

DOWN UNDER PUNKS AND DIXIE ROCK:  
REFLECTIONS ON MAKING THE DOCUMENTARY FILM  
CHINESE WHISPERS - SOUTHERN ROOTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN SWAMPY SOUND

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
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by

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes making the documentary film *Chinese Whispers - Southern Roots in the Australian Swampy Sound* through process stories and descriptive travelogue. The film depicts some ways in which the music of the American South influenced punk rock in Australia during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Through cultural immersion and participant observation, the filmmaker compares two seemingly disparate cultures to show some transnational currents that have carried this Southern cultural export to Australia's music city. The filmmaker traveled to Melbourne, Australia to document Melbourne's streetscapes and urban spaces where the music community gathers and collected video interviews with authorities in Australian punk including DIY entrepreneur and owner of Au Go Go Records Bruce Milne, *Stranded* author Clinton Walker, journalist Jo Roberts, and musicians Kim Salmon from the The Scientists and Spencer P. Jones, a founding member of the Beasts of Bourbon and The Johnnys. The most remarkable influences include the mid-1970s recordings by Memphis native Alex Chilton and covers of obscure rockabilly and rhythm and blues records by New York City psychobilly vanguards The Cramps. Because cultural exports traveled in fragments in the pre-internet era, transmutation yielded new sounds that went on to influence the grunge movement in the Pacific Northwest and have begun to establish a uniquely Australian musical identity.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Lynn and Virginia LaBudde  
for their unfailing support during completion of this project.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis film is the culmination of interdisciplinary study of my native region while nursing a virulent case of Aussioophilia. I am forever grateful to those who helped me see this intercontinental thesis project through to completion.

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your beautiful home in St. Kilda to a graduate student from overseas just because your neighbor Michelle vouched for me. To Adele Daniele, Judy Robinson, and Julian Wu, thank you for also giving me shelter so far from home. To my mates in Melbourne, I am grateful for your friendship and send you all love from overseas.

To those who appeared in my film - Bruce Milne, Clinton Walker, Jo Roberts, Kim Salmon, and Spencer P Jones - thank you for making the time to sit for an interview. Thank you to Robert “Carbie Warbie” Carbone for allowing me to trawl through your archives and use your “ace footage” in my film. Thank you to the artists who provided the music for the film including the Kim Salmon and the Surrealists, The Scientists, Spencer P. Jones, Beasts of Bourbon, The Johnnys, The Patron Saints, and Chris Russell. Thank you to Liz and Billy Pommer Jr. for entrusting me with The Johnny’s scrapbook. Lastly, I cannot overlook those who generously sat for interviews that did not appear in the film. Lloyd Dewar, Pierre Baroni, Billy Pommer Jr., and Pete Fidler, you all had great things to say even if I couldn’t quite fit your comments into my narrative.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Little Willie John sang, “If I don’t love you, baby, grits ain’t groceries, eggs ain’t poultry, and Mona Lisa was a man.” Here in the United States, his declaration of love is perfectly clear, but in Australia, the dearth of grits might leave a listener a little doubtful of his affections. My travels to Australia taught me that Antipodean versions of soul food don’t ring as true as the appetite for music from the American South. Polenta can’t pass for grits, deciduous trees are too precious to burn for smoking barbecue, and collard greens only grow from seeds smuggled past agricultural control agents at the island continent’s points of entry. But, as long as Hound Dog’s Bop Shop was open North Melbourne, Australia, finding a copy of Little Willie John’s recording of “All Around the World” or Little Milton’s version called “If Grits Ain’t Groceries” was a lot easier than satisfying a craving for the Southern American pantry staple. In fact, when I hungered for greasy blues licks or some twangy country sounds, plenty of musicians and deejays offered me both live and recorded options for sating my appetite. My documentary film *Chinese Whispers: Southern Roots in the Australian Swampy Sound* examines some of the ways that Australia’s underground punk scene during the late 1970s and early 1980s reinterpreted the music of the South to help construct a musical identity in an immigrant country that grapples with defining national identity.



Bill Malone's broad definition of Southern music suited my field study on the topic. He wrote, "We must conclude that southern music is now American music. Southerners have exported their musical treasures to the world and have in turn absorbed much that the world has to offer."<sup>1</sup> Although jazz certainly falls under this umbrella, I focused on blues and country as well as musical genres they spawned like soul, rhythm and blues, jump blues, bluegrass, Western swing, modern roots music, rockabilly, the more modern psychobilly, and rock 'n' roll. I also set limits on which aspects of Australian punk I would study. I was most interested in punk music from the late 1970s and early 1980s, encompassing both early punk and the second wave, but found that Southern music continues to influence the current crop of musicians. My geographical location in Melbourne did limit my access to interview subjects artists who resided there. For example, Tex Perkins of Tex and the Horseheads would have been a great interview subject because he was touring his Johnny Cash tribute show, but he resided in Brisbane. With the exception of a stop in Sydney to interview the music writer Clinton Walker, enough authoritative figures lived in Melbourne that I was comfortable with immersing myself in that locale.

Over the course of a four month stay in Melbourne, Australia's music city, I observed fandom and heard familiar guitar riffs. I wanted to know what about the South attracted the Australians who populated Melbourne's underground music scene. I was interested in the transnational currents that carried music from the South to Australia in a pre-internet era. I sought out conversations about how Australians transformed southern music, grappled with cultural authenticity, and used the South's cultural commodity in relation to their own Australian cultural identity. I also documented how Australians have in turn exported their own transmuted

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<sup>1</sup>Malone, Bill C., et al. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. University of North Carolina Press, 2008. p15.

versions of southern music. This paper will discuss processes behind making the film and attempt to contextualize some of these abstract concepts by presenting backstories of the imagery and explanations of how editing choices consciously and subconsciously added meaningful subtext.

## CHAPTER II

### A GOOD HYPOTHESIS WON'T KILL ITS HOST

On earlier visits to Melbourne, I began to notice how American icons resonated in this globally remote music city. A monument to the late President John F. Kennedy held a prominent place in Treasury Gardens down a wooded slope adjacent to the Parliament building for the state of Victoria. A gift shop in Frankston, an outer suburb far south on Phillip Bay, displayed President Barack Obama t-shirts and memorabilia. Evidence of a particular fascination with Southern cultural exports also surprised me. I heard Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama" on commercial radio in a touristy souvenir shop on Swanson Street in the Central Business District, more commonly known as the CBD or simply The City. I found a bourbon with a Confederate Battle flag on the label, saw fliers advertising shows with Elvis tribute artists, and heard lots of bands play covers of Johnny Cash tunes. Some singers mimicked Cash's accent, and others sang in their native one. Although I did not specifically show this in my film, details like this showed me that degrees of cultural transmutation varied widely.

A friend led me to The Gem Bar, an Americana themed joint in Collingwood. They served what they called barbecue, more like steamed pork ribs, in rooms decorated with Johnny Cash and Elvis album covers, old Hatch print show bills, and shelves of sugar skulls and tall glass sanctuary candles strung with Mardi Gras beads. They booked live musicians that played

vintage rockabilly and classic country. Regulars wore vintage cowboy boots and Western shirts. The flashiest dressers sported jackets inspired by cowboy couturier Nudie Cohn. The place looked like the Melbourne outpost of Austin's Continental Club or The Star Community Bar, my own greasy roots music haunt in Atlanta. On earlier visits, I dismissed The Gem because I was more interested in exploring aspects unique to Melbourne music scene, not an Australian version of home.

But as I began to recognize how often someone would shout<sup>2</sup> me a pint of cider if only I'd "talk Southern," I began to ask myself just what about the South resonated with Australians. Surely they weren't mulling over parallels between Anzac mythology and Lost Cause ideology. Back then I had yet to make that connection myself, but I did sense a similar position in the cultural hierarchy. Just as the rest of the United States has stereotyped the South as region populated by unsophisticated thinkers inclined toward racism, the English motherland has similarly stereotyped Australians. As a native Georgian, I was also quick to see a parallel between Australia's origins as a penal colony and Georgia's founding as debtor's colony.<sup>3</sup> Also both cultures are emerging from a sense of inferiority. Evidence of it lingers among those of us who actively refute the misconceptions and deliberately seek out evidence of social progress while acknowledging the social ills, that nuance that Patterson Hood succinctly calls "the duality of the Southern thing." There's also a duality of the Australian thing. Perhaps that was why Southern cultural exports resonated in Australia.

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<sup>2</sup> Shouting a round of drinks is an Australian slang for each person taking a turn to buy a round for the table.

<sup>3</sup> Although notions of Georgia being founded as a debtor's colony are rooted in myth, most Georgians learn this is historical fact. This overview of the state's origins explains that James Oglethorpe revised his petition for a charter to establish the new colony to instead settle the territory with "the deserving poor." Cashin, Edward J. "Trustee Georgia, 1732-1752." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Georgia Humanities Council and the University of Georgia Press, Sept. 2015, [www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/trustee-georgia-1732-1752](http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/trustee-georgia-1732-1752).

Some background on Australian national identity will help clarify my comparison. Since before Australia legally federated on the First of January 1901, cultural cringe lurked in the Australian cultural consciousness like an elephant in the parlor. Cultural critic A. A. Phillips coined the term that would stick. His essay “The Cultural Cringe” first appeared in a 1950 issue of the scholarly journal *Meanjin*. But, Australia had already been cringing for decades, and it undermined creation of national identity. To demonstrate the fallacy in placing a higher value on cultural exports from the U.K. and U.S. at the cost of recognizing homegrown talent, Phillips describes an Australian Broadcasting Commission radio program from the 1940s that paired Australian performers with ones from outside of the country and asked listeners to choose the Australian. Quite often the listeners were flummoxed because the domestic performer surprisingly matched the quality of the imported talent. Phillips pointed out that the program ginned up patriotism because the ABC understood how “an inevitable quantitative inferiority easily looks like qualitative weakness.”<sup>4</sup> The term has continued to resonate strongly among Australian social critics. Any commentary that addresses this defining cultural phenomenon and any trend suggesting evolution toward self-determined national identity employs the term like shorthand.

