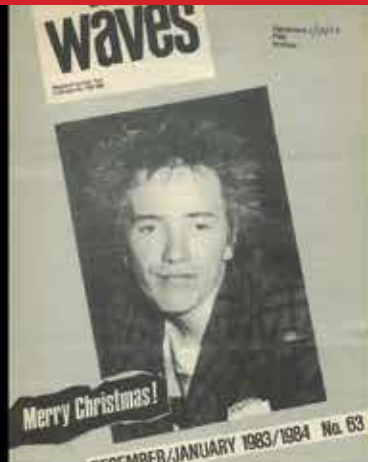


30 YEARS OF PBS



In 1979, PBS broadcast from its first premises at The Prince of Wales hotel. In its 30th year, **Steph Francis** spoke to presenters and managers about the station's history – and far-reaching future.

At PBS's 30th birthday reunion party, one of the founding fathers, John Maizels, recalled, with some glee, the reaction to a proposed "new wave" show in the early 80s, when PBS was in its infancy.

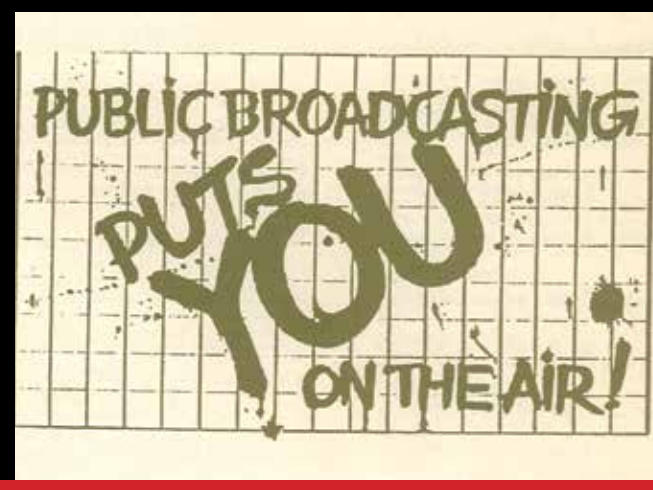
Back in the day, John said, only five genres of music were represented within the PBS mandate of playing under-represented music: jazz, folk, blues, rock and "country and western".

"We didn't know what 'new wave' was," he said. "And when we found out what it was, none of us liked it. And then we thought about the station's purpose: to play under-represented music.

"I remember we were really proud of ourselves saying 'yes' to a show of music that none of us liked!" he said, to the applause of past and present members of the PBS "family", gathered at Fitzroy Town Hall. >



“We didn’t know what ‘new wave’ was, and when we found out what it was, none of us liked it. And then we thought about the station’s purpose: to play under-represented music.”



In the late 70s, John’s house in Port Melbourne was the headquarters for the broadcast license campaign and the station’s first test transmission, which took place in a bungalow in the yard.

PBS’s first premises were at the back of The Prince of Wales hotel and on December 21, 1979, PBS broadcast from the pub, via a transmitter located on top of The Royal Women’s Hospital in Carlton.

The Prince was the venue of many fundraisers for the station, with bands like Hunters & Collectors and Painters & Dockers, and PBS volunteer techies began creating what is an incredible archive of live recordings of visiting and local bands.

Ian Stanistreet, who became the station’s manager in 1982, says that PBS was a big supporter of the “little bands” boom in Australian music in the 80s, while also recording touring international acts such as Chet Baker, Chick Corea, Tangerine Dream, The Fall and Iggy Pop, to name a few.

“We got the opportunity to record artists at all stages of their careers through equal parts of innocence, enthusiasm and sheer chutzpah,” Ian says.

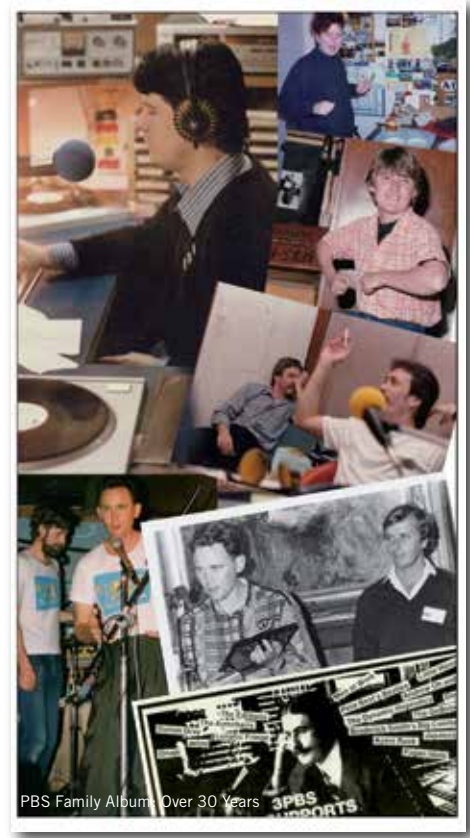
Musicians then, as now, understood and supported what the station was trying to do.

In the 80s PBS subscriber magazine - then called *Waves* - Robert Oertal reviews the Iggy Pop gig recorded by PBS at the Seaview Ballroom on 3 July 1983.

He tells the reader that Iggy Pop’s real name is James Jewel Osterberg and that young James declined an offer to go to Yale University in favour of playing drums with his high school band, The Iguanas (the abbreviation of which would give him his new first name).

We also learn that Radio Birdman named their band after a misheard lyric in the track *1970* on The Stooges’ *Funhouse* album and the lyric is actually “Radio burning”.

We also read that during a drug-induced meltdown in the 70s, Iggy spent some time recovering at his mother’s house, mowing the lawn. >



PBS Family Album: Over 30 Years 3PBS REPORTS





30 YEARS OF PBS



“I had this fantastic collection of LPs and I wanted to share it with someone. The best thing to do was to get on radio and share it with the public.”

Remember that this was written pre-Internet, pre-World Wide Web. If you wanted to know something about a musician, you couldn't just Google it. Research of anything, including music, took more effort. You had to track down press articles in a library, or (gasp) *talk* to people.

The man often name-checked for his ravenous appetite for gathering and sharing music was the late Mick Geyer. Mick was active within PBS in the late 80s and 90s, as a presenter, and editor of *Waves*, and was involved in the music scene on a broader level as a music journalist, band manager for Dave Graney and the Coral Snakes and advisor to Nick Cave's 1999 *Meltdown Festival*.

His encyclopedic music knowledge and enthusiasm for a broad range of music forms influenced countless musicians and fellow PBS presenters, many of whom were on the receiving end of Mick's famous mix tapes.

Henry Rollins, Nick Cave and Warren Ellis were just three of the musicians to be inspired and guided by Mick's passion and knowledge. They were among many who contributed to a seven-hour, four-part radio documentary about Mick, which was first broadcast in 2006 on the second anniversary of his death. Henry Rollins contributed a special program of music that Mick had either introduced him to, or that they had listened to and discussed.

Presenter of jazz fusion show, *Bitches Brew*, Len Davis has been involved with PBS for what he happily regards as an “insane” amount of time: 32 years. He was present at those early meetings when people debated what the station would be, paid up \$20 to become a subscriber to a station that did not yet exist, and has been a program coordinator, board member and board chairman.

There have been times when Len considered packing it in, times he has been fed up or burnt out “but most of the time it was great!”

Volunteering at PBS has brought Len the rewards of meeting and in some cases, befriending, jazz musicians who are as good company as they are accomplished players...people like Joe Savinul from Weather Report, Freddy Hubbard, New York-based guitarist Mike Stern and Australian guitarist Brett Garsed.

“I've had the chance to meet some of my absolute heroes. The only person I never met was Miles Davis,” Len says.

“That's the best part of it – and the ability to share your collection - that's the reason I joined in the first place. I had this fantastic collection of LPs and I wanted to share it with someone. The best thing to do was to get on radio and share it with the public.”

Back in the late 70s and 80s, PBS was a more free-form organization, Len says. At board meetings, the six or seven members of the board would be surrounded by 15-20 other volunteers, interjecting, asking questions, debating.

“There were arguments at every meeting about how we should do this and we shouldn't do this,” Len remembers.

“It was like this little communist community. Everybody was equal and we all had our say. They were good times! You know, it was freedom of speech and everyone spoke up and had their say. There were often strong disagreements. It was quite different then.”

Len concedes that the gradually increasing professionalism of PBS's operation was not only inevitable but has been a positive force for the station's viability.

