

## Publication Reviews

*At the beginning of the twenty-first century, folk country and world music musicians are sharing stages, repertoires and styles as never before ... They may have their separate and distinctive histories, their core musical repertoires, their characteristic audience demographic and their preferred performance styles and contexts, but within and between these can contemplate difference and contradiction and learn new ways to think and sing in Australia. (201)*

*Singing Australia* offers a unique contribution to our understanding of what Australian folk, country and world music are. It takes us to the beginnings of the folk revival in the 1950s and the organisations that were set up to collect and preserve a neglected heritage. There is a special concern to examine the role of the activist creators of the revival, and how much effort was expended to build self-sufficient institutions such as folk festivals.

*Festivals themselves are the result of enormous amounts of voluntary activist energy. The level of direct government assistance has been remarkably small, and their dependence on volunteers distinguishes folk festivals both from commercial ventures and from state-subsidised cultural activities which depend on professional levels of remuneration. (74)*

*Singing Australia's* scope in terms of the music it reviews, the theoretical viewpoints discussed, the performers, audiences and musical evolutions canvassed is incredible. Everything is here: jazz; the Communist Party; Aboriginal music and related struggles; international influences; Irish music; Greek and Balkan influence; bush bands; country; punk; nationalism old and new; the coffee shop and its effects on performance; type of instrument and style of playing; the didgeridu; vocal techniques and accents used in singing. This alone makes it a *tour de force*.

**MARK GREGORY**  
*Macquarie University*

**Stafford, A (2004) *Pig City: From The Saints to Savage Garden*,  
St Lucia: University of Queensland Press**

If Liverpool can be described as the 'fifth Beatle', what has been the influence of the city of Brisbane upon its recording artists and performers? Drawing on interviews with key musicians, radio and management personnel, Stafford, a respected journalist, has managed to construct a history interweaving the political, cultural and musical environments of Brisbane since the 1970s.

A recurring theme is the invention of musicians when faced with little real infrastructure. With few rehearsal rooms, bands claimed a disused Target retail warehouse, where "it was not uncommon for musicians – especially rhythm

## Publication Reviews

players – to moonlight in several groups at once” (196). Live music entrepreneurs similarly exploited opportunities created by the retail business flight from Fortitude Valley in the early 1990s, providing key venues for the ‘renaissance’ that was to follow. As in all scenes, music venues were critical to emerging artists and scenes; for Brisbane, the Cloudlands Ballroom had provided entertainment since 1947, from Buddy Holly to the Clash, only to be secretly demolished by the National Party government in 1982 (despite its National Trust listing). These actions, combined with the dominance of cover band venues and continuing political interference of all kinds, led to the infamous ‘creative drain’ of bands such as the Go-Betweens to Britain in the early 1980s.

The most detailed and interesting thread of the book is the story of Triple Zed (4ZZZ as it became known in 1976). Beginning as a University of Queensland station, its trials and tribulations symbolise the writer’s approach to the right wing authoritarianism of the National Party Bjelke-Peterson state government. As Stafford notes, the station was born from the desire to:

*provide an alternative source of information in a state poorly served by a docile media, and to cater for the large number of radio listeners equally disenfranchised by the anaemic musical fare dished out by commercial AM radio. (31)*

With limited resources, the station provided a leftist perspective on state, national and global affairs. Given Premier Bjelke-Peterson’s silencing of disruptive media, unions and the Labor Party, tensions were inevitable. The station played a vital role in ensuring key events received wider national media exposure, such as the 1976 Cedar Bay commune police raid, and the Boggo Road gaol reforms, even as Bjelke-Peterson became a regular part of the station’s breakfast show interviews! (124). 4ZZZ “gave that [music] subculture the capacity to communicate with itself” (36), providing musicians with the opportunity to hear a diversity of international influences, despite heated differences about genres and ‘important’ bands.

By the last chapters, examining the rise of Powderfinger and Savage Garden, aspirations and realities had clearly changed: “I thought I was heading for Scandinavia, because [Savage Garden] sounded like Roxette to me” (manager John Woodruff, 258). The very suburban backgrounds of both acts reinforce the dangers of overly emphasizing the local. Eager to display a sound of global dimensions, both groups reveal a Brisbane suburban sensibility, if not a ‘Brisbane sound’. This is also borne out in the equally readable snapshots of the birth of several bands in different eras, including Regurgitator, the Saints, the Go-Betweens and the Riptides.

The book deftly mixes narratives of blatant oppression and censorship, marginality of tastes and scenes and a generational divide in culture and politics. For the case study of 4ZZZ alone, it is worth reading to explain how urban cultures play their part in the maintenance/encouragement of creative lives, where the use of a derelict Target shop as a rehearsal space remains preferable to

## Publication Reviews

its former life offering five dollar bras and umbrellas (195). Indeed, the city's shift from *Kath and Kim* bogan culture to 'creative city' is complete, according to Grant McLennan (who sadly died on 6 May, 2006):

*You could actually get a handle on the scene here. You didn't have to sneak around anymore; there was almost a bit of an infrastructure happening. There were art galleries. There were people talking about writing. There was even a writers' festival! (275)*

Stafford ends the book by (briefly) acknowledging the work seeking to position Queensland as the 'creative state', and the tensions involved in establishing locations like Fortitude Valley as entertainment precincts, amid tensions about venue noise, ongoing gentrification of the Brisbane CBD, and the forms of culture acceptable to the Beattie Labor state government. For all the good intent behind 'Smart Queensland' initiatives, this book reminds us that the less 'sexy' music infrastructure – rehearsal rooms, recording studios, or a Rocking Horse Records retail store – remain critical. It is a suitable companion to Andrew McGahan's *Praise* (1992) and *Last Drinks* (2000) in understanding Queensland suburbia and the mixture of seedy entrepreneurs and generational clashes that existed on both sides of the Premier's desk in the 1970s and 80s.

**SHANE HOMAN**

*University of Newcastle*

## REVIEWS BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABC TV (2005) *Kath & Kim*, Riley Turner Productions

Bennett, A, Shank, B and Toynbee, J (eds) (2006) *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, London: Routledge

Frith, S and Goodwin, A (eds) (1990) *On Record: rock, pop, and the written word*, New York: Pantheon Books

Gramsci, A (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (ed. and trans. by Hoare, Q and Nowell, G) New York: International Publishers

Horner, B and Swiss, T (eds) (1999) *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, Massachusetts: Blackwell

Lloyd, A (1944) *The Singing Englishman: an introduction to folksong*, London: Workers' Music Association

McGahan, A (1992) *Praise*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin

— (2000) *Last Drinks*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin