

TRANSCRIPT

Sound As Ever (Australian Music Vault Podcast) Episode 2 Now, That's Punk!

Music: Paul Kelly – Before Too Long

Welcome to Sound as Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast produced by young content producers and radio makers interested in exploring stories and issues in the Australian Music scene. This episode focusses on punk rock in Australia. What does it stand for, what does it mean, particularly in the current Australian music scene. This episode was produced by Erin Dick and Paul Waxman.

Sound: A pub scene

Paulie Stewart: It all started off. We were supposed to do one gig, and one gig only. That was supporting a local Melbourne band called the Cosmic Psychos. They had to pay off some parking fines and they needed a support band. A group of guys got together and we said “we’ll be the support band” and because it was at the Port Melbourne Hotel we said “well, let’s call ourselves the Painters and Dockers” which was the name of the big union down there at the time. While we were playing, and this is a true story, a guy jumped the fence with an axe and started chopping up the mixing desk, cause he hated our sound so much and somebody saw that and freaked out and rang the police, so four divvy vans of Police arrived. Now, at the Painters and Dockers Pub they only had one rule. You could take drugs, you could have handguns, you could do whatever you like but the Police weren’t allowed on the premises, so when all the police tried to get in, the real Painters and Dockers started fighting them. Out in front of me there was just this scene of mass chaos of people fighting, there was beer going everywhere, there was vomit, there was blood and I stood up there and I went, ‘this is what I want to do for the rest of my life’.

Music: The Saints – I’m Stranded

Narration: You’re listening to Sound as Ever, I’m Erin, I’m Paul and we wanted to know more about the punk aesthetic, particularly in Australia, both in the 1980s and now. We’ve heard about the Sex Pistols and The Ramones, and about the Saints, The Scientists and Radio Birdman, and how they helped start a revolution in Australian music. So we wanted to investigate further. Here’s Paulie Stewart, on starting the Painters and Dockers in 1982.

Paulie: Well g’day everybody, this is Paulie Stewart from the Painters and Dockers and I’m one of the original members of the band. We’ve probably had about 30 people come through the band now over the years. Never paid the guys’ parking fines too by the way.

Clare Moore: Hi, I’m Clare Moore. I’m the drummer from the Moodists and also Dave Graney and the Coral Snakes. At school I didn’t do a lot of learning. But I went to a Catholic school and there was a nun there who was quite young and she started this thing called Rock Mass. So she got rock musicians in and rather than teach people classical music she wanted all the girls to learn how to play bass and guitar and drums. So she was really ahead of her time.

Narration: So, what did it really mean to be a punk?

Music: Painters and Dockers - Die Yuppie Die

Clare: I don’t know, we were just trying things out. We weren’t schooled in how to write songs or play guitar or anything. We just kind of banged it out.

Paulie: The thing was before punk was you had to know how to play music. With punk, you didn't have to play music. We couldn't play music for the first 3 or 4 years we were playing, we would just make noise.

Narration: Clare Moore tells us her perspective on being a musician in Melbourne during the Seaview Ballroom scene.

Clare: Well the scene was really close, like I said at the Seaview Ballroom, we pretty much went there every night of the week, there were bands on, it was just great. It was like a playground for people in their 20s, it was awesome.

Paulie: Probably the most punk place you could go to in Australia when it all broke was Queensland because they had Joh Bjelke-Petersen in power and he was really suppressive. But the local station up there ZZZ, I reckon that's the first time I heard the Sex Pistols and the Clash and Joy Division, and a million bands. It was like the radio of the resistance.

Sound: Archive audio from 4ZZZ - You're listening to 4ZZ FM in Brisbane bringing you stereo FM rock on a frequency of 105.7 Megahertz. While some people may not enjoy some of the material we put to air, we certainly don't deny them the right to switch us off. To attempt to impose limitations or restrictions on public broadcasting, is to seriously threaten a fundamental liberty, that of free speech.

Paulie: I got well aware of bands from Queensland, but we toured a lot. So, we'd go to Adelaide and play, there was a big punk band there that were Exploding White Mice and then we'd go over to Perth and play with The Jackals over there. Even up in Darwin there'd be punk bands and in Brisbane, the Voodoo Lust and in Sydney, the Screaming Tribesmen. Yeah, there was a real great scene.