Cultural Cringe has directly affected how Australians mythologize ANZAC Spirit, another major component of Australian national identity. The new commonwealth had broken from its colonial identity on January 1, 1901 when the Australian Constitution went into effect, but it continued to grapple with national identity until the Australia New Zealand Army Corps Forces landed on the beaches of Gallipoli on February 17, 1915 during the Great War. ANZACs

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<sup>4</sup> Phillips, A A. “The Cultural Cringe.” *Meanjin*, Melbourne University Publishing, 4 Sept. 2017, [meanjin.com.au/blog/the-cultural-tinge-by-a-a-phillips/](http://meanjin.com.au/blog/the-cultural-tinge-by-a-a-phillips/).

were anxious to prove to the world that Australia was a nation that would shed blood for its flag and exhibit battleground valor as great as any Brit or Yank. During the bloody and fruitless stand-off that lasted over ten months, the ANZAC forces dutifully carried out their suicide mission on the Gallipoli Peninsula. After having gained no ground, they evacuated January 6, 1916, handing the Ottoman Turks their only significant victory. Despite the defeat, many Australians trace their national identity back to this bloodshed in the name of country. They take pride that their boys exhibited the Aussie ideals of “Cobber, Digger, Fair Dinkum, True Blue, Mate.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the Returned & Services League of Australia’s sentimental explanation of the Anzac Spirit, these are certainly all admirable qualities, but after a hundred years, the mythology of a glorious victory encroaches on factual history. This mythologizing was never so evident as when the Australia II won yachting’s prestigious America’s Cup in 1983. Team owner Alan Bond exclaimed, “This is Australia's greatest victory since Gallipoli!”<sup>6</sup> More recently, Sacha Payne of Australia’s SBS Network wrote, “As we honour the heroes, we forget the horrors.”<sup>7</sup> This imagined memory also contributes to how whiteness determines who is and is not Australian.<sup>8</sup>

The ways in which the ANZAC Myth construct nationalistic identity are consistent with how some Southerners derive regional identity from Lost Cause Mythology. Both reckon with

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<sup>5</sup> Australian dialect for Close friend, Solider, Genuine, Patriotic, Loyal and Equal. “The ANZAC Spirit.” *RSL WA*, The Returned & Services League of Australia WA Branch Incorporated, 2017, [www.rslwa.org.au/spirit](http://www.rslwa.org.au/spirit).

<sup>6</sup> McMahon, Stephen. “Why I Can't Forget 1983: The Bondy's Heroes Ended Our Cultural Cringe.” *PressReader.com*, The Sunday Times, Perth - Now, 22 Sept. 2013, [www.pressreader.com/australia/the-sunday-times/20130922/281938835610662](http://www.pressreader.com/australia/the-sunday-times/20130922/281938835610662).

<sup>7</sup> Payne, Sacha. “How Much of the Anzac Legend Is Truth, and How Much Is Myth?” *SBS News*, Special Broadcasting Service, Australia, 24 Apr. 2015, [www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/04/24/how-much-anzac-legend-truth-and-how-much-myth](http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/04/24/how-much-anzac-legend-truth-and-how-much-myth).

<sup>8</sup> For further reading on this subject: Lockhart, Greg. “Race Fear, Dangerous Denial.” *Griffith Review*, Griffith University, Australia Council for the Arts, and Australian Government, May 2011, [griffithreview.com/articles/race-fear-dangerous-denial/#\\_edn5](http://griffithreview.com/articles/race-fear-dangerous-denial/#_edn5).

feelings of cultural shame through similar coded white nationalistic frameworks. Inversely, most in the Australian punk community reject this kind of mythologizing of their country's history, yet many have instinctively embraced the music of the American South. I observed a deep knowledge among some members of that scene that surpassed my own knowledge about Southern music. I had been immersed in the music business for twenty years. I was a bona fide cultural practitioner. I wrote about music. I worked in music sales and promotion for six years. Before that, I spent another six years programming my own music shows on 90.3 WBCR-FM Beloit College and 90.5 WUOG at the University of Georgia. I deejayed in clubs and posted 45 episodes of a music podcast while living with a record library that amounted to somewhere between 40,000 to 60,000 45s and LPs. I considered myself quite musically literate. Still, some of these Australians knew even the obscurities from my world better than I. Of course, that made a lasting impression.

I also arrived in Australia aware of something called the "swampy sound." Before I started this project, I knew that a lot of Aussie punk music had a dark quality and dense texture that evoked a sensual humidity that I associated with a steamy southern summer night. Musicians generate this swampy feel through reverb, low frequency tones, and a funky blues-derived groove which is a repeated motif composed of beats, riffs, and melody that create the rhythm and feel of a song. Mostly, I heard this quality in Scientists records, but other acts like Brisbane's Tex and the Horseheads, the Beasts of Bourbon out of Sydney, especially Melbourne's Rowland S Howard's post-Birthday Party projects. Best known of them all, Rowland's former bandmate, Nick Cave with the Bad Seeds conveyed this same dark sensual humidity in their sound. Their sound drew as much from the gothy end of the U.K.'s new romantic bands as from old timey

Appalachian murder ballads and the spare, reverby production of Bobby Gentry’s “Ode to Billy Joe.”

One the biggest boosters of this Australian swampy sound has been Bruce Milne from Melbourne. I met Bruce at the Austin Record Show sometime in the late 1990s. He founded Au-Go Go Records which was both a shop In Melbourne and one of Australia’s earliest independent record labels. Au-Go-Go’s catalogue dates back to 1979, but most notable for me was that he had released the Scientists 1982 seven inch single “Swampland.” This track was originally the B-side to “This Is My Happy Hour” [ANDA 025 1982]. At the time I thought that his label’s catalogue was a departure from the kind of music he was buying at the record show. His tastes ran along the lines of greasy rhythm and blues, soul shouters, surf instrumentals, and garage rock barn burners. Only much later did I learn that Au-Go-Go had also released a certifiably swampy album by Tav Falco’s Panther Burns called *Now!*<sup>9</sup> and a compilation of Memphis garage rock ’n’ roll called *Swamp Surfing in Memphis*, both in 1986.<sup>10</sup>

But at those record shows I had not made the connection. I simply perceived his taste as eclectic but linked by a swampy feel. We began to joke about Bruce’s finds. “There’s more of that swampy sound that you Aussies sure go for!” In that way, the term “swampy sound” entered my lexicon. Truthfully I can’t recall anyone in Australia other than Milne and me using the term, but among this circle of elite record collectors it not only described a certain sound shared by several Australian underground records but also implied a mythologized connection between

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<sup>10</sup> Scotti. “Au-Go-Go History.” Buttercup Records, Scotti BCR, [www.buttercuprecords.com/au-go-go-history.html](http://www.buttercuprecords.com/au-go-go-history.html).



Aussie punk and southern swamp rock. My nagging interest to tease out this hazy idea launched me into taking on this documentary film project.

### CHAPTER III

#### BEST LAID PLANS

Originally, I set out for Australia to document Elvis culture through oral histories and photography. I ruled out making a film because licensing the song publishing rights from Elvis Presley Enterprises, even for a scholarly documentary, would be too problematic. At the same time, I committed to make the punk film project as an independent study to fulfill coursework requirements. I was eager to satisfy this decade-old curiosity about how the music of the South resonated in this distant music scene from where Milne emerged. I based myself in Melbourne because I had an existing support network that I had built during two previous visits and because it is Australia's music city. With a very few exceptions, the individuals I wanted to interview for my film had relocated to Melbourne from Sydney and Perth.

That was not the case with the Elvis project. Very little of the hardcore Elvis culture I wanted to penetrate overlapped with punk circles. For the Elvis study I would need to start from scratch to forge new relationships with fans and Elvis tribute artists. The best place to start would be at the Parkes Elvis Festival, an event so big that attendees double the New South Wales town's population of 18,000 every second week of January. After a restless night in a bedbug-ridden youth hostel adjacent to Sydney Central Rail Station, I hopped a train dubbed the Elvis Express for a seven hour trek deep into dusty New South Wales. The flatter the terrain became,

the more drunk the passengers. The bedlam on the train didn't prepare me for the Elvis fever that gripped the town. I managed to scrawl contact information from several Elvis fans from points all over the continent, hoping that I'd sort out how to visit them later.

During the three days I stayed in Parkes after the festival, I collected a half dozen or so interviews. The regular train to Sydney didn't stop in Parkes. I tagged along on my innkeeper's shopping trip to Orange, an hour's drive. Before I left, she joked that I better not paint her town like the provincial backwater portrayed in *The Dish*.<sup>11</sup> I assured her that I would do no such thing, and yet I felt like I had stepped out of the charming but quirky rom com where neighbors banded together for the greater good but clucked about those who did not pull their fair share of the weight. My seat mate on the train more resembled a character from *Wake In Fright*.<sup>12</sup> For the entire six hour ride into Sydney I was assigned a seat next to a skinny youth wearing a singlet, clingy white footy shorts, a mullet haircut, and homemade tattoos. For most of the journey he talked on his mobile, making personal arrangements if he was found guilty of assault at tomorrow's court date and sent to jail. "Fuckin' 'ell! It was just a little barney!" he complained. Despite his thick ocker<sup>13</sup> accent, I gleaned that he had smashed up someone's face in a brawl. This squirmy brush with a likely felon seemed a fitting end to my week in Parkes along Bogan

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<sup>11</sup> This 2000 affectionate comedy film is a fictional portrayal of the idiosyncratic fanfare surrounding the Parkes Observatory's assignment to relay video of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon for global broadcast. Sitch, Rob, director. *The Dish*. Working Dog & Distant Horizon, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> In this classic 1971 outback horror film, the anti-hero protagonist gambles away his traveling money and gets stranded in a rough and remote mining town where he falls in with vicious drunks and pays a gruesome price. Kotcheff, Ted, director. *Wake in Fright*. Group W Films & NLT Production, 1971.

<sup>13</sup> "ocker, *n.2* and *adj.*" *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/130266](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/130266). Accessed 23 October 2017. Austral. slang. A. *n.2* A rough, uncultivated, or aggressively boorish Australian man (esp. as a stereotype).

Street<sup>14</sup> where the Elvis karaoke singers crooned behind a stage monitor draped with a rebel flag, the docent at the town history center reprimanded me for asking her about frivolity like the Elvis festival instead of the town's namesake Sir Harry Parkes<sup>15</sup>, and the beau of a former festival director openly spat anti-American insults at me. I couldn't wait to get back to Melbourne.

