

Excerpts from 'Stranded' by Clinton Walker

Ch. 3 Dogs in Space (1979)

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It's now, of course, a 'fern bar'. The landmarks of our youth will never be the same again. But the very grand old George Hotel in the sleazy Melbourne beachside suburb St.Kilda – sometimes known as the Seaview – has undergone numerous transmogrifications since it was originally built a century ago. Now it's one of those renovated yuppie joints, the irony being that a lot of the crowd is the same, old punks successful in advertising or journalism.

In the late seventies, the Seaview was in disrepair. Towards the end of 1978, promoter Delores San Migeula put on a show there, and the Crystal Ballroom, as it became known, quickly established itself as the centre of a renaissance.

The Ballroom's busiest period was the early eighties, but it was in 1979 that its legend was born as not only the Boys Next Door but bands like Whirlywird, the Primitive Calculators and Crime and the City Solution made the place their stamping-ground. That the latter three bands, however, still go all but broadly unrecognised is a measure of the established music industry's resistance to this inevitable phenomenon.

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Melbourne music was divided just as surely as was Sydney's, and not only by the Yarra. The Birthday Party scene, now including Crime and the City Solution, was centred in St.Kilda, and suspicious of anything north of the river. That suspicion was mutual. Yet the north side was divided too. Whirlywird and the Primitive Calculators lived next door to each other in North Fitzroy, wherein they spawned the 'little bands' scene as eulogised in Swinburne graduate Richard Lowenstein's Dogs in Space. This was in direct contrast to the nearby Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, which was home to a more academic form of experimentalism.

**John Murphy (Whirlywird):** The little bands thing was just a bunch of like-minded people playing in an endless array of line-ups sort of apart from the Clifton Hill mob of David Chesworth and Philip Brophy. It was in some ways very anti what they were doing. Philip Brophy was very against emotion in music, while the little bands thing was meant to be wild and chaotic and punk added into doing sort of art, experimental stuff, and not just electronic. A lot of the original participants were actually artists who applied the dada sort of approach of their painting. It was the attitude and idealism of punk, but applied to a post-punk art type thing.

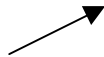
In the spring of 1979, Whirlywird and the Primitive Calculators played a series of gigs around town with, for the first time, little bands supporting. Certainly the Calculators were the first band I ever saw play in a pub with a drum-machine.

**Stuart Grant (Primitive Calculators):** We just told everybody we know, Why don't you get a band together? It's really easy; you can knock up a band

in five minutes, and then throw it out the window. The idea just seemed to take off.

Two views of the self-proclaimed 'North Fitzroy Beat': it was either a bold breaking down of the barriers between artist and audience which redefined performance itself, or rather the irrelevant self-indulgent ramblings of a bunch of egocentric junkies.

**Band Members comment:** A rather libellous and incorrect statement, from someone who hardly knew us at that time.



Ch. 3 Release the Bats (1980-1981)

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**Roger Grierson:** With the major record companies, the bands they signed, most of them weren't suited to the D-I-Y thing. ... But the managers and the record companies all carried baggage from another era, and they were looking for an extension of that, when they should have been looking for something entirely new. They were aware something was happening and decided they'd go along and see some bands. What they missed...well, nobody in their right mind would have been interested in working with the Primitive Calculators, but they saw the Aliens or MEO-245 or these kind of people and they thought, Oh, they've got the right idea. But it was mutton dressed as lamb. Unfortunately, they were the ones that got on to "Countdown", the Aliens and all these bands, and so unfortunately that's what people thought it was all about. Whereas there was a whole lot of other people who weren't interest in that, who judged success by other standards.