

Armageddon - A potted history from a non-exploding drummer

A TORONTO BAND

As rock bands go, Armageddon is something of a local legend in Newcastle, NSW - and especially in the Lake Macquarie suburb of Toronto.

Through the fog of time, our contribution too may seem small. There are no decent recordings and peers like "A Rabbit" and "Daniel" had much broader exposure and commercial acceptance. The 80's and 90's saw some success for "The Heroes", "The 88's", "The Porkers", NazenBluten, "Screaming Jets" and "silverchair". But, for 3 or 4 years in the early 70's, Armageddon was the most popular yet controversial live band in the Newburger.

From the extremes of noisy, unkempt, job rock with strong drug culture links to teeny-bop, pretty boys ("you're too straight" one of our mutual girlfriends said) - we charmed and/or upset just about everyone and were never far from everyone's lips. That's gotta mean something. Remember that only about half the world liked the Beatles! They had some business sense though.

In an era of Newcastle where all the successful bands came from "in town" or Maitland, we boys were from Toronto on the shores of Lake Macquarie and are remembered fondly there even until today and everywhere that expatriate "Tronoites" resettle.

I've worked a lot on cruise ships through the 90's and into the 00's and in 2002 even, in Tahiti of all places, a passenger in his late 40's said, "I know you - are you from Newcastle?". Yes", I said, "once upon a time." "What band were you in, Heroes?" "No", I replied, "Ward 10 or the Orphans, about then..." He says, " No, I don't remember them." "How about Armageddon?", I asked, "I was the drummer in that." He comes back with, "Yes, that's it! We followed you guys everywhere. We really thought you were going to make it big."Sacre Bleu!

60'S TEENAGE ROCK DREAMS

I'm Les Gully. I played drums, sang, wrote a bit and occasionally got on guitar. I'm also the one who found the name on an excursion into the Bible. I was a Sunday School teacher and altar boy, believe it or not, but it took me that long to get to the last chapter (Revelation - the weird, exiting one). Once the hormones turned up though, surfing, girls and rock'n'roll dragged me screaming away from church.

In late 1968, I had been in the doldrums since the final demise of my first band, "Yesterday's Orphans". It had been an escape from a high school where I was that weirdo outsider, the naïve, romantic dreamer, a gifted student (too proud to drop out of the A class) but a terrible pupil (communication difficulties) resulting in a Higher School Certificate result that was not going to get a university or art school scholarship - and a scholarship was the only way I'd get there. Today you borrow the money and pay it back - not then.

I demanded to do art for my senior years and as no teacher was available for a single senior student, I did it by correspondence. Thursday afternoons in the art room got me happily out of the sport afternoon. I've still to finish that sculpture - a "dynamism" of the girls playing basketball. Mr. Farmer, the maths teacher, was keen to see it and is still waiting. I'm not good at finishing projects, unfortunately. Learn it - beat it - do some - move on....

Not far away was the need to face the inevitable "get a job" conversation with the parents. The urge to be a rock star was fuelled by weekly visits to see "Velvet Underground", "The Gents", "The Psyche", et al... at The Cavern, Shindig Village, Henry Mousetraps or Belmont North Dance wearing a wine coloured jacket, floral shirt, deep purple bellbottoms and self-

painted sand shoes. Top this off with aviator sunnies (or wire-rimmed specs in the dark) and I was the ascendant rock star of the era. Took 'em a while to notice though.

Yesterdays Orphans had had reasonable success - to the point of holding a Saturday night residency for 6 months at Charlestown Community Hall Dance. It lasted about 3 years with varying lineups and had made a homemade (Vista Studios) limited edition single "Vermen Comethe" B/W "I Want Your Lovin'". That project proved more than anything did that we needed to learn to tune up, keep time and sing. That line-up never made it "to town".

Meanwhile at the end of 4th form (Year 10) were Peter De Jong (g,v) and Paul "Struck" Matters (b) who had a garage band tentatively called "The Pak" with John Greenhalgh (g) and John "Scottie" Riddock (d). Scottie, whose main talent was that of looking a lot like Billy Thorpe, decided that his surfing career was likely to be more gainful than drumming and headed off up the coast. The other three decided, one Friday night, to visit me and offer me the gig. I was already an established local celebrity and somewhat held in awe (or comical disdain) at Toronto High School. This was not only because I had been in a semi-successful (if fairly awful) band, was the school's only senior art student and wore weird clothes - but I also had a minor boxing trophy, having beat "Dingle" Ingle narrowly on points at the YMCA comp. This proved instrumental in not getting beaten up when caught late at night in a floral shirt and painted sneakers. I wasn't necessarily a good fighter - just apparently crazy.

The night the band came with the offer, I was out at "Henry Mousetraps" (the old Civic Wintergarden with décor and lighting a-la San Francisco). I contacted Peter the next day and, after a jam/audition, joined up. The Pak subsequently became Yesterday's Orphans for a while.

I had actually met Pete and John before and I remember picking on Paul once on the school bus home because he was annoying some girls and also because of his pretty boy grin.

Pete had challenged me once in the schoolyard to play "Happy Jack" by the Who, a drum solo which I confidently and loudly (if not totally accurately) demonstrated on several Globite school cases.

John lived just down the road from me, near Coal Point Primary School, and I actually did my first ever gig with him in 1964. It was a thrown together band with him and Paul Treloar where we had to play the "old time" part at a 50/50 dance at Carey Bay church hall. Sort of a support gig for "The Chevelles", Westlakes' biggest band of the era. The drummer, Col Burns, had liked my style and introduced me to Steve Woodman - the start of Yesterday's Orphans.

THREE YEARS IN A BASEMENT

Anyway, things developed quickly with "The Pak". It must have been OK because Paul actually went out and bought a bass and amp - a Maton "lute" and Vadis 40 watt. He had money, the Matters family being Toronto aristocracy through owning the Caltex servo. He'd been playing a nylon string acoustic guitar as bass until then.

This caused Peter to get his dad to build him an amp (he wasn't rich but dad was an engineer at BHP). Until then, Pete had been playing (and singing) through John's amp, a common start for garage bands - John had a job. The Matters' basement was duly fitted out with carpet-soundproofed walls and over the next couple of years, Armageddon was born. The neighbours were very tolerant - not "Pleasant Valley Sunday" but "Carey Bay Friday Night".

This was a period of classic 60's covers, eg - "Happy Together" by the Turtles and a proto-heavy metal version of the bubble gum "Indian Giver" as well as the standard 12 bar

rock'n'roll and blues and the obligatory Beatles, Stones, Yardbirds, Animals, Who and Kinks covers.

Peter Teague - already a successful performer in school musicals - tried out with us but, limelightwise, I don't think De Jong or I wanted to share with an actual lead singer. We had enough trouble sharing with each other. Pete and his tambourine made us feel a little like "The Monkees" anyway and we were far too cool for that!

Toronto High School dances, church socials and parties gave the band a few gigs a year but it was mostly still a garage band Friday night rehearsal - something of a neighbourhood social event followed by weekend surfing at Catherine Hill Bay. It kept it together.

ARMAGEDDON

By 1970 "Yesterday's Orphans" had gone through a series of name changes like "Frog Hollow" and "Gully Erosion" and finally settled on "Armageddon". We'd all learned to play competently in our genre and were a tight unit with a great heavy blues feel. This we tempered with power pop, big ballads and vocal harmony - we tried to do everything. Savoy Brown, John Mayall, Traffic, Spooky Tooth, Spencer Davis Group and of course - the Beatles, Stones, Kinks... plus notably, several interesting originals with names like "Yesterday's Orphan", "We'll All Be Eating Seaweed" and "In The Shadow Of The Mushroom" - unrecorded and long lost to posterity.

I had always written the occasional esoteric song but wasn't prolific. I'm even less so now. To be writer, you must write! Constantly!

Peter was just beginning to learn writing skills that he would carry through to the Heroes and his later career in advertising. Then, he was finishing school and destined to follow in dad's footsteps and study for an engineering degree.

Paul had been out of school a couple of years. School wasn't really his scene. He had a job as what he termed "bowser boy", i.e. - apprentice auto mechanic at dad's servo. He actually told people he went to "uni". He did. He regularly played table tennis at the Newcastle University Union. A good place to network rock music (and girls). He'd been runner up NSW boys champion at table tennis.

I was 2 years into an apprenticeship as vertical transport engineer (elevator technician). Art school might have been more rewarding but I learned a lot about life working in the building industry with a bunch of macho men and petty criminals. I also learned some useful skills like electrical knowledge, logical sequence of operations and some rudimentary tool skills. I would never be a good electrician, though. I actually managed to electrocute myself years later, in Ward 10, at Wauchope Country Club. I plugged in to some DJ's lead, wired for 110V lighting splitter with wrong plug. I survived because of a quick thinking, sax-playing angel - Kim Pink.

I actually tried to quit my indentures in 1969, 6 months in, so as to accept a public service (office) job offer that I had applied for a year earlier. But the boss at the elevator company was about to retire and they didn't want him embarrassed so I was browbeaten into submission and stayed the 4 years. They said they could stop the public service job.

Back to the band... it got heavier and moved away from the 60s pop sound and John left to follow a sales career. He had been a classic lead guitarist in the Shadows / early Beatles tradition but as we got heavier and improvisation moved in, Pete's ambition as lead player kind of moved John out in a bloodless coup.

MOVING FURTHER AFIELD

This was a time when the Mawson (Caves Beach) Hotel, the Bel-Air (formerly opposite Garden City, Kotara) and even some clubs were starting to use the new “heavy” rock bands. Newcastle had the Top of Town dance in the C of E hall and the forward thinking Pears family had opened “Adam’s Disco” upstairs in their Palais Royale as an alternative to the 50/50 dancing downstairs with the Hi-Fis. This was also an era of surf club dances and BYO parties in backwoods community halls. They were even at a quarries, farms and beaches. Sort of the “house” or “rage” party of the era - drink, drugs, cars, bikes, bonfires, skinny-dipping, sex – lots of joy and tragedy. Most of us survived – some didn’t.