Once back in Australia's second city, few of the Elvis tribute artists and superfans responded to my requests for interviews. The man who billed himself as The Aboriginal Elvis did respond, but he insisted that I pay him for his time. As my frustration mounted with the Elvis project, the film began to take over. Having a contact in Melbourne as well respected and well connected in punk rock community as Bruce was a real advantage in scoring interview access. Unlike my publicist friends in Melbourne who generously made introductions, but as a rule keep their contact info close to the vest, Bruce passed along email addresses and phone numbers without hesitation. Sometimes he even emailed notes of introduction for me. In fact, he was so helpful with making first contact that he passed along more names than I had time to follow up on during the four months I was in the field.

My observation method was cultural immersion and participant observation. Even ten thousand miles from home, I felt like these were my people. We spoke a common language through the music we followed. My days consisted of recovering from last night's field work by catching bay breezes in a breakfast cafe along Fitzroy Street in St. Kilda with a flat white coffee

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<sup>14</sup> "bogan, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/344463](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/344463). Accessed 23 October 2017. Austral. and N.Z. colloq. (depreciative). An unfashionable, uncouth, or unsophisticated person, esp. regarded as being of low social status.

<sup>15</sup> Sir Henry Parkes is known as the "Father of the Federation" for his work promoting the federation of Australian states and territories that created the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1, 1901.

or three, reading, planning interviews, and preparing for my appointments. I tried to schedule at least three interviews a week.

Evenings, I set out with a bag packed with a Myki card good for unlimited public transport rides for a week, a 3.5 x 5.5 inch Moleskin journal, a 5 x 7 inch day planner, some pens, and a ransomable stash of electronics. I had chosen my field recording gear for its travel-friendly weight and size. This included an unlocked iPhone 4s loaded with 64GB in memory and an Australian SIM card, a Kensington backup battery, a Marantz PMD620 digital audio recorder with extra AA batteries, a clip-on mic with a 1/8 inch jack, a table-top tripod, and Kodak handheld digital video recorder. Had I access to a tripod clamp for my iPhone, I would have left the Kodak single-tasker behind except for its tripod jack, essential for filming interviews. Sometimes I packed a Nikon D40 DSLR camera, but its weight and size more than equalled the sum total of my other gear. Even though I had originally purchased it for its ability to photograph in low light conditions, I used it more for daytime photo safaris and Elvis documentation.

I also thought about how the Heisenberg Principle affected my field study. My concern went beyond how just observing something changes its very nature. I was very conscious about how performance of my own southern identity would affect how honest people were about how much the South resonated with them. On this trip, amplifying my accent for free pints was out. I felt like I needed to take on a more reserved persona to lend my observations more objectivity. That reserve worked for and against me. Playing wallflower gave me lots of great people watching material, but one boozy Sunday arvo in the front bar at the Tote Hotel I overheard a friend's friend complain about how stilted I seemed. My friend replied, "I know, but then she

does call everyone gurlene!” My takeaway was that no matter what persona I felt I should project, all observation is subjective, and in the future, I should just relax.

My weekly Skype meetings with my most accommodating film advisor helped to keep me anchored. Despite navigating thirteen or fourteen time zones depending on who was observing daylight savings time and my awkward, inarticulate discussion of each week’s reading, I found our conversations reassuring. Yet, fieldwork began to feel way too fun. I trammed around town hunting up adventurous street art and ogling Bendigo gold rush era architecture and grand art deco apartment blocks. As the pints flowed from day to night, I hopped from gig to gig. I met brilliant people who worked in film, tv, and print media, as well as a few of my musical heroes. As Summer turned into Autumn, I traded chocolate eggs at an Easter picnic under non-native deciduous trees that rained red and orange leaves. The fragrance of decaying leaves on that holiday of rebirth was surreal. By then, the novelty of my Southern identity had faded among my friends. Instead of pausing to explain pop culture references and points of politics I didn’t understand, conversations loped along while I struggled to follow. Around that time I began to struggle for focus. My anxiety over the failing Elvis project peaked, and uncertainty about whether I was collecting enough B-roll for the film troubled me as well. No way could I return for follow up interviews or to snag footage I’d not thought to collect before the film’s narrative took shape. I dreaded leaving too soon to cover my bases, but I missed my North American seasons - even if returning to the States in May meant a double dose of icky sticky Summer that year.

Shortly before I left Melbourne, I managed to arrange an afternoon to visit the ubiquitous music photographer and videographer Robert “Carbie Warbie” Carbone to trawl through his

archived work. He generously shared raw video footage of several live performances I used in this film. Coming to rock photography from a technical background, he had the best gear to capture clear images in low light and pretty decent sound from the room. The technical quality of his work in the dark rock clubs eclipsed what I could manage with my gear, and the large volume of his work was full of live footage of performers as well as a handy source for B-roll.

After four months in Melbourne, I joined my friends Julian Wu and Michelle Nicol for a final goodbye brekkie at local cafe called Tyranny of Distance, named after the 1966 book by Geoffrey Blainey that examined how geographical remoteness from its British motherland shaped Australian identity. It was a few doors down Union Street from Julian's house where I had spent the last couple weeks and a fitting place to start the 10,000 mile journey home.

After one last flat white and a round of bear hugs, I caught the last possible train to Southern Cross Station to hop on the last possible Skybus to Tullamarine Airport to check into my flight to Sydney exactly 30 minutes prior to take off, the very minute the airline would release my seat. The nerve wracking connections were nothing like the stress-free departure I had planned, but for Michelle, an experienced global traveler, impetuous travel yields great adventure. I should have expected as much from the woman who once hopped into what she thought was a cab during a layover in Dubai. She was halfway to the hotel when she discovered that it was a private car driven by one amused but hospitable Arab who ditched the friend he was waiting for to chauffeur around this daft Australian woman. It was like she had to gift me one last Michelle-like adventure before I left the country.

Left to my own devices in Sydney, I interviewed author, pop culture historian, and television presenter Clinton Walker at his kitchen table. I visited Bondi Beach, but on that cloudy

day it didn't look nearly as blue as that nineteen-year-old Bondi blue iMac gathering dust in my parents' basement that had engendered fantasies about that faraway beach all those years ago.

I also interviewed Dave Warner of Skyhooks on the Manly ferry dock across Sydney Harbour. I had met him after he performed at the Oakleigh Bowling Club in SE Melbourne a month or so prior. Up to that point I had taken trams, trains, buses, and even airplanes to interviews, but on that day a ferry delivered me from Circular Quay past the iconic Harbour Bridge and the Opera House north to where the freshwaters of the harbor met the salty ocean at the cliffs of the Pacific headlands over to posh Manly. I met Dave at a dockside cafe where we discussed the presence of Elvis in his songs about suburban life in Australia. I could not use the interview in the film because I only recorded the audio.

Had I not visited Manly a few years previous, I would have strolled The Corso, a pedestrian mall lined with surf shops and cafes, to the Riveria-style beach promenade where just beyond a slim grove of evergreens looked like they had sprung come from Dr. Seuss's imagination and topless sunbathers tanned alongside clusters of 'tweens in wet suits practicing how to correctly stand up on a surfboard before their instructor led them into the kid-friendly waves. Instead, I boarded the next ferry and navigated Sydney's baffling web of trains and buses back to my rented room in Newtown. I think I even managed to snag a few pieces of 7-11 sushi for dinner before I melted into sleep.

The next day I returned to Circular Quay to attend the State Memorial Service for Jimmy Little at the Sydney Opera House. Little pioneered Aboriginal country music, defying racial mythologies that define country music in the American South. Despite the heinous acts committed in the name of Australia's government mandated programs of cultural assimilation for



indigenous people, Aboriginal musicians embraced this music favored by the “white fellas.” Clinton Walker documents this in his book about Aboriginal country music, *Buried Country*. Most revered among these artists was “Uncle” Jimmy Little, He was a member of the ARIA hall of fame, inducted into the Australasian Country Music Roll of Renown, and appointed both Officer of the Order of Australia and a National Living Treasure. I learned from Clint that tickets were free by request. Witnessing a tribute to Little’s preeminence and exemplary humanity inside an architectural monument on the UNESCO World Heritage Site<sup>16</sup> was too good to pass up. Two days later I boarded a jet to LAX and again traversed the Pacific Ring of Fire. Buh Bye Australia. Hello Kinard Hall, and my nocturnal summer of post-production.

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<sup>16</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre. “Sydney Opera House.” *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, United Nations, 2017, [whc.unesco.org/en/list/166](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/166).

## CHAPTER IV

### RENDER, RENDER, RENDER

I returned to Mississippi the first week of May, a month after my original return date. Trading Australia's last warm breath of Autumnal warmth for Mississippi's unusually sticky warm late Spring was disorienting. Despite taking a few days in Atlanta to recover from the twenty-four hour journey before motoring back to my duplex squat in Oxford, I felt the effects of jet lag keenly for weeks. By the time I learned enough of Adobe Premier to work on my own, having a body clock still tuned to Australian Eastern Standard Time was a real advantage.

Working in solitude through the night helped immerse myself in post-production. I culled through my footage, annotated interviews, and cobbled together a narrative. The Australian documentary about Rowland S. Howard, *Autoluminescent*,<sup>17</sup> video art by the Australian Daniel Crooks,<sup>18</sup> and experimental animation by New Zealander Len Lye<sup>19</sup> inspired me to exercise artistic license to convey Melbourne's gritty urban velocity with imagery that was far more vivid than any words I could conjure. Quickly, it became evident that I had very little usable B-roll, but I did have dozens of still photos. Against my mentor's advice, I experimented liberally with

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<sup>17</sup> GhostPicturesPtyLtd. "Autoluminescent Rowland S. Howard (2011) - Official Trailer [HD]." YouTube, 21 Sept. 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpP9iWupUo0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpP9iWupUo0).

<sup>18</sup> Crooks, Daniel. "Static No.9 (a Small Section of Something Larger)." Vimeo, 21 Oct. 2017, [vimeo.com/77660580](http://vimeo.com/77660580).

<sup>19</sup> Lye, Len. "1935-1937 Len Lye - 'Kaleidoscope' + 'A Colour Box' + 'Colour Flight' (Highlights Mix)." YouTube, 3 Nov. 2012, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DksmbDMDUU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DksmbDMDUU).

Premier's array of special effects. I had never before made my own film. He counseled that special effects can often look gimmicky, flash for the sake of flash, and do nothing to push the narrative, yet I made it work. I added multiple translucent layers of color corrected, distorted video and added loopy pans across still images to craft music montages and section transitions. These arty segments solved the drought of B-roll video and addressed pacing issues while adding visual interest. Some of the instinctual choices in image choice and sequencing even added unexpected subtext.

