. 'And basically, we all had to leave the room while he did it. He was sitting by the desk with a little mike and all these things around him. It was a toy he'd been tapping away on while he was mixing...I think it was Tone hinting "Hey. This would be a good idea Charlie. Put this on there." but at the same time just keeping himself occupied. So, "Let's do the drums then." "Oh I can't do that in front of anyone." So Tex [Perkins] and I left him by himself in the control room instead of the studio, did this track and it was fantastic, the hand drum part, his timing was perfect. I think he was a bit disappointed because we forgot to put his name on the first run of the covers. We forgot to say – Hand drum, Tony Cohen – and then belatedly on the next record we said

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“Special thanks to Tony Cohen for the hand drums on the previous album” so I don’t think Tony was real happy about that.’

Epitaph hung together for about twelve months, the wind taken out of their sails somewhat by the discovery of a group in America with the same name. Tony’s interest, beyond playing, lay in recording the band’s performance as well as those of other groups in the area. ‘I gave up the drums because in those days the drums weren’t miked up and you used to have to hit the bloody things so hard to get heard that it was hard work. I thought “Nah. This isn’t the way to go” so I got a four-track recorder and started going around recording all the local groups and that was how I got interested in the other side of it.’

Chris Thompson who shared the passion and played in a band called Flog gives an account of how his and Tony’s interest was directed into the recording process. ‘We must have been in that year at high school; I guess its fourth year where they say, “What do you want to do for a job?” You had to make some sort of decision on what you would do. We both gave the same answer. “No idea”. “Well, what do you like doing?” “We like sitting around at home listening to records.” We didn’t say getting stoned. I think we were a bright pair of smartarses but one of the teachers, I can’t remember if it was his or one of mine, I think it might have been the arts teacher at my school, came back and said “Hey look, I’ve found the perfect job for you where you just sit down all day listening to music. It’s a sound engineer”.’

When it became apparent that Tony could not or would not continue his schooling a family meeting was held to decide what course ought to be charted. Pressed as to what

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he wanted to do Tony was emphatic in his declaration that it had to be in music – doing what exactly, he did not know. It was at this point that his father asked his friend Lawrence Costen if he knew of any opportunities. Lawrence was a presenter at radio station 3DB which was one of the major music and sports stations in Melbourne. He knew Bill Armstrong who was the owner of Armstrong Studios in Bank Street, South Melbourne on the fringe of Melbourne’s central business district. It was arranged for Tony to begin two-weeks work experience during the school holidays. Chris Thompson accompanied Tony to the studio on one occasion and recalls what became a career defining moment, ‘There was this amazing amount of equipment. That was just it. From that point on we were just totally into the idea of becoming sound engineers to the point where we’d have all the old four-track tape recorders and pull them apart and just do stupid recordings at home.’

When the school holidays finished Tony, who had no intention of returning to school, simply turned up again at the studio, ‘No one said anything, so I stayed’.

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~ Two ~

## **Shit-kicker**

Armstrong's studio was the epicentre of recorded music in Melbourne in the early 1970s. Sydney had EMI and Albert productions studios but in Melbourne it was at Armstrong's that all the artists and bands of note gravitated – later Armstrong's Audio and Visual (AAV) and then Metropolis Audio until its closure in 2006. The reason was simple enough. Armstrong's was the best equipped and biggest studio in the city. Originally set up in a terrace house in South Melbourne, it had expanded into adjoining properties. In 1972 the operation was moved into a converted warehouse complex. At that time, it had two music `rooms, one housing a four-track system and the other a new sixteen-track system which in turn would be superseded by larger systems as time and technology marched on. There were three voiceover studios as well. The main studio at Armstrong's was big enough to fit a full orchestra and so easily accommodated the largest of rock ensembles. Rock bands usually recorded in studio two. A coffee machine graced the corridor and it was around this that some of the luminaries of Australian music would gather on any given day. It could be an eclectic mix; Billy Thorpe, Kamahl, Rolf Harris and John Farnham were among some who used the studio. At a later time, Tony remembered seeing Nick Cave and Joe Camilleri at the cafe bar wearing the exact same cardigan, a sight he found highly amusing. For Tony, in the early years, as an enthusiastic yet still naïve sixteen-year-old, such contact was the stuff of fairytales. The contacts were not always idyllic. The sight of drunken celebrities and drug imbibing

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musicians were not the life lessons Tony's parents would have imagined him undertaking in his new job.

Tony has described his early days at Armstrong's in an interview with *Sounds* magazine. 'I had two weeks of cleaning the toilets and getting the lunches and stuff, and then got promoted to mono dubbing boy. I did copies of jingles going to radio stations on reel to reel. Then finally, I got the big promotion to stereo dubbing boy! I used to sit in a funny little room and do copies of the latest albums. I did that for about two years, and I'd bring my garage band in on the weekends. It would take me about eight hours to get one microphone to work. I was just patching things in blindly. I didn't know what I was doing! I got my \$17 a week or whatever it was. I think I spent my first pay on lollies. I was working seven days a week and I just loved it. I can remember chief engineer Roger Savage saying "Look, this isn't about the glory and all that shit" and, of course, he was right. After awhile these people that you were in great awe of, some of them turn out to be complete monsters. I can remember being terrified of Billy Thorpe. "Where is that little shit?" he'd say. "Send him down the pub." I used to say, "Sorry Mr. Thorpe, I'm not old enough". "Aaargh, I'll write you a note", he'd say.'

'I remember I'd leave work on Friday evening and come back on Monday morning and they were still working, you know. I didn't know what speed was or anything and there'd be, like Gil Matthews, the drummer, would be under a pile of fish and chip wrappers and empty beer bottles, like proper big Carlton Draught beer bottles and there'd be bodies under this and some of them working away and I thought "Wow". I mean, that was it, it was the real thing. Thorpey's guitars were so loud the glass windows

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would bend from the sound pressure and then he wondered why it sounded so small in the control room.'

Being the underling at the studio, or 'shit-kicker' as Tony termed it, meant that some of the unwanted jobs fell his way. One was the recording of the eccentric endeavours of Steve Dunstan. Dunstan's parents had been one-time owners of the Hoadley's chocolate empire that sponsored a national battle of the bands competition. Dunstan was described as a 'true bohemian' and disappeared in mysterious circumstances in south-western Victoria. His car was found abandoned in a car-park at Port Campbell, 200 kilometres from Melbourne. He had previously been the victim of a fire bombing when his car was set alight in his driveway.

'He was fantastic' recalled Tony. 'Everyone would go running when he came. They said, "Steve Dunstan has landed his flying saucer on the roof" and me, being the lowest in the pecking order, had to deal with it. He came to Armstrong's all the time to do his cosmic plip plop plop plop music. It was like Tangerine Dream or one of those sort of things. He'd make me sort of edit bits of it. He liked the balloons. The balloons just went **bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop**. "I'd like you to just make the balloons go down." So I'd take the tape out and turn it around the other way so it would go **bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop**. And then he'd lock himself in the room which had great big speakers and listen to his whole forty-minute plip plop album in the dark after he'd done his edit. It was all synthesizer. He was the son of the man who invented the Violet Crumble, and they had this mansion in Toorak and the whole place was full of electronic things in clear plastic with lights that would flash. And he had a thing called a zapophone which was like this



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clear plastic with ball bearings and a string that you would run your finger along. They reckon he got killed by bikies for a drug deal gone bad. He was completely mad.’

Electronic inspired arrangements were certainly not Tony’s preferred type of music but he was open to working with new sounds. An appealing aspect was that it offered an engineer greater license for experimentation than some of the more traditional offerings. Garry Shepard, who was a musician interested in creating sonic soundscapes, recorded a quadraphonic composition with Tony in late August 1977. He recounts his first meeting and subsequent working relationship with the young engineer.

‘[H]is first words to me were, “Look, I’ve got to be honest with you, I think electronic music is a load of crap. But just tell me what you want and I’ll see what I can do.”. I explained everything as I was doing it, how I wanted the quad tracks to ping pong around the room, swirl, surprise, shift, and how the music was like a landscape painting; The strings like a broad field, tinkly bits like leaves or birds flying through from left to right or whatever; The bass sounds like the continuous flow of a creek, or big river at times; The wind like the sound of waves on the sandy beach that I grew up with. It was visual music - you would see it with your ears. Tony was sharp, and picked up on it immediately, and like any new convert, drove everybody at Armstrong’s nuts, saying “You’ve got to hear this amazing electronic music down in studio 3.”

‘I did a few all nighters with Tony, I’d end up sleeping for a few hours in my car in the car park at dawn...one morning about 3am Tony said, “Want a break?” “Yep!” said I. We grabbed some cans of beers and headed out to the loading bay where they parked the mobile recording studios...A friend of Tony’s was in there working late, so

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we dropped in. In about three seconds I worked out what he was working late on! He was cutting bootleg porn movies after hours!’

‘One day when I came in Tony said, “I’ve got to play you something, you don’t have to use it if you don’t want to...but just have a listen. I’ve been thinking about it while we’ve been doing the sound effects and...well...” It wasn’t too bad, an ‘Avon calling’ ding dong doorbell chimes, a door opens, footsteps walk across the stereo channels, into the kitchen, plates are smashed, and the footsteps run out slamming the door behind. “So, do you want to keep it on the soundtrack?” he asked, “I’ve found a space where it could work.” He brought up the other tracks that I’d recorded (which he had turned down) and it sounded good. “I won’t even ask for royalties.” he said, trying to sell me on the idea. “Oh don’t worry, if I’m paid, you’ll be paid.” I said. “Just think, when I’m famous, you can say you’ve got Tony Cohen’s first sound piece on your soundtrack.” he added with a cheeky grin...I admired his confidence. In the music industry if you don’t have complete self belief in your ability you won’t get anywhere...So I included it on the soundtrack. And I’m delighted to say that I have got Tony Cohen’s first sound piece on the soundtrack and have named the 40-minute work *Wildlife* which was the working title Tony gave it.’

Despite Tony’s lowly station in the studio his youthful pride was quick to surface on occasion as an incident with the singer Kamahl revealed. When Kamahl, in his rich deep distinctive baritone, commanded “Go and get me a coffee boy”, boy responded with calculated acerbity, “Black?” The indignant youngster was told off for his rudeness and left with a distasteful lesson as to the bloated ego of some celebrities.

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The positive of working at such a place far outweighed any perceived negatives and Tony was fortunate to come under the tutelage of two talented sound engineers in Roger Savage, an Englishman who had done some demo work with the Rolling Stones and would later add the soundtracks of Mad Max and Star Wars to his list of credits; and Ernie Rose, who was a truck driver who had somehow walked into the place and got a job and subsequently worked with Billy Thorpe. This accomplished pair taught their young protégé on the job. For Tony, the lessons learned watching these men proved invaluable.

Roger was deaf in one ear and would sit with his head turned, his good ear to the speakers. Tony tells the story of how Roger became deaf, at least as it was told to him. ‘One day he walked into a studio. An oscillator had been left on the previous night – a tone generating device, test tones - and the monitor was turned on full blast. He turned the power on and this tone hit him full blast and perforated an ear drum.’

In Tony’s estimation Roger was one of the greatest sound people he had ever met. ‘He was a hard boss though. He didn’t like me being late’. He also learned a great work ethic from Ernie Rose who just ‘worked and worked and worked until the job was done.’ From both he learned that recording wasn’t just about your ears. You had to use your eyes to read moods and work to create a vibe in the studio. He was eternally grateful for his time at Armstrong’s, the fact that they took the time to invest in him and provide the opportunities they did. ‘I worked bloody hard. I mean I did everything they asked me to do. It wasn’t until later that I started turning up late and sort of smoked too much hash before I went and all that sort of thing. I used to walk around in bare-feet and the hair

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down to my waist, bright red eyes. No one seemed to care as long as you did your job. I learned everything that was worth knowing because in those days they used to have the theory that a young bloke like me coming along, doing all the dirty work cleaning the toilets, moving the tapes upstairs and downstairs, doing all that sort of stuff but at the same time you were allowed to watch engineers doing sessions and that's how you learnt how to do it. Nowadays they've got schools for kids wanting to be recording engineers or whatever but in those days nobody even knew the job existed. It was a very obscure sort of thing.'

A third teacher was Graham Owen. 'He was a great engineer. He ended up at Planet Studios in Perth and I think he ended up pretty much more interested in his yacht than working in a padded cell. That's fair enough too. He was a good teacher because he used to explain things to me. Like, he'd tell me why these things did what they did. He was really, really, particular. Any knob that created any sort of [sound], he'd soon discover it and all that sort of thing. Fascinating. I was never quite like that, you know. I couldn't tell you what a compressor does. I know what it sounds like and if I turn this and that, oh that'll sound better but I can't tell you technically what it is other than a thing that makes things jump out a bit. I'm not really interested in why things work just as long as they work. I guess you just take in information from different people and use what you think is good for you.'

His apprenticeship at Armstrong's was not without mishap, though, and an incident during a Cat Stevens' session taught him a lesson in the need for applying one's full concentration whenever in the studio. As the systems were not fully automated,

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certain components had to be manually turned on and off. The engineer had to either be an octopus or enlist helpers to assist with the desk. On this particular day Tony was daydreaming and missed a cue and failed to turn the tape recorder on – the error saw him promptly kicked off the job.

In another incident he was asked to set up the drums for a ‘Smacka’ Fitzgibbon session. ‘I come along and I stuff a pillow in the bass drum’ recalled Tony. ‘because that’s what I’d been shown to do. I was too green to understand that different sounds, different music and all that sort of thing and ‘Smacka’ Fitzgibbon sees this pillow in the bass drum and goes “What are you gonna do next? Stick cotton wool in my mouth?” I was taken back a few steps. I thought shit, you know. Again, it was a lesson. I learnt something new that day. It surprised me. How often do you have on a jazz record a bass drum go thud, thud, thud? It goes boom, boom, boom.’

In his capacity as stereo dubbing boy he got to record many of the advertisements that went to air on various radio stations, one being John Farnham singing TAA’s virtues – Trans Australian Airlines being the premier domestic carrier of the day. A bonus of this job which provided some amusement for his family was the bringing home of some of the outtakes. To hear the singer associated with the cheesy megahit, ‘Sadie the Cleaning Lady’ swearing his way through the umpteenth take of a TAA ad was something of a revelation to Tony’s younger brother. Johnny Farnham singing “T...A...A...fucking... T...A...A” was the first time he had ever heard the word ‘fuck’ in a recording. Such language on a recording would have been jaw droppingly shocking given the censorship restrictions in Australia at the time. Up until 1970 conservative Australia was still

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beeping out the word 'bloody' on the Royal Guardsmen's Snoopy versus The Red Baron records!

For a short time, Tony tried to supplement his meager wage at the studio by working at Mister Figgins, a four-level shoe store in the heart of Melbourne which his father was managing. It was something of a failed experiment as Tony would simply disappear upstairs and not be seen for hours using the time to catch up on sleep rather than deal with the needs of customers and staff.

Whether it was his naivety or a penchant for a hedonistic approach to life, Tony often found himself in trouble at Armstrong's. 'I did an amazing recording with Lobby [Lloyde] on mescaline which was a hallucinogenic. I just turned up and they were rehearsing. Lobby said, "Why don't you record it?" I said "Fine" so put the microphones up. They were taking all sorts of weird and wonderful things and all weekend we recorded this thing and I think we filled up seven or eight brand new two inch tapes of twenty minute jams. Boy did I get into trouble. Oh man. I wasn't meant to be doing it and Lobby took the tapes off to England and finished it off and actually made an album out of it and that was pretty good.'

This recording occurred in June 1976. The album, *Beyond Morgia: The Labryinths of Klimster*, finally saw the light of day when it was re-mastered and released in 2007 through Aztec Music. It had been intended as a concept album and soundtrack to a sci-fi film that was to be based on a manuscript that Lobby had written. Lobby destroyed the manuscript prior to leaving for England and the book and film were never produced. 'Lobby was the first person to sell me an ounce of hash' remembered Tony.

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‘God bless him for that. I was very pleased. It was funny in those days. It was a totally different world.’

Armstrong’s also brought Tony into the orbit of visiting international acts. One unexpected encounter came at a Wings’ concert at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in November 1975 where Tony was assistant recording engineer to Ernie Rose. ‘Ernie and the serious people went off to dinner’ recalled Tony ‘and I had to guard the truck and the next thing the fucking truck door flies open and this huge black guy, big fucker...comes in, looks around, he’s the security dude, you know, and there’s Paul McCartney, comes in after him and he’s got a spliff...in his hand and I’m nearly like, I mean [I’m] speechless. I nearly had a coronary. I’m like, fucking Paul McCartney. “Alright so what goes on in here? What’s all this equipment you got?” You know, all that sort of thing. “You know I’ve never heard of an Optomic.” “Oh, you know, it’s an Australian made thing. Quite an innovative thing.” “Oh terrific. Have a great recording tonight. Nice to meet you, thanks son.” And off he goes. He was very polite and interested in what was going on. He was always the technical Beatle. One of my biggest life regrets is that it wasn’t John Lennon.’

Not all encounters were as benign. One night, in February 1975, some members of Joe Cocker’s band turned up at the studio with a girl to listen to her demo tapes. ‘I was the only one in the studio’ said Tony, ‘so I took them into what was called my stereo dubbing room which was my office at the time. It was an amazing room, perfectly square room with plush red carpets, red walls, huge Tannoy speaker boxes and you know, turntables and all that shit to play with...and they were smoking this dope and you know, I’m a pretty cool dude all of seventeen or something “Yeah Man” you know and the

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funny thing was every time I kept getting the joint it had a smell like I'd never smelled before. It smelled like shit, you know, a real shitty smell not like the smell I was used to and every time they passed it to me they'd all start chuckling and I didn't get it at the time. I got it the next day. I was so fucking whacked I was up at the dunny vomiting and everything and they thought it was hysterical, they'd got this kid and fucked him up.'

Recording work also took Tony beyond the walls of the studio at times. One such occasion was when he was sent to record a Chad Morgan gig at a strip club somewhere in the city. 'This was a fascinating thing' remembered Tony 'because I was only sixteen or seventeen and wasn't allowed in the place to start with and I had set up my tape recorder which was a TEAC four-track and my little recording desk and a few microphones, he was just guitar and vocals, it wasn't a great complicated thing. I had to set that up in the toilets, one at a time, which I did, I did my thing and the next thing this guy turns up at the toilets, a guy in a derro coat basically, a derro with a bottle of whisky in the pocket of the derro coat and next thing I've had to move the TEAC four-track from the toilet so he could chunder and he's chundering like fucking nobody's, you know, like he's having a serious chunder this fellow and he's fucking Chad Morgan! And I'm thinking "This is fucked. Well that's that. I've just set up this thing. I may as well start packing up." and the next thing, he's grabbed the guitar and he's heading out there. So fucking hell, I'm frantically plugging in all the mikes and leads again and he's got up there and done a fantastic show...in between the strip acts. There were girls in the toilet area and I'm just seventeen or something and this is quite a revelation to a young man. Here I am and they're all stripping off "You don't mind a bit of titties do you love?" And I'm like no, I



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don't actually. Fair Dinkum. He does his show. I record it and it was released. It actually came out as a compilation of Chad Morgan with some live stuff. There is a record out there somewhere with my name on it as recording engineer... The Sheik of Scrubby Creek. Fucking hell, man!

Another excursion took Tony to Sunbury '75 to assist Jim Keays. The ex-Masters Apprentices' front man had just released his *The Boy from the Stars* album. 'I had to play sound effect tapes. The sound effects being, and this is Spinal Tap, the sound effects being a flying saucer landing and Jim Keays is meant to come out. Oh man and the tape fucked up. Any Spinal Tap thing that could happen, happened. Disaster.'

As a teenager, with all the attendant testosterone related side effects, Tony naturally took an interest in the opposite sex. On one occasion this led to a considerable embarrassment. 'There was a fellow called Pete Best, he used to do jingles. One day he brought his niece in, I think it was, and she was a pretty girl, lots of make up and that sort of thing and I said, "Do you want a joint?" She said, "Yeah I smoke all the time." So I rolled up what was called a Buddha stick into a joint which is extremely strong pot and we went outside to smoke it and she was sick, man she was freaking out. It turned out she was about fourteen. She told me she was eighteen. Oh man. I got hauled into the boss's office. I had to apologize to Mr. Peter Best. Oh Christ, I screwed up so bad that day. But she didn't look like a fourteen-year-old for God's sake. It's not like I rooted her. I just gave her a joint. She said, "I smoke all the time". She'd never touched the stuff in her life obviously. And I rolled a joint that would knock down a big fat bikie.'

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For all the trouble and lateness that seemed to accompany the young engineer, it was clear that his boss viewed him with some affection. ‘I used to have a nice hiding place in an air conditioning duct when I decided I didn’t want to work. The roof of the studio was full of sand for sound-proofing and all that so I used to hide up there sometimes. Around lunchtime Roger Savage and Ron Tudor would lock themselves in the office and pour a whisky and they’d be roaring laughing at my excuse that morning for being late and I’d be sitting at the exhaust fan listening to the conversation. I used to argue that if I drove from Cheltenham to South Melbourne and get there at 9 o’clock it would take me three quarters of an hour but if I arrived at 9.30 it would take me half an hour or less and I was always there until 8 o’clock at night anyway, so what was the bloody problem. But no, he was insistent that I got there at 9 o’clock.’

As an eighteen-year-old, a car was one of life’s essentials that Tony felt he needed. He was able to acquire a red mini-van from Armstrong’s for a thousand dollars. It had been the studio’s delivery van. He drove it for a year before he gained his license at 9am on his eighteenth birthday. It suffered a premature death in an early morning accident with a Volvo on Beach Road in Brighton as Tony was on his way to Armstrong’s to set up an orchestral string session – possibly one of the Ferrets’ sessions. The Ferrets would play a significant role in the next stage of Tony’s musical journey as would Molly Meldrum.

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## **A Golden Start**

In 1976, Molly Meldrum, who had had a long association with Armstrong's studio, had taken an interest in a young glam rock band from Perth called Supernaut. Their single *I Like It Both Ways*, which Tony would engineer, dovetailed with a relatively new venture of Molly's on ABC television, a music show called Countdown. Hosted by Molly, Countdown was a weekly pop show that screened Australia wide on Sunday nights at six o'clock. It proved to be a musical phenomenon. It began in 1974 and would run for thirteen years finishing up in 1987. Aided by regular appearances on Countdown, *I Like It Both Ways* marched from the top 20 of the charts into the number one spot. For Tony, the jump from stereo dubbing boy to engineer of this very tongue in cheek and slightly promiscuous song was all the work of Molly Meldrum.

Due to the other engineers at Armstrong's being busy with other projects, Molly decided to give eighteen-year-old Tony the opportunity to engineer the recording. For Tony – he being a somewhat inexperienced young man – his selection for the job was a complete surprise and one made without apparent rhyme or reason. 'I progressed rather quickly through the ranks,' he remembered 'probably quicker than I expected and probably quicker than I deserved. But that was all just a matter of luck and probably Molly, too. So I got a boost fairly quickly into doing recordings that I probably shouldn't have done for a few years, Supernaut and that sort of stuff which probably a more senior person should have done.' On further reflection Tony thought his selection 'sort of made

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sense in a way' due to the youth of the band, the oldest member being eighteen, the same age as Tony at the time.

Molly had previously produced several hit singles, the most notable and enduring being Russell Morris' *The Real Thing*. Supernaut's single was hardly worthy of comparison with that classic nevertheless it was a hit and delivered the band and young engineer further opportunity.

For Tony it was new territory. Reflecting on that recording he thought that the song's cheekiness had much to do with the success as technically the band left a lot to be desired, being naturally quite raw given their youth. 'If I listen to that I know it's not really good work at all. The reason that was a hit record was because it was a novelty song, simple as that. I mean they couldn't really play. The drummer was only fourteen and I think we were up to take twenty-six and I said, "That'll do" because it wasn't getting any better, the guy couldn't keep it in time. He probably became a very good drummer but at fourteen, belting it out [he wasn't] and the guitarist thought he was Jimmy Page.'

The success of Supernaut was soon followed with another remarkable story. Originally known as the Rocking Ferrets, the Ferrets was a five-piece band that had formed while some of its members had been involved with the Jesus Christ Superstar rock music production in Sydney. They won a battle of the bands competition run by Sydney radio station 2JJ, the prize being some time in a studio to produce a demo. From this the band produced an eight-song demo tape. Billy Miller, a Melbournian who was the lead singer and guitarist, decided to send a copy to Molly Meldrum based on a hopeful

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triple premise that Molly was something of a kindred spirit in that he liked The Beatles, barracked for St. Kilda and had produced the Russell Morris hit *The Real Thing*. Molly liked the tape and took it to Michael Gudinski at Mushroom Records. Gudinski agreed to have the band record some demos at Armstrong's. Tony was assigned the job of demo engineer.

Billy Miller remembers his first meeting with the young engineer. 'Ian Meldrum was really happy with the job he [Tony] was doing on Supernaut so he suggested that he be our engineer/producer so, you know, the first day I met Tony he said "Oh Yeah. I'm doing Supernaut" – the boys were out of the studio at the time and he was mixing it or something – "Have a listen to this." He played me *I Like It Both Ways* and he soloed the drums and the bass and, like, it was as if they were playing different songs. It was, like, really rough but, you know, then he un-soloed it and everything came in and it sounded like the hit which it was, so I knew straight away that he could make something great.'

What was evident was Tony's willingness to experiment. 'Tony's way of miking drums and guitars is pretty unorthodox' says Billy Miller 'which was really different to the other engineers at Armstrong's at that stage. They were pretty old-school. He used to have microphones at the back of the room, up in the air and that sort of stuff. People would say "Gee, what's he doing?"'

Tony thought the Ferrets were an excellent band and recalled his first impressions 'They'd been rehearsing for a long time, for months and months and months and had some really good songs, some really good ideas. They had a pianist who was like forty-five and he was on LSD all the time and a guitarist who played left handed and upside

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down and Billy who played normal very, very good guitar and K.D. (Ken David Firth) who was the bass player with a missing finger and he wrote great songs. They had Rick Brewer the Pink Zoot fellow on drums - an amazing drummer, a complete mad hippy - because Ian [Davies] was in gaol at the time. [Ian] was basically one of the original members and wrote the songs with K.D. And they did this demo. They came in and we did a midnight to dawn demo. At the end of the night I think they had twelve songs all finished, mixed and I was blown away. I thought "My fucking God is this something or is this something. This is something really new and great". The demos were so much better than the album, chalk and cheese, it was really good. And the next day I had to make dubs, copies for the band. It wasn't like a computer where you put in a disk and silently it would go off. I was sitting in my little dubbing room with the volume up going absolutely flat chat. I was really enjoying this stuff and Molly came racing down the corridor and said "I've discovered the new Beatles. This is it, this is it!" And from that moment on things went to pot. He got the piano player sacked for being too old. Put Billy's two sisters in, even though they couldn't really sing that well [but] because they were girls and the guitarist was really pissed off. He said "There's no girls in my band. I really don't like this." And the whole thing really started to implode from there, you know, and it was very sad. But at the same time a great deal of fun was had.'

The Ferrets were taken up by Mushroom with Molly as producer but the production of the album proved slow going as Tony recalled. 'It took eighteen months to do the album because Molly would go overseas for a few months and would say "Just keep recording"'. So we just had open slather. I can remember one day we were all

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tripping and decided to record Billy Miller's grandmother's clock so we spent the whole day adjusting the spotlights and setting all the lights right and all this sort of thing and the boss, Roger Savage, is looking out of his little office window which looked down into the studio, "What the fuck are they doing?" So a great deal of time was wasted and a hell of a lot of money spent.'

The single selected from the demo recordings was *Lies* and the flipside was *Don't Fall in Love*. The 'B' side had taken between four to eight hours to mix (the exact amount varies between accounts) compared to countless hours for the 'A' side. Tony remembered that the band was tripping while recording *Don't Fall in Love* and dragged the drummer in at 1am to complete the recording. The drummer forgot his snare so they forged on regardless with Billy Miller delivering the vocal at 5 o'clock in the morning while lying on the floor of the studio. Molly Meldrum, who was present at the time, had to fly to Queensland after the recording and on his return a few days later decided that the 'B' side was obviously the better choice as an 'A' side and so it was released as such. It proved an inspired decision and the song was soon charting and quickly seized the number one spot attaining gold record status in the process.

Given virtual *carte blanche* to record by Molly during his absences it was not surprising that the rudderless ship would strike a course far from the fiscal line that Mushroom Records, which was funding the project, deemed appropriate. Molly admits that his constant absences compromised the project. Apart from that, another problem for the company was that Tony had a key to Armstrong's and would use the studios whenever the whim and opportunity allowed. Youthful exuberance and raffish excess

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meant that much unauthorized recording took place. ‘Unbeknownst to me,’ says Molly ‘they were in the studios a lot and doing all sorts of things, you know, and I arrived back or had Michael summon me back “What the Hell is going on with this group?” So I got back and said “Okay what have you done?” And there was this room that was like a big cupboard. “Show me what you’ve done.” And it was sort of all heads down in the back. I said, “What’s wrong?” So I walked into this cupboard and I’m looking and there were just so many...all these tape boxes with this and that. “What’s ‘Song for Lucy’? I’ve never heard of that song.”

On the night of the Granville train disaster, 18 January 1977, Tony and Billy Miller crept into the studio to make a recording for Billy’s wife Lucy who was overseas at the time. Billy Miller recalls the incident. ‘We thought we’d make a tape on all the deluxe gear and send it to Lucy. We used a whole two-inch tape and said “Here you are Lucy. This is the latest song we’ve written and this is what happened at Granville” and we did all sad music under it and sent it off to her on a cassette. About a month later Gudinski and Meldrum were going “Why is this taking so long?” But it was because of Molly that it took so long. He wanted to okay the final mix on everything and he’d be overseas with Elton John or something. So they went into the tape room and they’re looking through our tapes and get to this one that has ‘Song for Lucy’ on it. “Tony what’s this about?” “Well we snuck in the other night and Billy wanted to send a tape to his wife.” We were always getting into trouble and Tony, too, but because he was so good and unpigeonholeable and everybody loved him because he was such a nice guy, so there was no way he was going to get the sack or anything like that.’



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On that score Billy was correct. Molly, although recognizing that things were a little out of control, was impressed with the ideas that Tony and Billy were coming up with. 'I, more or less, with Roger Savage and Ernie Rose and Bill [Armstrong] sort of ...said "Maybe we can recycle these tapes and do something." Certainly with Tony, [I had to], I guess the word is to defend him at stages, to say "No. Just let them do what they are doing because something will come out of that."'. By this time, I realized how good Tony Cohen was going to be, you know, as a young engineer because he very much had a producer's ear and was not frightened to experiment, as such, in sounds and working with the band. He was quite open to those ideas and would even come up with them himself. By the time we had finished the Ferrets thing Tony was doing other projects obviously with the Models and God knows who else. So he became a recognized engineer that was quite unique; and he was unique.'

In an interview with the ABC's Richard Fidler, Tony described one of the meetings with Molly that he and Billy were asked to attend. '[H]e called us in for a production meeting 9:00 in the morning at his place and he was still in bed...he got up... and started dancing and putting the music on which was rather bizarre because Molly plays his music very, very loud and then proceeds to shout at you over the top of it, and we were all sitting there, sort of terrified thinking, "What on earth is he saying?"' And then he decided to show us what good production was and it was 'The Real Thing' but he didn't have a copy so he pulled the gold record down from the wall and played that." Molly confirms the story and says he just thought "Oh, Fuck it." and broke the glass casing to play the gold record. 'It did actually work. It was very scratchy.'

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Recording the Ferrets album, *Dreams of Love*, presented challenges to Tony that he had not encountered before. Two international artists credited on the album were Nicky Hopkins and Bobby Keys. ‘They were on the Ferret’s record’ recalled Tony ‘because they were touring at the time and, of course, Molly knew everybody and he got them in and they were so shit-faced drunk and the worst thing is, and I’ve sort of never forgiven Molly for this, you know, I love Molly but he made sure they were still on the record even though they played like shit, you know. They were so drunk and they were taking it as a joke, doing something on an Australian record. Yeah I didn’t have great respect for that but at the same time, look, Molly’s idea was...put their names on the record and all that...There was this thing where Nicky Hopkins did his take, a really bad piano take, on a rock n roll song and he was so drunk at the end of it, he fell off his stool and yelled “Albatross” which was supposed to be funny...and Molly insisted that stay.’

In a more grandiose statement a full orchestra and boys’ choir were used on some of the tracks. According to Molly, working with the orchestra was a valuable experience for Tony as it introduced him to new sounds and opened his eyes to what could be done with the many instruments contained within. Tony was amused by the memory of the session. ‘Molly was like a kid in a candy store. It was just hilarious. Molly was running in and out. “It’s not quite right. We’re getting there.” The funny thing was Molly’s ideas were actually very good but he wasn’t very good at putting them into practice. His ideas were great. I mean, he sat there and watched the Beatles do the *White Album*. He knew all about those tricks you needed to do to make pop records but Molly’s temperament is such that the party came before the actual studio thing. Like, you know, he had trouble

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separating the two, like when you had to actually really just sit and concentrate and get the recording done, [and] when it had to be up vibe and fun and I think that the two both have a place in doing something like that but I just always found that he had trouble. Geez, I used to listen to him though. I mean, I thought “Shit, I am really learning so much from this bloke.” It took me years to realize how much I learnt from him.’