Pre “Booze Bus” drinking habits were understandably silly and of course illegal drugs (so far only the soft ones - THC, LSD, FBI, Nutmeg) raised their salubrious heads. Didn’t everyone smoke pot then? Probably not – it just seemed that way. I didn’t until after I’d managed to get sex at the age of 18 (started late but made up for it) and smoked a cigarette!

Though most survived to get wiser - notably our band - some of the beloved didn’t. I heard years later that just about everyone in my class but me (the alleged weirdo) was smoking pot at school! Our first turn on was after I left school (1969) and provided by a Toronto High school teacher of all things. We all threw up and avoided the stuff for a long while. Paul, notably, wouldn’t partake that first time. I guess he made up for it later.

“PLAY THE BLUES!...”

A turning point came in 1970 when the band was booked for the annual presentation night for the Nine Mile Board Rider’s Club. They were sort of unofficial because “Nine Mile” is the stretch of beach from Redhead to Blacksmiths – fairly uncharted and certainly no clubhouse or patrolled area, just a sand mine. The infamous “Dozen” (they started the local celebration “Dozen Day” – 12th December) were in attendance - and a few youngsters. “Play the blues” became the cry of the evening to the accompaniment of Peter Monkhouse and Ken Hicks and Simmo banging full jugs of beer on the table to help us keep time. Big help!.. and beer everywhere! Lucky we weren’t electrocuted. Anyway, we learned the blues that night!

Armageddon played the normal pop/rock and the half dozen 12 bar blues that we knew, things like - “Walkin’ On Sunset” by John Mayall and “Mainline” by McKenna, Mendellsohn Mainline. This wasn’t enough, so the rest of the night was spent ad-libbing blues songs - some of which later became actual original songs. That Xmas I did a blues version of “Away In A Manger” with slightly alternate lyrics– went down a storm. I guess I’m going to Hell.

The move to a newer, heavier style was confirmed. This was also a year of massive change - the Beatles broke up - Hendrix and Joplin died - Woodstock and Easy Rider hit the screen - and young bands like Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Foghat and Mountain were cool. I was in the Vietnam conscription lottery. They picked birthdays out of a hat. Mine is 31st March. My condolences go to the winners on March 30th and April 1st. I’m not sure what I would’ve done if conscripted - either gone to war or gone to England.

Pete was riding his Honda 250 bike to work at his engineering traineeship at that textile place at Rutherford. One day we met at Paul’s garage and half his face seemed to be missing – a giant gravel rash. He’d had a prang - a lucky close call. A song called “Two-Stroke Crow” was born and he swapped the bike for a car.

BUS STOP

In Newcastle, “Bus Stop” disco was “it”. Though essentially an under-18s disco of its era, we oldies (20-21) went anyway – they had the best bands from out of town. We snuck in our bottle of Green Ginger Wine or Marsala and sat on the dance floor like it was a festival. This

was the era of festivals and so the groovy gigs weren't dances so much as concerts and an education.

Amazingly, one of my favourites was the "Valentines" last night. They were a "high camp", kiddie pop group from Melbourne, set to finish up their career with a gig at Bus Stop. We didn't really want to see them (teenybop) but there was nothing else on, so we went. This "teenybop" group we saw normally (on TV) dressed in pastel coloured chiffon and satin and singing pap like "My Old Man's A Groovy Old Man". This night they were dressed in black jeans and T-shirts (never before seen outside a Hells Angels movie) and sang pretty well a full night of Led Zeppelin songs. Ouch! The main singer was of course, Bon Scott.

Things like this and great bands like "Spectrum", "Daddy Cool", "Bakery", etc..., continued our education towards the music (as opposed to the biz). Outstanding among them was an ex-New Zealand band called the La-De-Das - a young Kevin Borich on guitar and Maori singer Phil Key singing like Steve Winwood. They played the new funky stuff (Traffic, and the newer Motown/Stax, etc...) as well as reworking some esoteric pop/rock (like Donovan's "Oh Gosh" and Dylan's "Just Like A Rolling Stone") and were as melodic and harmonious as they were bluesy. We saw them at every opportunity until they left for England to find their hard lines there.

Although still living at home we were all mainly in town due to work/education, social and band commitments. As electrician and owner of the first PA, I always had a van with a mattress in the back, so I often lived in it, like the gypsy in my... ah... soul. We had just about grown out of Toronto and the Matters' basement.

Despite periods of inactivity and some disputes (like when Pete got me to paint his precious Maton guitar psychedelic - I painted strings and metalwork as well! - didn't know any better) we hung in and grew. Things like work, tech, uni, girls, surfing got in the way but provided experiences and contacts and Armageddon stayed together and became a tight unit.

NEXT WE TAKE NEWCASTLE

Armageddon had an act. We sounded good - in tune, tight and tasteful (mostly). We were a gorgeous set of suntanned Aussie manhood! Even pommie me. The years of attempting to surf had gotten rid of the plump, bespectacled, freckly, pimply bedroom-groover - and we were also entertaining - a good sense of humour and public speaking ability goes a long way. Pete and I did tend to talk over each other a bit, but we worked it out. It's actually a wonder I got a word in!

We needed.... a manager!! Our mate Richard Gallimore seemed like management material but never really wanted the job, just Paul's sister, Gaye. Also, we'd never be the Beach Boys and they're his faves.