Constructing these segments was quite time consuming. I'd move a clip and hit render to see how the motion synched with the music bed. The more layers, the longer the clip, the more lengthy the rendering process. I'd step out of the department, lock up, and pace the sidewalk, stomping cockroaches while heat lightning flashed in the clouds south and west of Kinard Hall. Often staff would find me still trying to perfect yet another montage effect the next morning. Reluctantly I'd tear myself away, hope nobody jiggered my computer settings during the day, and drive home to sleep behind blackout curtains. The work possessed me. The film had to do more than tell a story. It had to be beautiful. It needed to capture all of its grit and glory and serve as my artistic love letter to Melbourne.

## CHAPTER V

### A WORD ABOUT THE FILM TITLE

The film resonated well with Australian audiences, but injecting a third nationality into the title of a cultural comparison between the American South and Australia might have needlessly confused would be viewers. More troubling, for some the title might even sound racist. Linguists agree that Chinese Whispers is the British name for a game of Grapevine or Telephone. However, they do not agree on the etymological origins of the term. Those who attribute its origins to anti-Asian attitudes that characterized the Chinese with negative qualities like chaotic and incomprehensible find the term offensive.<sup>20</sup> Those who consider the term to be an analogy to describe the great linguistic differences between English and Chinese find it less offensive.<sup>21</sup> That's how I interpreted it when Kim Salmon said it. The idiom succinctly described the kinds of valuable cultural transmutations I sought to document. It summed up how perception affects interpretation and performance. Best of all, it was a tidy soundbite to end my film. Salmon's tone makes clear that his meaning was benign. What more did I need to know? Well, apparently I missed enough to hang a somewhat tone deaf moniker on my film. Even as a subtle comment on how Australians talk about race, the racist connotation distracts from the healthy

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<sup>20</sup> "Chinese Whispers: Offensive or Not?" ICAL TEFL, 30 Nov. 2014, [www.icaltefl.com/chinese-whispers-offensive-or-not](http://www.icaltefl.com/chinese-whispers-offensive-or-not).

<sup>21</sup> Clinton, Bryce, and A. Joseph. "What Are 'Chinese Whispers'?" WiseGEEK, Conjecture Corporation, 21 Sept. 2017, [www.wisegeek.com/what-are-chinese-whispers.htm](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-chinese-whispers.htm).

cultural exchange I wanted to portray. If given the opportunity, I would strongly reconsider renaming the film.

## CHAPTER VI

### A LOVE LETTER TO MELBOURNE

The city of Melbourne is the capital of the southern state of Victoria. Despite its sprawling metropolitan area and increasingly unaffordable housing costs, The Economist has named it most livable city in the world for seven years in a row.<sup>22</sup> Melbourne owes a large part of its livability to the extensive public transport system. During my four months in residence, I rarely felt like I needed a car. Although the system included a network of rapid transit trains and city buses, I mostly traveled by tram. Later in this paper I discuss the importance of trams to Melbourne place identity, but for now suffice to say that in the same way that the cable car defines San Francisco, trams define Melbourne. This understanding of their meaning and because I relied on trams to get me around, using video of trams as well as streetscapes shot from trams was an obvious choice for a motif denoting segues between sections.

Street art in Melbourne also defines the city's cultural identity. Unlike Atlanta, where the city council is still debating whether to require private property owners to submit plans for any

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<sup>22</sup> The Data Team. "Global Liveability Has Improved for the First Time in a Decade." *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 16 Aug. 2017, [www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/08/daily-chart-10?zid=306&ah=1b164dbd43b0cb27ba0d4c3b12a5e227](http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/08/daily-chart-10?zid=306&ah=1b164dbd43b0cb27ba0d4c3b12a5e227).

publicly visible murals and as of yet does not recognize the cultural value of street art,<sup>23 24</sup> the City of Melbourne recognizes how street art adds vibrancy to the city's spaces.<sup>25</sup> On the official website, it maintains a page detailing the municipal government's policy on street art, where it's legal, when to seek a mural permit, and the consequences for violating their liberal ordinances. While most street art is technically illegal, street art is permitted in officially designated areas like Hoosier Lane in the CBD and tolerated in others like along the otherwise bleak pedestrian tunnels and walkways under the six-way intersection of St. Kilda Junction. This permissive approach to street art has allowed the work to advance to a quality that eclipses the run of the mill tags that one often associates with graffiti and elevates it to an art form that employs freehand spray paint, paint marker, stenciling, wheat paste posters, and even traditional brush work and mosaic work using non-traditional materials like Lego or typewriter keys and keyboard buttons. Using Melbourne's ever changing street art as another recurring motif to define place was an obvious choice.

By many accounts, Melbourne is also known as Australia's music city. A recent audit of the economic impact made by the music industry in the state of Victoria showed that it surpassed that made by the Australian Football League,<sup>26</sup> particularly eye-opening considering that half of the 18 teams are based in Melbourne. Melbourne's music industry also supports 470 live music

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<sup>23</sup> Sheperd, Joyce, et al. "Ordinance 14-O-1022." Atlanta City Council, City of Atlanta, Georgia, 10 Oct. 2017, [atlantacityga.iqm2.com/citizens/Detail\\_LegiFile.aspx?ID=3448](http://atlantacityga.iqm2.com/citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?ID=3448).

<sup>24</sup> For further reading on the issue: Blinder, Alan. "In Atlanta, Murals as Art, and as Zoning Law Test Cases." The New York Times, The New York Times, 15 June 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/06/15/us/atlanta-murals-art-zoning-law.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/15/us/atlanta-murals-art-zoning-law.html).

<sup>25</sup> "Street Art." Street Art - City of Melbourne, City of Melbourne, 2017, [www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/arts-and-culture/art-outdoors/Pages/street-art.aspx](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/arts-and-culture/art-outdoors/Pages/street-art.aspx).

<sup>26</sup> Music Victoria, et al. "Victorian Live Music Census 2012." Music Victoria, Dec. 2012.

venues, roughly double the 230 venues in Austin, Texas which markets itself as the Live Music Capital of America.<sup>27</sup>

Although most of the major labels in Australia are based in Sydney, the vastness of Melbourne's live music culture spawned a plethora of energetic DIY music businesses. This is one reason that many of the musicians I spoke to for my film have relocated to Melbourne from other cities in Australia. The city government has sought to preserve this music culture by passing an ordinance that reduces the power of neighborhood newcomers to shut down existing venues through noise complaints. Before the ordinance, new residents, who moved into these gentrifying neighborhoods because of the cultural vitality constructed in part by the musicians who performed in these venues, would file complaints against venues. Complaints from a few as one persistent neighbor scuttled performances as tame as unamplified back patio acoustic shows during daylight hours and indoor family sing-alongs. The city would slap the venue with fines that cut deeply into operational costs and require the venue to either suspend performances or install cost prohibitive soundproofing, or risk losing the licenses to operate. After a rash of closings threatened these places where the members of music community gathered, the new ordinance now requires real estate agents to disclose the proximity of existing live music venues to the property to prospective buyers and explain that these venues are exempt from noise violations. In the United States, we would refer to this as a grandfather clause, but in Melbourne it's called "agent of change."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Baker, Andrea Jean. "Berlin, Austin, Melbourne – Riffing on Global Music Cities at SXSW." The Conversation, The Conversation US, Inc., 18 Oct. 2017, [theconversation.com/berlin-austin-melbourne-riffing-on-global-music-cities-at-sxsw-23700](http://theconversation.com/berlin-austin-melbourne-riffing-on-global-music-cities-at-sxsw-23700).

<sup>28</sup> Music Victoria. "How To: Agent Of Change." Music Victoria, Music Victoria, Creative Victoria, APRA AMCOS, Australian Music Industry Network, Australian Government, and Australian Council for the Arts, Sept. 2014, [www.musicvictoria.com.au/resources/agent-of-change-explained](http://www.musicvictoria.com.au/resources/agent-of-change-explained).



Cooperation between city government and a well organized live music community to produces innovative solutions to preserve existing culture in the face of gentrification. It also reinforces the cultural importance that Melburnians place on live music. Other Australian cities like Brisbane and Sydney are slow to preserve live music venues. Their pubs and nightclubs are either shutting down or replacing the revenue from live music with “the pokies” also known as video gambling machines. Because of this, situating myself in Melbourne was ideal for the kind of study I wanted to do. In turn, because I was situated in Melbourne, a large part of my film is about showing some of the live music venues.

Before presented Melbourne’s live music night life, I assembled an opening sequence that serves as a visual welcome to the city and foreshadows the film content. I deliberately chose image content and the soundtrack to convey a sense of place, but after storyboarding the composition and motion in each clip, I discovered that by following artistic instincts, subconscious decisions also help set up the film narrative.

The film opens with a static black title card that reads, “A film by Gretchen Wood” with an angular one note guitar riff to create anticipation in a darkened room. The song is “Swampland” by The Scientists, the very same song that led me to this study, and the riff mimics the tick-tick-tick of a clock or metronome. That first big power chord from the lead guitar launches the viewer into a sun drenched streetscape that vanishes into one distant point at a horizon line that hovers along the lower third of the frame. The sky takes up nearly twice as much space as the land, and the land already appears to stretch into forever. This image is more than a sun-scoured streetscape. This is a clear view down the rails to that unreachable vanishing point that portrays the mind-boggling vastness that defines the continental space. Robert Hughes

called this Australia's "jail of infinite space."<sup>29</sup> The insignificance one feels under such a large sky is quite opposite of the sense of protection I felt under the lush canopied Appalachian foothills of my native north Georgia. An approaching tram sweeps into the frame pulling along the title card from left to right as it zips past. After a pause in the darkened room with the title, the frame slides right, mimicking the movement in the clip showing a new streetscape with windows that reflect a different model tram. The sequence mimics the velocity of traveling through the city, hopping off one tram, transferring to another, always a new view to see, a place to go, a purposeful movement forward.

