

SOUND AS EVER –SEASON 1 EPISODE 4 – If This is the Blues, Why do I Feel So Green (Regurgitator)

THE BAND IN A BUBBLE

INTRODUCTION

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the Sound as Ever podcast was made, the people of the Eastern Kulin nations, and pay our respects to their ancestors and elders, past, present and future, and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

MUSIC: *If This is the Blues, Why do I Feel so Green?* by Regurgitator

PRESENTER

Welcome to Sound as Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast created by music industry, journalism, and sound design students at RMIT University. This podcast celebrates iconic pieces of music created by Australians from an array of backgrounds, casting an eye to our country's cultural future.

Please be aware this episode contains some strong language and adult themes.

You're listening to *If This is the Blues, Why do I Feel so Green?* a song released by Brisbane-based band Regurgitator in the year of 2004 as part of their album *Mish Mash!* (spelling) an album which was produced as part of the "Band in a Bubble" project. Framed by this iconic Regurgitator song, this episode of the Sound as Ever podcast will explore the creative merits, failures and ultimate successes of the Band in a Bubble project.

Part reality TV, part social experiment, the Band in a Bubble saw the members of Regurgitator confined in a glass recording studio for three weeks in the centre of Melbourne's Federation Square. They had one objective: record a full album. Individuals could come by and peer into the studio as they worked, or tune into a 24/7 live show on Foxtel's Channel V. Throughout the production of the podcast we were afforded the opportunity to speak to lead singer Quan of Regurgitator.

QUAN YEOMANS

You kind of find your place in, in the industry you're in and ours has always been like, "Don't take yourself too seriously, just have fun with it."

PRESENTER

... producer Magoo, or Lachlan Goold...

MAGOO

All through high school I'd always have to correct the teachers 'cause they would just instantly see Goold and go, "G, O, U, L, D." So I constantly went, "No, it's G, double-O." So from "Goo" came "Magoo".

PRESENTER

... and Band in a Bubble event manager and coordinator, Mark Pope.

MARK POPE

Uh, and I guess you could call me a co-producer.

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PRESENTER

If This is the Blues, Why do I Feel so Green? represents the core of Regurgitator's Band in a Bubble project. Whilst a typical blues rock song at its core, when contextualised within the album and reflected against the band's other works, this album concluding title epitomises the genre-defying, innovative and often unique characteristics of the unorthodox musical group.

QUAN YEOMANS

Uh I think musically this song is influenced by, um, an old blues track that Led Zeppelin covered. It's like written in 1929 and it's, uh-... it was *When the Levee Breaks*, and they kind of rock it up a bit more and have a huge kind of bottom beat underneath it.

MUSIC: *When the Levee Breaks*, by Led Zeppelin (Blues version)

QUAN YEOMANS

And I've always loved-... I grew up listening and, and teaching myself how to play guitar by listening to Led Zeppelin and Hendrix and really have a lot of respect for the blues in the sense that it's not my cup of tea generally, I'm often quoted as saying that, "Blues is the soundtrack to dementia." My, my dad particularly likes that quote. He brings it out all the time.

MUSIC: *When the Levee Breaks* by Led Zeppelin (Led Zeppelin version)

[MUSIC fades]

QUAN YEOMANS

But, um [laughs] I do like that song and I did like the idea of creating a-... like some sort of poetic thing based about relationships and something a little more serious, 'cause a lot of our tunes are a tongue-in-cheek and very kind of crude, and it's nice to kind of try different things even though it may not necessarily be taken seriously...because you have that-... I find it really difficult to expect to be taken seriously when I do a serious kinda song, because I have this kinda backlog of ridiculous lyrics and, you know, crude metaphors. And I've just kind-... you-... you're a little bit pigeonholed as a result of those things that you do in the past. And so when you go to something a little different I think it gets overlooked or its gets kind of criticised for being a bit kind of, uh, contrived or not really "real" or not-... it's so out of character, it doesn't seem right. And I think that, that song probably has a bit of that to it. Um, but yeah. I mean the song is basically just about that feeling you have when you know your relationship is transitioning and you can't really do anything about it.