We didn't know how to approach the Newcastle nobs like Mr Reg Mason at Rayford's Records who seemed to have run Velvet Underground. A young Scot, Jock Gallagher, turned up at Uni or somewhere and sold himself to us. He was a born entrepreneur. He probably still is trying to be somewhere - he ran the hot dog stand outside Bondi Lifesaver in the late 80's and I last saw him in London about 1989 - hope he made some money by now. He could talk (and drink) the legs off a piano and he helped us into all the right areas. Adams Disco, the pubs of Westlakes, the Uni, etc...

Late 1970 - early 1971 saw Armageddon with regular gigs in town and the suburbs, roadies, PA, lights and a following. We were finally a real band. As an electrician with a job, I bought the first PA (Claybridge 100 watt) and built an overpriced lightshow out of 8 Portafloods - but it worked.

The 60s bands like the Hi-Fis and the Hounds were happy in the clubs. The Velvet Underground had moved to Sydney and were destined to form the Gang with Ted Mulrey. The top new groups like Michael Scott Group, Luke's Harp, Node's Levity and Midnight Soul even seemed a little old fashioned with their slick top 40, soul and pop covers.

There was a three-pronged attack coming on Newcastle. From Maitland was Bluegrass and their proteges, Eastlakes had Delta and later Mata Hari. Westlakes had Armageddon.

HOADLEY'S BATTLE OF THE SOUNDS – 1971

Every year since 1967(?), Hoadleys confectioners had run a national talent competition – “The Hoadleys National Battle of the Sounds”. Although ostensibly an obvious showcase for the pop idols of the day, at a local level it nurtured the raw talent of the garage bands and gave them a forum and moment of glory.

I had seen the local finals since 1967 and saw the promotional value. Even if you didn't win, you had to be in it to be noticed. And of course there was the dream of winning the lot and a record contract and trip to the UK. It took til the 90's and the assistance of the Castanet/Triple-J/Oz Music “mafia” for local bands to accomplish that.

Anyway - Peter and Paul didn't really like the idea of entering a “talent quest” so it was shelved. I wrote a letter and sent in the entry anyway. Two weeks before our heat was scheduled, I broke the news at rehearsal with a kind of ultimatum - either Armageddon was in the “Battle” or Les wasn't in Armageddon. Contrary to the belief held by some that I learned my management style from Himmler, I rarely pull rank or seniority (I was always “the old bastard” or “Uncle Les” - 2 years is a big difference to teenagers). Still, I was frustrated and luckily, this time it worked (it didn't work so well in 1975).

The band went into training. We needed two songs and, as a concession to our ego that resented the “talent quest” it was decided we should do “original” songs. Peter was main songwriter by this time. I was happy to concentrate on drums – I needed to. It seemed that our best chance was as a front for Peter's guitar and vocal style and I had an outlet playing my songs as an underground solo career at the “Purple Parrot” folk club at Tighes Hill Technical College - and any other solo opportunity.

We rehearsed Peter's two best songs solidly for those two weeks:

“Suite - Blind Eye” was a funky, heavy blues “suite” and “Song For Happy” was a more poppy heavy ballad with the obligatory drawn out guitar solo for the last few minutes - a-la Traffic or Cream. That allowed Pete to display his newly honed lead guitar skills. This was duly noted in all the friendly reviews. One parochial local journalist did see us as just noisy but he did change his tune somewhat the next year.

It was the Hunter Theatre (it used to be at the Merewether end of Union Street). It was #####date##### and beautiful, sunny, east coast Aussie day. The boys would rather be surfing but this was it. We'd played the night before at Adams Disco in the Palais and had a considerable following of young Newcastle “music lovers” there as support. Peter all but ordered them to be there and Struck just had to bat his eyelids (and shake his arse) shyly to draw 200 young girls. There was also a lot of Belmont-Swansea support (Delta weren't in it this year) and, of course, practically the whole of Toronto was there. The old school of bands either weren't in it or had half-developed new acts. We were paddling hard on the crest and about to stand up, head for the bottom turn and get locked in the tube. Our only serious competition with any support was Maitland's Bluegrass - my wife Pam was one of those supporters.

The equipment was crap. We used our own drum kit but the provided amps were 50-watt fuzz boxes (I forget the brand). Luckily (?), we drew last on the bill and got to watch every one else cope. This was nerve racking but also we believed in ourselves and didn't see any serious competition. Anyway, as last on the bill, you are required to go out and blow the rest away, aren't you?

We stayed sober (at least I know I did) and decided that though the amps were shit, they could be at least loud and it wouldn't be unjust to try to blow them up. So Pete and Paul did just that - turned them up to eleven. Hence our reputation as just noisy.

I nearly missed our cue. I was nervous and in the toilet emptying from both ends and I think that helped (so did all that rehearsal). Then you had 10 seconds to set up the drum kit while the 2KO DJ – Mike Webb I think - announced the band. It was tight - they'd run out of stretching patter by then.

We went on to a thunderous applause and played far too loud - but geez it was good. We killed it (that's good). That just left the judges. At least there wasn't long to wait for the result, still it's murder - the longest 10 minutes of your life.....