On a more conscious level, this imagery shows the environment I inhabited during my four months in Melbourne. Not only were the trams a ubiquitous presence visually and sonically, they were a pragmatic way to get around town. The city's network of street rails and overhead electric lattice define Melbourne similarly to how the cable cars define San Francisco. At the time I shot this, the 78 tram on Chapel Street was one of two commuter routes that still ran these class W vehicles.<sup>30</sup> The newer vehicles on other routes offered modern conveniences like air conditioning and wheelchair access. A good many locals along Chapel Street who relied on trams for their commute found these wooden classics to be slow, uncomfortable, and inconvenient. Deodorant was no match for an Australian heatwave, but I chalked that up to the price to pay for Summer people watching on Melbourne's trams. An equally vocal group of locals valued how these class W's maintained an historic sense of place despite their impracticality. I fell in the latter group. Regardless of the brutal heat, the distance to hoist myself up to the first step, and

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<sup>29</sup> Hughes, Robert. *The Fatal Shore*. Random House, 1986. 596

<sup>30</sup> "Melbourne Tram Network ." Public Transport Victoria, Victoria State Government, Jan. 2015, [static.ptv.vic.gov.au/siteassets/PDFs/Maps/Network-maps/Tram-Network.pdf](http://static.ptv.vic.gov.au/siteassets/PDFs/Maps/Network-maps/Tram-Network.pdf).

stinky rider who inevitably stood over my seat with his arm raised to steady himself on the rail, I fell in love with these old trams with their scarred wooden floors, leather seats, and brass fittings. Simply hearing the whirring sounds of the electric motor and clattering rails transport my thoughts to Melbourne.

The opening clip also implies the brutal heat that many abroad associate with Australia. Not only do the characteristic awnings shade the sidewalk, but the brassy light hints at the extreme heat on that stifling 36°C day and reminds me of the title Bill Bryson chose for his collection of Australian travel essays, *In a Sunburned Country*. He nicked the line from “My Country,” a poem by Dorothea Mackellar. She wrote the piece during a spate of homesickness while in London. An early draft appeared in the *London Spectator Magazine* in 1908 under the title “Core of My Heart.” It wasn’t published in Australia until 1911 when the revised work appeared in Mackellar’s rookie anthology *The Closed Door*.<sup>31 32</sup> It survives today as a fundamental piece of the Australian literary cannon for how the ode continues to define the young country’s earliest sense of national identity. Through rich imagery Mackellar portrays the uniquely Australian splendors and challenges of living in the harsh climate that blanket the vast spaces in that remote island continent where North means hot, South means cold, the seasons are backward on the calendar.

I was not at all conscious of creating subtext when I shot this. Instead I was sweating rivers in that crowded tram just as Melbourne’s afternoon peak hour commenced, anxious to get back to my digs in St. Kilda where bay breezes would hopefully cool me down before I found

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<sup>31</sup> Mackellar, Dorothea. “My Country.” *Official Dorothea Mackellar Website*, The Estate of Dorothea Mackellar, 2016, [www.dorotheamackellar.com.au/archive/mycountry.htm](http://www.dorotheamackellar.com.au/archive/mycountry.htm).

<sup>32</sup> Mackellar, Dorothea. “History.” *Official Dorothea Mackellar Website*, The Estate of Dorothea Mackellar, 2016, [www.dorotheamackellar.com.au/history.html](http://www.dorotheamackellar.com.au/history.html).

total relief under a cold shower. I often traveled that canyon of Victorian and Edwardian buildings that housed cafes, pubs, and locally owned shops to visit my friend Julian. Sometimes I stopped in at Greville Records or the fruit and veg shop in Prahran. Julian had tipped me off that they were one of the few that sold black-eyed peas in bulk. I also browsed what my mates called the posh Salvos, an upscale Salvation Army op shop<sup>33</sup> stocked with more desirable vintage items cherry picked from the warehouse and marked up for a hipster clientele and those who wandered down the street after browsing antique and collectable treasures at the Chapel Street Bazaar.

Continuing with my tram motif, the film segues into footage I shot from the 112 tram on Brunswick Street in Fitzroy. Newer trams ran on this line, mostly air conditioned, but the real draw to this line was that I could catch the 112 at its Park St terminus in St. Kilda and ride it north to the South Melbourne Market, across the Yarra River, past Southern Cross Station, through the CBD, and into the suburbs Fitzroy and Carlton without having to transfer. I also frequently caught the 96 into the City. A good portion of the route south of the river followed an old light rail line through a strip of green space along Canterbury Road and Albert Park. The scenery was bucolic, but it didn't vary enough to reflect the velocity of urban living. The 112 was slower, subject to the unpredictable traffic, but it better represented the streetscapes on my forays north and placed me in the middle of northern suburbs I most frequented as opposed to the 96 that ran up the western edge of Fitzroy.

I frequently crossed the Yarra to hit shows north of the river, but many Melburnians avoided crossing the river. Although punk originally centered around the Crystal Ballroom in the ornate St. George Hotel in St. Kilda, many young musicians eventually sought more affordable

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<sup>33</sup> Short for "opportunity shop", the British and Australian equivalent of "thrift store."

housing north of the river and built active scenes in Fitzroy, Collingwood, and Carlton. Before they gentrified, venues opened in those neighborhoods. I often rode the 112 up Brunswick Street to the Old Bar or switched to the 86 which traveled a more eastern prong north up Smith Street to catch bands at The Tote, The Grace Darling Hotel, or The Gem.

Next I created a sequence of still photographs and used special effects to pan across them. The images include Flinders Street Station. This is not only a transportation center connecting trams with Melbourne's commuter train system, but it is also a central landmark integral to Melbourne's space identity. It lies on a strip of land between the Yarra and the CBD at the foot of Swanson Street and adjacent to the Princes Bridge, an Edwardian iron and granite arched bridge completed in 1888.

Until the hula hoop clip, the focal point of every of every clip, except two, moves left to right. By diagramming the composition and sequence of motion I discovered a pattern of angular motion until the swirly hula hoops come along to mix it up, mirroring the film's narrative arc about imported Southern musical influences mixing with others in Australia.

I introduce the film's street art motif by panning across a tilted image of the labyrinthine footpaths that wind around and through the once-lawless tunnels under St. Kilda Junction. Footage of street art tags blipping along the train tracks from Footscray continue the linear motion which slowly crossfades into a dreamy gold, rose and purple sunset along the palm-lined Esplanade, St. Kilda's art deco bayside promenade. This segue juxtaposes an art form some would consider urban blight with a natural explosion of vivid color to elevate the spray painted tags to the widely accepted beauty of a sunset.

The street art throughout the city made a profound impact on me. At first one notices the vibrant colors and energetic line quality. The technical control artists used to hastily carved in spray paint these expressive forms under cover of dark astonished me. I took delight in cheeky cartoon faces with ragged teeth and lopsided eyes, soulful renderings of the gate into Luna Park, and psychedelic splashes of color that concealed melting skulls after you looked more closely. These images also became landmarks to help me navigate the city. More than once, an image disappeared under new work or anti-blight painting, and I missed my tram stop. I began setting out on photo safaris to grab images of the best work before they disappeared. I walked laneways in St. Kilda, the CBD, Fitzroy, and Collingwood. I began to believe that in Melbourne, flat white is strictly coffee, not a color for walls.

After the sunset, I drop in in one last daylight clip. The camera pans down street art on a wall along St. Kilda's Piss Alley to a stencil of kneeling military gunner. Piss Alley is the unofficial name that locals use for the smelly laneway. Hardly wide enough for a vehicle to service the back entrances of businesses on Fitzroy, the passageway also served as a cut-through to the shops, cafes, and tram stops on the commercial street. I passed this mural multiple times a day from my digs on Jackson Street right behind Leo's Spaghetti Bar. This imagery in this clip also speaks to the punk rock anti-fascist ethos that united much of the earliest punk rockers and foreshadows the sense of danger that Bruce Milne later says is an attribute in music.<sup>34</sup> As the

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<sup>34</sup> Because of the current debate over gun control in the United States, the use of the word "danger" might incorrectly imply gun violence, but the Australian government reckoned with gun ownership after the 1996 Port Arthur Massacre in Tasmania. That American government has not passed gun control measures as strict as Australia's is a point of frustration for many there who do not understand that the our sense of state cannot resolve whether or not to even govern on this issue. My personal conversations there are compatible with the media sentiments in the link. Barnes, Luke. "Here We Are Again': Australian Media Exasperated by America's Lack of Action on Gun Control." ThinkProgress, 2 Oct. 2017, [thinkprogress.org/australia-reacts-las-vegas-shooting-1110c7cf0af2/](http://thinkprogress.org/australia-reacts-las-vegas-shooting-1110c7cf0af2/).

sequence progresses, it shows the kinds of things I would see as I immersed myself in the Melbourne underground live music scene at night.

The rest of the opening sequence dives into sights from Melbourne nightlife. Sometimes I'd catch the 16 tram past the Balaclava train station and walk almost a kilometer down Hotham St. to the Lyrebird Lounge in Ripponlea or hop off the tram at the station and risk a twenty minute wait on the train to the next station south that was almost adjacent the live music bar. The mural over the stage, a skillful sign painted by Jack Davies that reads "Eat Your Young," makes an ironic comment on how the space serves as a community gathering spot for punk rock pioneers to mentor the coming of age generation as well as a cheeky wink at Australia's cultural cringe.

The still image of the "Made in Australia" tattoo practically flips off cultural cringe. The ginger-headed young man with the tattoo was the gregarious sort, probably more so from day drinking that slipped into night. We met at a show behind Pure Pop Records, in the cue for the dunny. He had noticed my accent and wanted to perform a little Australian pride for the Southern chick. In the context of the film, his eagerness to roll up his sleeve and show off his tatt clearly represents how Australia's national identity is emerging from cultural cringe and takes no guff for being Australian. Like the man's pride in his nationalistic tattoo shows, as well as an ironic read of the "Eat Your Young" painting, pride in things made in Australia is pushing back against cultural cringe.

The next clip of the Mr. Moon Gate at Luna Park can also serve as a metaphor for Australia quite literally illuminating value in its cultural identity. Modeled on the original Luna Park which opened in 1903 on Coney Island, New York, Melbourne's iconic amusement park

opened on Friday the 13th of December 1912.<sup>35</sup> I lived hardly a ten minute walk from those tiny teeth that look as if Mr. Moon could chomp down on those passing through his mouth into the carnival midway, but any time I traveled east to the Lyrebird, the St. Kilda Public Library, or just grocery shopping on Acland St., I had to gawk at the creepy monument to Victorian playtime. According to stories from people who were part of St. Kilda's Crystal Ballroom punk scene, the local punks affectionately also prowled the once dilapidated amusement park. In 1999 the park unveiled a spruced up Mr. Moon gate, and in 2001 reopened after extensive renovation that included restoration and upgrade of historic rides.<sup>36</sup> Inspired by footage of Luna Park in the Rowland S. Howard documentary *Autoluminescent*, I included my own footage of the gate and park rides in the film.