Molly says Tony’s brief apprenticeship under his stewardship was as much about trial and error for the two of them. ‘It was all working together and poor Tony was a captive victim in the sense that we were there for like days, sometimes literally we would go into the studios, say, hypothetically, on a Friday and before we knew it would be Sunday afternoon and I’d sleep in the studio and I was an absolute stickler for the “Let’s do one more mix.” And the one more mix would be like 40 to 50 mixes and still not knowing where to go and, with Tony, he was like a sponge and sopped all that [up].’

The time with Molly had a profound effect on Tony’s philosophy of what needed to be achieved to make a good record. Molly, along with the engineers at Armstrong’s, taught him about the psychology of the recording process. It was important to create a vibe within the studio to have the band up for the session. More than anything though it was the notion of recording big – with levels up that impressed him. The philosophy behind this was a simple one. When a song was scaled down to a transistor or car radio you wanted it to have effect. Tinkering with levels in a studio to please a perfectionist’s ear wasn’t going to sell a record – the finished product had to have an extravagance that made people sit up and take notice. ‘It’s got to be really exaggerated.’ explained Tony. ‘He knew all that. He understood all that. I can’t thank him enough for that.’ Billy Miller

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had no doubt as to Molly's expertise believing him to be the best producer he has ever heard and that he combined with Tony were an exceptional sound duo.

Whatever Molly's extravagances and weaknesses there was no doubting that he brought the studio alive. Both Tony and Billy Miller attest to the bizarre nature of some of the sessions. 'I'll never forget the drag queens he used to bring in.' remembered Tony. 'They were wonderful. One, she was about seven-foot tall, a Maori bloke, or woman I should say, and they were on Mandrax which was the ultimate sedative which used to make you do very, very bad things and she would drop her handbag and offer a 'man standing', as they were called, to Billy's dog. "You want a mandy love?" not realizing it was a dog sitting in front of her. I was a catholic middle-class boy. I didn't know what a drag queen was. One of them came in one day and said, "Have a look at the new operation.' [She] pulled her dress up and there was this horrible scarred purple thing...aargh...It's an image I can't get out of my mind, one of those things you wish you'd never seen.'

Billy Miller provides a broader picture of the colourful proceedings. 'There'd be four or five drag queens, Molly's friends, my mum knitting, my sisters and brothers because it's like a 24-channel desk and wasn't automated in those days so you'd have a drag queen sitting on channel 23 and her job would be to fade the guitar on the last track. There'd be twelve sets of hands on the desk and it might take sixteen hours to get the one where everybody does everything right but that's how we did a lot of it then. And your normal straight engineer at that stage wouldn't allow anybody to touch anything let alone

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a drag queen. It was like a big party and my mum would be just knitting, smiling away with drags everywhere, you know, joints going, but we got the job done.’

New Zealand band Dragon was also using the studio around this time and shared the same female drug dealer. After recording sessions finished, usually as dawn was breaking, both bands would go back to their dealer’s house and she would kindly cook them breakfast. Immediately she left the room Tony and others would, in their desperation, begin picking heroin out of the shag pile carpet. The dealer ended up in gaol but came out, according to Tony, a reformed and incredible person who assisted women released from prison to integrate back into society.

Oddly enough Molly Meldrum, who had worked closely with Tony during this time was ignorant of the extent of Tony’s addiction. ‘I really wasn’t aware of his drug habit at all.’ says Molly. ‘Obviously the Ferrets were at it as well. I was pretty naïve at that stage and one stage, with the Ferrets and that, I couldn’t understand why they kept being sick. “What’s wrong with them for God’s sake?” One of the most outrageous things they did which caused a lot of shit was they were taking a break and then they went back to Armstrong’s and LRB [Little River Band] had blocked off Studio One for their project for months and they’d just started and set up their sound, the drums and the whole thing like that and they went into that studio one night and decided to work and fucked the whole thing up, you know. Shit did hit the fan on that one. Michael Gudinski “Well what are we going to do now?” From Glenn Shorrock and God knows what. I was at a loss for that one. I went in and tore them to pieces.’

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Recalling that incident which occurred a little later in the Ferret's phase, Tony said 'That was the Wombats actually. I did a good album with the Wombats. They were quite good. That was Billy Miller's little brother's band and we were at Armstrong's and were all off our heads. Strolled into studio three, which hadn't been finished, a half-made studio and the Little River Band had their equipment set up for rehearsal and the boys just all jumped on everything and started changing their settings. I think a bass drum pedal got broken. I think that was what the big stink was about apart from all their settings being changed. It was totally an uncool thing to do but, you know, when you're off your face you don't realize the consequence of your actions I'm afraid.'

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## **On the Road**

The success of the Ferrets beckoned the band to hit the road. They were listed with Premier Artists and as part of that company traipsed the national circuit of major cities and towns along the East Coast as well as Tasmania, Perth and Adelaide. In an unprecedented move Tony was employed as the front of house sound man, mixing the live sound. '[It] was, like, unheard of' says Billy Miller 'because, I mean, there were sound guys but they were all part of the road crew. They all had to lift the gear. Tony never lifted anything and, you know, he was so fragile you wouldn't expect him to anyhow. They were all, you know, a bit pissed off, you know. "Why does he get to fly everywhere?" Well the answer is because the end result is the sound and he does sound better than anybody else. That's why he's doing it. So he was, like, really one of the band.'

The notion of Tony being one of the band is borne out in a photograph of the Ferrets and Supernaut in Launceston, Tasmania in which he appears with them for a newspaper article. In the picture long hair and flared jeans were clearly in the ascendency. The bands had flown to Tasmania in October 1977 to do a show with local group Airborne at the Albert Hall.

Soon after the Tasmanian gig the Ferrets were assigned as the support band for a short tour of Australia by the American new wave group Blondie. It is a tour that Tony

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remembered fondly and one that revealed a clash of cultures and styles. ‘The Blondie tour was fantastic fun. That was the most bizarre thing. They’d actually been signed to tour by Gudinski before they’d had a hit in Australia so it was this el cheapo tour. They were staying at the dreadful grubby Southern Cross Hotel.<sup>1</sup> That’s where we met, you know, to catch the bus. “Here’s your support band.” “Hello.” We’re all like scruffy long-haired things with jeans and t-shirts. Total opposites but we ended up really great friends. We were literally on a Ventura school bus with, like, bench seats driving from Melbourne to Sydney at about twenty miles an hour up the Hume Highway which was one way each way. The bus driver had his son with him and he had two eight-track cartridges, one of The Village People and the other was Slim Dusty, you know, so that was the music. So you can imagine!’

‘These guys from New York, their skin was just white. They’d all come out of a New York winter. They wore black suits and white shirts, black ties and they were just going “Where the fuck are we man? Where’s the McDonald’s? What is this place?” I loved stopping at these little country towns and these people would get out of the bus and you’d get the whole town just come out of the shops to have a look at these freaks in black suits and the funny hair and all that. I can remember stopping at Glenrowan and, you know, Debbie Harry patting kangaroos and all that sort of thing and they loved that and they bought Ned Kelly t-shirts and all that, all the souvenir stuff and we’re sitting round getting bored as hell going “Oh God.” These days I’d have respect and say, “You

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<sup>1</sup> Where the Beatles had stayed during their 1964 visit to Melbourne



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enjoy Australian culture for what it is.” you know, but back in those days we thought “Gawd. Who wants to see a dirty kangaroo?” They did. They loved the place.’

‘At the start, we were all in our jeans and t-shirts, [a] scruffy looking lot down the back of the bus and the Blondie lot, all immaculate, sitting up the front of the bus. She was just gorgeous. She was stunning. None of us could take our eyes off her, you know. She was just one of those people and she had the personality to go with it too. The presence as you’d call it, I suppose. We started to mingle and discovered we had one thing in common, that was that we liked heroin so, you know, once we finally got to Sydney - which seemed like it took a year - one of the Ferrets’ roadies scored a big bag of China White for everyone and that’s why Deborah Harry said the best thing about Australia was the heroin.’

‘They were one hell of a band though. To watch those guys doing a sound check was one of the most amazing things I ever saw, you know. [Chris Stein] he would just stop them as they were playing. Like I would be standing at the side of the stage with my jaw on the floor going “I can’t believe how well these people play.” and he would stop the band and call them all “Pussies” and “You’re shithouse. How dare you play so badly” and I’m just going “What?” but I mean that was the difference. If you’re going to make it in New York you gotta be really good and these guys could cook, unbelievable. I remember they did a gig with the Ferrets at a little pub in Sydney because we had to play every night to fill in, to try and make up money, whatever, and they didn’t like that because they were used to playing every night. They weren’t used to having nights off so a few of them turned up at our gigs. The drummer would sit in and the bass player and

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they were doing Rolling Stones songs so fast that, you know, the poor old Ferrets would like be desperately trying to keep up. It was spectacular. It was like those things you have when famous people jump up at total dives and jump up on stage to do that. I did a mix for them one night because it turned out that people were saying the live sound for the Ferrets was better than the Blondie live sound. As it turned out they had a fold back mixer from some PA company because it (the tour) wasn't treated seriously. They were fantastic.'

There was one quirky adjustment to the tour when Blondie was scheduled to play two nights on Great Keppel Island. A planned 3XY/2JJ rock-cruise had been cancelled and some of the disappointed punters were offered an alternative deal to the North Queensland tourist island. It was hardly an ideal crowd for the American band. Beyond five punk enthusiasts and a handful of mildly interested spectators the majority of the audience had been fed a diet of pub rock and disco all their young lives with little appreciation for the alternative scene. It was a gig that Tony and the Ferrets missed out on. 'We were really pissed off about that.' remembered Tony. "'Oh Shit. Are we going to Great Keppel?'" "Ah, no, you're not." In Brisbane Debbie Harry took too much dope and we were walking around backstage, slapping her and trying to give her coffee and water and they couldn't do it. The punks actually started ripping the seats up so the Brisbane police that were pretty renowned in those days, Bjelke's brown shirts, you know, came in with the riot gear, you know, and that was that. So they didn't play the Brisbane gig. Debbie Harry was too fucked up.'

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Chaos and mayhem were not confined to cancelled gigs and the American punk diva must have wondered at the mores of the country she found herself trapped in given some of the behaviour she had to endure. ‘We had a tour manager, Ray. I’ll never forget him.’ recalled Tony. ‘He was this toothless guy and he’d just do anything. He’d piss in a wine bottle and drink it, you know. Debbie Harry was a pretty sophisticated chick even though she was a junkie and all that but the worst one was, he got a Huntsman spider off the wall and ate it in front of Deborah Harry who ran off to the dunny just chundering, you know. She was just so disgusted with this guy. He was just this madman. He’d do anything to, you know, to cause a bit of a stir, to try and shock. You gotta laugh. He did a few other things but they’re a bit vague in my mind. He licked a cane toad or something because he said you could get off on it and ended up in hospital missing the best part of the tour. I mean, what a dickhead, you know. I know what he was trying to do. He was trying to entertain because this band from New York was just so bored. That was a great tour the Blondie tour, a great new experience.’

Accepting the offer to tour with the Ferrets meant that Tony could no longer work at Armstrong’s as a permanent staff member. Reflecting on his time there, Tony concluded ‘Armstrong’s was the sort of place that you had to fuck up pretty bad for them to sack you. Like they basically invested years in training you and you really had to fuck up before they sort of throw you out of the family. I just sort of drifted away more than anything as most people did. I wouldn’t say I outgrew it because it was the best studio in Australia in my opinion, that and Albert’s and, you know, I guess going on tour with the Ferrets was the beginning of the end for Armstrong’s because I wasn’t there enough. I

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never thought myself very good at live mixing but, you know, it was a chance to have fun really and travel and see places.’

Armstrong’s was where Tony met his first girlfriend, Robin. She had visited the studio on a school excursion and was a sharpie chick – sharpies, being something of a cult phenomenon, that had sprouted throughout Melbourne’s working-class suburbs in the early seventies. Their hairstyle and prevailing mode of dress, usually only varying in the gang colours represented by their striped cardigans, is depicted on the cover of Skyhooks’ *Living in the Seventies* album. As a sharpie Robin was the antithesis of what Tony represented at the time. The sharpie sub-culture, with the tacit approval of violence as a means to an end that fueled many of those who found comfort in the gang mentality, was something that was light years from Tony’s outlook on life. With hair down to his waist, Tony called himself a hippy and spent most of his time barefooted. Robin soon abandoned the sharpie makeover for one more reflective of her new boyfriend’s appearance. Both enjoyed smoking dope but they had graduated to heroin as Tony explained. ‘In those days we used to smoke the stuff, you know, maybe once or twice a week. You’d smoke it on tin foil. We both smoked it because we liked our pot and that’s how I managed to get a heroin habit. “Chasing the Dragon” hence the Beast of Bourbon’s song. “I brought back a souvenir all the way from Kampuchea. A plastic bag up my ass. Soon the goods would come to pass. I sell the seeds of misery.” That’s how most people used to get a heroin habit by smoking it and then all of a sudden it began costing so much it became cheaper to inject it. Once you got over the squeamishness of sticking a needle into yourself, it became easy.’

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Life on the road with the Ferrets had provided ample opportunities for Tony to satisfy some of his sexual needs as did his entry into the Melbourne punk scene. ‘I certainly wasn’t being very celibate at the time. There were plenty of punk rock girls running around.’ One of these was a slightly older woman, an aspiring singer, who Tony remembered as being very good looking but ‘probably past her use by date. She made me wear these tight black pants, leather jackets and things like that, you know. That’s when Robin came back and decided “Oh my Godfather what’s happened here? She’d come back from a holiday or something and discovered that I’d suddenly turned into a punk rocker and she didn’t like that at all so that was the end of that.”

According to Tony it was the finding of needle marks in his arm that proved the catalyst for the break up of that relationship. Robin abandoned Tony and Melbourne for a life in Nimbin – the fabled hippy haunt in northern New South Wales leaving him to follow a separate path.

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~ Five ~

## **Russian Roulette**

After the Ferrets' tour Tony and the band moved into a squat in Sydney, a 'beautiful falling down mansion' as he described it, opposite the Sydney Cricket Ground. 'We were upstairs, got scabies from it I might add, that's what squats were like, and were really lucky. There was a very nice doctor in Paddington who gave us all vitamin B shots all the time for nothing because he knew we were not living very healthy lives. And one of the girls from the Ferrets, one of Billy Miller's sisters, used to feed us all on tsatziki all the time – cucumber, yoghurt and garlic. We must have stunk. And there were these, sort of, thugs who lived downstairs and I remember one night, it was winter, and they pulled a phone pole out of the ground. Not one connected to the wires, a street pole sort of thing, the same size. So they slowly fed it into the fire place. I don't remember much of the sessions I was doing there. It was probably more just knocking round with them doing their gigs and that sort of thing. I can remember driving back [to Melbourne] with one of the band members and he'd broken a windscreen. It was the middle of the night, early hours of the morning and it was raining and the windscreen was broken and we stop at a petrol station and he says "Have you got any money?" "No". Fantastic. He ended up swapping a tow bar and a brief case for some petrol and waking this guy up at three or four in the morning, [a] scary moment, I thought we were dead, you know. Oh I wanted to be. I just sat with a coat covering my head hiding from the rain.'

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Touring and the brief sojourn in Sydney had taken up the better part of a year and the Ferrets, on their return to Melbourne, were set the up in a house in Greville Street, Prahran, courtesy of Mushroom Records while they were recording their second album *Fame at Any Price*. Tony lived with the band until all were evicted due to their rampant excesses. The album was recorded at Richmond Recorders which many bands were beginning to use as a preferred recording studio.

Tony and Billy had struck up a firm friendship during the recording of the first album. Billy used to visit Tony at his Cheltenham home where they would drop acid and listen to Beatle's albums in the garage. 'Billy is still a great songwriter and a great entertainer, too, whether onstage or not.' said Tony. 'I had a good relationship with Bill – a lot of fun – and he taught me a lot too, you know, just regarding the rules and things like that. Just his madcap attitude was... I don't know, I think everybody you meet in life rubs off something, you take on board some of the things you like about them.'

Once on tour, though, Tony struck up a friendship with Ferret's guitarist Dave Schofield. The two would room together. Billy Miller remembers them being well suited as 'they were at that stage a little less degenerate than me and the bass player'.

'He was a good friend' said Tony of Dave. 'but he went mad. He was never into hard drugs. In fact, the last time I saw him, it was just a fluke. He picked me up. He was an all-night cab driver. We used to think he might have been one of those back-pack murderers or something because he knew that park where all those bodies [were] but he picked me up late at night in Sydney in his taxi. "Hi Dave. How are you?" He said, "You're going to score smack aren't you?" I said. "No. No way. I'm going to get some

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pot.” lying through my teeth. He said, “Nah. You’re fucking getting the smack.” He was really down on it, really weird. [He] completely lost the plot. No one really knows why. He was a really good guitarist but he was a really aggressive fellow. He used to pick fights, like, with great big thug groups of Maoris in Bondi and things like that, I mean, stuff you just don’t do, from stage, I’m talking about. And the next thing the place would turn into a bloodbath, you know, and I’d hide under the mixing desk as any intelligent person would. Dave was great. I probably shouldn’t say he was a nutcase because if he read anything like that he’d probably come after me with a chainsaw or something. Nah I don’t think so. Dave was a really good friend for a long time.’

After the Ferrets, Dave played in a band called the Motivators. One evening on the way back from a gig at Festival Hall, Tony was driving his Mum’s car and was hit by a car coming out of a side street. ‘This guy clipped us and rolled us onto the roof for some time. No one was hurt but the guitars were broken in the boot and [Dave] was going to just clobber this guy something shocking. Thank God he didn’t. He probably would have gotten into big trouble.’

Tony also earned the nickname ‘squatter’ while on tour. Squatter was a well to do character in Peter Cook’s and Dudley Moore’s famous Derek and Clive comedy sketches which the band used to listen to and mimic. As Tony proved the best mimic of the squatter voice he was soon given that sobriquet.

The friendship that really blossomed post touring with the Ferrets was one that Tony had struck up with Ian Davies who used to write lyrics for the band. Ian would become an influential and dangerous association in Tony’s life. He was nevertheless a



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colorful character as Billy Miller explains. ‘Ian was sort of like a low-level criminal who had a knack and Tony started hanging around with him...not violence or anything but pinching things and fraud and shit like that, just a knockabout young bloke. Tony really was taken by Ian and a lot of Tony’s phrases, his phraseology is direct from Ian because he is such an infectious guy and Tony imbibed it into all these other people.’

Association with Ian Davies led Tony to some unsavory moments in the shadow-lands of Melbourne’s criminal world. ‘He was one of the great characters that ever lived.’ recalled Tony fondly, ‘Unfortunately [he] got himself a huge speed addiction and to cut a long story he ended his own life by making his own speed and experimenting on himself which finished him, unfortunately, but at the same time he was one of the funniest characters you could ever meet. He was a crook and, sort of like a good crook, you know, like the old East London type. He wouldn’t do an armed hold up but he’d certainly steal. I remember him once getting me, totally innocently, answering an ad in the *Trading Post*. It was miles away and I was driving mum’s little red Mazda and he asked me for a lift to this place that was advertising an eight-track tape recorder. So I drove him out there – it was just this little flat – and Ian was quite a coarse fellow, probably hard to like unless you knew him, he looked around and there were all these pictures of long haired girls playing acoustic guitars and there was a pulpit and a bible and all this, which set him right off, you know, like bible bashing and [that] sort of thing, not his cup of tea, you know, and later on he sent these desperate characters back to rob the poor man, you know. So basically I was involved in casing the joint, unwittingly at the time. They went in when he wasn’t home. They broke in and they knew what they wanted and they

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brought it back and all got rewarded with heroin. They were all in a state of having their noses on the carpet. That was an introduction to me that was quite startling.’

‘I remember him taking me to a place where Lionel Rose [Australian world champion boxer] used to hang out that was this sort of club near St. Kilda Junction, a derelict building, upstairs and all these guys and Lionel Rose and a lot of aborigines, but they were all crims and it was...Gawd Jeez...What an eye opener! And another time he was doing a big deal and I just knocked on his door, to buy a bit of speed from him. This is long after he was the drummer in the Ferrets and, you know, he wrote their hit songs and all that stuff. He was a good songwriter but speed fucked him, made him just repeat the same things over and over. It’s just one of the psychological things it does. I knocked on his door at some stage and these two huge bikies jumped out at me. One of them must have been over six feet tall and he had a machete strapped to his leg and all this. My life flashed before my eyes and Ian goes “No. No. No. No. He’s a music mate of mine. He’s okay”. And he says, “Tony, this is the Enforcer and this is somebody else.” So I said “Hello Mr. Enforcer. Hello Mr. Whatnot. Please pardon me for coming to the door at the wrong time.” And as I looked in the door there was, like, a mountain of marijuana. There’s a lot of great things about Ian that should be written down. In fact, if ever a book should be written it should be about that guy. He was sort of a crook with a heart, you know.’

Not surprisingly Ian Davies, with his past record, was well known to the police and had been charged several times for various minor offences. It was not only the police who had an eye out for him either, remembered Tony. ‘He got done by the Jews, too, for

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yelling out “Roll up your sleeves and show me the numbers.” in Inkerman Street. He used to “Seig Heil” them. He was just a trouble maker, you know. He couldn’t resist it. They got him one day and broke his arm. He wasn’t too proud of that one. He was just a madman, a crazy guy.’

Ian Davies died while Tony was overseas with Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds some years later. It was a heart-breaking moment for Tony. ‘I remember going to see him when I was in Australia touring with Nick. He used to have his house, he’d rent houses, the poor people he used to rent houses off and he boarded up all the windows and had microphones dotted all around the house coz of the speed, the paranoia and all that and, I don’t know, he might have even got to the stage of having little cameras outside and all of that and basically he used to spend all of his time sitting in a dark room with monitors and speakers listening to everything that was going on outside. And I went to visit him and, you know, knocked on the door and said “Ian, I don’t want anything, I just wanted to say hello” and that sort of thing and he had a pushbike outside and I went up the street to buy some smokes or something and came back and the pushbike was gone. So I knew he was inside but he wasn’t answering and I never saw him again which was very sad but I think also he had been diagnosed with some sort of spinal problem and his spine was dissolving, because what speed does is it takes all the calcium out of your body and your bones can crumble. So the amount this guy was doing, even though I considered myself a fairly serious user, this guy, goodness gracious me, I could never have afforded anything like that.’

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The death of friends and his own past addiction inevitably forced Tony into reflective assessment of his days as a chronic user. 'It sort of became a problem when the intravenous part came in, that's when it sort of all of a sudden...you take it that way and you feel like you can do anything. Unfortunately, the nasty thing is it has a habit of backfiring on you very quickly. I just remember it wasn't easy. It was funny actually, it was with Chris Thompson. We woke up one morning and we just decided we were going to because we were both using heroin, like smoking, and we decided we'd have a shot, see what all the fuss was about and that led on to shooting speed. It was just a small leap forward, nothing major. Once you get over that hurdle of sticking the damn thing into yourself which, you know, is not an easy thing to do, let's face it, it's the only time in our life in anything that we do where we force anything into our body like that. As far as I can see that's the [only] time. It's quite nasty when you think about it. Also, it can become quite an important part of it all, you know. It ends up becoming a [ritual]. Imagine someone that's addicted to tea – tea rituals – the ritual of it becomes so bloody important. I can remember the Jehovah Witnesses coming to the door one morning and we'd been up all night tripping and they opened the door and saw our big black pupils and this room full of melted candle wax all over the place, which we obviously thought was beautiful at the time but probably just looked like something frightening but all I can remember is the fear in their eyes as they backed off. It's very, very strange. I was lucky to survive, I really was. I don't think I was ever that big a [user]. I was consistent but never in really large quantities whereas when I look back on some of my friends, I mean, even Billy [Miller] when he drank – and to his credit he probably hasn't had a drink for

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twenty years – but when he did drink he'd have a bottle of vodka in the freezer for breakfast, like, I mean, I can't even contemplate that sort of amount of drinking. Billy used to drop a few times from taking the smack and we'd have to take him to hospital. I was one of those people who'd try a little bit and see what it was like. He was one who'd sort of pour it all [in] “Yeahhh. Whacko. Bewdy” next thing – plomp – he's on the ground. I'm not proud of it. It's not glamorous at all. It's a real waste of time but in that era it was so new. I guess it was sort of similar to the time when tobacco first arrived and people thought it was just the greatest thing and even doctors said it was good for you and all that sort of shit. It's just now that we realize, you know. I mean smoking marijuana was considered, you know, [an] opening of the mind and all that and I agree to a certain extent, but there's no doubt in my mind that it makes you want to try other things to open your mind which are not so easy to disregard. God knows what you're shooting. Speed is made of petro chemicals and all sorts of vile things. And imagine what else they mix with it. And you're sticking it straight in your blood so it's sort of Russian Roulette in a way.'

Looked at singularly, Tony may well be written off as a hopeless junkie by some. His continued existence was a source of wonder to Mick Harvey who says, 'I'm amazed he [hung in so long] to be honest.' Drug cultures in any society are always laced with stories of individual calamity and degeneration and Melbourne's was no different. It was true, however, that Tony was ensconced in an environment that perpetuated problems of drug use. The use of drugs as a means of fostering artistic creativity has long been a contentious point yet it was a point that many with whom Tony associated believed to be

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true, misguided perhaps. Once dependency had a hold it is easy to become delusional about a habit's necessity. Reflecting on the process, Andrew Duffield – the Models second keyboard player and songwriter - says, 'It's just a terrible kind of myth in your head coz you just believe it to be true, that you can't or won't do something because you haven't got whatever – a cup of coffee. It's just a belief system. It's terrible but it's potent and you believe it.'

The drug scene was a multi-layered one and Tony's friend and former girlfriend Joanne, provides an interesting perspective as to the motivation of some within the music scene. 'It (drugs) took a lot of great Australian musicians out. People were doing them favours. This was someone doing a favour. They'd walk in and say, "I've got the best drugs for you because I love you." and that was how it was working because they loved you. It wasn't because you were a junkie. They wanted to show their appreciation and there were a number of people in the industry who were high ranking doing the same thing.'

It was inevitable that Tony's drug taking would bring him into conflict with the law. The first of several incidents occurred probably sometime in 1975 or 1976 prior to him going on tour with the Ferrets. He and his girlfriend Robin had decided to take a holiday to Queensland. The trip was probably hastily arranged and bore all the hallmarks of an unplanned venture. '[We] ran out of money' remembered Tony 'so filled a great big plastic container up with [magic] mushrooms and honey because the thing is you can eat the mushrooms and once the psilocybin, the actual drug, kicked in you lost your appetite anyway so it was a really good way to live without any money. You didn't have to eat.

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Shocking isn't it? They [the police] didn't know what it was. They had to ring through to Sydney for what to charge me for. I remember the cop ringing and going "Psilo what? How do you spell that?" It was hysterical. It wasn't at the time. I remember having to go back for the court case. I think I got a \$100 or maybe \$200 fine. And I remember the judge looking down his beak at me. He looked down over his glasses at me and he says, "I don't know why you young people don't just take strychnine and be done with it." The funny thing is that's just what it is but anyway. Robin got taken [in] by the local vicar and his wife and put up for the night and I was in the cell in one of the nastiest little lock-ups I've ever been in. Somewhere [in] southern coastal New South Wales and it was just like a little box. It was horrible. Had a little bed and a bucket for a dunny and the mozzies were about a foot thick.'

The more serious of Tony's run-ins came in the early 80s when police tried to frame him for dealing. 'I got off thankfully because the guy who owned Richmond Recorders knew a really good barrister and that barrister didn't like cops who bashed people and I signed a statement because the cops beat me, basically, and they were searching a dealer's house and I knocked on the door. The dealer wasn't home. He was off skiing, I might add, and I got dragged in. I had just a miniscule amount of heroin in my wallet. They took me upstairs and the next thing the guy's pulling me up by the hair belting me. I mean, I didn't think cops did that. I was a pretty naïve suburban boy and I'm sort of thinking "Is this really happening?" and he says, "I'll stop if you sign this." So I signed a statement to say I was dealing dope, you know. So the guy who owned the studio rang the barrister. He said "Okay" and rang the cops and said "My name is

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Brendan Murphy. We're going to charge your officer with beating a statement out of my client." [He] put the phone down, glared at me across the desk over his glasses and he said, "That stuff will kill you son." Said nothing else. The phone rang. "The charge is dropped." "Very good." That was that. He cost a \$1000 for poor old mum and dad to get me off that – a \$1000 for literally half an hour's work to basically make that phone-call. I think I ended up with a fine, a \$100 fine for possession. It was 0.0000 point 2 of a gram or something like that which is basically an empty packet 'cause junkies are so desperate they save the empty packets and scrape them with a razor blade to try and get something. But the guy bashed me. Sergeant Cyril Berryman. I'll never forget him and one day I was walking up Chapel Street, Prahran, with my girlfriend at the time, Jo – Big Jo – and we were walking and I heard a voice from a car and it was this guy who beat me and he says, "Cohen! I'm gonna get you." "Oh shit!" I shit myself. I went through Coles, weaved through the back door and out through Woolworths. Of course the guy was just winding me up, you know, he wasn't chasing me. He couldn't give a shit. It was just that he missed out on his big bust because the dealer wasn't there. The funny thing was, this dealer lived in this little one room flat which had a kitchen and a lounge-room and there was this sort of brick thing about, say, two feet high with a wooden beam across the top and we knew that under that, you picked up that wooden beam and inside the hollow bricks was where he kept his stuff and the cop put his hand on the wooden beam to hoist himself up on the bench to look through the cupboard and me and five other shivering little junkies who were sitting in the room were going "Oh No. Oh No." But the wood



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didn't budge so we were all very happy about that. He got away with it. The guys name was Coffin, the dealer – an appropriate name for a drug dealer, I thought.'

Joanne would prove to become a life long friend of both Tony and his best friend Chris Thompson. She was a girl who stood just under six feet tall and cut an imposing figure next to Tony's slightly smaller frame – he was 5' 10". Her noticeable height was further enhanced by a penchant for bizarre hair colorings; blue green at the time of their first meeting and later red white and blue with one red and one blue dyed eyebrow before cropping her hair in an ultra punk style. Such fashion sense, she avows, gained her privacy on public transport. She was a musician and has remained a constant in Tony's life.

As told by Joanne, theirs was an affair of Shakespearian proportions. Jo first met Tony in mid-1979 while she was dating the guitarist from the Aliens. 'He was supposed to be doing a session with the Aliens,' recalls Jo 'and he hadn't shown up for work yet and we'd gone round and knocked on his door. Tone was responsible for recording their top ten single [Confrontation]. He opens the door. "I'm sick." I thought "Ohhh. Okay." He looked like quite a wild man and then I didn't see him again until I was in a session with Chris Thompson at Richmond Recorders [probably 1980] and he was in the control booth. He comes in the door and he goes over and looks at the amp, puts his ear up against it, looks at me and grimaces, gives me that really hard stare, adjusts it and goes back out again. I'm thinking "Who are you?"

Jo was at this time on the cusp of going out with Tony's best mate Chris Thompson who was then living in Windsor in a house that had previously been a brothel.

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Chris and Jo would eventually become engaged and as a woman with her partner's best interests at heart she had little time for someone like Tony whom she considered to be unscrupulously debased. The chief reason for this stemmed from a betrayal of trust involving Chris' previous fiancée. 'Tone was in my dark books...unbeknownst to me Tony had decided that Chris' girlfriend was not a good call and he should not marry her. So to prove a point Tone ran off with her to Queensland and he said "Mate. If she'd do this with your best friend, she's not the girl you want to marry." I thought Tony was just the worst. I was horrified. Tony said that he did not run off with Chris' girlfriend and that his actions, though questionable, were beneficial in the long term. "Chris was sick and she came on to me and I thought, "This is no good".' he explained. 'So I sort of couldn't miss an advantage, you know. A root's a root. I was trying to tell Chris "I don't reckon you should marry this chick Chris. [She's] the wrong bird for you." We had it out and in the end Chris forgave me so I actually did stop him making a bit of a mistake there. She was a bit easy, put it that way. She was a bit of a band moll, she liked hanging around musos and all that sort of thing. I met a lot like that. Some of them used to like Chris and I because we were an introduction to a whole range, a smorgasbord, you know. You didn't have to just follow one mob around. Follow us around and you got to meet all these drunkards which I used to think was quite amusing.'

Jo and Tony began to see more of each other but not through choice as Jo explains. 'Chris was working long hours and Tony used to just pop through the window and I got up and said, "There's somebody asleep on the couch." "Oh yeah it's Tone." I said, "How did he get in?" He said, "I always leave the window open for him." I said

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“Oh, okay.” So Tone was always there and Chris he’d go “He’s my mate.” So I evil eyed him for months, didn’t want to speak to him, didn’t want anything to do with him. I thought he was disgraceful and went on giving him the cold shoulder. I wanted him banned out of Christopher’s life. I thought he was a bad influence. I had Buckley’s and Nunn of that.’

It was at this point that fate intervened and threw the two antagonists together in the most bizarre circumstances. ‘Well Joanne was Chris’ girlfriend.’ explained Tony. ‘Chris went off to do Paul Kelly in Manila and Joanne had rung him one night and this Asian girl answered the phone and that was the end of that so Joanne sort of moved in on me.’