Clare: I did find after the Seaview Ballroom scene I went to England and when I came back unfortunately I did realise there weren't many women playing as instrumentalists in bands. That took a long time to kind of happen again, which was annoying cause it's the sort of thing that if you don't see people doing it you often drop off and stop doing it. So a lot of the women who were playing when I was younger just stopped, went on and did something else.

Narration: Historically, punk was a spontaneous combustion of sound relaying the political discontent of a nation. People wanted change and punk artists were on board. The scene was about the music, but also about discontent and the potential for change.

Music: Painters and Dockers – Kill Kill Kill

Clare: When people look back at punk that happened in the 70s they often will have a photograph of someone with a mohawk right? Or wearing tartan or chains or having lots of piercings. Really, in my day, if someone had come into a gig dressed like that, everyone would have fallen over laughing. That was some kind of newspaper's idea of punk.

Paulie: The real punk I liked, when I went to the Seaview Ballroom which was the home of punk in Melbourne, the real guys I liked weren't the guys in the uniform of the mohawk, the black leather jacket and drinking Jack Daniels, it was the guy in the wedding dress, I thought 'wow, now THAT is punk.'

Narration: So here on Sound As Ever, we wanted to know, what is punk in Australia's contemporary music scene? What does it sound like? What does it look like? How does it feel? What does it say about who we are? There are many new acts popping up in the

Australian music scene that might not sound like punk, but are carving paths of their own and fighting for a cause that'll make you say... now THAT's punk.

Grace Kindellan: I'm Grace Kindellan I play guitar and sing in Wet Lips with Jenny McKechnie and Georgia Maggie.

Birdz: Hey what's up people, this is Birdz from Bad Apples Music, proud Badtjala man.

Simona Castricum: My name is Simona Castricum and I'm a musician, DJ, producer and I'm an architecture academic.

Grace: Wet Lips started in 2012 in the lounge room of our sharehouse. I met Jenny at uni and we bonded and then decided we'd start a punk band together after seeing a bunch of bands at the Tote, including, I think it was Beat Disease. We were all going to see gigs 3 or 4 nights a week together, and we decided we could do what we were watching lots of men do.

Birdz: Music was always such a huge thing for me. I grew up in a small town in Katherine, so music was really like a window to the outside world. There wasn't much happening where I was. And so, when I first got introduced to hip hop was through Tupac, and all these different artists, I just gravitated towards it straight away and I could really just identify with like finally felt like this was a medium or something that I could really express myself and just be really honest and open. I think it just gradually, normally, as probably for most people, went from being such a fan to 'oh hey, I think I could probably do this myself'.

Simona: I was studying architecture, and I'd have much rather been a musician. Part of me didn't think I could live as the musician I wanted to be because I wasn't out as trans, or I was trying to come out as trans I think. The main reason I was interested in the rave scene and into techno was this love of electronic music that started as a young kid, a very young kid. I'm talking about 4 years old, being into everything from the Human League to Sylvester, Pseudo Echo or Simple Minds, or Giorgio Moroder. There was this spirit of electronic dance music of a pop sensibility to that too, and that sound of the late 80's was something that stuck with me. But I think too my trans identity was stuck there with it as well, so that sound was just a place that I always came back to because it was a part of my childhood that I never got to experience that I never got to be part of as it happened. I think musically I always go back to that reference point.

Narration: To some, punk might sound like rowdiness, screaming and anarchy, but in many cases, punk is more than just a sound. Genres like hip hop and dance, can reflect the attitude of punk, without sounding like the typical punk sound.

Grace: Sonically, I suppose you could relate our music to the Australian punk music lineage in its rawness, its roughness. Really, our music started as something we could grab hold of and use to express what we were feeling, to express our anger. Every time that we step on stage or step into a recording studio, every time our friends who are women and queer people and gender nonconforming people and trans people, every time they step on stage or step in a recording studio, it's an act of protest.

Music: Wet Lips – Can't Take it Anymore

I played the Wet Lips record to my girlfriend's family on the weekend and her Mum was like, "Yeah, nah, this isn't punk" and I was trying to talk about why it would be considered punk. I think as a disclaimer I don't know if these broad genre based terms are really relevant anymore, particularly in an age where you could be listening to a song that would be considered punk and then immediately on the internet you can listen to a hip hop song, and then an R'n'B song, and then a classical song.

Music: Birdz – Rise ft. Jimblah

Birdz: Yeah, I mean it's funny, I have to be honest, I never really thought about it too much but I think, to me, the term "punk" has always meant or means to me, kind of going against the grain, or rebelling in a sense. And just not conforming to society norms or that kind of stuff, and there's pressures every day to be a certain way, especially as a black person in Australia, that's a daily 24/7 thing. And I think hip-hop is definitely, like I said it's been that platform to rebel and speak out, to be proud and to be uninhibited.