PRESENTER

Led by vocalist and guitarist Quan Yeomans, Regurgitator were born out of Brisbane in the year of 1999. Bold, often rude, and quite energetic, the band thrived in the post-punk landscape of the mid-90s; their second studio album *Unit*, reaching certified triple platinum status, and winning five ARIA awards.

MARK POPE

One thing I can tell you with Regurgitator, going back to my A&R days at Warner's, there are some bands that you sign with, uh, as an A&R guy where you might have some feedback, might have some suggestions for producers or arrangements or that sorta stuff. With Regurgitator, given the

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unique and prodigious talents of the band led by Quan Yeomans, one thing you do, uh, when you get a band like that is you sign them and then, excuse my French, you get the fuck outta the way.

PRESENTER

Mark Pope doesn't exaggerate. Regurgitator seems to have been afforded free reign on their songs; their catalogue varied with deep, introspective, metaphysical tracks such as *Another Beautiful Story*...

MUSIC: *Another Beautiful Story* by Regurgitator

[MUSIC fades]

PRESENTER

... contrasted by crude, techno anthems such as *I Will Lick Your*...

MUSIC: *I Will Lick Your Arsehole* by Regurgitator

PRESENTER

The Band in a Bubble project found its footing in the early 2000s, a half-decade characterised by a cultural obsession with reality-TV, the advent of online streaming, and the early adolescence of social media.

QUAN YEOMANS

When we first came up the scene would be described as, in my mind, very conservative. A lot of the big bands were like-... it just seemed like it was Barnsy and Farnsy and, you know, really conservative era. Thank God. And particularly in Queensland as well, politically, it was a very conservative time. It's-... sometimes it's those kind of times that really produce interesting acts who are more punk based, more interested in, in doing something a bit sillier or crazier or, you know, against the grain. Which is I think how we felt at the time.

PRESENTER

Lachlan Goold, known professionally as Magoo, is an ARIA winning Australian producer and music academic. He acted as Regurgitator's primary producer throughout the peak of their career, and joined the band during their stint in the Bubble. Having witnessed and experienced the Bubble first-hand, Lachlan was able to provide us with some great insights into the experience.

MAGOO

I think Band in the Bubble probably speaks more to just culture in general at the time. So the-... I think, you know, for me, the internet sort of grew-... that late '90s, early 2000s. And around the sort of early 2000s the, the internet and emailing and-... people were beginning to communicate a lot quicker.

And through all of that I guess reality television was, was kind of becoming quite successful. The actual idea for the Bubble came up before we did *Unit*. They were trying to think of something different to do before they did *Unit*, a, a way to record it. And the manager said, "Oh, why don't we do it in a glass bubble in, uh, Queen Street Mall," in Brisbane. And everyone sort of, you know, laughed it off. Their manager, Paul Curtis, would have lots of wacky ideas, and there were many other wacky ideas at the time.

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MARK POPE

Uh, going further back though I was, uh, headed up the A&R department, which was responsible for finding and signing Australian artists. And one of the bands that we signed was the band Regurgitator out of Brisbane, who went on to have an ARIA award winning album, multi-platinum album, with *Unit* and all the rest of it.

And, I forged a good relationship with Paul Curtis, the band's manager. In 2001 I left Warner, took a year's sabbatical, and came back and started producing the ARIA awards. In that time I was still doing other projects and Paul Curtis approached me about this idea he had. And the idea was for the band to record an album in real time in a public space, where they eat, sleep and basically live and work, for a period of three weeks. And out of it comes an album.