‘The day Chris went away,’ says Jo ‘Tony said “I’m staying here while Chris is away.” I said “Oh, are you? I don’t think so.” “Oh yes I am.” And so that was pretty much a stand-off. I thought “Oh you dreadful man. You shouldn’t be here. You’re not meant to be here.” “And by the way, I’m sleeping in his bed.” “You’re what?” “I am.” I went “Oh, right. Fine.” So I’m sleeping fully clothed for ten days and he’s on one side of the waterbed and I’m on the [other] and then the waterbed sprung a leak [due to a syringe stored beneath]. Quite funny actually.’

Rocked by the revelation that Chris had betrayed her, Jo turned her attention to Tony who had gradually risen in her esteem. ‘By that time we’d come to a punk understanding that I like you.’ says Jo. ‘We had actually been quite civilized. Once I broke up with Chris we moved into our own place.’

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Chris is philosophical about the change in his fortunes. ‘When I got back to the house, the house was empty, there was no Tony, no girlfriend, the rent hadn’t been paid, the bills hadn’t been paid and I moved out of that house shortly after. She’d always been mad keen on Tony as well. We got on well too. I think she was possibly still quite infatuated with Tone twenty years later. She’d always looked out for him [and would ring] regularly to check up on him. If he didn’t answer her calls she’d ring me to find out how he was going.’

The place that Tony and Jo went to live was in Elsternwick in a dwelling above a newsagent by the railway line. Life at Elsternwick was anything but quiet. Their home became half commune where drugs were being freely imbibed by Tony’s music friends. Cocaine was the new drug on the street and was being mixed with speed which proved a potent brew. Tony admitted to being ‘off with the fairies at this time’ as he was taking a lot of a speed and smack but never acquired a taste for cocaine as ‘the buzz didn’t last long enough and it was too expensive.’

One night a group of heavy hippies, as described by Jo, arrived at the house. ‘Tony must have owed money and I didn’t know about it’ recalls Jo ‘and they were there to break his legs. “Would you like a cup of tea?” What else am I gonna do in the circumstances? Make a cup of tea. A cup of tea fixes everything. I thought. “He’s gonna be the death of me”.’

Jo had thought a move to Sydney might get Tony away from the Melbourne drug scene. One of Tony’s friends had overdosed in the Elsternwick house which did not impress her nor did what she saw as Tony’s increasing paranoia caused through his heavy

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drug use, ‘I remember going to Tone in Sydney, “I don’t understand why you shoot up. Explain it to me. Why? What is it? I wanted him so badly to stop using. “You’re just so brilliant anyway, you don’t need these drugs”.’

‘We were a volatile partnership I suppose, to say the least.’ mused Tony ‘We stayed good friends. I mean she was a bit mad then, a bit crazy but that was the speed. Some people just shouldn’t take it. I mean nobody should take it when it gets down to it but some people it just affects really badly and she was one of those unfortunate ones, you know. It really sent her quite strange. If you’re a bit sort of paranoid, oh forget it. It’s just like multiplying it by a billion. It’s incredible like that. If you’re a bit scatty, the same thing. Yeah, she did some pretty crazy things back then but anyway, she became a lawyer, so go figure.’

Jo readily accepts that heavy drugs did not suit her personality which was somewhat hyperactive but says that she was not a regular user. Marijuana was her preferred indulgence although she did try other drugs occasionally, usually from a point of curiosity or under the insistence of the boys to try something, often as a means for them to judge a drug’s effect – a memory that makes her bristle, “The fucks!”.’ Despite all this Jo adopted a mother hen approach to both Tony and Chris, attempting to manage their addictions. ‘I thought I could save them all. “You don’t need drugs.” Of course I was wrong which they proved to me over and over again. I was a bit of a dragon woman.’

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## **One of the boys**

When the punk movement began to take root in Australia in the late seventies, Mushroom Records saw a promising marketing opportunity. A subsidiary punk label was set up called Suicide which was intended to showcase and market Australian bands. The Boys Next Door had been one of the punk bands that had got themselves tangled in Michael Gudinski's Suicide net. Following the collapse of the Suicide experiment, Mushroom had taken up its option for the band to complete an album. The songs that had been submitted for consideration with the Suicide deal in June 1978 no longer reflected the bands direction or improved musicianship. They were loath to release the material. Mushroom insisted but agreed that if the band paid the recording costs they could select the songs for the second side. To complete the album, they opted to turn their back on Les Karsky who had engineered the first side. In hindsight Karsky was an odd if not inappropriate choice as sound engineer. He had been a member of the disco band Supercharge and had openly expressed a disdain for bands such as The Velvet Underground and Roxy Music. Reggae was his current musical love when he began work with the Boys Next Door. Nick Cave was not happy with the direction being given. Being new to the recording process the band was unsure as to exactly what ought to happen but they were positive that the intrusive suggestions of the engineer were a long way from reflecting their artistic preference and ideal. The emphasis on Nick's vocal needing to be

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rounded out and enunciated was particularly grating.<sup>1</sup> It is arguable whether the songs sounded worse off for it though.

The initial meeting between the young punks and their new engineer occurred in January 1979 at Richmond Recorders and is the stuff of rock and roll legend. Mick Harvey remembers Tony being recommended by their manager. Tony was late arriving at the studio as was often the case. The band in the meantime had been left in the studio to wait. They compensated for the boredom of this by filling up the grand piano with every conceivable metal object they could lay their hands on. Tony arrived in what was becoming a usual state, red eyed and washed out after a morning bonging on. He was greeted by the sight of a grinning group of punks and a piano chockful of microphone stands and rubbish bins. His response, possibly shaped by his loaded state, was a reflective one, “Well we might get an interesting sound out of that.” It was the beginning of what was to be an intense and artistically rewarding collaboration. His meeting with the Boys Next Door and subsequent immersion in the wider punk scene made him feel good and he adjusted quickly to it, cutting his hair shorter, dressing a bit differently – more black, more drugs and less responsibility.

Tony’s attraction to everything the Boys Next Door represented was instantaneous. If there was one thing which stood out above their appearance, behaviour and music it was the band’s willingness to experiment. As a sound engineer Tony was still wearing his ‘L’ plates. The Boys Next Door’s music was a wonderful vehicle in which to hone his craft. The freedom was intoxicating as Tony remembered there being

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 58

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‘no rules in recording whatsoever’ and lots of mistakes being made. At one point they miked up the exhaust of a car to try to capture the sound of something speeding up. He didn’t recall whether it was ever used or not. Nick’s manic prancing and jumping while singing saw the studio’s supply of headphones steadily depleted due to his constantly pulling the head phones from their socket plug. The band provided constant amusement for Tony as he watched from his sound desk. When bassist Tracy Pew collapsed during a session he suffered a similar fate to the grand piano, awaking to find himself encased in a pyramid of metal objects.

The completion of the album *Door, Door* marked a turning point for the band. They had been unhappy with what they saw as unwarranted impositions from the record company. Commercially and musically the album was hardly a hit. Tony didn’t rate it as a particularly good piece of work but it was of vital importance to founding the working relationship he was to build with the band as well as a useful exercise in testing the possibilities of what could and could not be done in a recording studio.

The Boys Next Door did themselves few favours through the anarchic attitude they adopted toward some of the performing opportunities they were given – turning up late or not turning up at all hardly endeared them to promoters. Whatever the group’s professional frailties Tony had become more enamored with them and had begun attending their gigs. They were regularly playing at the Crystal Ballroom in the inner bayside suburb of St. Kilda.

The Ballroom was formerly the Seaview Hotel, a somewhat dilapidated two-story Victorian styled hotel on Fitzroy Street and it had become the main punk venue soon



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after the scene had taken off and was originally run by Dolores San Miguel before taken over by Laurie Richards and renamed the Crystal Ballroom. It had a spacious upstairs room and the elasticity of the ballroom floor was well suited to the sea of pogoing enthusiasts who crowded the front of the stage. There were a number of venues throughout the various suburbs of the city that had supported punk bands for varying periods of time. Bernhardt's in the heart of the city, a gay club on most nights was among the first. The Exford Hotel in Russell Street, Bananas in St. Kilda, the Tiger Lounge in Richmond, the Champion Hotel in Fitzroy and Hearts in Carlton were some of the regular venues. Bombay Rock in Carlton dabbled briefly and some bands found themselves with gigs at university campuses but it was the Ballroom which was the most popular. Its size and accessibility were part of the attraction as was its location in the seedy prostitute riddled portion of the city. It fitted the rebellious attitude that the punk patrons fancied was their exclusive domain. The audiences tended to be mainly middle-class university students and others with alternative leanings mimicking a movement, in part, that had sprouted initially from a backdrop of severe social injustice in Britain.

In reaction to the demands of the record company that the Boys Next Door had disdainfully endured and also to an increasing perception that they were being marginalized and ostracized by others in the Melbourne scene, the band adopted a nihilistic approach to their art. It was in this metamorphic state that Tony began to realize and value the capacity of Nick Cave's creativity. The 7" extended play *Hee Haw* marked an emphatic change in direction and was recorded in July and August of 1979. It contained five songs 'Catholic Skin'/'The Red Clock'/'Faint Heart'/'Death by

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Drowning’/’The Hairshirt’ and was an attempt to make something completely different to anything else being done in Melbourne. If that was the sole indicator of the EP’s success, then they had attained their goal admirably. On ‘The Hairshirt’ Nick had wanted to underpin the main vocal with a squeaky little voice. To achieve this Tony had Nick sing through a telephone downstairs in the studio office. This was miked up and fed through a microphone upstairs and created a most effective piercing sound.<sup>1</sup>

Increased bitterness at reactions to the group saw them seek a change in landscape. In February 1980, they set off to England. It was a scheme suggested by the band’s manager Keith Glass who had signed them onto his record label, Missing Link. A month prior to their departure they entered the studio to record a three track 7” featuring ‘The Friend Catcher’/’Waving My Arms’/’Catman’. ‘That was a really good one’ recalled Tony ‘That was such a complicated mix and we didn’t really like using the automation. The automation on the desk in those days was pretty limited, really grim, so what we’d do was basically all hands on the desk. So everybody had their little bits to turn up and turn down and all that sort of thing. I can remember you’d sometimes get to the last bar of a song and someone would make a mistake. Shit, you know. Do it again.’

Most often it would be Mick Harvey and Phill Calvert as the clearest headed and Nick Cave, depending on his condition, assisting Tony on the desk. Tony recalled the guitar overdub on the lead track as one of the funniest he had heard in his life. Guitarist Rowland Howard had brought along a Blue Box with numerous pedals as well as a Space Echo which was a tape echo machine used to repeat the sounds it picked up. With every

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 63

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knob turned to the max Rowland began to frantically work the pedals as feedback caused a constant piercing noise. The feedback was coursing from the speakers irrespective of any guitar chords and was further amplified and duplicated by the echo machine. It was a truly horrible noise. Rowland would also assist with the mixing, a point Tony jokingly cautioned against. ‘A very dangerous thing to let a guitarist handle his own guitars because they can get a bit loud but no, we worked well together in those days and we were all learning at the same time, some faster than others. I loved everything that Rowland did. He was just one of my favourites. The guy had such an imagination. He was really an underrated artist, not guitarist, because he used to use the guitar in all sorts of ways that guitarists didn’t use guitars. Complete creative genius.’

It was the last opportunity that Tony had to work with the band for nearly a year as they headed off to England at the end of February. To reflect the fresh start the trip was to herald, the band changed its name to The Birthday Party – being, apparently, a mistaken reference to a dinner party scene in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, a favourite book of Nick Cave.<sup>1</sup>

The Birthday Party returned to Australia in November 1980 and again hooked up with Tony as Mick Harvey explains. ‘By the time we came back we’d gone a bit whacko, I think, and we knew that Tony would just go for it. He was just like “Oh yeah. Oh here we go” getting all excited, bouncing around, pushing the buttons “Oh yeah. Sounds crazy”. He loved that. He loved that it was really kind of mad and so then we knew we had someone we could go to for that, who would support us in our mad endeavours’.

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 65

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Tony noticed a marked edge in the band's attitude and felt that the squalor and hardship they had endured in London had truly made them a band. They emerged with a greater confidence and the sound generated at their gigs he thought was really scary stuff. 'It was like putting a jumbo jet in a little room and turning all the engines on full blast, except that the bottom end had been taken out and all the treble was on.'

Although he attended the gigs Tony preferred to listen outside as he found the noise too painful on his ears. On a New Year's Eve gig at the Crystal Ballroom ushering in 1981 Tony undertook the task of recording the band's performance. 'I'd been put in an Avis two-tonne rent-a-truck with a TEAC 4-track reel to reel tape machine and a couple of speakers and a little mixing desk and before this gig Nick was trying to have a bit of speed in the truck and he couldn't find a vein and there was blood running down both arms, and through the microphones in the truck I could hear Mick Harvey saying "Nick. Where the fuck are you?" you know, because they were all on stage and waiting for him. And he's going "Oh fuck. I just can't get it. Fuck. Fuck." And finally he ran out on stage with the blood running down and everything and all the punks "Yay, Nick. Great. We love it." Absolutely outrageous! And then I can remember, like, around midnight they're still playing away and they did a pretty poor gig as I remember. I gave the tapes to Mick Harvey. I presume he probably listened to it and decided not to release it. All the drunks got to the truck and tried to rock it. So I'm trying to hold the tape recorder and all that sort of shit to try and keep the recording going. It was a night I won't forget.'

In late December 1980, the band had entered Studio Two at Armstrong's to record *The Prayers on Fire* album. 'By then' remembers Mick Harvey 'Tony was already the

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most unreliable member of the band. He was meant to be steering the ship in some respect and that was the way it went with Tony for a long time, you know. He'd be there and his was a job of some responsibility but he was the most out of order person in the whole collective. It was all just part of the thing. With *Prayers on Fire*, we'd only just scratched the surface in England and we didn't know what we were going to be doing and there was Tony just going missing during our sessions at one of the most expensive studios in Melbourne and we're sitting there going "Well this isn't good economics." Even we could work that out. So there was a concern on that side of it. But, you know, it wasn't like we weren't creating problems too. There was a nice big padded thing on the front of the desk and Tracy had ripped it up with his spurs and, you know, there were a lot of funny incidents there.'

On discovery of the destruction of the padding, Tony had fled the premises. 'He's not the bravest person I know.' says Mick Harvey. 'It's a charming aspect of his character. He's a charming coward.' Needless to say, Roger Savage, Tony's former boss, was none too happy about the damage done and rang Tony at home in search of answers. Jo intercepted the call and assured the angry manager that she would let Tony know as soon as he got home. All the while Tony sat hunched in the middle of the lounge-room rocking backwards and forwards in a form of drug psychosis.

While Tony and the Birthday Party were working on the album, New Zealand group Split Enz was recording in the main studio following up on their hugely successful record *True Colours*. Tony had recorded some of the demos for that album. 'Rumour has it, I don't know if its true, that they actually used some of the recordings that I did

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because they didn't get it any better but I was never credited for it. Split Enz was an amazing experience, working with those guys and then I did a soundtrack for Eddie Raynor, the keyboard player for Split Enz. All sorts of things lead to other things.' Tony remembered that the Split Enz producer, David Tickle, had piled up virtually every piece of effects equipment to the ceiling leaving Tony with hardly anything to work with for the Birthday Party. Tony was allowed to borrow one of the lousiest reverb machines each night provided he returned it with all the settings set as they had been. Tony was frank about Tickle's attitude thinking he had behaved like 'a complete dickhead'. A justice of sorts was exacted for this unsporting behaviour when the Birthday Party discovered a dozen bottles of Moet champagne that had been individually gift wrapped for The Split Enz entourage and left in the studio. The wrapping was left strewn down the corridor of the two studios. 'I think we left Noel Crombie's' says Mick Harvey. 'He was the only one who got one, you know, you couldn't take Noel's.'

*Prayers on Fire* was completed in January 1981. Tony thought they had produced a fairly slick and polished product – something a Little River Band-esque. In March the band returned to England.

Hard drugs had been a constant companion of Tony's since entering the industry. He had gotten so used to drugs being in the studio that he couldn't contemplate doing a recording session without them. They had become part of the equipment. While this made for a great time and enhanced the experimental element within recordings – and he has no doubts that drugs and chaos were essential ingredients to Nick Cave's creativity -

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it was always potentially disastrous to the smooth production and completion of any album.

The next Birthday Party album that Tony worked on, *Junkyard*, marked the nadir or peak, depending on one's perspective, as to how the heavy imbibing of drugs could be pushed musically. 'By the time we did *Junkyard*' says Mick Harvey, 'Tony had been working with everybody, everybody in the scene and outside too'.

Recording commenced in mid-December 1982 following the band's return from their chaotic second sojourn to England which had also included a short American tour. Prior to the recording of any project Nick Cave would give Tony some brief direction of what he wanted to achieve sonically. For *Junkyard* Nick wanted the album to sound like junk or trash - scratchy and ugly. The album was recorded at Armstrong's. It was somewhat ironic that this album, which in many respects represented the antithesis of what good production and engineering strove for, should be undertaken in a quality studio.

The space afforded at Armstrong's did allow for further experimental tricks. The drum kit was set up in a long corridor to get a particular sound. To achieve something of the tone that Nick wanted Tony adopted a variety of innovations. To make the guitar as abrasive as possible the amp was surrounded by a tunnel of corrugated iron with microphones placed on the metal itself. A similar technique was adopted with the drum symbols upon which contact mikes were placed. These lasted only a few minutes before they were blasted to bits by the excessive sound.

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‘I learned a great deal in those days about sort of experimenting and it was those guys who got me onto the experimental thing – the punks.’ recalled Tony. ‘Like all of a sudden they said to me “Tony, give us a guitar sound that’ll make your fillings fall out.” Shit, you’ve really got to think about that. How do you make something sound so brittle and nasty? How do you actually get that sound on to a tape so that it will play back in people’s houses and have that effect, you know. Maybe not make their fillings fall out – I’m exaggerating – but to make it really intense, doing that sort of punk rock thing. That was the start of a very creative time, like, just as far as learning how to do things; Breaking all the laws.’

Phill Calvert remembers Tony being an instrumental force in this process. ‘You’d say to him, “we want it to sound like this”, and he’d take it way past what you could ever imagine. We were mixing 'She's Hit'. We'd done two mixes already, and then spent four hours on a third mix... it was now 1am, we said, “Okay, kill it, enough”. We came back the next morning to start a new session, Tony's still there, rolling up mike leads and stuff, really fazed, smoking a cigarette and tired as hell. “Well, that's it. I got it.” I said, “What?” He'd been mixing solidly since then until 9am, just doing 'She's Hit'. He played it to us and we went “Fuck!” We'd done a “this is how the song goes” mix, but Tony turned it into this huge aural experience, just remixed it because he wasn't happy with it, and done a fucking amazing job.’

The drug imbibing band members and engineer finished the project in near catatonic states. On one occasion Tony passed out in his chair before sliding beneath the mixing desk in what the band dubbed “The checking the mikes” position – a position not



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uncommon to their engineer. On another he went missing for a day after he had crawled into his old haunt - the ventilation duct - and gone to sleep. 'After he'd gone missing for four hours' remembers Mick Harvey 'we're starting to think "What's happened to him? He's been gone a long time now"' and eventually it got to some point where we just had to go home and we just went "Well it doesn't look like he's coming back. We'll come back at midday tomorrow" and he still wasn't there. I don't know what time it was, like afternoon or something. Twenty-four hours later he re-emerged kind of thinking "Ohhh I feel great". "Where have you been? What the fuck's going on?" He probably didn't even say at the time because, you know, he was a bit, you know, in trouble. He would have just fudged something. He was always fudging around the edges of what was going on.'

Tony remembered that the excessive consumption of drugs and alcohol had rendered everyone near senseless. They had become the nearest thing to the living embodiment of zombies and by the end of the recording were all unable to talk, their communication being reduced to primeval grunts. Given the outrageous indulgences, Tony thought it a wonder that the album was completed at all.

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## **Richmond Recorders**

**R**ichmond Recorders was to mark an even more bizarre and pitted path in Tony's professional life. The increased use of heroin and amphetamines made it inevitably so. Although Tony's success with Supernaut and the Ferrets was a professional badge of honour, none of his work at Armstrong's really prepared him for what was to confront him in the four walls at Richmond Recorders. Up to that time his main dealings had been with established pop stars and relatively safe middle of the road Australian sounds. That is not to say that Tony's life had been a boring one. Drugs had already insinuated themselves into his life and touring with the Ferret's had been lived with strict adherence to the time-honored excesses of rock and roll.

Tony had by this time also developed a certain persona in and around the studio, as Molly Meldrum explains. 'Tony was almost like a phantom. He had the amazing ability to almost become the invisible man and sort of creep into the shadows. He'd be there one day and you wouldn't see him the next. At times Tony was almost like a Phantom of the Opera or a Hunchback of Notre Dame where the Notre Dame thing for him was the studio, you know, he was always there slinking around. I mean, he didn't like confrontation of any sort and it was really letting him do his own thing and basically when he moved over to Richmond studios and was working with the Models, I think they lived and breathed over there.'

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The punk scene and the alternative sounds driving the bands within it were, however, to have a life changing effect on him. If there was any trace of Melanie like hippy in him it was flushed away with his introduction to the punks in Melbourne.<sup>1</sup>

Richmond Recorders was situated at 17 Pearson Street, Richmond. It was a one room studio, modestly furnished with fairly basic equipment. It was run by Tim Stobart and would quickly become the alternative answer to Armstrong's. Its main attraction to young musicians was that it was cheaper than Armstrong's and therefore affordable to the shoestring budgets of emerging bands. It was certainly a lot less elitist than Armstrong's was perceived to be by some. Lacking real state of the art equipment it soon became a laboratory for all manner of mad experiments. Records by the Laughing Clowns – the EPs done in May 1980 and January 1981 – one of which featured a saxophone recorded in a microphone cupboard - and the Models *Cut Lunch* are, in Tony's opinion, good examples of what Richmond Recorders represented although in one sense the latter wasn't a pure Richmond recording. 'I used to sneak them over to Metropolis, to Armstrong's in the middle of the night because I had the key.' stated Tony. 'So after midnight we'd just go down to Armstrong's, use all the good equipment in Studio one, totally illegal, totally wrong but they were delighted. It sounded fabulous.'

Tony probably began working at Richmond in early 1978 having drifted there. 'I'd sort of left Armstrong's – gone freelance. I was really just freelance there. I was never really employed by the studio. The guy who owned the place used to pay me mostly in speed to work, you know, so I was working twenty-four hours a day. I just

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<sup>1</sup> One of the first albums Tony owned was Melanie Safka's first album.

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happened to land there.’ Tony’s shift to Richmond was a cause for some sadness for those who had cultivated his talent at Armstrong’s. ‘Tony rarely socialized in my mind because he was always in the studio, I mean from project to project’ recalls Molly ‘and with the Ernie Rose’s of the world and Bill Armstrong and that, they kept him under their wing and loved him. He was just part of the furniture over there and they absolutely adored him and they could see what a creative producer come engineer he was. When he moved to work with the Models at Richmond it was a sad day for them but Tony’s lifestyle had moved over there.’

If true, one can be justifiably suspicious of Tim Stobart’s reasons for paying Tony in speed. It ensured, for the most part, long hours in the studio by the drug addicted engineer and was a much cheaper outlay than cash in the long run. Of course it was a cynical practice that showed no respect for Tony’s health. Yet, on that issue, Tony blames only himself. ‘It wasn’t a very healthy environment. Not that that was his fault. It was my fault for taking it.’ Even years later it was obvious Tony still maintained a lustful memory of his working habit. ‘I always found speed good for working as it meant you could put a lot of long hours in, really intense concentration and all that sort of stuff, and get good results. It tends to backfire after a while when you start concentrating on things that aren’t important, gaffer taping the mike leads down in a very neat way, playing with office supplies. You become fixated on one thing. It’s a very dangerous substance. I really feel sorry for the young people of today with the ice and stuff, that’s intensely strong I believe. I’ve never tried it and never will ‘cause I’m likely to go “Whoa, this will do me” and six months later I’ll be dead. I know the feeling of good speed. It’s like all of

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a sudden this cold air rushes through your lungs and you feel fantastic. That's in the early stages.'

Tony's girlfriend of the time, Jo, scoffs at any suggestion that, as an addict, he had any other option but to take the drugs being offered by Stobart. 'Tone will tell you he had a choice but it's a really hard choice when someone sticks two grams of speed in front of you and said, "There's two grams of speed, mate, and here's a hundred bucks." Tim got \$2000 for a session...[He] managed him into the ground. They were making me so mad and between the two of them [Chris and Tony] I could have necked both of them. "You guys are just being raped here".'

On other matters Tony is less forgiving. 'He got me to sign bits of paper to sign over my royalties for the Models and things like that to him which was pretty lousy.' Stobart's alleged behavior in this matter invoked especial loathing in Jo, who was doing her best to look out for Tony's interests. 'I started getting stuck into Tim Stobart about not paying Tony the right amount of money and I got hell bent on discovering Tone's untold non-fortunes that he wasn't getting paid, his producer royalties. Then I found out that Stobart had taken over all his contracts and was taking all his money really. I said "Why don't you pay him? Don't pay him in drugs."

On the matter of royalty payments, Tim Stobart says he only ever received eighty dollars for work done on the Models record and that the problem lay with Michael Gudinski who refused to pay. Nevertheless, the issue of royalties rankled with Tony. 'Nick Cave is the only one who has ever paid me royalties. The Cruel Sea once gave me a \$1000. It causes a little bitterness that, the way record companies treat people who

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don't have a team of [lawyers]... Basically I've been told "Well what are you going to do about it? You can't afford to sue us.' I've been told that one once or twice but Nick Cave's record company, Mute, in London, its run by a musician or was, they're sold now to EMI or whatever. Daniel Miller, he had a royalty department that twice a year just put your money in the bank. Of course you had Mick Harvey looking over that making sure everybody got what they were due.'

The excessive time that was spent by Tony at Richmond Recorders saw him ultimately adopt the studio as a home. 'I was hardly sleeping. I thought I may as well just stay there.' He began sleeping under the grand piano and continued to do so for about six months. His presence proved a surprise to some visiting artists. 'One morning I was woken up by an all girl heavy metal band starting to tune up and they got the biggest fright of their lives because this disheveled thing with a pillow and a blanket crawled out from under the piano screaming and abusing them for waking me up... Thank God there was no vision from those days.'

Tony's dossing down in the studio also came as a surprise to the owner who then arranged for his engineer to live in house only a few doors away from the studio. It was a rent-free deal based on Tony doing the place up. On that the landlord was clearly short changed as all Tony did was paint one room. 'That was a bit of a poor deal for the guy.' conceded Tony.

By the early eighties Richmond Recorders had become the place to record for independent bands in Melbourne. Given the recreational bent of many in the industry it was also a place where drugs were freely indulged in. Although drugs were an obvious

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source of recreation and inspiration to some bands and clearly tolerated by management at Richmond, if not encouraged, the main record companies still clung to the vestiges of conservative morality as Billy Miller remembers while recording for Mushroom Records at Richmond. ‘We were doing a few songs like ‘The Man in the Moon’ but it was about legalizing pot and there was a famous drug runner called Donald Tate and I wrote a song called ‘Tate’s Run’ which was about him and how he flew his plane in full of marijuana from Asia and got shot down and he ended up in Fanny Bay in Queensland. So we were doing these songs and were thinking, you know, it’s okay but then Gudinski and Meldrum came down to Richmond to hear how the album (by the Ferrets) was going because we’d sort of been dropped a bit by them at that stage because of all the drugs and grog and outrages and everything so they let us, sort of, work on our own. They came down towards the end of it to hear how it was going and the first one about legalizing pot came on and Gudinski’s jaw just dropped. “Tony how could you let people...”

To sheet the blame home to Tony given the hands-off approach of Gudinski and Molly was grossly unfair but it also revealed the expectations they had of him as holding something of an advisory capacity beyond just mixing the sound. Billy Miller remembers Michael Gudinski being as fond of Tony as everybody else. Tony said he didn’t know Gudinski that well and felt that he was treated very much as a hired hand. ‘I’m just one of the workers that do things. I never actually had any personal drama with him. I’d talk to him about things and he was interested. I think he always had respect for my ability at what I did. I have no doubt in my mind about that but, of course, it was very difficult with the Ferrets album going so far over budget and that sort of thing, you know. I got sacked

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three or four times and other engineers were called in, then me brought back. It turned into, you know, a real shit fight.’

The most obvious source of tension between Tony and the record companies was played out in regard to payment for his work in the studio. The situation was an awkward one reflects Billy Miller. ‘He [was] always complaining that he had to ask them for money all the time and they’d be thinking, sort of, well we give you too much we know what’s going to happen with it and we might not [get the job done]. He probably needed a manager back then which would have been unheard of for a sound guy to have a manager but, yeah. It was like a war, you know, in a way, between him and the recording companies “The bastards never pay me” and all that sort of stuff. I still think they should have paid him up front or, at least, half of it rather than for the work done because what happens is, if he hasn’t got the money he still needs to get out and it means you’ve got bands sitting in the studio paying how much an hour, waiting while he’s out with somebody whereas if they’d have given it to him up front, at least he would have been there and I don’t know how much it affects recordings anyhow unless you’re really gone. I mean it happened to us heaps of times but because we understood what was going on... but straight bands and that were in uproar, “How dare this guy do this.”’

Tony’s view of the record companies was swathed with cynicism, perhaps justifiably. ‘They weren’t really good payers, not really. Like they, sort of, if they knew you had legal teams and all that sort of shit they’d do everything but if they knew you were just small fry, they basically got away with whatever they could. I think, you know, they were just dodgy Arthur Daley’s in my opinion.’ Compounding that problem was an



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inherit weakness in Tony's character as his mother says. 'Tony didn't fight for anything. He's not that type. Lets it go.' Jo, his girlfriend at that time, was trying to manage his affairs and probably only further antagonized the situation with her approach. 'I told Mushroom, "I know about your second set of books. If you don't deliver I'm going to go to the tax office".'

Further to these things, the artist in Tony appeared reticent to bother with income earning strategies, whether embarrassed by the monetary transaction or whether lost in the artistic endeavour or whether he held an intrinsic trust in others is hard to say – money matters appeared as distractions. Despite his grievances about being ripped off with royalties he was, in that regard, his own worst enemy to some extent as Andrew Keese's experience suggests. 'I actually had to force him to sign his own contract. I had to bring it in and say "Tony, you've got to sign this thing".'

Living practically next door to the studio in Richmond, Tony became a virtual caretaker and manager for the place and was on hand to witness and record many of the hopefuls that graced the building. Jo has no qualms about Tony's importance to the music scene at that time. 'There's a whole alternative rock music punk pop scene that would never have lived except for [Tony's] generosity and kindness really. He was doing sessions when other people probably wouldn't have given them the time of day. And as far as being one of the band, as far as being patient, as far as being great, he was just fantastic to work with. I suppose if I was going to put it in an American sense, maybe he was a Phil Spector. Whatever it was, it worked and the bands knew there was a chemistry. And you couldn't get that anywhere else. He was like it as a person. He was

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like it in the studio. He lived it. There is no question it is what he was, you know. He was a blessing. I just thought he was the bee's knees.'

Jex Byron, ex Olympic Sideburns vocalist, believed that there were simply no other engineers around at that time who were receptive to the new sounds and creative enough to embrace them and capture the excitement. As well he cites Tony's energy levels during work as extraordinary and paramount to getting so much done.

The Models' Andrew Duffield is similarly disposed. 'Its hard to imagine the music scene without Tony's input at that time. If Tony hadn't been around to do it, there just weren't any other engineers around who could work at the same intensity that Tony did, night after night. I just don't think any other engineers were, frankly, as good really. I think the kind of ideas bands were trying to articulate in the punk thing or post-punk thing or whatever it was, there was no-one else who could do that except Tony. People that came along later, Lobby (Loyde) came along later and expressed a kind of interest in it and was a great kind of mentor figure I think but I don't know how Tony managed to steer it or got himself in that position but you can't change what is and he is just central to the sound of that music.'

This period marked a definite growth in alternative or underground confidence in the music industry and there is no doubt that Tony stood at the forefront like a mad captain. Bands did not feel restricted by the moguls in the mainstream industry or weighed down by any inferiority complex. Their driving ambition was simply to get stuff out. The quality of equipment used or of the quality of sound was of secondary importance to the desire to produce a single, EP or album which, after all, was the most

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tangible record of a band's existence. Bands that had been listening for three years to the copious new sounds coming out of the English punk scene knew by comparison that they were the equal to many of the bands being feted on albums such as *Live at the Roxy*. With the initial arrival of punk rock many bands styled themselves on the British bands.

However, it was not long before distinctive Australian flavours began to emerge. For Tony this sea-change and particularly his association with the Boys Next Door/Birthday Party heralded a decision to chart a course wide of the mainstream. 'Tony was so set in what sort of genre he would work in,' recalls his brother. 'He obviously only picked stuff which interested him and it had to be a little bit different to interest him. He didn't like mainstream. He didn't listen to music. Didn't listen to the radio or buy CDs because he said "I do it all day. I don't want to hear it when I'm not there."

In the late 1970s and early 80s many bands had adopted the Do It Yourself approach to recording and distributing their music. This has left a particularly colourful and interesting legacy for avid vinyl collectors of punk 7" singles. The burgeoning alternative music scene also beckoned entrepreneurs who saw a worthy if not lucrative business opportunity in providing young bands a chance to record beyond the major labels. One of the pioneers in this quarter was Keith Glass who co-founded *Missing Link Records* in Melbourne. Originally named *Archie and Jugheads*, and for a brief time *Dr. Peppers*, this basement shop in the heart of Melbourne's central business district became one of the major distribution points of local alternative product. Glass had also set up a record label, Missing Link, which, along with Au Go Go Records, became one of the more reputable independent labels based in Melbourne.

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As manager of the Birthday Party, Keith Glass had come to know Tony quite well. Many of the new bands on Missing Link would record at Richmond Recorders but Glass did not limit his operations to Melbourne. Tony remembers being shaken awake in a hotel one morning and seeing Keith Glass standing over him urging him to get up. Disoriented entirely he asked where he was and was told, to his surprise, that he was in Sydney and they had to get to Trafalgar Studios to record a new band called the Go-Betweens. With no memory of the flight to Sydney let alone any recollection of how he got to the airport Tony soon found himself in session with one of the country's most talented bands that would go on to produce some classic Australian recordings and forge a wonderful reputation. The whole episode associated with the 1981 recording of the Go-Betweens single *Your Turn, My Turn* proved 'very strange' for Tony as he was operating in something of a twilight zone having no idea how he had got there or of what he had been taking the night before.

Tony was not beyond being star-struck with some artists who used the Richmond studio. 'One day I was told Barry Humphries was coming in to do a demo for his arranger, just piano and vocal and he turned up and he was extremely apologetic for being late which stunned me a bit because he was Barry Humphries, an absolute hero of mine. I used to think his Bazza McKenzie cartoon books were the funniest things I'd ever seen. As a schoolboy I thought that was a hoot and so he apologized to me and I hit record and off he went into Dame Edna's voice, just one take, sang his little song, sang his little ditty, took his cassette and left. "Thank you." A very polite man. It wasn't the first time I'd seen him. The first time I saw him was back in the days when he used to

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drink. I had to drop a projector off at Her Majesty's Theatre and he was just drunk in the gutter. "Derro" I thought and I dropped the projector and ran back to the taxi to go back to the studio (Armstrong's) and by the time I'd got back this guy had got up with an umbrella and that and he was shouting "Fucking wog taxi drivers." and stuff like that and I looked out the back window and it was Barry Humphries. Lucky he gave up his drinking coz he was pretty bad apparently.'

The workload at Richmond Recorders was by now quite intense with more and more bands emerging and wanting to record. Tony's receipt book for the period December 1980 to September 1981 records his work with the following artists, Steven Sinclair, Peter Lillie, the Reels, the Motivators, Bwana, Paul Kelly and the Dots, Little Murders, the Ears, Eddie Raynor, Serious Young Insects, the Editions, the Go-Betweens and Hunters and Collectors. Some of the sessions were demo recordings and others for singles and albums. Not all bands benefitted from Tony's input. The band Psych 59 was a case in point. 'They were great people' recalls Tony 'but they kept doing this thing and we thought we could get it better so I don't know if it ever got released because I was obsessing a bit, one of the unfortunate side-effects of taking amphetamines. "No, no. We can get it better. We can get it better."

Chris Thompson often found himself as Tony's back up during this period. 'It wouldn't be unusual for me to get a call in the middle of the night. "Tony's been doing a session and he's gone missing." He's just popped out for half an hour, possibly to get some supplies and he hasn't come back so I get this call in the middle of the night. "Can you come in and finish it off for us?" I remember several occasions I've had to go in and

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finish jobs off. Maybe just a session or until he's turned up to do the next or whatever but there was a bit of that in the old days.'

Such no shows, while aggravating to the artists, were not surprising to Andrew Duffield who viewed them as an understandable by-product of the pressure in which Tony worked. 'To me the requirement for Tony to be focused and to push out all the shit that he was required to be, because, you know, he was the engineer but he was the producer for all intents and purposes when often there wasn't a producer. It would be up to Tony and you could see that if he had a problem with confrontation and the band quietly imploding in the studio it's going to really upset him and its gonna upset the flow and he was just under such continuous pressure from the studio and the schedule of timing that, you know, things had to give around him so that he would do a runner at three in the morning and leave you sitting there wondering whether he was coming back or not, you know, is not surprising to me at all. I think everyone, everyone understood this. But the kind of bands that Tony was working with, I mean what an unusual collection of people that, really, were trying to mature in some way or didn't have the playing skills of a Little River Band or that kind of focus or togetherness and, indeed, would thrive on the angst bit of it all, you know. I think what he was doing was always really tough.'

Although Tony's name is symbiotically attached to the Boys Next Door/Birthday Party and the Bad Seeds, the Models was another significant band with whom he collaborated. His selection as engineer was purely by chance as far as he can remember.

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‘I was just asked to do some sessions with them. In those days there was sort of no, you pick the producer because of the stuff he’s done. This guy’s around we’ll use him.’

Andrew Duffield had, in fact, worked with Tony previously. ‘I’d worked on the Boys Next Door album with Tony. I played keyboards and synthesizer on it. I used to share a house with Tracy Pew in Blanche Street, St. Kilda...that would have been my first meeting with Tony and Sean’s (Kelly) would have been through the Spred or one of those early James Freud things.’ Tony thought Andrew was a real creative force within the band. ‘Andrew was a good writer and he was also a great user of the synthesizer which was a great art as far as I’m concerned. It’s something. I totally respect anybody who can pull great sounds out of a synthesizer, coz I’ve tried. The first synthesizer was Abbey Road, I think. They went from there. Pink Floyd got hold of it and really turned it into something. Stevie Wonder got his claws on them and decided this is pretty good. God bless Stevie. Oh yeah. He’s done some great records, a few shockers, but mostly great. *Living for the City* and *Innervisions* and stuff like that. Goodness gracious... it’s a great record. If you want to go to sleep in a great frame of mind, stick *Innervisions* on. It’s a great album.’

Molly Meldrum was an interested observer of Tony’s work with the Models. ‘With the Models he started becoming more assertive because within the Models you had such a diverse collection of musicians and Tony was fantastic with all of them. Watching that collection of musicians, it was quite fascinating to see them, you know. James doing his thing especially and you had Andrew the keyboard player who was quite a genius in his own right and Sean [Kelly] as well, then the drummer. I mean Tony was the perfect

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engineer/producer for them and the results of what came out of the Models time from what they did at Richmond was quite astonishing. I became a great fan of all of that. You could see things evolving there. Again, it took too much time. I'll give it to Michael [Gudinski], there was a bit of leeway given, an understanding to develop this and that, you know.'

Tony first commenced working with the band on their *AlphaBravoCharlieDeltaEchoFoxtrot (ABCDEF)* record and the *Cut Lunch* ep. 'I think it [*Cut Lunch*] was a 10" record which was quite rare in those days. People used to get quite pissed off because it wouldn't fit in their record racks, you know. They used to have those record stacker things that would flip but, of course, this would bugger it all up because it was the wrong size. That was actually done at Richmond Recorders but I used to sneak into Armstrong's, still had the key, in the middle of the night because they had better equipment. They were still a relatively quirky underground band when I worked with them. They weren't mainstream although they were being pushed that way by the record company. That's why James Freud was put in, to add the pop thing. The record company didn't really want me. They wanted the big David Tickle and big pop producers. So I just did bits and pieces but I worked a lot with Sean and a little bit with Andrew Duffield, just a piece here and there.'

'We just started doing demos with Tony' says Andrew Duffield 'but, you know, we didn't know it was going to be an album at that stage. The first album (*ABCDEF*) and 10" ep *Cut Lunch* they were both demo sessions. By the time of *Cut Lunch* we'd signed a contract with A&N records in Europe because we were with Mushroom so the *Cut Lunch*



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record was actually demos for us to go overseas and record so, you know, when you look at the small space of time, they were both done in under a year.'

Andrew cites the track 'Germ' from that record as an example of how Tony could turn simple ideas into solid musical pieces. 'We'd finally managed to get a fancy synthesizer and a little drum machine and the synthesizer was called a Profit Five and you could play five notes at once on it, the only synth I had you could only play one note at a time and we all left the studio except Sean and Tony and the following day we turned up and the two of them had just put down this track of Sean just holding his hand down on the keys and just changing the patches, you know, going from one sound to the next with a simple drum machine and a bit of piano. Sean might have put down some piano with it as well and it was incredible. It was so good and as the keyboard player I was jealous as all shit that this was so simple and so good and a great piece of music so I started adding things to try and make a contribution and really Sean and Tony had nailed it already and it should have stayed that way.'

Tony had worked on James Freud's solo material prior to his joining the Models. Freud didn't join the Models until 1982 and had originally been a member of the Teenage Radio Stars, another of the Suicide bands, with Sean Kelly who left to form the Models with Ash Wednesday (synthesizer), Pierre Voltaire (bass) and Johnny Crash (drums) who had all been part of the band JAB. Two others from Teenage Radio Stars, Graham Schiavello and Peter Kidd left and formed part of the punk band La Femme.

With the assistance of his manager Barrie Earl, Freud had headed to England to pursue a solo career in April 1980 following close on the heels of the Boys Next Door. In

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that sense both were trailblazers of sorts – the Saints being the only other punk/alternative band of that time to have set their bearings for the mother country. On his return Freud had commenced recording songs for his first solo album, *Breaking Silence*, at Richmond. The engineer was an Englishman named Frank – a classic whingeing Pom according to Freud. Although he had worked on earlier demos for Freud it was apparent that he had no empathy for the sound the frustrated musician was trying to achieve. One day while in the studio Freud happened to hear Tony mixing some of the Birthday Party's songs. Impressed with the sound he asked Tony if he would agree to finish off the album. Tony agreed on the proviso that Freud's manager was not permitted in the studio while recording.

The recording deal that Barry Earl had negotiated with Richmond Recorders was to use the studio from 11pm ensuring that they had cleared it by 9am so that the Young Talent Time crew could begin their sessions – Young Talent Time was a television series that showcased young performers singing popular songs and ran from 1971 to 1989. At times punk bands in various degrees of stupor and undress were bundled and carried out the doors after all night sessions as the wide eyed tots of Young Talent Time arrived to record.

Tony was handed the project and set about trying to resurrect the album. The album would take eight remixes before it was considered good enough for release and included some innovative tricks in the studio to try and brighten up the sound. 'It turned out the English bloke had only ever done live recordings. He'd never mixed anything or done anything like that. So, the end result? There was no presence or treble or anything

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like that. And I was already put out because I was living just up the street from the studio and I thought it was an album I'd be doing so I was a bit put out by them getting this guy over and I was quite delighted when he made such a bad job of it. So I had to pull every trick that I could think of. I mean, I'd get a speaker, put it in the famous mike cupboard where the Laughing Clowns saxophone was done and put a snare drum upside down on top of the speaker, feed the snare drum that was on tape through the speaker so that the actual pressure of the speaker hit the snare drum and then miked it from a big distance to give it a crack and a room sound and everything.' Drum mikes were placed in cupboards to create ambience and the grand piano was filled with cutlery – *ala* the Boy's Next Door – to create the opening bang to the single *Modern Girl*. '[I] did all this stuff to resurrect the sound and it worked. It turned out okay and that was his claim to fame. That was his beginning I guess. *Modern Girl* was a hit.'

James Freud has detailed his working relationship with Tony in the first volume of his autobiography *I am the voice left from drinking*:

'The first night we started working together, Tony and I arrived at the studio at about 10.30pm and found Paul Hewson, the keyboard player and main songwriter with Dragon, sitting on the toilet with the door wide open with a syringe hanging out of his arm...resting. Tony and I just stared at each other in amazement.'

"How uncouth," he said. "Let's have a blast." So we locked the door of the control room and mixed up a hit. It was the beginning of a great working relationship.'

'Every night was the same. We'd arrive at the studio and try to figure out how to get high. We'd check out all our stashes and scrape bits of foil and shoot whatever we

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got. Then we'd pool our money to buy a cap, which cost \$50 in those days, and head off to Fitzroy Street in St. Kilda to score. We usually bought it at this greasy fast-food joint where you'd order by code.'

'One night we were flat broke and knew we couldn't possibly be creative without a blast. What to do?...The Space Invaders machine. It was full of money. We raced over, tipped it upside down and started rocking it back and forwards. Sure enough coins started falling out. Yes! Luckily it was one of those tabletop models as opposed to the full-size mammoth, so it wasn't too taxing on our puny, Mr Burns-like arms. Finally, we had shaken out \$50 worth of 20-cent pieces. We put them in a plastic bag and headed off in Tony's red Mini Minor van through the foggy Melbourne winter's night in search of drugs.'

'The first place we visited was the greasy fast-food joint in St. Kilda, without luck. So we went to the seedy pool hall up the road to see a Lebanese dealer. Everything was going great. The guy pulled the cap out of his pocket and held out his hand for the 50. Tony plonked the bag of coins on the pool table and smiled. The dealer didn't see the funny side at all. He put the cap back in his pocket, grabbed us by the scruff of our necks and threw us down the stairs, yelling abuse about doing something to our naked butts if we ever showed up again.'

'We managed to find a C-grade dealer with D-grade smack who *would* take our coins. After that episode, all we ended up with was a mild buzz and an overwhelming urge to watch our butts whenever we were on Fitzroy Street. We pulled the coin heist off a few more times but the studio manager wised up to it. I think he had the machine

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removed after coming in one morning and finding it in pieces. We denied everything, of course.’<sup>1</sup>

Another band of future note and another of Keith Glass’s Missing Link stable was the Go-Betweens with whom Tony had already worked briefly. Tony recalled working on their first album *Send Me A Lullaby*. ‘That was an interesting one because upstairs were going to be offices but it was basically just a concrete empty area. So what I made them do, in the middle of winter, was set the drums upstairs, have all the amplifiers downstairs so they could be separated so they wouldn’t get into the drums, ran all these thousands of mike leads up the stairs and headphone leads and all that sort of stuff. And I can remember the poor buggers shivering around these little tiny radiators, you know, like they’re playing and can hear their guitars through the headphones and all that. You can hear it on the record, like the 5.15am train to Richmond sort of going past and all that sort of stuff (though others say you can’t). Richmond was good. I did the Laughing Clowns there and put the saxophone player in the microphone cupboard and the sound was astonishing and that’s where I started to learn stuff, you know, all about using different spaces because Richmond Recorders was not a good studio by any means. It was a lousy studio and everybody complained about the control room. You couldn’t get a good mix in there. I sort of could but that was only because I’d practiced enough but someone just walking in off the street, they’d have hell. They actually recorded [Men at Work’s] ‘Down Under’ there with this American guy who was so horrified with the lack of equipment that he practically filled the building up with bits ‘n’ pieces that he’d hired in.

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<sup>1</sup> James Freud, *I am the voice left from drinking*, Harper Collins, 2002.

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To his credit he got a good sound. I was a hopeless assistant because I was just, you know, my ego was too big at the time. I thought “How dare you come into my territory.”

The American guy was Peter McIan and the post punk trio Serious Young Insects employed him to engineer a single of theirs but found no common ground and turned back to Tony to finish the job, he engineering the B Side *On Time*.

Tony’s chagrin was understandable as Andrew Duffield recalls. ‘It was a period of time when the Australian music industry was starting to import producers and that might mean producer/engineer from overseas and with the whiff of success for LRB or Air Supply, eventually Men at Work and they were recording at Richmond Recorders. The tendency was all of a sudden to bring these people from overseas and I think it was about having a moderator between the record company and the band. If the record company hopes the band can be successful and thinks introducing the producer who did Melanie’s something or other or Wham or something or played congos on something, that they would bring, you know, some degree of security to it and some assurance of security and Tony was one of the few engineers who was working outside of that mould. They all had representation and were getting slices of, fixed percentages of something but Tony was just working in a different kind of market place really.’

Richmond Recorders eventually lost its place as the central Melbourne recording studio. According to Tony shady deals were implicit in the studio’s downfall. ‘Towards the end of his [Stobart’s] reign there, the son of a wealthy guy bought shares because his father was obviously just trying to find something he was interested in. He ended up dead in the toilet upstairs, you know, an overdose. That was pretty much the beginning of the

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end of that place. I remember people like Lobby Loyde got involved in pressing vinyl records. They bought record presses and there was something to do with tax and that's where all the police action came down. So it wasn't actually a drug thing. Like Al Capone they got 'em all on tax fraud and stuff like that. The building next door, they'd turned it into a record press and were doing something dodgy there. I'd sort of left by then and was off on tour with the Models and working in Sydney with people like the Reels and that sort of thing.'

For a brief time, Tony found himself back on the road mixing sound for the Models as they played dates on the East Coast. 'I remember the Gold Coast mostly because of what happened. We had the police follow us from Brisbane to the Gold Coast. We knew that because we stopped at a drum shop somewhere and this car pulled in a few cars behind us and then we realized the detectives were following us. We get to the Gold Coast and we were about to do the gig. We're all having a joint in the band-room, a dangerous thing to do in Queensland or wherever it was. At the time the police walked in, the joint was in my hand, lucky me, and they grabbed it off me and this fellow opened it up and, they were so dumb, "It's green. It's green. Look it's green." I mean, couldn't you smell it? Anyway they opened it up a bit further and the filter was made out of a piece of a Serapax packet, Serapax being a fairly common drug of pleasure, a sedative, so that really got them going and, you know, it looks like the gig's not going to happen, you know, and I'd get hauled off to gaol but the manager took them outside. I swear not, the gig went on as expected and at the end of the night we were all walking out and there's these four detectives standing at the till. I think a few of the bolder members of the band

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made some oinking noises but these dudes wouldn't even look at us. They got their pay. I didn't think things like that really happened, that it was just American television but there it was in real life.'

Tony had undertaken a number of interesting projects at Richmond Recorders. Some were unexpected such as recording the Tuff Monks in February 1982, a combined studio band of the Birthday Party and the Go-Betweens who both happened to be using Richmond Recorders at the time and Nick Cave and Robert Forster penned a song together, although the recording occurred at Armstrong's.

Tony's association with Richmond Recorders wound down in 1983. Psyche 59, Bohdan X, the Kevins and the Sacred Cowboys were some of the bands and artists he worked with early in that year. 'The Sacred Cowboys were really my sort of scene.' said Tony. 'They were a real cowboy punk band and I kinda liked that sort of stuff and they played well. Neil Bradbury was their manager. He also managed Split Enz for awhile as far as I can remember. My memory could be a bit shot on that.'

Pel Mel was another which he remembered. 'They were strange. That was a really strange match because they did like...they drank tea! They made quite a good record. It was sort of experimental stuff, sort of little Casio keyboards, little toy keyboards and they'd stop their session at whatever time of day to watch their favourite soap opera, *Days of Our Lives* or something. I can't remember which it was. I shouldn't insult them. It was probably a lot better than that. That was quite a good record actually.' The record was the band's *Persuasion* album and single 'Pandemonium'.



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Two other significant sessions were held with Cold Chisel and the Spaniards. Chisel 'was a sort of, like, a try out session for me' says Tony. 'They did 'Hold Me Tight' which went for about two minutes and was a rude song about fucking. It wasn't great but it was alright but Chisel was a bit difficult at that stage because they were sort of in their death throes.' The band was considering employing him on their upcoming *20<sup>th</sup> Century* album. Impressed with the sounds Tony had elicited on the Birthday Party albums, Don Walker wanted to try and catch some of the earthiness and intensity of Cold Chisel which he thought was being lost.

Tony travelled to Sydney for the try out session and passed muster. Plans were made to begin recording later in the year. 'Don Walker always wanted me to do stuff and Jimmy wasn't that keen, probably because I wasn't a big name.' reflected Tony. 'Don loved my work with Nick Cave and all that sort of stuff plus we seemed to get on well. He had a lot of patience, more patience than most with junkies and things. Having lived in the Cross all his life you get a lot of inspiration from them oddly enough, just sort of the low life. Although I wasn't particularly a low life, I was still a bit of a scum bag. He'd only get annoyed if I couldn't get the job done there, he wouldn't tolerate that but as long as you got the work done.'

The Spaniards sessions took place in Melbourne later in the year and featured his old friend Billy Miller as well as Mick Pealing and Mark Mannock. They were recording a single, 'God is a Shield' with Molly Meldrum as producer. As with most Molly projects it was a lavish production. It required recording samples of the organ at the Melbourne Town Hall reigniting memories of the early Ferret days recording with choirs and

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orchestras. The bulk of the recording was done at Richmond though. It was a beautiful song, remembered Tony, but one that he obsessed over trying to get it 'better and better and better'. Tony remembered it well as he suffered a serious migraine that forced the abandonment of one session. 'We had to stop' recalled Tony 'and we all went back to Molly's place and I went to sleep in Molly's bungalow out the back coz I was really, really sick and then Molly came racing in at about four in the morning or something, screaming. "Wake up! Wake up! We won." It was the America's Cup - the seventh and final race, sailed on September 26, 1983 and won by the Alan Bond owned and John Bertrand skippered *Australia II*.

The Richmond Records era had left an indelible mark on the Melbourne music scene and on the bands that had passed through its doors. Andrew Duffield is forever grateful for the opportunity to have worked there, particularly with such a talent as Tony. 'I don't know who was steering the ship that is Richmond Records. That was all the stuff that the Models and the Boys Next Door were doing, all that midnight to dawn stuff. I don't think we knew of any other way of recording and, you know, the thing that struck me about Tony Cohen is that none of these bands had any real money nor any real record company support behind them and I think that Tony was pushed into that position of having to moderate for everybody.'

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~ **Eight** ~

**Sydney**

While Melbourne had developed its own punk scene, one that had claimed Tony to a degree, Sydney, too, was home to an energetic independent music scene. Early in 1983 Tony had travelled up to record with the Reels for eight days at Albert Studios. He had worked with them previously on their Christmas EP or mini LP in 1980, *5 Great Gift Ideas*. ‘They used to use an eight-track tape and sort of play to it, although they’d play a lot of stuff live, you know, they’d do funny things like, Dave Mason would do a harmonica solo and then show everybody that he didn’t have a harmonica in his hand. So they took the piss out of the fact that they were miming half of it and they used to put the tape recorder on stage with a spotlight on it so it was like the fourth member of the group. They were a fantastic band. Dave Mason – absolute genius. That *Beautiful* album they did for K-Tel. I did some *Beautiful* stuff for them. They thought it was a great joke to get Tony Cohen the great punk rock producer to do something nice, you know. They thought that was funny. I didn’t because I like doing nice records. I didn’t like getting pigeon-holed into doing nasty punk groups and things like that because I started off, obviously, doing pop records.’

From late 1983 Tony began to record in earnest in Sydney. ‘I was doing stuff for Roger Grierson.’ he recalled. ‘He had the Johnnys, the Allnitters, but he was also attempting to be my manager but I drove him up the wall by not answering the door,

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feeling sick and basically giving him the shits, so, poor Roger. He ended up being a real big wig in the music industry. I probably should have kept in with him.'

Tony had moved to Sydney in October 1983 with his wife Josephine. They had married on 28 May 1983 in Melbourne. At what point Joanne was substituted for Josephine is an elusive point. 'I don't think Tony ever had a distinct line between dumping one girl and getting on with another' remembers his brother, 'It was always a bit blurred'. According to Tony, Josephine was his dealer. Josephine laughs at that description saying that she wouldn't dignify what she did with such a label though she remembers her first meeting with him being when she was delivering drugs to a Birthday Party session – the 'She's Hit' session she thinks. Josephine's arrival was something of a mystery to Joanne, 'I did not know how she came to be and I didn't know until, God, the last seven months. I never knew. This bird just showed up and she was kind of quirky and kind of cool.' Josephine remembered Joanne being present on the day she met Tony though it wasn't until later that they became intimate. Their next meeting was at Tony and Joanne's place in Elsternwick around Christmas/New Year of 1982/83 where Josephine overdosed. Josephine recalls Tony walking her up and down the street in the cool night air, an act that on reflection she thinks probably saved her life. Early in 1983 they again met by chance in Fitzroy Street probably while visiting the same dealer there and soon after Josephine moved into the garage at Tony's parents' house in Cheltenham.

Tony says he doesn't really know why he and Joanne broke up. The long hours worked in the studio and the irritation of Jo's anti-drug crusade may have contributed. Jo places a sentimental night of forgiveness with Chris Thompson as sounding the death

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knell of their relationship although Tony said he was unaware of any such thing and didn't think he would have cared given his state at the time. It was, he said, 'more because she was acting a bit loopy. I know she'd disagree but, yeah, she'd just become a bit of a handful. I've always been fond of Jo. I should have stuck with her but at the time she needed help and I couldn't give it to her. I probably needed help just as much.'

'Old habits die hard.' reflects Jo, who had gone to Sydney and stayed with Tony during the Cold Chisel try out and, as she put it 'caroused' with him up there. 'I was heartbroken coz he was still going to get married.'

Thirty years on Josephine cannot remember whose idea it was to get married or to explain why she and Tony got married. Drugs were an obvious mutual interest and she thinks that her holding a British passport may have figured in their thinking as it might have made working overseas easier for Tony. Perhaps there was some subconscious belief that the institution of marriage would cure their ills. Dave Schofield was the best man and Tony's brother, who arrived in a mad dash from a football match he had played in after leaving at three quarter time, was the groomsman. According to Josephine, Tony was stoned on heroin on their wedding day, a fact she wasn't aware of until she found out a few months later. It was, she thought, indicative of the lack of respect he had for their union.

The married couple moved into a flat in Pott's Point. It was a charming area perched on the inner fringe of Sydney Harbour. Later, at the beginning of winter in 1984, they moved into a flat in Bondi. While the postcodes bespoke an idyllic existence, reality was far less so. 'Things got a bit low there' remembered Tony.

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The Cold Chisel project did not go well. Recording of Chisel's *20<sup>th</sup> Century* album was undertaken at Festival Studios. Many clashes occurred over the direction the album should take. These were a reflection of the problems within the band at the time as well as concerns over Tony's capacity to do the job. Josephine said that he was in a bad way due to his heroin addiction, wearing his hair long and unkempt with his face and body covered in sores from skin picking, a compulsive behavior that comes with excessive drug addiction. Tony's appearance was given a garish twist through the Betadene daubed over his sores. Although Tony thought Jimmy was a good guy, and a very funny one at that, he always felt like an outsider within the Chisel camp and was eventually chucked off the project. Artistic differences and Tony's waywardness were the chief sources of conflict. Pairing Tony to a 'meat and three vege band' was a doubtful proposition reflects Mick Harvey. 'You know when he'd go and work with someone like Cold Chisel, when you go and work with someone like that, they realized very quickly that he was maybe going to be a liability and they wouldn't necessarily have understood why they'd asked him to come in.'

One of Tony's drug cohorts in Sydney was actor Phil Motherwell. '[He] was a beauty.' recalled Tony. 'He was a heroin dealer and a poet and everything like that and he ended up in gaol because he tried to rob a travel agency or something cunningly disguised as himself. The police were around in about half an hour to pick him up. But his house was the most disgusting...you couldn't even imagine. There was no carpet. It was just wall to wall stomped in syringes. I remember there was a woman with a baby

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there and it was just horrible.' Phil had penned a poem in Tony's work-book which summed up the type of lifestyle each was leading.

*Ring up the Dragon Lady*

*Make a meet*

*She sure is sour*

*But her goods are sweet*

*What can she buy?*

*I ask myself*

*That's half as sweet*

*As the stuff she sells?*

*The man got his hands on some*

*Did a test*

*Half was sugar*

*The rest was death*

*She lives in his shadow*

*Walks his beat*

*Steps hard on the dope*

*Lightly on the street*

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*Ring up...*

*Got a coin for the call*

*The price of a bag*

*She takes my arm*

*I love the old hag*

*Phil M*

Legendary punk outfit the Saints or at least a later version was another band that Tony came into contact with in Sydney. ‘I did the *Ghost Ships* record but that was Albert’s but that was a fantastic record, a really hard mix. Mixed in three parts and edited together and if you listen to the three sections you can hear the edit as clear as day, at least I can. Anyway you can hear it jump into this sudden...I mean it was mixed over three days, I think, you know, the first bit and then the brass and then the brass and strings were going. It was near impossible to mix but there you go. We battled through it.’

Tony’s time at Albert Studios came to an abrupt end in the most spectacular circumstances when he recorded a band largely lost to public memory called Zulu Rattle. They had won a battle of the bands competition at Strawberry Hills. ‘I think they might have been the punk band that saved up all their money to do this thing and caused Albert’s huge bother by setting the smoke alarms off with their pot in the early hours of the morning when the Fire Brigade smashed the door in. I’m not sure if it was them or not. I’m pretty sure it was. I’d come into Albert’s because it was a midnight to dawn sort



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of thing. They'd saved up huge amounts of heroin, speed and marijuana for this big recording session and it just got out of control. They were playing really well. It was punk, absolute punk. One guy rolled a joint the size of your forearm, it must have been three o'clock in the morning, and it set off the smoke detector and the next thing this big red light comes on "EVACUATE AREA" and the next thing a great big panel blew off the wall and, it was like, my first thought was that a jet had hit the building because we were in this skyscraper sort of thing and all this foam started gushing everywhere all over the equipment and all over the place. "Oh Fuck!" It freaked us out. We cleaned it all off, sort of thing, and tried to get back to work again and then BANG! BANG! on the door, which we'd locked, obviously, due to the mischief that was going on and all I can remember is the door bursting open with the axes and these shiny brass helmets and shiny buttons coming in and they were not amused. Nor was Albert's, I might add. It might have been the end of my time at Albert's after that. I think the band cleared off with just about everything that wasn't nailed down. I'm sure Stu Spasm had something to do with it. They weren't allowed back and they kept the tapes. All I remember is getting a cassette, a rough cassette of what was recorded that night. And if it was them, they were really good. It was a great piece of punk work which was totally sacrificed unfortunately.' A version from an acquaintance from the band is that Tony bolted when the session plunged into chaos and they never saw him again.<sup>1</sup>

Some sessions were quite unexpected as was the case with Paul Kelly in August 1984. That year the Olympic Games were held in Los Angeles. The games were

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<sup>1</sup> A rough cassette version of the intended single *Come Down* can be heard via the link <http://www.cousincreep.com/mp3/Come%20Down%20-%20Zulu%20Rattle.mp3>

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boycotted by the Eastern bloc countries as a payback for the 1980 boycott of the Moscow Games by the Americans and various other western athletes. Australian eyes were suddenly focused on the weightlifting. Paul Kelly had just penned a song with friend Paul Hewson about Dean Lukin called 'Cool Hand Lukin' and was in a hurry to get it down on tape. 'He just rang me up,' explained Tony. 'Dean Lukin had just won the weightlifting and all of Australia was excited because here was this unknown tuna fisherman whose got up at the Olympics and done this clean and jerk and Paul had written a song about it and he wanted to record it that night to give to the record company because it was so topical.' Tony already had a session booked with ska band the Allnitters at Paradise studios but arranged for Paul to come in anyway. 'The idea was that he'd hide [a microphone cupboard was chosen as the hiding spot], I'd get rid of the band and we'd record that song and because it was just an acoustic guitar and a vocal mike I just said, "We'll leave the tape running and just do a few more songs." He did some of probably his biggest hits. Sorry to Roger Grierson, he was the manager of the Allnitters. I pulled a good migraine on them.'

In November Tony worked on some live mixes of the seminal post punk band from Canberra, Tactics. These were recorded at Mona Vale and the Chevron in late November. Most of the work that Tony was doing in Sydney was generated through Roger Grierson via his Green record label. After the Albert's fiasco other studios were used, A.T.A, Now, Koalaroo and Paradise – owned by Billy Fields – being foremost among them. Grierson had built up a bit of a stable of cowboy, punk swamp rock for

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wont of a better genre descriptor that included the Johnnys, the Sacred Cowboys, the Corpse Grinders and the Beasts of Bourbon.

‘The Johnnys were great man. It’s a pity I was in such a terrible state at the time. ‘Spencer [P. Jones] was just amazing. That’s how I first met Spencer and we’ve remained friends ever since. I like Spencer a lot. He’s an out of it bastard. He nearly killed himself with alcohol. He played with the Gun Club in America and all that. He’s a really well-respected man throughout the world as a guitarist and a writer too. He’s written some great songs. “there’s no excusin’ my boozin’”. That’s a beauty – a Johnnys’ classic. They didn’t get the success they deserved but at the same time they probably weren’t very easy to handle, you know. There was a lot of ego going on and the usual thing.’

The Johnnys’ first album *Highlights of a Dangerous Life* was a disappointment to Tony. ‘I called it the Wilsons because Ross Wilson was producing it and I had a big, big disagreement with the way he saw it because he saw it as a pop record and I saw it as being a tough [record]... and, of course, I wasn’t going to get paid until the job was finished so I had to pawn the odd mike. I remember going into a King’s Cross pawn shop, the dirtiest place on earth. One day I went in, the vice blokes were there, the detectives, and they grabbed me. But the pawn shop guy says “No he’s a regular. He’s a good bloke. He always comes back and picks up his equipment.” And I was very lucky because I had one of my [work]books there and the cops were going through my bag and everything and I told them I had to pawn the microphone to get a ticket back to Melbourne and as they were flicking through the book they missed the return ticket that I had in there. Oh Jesus. It was one of those moments’. Tony also travelled to Queensland

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as the front of house sound engineer for the first three gigs of an East Coast tour of the Johnnys. From time to time he would return to Melbourne for one off live mixes with bands touring through or playing in Melbourne.

A band of similar ilk to the Johnnys and the Sacred Cowboys with whom Tony worked but 'even dirtier, punkier and grubbier' was the Corpse Grinders. Although not remembering the band members' names, Tony remembered them as a fantastic outfit.