From there the sequence lopes through quick edits of footage mostly shot by Carbie Warbie that portrays the kinds of things I'd see in Melbourne nightlife. The Bitter Sweet Kicks playing a packed house at the Cherry Bar, the jukebox at the Tote, clapping to music, a case of effects pedals for guitar, Kim Salmon on stage in the lurid light of the Old Bar, Spencer P. Jones also at the Oldie, and Billy Pommer Jr. once of the Johnny's but here drumming in the duo the Patron Saints before the red velvet curtain at Cherry. I particularly liked the bar design at Cherry. It was plexiglass painted black on the underside, scratched up with graffiti, and underlit by red light. On busy nights it glowed red across punters shouting up another round of Coopers. On this night, another sleepy Tuesday during the Patron Saints' lengthy residency there, I could capture the bar unobstructed. Really I was there because I was a fan of The Patron Saints' Kim Volkman.

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<sup>35</sup> Dee, Siobhan. "100 Years of Fun at Luna Park!" NFSA - Australia's Living Archive, National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, 7 Dec. 2012, [www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/100-years-fun-luna-park-celebrating-melbourne-icon](http://www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/100-years-fun-luna-park-celebrating-melbourne-icon).

<sup>36</sup> "History." Luna Park Melbourne, Luna Park Melbourne, 2017, [lunapark.com.au/park-info/history/](http://lunapark.com.au/park-info/history/).



I loved how he played, able to let a note hang and wring the soul out of it as well as any blues riff that Keith Richards squeezed out of his Telecaster and just as likely to spontaneously unleash an intensity that gave me goosebumps.

In the next clip, Chris Russell plays the blues differently. I stumbled across his performance on the back patio of Pure Pop because I was intrigued by an Australian musical act that would bill itself as Chris Russell's Chicken Walk. The word "chook" would have been a more commonly Australian to refer to a chicken. His style is more calculated. His performance captures the vocal quality and guitar tones that would resonate with audiences familiar with their source in the Mississippi Delta. Unfortunately I discovered Russell's music late in my stay and missed interviewing him because he was flying overseas to play at the annual Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale, Mississippi. About the time we returned, I would be making my own way to Mississippi. Tragic irony!

The opening sequence wraps up as the chorus in the music bed winds down. A deejay flips through American R&B and soul 45's, the turbaned frontman in the Exotics yowls in synch with one last screeching riff, and a smiling harmonica player finishes a number in front of a reproduction of a vintage Al Green show bill. The last clip shows my friend and St. Kilda music promoter Nick Haines appearing particularly rosy after a Kim Salmon show at the Old Bar. I added this clip purely in homage to his support of my field study. For Nick, not only is he a longtime fan, the show brought back fond memories of Kim singing at Nick's wedding to my Auntie Mame figure, Michelle Nicol, who was equally supportive of my work. After a weeklong heatwave with temps in the high nineties and little access to air conditioning, we emerged from

the sweaty night club to the chilly relief of the cool change. As the saying goes, if you don't like the weather in Melbourne, just wait five minutes - or in this case, five stultifyingly hot days.

## CHAPTER VII

### BRUCE MILNE

No matter how hot, the air in Melbourne rarely felt thick, like the rooms in which Bruce Milne imagines Southern music gets made. He was the first interview for the film. We sat met at the art deco flat that he shares with his wife, musician and graphic artist Adele Daniele. Lighting was a tad tricky with dappled sunlight behind the sofa. It rippled across the background of my shot, but not distractingly so. It lent the shot a subtle degree of psychedelia that I thoroughly approve of. If I had to fumble with my gear with anyone, I'm glad it was with my friend.

The audio was accidentally good as well, best of any interview I have on camera. Something about the microphone set-up didn't satisfy me. I had forgotten to buy a collar mic or the cord was too short or I needed an adapter. Something dumb that I should have anticipated, so I improvised and set the Marantz next to him just out of the shot. It captured the best sound of all my interviews, good room sound, but his voice was much more present and full frequency. I wish I had used that for the rest of my interviews. I always had problems with the collar mic. Before I lost the pea sized spit guard, people would tug at their clothes or gesture extravagantly. After the spit guard disappeared, everyone sounded either too bright, too fried, or too muffled. No Goldilocks problems with the Marantz sound. It was just right, maybe even production quality.

Framing the shot was tricky, too. Bruce was also extraordinarily patient while I figured out how to fit the tripod around his Danish coffee table. Every leg wound up a different length. I remembered the gyroscope in my iPhone, and leveled camera. I didn't like how it was framed. I tilting the camera, but tightening the tilt platform often jiggled the angle. I felt frustrated, but I joked to him about his dubious luck to be my set-up guinea pig. I knew that he has sat for several interviews that involved much more laborious set up. Either that, or they had the set ready when he arrived. Although I was living in a beautifully restored Victorian bungalow that would have provided more than enough visual interest, I wanted to film these people in the spaces they inhabit. Perhaps I missed an opportunity to showcase the space that I inhabited during most of my stay in Melbourne.

Once I framed Bruce in the shot and gave him the heads up about repeating the question and speaking in complete sentences, he spoke candidly about how Australians mythologize the South. By then we had been chatting about my project for a few months. I doubt that I had planted any ideas in his head. After all, he was the guy who initially sparked my curiosity, and the first person to whom I floated the idea of the film. It might even be fair to say that the film started out about Bruce's theory that an element of Australian punk rock emulates the romanticized sound of Southern thick air.

I must acknowledge that he has also played a significant role in promoting that sound of thick air. In addition to his higher profile roles, he also hosted a weekly radio show in 3RRR and produced a couple fanzines, *Inner City Sound* with Clinton Walker, and *Fast Forward*, the cassette zine that included a demo by the Scientists. Between collecting material to share through those media mouthpieces, curating the stock in his popular record shop and providing an

important daytime gathering place for members of the music scene, he had the skinny on the cool new thing from faraway or played an obscure treasure that he scored during record safaris in the States. These activities cemented Bruce's principle role in both reflecting and defining the musical tastes for a generation of Australian punks. When he says, "Largely the music I love comes from the Southern states of America," not only does he speak for himself, he speaks for the generation of Melbourne music fans who came of age during decades spanning from the late 1970s until the late 2000s who credit him for helping to shape their tastes. He has recently returned to music retail as part owner of Greville Records in Prahran and conducts tours of Melbourne punk history and frequently appears as a primary source and pioneering cultural practitioner in various musicological panel discussions and documentary films.

He'd laugh if I ever joked that he's the Bono of Australian rock docs, a ubiquitous figure inserted to add to draw attention to a documentary film, but he definitely speaks with much more authority than prestigious window dressing. Milne's experience with owning a record shop, curating releases for his record label Au-Go-Go, and operating a rock club lent his commentary in my film the gravitas unique to someone who helped shape the music scene I sought to document. He effectively explained how music traveled from the American South during the era when jet travel was still glamorous and international communication via the internet was hardly more than science fiction. A homogenous diet of country artists stuck in 1950s style and MOR hits from overseas frustrated music fans with more adventurous tastes. Savvy deejays bribed pilots and stewardesses to bring them American records. In turn, import record shops became popular because Australian catalogs were limited and record pressings of poor quality. He also provided insight to how the cooler climate encouraged an indoor arts and music culture that

attracted musicians from both Australia and New Zealand. Perhaps I didn't emphasize enough his role as an international musical gatekeeper in the film. Of course I only had the words he spoke on camera to work with, and he would never say such a thing.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CLINTON WALKER

Bruce connected me with his old mate Clinton Walker, the self-described recovering rock journalist. They had known each other since before Walker dropped out of art school. One weekend they met up Brisbane to catch the Saints, the first punk band to make its mark internationally. The gig was a house party. This was during Joh Bjelke-Peterson's authoritarian premiership in Queensland when such gatherings were unlawful. Bruce had been warned, but he thought Clint was exaggerating. Sure enough the Queensland police raided the party with billy clubs and dogs. People scattered. Some dove out of windows. Bruce scrambled to the car and got away with his friends. Clint was at the wheel when a cop pulled them over a mile or so down the road. The officer sneered, "You look like some of those blokes at that punk rock party we just busted up." Nothing else wrong. Taillights all worked. They weren't speeding. They were pulled over for driving while punk. The officer trumped up a suspicion of drunk driving and arrested Clint. "If you really was at that party, then you must be drunk." The police impounded the car, and Bruce found himself on the side of a dark road with no idea where he was and no way to contact anyone except a great aunt who didn't appreciate his plea to come fetch him after her bedtime. Surely he had to have been up to no good if the police were hassling him. The

respectable folk like her didn't yet understand that instead the police in Queensland were up to no good, but she collected her nephew anyway.

Bruce told that story during a visit to Atlanta months after I met up with Walker in his Sydney home. When he had me around for dinner with his family, I had no idea how far those two went back. After the meal, he and I talked over my project in his comfortably appointed backyard writing shed. The expansive desk was piled with books, magazines and CDs, the expected detritus from an active music researcher and freelance writer. He was so insightful, too. He had authored *Buried Country, Stranded: The Secret History of Australia's Independent Music*; and *The Inner City Sound: Punk and Post-Punk in Australia, 1976 - 1985*, an anthology of the punk zine he and Bruce put out. I was elated over how he discussed music with the critical perspective of a cultural historian who was also a cultural practitioner. That he had worked in front of the camera for ABC television reassured me that he'd give a great interview. Then he rolled a spliff. He asked, or maybe stated, "You don't mind?" right as he lit the thing. The interview did not come off as smoothly as I had hoped. Even though I decided there was more light at his kitchen table, I fumbled with the limited lighting. The audio was almost distractingly bad. The video is under lit and grainy. There's even a missing pixel glaring like a white blemish. Worse, what had been succinct observations during our chat in his office became rambling fragments at the kitchen table. Despite those obstacles, I extracted some valuable thoughts.

He explained that Australians absorbed filtered elements from other cultures because they tended to have little faith in their own. This is a classic result of the cultural cringe. Because cultures from elsewhere felt more valid, Australians were more receptive to music from the South. Artists like Louisiana swamp rocker Tony Joe White and Mississippi's Bobbie Gentry



made huge impressions by introducing a soulful and even psychedelic side to country rock that had been absent from Australian radio. Country turned groovy, he said. This signaled the beginning of dangerous sounds were encroaching on Australia's airwaves.