QUAN YEOMANS

The project itself, um, it did evolve, uh, over about a year I think after the instigation of the idea, uh, in saying like, "Let's try this. Let's get it going," and, and Paul really got the thing rolling. So I mean we kind of were thinking about what we were gonna do in there, how we were gonna like proceed, what it would be like to be in there. Imagining these things, mind you. And we just thought, "You know, it's kinda silly to go into a place like that." I mean you don't go to record a studio record, you don't go in cold, because you're on the clock when you're in a studio, there's a lot of stress to get the things down. You wanna be prepared so you do a lot of pre-production work, which is writing the songs, generally arranging them, practising them if you get a chance – although on a lot of occasions this band never did that like [laughs] I mean we went over to Thailand and found this like crazy studio in the middle of the jungle run by "The Beatles of Thailand", this guy who had sold like forty million records or something and just created this incredible studio complex in the middle of this poverty-stricken area just outside Bangkok [INTERVIEWER: Wow]. And we went in and a lot of those songs were written in the morning, me writing the lyrics in a closed room while the other guys were putting down backing tracks and stuff like that. Uh, you know, bass and, and drums. So a lot of this stuff was very off the cuff but this one I think we have a fear that we were gonna be watched constantly and really would have found it difficult to focus.

MAGOO

Musicians like to feel sort of safe and cocooned from the outside world rather than being on display. You're preparing songs to then be put on display so to, to bring the public into that process of songwriting I think would be too confronting for the band.

They had actually demos, which was a new concept for me and for them. We had a bit of a pre-production meeting, but it was not my normal pre-production thing where I'd normally sit with the band for rehearsals-... for an album project I might spend a week with the band in rehearsals where you kind of discuss arrangement, tempos, keys, how we're gonna record it, etc. It was just more, "I've sent the demos, I've probably made some notes that were probably ignored by the band." They sort of didn't really have that traditional way of working.

So it woulda just been, "Hey, let's go in and do this. Set up in the bubble and go." And there was not a lot of-... we didn't, um, trial anything beforehand; "How did the room sound, how did the gear work?" It was really just, "Get in there and go." Which is how we'd done every record beforehand.

MARK POPE

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And did they do it for publicity reasons? No I think so. I think it was a-... I think it was, um, again, led by Quan. It was one of those things whereby they liked to push boundaries, they liked to go beyond the safety of the norm. And in a way that's where creativity lives, out on the ledge.

So they were confident enough in themselves to take on what was in hindsight ahead of its time social experiment, because recording changed dramatically over that time due to digital technology and all that sorta stuff. If it was about publicity then why did they write a song called *I Sucked a Lotta Cock to Get Where I am?* You know?

Like, you know, they, they tested boundaries and that's what I loved about them. And as I said signing them was, was a joy because all I had to do was get out of the way and let 'em do their thing.

[SEGMENT from BAND IN A BUBBLE begins]

MALE 1

Looks like we've got a jewel on our hands.

MALE 2

[unintelligible]

MALE 1

It's a jewel. [laughs]

MALE 2

There was a lead somewhere. Oh okay.

MALE 3

You gonna, you gonna play guitar mate?

MALE 1

Yeah cool. [electric guitar noise]

MALE 2

Yep. Three.

MALE 1

Awesome.

MALE 2

Somewhere, I think there's four.

MALE 1

That's great. Awesome.

[SEGMENT ends]

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MAGOO

There was a song, *Shopping Mall Soul*, where they decided to get people from outside to do the guitar solo. So there was a DI box outside so people could come in, plug their guitar in, and I would use an amp simulator to get a guitar sound in the studio. And we could get people from outside playing on the song.

[SEGMENT from BAND IN A BUBBLE begins]

MALE

So there's a drum fill, and then you're in. Alright? Okay.

MUSIC: *Shopping Mall Soul* by Regurgitator

MALE

Okay, here it is. Okay.

[GUITAR SOLO begins]

MAGOO

So that would sort of always buoy the team. Everyone would get a bit sort of excited, it'd be something different. So I guess it was those kinda things that kept us going throughout the process. And Jabba, Jabba was good at taking the attention away from us.

Uh, or me specifically, which was good. But yeah he kind of kept an energy happening and, and would be a focus for the people. [GUITAR SOLO ends] So at times we could get work done, 'cause often when you're tired in the studio you might sort of start doing more... housekeeping tasks so in a recording I might need to do a lot of editing where I'm just chopping up performances and arranging it and placing them et cetera. Things that maybe aren't really that creative. So you give your brain a bit of a rest by doing some sort of menial task.