Of particular importance to the direction of Tony's career was the Beasts of Bourbon. The associations made working with them, would prove pivotal in years to come. 'They were just absolutely outrageous, real punk, real punky punks, real thugs. Tex would try to get into fights at gigs. I can remember them getting attacked at some R.S.L., one of those League clubs out in the suburbs outside of Sydney. Oh boy. It was pretty scary. Those crowds really hated him. He wasn't Jimmy Barnes, you see, and they didn't like him. Got a lot of that stuff.'

Their first album is one that Tony recalled with pride. '*Axeman's Jazz* is a great album. Roger Grierson got me to do that - paid me a hundred dollars. Lunch time, I'd run up to the Cross and score because it was at Paradise which was, you know, just a couple of streets down from the Cross. They would play the song once so I could get a mix of it and then just put it straight down on to two-track. So that was the finished thing. So as a result it sounded fantastic. Not that the mixes were great because you didn't have time to really perfect them. But the sound quality, when that actual tape is put out, is amazing. It jumped off the record. That was brilliant. And I remember Spencer getting so drunk we had to dump him in the car park after the session. I think we had a couple of slabs and a

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couple of bottles of bourbon between like eight of us. It was a severe session but a great one.'

Tony's time in Sydney concluded around mid-July when he and Josephine returned to Melbourne.

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~ Nine ~

### **Bad Seed**

Once back in Melbourne, Tony and Josephine moved into a flat in Toorak and then later into Josephine's parents' home in Mont Albert where they made a concerted though ultimately doomed effort to straighten out. Josephine recalls leaving Tony on a few occasions only to be talked back into returning by Tony's mother who rang pleading her son's case. Josephine considered her mother-in-law to have been a strong woman but an enabler, in that Tony knew he could always fall back on her.

In late November 1985 Tony was reunited with Nick Cave and his new band the Bad Seeds to record the album *Kicking Against the Pricks* at Armstrong's, the previous bad behaviour of Nick and his cohorts being seemingly forgotten. Tony was immediately impressed with Blixa Bargeld. For sheer impact the sight of this tall, high cheek-boned German in tight leather pants and an outrageous crop of hair cascading from his head like a fountain was astounding. Equally compelling was Blixa's technical ability. His voice resonated and he understood what was going on in the studio.

Although he felt he established a good rapport with the band Tony did not quite feel at one as he had previously with the Birthday Party. After a four-year absence working with Nick he felt something of an outsider. A sense of the old days was still retained though. The drug taking habits of neither Nick nor Tony had mellowed over that time. Beer and heroin were partaken of freely except with the arrival at the studio of

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Nick's mother Dawn to play violin on the track 'Muddy Water' when all presented pictures of angelic innocence drinking only cups of coffee. The use of Tracy Pew and Rowland Howard on some of the tracks further added to a sense of the past. Both had left the band at various points during the transition from the Birthday Party to the Bad Seeds.

Twenty-three tracks were recorded for *Kicking Against the Pricks* with the view of making a double album but Tony suggested a preference for making 'one good single album'. The title of the album was deliberately chosen to take aim at musical critics for whom Nick held especial loathing. After the initial recording Nick and Tony worked on the tapes at Richmond Recorders. It was claimed that Tim Stobart, having offered a special rate to Nick, reneged on the agreement and then refused to hand over the tapes unless Nick paid the outrageously exorbitant bill that Stobart subsequently presented the band.<sup>1</sup> Tim Stobart bristles at that claim and as a counter point says that he had agreed to a sum that Tony had set and had simply, on finding that Nick wanted to take the tapes back to England, asked that he provide a purchase order from his record company in London before doing so. It was, he thought, a standard and fair business practice that provided some insurance for the work done.

It was when the Birthday Party morphed into the Bad Seeds that Tony's already obvious interest was further piqued. 'I got interested and said, "I want to go over and see what's going on and have a bit of fun there too." I'm glad I did. I saw a great deal of the world that I would never have seen even though it was mostly airports, hotels and venues.'

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 189

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One job that Tony had landed prior to his decision to try his luck overseas was working on the soundtrack for the classic Australian indie cult film *Dogs in Space*. 'I did a lot of the soundtrack work on that and had some friends doing little parts in it. There might be a few out-takes that didn't quite make it to the movie. I was one of the idiots outside the supposed David Bowie concert outside the MCG. They just wanted anybody who had long hair or punk hair or something like that. I think I threw something at somebody. I don't remember the scene. I met Michael Hutchence. He was the most humble fella and he was saying it was such an honour to meet me! I mean this is Michael Hutchence saying that!' Tony had, in fact, worked with the INXS frontman previously. Luisa Viggiani recalls a session in which she was a backup vocalist for the band Beargarden on a song that Hutchence was producing. She recalls everyone having tired of Michael after a long session but remembered Tony's involvement on the project fondly. 'Tony, thinking back was a genius at what he did, he was erratic, funny and always had time to listen at other people's ideas regardless of how lame they were and found a way politely and without any malice to do his best with their idea and then suggest something different and then make it seem like it was them who gave him the idea somehow! He must have worked with some divas in his time already when I met him because he handled working with Michael who had only recently gained fame through the *Stay Young* album like a real pro as by the end of the session, most of us had had enough of him! What more can I say about Tony, he made me laugh till I'd nearly pee myself, he would say things to everyone then mumble under his breath some comment that was so fitting at the time, hilarious really but maintained a professionalism while still able to



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laugh and party on with everyone while making you feel relaxed. He always asked every one of their opinion regardless of how little a role you played on whatever he was working on! That I remember well due to an incident I had with MH, Tony asked me what I thought of an idea Michael had put forward, Michael cut him off saying that I didn't matter or what I thought would be of no use to him, the way he just looked at him and smiled and said "So, what do you think then?". It was a special moment indeed for me as I never forgot it! If you were in his studio, your opinion mattered, never saw him be elitist in that way but he would lose it sometimes or that's what it looked like but he always ended it in a funny way! I walked into Richmond Recorders a couple more times and he always remembered me and said hi by name which meant a whole lot in those days!'

In June 1986 Tony packed his bags and followed the Bad Seeds to London to finish the double 12" EP *Your Funeral...My Trial* which they had commenced recording in Berlin the previous month. It was, in some ways, an attempt to make up lost ground, he had harboured an odd sense of regret for not having followed the Birthday Party on their first excursion. 'I just felt I'd missed out because I'd worked with the Birthday Party and I could have sort of gone but I just stayed in my little studio and kept doing all that stuff which I'm sort of glad I did because I learnt more'.

Tony and Josephine scraped the bare minimum together to buy their tickets to England. To his regret he sold off his record collection to help finance his trip. 'I sold the bloody lot; a stupid mistake.' The flight was a long haul, stopping at Jakarta, Abu Dhabi, Brussels and London. The sight of Arab sheiks and their entourages was a fascinating one

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to Tony who had had little opportunity to glimpse the ways of other cultures in suburban Melbourne. London was reached in the early hours. The couple was met by Josephine's brother, Jeremy, and his boyfriend and whisked away to freshen up. An afternoon of sinking the obligatory pint or two in an English pub followed.

According to Josephine the two of them had managed to stay clean in the months prior to travelling overseas. It was with some hope that they looked forward to the new adventure. Initially Tony relied on Josephine's brother as well as Mick Harvey and Nick Cave for advice on how best to navigate the perils of the city. They had arrived in mid-summer and first stayed in Jeremy's flat in Sutton before moving into a flat in Aberdeen Road in neighboring Croydon, an outer suburb south of London. There was a good cheap market nearby and it was close to transport – they were its only saving graces. It was, said Tony 'a real dive' run by a less than diligent landlady. 'The fucking landlady, I mean, you hear these stories of Aussies in London and they're fair dinkum. This dreadful place had probably six layers of carpet because instead of re-carpeting the place she'd just put some more old carpet over the old one. Ohhh it was rank. And we got snowed in and like the trains wouldn't run because for some reason in England when it snows the trains stop! It's like Australia when it gets over forty degrees, the trains stop. Yet in Scandinavia the trains run all winter. Fascinating!'

Tony was soon ensconced in the Bad Seeds camp and with it disappeared any vestiges of sobriety. In September he and Josephine accompanied Crime and the City Solution on a short tour of Germany. Tony and Katy Beale, Mick Harvey's girlfriend, did most of the driving as they were the only two possessing a license. The band's tour

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vehicle was a fifteen-seat bus with three seats removed to fit the instruments and luggage. They caught the ferry from Dover to Zeebrugge (Belgium) and drove to West Germany through a countryside dotted with castles before arriving at the East German border. Eventually the tired band and crew arrived in Berlin at 3am.

Prior to the first gig Tony toured the city with Josephine, riding the underground and visiting the Egyptian Museum to view the ancient statue of Nefertiti. He did not rate the band's performance as a particularly good one. One welcome difference to the venue's treatment of the artists, compared with Australia, was the copious provision of food and beer prior to going on stage.

Next stop was the port city of Hamburg, followed by a gig at Weisbaden which Tony thought was akin to a big country town. Munich was next but the concert was disappointing sound wise as the room was a large barn that allowed too much echo. The band had a day off after the gig which allowed an opportunity to tour the city. Tony was impressed with the fact that beer was available everywhere, even at McDonald's. Stuttgart was the next and final performance. The venue was a tunnel set in the side of a hill – an odd setting to Tony's mind but one that did not spoil what was a successful night. The next day the English based portion of the band drove back to Ostend to catch the ferry while the Berliners caught the train home.

A Bad Seeds' tour was scheduled a fortnight after the conclusion of the brief German sojourn. The thirteen date European tour commenced on 26 September in Zeche in Bochum, Germany. The tour was characterized by a need to procure drugs as much as performing on stage, at least from Nick Cave and Tony's perspective. In Amsterdam they

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scored a large amount of strong smack. Nick and Tony did their best to consume as much as they could. They crossed the border into France with the drugs bagged up and under the seats of the tour van. The group was subjected to time consuming drug searches which can hardly have been efficiently conducted given the obvious place of concealment for Nick's and Tony's stash. As a result, the band arrived at the Paris Elysee Montmartre venue with only minutes to spare before they were due to go on. Tony remembered the exasperation of the moment. 'We got to this fucking joint and I'm going, "Jesus, the PA's not here!" The PA was the size of two little home stereo speakers. The gig erupted into violence: bouncers, blood, broken glass, people slashing each other. A group of feminists really wanted to kill Nick. The bouncers helped him get out the back of the venue and we took off in the van to escape the riot. It was really scary, that was an intense one, Jesus, the blood. Red was the colour of that gig: the carpet, even the horrible speaker boxes they called the PA were red. I just remember those women chasing the van with broken bottles.'<sup>1</sup>

The source of the women's ire had been the reporting of Nick's flippant response to the suggestion that he was a misogynist. Rather than deny the allegation the lead singer had happily embraced the concept as a source of provocative artistic fodder. The tour continued into the UK for three dates before finishing at the Roxy in Reykjavik, Iceland on 19 October. Two days later the group flew to the United States to commence a short tour beginning in Cleveland, Ohio on 21 October.

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, pp. 199-200

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Both Tony and Nick got drunk on the plane, there having been no drugs available since they had left the UK. The flight offered a spectacular view of the Northern Lights, emerald green streaks of light reflecting beautifully upon the frost blue icebergs and fjords stretching beneath them.

The band was booked to stay at the Iroquois Hotel on West 44<sup>th</sup> Street which was only a few blocks from the Empire State Building and Times Square. The odd planning of the tour meant that they had to fly from New York to Cleveland via Detroit for the first concert which was performed in front of a largely disinterested crowd whose main focus was drinking and talking. Once back in New York the band was to play what was meant to be a financially lucrative gig for the media at the Ritz on 23 October. The gig was not to be.

Both Nick and Tony had not scored since leaving London and both were in a desperate state for a fix. The two wayward tourists caught a taxi down to Alphabet City on the lower East side of Manhattan to score some heroin. Tony recollected the subsequent nightmare which was a cautionary tale of what not to do in a foreign country. 'Louie, the tour manager, told us not to go there because we were white for a start. We stuck out like golf balls in that place. We went to the vacant lots, the drugs supermarket where you put the money in a bucket and the bucket goes up and comes down with whatever you want in it. I was walking twenty yards behind Nick and saw him turn a corner where he bought some syringes off some guys. A scary business, they'd just glue the lids back on and sell you used fits. We're lucky we're not dead. As soon as he'd done that the cops grabbed Nick but I didn't see them. All I knew was that Nick had vanished

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and I was really worried. Anyway, I sat down in Needle Park until the sun went down, about four hours. That was our meeting spot. When he didn't come back I started getting freaked out, sitting there in the dark, so I went back to find the others. It was about twenty-four hours until we found out what had happened to him. We were all really depressed. Everything was ready to go and we were still waiting. There was this guy from a music paper in Sydney and he came into the band room. I had really long hair, I'm a skinny sort of fellow, so I put some sunglasses on and sat there and did an interview as Nick Cave. This guy was from Sydney, so no one expected to fool him, but this fucking dickhead went, "Hi Nick," and I said, "What the fuck do you want?" He then started the interview, "Where do you get your inspiration from? And I said, "What the fuck's it to you?" He was completely taken in! Now I think he got a little suspicious after a while when the rest of the band couldn't contain themselves any longer and were howling on the floor with laughter. Now, Nick really didn't look like he was going to show and things got more serious. I remember sitting on the steps of the venue with Mick Harvey and a couple of the others. People were turning up and they'd spent forty-eight hours doing their hair. For Christ sake, people with hair the size of the bloody Empire State Building, rolling up dressed in leather and chains and God knows what. We had to tell them that Nick was in jail and the gig was cancelled. Some took it well like, "Great, Nick's in jail!" The one's who'd spent forty-eight hours doing their hair were really pissed off. Did they get their money back? No. We rescheduled another gig at the Ritz at

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the end of the tour and about four people turned up. So it was like pretty down, getting pretty grim at that stage.’<sup>1</sup>

Once Nick was located and released the band could do nothing but set their sights on the next show which was in Chicago. The city provided some unexpected excitement when Tony and Mick Harvey went down the street to order some Mexican takeaway for the band and crew. ‘We were loaded down’ wrote Tony in a letter to his parents, ‘when a couple of big fat rednecks jumped out of their car screaming “Fuck you!” and chased us with baseball bats for two blocks back to the hotel.’

Minneapolis, San Francisco and Los Angeles followed. The west coast gigs were much better received as the audiences had actually come to see the band. Vancouver in Canada was the next port of call and then back to the U.S. for a show in Denver. The plane flew in icy weather, skidding sideways across the tarmac on landing which gave all an unwanted moment. That night was Halloween and the crowd arrived clad in costumes of all descriptions. The monsters had a good time according to Tony. A gig in Detroit followed before the band returned to New York to play the owed show and fly home. The tour finished on a sour note for Tony when he was pick-pocketed in Times Square. He lost all his money but the police did manage to recover the empty wallet. An SOS to his parents was sent to ask for money to cover the loss.

Once back in London, Tony’s relationship with Josephine began to falter. She had begun working in a pub selling lunches but then found a much more amenable position answering phones at Mute records. Perhaps Tony’s absences touring caused some

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, pp. 200-201

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loneliness but as well Josephine was working hard at getting clean. Tony's and Josephine's mutual attraction for speed had not been an ideal foundation on which to build a relationship. 'She was a bad mistake,' reflected Tony 'but anyway, during some sort of drug crazed moment we decided to get married which was really dumb. Never marry your speed dealer. Fortunately, it was only twenty quid each to get the whole thing annulled and divorced and all that sort of thing in England so that was no drama. There was no demand on anybody's property or anything like that because neither of us had anything.' Josephine declares that Tony, in fact, never paid a penny and that she had paid for and organized their divorce once he returned to Australia.

The deterioration of his marriage led Tony to abandon the country for Europe in January 1987. Josephine remembered just deciding not to go home one night late in January after work – the night on which the house was snowed in. She had had enough. Instead she went and stayed with the tour manager of the band Erasure. She considered herself to have been in an abusive relationship due to Tony's drug affected mood swings. While he was never physically abusive he was verbally so and had once ripped a phone from the wall in a fit of anger. In England Josephine's patience had finally run out. 'I tried to ring her and found out she was staying with some roadie' said Tony, 'so I packed up my bags and moved out of Croydon and left the landlady and everything else to her because the landlady was just a nightmare, so left all that to her figuring that was fair enough, a fair trade, and moved to Berlin. I was late for the flight and they wanted to search my bags and the flight was going to take off and I was sweating, I was an absolute mess and walked down the aisle of the plane to the back seat and every person on the



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plane was giving me a filthy look, as they do, 'cause you're the one who has held up the flight and the person I'm sitting next to is Mick Harvey. You wouldn't believe it. And he goes "You! Aaaargh!" So I moved to Berlin.'

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### **Berlin**

With the bitterness of his broken marriage still fresh, Tony rang Joanne. ‘I got a phone-call from Tone’ recalls Joanne ‘and he says “Jo and I have split up. Do you want to come to Berlin?” and I went “Ohhh wow.” You know how you wanted something so bad for so long and you couldn’t have it and all of a sudden it’s given to you on a platter...I was going to Berlin to be with him, you know. It was kind of like the end of a really beautiful love story. It was kind of like we’d all end up happy and I had this thing – If we end up in Germany, we could both end up dead. This could be so intense I might not survive it. Coz I mean, I loved him to death. It was a very intense thing. It was like I thought “What if I get caught by the temptation of it all coz I’d stayed so strong and I might not have been able to maintain that stance because to be with him I probably would have done anything really and I would have gone anywhere and then all of a sudden I thought “No. I’ll do this for me.” I just made this decision to go to America.’ The path of self-preservation that Jo chose led away from the mayhem of Tony’s world to a saner and more stable lifestyle with a man she met there with whom she would marry and have two children.

According to Mick Harvey Tony arrived in Berlin declaring “I’m going to stay off the gear.” It was a probably a genuine hope as Mick explains. ‘People have that geographical location change and they often think it’s going to sort out. “If I can just get out of this place and I can clean up I’ll be alright.” It was a declaration that never found fruition.

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Berlin with its bohemian and entrenched sub-culture was hardly the place to get clean. A sentiment for artistic creativity and endeavour coursed through the city. It was an energy source that had been cultivated over a long period of time. It was given a real cutting edge by the post war division as part of the carving up of the German state into East and West. Mick Harvey describes it thus. 'It was a German city but it was a stateless city. There were loads of people who didn't like their own country and ended up there, kind of an anti sentiment. You were kind of in Europe but in a city that had no affiliation, a city in limbo, so it was really interesting from that perspective but the whole art scene there just continues. It's still the same. It's been like that for a hundred years now. It's been a real magnet for people.'

'At first I stayed at Mick Harvey's flat because he was away for a while with Katy.' recalled Tony, not mentioning the fact that he wandered off and left the heater on for six days and incurred a huge heating bill which Mick insisted Tony pay much to his chagrin. 'They used to travel a lot just for the hell of it. Mick's a lovely man. He's very businesslike. He was the one who kept it all together when we were all fucking up something shocking. He was clear headed enough to keep us out of gaol most of the time.'

One of those times in which Tony fell through the cracks was when he was house sitting another Berlin friend's flat in the Kreuzberg district. After buying some particularly strong heroin Tony decided to visit the local supermarket where he proceeded to stuff a bottle of whisky down his pants in front of a policeman who couldn't believe his eyes. 'I remember getting hauled off to gaol and thrown in a tank with about twenty

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other people and because of the drugs I slept through the whole thing. I could have been there 24 hours, I'm not sure, but the door opened and they said, "Anthony Cohen."  
"Yeah. Yeah." "Your case has been heard. You have a fine. You must go." "Oh. Okay." I think I yelled out "Kangaroo Court" or something like that, something inappropriate anyway and they threw me out on the street and then I had no idea where in Berlin I was but somehow, it's amazing how you can get around in foreign places if you have to, and I found myself back at the flat I was looking after and there was my dope and everything sitting there where I'd left it. Off I went again, very happy.'

House sitting was not Tony's forte and he found himself again drawn into a relationship and the squats that housed many of Berlin's artistic fraternity. 'I met up with an American girl, Claudia, who had purple hair and a skateboard.' explained Tony. 'Quite ahead of her time really. She skateboarded all over Berlin and she had a very rich Daddy who had some sort of insurance company or bank or something in London. I never met him. Anyway, she was obviously the black sheep and she put me up in her place in The Ruin which was a bombed out building on the outside from the war and really comfortable on the inside except in winter when the pipes would freeze and you'd have no water. [There was] the Winterfeld Plaza which used to ice over in winter and they used to skate on it and everything. The rest of the year it would be a market every Sunday and all that sort of thing. A fantastic place but there was a café around the corner where we all went to, all the musicians would go during the day and whether you had money or not they would give you coffee and food and stuff like that and just keep it coming all day. Unbelievable! Sort of thing you wouldn't get these days, you know, incredible, just

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simply for being part of the music scene or the art scene or whatever. In Berlin in those days, I don't know how it is now since the wall's come down. In those days there were places where the poets would go, the painters would go, the musicians would go and at night we'd go to the Ex'n'Pop which was the musician's bar. I ended up serving behind the bar there for awhile until they realized that their takings were down a bit too much so they had to let me go. I was using the money for certain substances. That was a wonderful place. My shift would be from midnight to midday. It closed usually after midday. Everybody would drop, either that or if at five in the morning everybody had gone home you'd close up. But, you know, I can remember goose stepping home drunk out of my skull a few times, you know, lucky to be alive really. Not the sort of thing you do in the middle of Berlin. A lot of drugs and a lot of drink causes that sort of behaviour. I mean you used to get [Becks] for forty cents a bottle. That's why I'm still addicted to it, particularly the imported one. I had the best time in Berlin. I loved it.'

Tony's friendship with Nick Cave was at its strongest in Berlin. Both were pushing the envelope in regard to their drug use and became comic, if not slightly pathetic, drug buddies. 'Nick was really off his tree with a lot of speed and heroin.' recalled Tony. 'He was writing his book at the time which was gonna be a three-volume thing about this murder serial killer sort of dude which ended up being *The Ass Saw the Angel* which was quite a small book because the publishers weren't going to have this...I mean, his version of it was that it was going to be like *Lord of the Rings* with maps and, you know, real detailed stuff but that was probably more the drugs talking. And he used to write chapters in his own blood, you know, from the syringe he would fill his pen up

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with his blood. Oh yeah. He used to sit in his room for hours and hours. He had this one little room with one of his paintings up on the wall and there was an actual postcard of Berlin “Come and visit Berlin. Nick Cave lives here” and a picture of him sitting in front of his painting of a woman with her legs open sort of thing, you know. Green if I remember correctly. And we used to spend hours there. Nick had a gun, you know, a replica gun which he used to play with all the time. In speed psychosis, which is the only word for it because when you get really deeply involved in that stuff you go into sort of a psychosis hence the book was going to be three volumes and writing in blood and doing all that sort of thing. I must have spent days and days just sitting there, literally days and nights, you know.’

Tony accompanied Nick on one of his reading tours to Hamburg which was new territory for both, ‘He read ten passages from the book he’s written to an arty crowd who loved it. At first he was very nervous, and so was the crowd, but as he got further into it he improved.’

‘Nick used to like driving. He didn’t have a driver’s license so I used to give him mine and it didn’t have a photo on it in those days, the old Victorian driver’s license. We got pulled over and he was calling me Nick and I was calling him Tony and the police were, sort of, a bit suss but they couldn’t believe the driver’s license had no photo on it, you know. ‘This is a driver’s license? What is this?’ “Australian mate”.’

The car they were driving was barely roadworthy and the social backdrop of the May Day riots, in which about 900 youths fought running battles with the police for twelve hours in the Kreuzberg district, made for an edgy atmosphere. The back of the car

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was full of water containers due to a leaking radiator that needed refilling every few kilometres. ‘It just looked like a whole car full of Molotov cocktails.’ says Mick Harvey. ‘I don’t know why they didn’t get railroaded in there. And Nick’s driving and Nick’s got Tony’s license. It would have been like Abbott and Costello, completely mucking up their stories with the German police, talking in English to them. Even Nick says, “I don’t know how we got away with that”.’

In another incident Nick and Tony stole a tape recorder from a studio to pay for a score. The crime did not go unnoticed as Tony recalled. ‘The next day they rang us and said, “Why did you take the tape recorder?” We had to bring it back. [They] got it on the camera, clearly, of Nick and I wandering around with a tape recorder under our arm. We made up some story like “Oh, we were just experimenting at home.” “Oh, okay, just bring it back.” So we had to go and get the pawn ticket.’

Tony’s association with Nick was neither beneficial to the health and function of either man. Certainly Mick Harvey had noticed a deterioration in Nick’s professional behaviour. ‘Nick wasn’t in a good state then. He was really unwell and it was starting to actually interfere with stuff which he’d never let happen. There was only a very small period when it got in the way of things and then he had to control it in a different way.’

Tony described the vicious cycle of entrapment of drug taking at least as how it was rationalized by a drug user. ‘The thing is if you took speed you had to take heroin or otherwise you’d go off your rocker, it’s sort of like, you had to do it because otherwise you’d go completely ratty and be awake for so long and you wouldn’t know what was what so to counteract that you took the antidote sort of thing. It’s a very expensive

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business. To begin with it makes you feel fantastic. That's where the name comes from, hero – it makes you feel heroic, you feel like you can do anything, it's wonderful. Unfortunately, it turns nasty on you, of course, like everything does once you realize you're actually addicted to it then you do anything to [score] because the sickness that comes from it when you don't take it is absolutely unbearable. I still take methadone and if I didn't I don't know what would happen. You wouldn't sleep. You'd cramp. You'd be sick. It's just...very unfortunate that. At least Nick managed to get away from it and didn't get into the methadone and all that. He was very lucky but he used to get up on the stage some nights on tour, withdrawing from heroin, and do some of the best shows you've ever seen but I'd be standing at the mixing desk feeling like a shriveled up little piece of pain but he was amazing. He'd just get up and do a fantastic show then go to the dressing room afterwards and just sort of flake like, you know, on pure adrenalin I suppose. The longest I was ever awake was seven days and seven nights and believe me you start hallucinating, you don't know what's real and what isn't. Very nasty side effects, psychological and that sort of thing and for many, many years I believed I couldn't go into a studio and work without it. I was completely convinced of that. It took a long time to get over that thing. It's more a psychological addiction whereas heroin was a physical addiction.' With a rueful shake of the head he adds. 'People who say marijuana leads to hard drugs, they're pretty much spot on.'

Remarkably, the intake of drugs had a minimal effect on Tony's working capacity at the time. Apart from the work he was doing with the Bad Seeds he was also busy on other projects. One which he was drawn into, if only in a token way was the filming of



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the songs *The Carney* and *From Her to Eternity* with the famous German film director Wim Wenders in the wing of a bombed-out hotel. The songs were to form part of a film called *Himmel Uber Berlin* (Sky Over Berlin) that Wenders was putting together. It was later released under the title *Wings of Desire*. ‘Meeting with Wim Wenders was real peculiar because he was a real acid casualty.’ recalled Tony, ‘You wouldn’t read about it. We’re all sitting in his office waiting to hear what he’s got to say, his vision for the concert and how it should look and he’d just stop and go “Ahhh. What was I talking about?” We’re going “What?” This is the great Wim Wenders. He was fantastic. I think I was on the cutting room floor again. I was in a few crowd scenes. I got paid a hundred deutschmarks just for playing sound, rolling sound. “Roll sound.” Hit the start button, one hundred marks. Beautiful, yeah. When we were doing ‘From Her to Eternity’, don’t say ‘here’, Nick will come right down on you. I used to write it down in the running sheet for the gigs. He’d say “It’s from her you idiot. You always write that.” I’d say, “Yes Nick because it pisses you off.” Poor bastard. We recorded that song at Hansa studios with a PA to make it sound live.’

Band-wise, Crime and the City Solution provided Tony with regular work. Another band, featuring some of the German members from both the Bad Seeds and Crime and the City Solution was Die Haut (the skin). Die Haut was headed by Thomas Wydler, the drummer with the Bad Seeds. ‘Most of them didn’t speak any English’ recollected Tony ‘so trying to do the recording, they’d have these big long discussions then turn around to me and say, “Okay Tony, now we will do it.” “Right. What?” “Ah schiza! We forget you do not speak the German.” That was a bit of an adventure, quite a

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good record. They were nice blokes. I remember they were very good musicians, I mean, Thomas was one of the greatest drummers. A sort of tragic story in a way because he had wrist troubles and ear troubles because all those years of bashing cymbals and trying to keep up with the Bad Seeds, smashed cymbals and all those things is really bad for your eardrums because they didn't have plugs in those days but he does now.' Most of the German musicians with whom Tony worked were introduced through his association with Blixa Bergeld.

The main studio in which Tony worked was Hansa Studios. When The Birthday Party decided to relocate to Berlin in 1982 they had to find a suitable place to record. Mick Harvey recalls the decision. 'A little light went on because I knew about Hansa because of the Iggy Pop albums and Bowie and stuff, those great albums they'd done in the late seventies. So I said "We should go and check out where it is." So, I asked a couple of friends and they said, "Oh yeah." They told me where it was and it was still going so I went up and had a look at it and it took me all of ten seconds to realize it was the room for us. It's such a fantastic room.'

It was an assessment with which Tony readily concurred. Hansa studios was by Tony's estimation an 'amazing place.' Made of timber throughout, it was dripping with a macabre history. It was not just the size of the place, its décor and ambience but also the attitude contained within. 'I've never seen anything like it. It was an old Nazi ballroom and they still had the old propaganda projector up in the wall, like a 1940s thing where they used to show them all goose-stepping around and carrying on. Hitler himself would have been dancing in there. I don't know if he danced. He would have been there, you

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know. It was just amazing. A ballroom that they'd turned into a studio. An attic right at the top was just [a] state of the art mixing room that looked out over the Berlin Wall and on the other side of the Berlin Wall was where the Bunker was, which is now just a concrete slab – they filled the bunker in with cement and put a slab over it because they didn't want the neo-Nazis treating it as a shrine to Hitler and all that shit. Downstairs from the ballroom was the recording place and it was all sort of stacked with crocodile clips and gaffer tape and all that sort of thing, you know, milk crates to put the speakers on and you had to walk five minutes to get from the actual recording room to where the musicians played, the control room to where they played, so we had little black and white monitors to see what was happening and we did things like set the band up in there with a PA so that it was so loud and distorted like crap. The Germans are incredible like that. If you say "Can you do this?" "Yes we will do it. No trouble. It will be done. You want 100,000 speakers we will put them in this place here." You know. Not that we'd use 100,000 but that's the attitude they had. Then U2 went and bought it and blew it because they did their Berlin album there and as far as I know it never recovered from there.'

Verkelung was another studio in which Tony worked. 'Oh that was a junk studio. It was right next to the Berlin Wall. It was really close. We just would have the doors open to be looking at it. It was one of those streets where the wall went right down the middle. It halved the street. That's where we did things like 'Deanna' and stuff like that. Mick was hitting the floor tom and Nick was playing a Hammond organ and that, you know, the song was built on from that. We used the demo on the album track and Thomas put the drums on later and all that sort of thing. That was a fantastic studio just a real

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crappy little demo studio with egg cartons on the walls. It was held together with lots of sticky tape and God knows what but it was fucking brilliant.’

As much as fun was being had in the studios the tension of the politically divided city was omnipresent and sometimes spilled over in stark sobering reality as Tony recollected. ‘One night we were mixing one of our tough little punk rock songs and we heard BANG! BANG! BANG! And sirens and lights and everything. We look out the window and there’s an East German guard dead, halfway over the wall, and his mate had shot him trying to jump to the west.’

While overseas, Tony kept in regular contact with his parents and other members of the family, writing postcards and letters describing the sights seen. Sometimes he would ring though the expense in those days usually acted as a deterrent. However, one particular phone call home caused substantial alarm to his parents. Tony wrote home apologetically trying to allay his parents’ concerns. ‘I am very happy to be living with Claudia, she is a lovely girl and looks after me well. I haven’t had my problem for over two weeks. She is a great help and won’t allow me to mess with the stuff. When I rang Dad I was coming down and rather depressed, things were not so bad as they sounded, so I’m sorry to have caused more worry than was necessary. Thank you Dad it looks like the money has come at a good time and will save our lives...I hope you have cheered up a bit too mum. This letter should help to set your mind at ease because what I have told you about my having stopped using is all true, if you have any doubts Claudia will speak to you on the phone. I haven’t anything for almost three weeks and I’m feeling very good. It

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sure helps to have someone around who really cares, she is such a help to me I cannot begin to tell you.’

This low point occurred in mid April 1987 and was primarily brought on by a downturn in work. Fortunately, a short tour to Sweden, two shows in Stockholm and a third elsewhere, with Crime and the City Solution filled the coffers again. However, the joy of this payment was short-lived as Tony left his wallet and passport on the airport bus when they flew back into Berlin. A frantic few days of worry ensued after which all were recovered. Unfortunately, East Berlin being what it was, the money was not immediately returned but had to be put through a bank account which caused a delay of two weeks to Tony’s payment. A gig in Vienna, a week in the studio with Die Haut and a trip to Amsterdam kept the money flowing.

The first week of June 1987 saw Tony return briefly to London recording Anita Lane’s EP *Dirty Songs* at Trident studio with Mick Harvey. Anita had been a long-time associate of Nick Cave. Tony said the sessions were hard work. ‘I remember Mick Harvey being very patient because she wasn’t much of a singer. We used to take sixteen takes and Mick and I would just have to find the most in tune words and cut it all together but still very good.’