As a community, membership-funded organisation, the station has often been in financial peril. Let's face it, on shallow seas, the ship is always close to the rocks. But the combined skills, contacts and blind will of PBS's passionate music-loving community have kept the station afloat – and membership continues to rise. >





30 YEARS OF PBS



John Carver, presenter of *Across The Tracks*, is one of those many people whose passion as a listener inspired a deeper involvement in the station and indeed, a career in community broadcasting.

"I remember reading an article on PBS in the Green Guide that talked about (the station) covering 50 different types of music," he says.

"I read the article again and again, as I couldn't believe it. This sounded like a reason for listening to the radio again!

"I ran two kilometres to where my car was parked and tuned my radio in to this station and it was like a revelation. I sat in the car for about two hours. I can't even remember the program but I knew I had found nirvana."

As Board Chairman, he is more familiar than most with the station's fluctuations in financial health.

In 1991, having been a subscriber to the station for about five years, John approached the then-manager Mazz Knott about undertaking a review of PBS as part of a consulting course he was doing at the time.

The PBS board implemented every recommendation. Within months, John became a board member, then chairman.

John, and then-Treasurer, accountant and heavy metal show presenter, Tony Panther, became accustomed to working out how to keep PBS alive.

"Very early on the State Government demanded repayment of a loan that PBS did not realise had been a loan. This demand would have closed the station as we simply did not have the money to pay it back," John recalls.

"Back in those days, Mazz used to have a pile of disconnection notices and we would make a choice together about which was the more important one. It was not unusual for our phones to be disconnected.

"I was able to convince the Minister of Labour, who was my boss at the time, to allow us to pay the loan back over a five year period. This saved us from closure. How I got away with this without being accused of a real conflict of interest is conveniently lost in history."

In January 2007, Adrian Basso joined PBS as Station Manager and spent the first year navigating the station out of another perilous financial situation, culminating in the first use of the word "profit" in the annual accounts in many years.

Turning 30 is a life milestone and not for nothing is it characterized by a solidifying of identity and increasing sense of responsibility for one's place in the world.

Adrian says that the culture change that has occurred within PBS as an organization reflects broader cultural shifts from the 70s until now.

"In yesteryear, people would protest more often and they'd get up and respond to a call to action.

That's how PBS, and a lot of other community stations, came about – because of that passion," he says.

"There was a big surge in the late 70s of community (radio) licenses. The first was 3MBS and then in a succession of a few years, PBS, RRR and 3CR."

The passion within PBS has survived but like many 30-year-olds, the station's identity and practices have evolved and matured.

"If you're doing something for the first or second time, you're testing it out and seeing how it goes. After a while, you know if something works. You become wiser, you learn from previous actions," Adrian says.

This year, PBS will broadcast through a new transmitter - bought with the generous donations of members and listeners - and is revising its website, which already has streaming and radio-on-demand, so people can listen to shows wherever they may be, at times that are convenient for them.

Adrian and the Board are also investigating how they can share the station's mother lode archive of live recordings, which number in the thousands and include many metres of fragile reel-to-reel tape.

"We've been cataloguing them and the idea is to convert them into a readable format on hard drive, so the announcers would be able to pick something out of the catalogue and play these live gigs for listeners," Adrian says. >



PBS Staff, 2009

It is a project that requires a fair wad of cash but would represent so much: the history of a city whose reputation as a live music hub has extended beyond Australian shores; a collection of performances by an amazing array of local and international musicians at various stages of their careers; and an aural archive of the collective effort of PBS people - those who have given their time to support and share good music.

“Our vision is about propelling people to listen to music that we think isn’t heard enough and we believe that the music we play is streets ahead of music played on commercial stations, which is ‘focus group, this is going to sell this many units’ kind of music,” Adrian says.

“We’re not like that. We’re out to highlight the beautiful music that you can find.” >

In 30 years, hundreds of announcers, musicians, staff and volunteers have walked through the doors of PBS, at its old locations in St Kilda and its present one in Easey St, Collingwood. People have met their partners (and it has to be said, their ex-partners) there. Some of those announcers and musicians are no longer with us. What has remained solid as a kick drum beneath a shifting melody is the spirit that drove a bunch of people, from punks to doctors and engineers, to create a station in 1979 playing “little heard” music.

Happy 30th PBS ■