I think the band would go through keyboard patches and drum sounds on the electric drum kit. I do remember the electric drum kit in the back of my brain, the whole time someone tipper tapper-ing on the drum kits. It was a very interesting process, the whole thing.

MARK POPE

Well, as a producer, I guess the most memorable moment was watching them go in the Bubble. It was sort of like being a member of NASA and watching the three astronauts head into the space capsule on their way to the moon. And in a way my job was done once they were sealed hermetically into the womb or the tomb or the bubble or whatever you wanna call it. That was the notable moment for me personally.

PRESENTER

Throughout the filming of the Bubble, the band were joined by Channel V host and TV personality Jabba, or Jabbatron. A well known music TV personality at the time, Jabba was responsible for hosting the daily recaps of the show, keeping the energy high, and maintaining interest in the project during its 21-day run.

[SEGMENT from BAND IN A BUBBLE]

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[CROWD cheering, MUSIC in background]

CHANNEL V PRESENTER

This is Channel V live from the Australian Centre of the Moving Image, right next to Federation Square, Band in a Bubble about to occur. Can we please make a noise for him people!?

CROWD

Jabba! Jabba! Jabba!

[SINGER starts singing]

CROWD

Jabba! Jabba! Jabba!

CHANNEL V PRESENTER

Where are you?? Get in here! Jabba! Jabba!

He is a man of the people.

Welcome to this very special press conference to celebrate your entry into the bubble!

[SEGMENT ends]

QUAN YEOMANS

A couple of us didn't really enjoy it very much at all. Uh, Jabba, the, the Channel V guy that was in there most of the time, had a bit of a nervous breakdown. [INTERVIEWER: Yeah] He was doing a lot of drugs on the side and kind of just fell apart a little bit. I think he escaped at one point, like got out through the back and didn't tell anyone.

And, um, yeah, I, I don't think it was particularly comfortable for the crew guy and, um, Hugh, and, um, and Peter the drummer's not used to really-... I mean he's kind of... he sits back there and kind of enjoys himself but doesn't really interact so much with the crowd, so it's very much like a much more of a kind of self-focused type job for him. Uh, so I think he felt a bit on display, particularly while he was doing that. Which is, you know, it's a personal thing when you're in the studio. And he's very, very tough on himself in the studio so I think that he felt each mistake he made because it was on show. And so that probably made him quite awkward and, and, uh, nervous about things and anxious about things. Ben I are kind of-... I dunno, we're a bit more kind of open to that sort of display, and our egos are a bit more built around that enjoyment of, of being on display so I think we kind of got more out of it and were kinda more relaxed in there as a result.

[SEGMENT begins]

CHANNEL V PRESENTER

Come on in, we're in the Bubble, this is the Bubble.

CHANNEL V PRESENTER 2

Now you guys haven't been inside the Bubble before, have you?

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BAND

No this is the first time.

CHANNEL V PRESENTER 2

And of course, Jabba from Channel V will be joining you, the only man with a stranger name than me on television.

CHANNEL V PRESENTER

Jabba's made himself pretty comfortable already.

[SEGMENT ends]

MAGOO

I think the whole thing was maybe the birth of sort of content creation, YouTube. I don't even think YouTube was a thing in 2004. But it was, you know, content even before the digital channel because we were going 24/7 on the digital channel, so those, I guess more affluent people that had Foxtel could watch.

And so I remember Ben created the s-... or maybe we did, it was all of us together, called Ben's World, 'cause Ben had this kind of-... always had this strange view on things and we decided to make a show called Ben's World, and every day we would shoot this-... an, an episode of this show in a kind of clandestine sort of manner.

And then Channel V sort of-... 'cause there's someone watching, we would broadcast 24/7, so they would start editing bits of it and putting it into the daily show. So they would sort of put together a little five minute package of what we were doing for Ben's World.

So yeah, I would try and make sure that we finished at a not too crazy an hour so that, you know, we wouldn't burn all the creative juices. I remember, a-... at the time, it was quite amazing. I, I think people could text in to the TV show, and we had monitors in the whole back wall of the Bubble, it had, um, maybe twenty plasma screens. There were screens set up go outside, that was kind of the show, the 24 hour channel. And people could text in to that show and we would get texts and we could respond straight away.

And I think that was the first time I know that I felt there was that sort of instant response that you get from social media. Sort of a stranger making some kind of request, you could do it instantly and text back to a number or, or they would see you do it and then they would text in a response. So that kind of element was quite sort of full on at the time.

QUAN YEOMANS

It was really interesting for me to see journalists actually come and try and do interviews with us through this glass. We had like a portal there. It was like an intercom system where you-... so, you know, you had to press the button and then talk and the other person would have to talk and stuff.

Um, it was really interesting to watch journalists approach the thing and they all looked really [laughs] perturbed and really not sure about it. Because I think the one thing about the transparency of the project, which was kind of the overall metaphor for it because it's glass, you see everything, you want transparency and you wanna let people know what's going on behind

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closed doors. There's kind of like a, a sense of democratising the process or like, letting people in to that process in a way that they've never been before. And I think the same thing happened with the journalism that was surrounding it.

Which is often the case with an event, it would release this circle of journalism that's going on at the same time and you saw the people unable to c-... you know, the, the interview is being seen live, it's funny, you can't curate it in any way.

If you were down, like you would know and you'd see how it's curated or edited. And so I really liked that, that aspect of it and I really appreciate-... I think that in most areas in life-... yeah, there's a lot of editing and a lot of curation going on and a lot of hiding and a lot of lying and a lot of altering of the truth. And the whole idea behind this was to kind of subvert that in a way. And I think you saw that particularly in that.

MAGOO

Would I do it again? It would really depend on the band. If it was with Regurgitator, probably. Which I doubt that they would do, because they weren't about sort of repeating the way they sort of made a record. I don't, don't think they ever have. Not sure if they ever will.

Yeah, it would be difficult to do it. Like, like afterwards I, I think I spent six months recovering, it was quite a draining process. I'd be very reticent to do it again but, you know, never say never. And if I was gonna do anything different I would like to try and encourage more of that sort of-... to take more risks, you know?

Like in a lotta ways I don't think the record was amazing, partly through the production process because some of the performances are a little bit more restrained. And as much as we would try and do things to create novelty, we just didn't quite get to the same levels that we had previously.

And I think it was because of that-... that we were being watched, there was that constant sort of audience through the process. I'm not-... I'm not sure-... like the whole glass bubble-... yeah, it's, it's hard to get an artist into that zone where they can fully trust you and trust the process.

And to have the public watching would make it very difficult but it'd be something that I think if you could work out a way to do it, it would be very rewarding. It'd be like watching test match cricket: it's a bit slower, you would watch the seed of an idea change, become something perhaps ugly and then go, "Oh no, that's not the right way to do it. Let's go back to the beginning." Try something else and then it be really good. There'd be that reward at the end of the day, there'd be that wicket where someone had been, you know, chipping away, bowling the same ball over and over and eventually the ball hits a crack in the pitch and you get that wicket.

MUSIC: *If This is the Blues, Why do I Feel so Green?* by Regurgitator

PRESENTER

We hope that through this episode of the Sound as Ever podcast, you were able to learn more in-depth about, or even discover, this unique and fascinating flash in the Australian music scene. Innovative, bold and often culturally clairvoyant, the Band in a Bubble project's focus on pushing the envelope of reality TV through a pseudo-interactive livestream, signalled a shift in the music

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industry towards the 21st century, ultimately paralleling the developing culture of social media and streaming.

PRESENTER 2

You've been listening to Sound as Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast produced by RMIT music industry students Jasper Bradley, Dan Walkeden and Juan Piflow; with interviews from journalism students Katie Colston, Linda Liem and Hussan Jama; and alongside sound design by D.A. Calf.