Soon after the Bad Seeds were invited to perform live at Bundesfilmpreisverleihung at the Ula Gelände on 13 June. The night was to feature a presentation of the Wim Wenders film in which the band had contributed. It was a high society affair with government officials in attendance. The generous concession to allow the band to invite thirty of their friends proved the night’s undoing. The band and

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entourage became hopelessly drunk and behaved in a generally abominable manner. One of their friends, Olivier – who owned the record shop The Gift – was the worst offender according to Tony. ‘He went off his rocker. He did some pretty disgraceful things. He was a great guy. Everybody loved having him around. He was one of those crazy people basically a fan who became a friend.’ The evening was broadcast live nationally and into neighboring countries and brought a new level of notoriety to the band.

With the chaos of the film night fresh in the public’s consciousness the Bad Seed train wreck careered into further mayhem. Jeanette Bleeker, Cave’s girlfriend at the time, had organized two concerts, one in Hamburg and one in Bonn on consecutive nights under the banner of Kings of Independence. The bands featured were the Bad Seeds, Crime and the City Solution, Die Haut, the Butthole Surfers, the Swan and the Fall. The first show took place on 15 August at the Knopf Music Hall in Hamburg. A thousand tickets above the venue’s capacity were sold and when the doors were closed the large crowd of valid ticketholders rioted, storming the building and setting fire to tires, cars and a gasoline station opposite the hall. The Bad Seeds did not play until about 5.30am and then stumbled back to the hotel and into a bus to Bonn three hours later. ‘By the second day everybody was so out of it, nobody had slept.’ remembers Mick Harvey, ‘We all kind of got on this bus with four other bands and drove from Hamburg to Bonn and half the people had had half an hour’s sleep and everyone else hadn’t slept at all and by the time we got to Bonn...Tony had taken lots of smack or something and he nodded off at the mixing desk. He famously had all the imprints of the buttons on his forehead but I could tell from the audience the sound was [poor]. It sounded great where we were and I

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thought “What the fuck is going on out there? What was going on with the sound mix?” And it was just Tony had nodded off and fallen asleep with his face on the desk.’

In September the band retreated to the relative safety of the studio to begin recording the *Tender Prey* album at Hansa before moving the show to Trident in London on 18 September. It was ‘a beautiful album’ said Tony. ‘That’s one of the ones that Nick presented me with a gold record. We were all having dinner and Nick got up and said, “I have a presentation to make.” Picks up the plaque and says, “This is for you.” I’m sort of going “What?” I was terribly, really touched. It was very nice of him. He made such a big hammy scene of it such is his sense of humor. Don’t know where it is though.’

Tony was not in a good state at that time, one he called euphemistically – foggy. ‘It was all at a peak when we started *Tender Prey*, really hitting it, especially the speed, which was a real motherfucker. *Tender Prey* was like the end of me for awhile. ‘The Mercy Seat’ for instance knocked ten years off my lifespan, just working on it. That’s the song we really had trouble with. It was 48 tracks of noise and every time you turned it up it just sounded like...so we had to sort it out. That was hard but well worth it. It was still a great track. There was so much on there, to try and make any sense out of it, which is great, you know. I think we mixed it eight times in about four different countries. The vocals were very hard, getting a good vocal sound, the difference between Nick’s talking and singing. I think we actually recorded the original version of it in Australia. Today I could do it in five minutes. I think me being foggy didn’t help. I’m sort of quite fond of his acoustic version myself. I just think the mad one is just so mad it sort of takes away a bit of the beauty of the song because it is a beautiful song – well it’s not beautiful, it’s

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quite ugly but, you know, it's a great song. It started off with Tracy just hitting the bass with drum sticks as hard as he could. Broke the bass, broke the strings, broke the sticks.'<sup>1</sup>

On 25 September the band flew to Athens to play two gigs at a venue called Club 22. 'Shit, we got up to all sorts of mischief there.' said Tony, 'I stayed a bit longer because the heroin was so good. I ended up with some girl – there were two of them. There was one girl who sort of couldn't wait to get me back to the hotel room and I chose the wrong one and I went with this other girl. She took me back to her mother's place so, of course, I had to sit down to the Greek family dinner. I mean, it was quite a good experience but it wasn't what I was expecting that night so I ended up sleeping in another room and having a nice family dinner with mama and grandma and the whole family. It was really hot there. It was a hell of a summer. Old people were dying everywhere and we had a beautiful air-conditioned marble room. I think it was the first time we were living like some sort of royalty because we had some English money and basically it could just pay for anything. If you had English pounds you were a millionaire in Athens in those days.'

Soon after, Tony and the band were rocked by the news of former bass player Tracy Pew's death in November. Tracy Pew's accidental death at his girlfriend's place in Melbourne was a sober and salutary reminder of the fragility of life. He had suffered a violent epileptic fit and struck his head against the bath and died from a brain hemorrhage. His passing was a heavy blow for all who knew him. His death was sadder still given that he had put his hell razing past behind him and had been studying

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 222.



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philosophy and politics at Monash University until forced to defer due to his deteriorating health. Tony and Tracy had shared an odd connection in that their fathers had worked together for a number of years prior to Tony knowing Tracy. If Tracy's death provided a warning as to the dangers of the lifestyle, then it was lost on his former engineer whose drug addiction was spiraling out of control.

Tony was in bad shape when he flew home from London in January 1988. His father went to Tullamarine airport on Melbourne's northern outskirts to collect him. Not having been able to score while on the plane Tony became unruly as he began to withdraw. He fell asleep in one of the aeroplane's toilets and airline staff had to force the door open to remove him. The Federal police were on hand to take charge of him on landing and he was interviewed on suspicion of being on and transporting drugs. His stomach was examined for possible ingestion of drugs. It was late at night when he was finally allowed to leave. He was painfully distressed and relief was only gained when his father, after much searching, found a chemist in Moorabbin who could supply the drugs necessary to counteract his son's withdrawal.

The Bad Seeds arrived a week later to commence an eight-date tour and to complete the *Tender Prey* album. They travelled to Adelaide in searing heat which proved an ordeal for the German members of the band. 'It was like 44 degrees or something like that' remembered Tony 'and the road was melting and we were in this cheap hotel with no air conditioner just dying from the heat and Blixa and Thomas were just like...they couldn't believe it. All I can remember is we used to go up the street every ten minutes for more ice-cream. It was just terrible. That was Hell.'

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The tour finished in Sydney and the band returned to the Power Plant studio in Carlton and undertook an intensive seven-day session to finally complete *Tender Prey*. Tempers became increasingly frayed. ‘Nick punched me on the nose during a ‘Mercy Seat’ vocal. He kept saying, “Fuckin’ headphones ain’t loud enough, turn it up!” so I kept turning them up and up until the feedback must have fucking fried his brain. I’m surprised he can still hear. He just marched in and went BOFF! I stormed out in a huff. Nick and I were so sick because we hadn’t scored yet. I got a lot more of the blame for that than I think I deserved, but anyway that’s my opinion. All this was putting a lot of stress on Mick Harvey. I think a lot of that time Mick was seeing his friends killing themselves and that wasn’t doing him a lot of good. He’s quite an organized person and he was watching this complete rat-bag situation going on around him all the time. It must have been horrible for him.’<sup>1</sup>

It was obvious after the *Tender Prey* sessions that Tony’s relationship with the band was beginning to go stale. His increasing unreliability undoubtedly was beginning to play thin. ‘I think we just did tell him to fuck off’ recalls Mick Harvey ‘and then did a really rotten job of it ourselves because we don’t know how to do that. But he was just...I don’t know what was going on.’

The final break came in London in mid July 1988. According to Tony, ‘Nick was running amok a bit, you know, he had to slow down, we all did. It was at the National Ballroom gig in London [14 July] where they finally sacked me. That was the first gig I didn’t mix and Victor [Van Vugt] came in. I turned up, got to the door, didn’t go in and

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, pp. 232-3.

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went, “Oh fuck it.” It was just after that Nick came round to where I was staying at this squat with a girl smack dealer (whose name was also that of his previous girlfriend, Claudia). He’d been coming round every day. Then I’d steal smack off her and stay at his place until it ran out and go back again.<sup>1</sup> Nick and I were just sitting in this room together, stoned. Then after a while Nick sort of looked up at me and said, “This is fucked.” I said, “Ah, I’m sick of this.” He said, “I’m going into a clinic,” and I replied, “I’m going back to Australia.” And that’s what happened. I stayed on my folk’s farm for a few years drying out. That was one of the last times I saw Nick for a long time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A thinly veiled fictitious account of Tony’s time in the squat is contained in Phil Shoenfelt’s novel *Junkie Love*, Ebury Press, 2007, pp. 122-127.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 236.

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~ Eleven ~

### **The Farm**

The farm to which Tony retreated was his parents' five-acre property at Kongwak in South Gippsland, Victoria. Kongwak lies in the heart of some of Victoria's most prosperous dairy country nestled into the green folds of the rolling countryside. To its south is Inverloch, a thriving coastal getaway for Melbournians seeking good beaches. To its north is Korumburra, a country town with a rail connection to the city, a major arterial for freight and passengers travelling up to the big smoke. It is verdant country and Tony eased into a life of relative tranquility. The property had an orchard, a small dam and backed on to a dairy farm on which the cows sauntered in amusing conformity from the pasture to the milking sheds each day. Chickens and the family pets added to the rural flavour. There was a bungalow out the back into which Tony settled as well as a large shed in which he could record should he feel so inclined.

His parents move to Kongwak had derived mostly from the fact that both had retired and were looking for somewhere with a bit of space to relax. Margaret Cohen had fond memories of living at her uncle's place at nearby Leongatha when she was a girl of eleven or twelve and had long held a desire to return to the area. In making the decision to move Tony was clearly in their thoughts though. 'We thought if he came home,' said his father 'it was a place he could come to and rest.'

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Tony's brother has no doubts as to its importance to Tony's homecoming, 'I think Kongwak probably saved his life in a lot of ways. He loved the farm and did a lot of work down there.'

For the first few months at Kongwak Tony's parents held as tight a rein as they could over him. They refused to allow him to drive and twice a week they would drive him up to the city so that he could receive his methadone treatment. After a time, they relented and allowed him to drive locally though still insisting on driving him any longer distances. For the moment they were content in the knowledge that the isolation of being in the countryside meant that their son had no access to harder drugs. There were rarely any visitors as few people knew where Tony was. Tony used to kill time watching the cricket although he claimed to have had no real interest in it. 'It was just a nice green picture on the television. It was good to doze off to. There wasn't much to do in Kongwak.'

One activity Tony became involved with for about six months was presenting a show on the local radio station at Inverloch, 3MFM. 'I just played demos, outtakes and things that I'd done and talked about how they were done. I used to get people ringing up and saying "Who do you think you are, talking about these people as if you know them?" It was quite funny.'

Claudia, from London, followed Tony to Australia but he recalled rural Victoria being too much of a culture shock to her urban junkie sensibility and his parents ended up paying for her return after a few weeks. Billy Miller was the first of old friends to seek Tony out and renew their friendship. 'I'd go down there heaps and Lucy would come

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down and stay for four days. I somehow got Mushroom interested in doing a solo thing for me so I went down there and were recording down there. It was great. He had ponds with the birds and frogs and he had microphones running out to the pond and mikes running out to where the sheep were and we just left them open the whole time and you're recording away and every now and then you'd get a frog and its always at exactly the right time. It's weird like that with music. It always works. We had a really good time down there. We had it worked out. We'd go down every morning and we'd get his methadone and grab a dozen bottles of beer and drive back up.'

Although Billy's visits were welcome they did have a downside as Tony explained. 'Bill was drinking a bit then which made it a bit difficult because that just encouraged me to do it too.' Methadone and alcohol would prove to be two addictions that Tony could not shake.

Motivation to kick his drug habit varied for Tony over the years. Particularly low moments prompted him to attempt to clean up or at least say he would. There were examples for him to follow. Chris Thompson had, just prior to Tony's return to Australia, decided to get off drugs. A new girlfriend and an understanding that his drug use had gotten out of control led him into a methadone program. 'I just turned around and said "That's it." Easter '88. I did methadone for twelve months and slowly reduced off it and stopped it and never ever, ever looked back.' says Chris with obvious satisfaction. 'Some people go on it for the rest of their lives. It's in their personality I think. Every time Tony got down to a lower level he became agitated and became a different person, you know. He just seems to me to have had that in his system and I know they tried several times

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over many years to try and reduce him down and he always went back up again. It is a shame and it would certainly have been better for his health. It's almost a life sentence. You can't travel easily you can't do anything easily. Every single day you've got to make a trip to the chemist. The health issues with Tony were fairly extensive. He's had amazing resilience and he was such an affable bloke with it all. I know that it was difficult for people wanting to work with him those days, you know. He's only had a few hours productive work in him for a day. That's fine. Anyone with health issues would totally understand but, you know, bands always want engineers and producers to be there ten hours a day.'

Although far removed from the heart of the music scene, Tony was still sought out by some bands seeking to connect with the independent genius they had heard about. Wild Pumpkins at Midnight were a hippy styled combination from Tasmania, friends of his old girlfriend Joanne that made the trip down to Kongwak to record with Tony. 'It was a very good recording. I did it in the shed while it was pouring rain. You could hear the rain all through the record. It was good. I liked it. All the cows used to come and stand and listen. I suppose it's pretty boring being a cow. They liked feedback and drums for some reason. They stood along the fence chewing and listening. They were good fellas. The Pumpkins used to live up in Sydney for a while. I remember visiting them in Tasmania and they had chooks. They were white chooks and they had a bit of paint on each chook so they would know which one it was. And you couldn't tell where the backyard ended and the house started. I was sleeping on the couch and you wake up in the morning with a chook sitting on the arm rest. The shit was all over the floor because it

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was just dirt. It was just like the same as being outside. Tasmanian hippies, they were really good. The guitarist was a genius, still is probably. He went off to India once and wiped himself out on hashish. He discovered that you just walk through the wild marijuana with your hands out and you then rub your hands together and get a big ball of hash. Apparently they had a lot of trouble getting him back from there – which happens. There's probably some 70s Australian hippies still wandering around the hills of India.'

Tony's time on the farm was interspersed with regular trips to Melbourne to visit his doctor and to catch up for a round of golf with Chris Thompson. Golf was a far more genteel pursuit than some of their previous expeditions together as young men into the forests to imbibe in greenery and drug-taking although the nine rounds were usually undertaken with the stimulation of a couple of cans of UDL.

Another character with whom Tony became friendly was a chap named Mick Geyer. 'He came up to Kongwak to write a book about Nick Cave and I introduced them eventually,' explained Tony. 'He became Nick's best friend until he died a few years ago of cancer. They ended up close friends because Nick used to employ Mick as a researcher, researching stuff for his books or words or whatever. [Mick] was a good friend for a little while. He went off overseas with Nick and the boys. I didn't see a lot of him after that.'

Opportunities to work began to build from early 1991. Up until that time Tony had been enjoying a relative life of `leisure on the dole, assisting around the farm, playing golf and watching cricket. He also took time to contact a lawyer in an attempt to have some contracts drawn up to ensure payment from some upcoming work with John Foy's



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record label, Redeye Records, as well as trying to chase up royalties owed from previous work. The non-payment of royalties had been a constant source of aggravation to Tony over the years.

Two projects that he undertook around late February through to mid March 1991 were, first, the recording of an album for the band Bhagavad Guitars of whom Steve Kilbey's (The Church) little brother was a member. 'A pretty shitty album if I remember correctly,' said Tony. The second, more significant and damaging project was accompanying the Beasts of Bourbon on a short tour. Re-acquaintance with the Beasts sounded the death-knell for Tony's drug rehabilitation. 'They were rat-bags,' reflected Tony. 'Lot's of drinking, lots of everything,' Tony resumed his heroin habit.

Tex Perkins was also in a new band called the Cruel Sea that had just released their first album *Down Below* and Tony was able to catch a glimpse of them at a gig on Easter Friday in late March. They had been an instrumental band prior to Tex joining them. 'The story I heard,' recounted Tony, 'as far as I know is he [Tex] was doing lights for them just for fun, you know, just turning up to their gigs. They were doing gigs on harbour cruises or something like that and Tex was digging it and he's doing lights and he must have had friends there or something. I don't know how exactly it started because I came along later but he started putting lyrics to Danny's music and that's how the whole thing has been although Danny, of course, still had instrumental songs on his albums. Danny Rumour is a genius of guitars and songwriting and, basically, he once said to me putting lyrics to his music was like putting a red nose on the Mona Lisa which I thought was a really funny insult to Tex but at the same time, you know, a whole album of

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instrumentals wouldn't have got the success, it would never have done as well as one with Tex's vocals. Tex is a very charismatic front man, always has been and he found a really good vehicle with those guys.' Tony was booked to commence recording their album *This Is Not the Way Home* from mid April.

The relative clean living that Tony had imbibed for the past three years had come to a sudden end. To pursue his work, he now moved once again to Sydney taking up a flat in Hall Street, Bondi. The principal focus of his work at this time was the Beasts of Bourbon and the Cruel Sea, both in and out of the studio. Other bands and artists to crop up in his workbook included Harem Scarem, Desert Boot, John Justin, Sean Kelly and Killing Time.

In September 1991 Tony accompanied the Cruel Sea on a ten-day tour that included a date in Adelaide with English band Transvision Vamp. 'I didn't have much to do with them.' said Tony 'We were all a bit stoned and our main concern was where we were going to get our next drugs from.' He returned to Sydney via Melbourne having made some enquiries about a detoxification program at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Camperdown. Earlier in the year Tony had begun a relationship with Astrid Munday, who was the vocalist in the country influenced band Desert Boot and prior to that had been a member of the alternative country outfit, Killer Sheep. Tony had first met Astrid during a Grant McLennan session in which she was providing backing vocals. He later began to see more of her when recording the Cruel Sea's *This Is Not the Way Home* album at Megaphon studios near the airport and finally love blossomed at an Ed Kuepper concert. The two moved into Tony's flat soon after.

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Prior to meeting Astrid, Tony had a girlfriend, Fiona. The two were engaged according to Fiona. ‘Fiona was a nice girl. She was a bit too nice for me I think. Of course, I do drugs and all that sort of thing and she couldn’t have been that silly not to know that there was definitely something going on. She’s still in touch with Mum. Mum and her got on really well and were great mates. She wasn’t the girl for me. She worked for American Express. I’d had enough of driving her to the office and back which was getting on my nerves. A bit sad because she was a bit taken but nothing I could do. I think I was a bit gutless about that. I’ve seen her a few times since but, I dunno, Astrid was more my type being in the music business, although not a druggie. I must admit, Astrid had never taken drugs. She smoked a bit of dope but that was as far as it ever got.’

In October Tony spent four days at Rich Studios with the band Mixed Relations. They were a Sydney band of, as their name suggested, mixed ethnicity. Tony’s drug use, at that time, was clearly affecting his relationship with Astrid who penned a searing and despairing note in his work diary. ‘Why do you treat me like SHIT?? I don’t deserve it – but you obviously think so – Go with your habit – you’ll never get to know anyone or thing better than that – your life’s in the point of a needle and I don’t want to sink with you. Your life is one big LIE – how can you bear it? Maybe one more flush through your veins and you’ll be gone and you won’t have to...tick, tick – getting closer Tony – your [sic] 34 and getting nearer to the real thing anyway. Total oblivion.’

In late November Tony abandoned Sydney and returned to Kongwak with Astrid. He again hooked up with Chris Thompson, the two working on the tapes from the Mixed Relations session as well as some Cruel Sea mixes. Tony would stay at Chris’ place when

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working. Although Chris had cleaned up his habit Tony's was still in full swing and inevitably led to trouble with the police when he was arrested while looking for a score in Footscray, one of Melbourne's innermost western suburbs. He was trying to use a credit card that he shouldn't have had.

Addiction creates desperation and Tony had at times proved himself a shameless immoralist ripping off those close to him. On one occasion, he cleaned out his parents' bank account after finding their pin number. His brother suspects that half-a-dozen bottles of expensive red wine, allegedly stolen from the family home by some light-fingered tradesmen, were probably sold to feed Tony's drug addiction or drunk to slake his alcoholism. Such was the need of his habit that servicing it was sandwiched in between family duties. In December, he drove to the airport one morning to collect his mother who was returning from a trip interstate. On the way home, he dropped in to see his drug dealer to collect. 'How delightful was that.' said Tony remorsefully. 'Pick up your mother and then go to see your dealer.'

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~ Twelve ~

### **Hitmaker**

The New Year, 1992, began with good tidings on two fronts for Tony. The first was the finding of a new place to live, a house in Bowling Green Street, Windsor. ‘It was the only house in the street.’ said Tony. ‘That was terrific. We stayed there ten years. The second occurred on Thursday 9 January 1992 when Tony was handed a professional lifeline. ‘Nick [Cave] rang up and said, “Oh. Do you remember me?” I said, “Oh yes.” And he said, “We’ve done this album with an American producer [David Briggs] and its shithouse and we hate it and you’ve got to fix it.” So, the pressure was on that one because Nick was really unhappy about it. He [Briggs] completely fucked up the mixing. He did a good job on the recording, in fact, they all commented on it, on how great it was, how he made them do different takes and got the best performance out of them and all that but then when it came to mixing he just left all the faders set in a line and said “The performance and the playing that’s where it happens.” But there was no dynamic and for a Nick Cave record, of course, that was just not what was wanted. So, I just did whatever I could, did all the things I would normally do...and Nick was happy. Saved the record for him, I’m sure of it, if I do say so myself.’

The importance of dynamic and how it worked is explained by Andy Parsons, owner of Fortissimo studios, ‘Even if there was automation on the desk Tony would get hands on the faders and invite the band to have hands on faders and anybody else and it would be like a performance, a mix down would be a performance of a song where

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everybody has a task to switch things in and out or fade up or down and that injects feel into a mix where things are getting louder or softer. Reverbs would change between chorus and verse or drums which is not that unusual to do but you have a big reverb on a drum but in a chorus take it away or in the verse and it's a dynamic and these dynamics were injected by Tony live in a mix on the spot even if it was automated...he would always hang on to the vocal and he would ride that fader all the way through and the mix was only done when Tony thought it had been done correctly or the dynamic sounded right. That is unique to Tony. Most engineers will avoid that like the plague, they'll thank automation because they don't have to do that but Tony would make sure he did do that. When automation came in Tony looked at it as useful but not the be all end all whereas engineers who have only known automation rely on it, totally. In Tony's mixes nothing was safe from getting pulled up and given a bit more punch or being dumped...during the song going to tape. That's where the difference is and Cave realized that.'

Nick Cave thought that Briggs had missed the heart and soul of the band. 'What he called overdub Hell' explains Nick 'was what we considered a very essential part of our music...Me and Mick Harvey and Tony Cohen, who's a brilliant engineer...basically remixed the record and turned it into the fine upstanding piece it has become'.<sup>1</sup>

The songs that Tony remixed would form the album *Henry's Dream*. To a degree, working with David Briggs proved to be a throwback to the Suicide experience when Nick Cave had first started recording. Briggs had produced a number of Neil Young albums, which had impressed Nick, including *Tonight's the Night*, *Zuma* and *Ragged*

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<sup>1</sup> *Beat*, No. 294, 29 April 1992, p. 37.

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*Glory*. His style in the studio has been described as that of a ‘Go-Go dancer MC’. In that sense, his theatrical bent was not dissimilar to Tony’s performance in the studio. Briggs proved himself a failure, in the band’s eyes, he being unable to understand and work with the nuances – the peaks and troughs of their musical composition in the mixing stage. The songs required much tweaking to reflect the layered fullness of the sound they were trying to attain. Even though their decision to re-engage Tony was laced with trepidation, it was also known to be the right course that needed to be steered.

In Ian Johnston’s biography of Nick Cave, Tony gives further detail on those vital sessions, ‘In my opinion it sounded like they’d paid a lot of money for a bit of “air guitar”, but anyway...It went really well. Nick was straight, and I was straight. We were drinking at 11 a.m., we’d go for the first fruit juice, you know, but we were totally off any drug whatsoever. It was really quick getting it together. The drug barrier wasn’t there and we were having fun. There was a lot of doubt, perhaps with them at first, in particular with the record company. I’d had a fairly bad reputation two years before. It went really well and it was becoming obvious that we were back in business, particularly where Mick Harvey was concerned. He was in quality control mode quite often. You don’t pay someone money to not do their job or not get good results.’<sup>1</sup>

During the mixing of this album, the band had put Tony up at the Kingsway Hotel in South Melbourne which was just around the corner from the studio, so that he did not have to travel up from Kongwak. On completion of the tapes Tony returned to his parents and began moving his belongings to his new residence in Windsor, he and Astrid

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 281.

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spending their first night there on 27 February 1992. In between moving and health checks Tony had been working on live recordings of Killing Time as well as mixing live for the Beasts of Bourbon and also Kim Salmon and the Surrealists.

The year developed into quite a hectic one, work was steady and comprised of the usual long hours. Tony's workbook reads as a litany of Australian independent talent, Charlie Marshall (who would go on and form the Body Electric), T.I.S.M. (This Is Serious Mum), Stephen Cummings, Cruel Sea, Dave Graney, Merry Pranksters, New Zealand band Straight Jacket Fitz, Rough Diamond, Mixed Relations, Intoxica, David McComb, Things of Stone and Wood, Swordfish, Fred Negro, Ross Hannaford, Red Dress, Conway Savage, Tiddas, the Vanilla Chainsaws, the Clip Clop Club, Don Walker, Charlie Owen, Tex Perkins, Working Class Ringos, Robert Forster, Anita Lane, Acuff's Rose and demos for Astrid Munday. There were others and not all with whom Tony worked finished up producing CDs. Some were demo recordings and others mixing of live tapes that did not necessarily make it to CD.

Two decades on Tony, not surprisingly, could not remember the fine detail of all sessions although some stood out as memorable such as time in the studio with Kim Salmon and the Surrealists. 'I did *Sin Factory* around about this time. A fantastic album, a lot of fun, a crappy studio and there was a lot of animosity between Kim and the drummer. The drummer had a very bad heroin habit and there was lots of fights. Kim was a funny one to work with. He often said, "I'll just leave it to you." Doing the mixing he just let me do what I wanted to do. I thought it was terrific. He threw a full beer can at the drummer's head one night. I remember that but most of that album I spent absolutely



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head down on the mixing desk, working on it and doing diabolical things in the toilet. It was a bit of a speed album that one. But it doesn't matter. The results were good.'

One reaction to Tony's work left him a little puzzled. He worked on T.I.S.M.'s *Beast of Suburban* album. 'They thought that it was very funny to get me to do one of their records. They were quite good fun actually. They didn't use me again because they thought I made them sound too dark which I always thought was quite a strange thing to say.'

Mixed Relations was a band Tony was fond of. 'They were good fun, just good blokes, all a mixture. They weren't all aboriginal musicians, black and white fellas just doing their stuff. I remember the drummer telling me a great story. There was this Perth company making drums out of really, really good West Australian wood and any drummer would absolutely kill to get one of these drum kits, handmade, beautiful and Mixed Relations had one, the drummer had one and they were touring through Germany and, apparently, they missed a train and they were stuck on a railway station in the middle of nowhere in Germany and it's freezing. It's snowing and these guys are from the Northern Territory. So, what do they do? They chopped up the drums and used it for firewood. But that's what I love, I love the aboriginal way, you know, possessions are not as important as like [staying warm].'

Although based in Melbourne it was not uncommon for Tony to travel to Sydney to record bands. When money was flowing in such travel usually meant a flight. In the leaner times of the mid-80s it generally meant by bus. With his stocks riding high, bands

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or their record companies would cover the cost. Trips to Perth and Brisbane were a rare event but both beckoned Tony in this busy year.

In March he travelled to Perth to record the song ‘Black Stick’ by the Cruel Sea at Planet Studio staying at the Sands Motor Hotel in the beach side suburb of Scarborough. ‘They were over there and had some time off so they flew me over to do this one song that they’d just written and it came up really well. Tex was tripping but he did the vocal in one take, thankfully, and I went back to the hotel and he was talking to the crows at five in the morning. Fantastic.’

Another project interstate was doing a recording for Robert Forster in Queensland in late November 1992 at Sunshine Studios. ‘That’s the place where the fellow had the roof raised because he rang me up while I was busy and said, “I’ve got a little studio with a low ceiling.” I said, “I hate low ceilings.” He actually got workmen in to raise the roof! It’s one of the most bizarre things that happened to me in my whole life. And then when I got there I had to rewire the whole bloody set up because it wasn’t working properly, you know. He should have left the roof and got the mixing desk done. That was a hard gig that one. I was hanging out for speed. I had to get a person down here [Melbourne] to send up a package. That was about the third day and I couldn’t start work until the mail turned up. I’m just going to the front office every five minutes. “Is the mail in yet?” They must have been going “What’s his problem?” Then I finally got the record done.’

In December 1992, the Bad Seeds returned to Australia and entered Atlantis Studios in Melbourne in January/February 1993 again with Tony to mix the *Live Seeds* album – which captured the live performances of songs from the *Henry’s Dream* album

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recorded in their recent European and Australian tours. Atlantis was located by the King Street Bridge near where the Casino now sits. ‘It was a great studio,’ remembered Tony ‘a really amazing place where people used to meet up. I can remember a Dave Graney album there and Tex Perkins would drop in and Dave would get him to sing on one of his songs. It was just the sort of place where that sort of stuff happened all the time. It was a terrific studio. It didn’t last a huge amount of time. It was just a meeting place. People could score there and God knows what. It was just a happy place.’

Atlantis had two studios which were acquired at a cheap rate for the *Live Seeds* album. ‘We mixed the live stuff in the main studio at the same time as working the demos in the smaller one. That worked out really well and it was obvious that we should really get back together as a team. Everyone’s learnt a lot. It’s so easy now to get the sounds and to understand what kind of sound people want.’<sup>1</sup>

Sessions were still long and arduous. The session mixing the songs ‘Jack the Ripper’ and ‘The Weeping Song’, for example, began at 1pm on New Year’s Day and finished sixteen hours later at 5am. This was not unusual and was the story of Tony’s working life. Reworking the live recording of ‘Jack the Ripper’ was remembered with satisfaction by Tony. ‘That was really good because the vocals on there were no good because Nick was so busy running around on stage that he was out of breath so we basically had to redo the vocals. So, what we did was used an ordinary stage mike and I had to sit in the control room with the big speakers on as loud as I could possibly get it, no headphones, I had headphones on but they weren’t connected, just to protect my ears

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 291

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‘cause it was so loud and Nick would run up and down the room and he would do it all in one take. In fact, I think we tried not to stop the tape so do fifteen minutes and then change the reels so, you know, he did all the vocals live but he redid them live, if you know what I mean, as though he was there. And he went there, he was there. He had his eyes shut and he had the music really loud and he was singing it like he would be singing it except not out of breath and not as badly out of tune. It was a good idea though because it was a little cheat. If it had been a big cheat it wouldn't have worked, if he had have done it like a studio vocal, fixing bits up and dropping in and stopping bits. So we just rolled the tape and sang through that whole section. It was a good move. I can remember while that was going on, [in] the other room, I could see through the window, there was about twenty people all playing percussion to some sort of demo that was going on for the next record which could have been the *Murder Ballads* album.’

*Murder Ballads* was an outstanding album that was widely acclaimed. Tony did not produce the album but mixed it. It included the track ‘Where the Wild Roses Grow’ a duet by Nick Cave and Kylie Minogue. ‘Apparently she only had one demand – a bowl of lollies – that was her rider. That’s all she wanted in the studio, a bowl of sweets.’ said Tony with a laugh. ‘I was still mixing [the album] when Nick had gone back to London so I’d ring him up in the night and ask him things. It worked out well.’

The intensity of the sessions, though, was alleviated considerably by a constant swathe of visitors who dropped into the studio. ‘He had a team of people working on words and things like that. He often does. If he’s got people around and he respects their intelligence on matters like that, he’ll set them straight to work. I mean, there’s no free

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lunch. Everybody's got to pull their weight. That was probably a hell of a lot of enjoyment for him too.'

Lurking in the background was a spectre that would come to haunt Tony as much his drug addiction. The first warning signs of deteriorating health - beyond the hepatitis C that he had already contracted - ambushed him in early September 1992 when he began vomiting blood. He was admitted to the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne where he stayed three days. He was diagnosed as suffering with pancreatitis and loathed the time he spent inactive in the ward, a stay that would undoubtedly have been accompanied by severe withdrawal symptoms. A series of blood tests were ordered which revealed a more extensive problem. 'I remember going on a huge binge, you know, because I just spoke to [the doctor] on the phone and he said "I've got to talk to you but I can't do it on the phone, you've got to come in." So I just immediately thought I had AIDS or something and went on a huge binge then I went and saw him and he said it was diabetes. I was sort of relieved at the time. I thought it was something more terminal, well it is terminal but not as quickly as I expected.'

Despite the onset of diabetes, the period from October 1992 to May 1993 marked a purple patch in Tony's career and saw the production of a series of outstanding albums which underscored both his resilience and genius. It began with the recording of Mixed Relations *Love* album at Glebe studio in Sydney. On completion of this he spent three days recording the Falling Joys before flying home to Melbourne where he began mixing the Mixed Relations album at Atlantis. Then followed the Robert Forster work in Brisbane. On his return in early November he commenced recording a new combination

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that would prove a startling success – Charlie (Owen), Tex (Perkins), and Don (Walker). Fifteen tracks were recorded that would form the much celebrated Tex, Don and Charlie *Sad But True* album. Dave Graney's *Night of the Wolverine* which would be feted as one of the classic independent albums of that era was another upon which he was working at the time.

It was the Cruel Sea's *The Honeymoon is Over* album which was completed in early 1993 that perhaps stands as Tony's finest piece of work, certainly Chris Thompson thinks so. 'One of the truly inspiring things that Tony is responsible for is, I think, he has made some of the best sounding Australian records of all time; And not just Australian records. These hold up internationally. *The Honeymoon Is Over*, the record he did with the Cruel Sea, is one of the best sounding records I've ever heard. And that's putting it up alongside things like Pink Floyd and some of the other great world recordings. Tony has just got this ear. Somehow he can pick the defining piece of a song and he just gets his sound so well placed and a very extensive use of effects and stuff. I remember when I heard him mixing *The Honeymoon is Over* being extremely jealous.'

'The Cruel Sea albums were fantastic Aria award winning and all that sort of thing.' said Tony. 'The first two were fantastic albums and we did a lot of innovative stuff which is probably why I'm a bit angry about the modern era of recording because you can't do that sort of stuff anymore. We were doing things like, we had a bass amp in the normal studio and then an extra speaker box down stairs, in this deep concrete stairwell and put a microphone on that and did things like that, which gave this amazing, amazing bizarre sound that we could use in mixing and then when mixing came along I

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actually had enough time to really do what I wanted to do even though I wasn't sleeping very much due to certain chemical aids and I was getting really good mixes out of it. Some songs were going three or four days. I was still working on them. In fact, I can remember them going away on a Friday and coming back on the Monday and I was still fiddling with the same song and they all shook their heads and said "Oh Tony, you've lost it. You're mad. You've flipped." and all that. This was *The Honeymoon Is Over* which was the one I had more time to do because *This Is Not the Way Home* was quite successful so they got a better budget so I had more time to mix. So when they won their Aria award I remember Danny, I think it was, coming up to me and saying "I'm sorry I said you'd lost the plot and gone mad. I see what you were doing now." which was basically just getting it to sound better and better and better and all that. Probably I could have done it quicker if I hadn't sort of altered myself but, you know, so be it. That's history. I still have people come up to me today and say they tune their PAs to that record which is about the biggest compliment you can get really because PA people are not, you know, the most generous of all people. It's a great sounding record. It was just one of those things. The planets had aligned and everything worked well. The band was working well. Tex was really good, too, his vocals were great, they weren't laboured at all. He did them all in one take.' Tony's aim was to make the album a 'very radio friendly record'. In that, he succeeded admirably. Tony was rapt to have won the Aria as he thought it recognition not only for the *Cruel Sea* album but for his work of the previous twenty years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Advertiser*, 13 July 1995, 'The Guide', p. 3.

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The excessive workload Tony had taken on during this time coupled with his drug consumption and poor health was both physically and mentally taxing. Dave Graney described time in the studio with Tony as somewhat 'fraught' due to the amount of projects he was juggling. An inevitable state of exhaustion visited Tony in mid-March after he had finished an eighteen-hour mix for the Cruel Sea recording on Wednesday 10 March. Notes in his work diary, scrawled boldly in black Texta the following day, reveal something of his exhausted state at that time. ***11 March: Day Off. Very Bloody Off!!*** ***12/13 March: Another Day Off Or Should I Say...A Week of COMA!!*** ***14 March: Tried to do a Cruel Sea re-mix at Atlantis but I was too rooted this weekend.*** The subsequent three days saw Tony take a break after the cancellation of a Cosmic Psychos session. He returned to the studio to spend two days mixing six songs for the Ocean Stairs self-titled extended play CD. This included a 3.30am trip to Port Melbourne to record the surf for some sound effects. The following week Tony travelled to Sydney for what was an unhappy few days recording the Whippersnappers at the Sony studio. It seems a clash occurred with the band's bassist and vocalist. Tony's recorded jottings of events show him to have been reduced to a rare state of antipathy toward an artist with whom he had to work. ***26 March: Hard Day; Finished drums started bass O/D's – 1 bloody note at a time!!! (She's a scum-bag) Bass out of tune and so is her attitude!!*** ***27 March: Didn't go to the studio. Too tired and can't work with the cow!*** ***28 March: No studio; Won't go in!!*** ***29 March: Won't go into studio. Flew home 4pm. Arrange to see Doctor (soon!).***



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Reflecting on such entries Tony said ‘Speed’s getting me down when I write things like that. I can’t remember anything about them. I must have blocked that right out of my mind. It sounds like my ego might have been getting a bit inflated by this stage too. I’m sure of it. I probably thought I was pretty good. “I’m not going to work with no shit like that!” Ah, well, you’ve got to laugh.’

His return to Melbourne found him back at Metropolis re-mixing some of the Cruel Sea tracks for *The Honeymoon Is Over* before a meeting with Tiddas to discuss possible sessions to record their album *Sing About Life*. Tony had had a good feeling about the Tiddas album from the outset after hearing their demo. On Day Four of recording it was obvious that things were coming along nicely. ‘4 new songs...10/10.’ wrote Tony. Tony had long been in the habit of scoring performances either live or in the studio in his work diary – 10/10s were not given lightly. ‘That was a big job that one. I was taking a lot of speed doing that. Quite good except that I had an assistant at the time called John Brewster who was an ex-roadie. He was taking so much speed he was completely manic unfortunately. He was so far gone I had to keep taking him aside and saying “Man, you’ve got to settle down. It’s really obvious that you’re speeding off your head.” Poor old JB.’

‘They had this didgeridoo player ... I sent him and my assistant out to record the didgeridoo in some tunnel. It was night time I might add so, of course, the police turned up. Good God. What were we thinking? “Hello, hello, hello. What’s going on here then?”.’

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Sally Dastey remembers the time spent recording the Tiddas album fondly. ‘I have a Gary Larsson cartoon. Tony cut it out and stuck it on a piece of cardboard (The cows were knocking on the farmer’s door and then assuming innocent cow positions when he came outside). He wrote on there “To Chuckles (that’s what he used to call me) - the mad cow award”. I treasured it, getting special treatment was cool. I was very eager in those days hoping to learn from the experience. Tony was really into showing me stuff which I realize now was priceless. In those days he was still cutting the tape with razor blades, no bloody pro tools, just a huge desk and a brain with all that information in there. We organized a live day in the studio, Metropolis I think it was, invited heaps of people but of course we had no idea what went into setting up for that so when Tony realized what we had in mind and that it WAS TODAY he started setting up at a rapid pace. Pretty sure from memory he was a little cranky but didn’t let on, just went about getting ready. He carried himself with that usual springiness. You could get carried along on that. I remember being excited by his enthusiasm. If you listen to the recording of 'Inanay' and 'Tiddas' you will hear it is the most beautiful recording. It sounds amazing. Those were exciting days for us. We couldn't believe we'd scored Tony. I thought it was great kudos for Tony, ahead of his time, you know, for a rock producer to work with an indigenous all girl harmony trio, folk/acapella wasn't beneath him. I remember going home and telling my brothers Billy Miller was arranging our strings and they were sufficiently blown away. Lou (Bennett) remembers Tony telling the record company if they wanted to come in and listen they'd better bring a slab, told you he taught us a lot. In all honesty we didn't

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know who was beyond our reach and what was achievable. We were very naïve. Amy said years later, “We were so wet behind the ears we nearly flooded the joint”.’

Charlie Owen points to the Tiddas album as a great example of the process of Tony’s recording method, his use of delays, reverbs, and how he gets them in time with the music. ‘It’s a normal trick,’ says Charlie ‘[but] he does it in such a way, he can do it with acoustic music too. He did it with Tiddas beautifully with just the three of them singing and it’s so full and rich. Probably, if you had been there mixing and listening to all these effects flying around, you’d go “Oh My Lord!” When he gets it right, like in those circumstances, you don’t hear the effects, it’s just part of the sound. Part of his way of making it percussive, his tempo is just much more than the drums. He’s able to capture that pretty well, I reckon.’

Following the Tiddas album Tony made a concerted effort to clean himself up. His poor health and the advice of his regular doctor and diabetic specialist were beginning to shake him awake to the reality of life ahead of him. He was thirty-six years old and had been punishing his body for twenty-two years with little let-up beyond a short flushing at Kongwak.

The Tex Don and Charlie album produced in 1993 proved a much happier project. ‘That worked really well, like it was a great recording session.’ remembers Charlie. ‘Of all the sessions with Tony it was the least fraught with anxiety. He never went out for the proverbial chocolate milk shake and never came back. A lot of people would say to me “Oh God, Tony left a session.” And I’d always think to myself “Maybe it was that he can’t polish a turd problem and got all stressed out.” “This is shitting me I’m going

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home.” Part off me goes “Fair enough”, you know. I guess you had to treat him as one of the band, one of the musicians in a way. He’s been sacked halfway through records but I haven’t sacked him. Maurice Frawley, God rest his soul, used to always say we’d get Tony fresh off the rack. He’d always do a really good job. It was how we timed our recording. It was the same with Tex, Don and Charlie, he was in a pretty good place. I mean he wasn’t perfect. It was still waiting for fucking Tony sometimes but, you know, I don’t really get impatient at that sort of thing that much but it could be pretty shitful when you’re ready to do something. “Tony, come on man.” Over time that’s the least of my thoughts about it really. You listen back to some things, at the time you thought “Fuck. He fucked up that mix.” You listen to it now and you go “No. he was right on the money.” and other ones I thought he’d got right “Nah, not as good as I thought he’d done.” So, all those things disappear over time. He was just trying to get his job done and deal with his life at the same time, I reckon.’

In September 1993 Tony boarded a flight for London to join the Bad Seeds as they recorded the *Let Love In* album at the Townhouse III studios in the south of London. ‘That was quite a difficult session.’ recalled Tony. ‘I found it quite difficult. I don’t know why. In my opinion Nick was sort of cleaning up his act a lot and he wasn’t as open to suggestions. Like, I did a vocal sound for him which was like, you know, really in your face, great. He took it home and didn’t like it. “It’s just not me. It doesn’t sound like me.” I found that a bit difficult, that one. It was sort of the beginning of the end of doing stuff with Nick.’

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Compounding these differences in artistic license was the problems Tony brought to the project with his deteriorating health. ‘It was a bit of a shocking time.’ conceded Tony. ‘I don’t think I did my best work. I was a bit freaked out. That’s a shame. I was put on insulin then. I knew I had diabetes but I wasn’t on insulin and, yeah, I had to go to the hospital there. It was pretty nasty. After I took the insulin I didn’t look grey anymore so I knew I had to have it. Yeah, that was a pretty bad time. Not a good time to be doing an album. [I was] taken by ambulance, it was in the middle of the Notting Hill festival and we were staying at Notting Hill so the only vehicle that could get in was an ambulance. I mean, there was something like three million people in an area the size of Chelsea (Victoria).’

Despite these underlying problems, the sound achieved was satisfying to everyone and Tony was surprised to win hard won praise from the usually tight lipped Blixa Bargeld who thought the guitar sound elicited was the best he had ever heard. The sessions were completed on 12 September and on the 21 September the band headed to Prague to begin a short European tour promoting *Live Seeds*. Tony and Astrid were invited to accompany the band. ‘Mick [Harvey] did it for me more than anything. “You may as well see a bit of the world with us.” As I’ve said, I was never a great live mixer. It wasn’t something I understood very well.’ said Tony. ‘But that’s just what Mick’s like. “Well you deserve to check it out”.’

Compared to previous tours with the band, the tour was a sedate one without crazy incident. The only glitch of any note, occurred in Prague, as Tony explained. ‘I had my grandfather’s gold watch which I’d left on the pillow and I went back to get it and it

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had gone. They'd already cleaned the room, sort of thing, so I sat in the foyer and said "I'm not leaving until I get my grandfather's watch back." Suddenly it turned up after they'd denied it was ever there.'

The Bad Seeds returned to Australia in December 1993 to complete the *Let Love In* album at Metropolis. The album was completed and won general approval throughout the industry. The *Let Love In* sessions were run to a tight deadline. That along with Nick's continued sobriety and increased maturity on both his and Tony's part led to a newfound professionalism in their approach to their work. 'The time pressure really added to making the record good because it suddenly brought it home that this record had to be done now. It crammed in a twenty-hour-a-day workload with four hours trying to recuperate. It was pretty wild. We were working like we used to, a lot of confidence seemed to be coming out of Nick at this stage, which was really good to see, and I think that spurs everybody on. If he's feeling good and confident, really enjoying it, I think everyone else does to a degree. When Nick is in frantic mode he sets up his little camp which is usually around his piano, and all the artwork started growing from around that area. He was tearing up bits of paper and making pictures on the wall, and stuff. When the pieces got too big, because they were all gaffa taped together, he had to move out into the corridor, the walls out there, and God knows where else.'<sup>1</sup>

Tony was working particularly closely with Mick Harvey in editing the final mixes. 'One has to insist on that after a while because if there's no one there, it's very difficult to know what direction to take. There's a million ways a mix can go, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 298

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sometimes you've got to have somebody there. It was difficult. It was hard for Mick, there was a lot of work.'<sup>1</sup>

Recognition for the work Tony had done during 1993 as well as his contribution to so many great Australian records came unexpectedly at the 1994 Aria awards. The Arias provided a rare opportunity for Tony to step from the shadows of his independent cocoon into the broader public light. In 1994 he won the Producer of the Year award. The Cruel Sea had won best single, album, group and best song for that year while Tiddas won the best Indigenous record category. Tony carried off the award again in 1995 as well as Engineer of the Year with Paul McKercher for their work on the Cruel Sea's *Three Legged Dog* album. The experience was one which he looks back on with mixed feelings. 'The first year was really good. I really enjoyed it. It was a bit smaller. The second year I didn't like because I had a hypo just as they announced my name so I was in the suit and everything and sweat was just dripping off me so I had to go and hide up the back and Molly was standing on the seat going "Where are you? Tony, where are you?" So it wasn't a great memory for me. The first one was like a bit of a shock. I didn't expect to win anything and the next thing you've got to get up on stage and make a bit of a speech but the second one sticks out because I couldn't get up on stage and make a speech. It was a completely...you know, my blood sugar had dropped and I was a mess; such a shame. Molly was most upset because he wanted me to get up and do my thing. It was an interesting night, just all people from the industry getting a bit drunk, making fools of themselves, sort of thing I'm not interested in anymore. I find them a bit

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: the biography of Nick Cave*, Abacus, 1996, p. 303

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hypocritical those Arias. I mean, the awards for the technical people are quite honest but the ones for the actual artists, basically the record companies just sit down at a meeting and decide which one of their acts are going to win this year and all, that sort of thing. It's like a promotion thing rather than a...like that girl [Gabriella Cilmi] who won everything...who only had one song. It's a great song but, I mean, I'd rather see a little longevity first. Even the Cruel Sea had done a lot of work before they got theirs. I just don't see how you can...I wish her luck and everything but you just don't, especially with kids that young and now its younger and younger since Silverchair – High Chair, you know. Everyone thinks, you know, the use by date is around twenty years old sort of thing. I've got problems with that.'

During 1992-95 Tony had certainly enjoyed something of a purple patch – the Aria awards being an obvious proof. An integral element in this period and the years beyond was the camaraderie experienced at the Atlantis studio in Melbourne. 'It was the greatest,' recalled Tony, 'under the King Street Bridge where the casino now is. That's why they got chucked out because of the casino but it was a magic place. It was sort of considered a bit of a demo studio in a way, which was really unfair because it was one of the best. It just didn't have a really great mixing desk and a lot of equipment but it had something. It was a place where people wanted to be. People would drop in. Some dude would come in and say "This guy's from Peru and he's a percussionist. "Oh Bewdy." you know. "Get him in there. Whack something down." It was that sort of place and also there was a lot of drugs involved, not that the owner of the studio [David McCluney] had



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anything to do with that. He turned a blind eye to all that. It was just a meeting place but it was always the same sort of crowd.'

It was the concentration of this same crowd that prompted an article from a journalist to dub the Atlantis artists the Melbourne Music Mafia. Tony was named among them. Charlie Owen recalls the period with bemusement. 'Atlantis proved really fertile. I reckon the Melbourne Music Mafia was basically that period of all those people down at Atlantis. Tony, Spencer, myself and whoever else, Maurice, all that scene, Brian Hooper, Rowland, Tex, we were all in the Melbourne Music Mafia. "Oh! That's what they've named it!" And everyone was up in arms about it and I remember people saying, "How dare that journalist call us that." Apparently we get all the gigs and blah, blah, blah. We were all shrugging our shoulders at home wondering where all these gigs were but I was secretly thinking 'Oh good. Is that what that period is?'" It was funny. I think it was about a Rowland Howard gig and Brian Hooper and I remember some people in the Melbourne Music Mafia objecting to being called the Melbourne Music Mafia but at the same time saying that they [Rowland and Brian] weren't original parts of the Melbourne Music Mafia, so, you know, I reckon it was all pretty good.'

When building of the Crown Casino commenced in mid-1993 Atlantis was forced out and set up in new premises in Hawthorn. It was a location that Tony found lifeless by comparison with the original studio. 'I didn't find it a very nice place to be at all' said Tony, 'but Mick Harvey kept working there and paying Dave good money so he could end up buying his new studio which is the one in Port Melbourne which is a very good studio. In fact, it's a great studio. So Mick is basically responsible for Dave owning one

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of those factory warehouse things, little blocks. Good on Mick Harvey for that because if anyone deserves it it's Dave, one of the nicest people in the music business.'

It was the Atlantis crowd who would provide the cornerstone for Tony's work over the mid to late nineties. Charlie Owen, Tex Perkins and Maurice Frawley, in particular, were artists with whom Tony would collaborate on numerous albums. It was not just the artists themselves but spin off projects with others with whom they had played. Despite these friendships time in the studio could be strained as Charlie Owen remembers of the first Tex solo album in 1996. 'He wasn't in such a good way and we went up to Sydney to do it. That was a bit fraught with difficulty. I think he got the sack halfway through that one and someone else finished the mix, not all of it, just some of it. Everyone can overstep the mark. If you've got to get something done and it's not getting done, what the fuck do you do? "Sorry Tony." No one's really to blame. Shit fucks up in the studio. A certain level of professionalism can be pretty fucking boring so you've sort of got to balance it, I mean, we were doing long hours and fairly out of it I suppose. I guess the hard part is Tony is expected to work the whole time whereas [with the band] one person has to work for a bit but that's taken for granted.'

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~ **Thirteen** ~

## **Downturn**

The late nineties saw a marked shift in the recording landscape. The advent of computers - and subsequently the development of music recording and editing programs - propelled many bands in to home recordings. Forgotten was the fact that such things were just recording devices and that they did not provide the intangible element of a producer's ear. The upshot was an almost immediate devaluation of the work of sound engineers and producers. 'Before that' says Charlie Owen, 'people like Tony were making heaps per day with sessions. Everything changed, looking back now, sort of overnight in a way.'

Mick Harvey suggests that this change was accompanied by a general tiredness on Tony's part that pushed him in a new direction. 'There's a bit of labour in getting the initial recordings and at some point he didn't have a lot of energy anymore. Once he got into the nineties and stuff and he decided he was a mixing engineer and that's what he'd do because he didn't have to do all that hard work, running around and setting up doing all those sorts of things.'

Faced with diminishing prospects in Australia, Tony decided to head to England and try and rejuvenate his career there. He and Astrid turned their backs on their near decade long home in Windsor, skipping out without paying their last rent, an act Tony thought 'fair enough' given his straitened financial circumstances. Astrid planned to get work teaching, while Tony was guaranteed work, in the short term, with the Bad Seeds

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who were working on their *No More Shall We Part* album which was recorded at the iconic Abbey Road Studios. The reunion was not all that either party had hoped it would be as Tony brought with him a serious health problem, his worsening condition of diabetes.

‘He became more unreliable in some ways because that was a genuine health issue.’ says Mick Harvey. ‘We got him over in late 2000 and we had another engineer, Kevin, who we knew was a good experienced engineer and that if Tony just couldn’t work, Kevin would just take over and there were several days when Tony had to go to the hospital, you know. “Shit I’ve got to go to the hospital this morning. Bye.” Then a few days he’d just come and walk out the studio “Oh I’ll see you tomorrow.”, babbling and, you know, he was gone for the day and we’d just keep working with Kevin. We got him over to do that album. I’m not sure why. No, because we liked working with Tony. I think that was probably the last one. He still did a great job on that record, on the album and all the rest of it, a really good recording and great mixes and everything. Nick’s very straight now and completely on top of everything and just having that unreliable, erratic nature around just didn’t sit well with him at all.’

‘He sort of decided to move to London and try and live and work there,’ continues Mick Harvey ‘and that didn’t work out because I think his reputation was a bit shot in terms of his being reliable. You can’t just be a guy pissing off all the time. You’re meant to be steering the ship and he’s not really doing it. He’s mucking around with the sails up the back. He’d decided his prospects had dried up here or he’d burned his bridges or whatever combination of those you want to look at and I think he found it difficult to get

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the contacts going to start up work in London. If he'd been treated fairer by people then maybe he would have been able to steer through that and get to where he could start getting work but, at the same time, he was already struggling with his health and stuff like that, badly. He was already doing the diabetes number so he'd bring those problems to any project so people would just go "Hang on. What's this about?" People are wary of entering into that kind of professional relationship.'

Tony recalled the whole relocation attempt being a disaster. 'We were living in commission flats and it was just DUM, DUM, DUM [music all day], drug dealers outside your door. I just thought it would be a good career move at the time. I was wrong. There was no work. Basically, there wasn't much work for anyone, that's when the decline in this sort of work dropped off everywhere. I just thought there'd be good work over there. When I went to Pete Townsend's studio for a job interview, Pete Townsend was a friend of the director of *Dogs in Space*, and he agreed to have an interview with his studio manager and he basically said, "I don't want any Aussie upstart coming in and taking jobs off my boys." So that was the end of that idea. It was a great studio though, a floating barge on the Thames. Anyway, that's life.'

Tony spent nearly a year in England. 'It was pretty tough. Astrid was bringing in money with teaching and that and I was sitting home all day. I got fed up with that. I had to get home because I couldn't stand it anymore and she stayed on to do some more teaching. That was a bad mistake, lost the house in Windsor and everything. To my surprise I came back to Australia and the same thing was happening whereby anyone

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with a record company, they were only going to give the work to the biggest names and the biggest studios so basically five or six people were doing all [the] good work.’

With opportunities for employment further diminished on his return from England, Tony began working at Fortissimo studios in South Melbourne. He had used the studios prior to going to England but now began using it more regularly. ‘Fortissimo is another story.’ recalled Tony. ‘Andy [Parsons], the guy who used to own it, unfortunately lost everything due to drugs. Fortissimo was a studio in South Melbourne, 145 Dorcas Street, where we did some fantastic things. Blackeyed Susans was one that stands out.’

Andy Parsons considers the song ‘A Shadow of Her Smile’ by the Blackeyed Susans, from the band’s second album *Mouth to Mouth* to be the quintessential example of Tony’s style of recording. Andy had recorded the album but brought Tony in to do the mix down. ‘[It] was a track that basically [they] had thrown all [their] ideas at... Tony walked in...and it became nothing like it started, nothing like I had in my head, nor did they, I think...and before you know it, it is a totally different sounding song than how it started. It ended up a sort of throwback sixties ballad sounding very empty and using a lot of pedal steel, sparse drums, whereas it started as a full band.’

The Blackeyed Susan mix was done in 1995 some years before Tony returned to Fortissimo and entrenched himself at the studio. ‘Basically, Tony had a roster of Melbourne guys who loved his work and used him’ says Andy. Apart from his own work Tony was also employed by Andy as an assistant engineer on some of his jobs, a boon for some as Andy explains, ‘There were a few bands around who got Tony Cohen as their assistant actually. He would sit there and be my assistant while I was paying him to do

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that. He would plug things in for me and unless I asked him he wouldn't do anything other than assist despite the fact that my twenty years' experience was outweighed by his genius and thirty years' experience at that time. It was like no ego at all which he will have but I was amazed by that constantly. But yeah, a few people got a real bargain and they didn't even know, weren't even aware who the scruffy guy in the corner was apart from he was making their coffee'.

For his own recordings Tony had a willing and empathetic assistant in Andy. 'Tony is not technical.' states Andy. 'He doesn't have a great knowledge of musical theory or in terms of synes and sounds. Tony's instinctive and works by an incredible ear which is the best ear, like...he has an incredible hearing range...his actual work was instinctive, brilliant and genius. Basically, I learnt how he liked to work and I made sure everything was set that way before he started a project...so he could do his stuff and I'd do all the boring bits...so I'd fix the automation, I would patch the pitch bay, I would set things the way he liked on the desk. I would make sure his favourite settings were on there, reverbs or whatever...everything was ready to go before he walked in.'

'The Clip Clop Club and all those quirky little Melbourne bands that were fantastic, all done at Fortissimo.' said Tony. He thought the Clip Clop Club was a 'Great band. They did country music and covers and things like that and do a funny floor show. Got this old blind guy, an old pensioner who gets up and they make him dance with pretty women much to the poor women's horror. He used to come to their gigs and they basically signed him up eventually. They found he could play some harmonica and sang really old country and western songs. Really funny. They'd lead him around because he

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couldn't see a thing... Very funny. Blind Jim. Big Jim. They were great. They all had funny names like John Wesley Hardon and all that sort of thing.'

If there was a favourite band of Tony's it was probably Maurice Frawley's Working Class Ringos. 'Loved them.' recalled Tony passionately. It was a special union as Charlie Owen describes. 'I think with the Ringos...him and Maurice, they were pretty close, they understood each other pretty well. I think Tony had done just about every recording that Maurice had done...and those Ringos records, he put [in] a lot of time for bugger all money.'

Tony fondly remembered Maurice as a 'beautiful man'. 'I think with Maurice it was more just the fact that I never tried to impose on anything that he was doing and that's exactly what he wanted. He just wanted someone to record what he was doing without saying "Oh I think you should try it like this or try it like that". He was just a country boy, like, "This is how I do it. Don't change it." And I got that straight away. Yep that's Maurice, that's his sound.'

For Charlie Owen, albums with which he was involved, albums such as *Triple Stem Marquee*, with Louis Tillett, the *Tex, Don and Charlie* work, and Tex Perkins' *Dark Horses*, stand as his favourites, he considering them to be 'all incredible sounding records.' Throughout those marvelous recordings Tony's old 'no show' habit was still evident. 'He has disappeared on me at sessions' admits Charlie Owen, 'but he's always come back or said "I'll make it up to you". It's just a shame when you really feel like doing something and you're all geared up to go.'



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Unfortunately, Tony's time at Fortissimo turned into a drug binge. 'It was a time when I'd given up smoking and cleaned up everything. I slowly slipped back down the evil slope' lamented Tony, 'and took Andy, the poor old owner, with me unfortunately, except that he went a little bit too far and ended up selling all his equipment and got into a quarter million bucks debt and his mother came over from England and took him back. She sold her house to pay his bill and dragged him back to England, cleaned up his act. But Andy's still got a few marbles left... A sad story, but a happy ending because he's okay now but, unfortunately, I had a bit to do with him getting into the drug scene. I didn't use like he had. He just took too much, you know. Really sad but it was a great studio while it lasted. It was pretty bent though.'

Andy is adamant that Tony was not to blame for his drug habit. Like Tony he had been using marijuana since he was a teenager and had been using amphetamines for years. Running a studio meant he was no stranger to the presence of drugs though he admits that Tony was influential in his decision to begin using heroin. The demise of the studio he attributes to the landlord's refusal to renew the lease rather than any debilitation as a result of excessive drug use.

'Me and Andy got on pretty well even before we started getting out of our heads together. I was just doing jobs that came through the door, bread and butter jobs, just survival sort of stuff but a few great albums at the same time. I did some Cruel Sea stuff there for sure and a lot of Tex 'cause I can remember him in the little vocal booth. I also did a terrible thing with the drummer from Cold Chisel, Steve Prestwich. He was doing his solo album. The songs weren't that bad but he was sort of trying to do it all himself

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and he had to get people to replace bits and redo the guitars and all that and it didn't really work. It wasn't planned out well enough.'

A surprise project of sorts presented itself to Tony in early 2003 which presented his collaboration with Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds to a new audience. Acclaimed New York based choreographer Stephen Petronio produced a show *Underland* with the Sydney Dance Company set to Nick Cave music. Tony was invited to extract sounds from some of the original songs to link the songs during the performance. It was a fortuitous thing as the original two-inch tapes were in bad shape and so offered an opportunity to rescue them. Some of the songs used in the performance were 'The Ship Song', 'The Weeping Song', 'Stagger Lee', 'The Carney' and 'The Mercy Seat'.<sup>1</sup>

In a bid to rid himself of a renewed taste for drugs and to revive his ailing health, Tony decided to retire from the business in 2004-05 which was, at least personally, stuck in the doldrums. He resurfaced in late 2006 to produce an album for Andrew Keese. The last substantial project was producing eight tracks for Leanne Kingwell at Sing Sing in 2009. The songs that Tony mixed were for a television pilot and were never released as an album and still reside in Leanne's bottom drawer. Leanne remembers Tony being clean, sober and an awesome ball of energy and enthusiasm like a kid in a candy store. She had worked with him previously in 1999 when he mixed five demos at Fortissimo that secured her a record deal with Mushroom.

Leanne thought Tony was great to work with and notes 'He works off pure instinct and always seems to get it right.' One of her fondest memories was of 'the way

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<sup>1</sup> Beat Magazine, 2 July 2003; *Age*, 4 July, 2003.

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he grabs a dial and recklessly slams it all the way left, then all the way right, then swiftly back someplace in the middle stopping suddenly when his ears and fingers scream “Sweet!”.’

Tony continued to work on a casual basis, working mostly for old friends. Most recently he worked on a song by Spencer P. Jones and Kid Congo. ‘Musically he comes from the same sort of place [as the guys who use him]’ says Charlie Owen, ‘so in that regard it’s a taste thing too and he’s kind of a fun-time guy to all of us, you know, a bit of a rat-bag. His ear and his way of getting things done, when he’s on form is as good as all good. That’s how come he is there.’

Old friends continued to use Tony’s talents but were mindful of his health as Billy Miller explains. ‘I was working out of this advertising place in the 90s and it had state of the art pro tools gear and I learned to be a pro tools editor and engineer then but still, you know, nothing like Tony so I just paid him to come in a couple of nights and just set the base tracks up and say put your EQs on it. We were really good friends and he didn’t need any more projects, I think. I’d love to have done something with him again but I didn’t want to stuff him up because especially for old friends like me and that he’d be doubly anxious for it to be good which probably wasn’t good for him.’

Although Tony’s career fell into a hiatus of sorts, he maintained strong views on the technical progression of the recording industry. The wizardry of computers and the techniques that have evolved with them were things for Tony to rail against. ‘I’ve been a little disillusioned by bands who record twenty or thirty guitar tracks and then just say “Oh, okay just mix it”. I said “Oh alright do you really want to hear what it sounds like if

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I turn all those twenty guitar tracks on. It's just a blur. It's nothing. I said, "This is just not the way to make music". I had the most unfortunate experience a couple of years ago and I won't name names. They did sixteen vocal tracks and weren't just editing words together, they were editing syllables together! Because you can do that with a computer, you can cut this little piece and that little piece. So taking little bits of a syllable from one take and joining it. Editing syllables of words together! That's not singing. That's not what I call music.'

'I don't like digital sound. I like analogue. I can hear the difference.' he declared emphatically. Many bands will record onto 24-track tape and then cross it to digital and work from there. 'With tape you can actually put more level on, run it into the red and that'll give you distortion. If you try to do that on a computer it just breaks up.'

Tony's preference was to record tapes through valve machines. One might brand him a sentimental traditionalist. 'The valves, the tape added a warmth, a sort of compression. Say you listen to an old sixties or Motown record and its going along swimmingly, then all of a sudden, say an Animals record, Eric Burdon and the Animals and the drummer suddenly hits the tom-toms. All the sound suddenly vanishes for one split second like it's sucked down and the tom-tom jumps out into your face and then it all comes back to normal. It's what compressors and tape would do, make something that was loud suddenly just suck the rest of the sound down for a second and create this dynamic that you can't get unless you fake it by using faders and digital, what they call, these days, automation whereby you program the computer to do all those moves and it does all that but there's something magic about tape. It decided what was going to jump

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out and what wasn't, especially on John Lennon records. He would scream really loud and it would sort of drown out everything else. It was just a feature of how analogue recording worked. I'm not saying vinyl is the greatest way to deliver it. I think CDs and probably hard drives and things like that because everything is getting converted to digital anyway so you may as well have it scratch free. I hate the MP3s and all that because they just squash things down and take actual parts of the music out to fit it eventually into a small space so actually you're missing a part of the sound. In that case an LP or vinyl is the best or even better, a proper half inch tape.' Tony's prejudice for automated music dated back to the introduction of the Fairlight in the 1970s 'The first thing that I ever saw that amazed me was the Fairlight and that was pretty bad. I did a song with Duncan McGuire, ex-Ayers Rock. They did this thing with Doug Parkinson, 'Eloise' and they had to keep replacing all the Fairlight stuff with real instruments because it sounded so bad.'

'[In the late 80s] it was all analogue, digital hadn't happened.' remembered Tony. 'I certainly avoided it as long as I could anyway. I didn't like the sound and the sound has only come good in the last few years. It's just taken a lot of the fun out of it, I think.'