WAITING FOR THE HAMMER TO FALL

...waiting for the result... I must digress into a mid 1990's story:

Back in the mid-90's, as local "legends", Pam and I would occasionally get asked to be judges in the Jolly Roger Band Competition - a free meal and drinks and a chance to chat with the old gang plus contribute to the industry.

This one Tuesday it was a "covers" heat with 6 bands. There was me, Pam, Screenie and Kent Jackson judging. Mick Stove was photographer. We hung at the back, drank, smoked, and talked more than we ought to but generally paid enough attention to the acts to judge reasonably. I don't recall the other bands but about 4th on the bill was "Innocent Criminals" and they opened with Cream's "Sunshine Of Your Love" - and they were good at it. I excused myself, took a drink and smoke down to the front table and soaked it up. I think the next song was Hendrix' "Hey Joe" - I was wrapped! The whole set was Cream & Hendrix. A repertoire not necessarily viewed as a correct cover set for a 90s group, but I loved it.

These 16-year-old surfer types were also obvious video opportunities (nearly as good-looking as we had been) and talked to the audience - and so got top points from me. I thought, "Hell, I couldn't play that stuff at their age". But then I realised - that stuff wasn't released when I was their age! I could play Animals and Beatles and Who and Dylan then though (I knew Glen Miller and Sidney Bechet too).

At the end when we added up, everyone else had rated up the older band with the pro 90s act (Pearl Jam, etc.) as winners. Mick Stove said, "Whaddya doin'? Ya voted for the kids!!" B.I.O.Y.A. Mickey! I told you so!

The point? As I walked past the "kids" sitting at the side with their parents and looked at the stress in their eyes, I was taken back to that arvo in 1971 and waiting for the hammer to fall. I couldn't make them wait. I looked into Daniel Johns' eyes and said, "At least I voted for you". I hope that was more a kindness than wank. Of course they won some National Comp and next year they were "silverchair" and making history.

In hindsight, maybe losing the local contests is better for you. Mark Tinson (and a few others) never won a Hoadleys Battle despite Bluegrass' popularity but him and his mates were more successful than the rest of us in the real biz of the 70's – its must also help that he's not called Jew just because of the nose.

I guess it's what you follow your success or failure with.

POP STARS

Back to Armageddon... rebels without a clue. When they announced us winners we were in shock. The acceptance photo shows Pete in his "lumberjacket" making a typically humble speech, "Struck" (that's Paul) scratching his head in disbelief and me talking to the Festival Records dude and looking like some hippie businessman – I wonder what he said.

Afterwards there was a mass exodus to Bar Beach for joint smoking and beer and that night as part of the prize we got to support Chain at the Hunter Theatre before the showing of the film "2001 - a Space Odyssey" (it was new then). Note - It has been said that we also had unfair advantage because Bryan Rippon, who was doing the PA for the "Battle", showed the end scene from the film over the stage while we played - a light show to kill for, especially then. Let it be known we had nothing to do with it. I think he wanted to manage us. I guess it helped. He did sell us a high quality, overpriced PA. Good guy, but kept us in debt for years.

Anyway, our career was set. 2KO and the Herald gave us lots of promo - we just had to live up to it. Tony Heads said to me after we won at the Hunter "so how's it feel to be a pop star?!" and I wish I understood.

A DEMO

Some decent management would've helped. God, we didn't even visit the radio station! The judge from Festival Records had requested that we send a DEMO TAPE and so, we made the trip to Wickham's "Vista" studio (you think I'd have learned from the first time).

Newcastle's only studios at the time were that one and Bourne's in Cook's Hill. It was instruments recorded first then vocal on the other track of the stereo (like they did in 1962). It was in a tinny, semi-industrial shed with quality equipment but an engineer that didn't know how to record a loud band and a loud band that didn't know how to record.

So he made us turn down. We did. A bit. It came out tinny and could've used a few more takes. We sent the result to Festival Records as asked and promptly heard nothing back. I'm not sure if we followed it up or even if Pete actually sent it. We'd never heard of a Press Kit or making an appointment with A&R. It wasn't an unsolicited approach to the record company, but I think the demo tape went the same way that those do... bin.

THE SYDNEY FINAL

The City/Country Final in Sydney was something else. Lots of support from the local media and even two busloads of fans for support. We were actual celebrities. For us and the gang, there was a wild weekend of party and groupies in Vacluse Park then the gig at the stadium with the big names. My main memory is being hung over after having pot & sex all night with a Uni student called...??, who certainly educated me. Pity she wasn't an economics student.

Next, we were told we had 6 minutes to perform our act. Our 2 songs took 8½ minutes. I had the bright idea to play them faster! I doubt it mattered. The Country Final was won by Stafford Bridge, a Jethro Tull cover band from Sydney who went to Katoomba to win a heat. The City Final was at the same gig - a win shared in a very egalitarian manner by Jeff St. John's Copperwine and Sherbet – the two current hitmakers.

BIG FISH IN A SMALL POND

As kings of our hometown, we became insecure that year. Remember Elizabeth Taylor's movie star character in Agatha Christies "The Mirror Cracked"? She says - "The worst thing about having everything is that everyone wants to take it off you!" I didn't know that. I'd never had anything - just the good things: a great family, a lake and a rowboat, a drumkit - poor but happy - in ignorance is bliss.

Anyway, along with social pressures - sexual abundance, booze, drugs, more “friends” and “advisors” than you can believe, we learned the hard way. I owe a serious apology to two particular women who shall remain nameless. I hope the rest of your life has treated you better than this naïve idiot did.

Along with that, I was coming to the end of an apprenticeship that I wasn't really good at with no prospects for the future. I sure was going to miss that \$400 per week next year.

Roadies.. We had a few. I remember an early one died in his Kombi - I hardly knew him - Pete did. Some names I remember: Bruce Carrol, Tom..., Rod Burton, Jacko & Carrots, Bruce Fields, but in the end Jeff “Jaffa” Coulter, another schoolmate, saw us out til the end (well almost - Joe from Sydney did the last bit).

QUADRA

Management... We'd had Jock but he moved on. We never really got management - too headstrong? Late 1971(?) saw the formation of a “co-op” of the town's top four rock bands - Armageddon, Bluegrass, Delta and Sage - into the Quadra Agency.

Chaired by Roy Duffy, it gave us youngsters a forum to meet and discuss business, a phone and some advice as to how to bargain our real worth. This was a turning point in Newcastle music and to the chagrin of the Muso's Union, it worked. We got together and did the job that they couldn't do for us. Some bands (and individuals) made more money than others but the industry got a lift and soon the Quadra top four were handing out spare gigs to a dozen other bands that would hardly have worked otherwise. We actually managed to double the standard fee (from \$50 up to \$100 - Union rate came to about \$40). Also the Tinson - De Jong bond was formed. Some Machiavellian politics must've passed like a storm in a teacup. I didn't notice. I was having too much fun.

STEVE “JIMMY FINGERS” COWLEY

Armageddon still weren't comfortable with the sound. We wanted more sophistication - like the La-De-Das (funnily enough, the La-De-Das had returned from the UK and were cutting down in numbers and going more bluesy - the opposite of us). They'd seen the Stones and Hendrix and almost hit it with a Beatles cover then came home.

We had tried a few keyboard players (Gil Mouat, Graham Hawkins and Bob Mueller) but none stayed. Gary Wilson joined and we had two drummers for a while. Sandra Pears from the Palais got Horrie Dargie to look at management but he said “too much drums”. Garry left, toured Aussie and then went to England on Ian Nash's winning ticket from Star Quest and became a top recording and folk rock drummer with Maddie Pryor (and almost Jethro Tull).

I even tried playing guitar in the band for about a minute. Although I already had a pleasing amateur “career” as an acoustic soloist, I'd never played electric and didn't own a decent guitar or amp, so I failed miserably one night playing the “Brick” - an impossible-to-tune red Maton – also, too much booze put an end to Pete putting up with that. Back to the kit drum trog.

Peter met a 16-year-old guitarist (also violin and keyboard) called Steve Cowley who was interested to try out with us. His audition tunes were “All Along The Watchtower” (Hendrix / Kevin Borich) and “Goin' Home” a faster than light 12 bar by 10 Years After. Struck & I were blown away. So was Pete, but shocked. All of a sudden he wasn't the only guitar hero. I don't think he'd realised what he was bringing in. Or maybe he did. Paul was adamant that Steve join. I think he regretted that. I loved it. Two lead guitars and another singer!

Our reviews improved. We got musical credibility. We'd had some bad press after the '71 battle claiming our victory to be rigged and that we weren't that good - just a bunch of noisy

(a.k.a. druggo) yobbos. Well we were noisy! The new act seemed to get rid of a lot of this. We dressed better, played bitchin' and also actually "entertained". Clubland here we come! If the truth be known, many of the fans and hangers on at the time were the worst "druggos" of the lot. We looked cleaner, but our circle (and therefore us) were probably dirtier than the messy looking innocents we'd been a year before. We've always been, and still are, nicer than many of those "nice" stars though Mum – believe me.

2 YEARS IN A ROW

Hoadleys '72 came along - we made it through the heat at Maitland Basketball Stadium (enemy territory) and a couple of weeks later beat the odds and won the Newcastle Final a 2nd time - unheard of! Again with two originals - a medium rocker called "Sprocket" and a bossa-nova called "Thursday" about the loss of a child by our roadie Rod Burton and his wife Bev.

The next week at the Zone Final we weren't even placed. "Bogislav" won it and "Mata Hari" 2nd. It seems that we had some kind of a "sound problem". A little bird said that the judges had their backs to us and never heard us. We actually had to re-record our performance for the radio after the show. The look of incredulous sympathy on Jim Staines face is still worth a million bucks. At least we didn't have to do that Sydney Final thing again.

Anyway, the Hoadley's thing was all over. That was the last year it ran. It wasn't cool to be in talent quests anymore. Business was getting serious. Also the mid-70's became a confused melting pot / doldrums out of which came disco, heavy metal, punk, country rock, power pop, rap....etc... Where did we fit? We already played it all.