Clinton Walker also talked about how The Cramps enthralled the Australian punk scene. The band emerged from the New York CBGB's punk scene in 1976 dressed like Russ Meyer outlaws. Their stage personae emulated Z-grade film taboos that embraced everything scary, druggy, and kinky that frightened Eisenhower Era America. Credited with launching the psychobilly genre, they derived their snarling, lo-fi interpretation of rockabilly from collecting discarded independent seven inch records from the 1950s and 1960s. Cramps founders Lux Interior and Poison Ivy met in Sacramento, California before arriving in New York where they joined CBGB's early punk scene in 1975. Although they weren't geographically located in the South, much of the material they covered did come from the region. Lux and Ivy were both ravenous record collectors. Musicians like Hasil Adkins from West Virginia, Link Wray from North Carolina, and The Green Fuz from Texas might have languished in obscurity much longer had the Cramps not covered their records. In 1977 the band made another Southern connection when they went to Memphis to record. Additionally Big Star's Alex Chilton helmed the production.

The Cramps had amassed an international underground audience with their first two albums, *Songs the Lord Taught Us* and *Psychedelic Jungle* on Miles Copeland's I.R.S Records by the time the British film *Urgh! A Music War* opened in 1982. The film collected performances from the punk rock, post-punk, and new wave scenes. Unknowingly I was part of an American cult following from the frequent showings in the USA Network's *Night Flight*. I was maybe 15

or 16 when Lux's pale wiry body undulated across my TV screen. The top of his spandex pants was cut off and creeping ever lower while his hips pumped to "I Can't Hardly Stand It," a tune originally recorded by Memphian Charlie Feathers for Meteor Records. Only, I had no idea what the hell I was watching. The ghoulish singer writhed while an aloof woman wearing a tiger stripe leotard, fishnet stockings, and stiletto boots banged on the strings of a big Gretsch guitar. This was everything tantalizingly primal, frightening, rhythmic and forbidden. Even more forbidden when the singer shoved the mic down the front of his pants and mimed sex on stage. I was agog, shocked, mesmerized. I simply could not tear myself away. Who were these people! I had missed the title card, and was too isolated to be part of any music scene where I could get word of mouth information. That electrifying memory eventually propelled me into college radio where I could delve into underground music, but I never learned who was on my family's television until I was working at a used record shop in the early 1990s when a used VHS tape of the concert film came into the store. If the Cramps could affect how I perceived music, I can easily imagine how deeply they rattled musical foundations for the figures in my film. Several of them credit the Cramps for injecting their perceptions of punk music with a distorted Southern backbeat. Hungry for more, they also embraced Memphis's crusader of anti-music, Tav Falco<sup>37</sup> and The Gun Club, a cowpunk band from Los Angeles that emerged during the advent of post-punk.

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<sup>37</sup> "Tav Falco's Panther Burns on Marge Thrasher 1979." YouTube, 27 Aug. 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U-k32L0KcC](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U-k32L0KcC).

## CHAPTER IX

### JO ROBERTS

By the late 1970s, the music of the South had intermingled with enough avant-garde approaches to rock music, that regional transmutations had radically stretched the scope of Southern music far beyond its geographical boundaries. Jo Roberts, however, introduces authenticity into the conversation. At the time of filming she was editor of the weekly Entertainment Guide for the paper. Her job was to know the music that was important to her readers, which included music derived from the South. Her notions of the Southern influence on Australian music involves less transmutation and more authenticity. Although cultural authenticity is a fallacy mired in the chicken-or-the-egg conundrum, she uses the word as a more diplomatic synonym for musical mimicry or the pursuit of purism. To her readers, mimicry carries negative connotations like succumbing to American cultural imperialism and dismisses the passion that purists bring to their craft. They work hard to reproduce the sounds that they hear on records. Often the tyranny of distance limits how often Southern musicians can travel to the remote country to perform, and these mimics offer audiences an opportunity to experience at least a faithful copy of music from a certain genre or by a certain artist. Tribute artists like those devoted to Elvis or the aforementioned Johnny Cash tribute show that Tex Perkins has been touring are quite popular among more mainstream fans while genre purists are part of

underground niche music scenes. The purists are unlikely to experiment with musical synthesis, but tribute artists and mimics do explore music outside of their more lucrative gigs.

Roberts also points out that Australia is not just a consumer in this cultural relationship. The process is really an exchange. She describes an ARIA<sup>38</sup> winning Melbourne blues band Collard Greens and Gravy that took second place at the 2001 International Blues Challenge in Memphis. Although she doesn't key into how a classic Southern fare would not normally pair collard greens with gravy, she cites their authenticity, or rather what I call expert mimicry, as an example of how Australia reciprocates music to the Southern source of the musical export. Even though a stylistically faithful blues band from Melbourne recognized for excellence in Memphis involves little transmutation, it does represent the circular nature of now the South's cultural exports return to the geographical source.

To illustrate the abstract idea of Australian culture giving back to the South, I show a Memphis trolley in the B-roll. Perhaps the film would benefit by clarifying my intended subtext. The clip shows how Memphis Area Transit Authority constructed touristic authenticity of Southern heritage space by importing class W trams from Melbourne. The pictured trolley is one of ten antique Class W2 trams imported from Melbourne.<sup>39</sup> Melburnians visiting Memphis pointed this out before I launched my field study. Unlike the vehicles imported from Portugal, class W's have a wide center door and bumped out driver's perch that doesn't extend across the entire width of the car. This is also the same model tram in the film's opening clip. Also worth

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<sup>38</sup> Australian Recording Industry Association awards are equivalent to America's Grammy Awards. Collard Greens and Gravy were awarded Best Blues and Roots Album in 2001 for their album *More Gravy*. "2001 ARIA Award Winners." All Down Under, Uniquely Australian, 2017, [alldownunder.com/australian-music-aria/2001-aria-awards.htm](http://alldownunder.com/australian-music-aria/2001-aria-awards.htm).

<sup>39</sup> Ehrlich, Peter. "Memphis, Tennessee." World.nycsubway.org: Memphis, Tennessee, NYCSUBWAY.ORG, 2012, [www.nycsubway.org/wiki/Memphis,\\_Tennessee](http://www.nycsubway.org/wiki/Memphis,_Tennessee).

noting, the Melbourne tram remade into Memphis trolley 553 is the last appearance of the tram motif in the film, meant to reinforce the circular nature of cultural exchange.<sup>40</sup>

A more obvious example of how Australia reciprocates music that Roberts did not cover is ACDC, Australian rock 'n' roll heroes and perhaps the biggest global music export. I allude to ACDC in a couple of the early B-roll montages. During the Patron Saints' soupy blues jam at Cherry, I pan down ACDC Lane and switch between the happenings inside and my panel's introductions. As I transition out of that segment, I pan up from the door at Cherry to a poster of Angus Young. Even if one doesn't recognize Young as the hard rocking lead guitarist for ACDC, perhaps the viewer remembers that the club is on ACDC Lane and understands that ACDC is a household name among rockers across the U.S. Every record shop with a rock 'n' roll section stocks ACDC. Rocker kids in Mississippi wear their jerseys to music festivals, the kind of place you would wear your coolest t-shirt. I even picked up a bootleg ACDC lighter at a truck stop in Batesville, Mississippi. Hip underground rock bands cover their songs, while their earliest fans are grandparents. The Australians' enduring impact on American rock 'n' roll resonates across a wide spectrum of age and class, and is so deeply woven into the American rock 'n' roll textile of identity that fans can easily forget their Australian identity.

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<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, trolley number 553 pictured in the film caught fire on April 17, 2014 resulting suspension of the vintage trolley service in Memphis. Brown, George, and Mike Suriani. "Another MATA Trolley Goes Up In Flames." WREG.com, Tribune Broadcasting, 7 Apr. 2014, 5:40 PM, [wreg.com/2014/04/07/mata-trolley-goes-up-in-flames/](http://wreg.com/2014/04/07/mata-trolley-goes-up-in-flames/).

## CHAPTER X

### KIM SALMON

Not only is Kim Salmon an Australian punk pioneer through his work in Perth with the Cheap Nasties and his best known and most influential band, The Scientists, he misunderstands how to replicate a fragmented version of Southern music to create new sounds that helped define his influential band. In the other, he tells about how he showed an iconic Memphis musician how to do a guitar riff credited to a Memphis rockabilly pioneer.

The Scientists frontman invited me to shoot the interview in his home the northern suburb of Faulkner. I had never traveled that far north by train. Gentrification in the communities that were havens for musicians and artists had priced him out of the rental market. He wasn't particularly wild about the neighborhood, a strip of single story industrial sterility and red brick box apartments that bore as much character as the migrant hostels from where most everyone's ancestors first landed - to their dismay. No palm trees, cheeky street art, or cafes serving up flat whites to a bleary eyed creative community. He was a casualty to Richard Florida's broken promises as the high demand to live in the spaces that Melbourne's creative communities inhabited priced out the denizens that reinvigorated those spaces. He felt it so acutely that in August before our meeting that he wrote about his frustration over diminishing pay for working musicians for The Age, and made a few waves demanding pub owners to pay for his services as

readily as they would pay the beer vendor.<sup>41</sup> Hence the homogeneous but affordable digs in what he felt was Woop Woop suburbia.

Once I pinpointed his flat, we commenced the interview. Thankfully set up was painless and the collar mic worked, for once. Unfortunately I wasn't able to adjust the shot quickly enough to capture Salmon's fingers when he demonstrated how he was incorrectly bending notes down, but his fragmented knowledge from not being able to see a blues musician correctly bend the note up led him to sound that has since helped set apart the Scientists as a defining act during the second wave of punk during the early 1980s. They were every bit as confrontational as Nick Cave and Rowland S Howard's Birthday Party but more soulful. Evidently he had learned how to correctly bend notes by the time Milne heard a sweaty and wet Slim Harpo groove in the Scientists' material.