Although slow to embrace computer technology and digital sound, Tony's reticence had been broken down over time as Charlie Owen points out. 'I kind of remember when he got turned back to being able to trust them. They have gotten better, of course, systems have gotten better. I mean, he was still pretty hopeless at operating them but by the same token with the tape machines he generally got the assistant to push the buttons anyway. The only thing he liked to do with them was cutting and splicing

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multi track tape. He always enjoyed that act. With the computer it was Chris Thompson, 'cause he stayed at Chris' a lot and Chris, ages ago, got a really contemporary system in there and Tony would be in there with him. [He] sort of worked out "I can probably get around this digital sound." I think Tony went "I can embrace this, its clarity." because he worked out how to clear it but the problems with digital music, Tony couldn't solve them.'

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~ Fourteen ~

### **Genius**

**T**hat Tony was considered a genius behind a mixing desk is an undisputed fact.

Musicians who worked with him continually attest to his brilliance. Trying to define exactly what he did is an elusive task. There is no template that one can look at to study Tony's skill. There are albums, EPs and singles one can go to but they show only an end product not the process. Tony's skill was an intangible and those who sing his praises do so from a deeply personal level – artists reacted to the alchemy achieved through his input with their own musical compositions. They responded to the nuances he seized upon and developed. The general listener may revel in the richness of the final sound but will rarely have an understanding of where and how that sound came to be.

Was there a sound or style specific to Tony Cohen? Andy Parsons certainly thinks so. He points to the Cruel Sea song 'Black Stick' as an example of Tony's distinctive touch. 'Tony's mixes have a signature as in a lot of guitarists.' says Andy. 'There's not many guitarists you can say you can hear them without looking at a picture and know who they are. Dave Gilmour springs to mind, he's got a sound, Jimi Hendrix... Tony Cohen just sounds like him. It's down to the way he actually worked in the sound. It's unique. I've not seen anyone else work like that, ever.'

Charlie Owen adopts a quizzical frown when he ponders the question. 'I can't explain it.' says Charlie. 'He's got a particular sound hasn't he? He's been criticized a lot sometimes for the thing that, to my ears, is the best thing about him. He can't polish a

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turd. Tony gets the stuff and focuses it and puts it in such...sometimes, okay, sometimes too clear, such a clear thing that if it's crap, it sounds like crap. So he gets criticized for crap whereas a lot of other engineers would work to get rid of the crap but he tries to highlight the music. The music is up to the musicians in his way of producing. He didn't tell someone "I think you should play it like this. You give me what you can do and I'll do what I can do to it".'

As a proof of Tony's ability to capture an artist's intent, Charlie cites an example where they were recording him playing dobro. 'I was trying to use it as a voice, a second voice like a singer in the band instead of a backing instrument. He sought of locked on to it straight away and it's to do with his production technique where he would grab the sound out of the mix and highlight it, just being able to understand what people are trying to achieve and the way he would mix, to go through and compare and sometimes we'd go. "Where the hell is this mix going? Tony, what are you fucking doing?" But then, if you've got the patience, because some people run out of patience before the end of it, I mean, because sometimes it is obviously going down the wrong path. BANG! Up would come the mix and "Oh. I see what you're going for." He's just got this incredible ear. I remember sitting in the studio about to do the overdub with my dobro waiting for the track to start and I go "Jesus Tony, I can hear the sound of my fingernails growing." He tries to feed back to your headphones what he imagines it's eventually going to be so you're really kind of playing with the final sound in your head. I remember saying to another engineer. "Okay, I want to hear my fingernails grow." Didn't happen! When he records your stuff, the actual recording and mixing, that's the perfect thing for Tony's



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result, but it's interesting when he engineers something, and you go to another mixer, sometimes they just don't know how to deal with it at all. It's just that he has a specific talent and a way when he was recording. "I'm going to record it this specific way because I know when I'm going to mix it and do that to it." I suppose every engineer does that, but he has a way of finding a certain nuance in each instrument and sometimes it's, say a piano, they don't sound like an acoustic piano but it's a nuance that's going to really work and stick out in the music, the way he works it. That's part of his sound, what makes his sound, you can hear those things. Often the sound of Tony is much more subliminal. When you're at the mix, sometimes he'd be doing things with delays, you'd go "Aw fuck Tony that's...don't put that down there. Jesus Christ!" and you know it's there. When you hear it mixed back later you hear it. Other people can't because by the time the mix is done he pulls the delays right back so that they're part of the sound and you don't hear them but sometimes I'm sitting there and I can hear that fucking thing and I wish he hadn't done it because you know it's there and I've played stuff I've done with Tony to people and they go "I don't know what you're talking about." I mean, you know, part of his process of putting a mix together, [is] pushing things too far and pulling them back and he doesn't pull them back far enough sometimes.' laughs Charlie.

Jex Byron who was the lead singer of the Olympic Sideburns and founder of the Major Record label with Max Robenstone (former owner of Climax Records) in the 1980s believed Tony understood distortion better than most and produced outstandingly textured and layered sound that added atmosphere and cadence to most of the records he produced. He described Tony's sound as 'boisterous, loud and messy' a signature that

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was enhanced by the reverb machine that graced the studio at Richmond Recorders which was full of gold leaf and gave a depth and richness to the bottom end. As an example he cites Sydney band X's second album *At Home With You*. Tony had mixed the album originally in early 1985 but due to the contrariness of Ian Rilen toward the reverb the album was passed on to Lobby Loyde who is credited with the final mix. Jex is adamant that the first mix was vastly superior and that when he played it to Ollie Olsen, one of the doyens of the little band scene in Melbourne, he also attested to how remarkable the sound was. Olsen held Tony in high esteem. 'He was a pretty amazing engineer and a fantastic guy. Tony always blew me away with his incredible enthusiasm but also with his amazing ability to spot greatness in small things as well and his really keen aptitude for knowing when something is actually sounding good.'<sup>1</sup>

Mention of Ian Rilen brought a smile to Tony's lips, 'I saw X at their height and I was just pinned to the back wall. They were just amazing.'

Tony has never thought of himself producing a particular sound, although on reflection he thought he may have possessed one. It is not something he consciously sought. Quite to the contrary he had always avoided it. Apart from his early dabbling as a drummer he never learned an instrument. This is partly because he wanted to remain separate from being a musician – he did not want that perspective to intrude into his job which he saw as primarily being that of an interpreter between a band's music and the technology at his fingertips. It was not for him to change the music but to present it as best he could to make it jump out at the listener. If there was a certain style to his work,

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Cohen radio special on Max Headroom, 3RRR, 2009.

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he suspected it lay in the more carefree approach he adopted when recording. Americans, according to Tony, were far more uptight. Australian music was different to that from overseas and he had never operated under the belief that it might be inferior.

As to formulas for making hit records, not that it was something he ever really aspired to, he believed there were some basic things common to most. The sound should build incrementally from the intro to the end with new sounds introduced with each verse. The song needed a hook – a definite melody that people would remember. Most importantly the vocals needed to be clear, distinct, and pulled to the fore. Ultimately though Tony believed it was a producer's job to invent a formula for any particular band. He was the ringmaster. Certainly, that is a role Charlie Owen sees as fitting. 'It was a whole show when you did a record with him. It was a show. That's why he got so overstressed by it and everything. The build up was so...half the time, with the overnight records, he'd have half the band sitting there watching, you know, listening like it was kind of an all-night party or gig. He'd be sitting there keeping them entertained and at the same time keeping the focus on him in a sense so that he can keep his concentration.'

Hunters and Collectors percussionist Greg Perano recalls Tony's inspiration and management in the studio. 'I'd say he was probably the best producer we've ever worked with actually because he was never out to create the hit record he was just out to create a good record. And he had complete original ideas of his own. If you suggested something he'd work out a way to do it rather than like the producers of old who would say that's an impossibility. On the track 'Alligator Engine' on the first album we did, I wanted the sound of a drum crashing around the room and without saying a word he completely

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emptied the concrete mikes cupboard and put five mikes in there and then went and found a huge kerosene can so that I could get that sound. Also he had this brilliant sense of humour and an ability to, like after you'd been working for twelve hours, to break the tension. I remember once we were recording at Armstrong's and it got to a kind of impasse and everyone was tired and crotchety and Tony suddenly has marching band music come blaring out of the speakers and he came marching out of the control booth with a mike stand and he'd taken his T-shirt off and tied it up as a flag and marched up and down four times and then went back into the control booth and carried on and everyone just went "Well...if he's got that sort of spirit!" I don't really like the word genius, but Tony Cohen was always a brilliant person to work with because he was such an eccentric character and such a warm personality, like more than anyone I ever worked with. He was an extremely loveable character which makes recording a lot easier for people. He never actually made recording an ordeal. He always made it a pleasure.'<sup>1</sup>

It was Tony's job to provide objective comment, to motivate and at times to assuage egos. He urged young bands to try things and found that most musicians as they mature became self-motivators. Recording is not an easy process in that it is not something that can be planned to the last detail beforehand. It operates on general principles with the best things happening in the moment. It is also about finding a balance between the producer/engineer and artist. Charlie Owen provides an example of the tussle that could sometimes occur, in this case about the separation of sound. 'The thing about this, sometimes you don't want it to be quite that separate and sometimes "Tony can we

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Cohen radio special on Max Headroom, 3RRR, 2009.

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put it back into more of a thick unit?” “No. What? Whatever would you want to do that for? You’re mad Charlie, you’re mad. No. No.” “Come on Tony, let’s put some more on it.” “What? No. You’re crazy. Everything’s there. Look, you’ve got one there, one is in the other room, one’s here...” “Yeah but they’re all meant to be together Tony.” “No. No. God, Charlie. Okay. Do what you want. I’ll deal with it, mutter, mutter.” That’s kind of what would happen if you tried to push him to do something he didn’t want to do and then you’d go out for a cigarette, you’d come back in and hear it a bit and go. “Actually, you’re right Tony.” Meeting him half way was a good way to deal with it.’

As to what projects he would take on he said the key to his agreement was that the offering contained something fresh. Andrew Keese who recorded his debut album with Tony in 2006 is an example of this process. Thinking that Tony would be way out of his league, Andrew chanced his arm and contacted Tony via his Myspace account and was rewarded with the invitation to send a demo which in turn led to an approving phone call. What had drawn Andrew to Tony was the sound he had detected in many of his favourite recordings. ‘Whatever is being communicated just comes screaming out of the speakers. There’s sort of no way to escape it and there’s a kind of depth to what he does that is so kind of rich that he never seems to miss the emotion behind, you know, the creation of the song. So it was just the way he captured it. Every recording he has done I have just loved even if I didn’t like the band. On a sonic level it is just unbelievable.’ For Andrew the Beast of Bourbon’s first track off their *Low Road* album, ‘Chase the Dragon’ stands as a classic example of Tony’s work. ‘Some parts of it sound almost like techno and

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that's like back in the early 80s, so the production style is so ahead of its time and the song is just so kind of in your face that it captures everything about him that I liked.'

Andrew's first meeting with the legendary producer was daunting. 'When he turned up it kinda scared the Hell out of me because I just thought the guy was insane. He was just all over the shop but it took about a day, I guess, starting to record and he felt comfortable with what we were doing and vice versa.'

Andrew has left an eloquent account about his experience working with Tony on the blog page of his website. 'His entrance to the studio each day was always infused with high drama and chaos. Perpetually running late, the actual day would begin at about 2pm when the doors to the studio would burst open, followed by a series of expletive laden verbal explosions relating to cyclists, traffic, the weather, his health, pop music, John Howard, the radio, the Veronicas, young people, old people, middle aged people ... the target and the ferocity of the attack all depended on whatever, or whoever, had managed to offend him during the trip from his accommodations to the studio that day. Following this startling and unnerving tirade, the top would be ripped off a beer, the first in a long line of cigarettes would be ignited and Tony would throw himself into the control room, take his seat in front of the console and start work. There's a streak of dark and wild humour in Tony... There was a real soul about him, there was uniqueness and an authenticity that I deeply admired and liked... Watching Tony mix was akin to watching any of the finest musicians in the world perform. The lights in the studio were literally dimmed prior to the commencement of mixing. Most people not involved in the recording of music are unaware of the importance or the skill of perfecting a mix, but

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take it from me - Tony is a master...His primary source of frustration, it seemed, was the eternally glowing computer screen, which to him, represented just about everything that was wrong with modern music...Fader movements (the ever changing level of each individual instrument) were marked in pencil on the desk itself and performed manually, effects like reverb (a kind of echo) were brought in "as needed" during the mix, not simply switched on and left on the whole time. The whole process was intense and harrowing to watch, but when he got it right - it was sublime...Tony's health isn't the best these days, but when he mixed, he physically transformed. I found this incredibly moving to watch. It was like seeing someone wrench this kind of weird, dark beast from their soul and hurl it at the mixing desk...Inspirational, affecting and ultimately beautiful.'

For Andrew there is no question that Tony was an artist in his own right. 'He did things in the mixing process which really excited me and gave the songs a dimension above what they had. That's what he does and he actually makes the songs into a production. It actually didn't sound like just a song, more like this event and that was more to do with the way he mixes which nobody does anymore, which I loved to watch, just to do it live with all hands on the faders and just go for it. The mixing is what he lives for. I think if he could just do that I think he would be a lot happier. There was one time when he was cleaning the mixing desk with this bottle of highly flammable liquid in one hand and cigarette in the other and screaming and waving these two potential explosive things around. Sub-consciously I think he actually knows what he is doing, a lot of this is [theatre] and it is the way he is but, you know, underneath it all he is actually incredibly brilliant and very talented. His primary concern is this sound to the detriment of other

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things in his life but that's important to be able to have that understanding that it's not actually about how much profit we are going to make, that the reason you are there is because you actually desire to be there; not just to do a job.'

Charlie Owen, who worked with Tony on the production of eleven albums, agrees wholeheartedly with the concept of viewing Tony as an artist. 'He was much more a producer of sound than purely an engineer.' says Charlie. 'That's why half the mixes people go "Oh fuck. I just can't stand it." Not half, that's a terrible thing to say but some people go "Oh fuck. That's awful." And other people go "No, you're kidding me. That's great." 'Cause its got personality.'

During his early days Tony was a doodler in the studio. Billy Miller recalls the nature of this habit. 'He drew little faces and what happens is that his face would start off a normal Tony sort of face which is like a cartoon sort of face. It's him. He'd start each session bright and fresh and as time would go by and everybody would get more...not depressed, recordings are pretty laborious and as things got worse and worse he'd start coloring in the eyes and making [them] bloodshot plus he'd have drawings of the face up around the studio. By the end of it the faces are mirroring what's going on.'

Andrew Duffield describes Tony's illustrations as legendary. Tony would illustrate the sheets of tracking paper that slipped into the magnetic reel boxes. 'Tony would illustrate all those' recalls Andrew 'and, of course, that was another thing you'd do in the recording studios to personalize that environment, that sort of air-con environment you'd put, I dunno, whatever posters on the wall or whatever would kick things along and



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promote creativity I suppose, so Tony's kind of bug eyed loopy take on Leunig or whatever were essential.'

'He had a great ear.' continues Billy Miller. 'He used to play the drums and he wasn't a great drummer but that was his instrument if there was an instrument. But his ear! [At his 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday party] They had a good PA there and Tony was holding court and smoking his pipe and everything was going well but the sound, you know, was typical sound. There were eight people up there, fucking violins going off, three guitars, it just sounded like a bit of a mess. I said, "Tony can you just do something?" So he walks up to the desk and he sits down, and this is what his genius is, he just sits there doing this, fiddling here and there and all of a sudden – it's like magic – it starts sounding solid and at the end of 10 or 15 minutes it just sounded like a record. All of a sudden you could hear the violin because he was doing different things with other mikes. It's just a magical quality to make it sound really good and that probably goes back to Supernaut. He could just do that.'

Billy recalls a similar incident at a performance of Tony's wife, Astrid Munday. 'She was playing at the Espy and Astrid's got a very high-pitched voice and it's hard to get it right. Tony just went straight up to the sound guy and said, "Where's her channel?" and just [sorted it] and it just sounded great.'

Kevin Welgus, owner of Guruland the studio at which Tony's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday was held, confirms Billy's take on things, 'He just walked up there and one adjustment and it sounded a whole lot better.' He too attests to Tony's incredible 'ear' and of Tony's mixing prowess says, 'What he does. He finds pockets of air. That's what he does. "I

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need to fill that little gap there”. It’s just a matter of panning or a bit of EQ...It’s just amazing to watch.’

Reflecting on Tony’s skills Mick Harvey concludes, ‘He was a good mixing engineer but I think he was actually a really great recording engineer. I think that was actually his forte because he really was this great animated crazy thing in the control room while you’re making the music, while you’re actually making it. What he got on to the tape and how he went about it was really unique. Mixing really has to be your taste but the recording means injecting ideas into what you’re doing when you’re in a really creative stage of the work. So for me, he was a really great recording engineer to work with. He really brought something creative to the process whereas mixings a different thing. It’s kind of a technical thing. So if Tony was going through a stage of wanting lots of reverb on things and I didn’t, then you’re just sitting there disagreeing about things. It’s just a technical thing, you know, but the actual creative part of the work, he was fantastic. He really excelled at it because he brought something into the working environment which was really special, especially in the bands I’ve been in, that was welcomed. We were happy to have things thrown in there that may mess up a bit and take it somewhere a little unexpected. Not everyone’s into that but for me, you know, when he was really focusing on being a mixing engineer that was going to be a real loss for the potential of what he could do for people.’

Perhaps the most appropriate way to conclude this account of Tony’s life is with a comment from his near life long friend Chris Thompson. ‘There was an interesting thing with Tone and me over the years. He pushed me to become a better engineer. He really

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was an inspiration to the Australian, not so much the music business but the audio business. He set the standard for everyone and he seemed to do it effortlessly. He seemed totally distracted when he worked, diving around at a million miles an hour and ten minutes later it was brilliant, you know. Just focused in on it. Everyone gets their own sound and Tony achieved a very individual and identifiable sound. He seemed to make everything loud and he got incredible depth, his mixes have got so much depth you find yourself looking through to the next room, like there's another room behind the speakers. I don't know how to describe it, you know, apart from to say, it's tops.'

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## Discography

An incomplete list of recordings on which Tony has mixed, engineered or produced wholly or in part.

s - single, ep - extended play, mlp - mini long play, lp - long play, cd - compact disc

Jim Keays	lp	The Boy From The Stars	1974
The Paul McKay Sound	s	Take You Where The Music's Playing	1975
Fat Daddy	s	Fat Funky Rock N Roll	1976
Supernaut	s	I Like It Both Ways	1976
Supernaut	lp	Supernaut	1976
The Paul McKay Sound	s	You Better Believe It	1976
Southern Electric	demo/cd	Beyond Morgia	1976/2006
Ferrets	s	Don't Fall In Love	1977
Ferrets	lp	Dreams Of A Love	1977
Ferrets	lp	Fame At Any Price	1977
Various	lp	Nightmovin' Live	1977
Tangent	s	Little Children	1977
Ferrets	s	Are You Looking At Me?	1978
Madderlake	demo		1978
Peter Lillie	demo		1978
Garry Sheppard	lp	Wildlife	1978
Mark Gillespie & the Victims	lp	The Black Tape	1978
Clint Small	ep	Crack In The Wall	1979
Mondo Rock	lp	Primal Park	1979
Boys Next Door	s	Shivers	1979
Boys Next Door	lp	Door Door (Side Two)	1979
Boys Next Door	12"	Hee Haw	1979
Dave Warner's from the Suburbs	lp	Free Kick	1979
Johnny Topper	s	And His Beatnik Buddies	1979
The Kevins	s	And So We Meet	1979
Pressure Drop	s	Pressure Drop	1979
The Dots	ep	The Dots	1979
Peter Lillie & the Leisuremasters	s	Hangin' Aound the House/Holiday House	1979
Nexus	s	Loving Only You	1979
The Aliens	s	Confrontation	1980
Laughing Clowns	12" ep	Laughing Clowns	1980

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The Reels	s, promo	According To My Heart	1980
Boys Next Door	s	Happy Birthday	1980
Boys Next Door	lp	The Birthday Party	1980
James Freud & Radio Stars	s	Modern Girl	1980
James Freud	lp	Breaking Silence	1980
Clint Small	ep	On the Fourth Floor	1980
The Models	lp	AlphaBravoCharlieDeltaEchoFoxtrotGolf	1980
Birthday Party	s	Mr. Clarinet	1980
Birthday Party	s	The Friend Catcher	1980
Laughing Clowns	lp	Reign of Terror, Throne of Blood	1980
Peter Lillie	s	Samurai Star	1980
The Reels	12" ep	5 Great Gift Ideas from the Reels	1980
Laughing Clowns	s	Sometimes, The Fire Dance	1980
Kikx	s	Nova Express	1980
International Exiles	s	Let's Be Sophisticated	1980
Japanese Comix	ep	E.P.	1980
The Motivators	s	Summer	1980
News	s	That Girl	1980
James Freud's Berlin	s	Enemy Lines	1980
The Cruisers	s	You Don't Know Me	1980
Bwana	s	Pamela	1980
Birthday Party	s	Nick the Stripper	1981
Peter Lillie	lp	Guitar Method	1981
The Editions	ep	Aggression	1981
Serious Young Insects	s	On Time (B side)	1981
Exhibit A	demo		1981
The Zorros	s	Too Young	1981
The Models	mlp	Cut Lunch	1981
Birthday Party	lp	Prayers On Fire	1981
Dynamic Hepnotics	s	Hepnobeat!	1981
Hunters & Collectors	ep	World of Stone	1981
The Go-Betweens	s	Your Turn, My Turn	1981
The Ears	s	Scarecrow	1981
Laughing Clowns	lp	Laughing Clowns	1982
Hunters & Collectors	s	Talking To A Stranger	1982
Mark Ferrie	s	Unhappy	1982

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Hunters & Collectors	lp	Hunters & Collectors	1982
The Go-Betweens	s	Hammer The Hammer	1982
The Go-Betweens	lp	Send Me A Lullaby	1982
Birthday Party	lp	Junkyard	1982
Tuff Monks	s	After The Fireworks	1982
Voxpop	s	You And Your Ways	1982
Pel Mel	lp	Out Of Reason	1982
The Reels	lp	Beautiful	1982
Dynamic Hepnotics	mlp	Strange Land	1982
Sacred Cowboys	s	Nothing Grows In Texas	1982
Dorian Gray	s	The Emperor's New Clothes	1982
Pel Mel	s	Blind Lead The Blind/Water	1982
Hunters & Collectors	12" s	Judas Sheep	1983
Cold Chisel	s	Hold Me Tight/No Sense	1983
Pel Mel	lp	Persuasion	1983
Sacred Cowboys	mlp	Sacred Cowboys	1983
The Moodists	mlp	Engine Shudder	1983
The Reels	mlp	Pitt Street Farmers	1983
The Kevins	s	Ululation (Here It Comes Again)	1983
Birthday Party	ep	The Bad Seed	1983
Birthday Party	ep	Mutiny!	1983
Zulu Rattle	cass	Come Down	1983
The Spaniards	s	God Is a Shield	1984
Pel Mel	lp	O.D.R.	1984
Allniters	12" s	Screaming, Dreaming	1984
Allniters	s	I Saw You First	1984
The Beasts of Bourbon	s	Psycho	1984
The Beasts of Bourbon	lp	The Axeman's Jazz	1984
The Johnnys	s	My Buzzsaw Baby (Really Cut Me Up)	1984
The Johnnys	12" ep	The Johnnys	1984
Dynamic Hepnotics	s	Soul Kind Of Feeling	1984
The Saints	s	Ghost Ships	1984
Cold Chisel	lp	Twentieth Century	1984
The Saints	lp	A Little Madness To Be Free	1984
Corpsegrinders	ep/mlp	Corpsegrinders	1984
Olympic Sideburns	s	13th Floor	1984
Paul Kelly	demo	Dean Lukin	1984

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Sacred Cowboys	lp	We Love You... Of Course We Do	1984
Birthday Party	lp	It's Still Living	1985
X	lp	At Home With You	1985
The Seamonsters	s	City Of Funk	1985
The Seamonsters	lp	Winter Sun	1985
The Johnnys	s	Injun Joe	1985
Tactics	s	Fatman	1985
Blue Ruin	lp	Such Sweet Thunder	1986
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	lp	Kicking Against The Pricks	1986
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	lp	Your Funeral - My Trial	1986
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	s	The Singer	1986
Crime and The City Solution	lp	Room Of Lights	1986
Soundtrack	lp	Dogs In Space	1986
The Johnnys	s	Bleeding Heart	1986
The Johnnys	s	(There's Gonna Be A) Showdown	1986
The Johnnys	lp	Highlights Of A Dangerous Life	1986
Wild Pumpkins At Midnight	mlp	Wild Pumpkins At Midnight	1987
Michael Hutchence	s	Rooms Or The Memory	1987
Ollie Olsen	s	Win/Lose	1987
Jeremy Gluck	lp	I Knew Buffalo Bill	1987
These Immortal Souls	lp	Get Lost (Don't Lie)	1987
Lolitas	lp	Series Americaines	1987
Bohdan X	mlp	Kingsnake	1988
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	lp	The Mercy Seat	1988
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	12" s	Deanna	1988
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd	From Her To Eternity	1988
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	lp/cd	Tender Prey	1988
Phil Shoenfelt	12" s	Charlotte's Room/The Long Goodbye	1988
Sacred Cowboys	lp	Trouble From Providence	1988
The Butcher Shop	12" ep	Hard For You	1988
Crime & The City Solution	12" s	On Every Train (Grain Will Bear Grain)	1988

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Crime & The City Solution	lp	Shine	1988
Die Haut	lp	You Can't Argue With A Headless Body	1988
Soundtrack	lp	Wings Of Desire	1988
Crime & The City Solution	s	The Shadow of No Man	1989
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd	Crime And Punishment	1989
Wild Pumpkins at Midnight	lp	Living	1989
Blue Ruin	lp	I'm Gonna Smile	1990
The Beasts of Bourbon	cd	The Low Road	1991
Grant McLennan	s	Haven't I Been A Fool	1991
Grant McLennan	s	Easy Come Easy Go	1991
Grant McLennan	s	When Word Gets Around	1991
Grant McLennan	cd/lp	Watershed	1991
The Cruel Sea	cd	This Is Not the Way Home	1991
Falling Joys	cd	Psychohum	1992
Mixed Relations	cd/ep	T.I.O.L.I.	1992
Swordfish	cd	Stranger Tractor	1992
Straightjacket Fits	s	Done	1992
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	s	Straight To You/Jack the Ripper	1992
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	s	I Had A Dream, Joe	1992
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd/lp	Henry's Dream	1992
The Beasts of Bourbon	cd	Just Right	1992
Falling Joys	s	A Winter's Tale	1992
TISM	cd	The Beasts Of Suburban	1992
Kim Salmon and The Surrealists	cd	Sin Factory	1993
Mixed Relations	cd	Love	1993
Tex, Don & Charlie	cd	Sad But True	1993
The Cruel Sea	cd	The Honeymoon Is Over	1993
Maurice Frawley & the Working Class Ringos	cd	Queenstone	1993
Dave Graney and The Coral Snakes	cd	Night Of The Wolverine	1993
Things Of Stone &	s	Share This Wine	1993



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Wood			
Things Of Stone & Wood	cd	The Yearning	1993
Wild Pumpkins at Midnight	cd/ep	Going Sick	1993
Robert Forster	cd	Calling From A Country Phone	1993
Mick Harvey	cd	Alta Marea & Vaterland	1993
The Beasts of Bourbon	cd	From the Belly of the Beast (Live 91 & 92 and shit we didn't put out the first time)	1993
The Beasts of Bourbon	cd/ep	Ten Years Behind Bars	1993
The Cruel Sea	s	Woman With Soul	1993
Anita Lane	cd	Dirty Pearl	1993
Whipper Snappers	ep	Dragster	1993
Tiddas	s	Waiting	1993
Tiddas	cd	Sing About Life	1993
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd	Live Seeds	1993
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd	Let Love In	1994
Stickyback Monkey	cd/ep	Untitled	1994
Dave Graney and The Coral Snakes	cd	You Wanna Be There But You Don't Wanna Travel	1994
Powderfinger	cd	Parables For Wooden Ears	1994
The Stiff Kittens	cd/ep	Fatboy	1994
Ratcat	cd/ep	Rain	1994
Maurice Frawley & the Working Class Ringos	cd	Livin' Lazy	1994
Paul Kelly	cd	Wanted Man	1994
Kim Salmon and The Surrealists	s	Desensitised/Intense	1994
The Cruel Sea	s	Seems Twice	1994
The Cruel Sea	s	Better Get A Lawyer	1994
Kim Salmon and The Surrealists	cd	Hell Is Where My Heart Lives	1994
Spencer C Jones		Selfish (on the Rumour Of Death album)	1994
Kim Salmon and The Surrealists	cd	Kim Salmon and The Surrealists	1995
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds/Kylie	s	Where The Wild Roses Grow	1995

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Minogue			
The Cruel Sea	cd	Three Legged Dog	1995
Anita Lane	s	The World's A Girl	1995
Louis Tillett & Charlie Owen	cd/lp	Midnight Rain	1995
Plums	cd/ep	Heavenly	1995
Various Artists	cd	Fusebox: AC/DC Tribute	1995
Hoodoo Gurus/Masters Apprentices	cd/s	Turn Up Your Radio	1995
The Blackeyed Susans	cd	Mouth to Mouth	1995
The Blackeyed Susans	ep	Let's Live	1995
The Blackeyed Susans	s	Mary Mac	1995
Mick Harvey	s	Initials B.B.	1995
Mick Harvey	cd/lp	Intoxicated Man	1995
The Stiff Kittens	12" s	Face	1995
Boom Crash Opera	s	Soundtrack	1995
Hugo Race and the True Spirit	cd	Valley Of Light	1995
Hunters & Collectors	cd	Living...In Large Rooms And Lounges	1995
Christina Anu	cd	Stylin' Up	1995
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds & P. J. Harvey	s	Henry Lee	1996
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd	Murder Ballads	1996
Mick Harvey & Anita Lane	s	Harley Davidson	1996
Delicatessen	s	Monkey Suit	1996
Delicatessen	cd/lp	Hustle Into Bed	1996
The Jaynes	cd	Shop Front Windows	1996
Hugo Race and The True Spirit	cd	Valley of Light	1996
The Beasts of Bourbon	cd	Gone	1996
Delicatessen	cd	Hustle into Bed	1996
The Blackeyed Susans	cd	Mouth To Mouth	1996
Wild Pumpkins at	cd	Sad Trees	1996

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Midnight			
Frenzal Rhomb	cd	Not So Tough Now	1996
Frenzal Rhomb	s	Parasite	1996
Sacred Cowboys	cd	Things To Come	1996
Wild Pumpkins at Midnight	cd	The Secret Of The Sad Tree	1997
The Dead Salesmen	track	Beer	1997
Horsehead	cd/ep	The Golden Cow Collection	1997
Mick Harvey	Cd/lp	Pink Elephants	1997
Astrid Munday	cd	Astrid Munday	1998
Cold Chisel	s	The Things I Love In You	1998
Nick Cave, Mick Harvey and Ed Clayton-Jones	cd	And The Ass Saw The Angel	1998
Straightjacket Fits	cd	Straightjacket Fits	1998
Lodger	s	Small Change	1998
Lodger	s	Always Around Here	1998
Lodger	s	I'm Leaving	1998
Don Walker	track	Highway Fever	1998
Cold Chisel	track	Pretty Little Thing	1998
Hugo Weaving & the True Spirit	cd	Chemical Wedding	1998
Horsehead	cd	Goodbye Mothership	1999
Cold Chisel	s	Way Down	1999
Leanne Kingwell	demo		1999
Working Class Ringos	cd	Triple Skin Marquee	2000
House of Circles	cd	Swell	2000
Tex Perkins	cd	Dark Horses	2000
Astrid Munday	cd	Apparition	2000
Steve Prestwich	cd	Since You've Been Gone	2000
The Fauves	s	Give Up Your Day Job	2000
The Fauves	cd	Thousand Yard Stare	2000
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd	No More Shall We Part	2001
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	s	As I Sat Sadly By Her Side	2001
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	s	Fifteen Feet Of Pure White Snow	2001
Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds	cd	No More Shall We Part – The Westside Sessions	2001
Caffeine	s	Slippery Ride	2001
Nick Cave and	s	Love Letter	2002

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The Bad Seeds			
Spencer P. Jones	cd	The Last Gasp	2002
Rosie Westbrook	cd	Wave	2003
Tex Perkins' Dark Horses	cd	Sweet Nothing	2003
The Devastations	s	Leone	2003
Fur Patrol	s	Precious	2003
The Forgotten Ways	cd	The Forgotten Ways	2003
Chucky Monroes	cd	Fallen Angel	2003
Joni Lightning	cd	Joni Lightening	2004
Souls On Board	cd/ep	Souls On Board	2004
Astrid Munday	cd	Sunshine & Promises	2006
Jesus Volt	cd	In Stereo	2006
Andrew Keese and the Associates	cd	Desire	2006
Skipping Girl Vinegar	s	s	2007
Tim Freedman	cd	Little Cloud	2007
Mercy Arms	cd	Mercy Arms	2008
Leanne Kingwell	demo	demo	2009
Charlie Owen	cd	Turn The Light On	2009

\*Most of this data was extracted from discogs website at the following link:

[https://www.discogs.com/artist/115046-Tony-Cohen?filter\\_anv=0&subtype=Technical&type=Credits](https://www.discogs.com/artist/115046-Tony-Cohen?filter_anv=0&subtype=Technical&type=Credits)