

MICK GEYER

MUSIC GURU 1953 - 2004



FULL TRANSCRIPT OF DOCUMENTARY #4 **First broadcast on PBS-FM Thursday 13 April 2006, 7-8pm**

MUSIC: John Coltrane - Welcome (Kulu Se Mama)

Nick Cave interviewing Mick Geyer in 1996:

NC: Mr Mick Geyer, my chief researcher and guru. He is the man behind the scenes...

LISA PALERMO (presenter):

Welcome to 'Mick Geyer: Music Guru'. I'm Lisa Palermo and this is the fourth documentary in this series paying tribute to Mick, a broadcaster and journalist in the Melbourne music scene in the 1980's and '90's. Mick died in April 2004 of cancer of the spine. He had just turned 51.

We've already heard about his passion for music and contemporary culture, his time at PBS, and his connections with people in the Melbourne music scene, with more to come. In this program, some of the more personal recollections of Mick, and about his involvement with Nick Cave in the Meltdown Festival in London in 1999.

To start this program, Nick Cave interviewing Mick on video in 1996, beginning with a familiar theme.

Nick Cave interviewing Mick Geyer in 1996:

NC: OK Mick - you're a very close friend of mine and you're a great music lover with an encyclopædic knowledge of the form. Your compilation tapes that you've put together are found in tape collections across the world, and you were for example largely responsible for searching out the hundreds of murder ballads that I listened to in order to make the Murder Ballads album. I have a tape of yours at home for example that has probably about 15 versions of the great classic Stagger Lee, which you dug out from your incredible record collection. So, that's why I credit you on my records as being my chief researcher. And I know you pass on your musical discoveries to a lot of different people - I know Henry Rollins has a lot of your tapes, and Tex Perkins and so on. I love the way that you are so generous with your ideas. How important is music to you? What's the role of music in your life would you say?

MG: It seems to be a fundamental spirit of existence in some kind of way. The messages of musicians seem to be as relevant as those of any other form of artistic expression. There seem to be universal themes that all music approach(es). That's the fundamental curiosity and I suppose the tales of exhilaration and tales of sadness. Music seems to be really important as a carrier of those messages.

NC: Mm - certainly does. Do you see yourself as a kind of teacher?

MG: No not at all. I just think it's um.. I'm privileged with the company of certain musicians and the greater the musician the greater the listener I've actually found. Their curiosity is in many ways equivalent to my curiosity in music. It's an honour and a privilege to keep their company. Why they keep mine is another guess, but I don't cross the boundary in terms of having to express that in some sense, you know in a public manner, and therefore the private conversations and that seem to be a means of communication and fundamentally of discrimination. Some people are very discriminating about what they listen to, and are blood-

thirsty in terms of seeking out anything which aims towards the Gods, aims very high.

NC: Yeah. So you don't see music in kind of hierarchical terms. I mean, you have a great respect for rock music for example.

MG: Those that I think aspire to something to do with the vagaries or virtues of the human condition.

MUSIC: Tom Waits - Clap Hands (Rain Dogs)

Hugo Race:

I feel that Mick was a very creative influence on me as an artist when I was young. He filled in all the gaps and joined the dots for me in a certain way and he was also a lot of fun to be with and he could really tell good stories and he had a great sense of humour, so there was nothing arid and intellectual about any of this, quite the opposite it was all very spiritualized in a way. His influence on me is fairly much confined to the 1980's and the early 90's, because from around about 1993 onwards basically I've been living in Europe.

He didn't live long enough - to state the obvious. He certainly made a lasting impression on me and I'll never forget him.

Warren Ellis:

Mick had such a discerning and broad interest in things. He was interested in film, he was interested in writing, he was interested in music, he was interested in politics, he was interested in cricket, he was interested in football, and he seemed to have such a solid base to draw on, it was always impressive. He always was the person if you called up and you'd just seen a film or read a book that you really liked, and he goes "how about this, check this out" and he would just send you this pile of other things to look at, or a video with a whole bunch of stuff on or some movies, or you know just this fantastic cassette, and then later he upgraded to CDs of just compilations to listen to that were just fantastic, just to try and get you going in a different way or to look elsewhere, and he was kind of always up for a discussion and also prompting you in an area that not too many are ready to. There was a stream of conversation that you could have with him that you could have with not very many people. He seemed to understand more about the creative process than people actually doing it.

MUSIC: Dave Graney with the Coral Snakes - I Was The Hunter And I Was The Prey (I Was The Hunter And I Was The Prey)

Gordy Blair:

My names Gordy Blair, I met Mick Geyer in 1991, when I came over to Australia to play with Dave Graney and the Coral Snakes. He was our manager, sometimes came on the road with us in the back of the van, smoking his Camels.

Mick couldn't care less about business you see, and Mick was only interested in the art, and so he probably was no good as a manager, which was fine by me, he was a human being and we liked the same things, or we were on the same planet anyway, we could talk to each other. Normally with rock managers, I mean they're business men and they're parasites. You know Mick wasn't like that all, and the record companies just couldn't deal with him, he wasn't on their level, and they weren't on his, so I guess he wasn't a brilliant success as a manager, but as a person he was.

Lisa Miller:

I first met Mick after a Dave Graney show, I think it was an invitation to either sing back-up vocals for a live performance or it was to support the band with my band. But I remember when he approached me he was quite serious and it was like a real interview, he had to be sure that my motives for supporting the band or being part of the whole thing were true and

artistic and my heart was in the right place. And it was really good, it was really funny, but touching at the same time.

He wrote the most beautiful bio for me, full of Shakespearean quotes and very dramatic and, I think it made a real impact and got me noticed a bit because he was a wonderful writer, eloquent writer, eloquent speaker. And, yeah, he gave me a little kick start and I went on to work with him for about a year.

MUSIC: Lisa Miller - Wipe the Floor (As Far As Life Goes)

Lisa Miller:

Mick was sort of my buffer, the buffer between me and my record label, and I was having a few hassles at the time and he was certainly very creative in the meeting room, very entertaining and he handled himself with real finesse! He used to write the most magnificent letters after meetings and really, really fire them up about something they'd said, because he was very good at remembering everything that people had said, and holding them to task about the things they were proposing, and he was a very fierce fighter in that way.

I took it seriously that he was representing me and I wanted to live up to that and just produce the best that I could which was, my best work really. It's the difference between talking to someone and saying, "Oh yeah y'know I've got a bunch of songs and I'm gonna record them and a couple of them are okay and a couple of them are good". And he's the sort of person who would just say y'know, "just get rid of the ones that are no good and just go and write some more", whereas other people would say, "yeah that's okay". Yeah, there's a few people in my life who do that and it's really great to have them around 'cos they really make you work much harder.

Gordy Blair:

Mick would say, always want to know what you were reading or what you were listening to, and ah music was really, it was a life thing for him, it meant more than it did for most people. I was a Punk Rocker in Belfast in 1977 and ah my tastes were from that and from I guess the kind of pop music that I was listening to as a kid; T Rex and David Bowie. Mick's was a more intellectual approach and also he was more interested in the counter culture and all that, which I, was a generation before me, and I couldn't care less about it.

He would talk about people like Frank Zappa, who I detest, so in that sense our taste didn't really coincide all that much. He used to always wear these stupid old brown boots which I would always take the piss out of him for and ah, he would say, "Brown shoes don't make it", I only realised later that it was a song by Frank Zappa.

MUSIC: Frank Zappa - Brown Shoes Don't Make It (Tinsel Town Rebellion)

Gordy Blair:

GB: One of the things I always remember, when I think of him is, he came over to Belfast, my home town. In 1996 we were on the road and we'd gone to Europe and I went home to see my mother and Mick came over to Belfast and we climbed up the top of the Cave Hill, which is the hill looking over Belfast and looked down on the city. So I have a picture of him in my head and he's out of place, he's in my territory and not his and I can see him very clearly standing there, looking down over the city, with the wind in his hair. And his hair was mad all the time, you know he kind of had that sort of Keith Richards, Johnny Thunders vibe to his hair. Actually, people used to say about Mick that his hair it was drunk, sometimes he was sober and sometimes he was drunk, but his hair was always drunk, you know.

Jenni Crowley: And did he still have the Camels and book in his hand?

GB: He did, yes he always had a book and ah yes, he was always smoking.

Peter Jones:

I did have one habit, it wasn't a habit it was like a ritual, because Mick smoked those Camel

cigarettes, and I don't know where it began, I think it was him years and years ago, whenever I would see him for the first time and when I saw him he'd give me a Camel cigarette. So that happened for years, whenever I met Mick, it'd be like, give me that cigarette, give me that Camel cigarette, that was like a little ritual and I might be dying of the 'flu or something but I had to have this Camel cigarette.

Stephen Walker:

He seemed to perennially have a cigarette, never a new cigarette always seemed to be burnt down quite a bit, and a drink, and also he reminded me actually physically of like a character out of a Charles Dickens book, like Artful Dodger or something, cause he seemed to persist in buying suits at the Op Shop that didn't quite fit him, such that the sleeve would sort of be up towards the elbow and stuff so, yeah I used to actually joke about him about being the Artful Dodger of Melbourne music.