Grace: When we started going to see gigs we were seeing a lot of male dominated garage bands and punk bands. For us to then go see Terrible Truths and see Rani and Stacey's beautiful complex guitar playing, then to see a band like Hissy Miyaki (who are now Glow) playing was really important. And I remember going to see UV Race and I'd only ever heard their records and I saw that there was two women in the band, and that was so awesome for me, and I remember going up to them afterwards and talking to them and being really excited by seeing women participate in this genre of brash and free music was really inspiring. To be honest, the classic bands like Bikini Kill and Slater Kinney were really inspiring to me. I'd heard of Bikini Kill and I bought their CD when I was 15, and I listened to it, and I didn't really like the sound of it at first. It was so different to everything I'd heard. But then I listened to it on repeat over and over again and it made so much sense to me.

Music: Bikini Kill - Rebel Girl

It was really cool to hear an angry woman and a woman who didn't care how she came across. And it was really cool to hear someone saying "No, I'm not going to listen to this masculine bullshit. I'm not going to give into the forces that are telling me to be quiet and polite and feminine, I'm just going to yell".

Simona: I probably went down the more synth-pop route, because I was interested in the idea that pop was actually quite a punk thing.

Music: Simona - Still

The idea of punk was to go against the grain, 30 years had transpired since then and underground pop just seemed like this thing that people didn't want to have anything to do with, and it was something I wanted to have a lot to do with it. So I started to write these lyrics and I wasn't sure what I was singing about at all until about ten years when I came out as transgender and started singing this music and I understood that I was signing about this need to change or to transition and become myself. But there was this sense of isolation and feeling completely lost in those lyrics, now when I listen back to them they make complete sense to me. But when I was standing on stage delivering these lyrics in the early 2000s it didn't make sense to me and it probably didn't make sense to anyone in the audience. Who is this person presenting this music, presenting themselves as masculine and singing about these issues. When I was standing on a stage as a transfeminine person it certainly made sense to me and it probably made sense to some people in the audience. So I not only started to connect with my music, I started to connect with an audience. One of the big things about punk was the DIY ethos, and in the late 90s it was when music software became ubiquitous and easy to swap with students or download illegally and all this kind of stuff. There was a lot of that happening.

Sound: Synth Beat

So, you could get a drum machine as a piece of software and you could get a sequencing piece of software and you could start make your own music so the language that I was into

at that time was writing these techno sequences which also happened at that time translated into architectural projects so I was kind of killing two birds with one stone.

Music: El DeBarge – Real Love

I would consider techno and house music as a considerably punk thing. Detroit techno was kind of made out of, it was its own DIY startup industry. The roots of house, techno and disco are in black, latino, gay and trans clubs. But I think those origins are very underground and punk and DIY.

Narration: Punk has always been a musician's and a punter's medium to rebel against a repressive regime or authority figure, that isn't too different in genres like hip hop and dance. With both these genres having their origins in smaller voices fighting for representation, these genres have a surprisingly punk attitude to them.

Grace: From the very beginning it was about challenging the idea of what a punk band is in Melbourne. We didn't really realise at the time how difficult it would be. We spent about three years learning how to be a band and trying to seek approval from our male peers. And we realised over those years that we would never really get approval from those men. So since then, Wet Lips is about taking up space, and form our own community, because we're never going to get approval from the male punk scene. So we want to start our own community and continue to build that.

Birdz: Well, I think there's been people and there's been artists, like particularly black artists, and, Aboriginal people really pushing in the arts for a long time, longer than 5 years ago. People like WireMC, Local Knowledge, a mentor of mine, DK, Fred Leone from Queensland, all these people and there's so many more, have been working for such a long time, and laid a really strong foundation. And even Briggs and Trials, in their careers, being black people, like proud black fellas, have really worked really hard to get an audience, to get people to listen, and then finally getting to a point where it's like 'this is the time'. I think without all that background or without all that foundation, it would still be a long way behind. But I think we're definitely moving in the right direction now because of all those people that came before me. It's just the categorisation, and the labelling and 'Indigenous or Aboriginal Hip Hop', and some artists claim that and that's cool, and I've got a lot of support from the community and different community radio stations, who've really supported my voice and I'd be nothing without them and they continue to support me but I just think from an industry perspective, that's super limiting. Don't judge my work as 'Oh this is Indigenous Hip Hop, so it's over here in the too hard basket and we're just going to talk about politics, or how he's such a good black fella', judge it like, you would judge my peers and my non-Indigenous peers, like how good is the music, really?