The swampy quality to the Scientists' music illustrates Milne's comments about the mythology of thick air. Milne described a sound that evoked air so hot and thick that it was difficult to breathe. In particular he named Excello Records in Nashville who included on their roster Slim Harpo of "King Bee" fame, Warren Storm, and Lazy Lester who recorded the namesake for New Orleans' Ponderosa Stomp Festival. Long rumored to be the compiler of the multi-volume bootleg LP series that collected songs that the Cramps covered, he heard in "I Can't Hardly Stand It" by Charlie Feathers, Little Willie John's primal classic "Fever," and especially in Jody Reynolds' steamy rockabilly ballad "Fire of Love." The men who recorded these these artists artfully miked the room to capture the exact kind of reverb and echo that Milne speaks about in the film. One can hear similarly thick air on *Blood Red River*, the title track for

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<sup>41</sup> Salmon, Kim. "Spare a dollar for the maker, music doesn't pay for itself" *The Age*, Aug. 10, 2011 pg 17. Retrieved from Lexus Nexus Oct 6, 2017.

the Scientists first full length LP for Milne's Au-Go-Go label. The a slow and sexy blues rhythm reverberates creating a primal tension with the angular urgency in Salmon's backwards bent notes. The tempo and dynamics invoke danger prowling in the darkness, and are compelling listening.

Salmon also talked about how deeply Alex Chilton's work on Big Star's *3rd/Sister Lovers* and his solo album *Like Flies on Sherbert* (sic) affected him. Produced by Jim Dickinson during chaotic sessions at Ardent Studios in Memphis, both albums display Chilton's increasing disillusionment and cynicism after the commercial failure of Big Star and the death of Big Star co-founder Chris Bell. Salmon, and Milne, were among those who found compelling beauty in both Chilton's fearless expression of an anguished man on *Sister Lovers* and his truculent man on *Like Flies* who plays like he has nothing left to lose. Jim Dickinson produced both titles. Despite Chilton's efforts to play as intentionally bad as possible, Chilton's brilliance shines through. Dickinson's job was to mine the brilliance from chaotic shambles and stay true to Chilton's rebellion against musical convention. Salmon talks about hearing the anarchy he heard in the music. He also cites Chilton's 1978 single "Bangkok" backed with a cover of The Seeds' "Can't Seem to Make You Mine." Salmon says in the film, "That sounds like punk rock too me. That's what punk rock should be." Adding yet another variation to notions of what constitutes Southern music, this Memphis musician picked up New York punk rocker Arto Lindsey's confrontational concepts from time spent in that city's punk scene and incorporated them in his Southern boogie woogie and swamp pop to create a proto-punk sound that is recognizably Southern yet as angrily deconstructed as punk rock. Essentially, Alex Chilton brought punk South and in turn inspired Australian punk musicians to write songs with a Southern funky groove.



That Southern inflection in Australian punk led Kim Salmon to spend a few weeks with Jim Dickinson, the producer responsible for two of his favorite records, Big Star's *Third/Sister Lovers* and Alex Chilton's *Like Flies on Sherbert*. In his story about showing Dickinson how to pull off a Paul Burlison string pinch, he departs from his largely transmuted treatment of Southern music to return a faithfully recreated guitar technique to a man who could have easily picked it up from someone closer to home. After all, Burlison came from Memphis and showcased the technique on records like "Train Kept A -Rollin'" during his time in the Rock 'n' Roll Trio. Dickinson was quite surprised to learn it from "that guy from down under." This is yet another instance I found of Australians reflecting their affection for Southern music back to the South.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

I set out to create a film that portrayed musicians who associate the music of the American South as a positive influence on their work, although at times I feel like I unintentionally created a visual rock 'n' roll travelogue. I relied on my interviews to tie Australian punk and underground music to the South. I collected stories to illustrate the different ways music traveled to Australia, before the internet gave global music fans instant access through a few keystrokes on a computer connected to the internet. I am pleased to report that my film has resonated well among the Melburnians I have spoken to since it went live on the Southern Documentary Project's Vimeo channel. I portrayed the abstract topic of cultural cross-pollination in a well paced and meaningful way. I employed artistic instinct to sustain viewer interest through manipulated visuals. Following these instincts also added visual subtext. Lastly, I supported my observations with a soundtrack of almost all Australian made music. The only exception is Jim Dickinson's performance on the Thacker Mountain Radio Hour.

*Chinese Whispers* showed not only how Australian punk music relates to the music of the South, but also how it reflects Southern music back into the world. As with the parlor game, sometimes the transnational interpretation retains much of the original sound, and sometimes fragmentary perception transmutes the sound into something much different. Chris Russell's

Chicken Walk and Jo Roberts' discussion about the Australian blues band Collard Greens and Gravy are examples of how Australian musicians can capture details that ring true to Southern listeners. Salmon's story about string pinching while jamming with the Dickinson family also illustrate this. Meanwhile, in his earliest work with the Scientists, Salmon's fragmented knowledge of how to play the blues yielded punk innovations that traveled back to the Pacific Northwest where major grunge bands cite his work as a top influence. So does cultural synthesis from the "bits of this and bits of other things" that Walker describes.

While music from all points in the American South resonate among Melbourne's music fans, I found that the ways that Memphis musicians married punk with rhythm and blues particularly affected many musicians and fans. In particular, Alex Chilton's recordings from the mid to late 1970s offered new ways to think about music. This revelation warrants deeper study of how Australians mythologize Memphis music. Not only would this continue the conversation about the the cultural seeds that Bruce Milne planted when he began releasing music by Tav Falco's Panther Burns, compilations of Memphis garage music, and (supposedly) the collections of songs that the Cramp covered, but such a study could also explore current exchanges between Memphis and Australia like why the most overseas attendees of the annual Goner Fest weekender come from Australia. Over the 14 year history of the small music festival, consistently the most international festival-goers have traveled the furthest. This would be a valid question to investigate if I expanded my study beyond musical exports in pre-internet era.

This work also raises questions beyond musical comparison between the American South and Australia. Principally, striking similarities between mythologies involving the ANZAC Spirit and Lost Cause ideology deserve further examination. Both mythologies are a means to

compensate for the cultural shame from a history checkered with exploitation and defeat. Both detour from historical fact in their glorification of their ancestors' service to country. Both also construct a nationalism that emphasizes whiteness in their cultural identities and perpetuate an undercurrent of racism in their cultures. Conversely, the South has engaged in a sense of exceptionalism that is absent from Australian cultural criticism. Reasons behind these phenomena would also yield interesting scholarship.

Personally, my study has answered many of the questions about why I felt so at home during my visits to Melbourne. I discovered a similar sense of underdog history and mutual exoticization of our cultures. It showed me how organizing the music community can persuade local government to better support the arts to supplement livability in an urban setting. Since my return, I have also found that the street art in Melbourne has affected my own visual art. Through that work and this study, I too perform as a transnational carrier of cultural commodities. In the words of Jo Roberts, I take it in, but I give back as well.

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## APPENDIX

## SOUNDTRACK TO THE FILM CHINESE WHISPERS

1. "Swampland" The Scientists *Blood Red River* (Au Go Go Records, 1983)
2. "Volk Broke String Opus" The Patron Saints (Live at the Cherry Bar, 2012)
3. "A Good Parasite Won't Kill It's Host" Kim Salmon And The Surrealists *You're Such a Freak* (Half A Cow Records, 1997)
4. "Ten Wheels For Jesus" Beasts of Bourbon *The Axeman's Jazz* (Big Time Records, 1984)
5. "Food Song" Chris Russell (Live at Pure Pop Records, 2012)
6. "Clementine" Spencer P. Jones (Live @ Cherry Rock, 2011)
7. "Between the Raindrops" Spencer P. Jones (Live @ Northcote Social Club, 2010)
8. "Non Stop Action Groove" Kim Salmon And The Surrealists *Non Stop Action Groove* (Red Eye Records 1992)
9. "Blood Red River" The Scientists *Blood Red River* (Au Go Go Records, 1983)
10. Track 07 The Scientists *Live at the Venetian Room* (1983)
11. "Graveyard Train" Beasts of Bourbon *The Axeman's Jazz* (Big Time Records, 1984)
12. Unnamed blues solo The Patron Saints (Live @ Cherry Bar 2012)
13. "Cuckoo Blues Jam" Chris Russell (Live @ Pure Pop 2012)
14. "(What Can I Do To Change) Your Mind" Spencer P Jones And The Escape Committee *Sobering Thoughts* (Aztec Music 2010)

## VITA

Gretchen LaBudde Wood is a native of Atlanta born in 1967. She earned a Bachelors of Arts in Studio art at Beloit College with a concentration in ceramic sculpture in 1989. While at Beloit, she also began writing about music and hosted a program called *Gretchen's Greenhouse: a terrarium of hot and humid new music* on the college's 130 watt radio station 90.3 WBCR - FM. Her lifelong interest in underground rock 'n' roll blossomed here. In 1987 she interned at 688 Records in Atlanta and after graduation she worked at Wax 'n' Facts, an influential new and used record shop in Atlanta's Little Five Points that is co-owned by DB Records founder Danny Beard. There she helped manage the used record stock and immersed herself in the local Redneck Underground music scene which raised deeper questions about her Southern identity.

In 1993 Wood moved to Athens, Georgia where she enrolled in journalism classes at the University of Georgia and hosted *Dirt Roads and Honky Tonks* and *Who Put the Bomp* on the university's student run radio station WUOG 90.5 FM. In 1995 she won DJ of the Year. In 1996 she began traveling to the Austin Record Fair in Texas and the WFMU Record Fair in New York City. At these record shows, she met the influential Australian underground music entrepreneur Bruce Milne. From 1998 to 2001 she worked in the Southeastern office of Koch Entertainment, a music and video distributor. As music streaming began to undermine music media sales, she transitioned into part time music writing for local publications including *Flagpole*, *Creative*

*Loafing*, and *Stomp and Stammer*. From 2001 to 2004, she owned her own production ceramics studio. In 2006 she began producing the monthly music podcast *Hanging on For Mercy* for the Garagepunk.com daily podcast blog from 2006 to 2009.

In 2010, Wood enrolled in the University of Mississippi's graduate program in Southern Studies where she reconciled her Southern identity and her twenty-plus years of experience in the music business with her fascination with Australia and embarked on a cultural comparison between Australian underground rock and the music from the South. In 2011 she presented papers on this topic at the Popular Culture Association in the South and the American Culture Association's and the Austrian Association for American Studies annual conferences in New Orleans and Salzburg, Austria respectively. *Southern Cultures* journal published her photo essay *Outback Elvis: Riding with the King in Parkes, Australia* in their Spring 2013 issue. In 2015 The next year she produced a music video for a solo project by Midnight Larks front-woman Sasha Vallely. The year after that, Wood began custom painting musical instruments. Currently, she continues photographing the music scene in Atlanta and is working on a series of abstract paintings influenced by psychedelic illustration and graphic street art.