OVER THE PEAK

Armageddon's sound matured. For better or worse the music and act got more sophisticated. The Eagles turned up on the scene and we fitted that style. Also about then funkier, jazzy stuff was being popularised by Daniel and Marshall Brothers. Bluegrass had given way to A Rabbit (somewhere between Kiss and Aerosmith) and they owned the teenyboppers and hard rock fans. We played rock clubs like the Ambassador and the Savoy and the Ivan Dayman circuit "showbands" (eg - "Troupadores" and "Statesmen") started to move in – slick, well dressed, clubby bands playing top 40 with a "show".

On the downside with us, Paul was never going to be a "real" musician like the classically trained Cowley. He had good "feel" for rhythm and bass lines but was always a bluesy player. He was also our main chick magnet. Pete was also a well studied musician and teacher and I'm lucky enough to have a high IQ, a kind of natural understanding of music structure and am cunning enough to learn what I need when pressed.

Some of the new music didn't allow Paul to play "the minor 3rd in a major scale" – it seems that not everything is the blues. He didn't seem to understand and gradually became alienated. Rehearsals got harder to schedule. The ones we did seemed endlessly spent on refining covers and no creativity. Paul lapsed into chasing pot and groupies. I hung out there too. Holding the ends together. We played a lot of snooker at Toronto Workers Club.

We were playing Sydney every other week and travelling up and down the coast a lot, especially good old Taree. We had management – the Sebastian Chase Organisation (who I don't recall ever meeting). We did some regular big gigs - Manly Vale Hotel, Chequers (apparently the best support group they ever had) and Whisky-A-Go-Go. Still, nothing developed. Everyone was broke and homesick and few songs were written. Pete and I did write one together - "Sea Saw" - a kiddies lyric I penned to a riff by Pete. No big deal was in the offing. We still didn't record. The Newcastle Music Industry stabbed Paul in the back at every turn and, in late 1974, Pete and Steve told me we had to kick him out. He was my best

mate (and Pete's), so I cried, but I agreed. That was probably the beginning of the end really though. It maybe should've been the new beginning but somehow we got in a rut.

BETTER PLAYING BUT THE SPARK GOES OUT

Greg Dawson, Newcastle's best young bass player joined up and the music moved up to another dimension. That year or so, we played some of the best ever. We arranged great covers but wrote little. I loved playing that era and Greg and I went on to play together on and off for many years. For about a year it all seemed good, same routine of gigs though and no indication of the "big break". We never did any recording. Since 1970 I think we recorded twice, apart from rough live tapes and were never happy with any of it.

We tried some changes – Pete Teague joined for a while and Pam sang some gigs with us but it didn't seem to stop the rot.

I don't make it sound good, but it was really. The music and atmosphere were great. Some of us just still had a hankering for something bigger. It was still just out of reach.

STRUCK AND AC/DC

About halfway through 1975 Tinno got a call that a young Sydney band, AC/DC, were looking for a rhythm section and Broderick Smith of the Dingoes had suggested Paul and I since we'd worked supports with them. Paul, being available, joined up. He stayed a few months, but I always said he was: too tall, too well dressed, too good looking and played too much. They used his photo in TV Week for over a year. The official records say that George Young played with AC/DC during that period. After that, Paul joined the SDA but fell ill now lives a quiet "reclusive" life.

We had a girl in between us then too - Kaz. I don't know if that affected his stay with AC/DC. After he left Armageddon, and I was away, he seemed to move in on my girl (or did she move in on him?). I wasn't exactly celibate myself. Hell, she was only Jacko's estranged wife anyway. We loved her though.

Anyway, he went away to AC/DC and I moved back in. I took her to see them at Chequers one night. We went to the motel afterwards and Bon Scott said, "Hey, you wanna see me new song!?". I said, "Sure". He gave me the manuscript lyric to "She's' Got The Jack". I said, "You think it'll get on the radio?" He just lifted an eyebrow and did that kinda satanic laugh of his. It got on the radio.

Anyway, Paul left AC/DC soon after. AC/DC don't seem to remember him officially. Maybe they can't. That period says brother George Young played for that year. There was a big turnover of members then, among them Larry Van Kriedt another Newcie, expatriate Yank, son of Dave (ex Brubeck Quintet). There is the TV week photo of Paul with them. The schoolgirls actually used to scream at him from the bus as it passed when he was back working at Dad's servo. That's gotta piss you off.

NOT WITH A BANG BUT WITH A WHIMPER

Not long after all this, Pete and Steve seemed to fall out and I probably wasn't much fun either. Cowley had decided to quit. Rumours were he was to join Daniel (that didn't happen 'til the 80's – Cowley, Neal and Hoffman).

There was a big Armageddon meeting at Roy Duffy's. No-one could pull it together - recriminations about money and musical differences and no development, etc... (Pete offered to quit too) - I quit - up and walked out. No-one rang. I guess it was over. The ultimatum didn't work that time. There were 3 really - Steve - Pete - Les. Poor Greg had to sit and watch his great new career fall apart.

We finished up two weeks of gigs with a melodramatic “farewell” performance at the Mawson lit only by 200 candles (?).

Jim Porteous said: “So this is how it ends... not with a bang but with a whimper”.

Our actual last performance was at the Poplars in Taree. Just desserts. Pete, Steve and Greg had a car. I came home with Joe, our interim roadie – Jaffa had left already. (I think we still owe him \$140. Good Luck Jaff.)

A rock broke the windscreen north of Buladelah and we drove the last 50 miles with a rainstorm pouring through the front of the van. Great finish.

There were talks and a tentative rehearsal some months later but the hurt was too deep. It was never to come again. We chat these days and there’s an unbreakable bond built the way 7 years of sharing a life only can... but those days seem long gone.

AFTERMATH

Later that year Cowley said, “Let’s play”. I said, “You find the gig and I’ll do it”. Greg, Steve and I got back together with Pam and played as “Geddon” at the Clinker Tavern in Belmont for a year - in 1975-76. That was a great time and we played great stuff, covers, but just what we liked – different from everyone – from folk to rock to jazz, just songs we liked, played our way - and were even kind of theatre. We dragged crowds in and got paid crap. Permanently stoned - I was borderline insane, with a day gig as Post Office parcel contractor and weekend popstar with seven girlfriends and creeping alcoholism. The best part was that Pam was finally in the band. We’ve hardly been apart since.

Steve left after 6 months for the security of the Newcastle Worker’s Club band and serious study. Maurice D’Abbruzzo joined. That lineup was even wilder! We had a great laugh when Abba’s “Mama Mia” came out. Maurice sang a couple of choruses and then we segued into the end of Bohemian Rhapsody... “Mama Mia...etc” into the guitar solo and big ending. Shit like that. I used to do a horizontal dance finale crooning Moon River or some other schlock pisstake on top of a girl of choice from the dance floor to finish the night. Maurice tried it one night and Mrs. Berry, the publican, sacked him. Not the band...him. We went out to the car, drove round the block, had a joint, talked about it (he couldn’t understand how I could get away with it and not him), went back in, he apologised and I begged and he was back. Ludicrous, but fun.

It was a great band, could’ve gone further. We played outside gigs – surf clubs, etc – with wild success, but I was insane, brokenhearted and nothing eventuated. Maurice was young with other ambitions anyway. He was a great player and writer and also had his own band with Roy Giles and his brother, Tony, at the same time (I forget the name). He went on to success with the 88s. Got on Countdown with a song called “She Fell In Love With James Bond”. The Broccolis took the money. Oh well. Haven’t seen him in ages. Hope you’re well Mauritius Woggianus.

THE WORLD AWAITS...

Via Joe Kolodsij (ex-Maya), I got an offer from the Troupadores – “Australia’s No.1 Show Band” and trotted off to the Gold Coast and the world of Ivan Dayman. A year touring Australian capital cities (even Perth) and the far reaches of Queensland was an education I needed, but it wasn’t my band. I hated playing top 40 disco and wearing a uniform like an RSL band - but I wasn’t writing any hits so a gig’s a gig. I hated clubland then - the guys in “Troups” were great – but it wasn’t the band for me. They also drank more than anyone I had ever seen. I joined in and was more alcoholic than ever – a bottle of scotch a day, plus some

beers and and a bag of pot a week. It fell apart after a year and I went home to dry out. We sort of reformed in Sydney but I left again after a month.

Meanwhile DeJong, Tinson, Screen and Dawson had formed the Heroes (look them up elsewhere) and took over the Klinker Tavern as a prelude to the Star Hotel. Maurice joined the Marshall Bros. Steve was still in clubland.

Pam had gone up the coast for a while. I visited as Troups passed through and she visited me in Sydney so the bond remained.

I came back after a year and Bob Fletcher played me "My Aim Is True" – Elvis Costello, and "Never Mind the Bollocks" – Sex Pistols. Near the end of Armageddon (I think) we had done some gigs as Waterwing City, a vehicle for his songs with Terry Smyth. We formed the Gonzo Twins - a sort of punk duo that led to... some other stories.....

...Jim Fortune...

...Ward 10...

...Pandemonium...

...The Orphans....

...Pam & Les.....

...Gonzo Twins 2.....

...The Kingswoods.....

...Tucan.....

WHY ARMAGEDDON?

I was a good C of E church going teenager. No-one forced me - my parents are kind of agnostic really, but I liked it – I learned to sing harmony for a start. I served as altar boy and Sunday School teacher along with some teenage criminals who taught the kids how to shoplift.

I read the Bible - some of it - obviously, I had read Revelation. Armageddon – a good name for a big noise, event, good wins over evil, bright lights, strong characters, attention seeking, topical, relevant to the mood of the era.

A Sydney uni student who took us home for a smoke once from Chequers said it right..."You've weighed yourself down a bit heavily with concept, haven't you?" Hmm...

I always saw Armageddon (the biblical concept) as a personal thing for each soul. It's an archetype. You'll all see it one day. When you end, the world ends. At least when I do it will.

go quietly into the darkness>?

like you never existed>?

upon the trillions before>?

adrift/set in a layer of like/not-like>

built since time>

a small space>

contributes to a unique>?

shaft through dimension 4>?

a spot of light / sound / something / >????

thereon..>?

the lot builds a.....