Simona: I think that gender-non conforming musicians have existed forever, and I think a lot of gender non-conforming musicians have existed in their bedrooms.

Music: Simona - Triumph

It's been recently that we've had the confidence, the ability, and the community and the connection to be able to come out of the bedroom and do that on stage. Being on stage as a gender nonconforming person, in my sense in the late 80's and early 90's, you had to be a very specific kind of entertainer. You had to be a very specific performer. You had to make people laugh, what are people laughing at? I didn't want to get up and make people I laugh, I wanted to get up and make people listen to my music. I didn't want to be perceived in the sense that a cis-gender audience is so used to seeing us. Now whether that was drag or whether that was comedy or what, there's so much more that we could be, we can be anything we want to be up there.

Narration: Change is pretty hard to achieve when you're alone. Punk has always been about a deviant culture questioning an oppressive system, together, musicians, audiences and communities. A punk attitude is palpable in the industry itself, with many movements appearing throughout Australia's music scene such as the Thirty Days of Yes a project aimed at supporting the LGBT+ community through the marriage equality debate, or Girls Rock, a movement encouraging young female musicians to play rock music.

Music: Wet Lips - Here if You Need

Grace: Going from being a spectator of something to a participant in something is a really radical change in your world view, and it can really make someone more able to fight for more vulnerable people or take charge of their own lives. Whether it's a young kid hearing Briggs's songs going "Yeah, I can do that, I can be a hip-hop artist".

Music: Birdz - Black Lives Matter

Birdz: There's different movements, coming through the hip hop now, like with House Of Beige and REMI and that, obviously Bad Apples and AB Original. Punk as well, to me, is like, there's people and there's pioneers that make the hits, for the people that are coming through, and are willing to do that, it's bigger than them and it's like there's a cause and there's a movement, that everyone's kind of striving for. I think people in the hip hop community in Australia, the listeners, I've seen at shows and online that there's a shift, there's a massive shift in the way people are thinking. And the people that aren't shifting well they're idiots and they're just staying in the same spot and they're going to get left behind. It's definitely getting there now. With people like AB Original, Briggs and Trials, who I think have just shifted the landscape and after that record [Reclaim Australia] came out, I feel like it made it so much easier for artists like myself to just be myself and be completely honest, doors kind of opened because of that, and songs like Black Lives Matter got a lot of love I feel, because people like AB Original, were really at the head of that movement and I think a song like Black Lives Matter would never have got played on the radio 5 years ago.

Simona: It's not only just about musicians, it's also about punters. It's a relationship that's on either side of that stage. It's also a relationship back into the industry as well. For us to really come up in this we need to be part of all aspects, we need to be a part of labels, we need to be a part of the media. So visibility is important, platforming is really important.

Grace: Punk is challenging structures in society. For me, all art is political, every time someone picks up an instrument or makes something it's a political act. We like to talk about music in a free and expressive way. It's a matter of me being culturally conditioned to listen to music, to think that I am good enough to make music. Even for people to hear the voices of women and queer people and LGBTIQ people and Indigenous people, that is super powerful.

Birdz: On the one hand, as an artist, I feel like we should be given the freedom to create what we want to create, but you also have, at a certain point you have a responsibility, to your listeners, and to be vocal. It's a beautiful time in hip hop, now, because there's so many different stories and the face of hip hop in this country, I think, is really changing and it's opening up to different stories and listeners are actually ready to hear a new story because we've kind of heard the same thing for so long.

Simona: What is it like for me to exist on stage? And what is it like for us to walk off that stage and then walk down the street? That's something I would like people to consider.

Grace: We're about really challenging that idea that punk is about nonchalance and not giving a fuck. We are more about wanting a vision of punk and coolness that is not mutually exclusive with passion and caring about other people. One of my favourite feelings is just watching people play music and being in room with all these other people, and letting the sound wash over me and dancing, putting my arms around my friends and feeling like anything is possible. And to me that's what punk is.

Thanks for listening to Sound as Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast. This episode was produced by Erin Dick and Paul Waxman.

Thanks to SYN Media, Supporting Partner of the Australian Music Vault.

Music: Paul Kelly – Before Too Long

END