Henry Rollins:

Mick always look like a kind of a cool, low-rent Bohemian Ron Wood. You know he had that cool hairdo, and the jacket. Sometimes he'd roll the sleeves up like you'd see Keith Richards or Mick Jagger, or Ron Wood do. And I always used to visit him in St Kilda, I would stay down there cos he would always seem to live around there and he always had time for like the homeless guy who needed a cigarette, or change. He was just a very laid back..., really enjoyed time.

Warren Ellis:

With Mick it's funny, his character is so Australian and yet so un-Australian as well. I've often thought about this. There were aspects of him that were so comforting, like that he had those qualities to talk to him particularly after have been, not lived there for so long, and he was almost so sort of un-Australian as well. He seemed almost from a different time or something. Quite a character.

Tex Perkins:

I remember when Mick came up to stay at my house in the country in northern NSW, I have a creek on my property and it's a beautiful sheltered kind of creek with trees overhanging, and there was a dead tree lying across the creek, kind of spoiling the view a little bit. And I still have visions of Mick in his sort of suit pants, or whatever because he didn't really have true sort of outdoor gear, but let's picture Mick Geyer in his suit, with it rolled up above his knees standing in a bush creek hacking away at this dead tree and then finally dragging it off and out of the way. And to this day we still have that beautiful view, thanks to the hard labour of Mick Geyer!

Lisa Miller:

He was a person who really loved beauty and art and I remember giving him a gardenia once out of the garden. He was really touched by that and you could see he really appreciated the gardenia for all its beauty and you don't get many men who can really appreciate a beautiful flower with a wonderful fragrance, and he stuck it in his lapel and he strode out the gate. And I always think of him when I see gardenias now. I like that cross reference too, I always think of Billie Holliday with the gardenia behind the ear, that nice jazz reference too, classic reference.

MUSIC: Billie Holiday - They Can't Take That Away From Me (Billie's Best)

Lisa Miller:

I think anyone who's had someone like Mick Geyer in their lives is richer for that, for having known someone like that, and they're just people that have really powerful presences.

LISA:

Now here's Brian Hooper, bass player with Kim Salmon & the Surrealists and the Beast of Bourbon

Brian Hooper:

At a time in my life when my marriage had fallen apart, he actually put me up in his house for a few months when he was living in St Kilda. That means a lot to a person when they're on their arse, and there was just never any question, I didn't ask him he just offered, and I'll never forget that. It doesn't happen that often that someone just opens their door to you and lets you live in their space without question, even if you do have a questionable reputation in some areas. That's where I spent a lot of time listening to a lot of stuff and browsing through a lot of books.

Cameron Paine:

I never saw him do much reading, but clearly he must have read prodigious amounts. And just even sitting in his living room and running your eye down the titles in the book cases and most of them were well thumbed, but I never sprung him sitting in an armchair and reading a book, or seeing books scattered around the room clearly being read. But, certainly the books were full of notes, little notes that he'd written to himself, perhaps to remind him of things. If you got on a subject and you challenged his authority on it and he was in his *own* space he would go to a bookshelf and pull something down and open it up at a page, apparently randomly and hand it to you and, oh my god, there's an authority underscoring what he's had just said! And you sort of always got the sense that he'd steered the conversation in that direction, but no, I joke. Clearly he had an extraordinary memory and he hated being caught out on something and would go to extraordinary lengths to prove to you that you were wrong. Personally I found that an endearing characteristic, it sounds like it might be a negative attribute, but not at all, it was, by calling your own bluff and then showing you. And it wasn't done in a way to elevate himself, it was to educate you, to share something that he'd discovered, that he thought was particularly precious, with someone else.

Hugo Race:

I can see all these visual images in my mind. This certain gesture that Mick had when he would kind of arrive at the point of a story or he would coax and provoke someone into revealing something that they weren't really aware of and didn't necessarily want to make public in the first place, and then he'd kind of raise a hand in the air and crack this imaginary whip which was kind of like a touché signal, and then just look around at people - there you go, there I told you.

Greg Geyer:

Mick used to love throwing quotes around, like a line of a song, or something like that. And uh this one is, "He who throws mud loses ground", and that's Flo Bjelke Petersen quoting Confucius. So there's a beauty! (laughs)

Kim Salmon:

He was full of quotes from people, all kinds of people, like local people, like Conway Savage for instance, and then he'd throw something else at you from Vaclav Havel or something, you know, all to illustrate some point, something you might've said, he might quote somebody else later on. It was all these opinions that he seemed to be really interested in, like he was mixing them up and throwing them back out at you.

Gordy Blair:

When Mick was in Belfast, he did like debating people, and he did like talking about books and art, and music, and my friends in Belfast that I grew up with also did, and I thought that it might be interesting to bring the two together. And so I brought Mick along to a restaurant in Belfast, where 3 or 4 of my friends were there, my Irish friends. And when we arrived they were already fallen out over who was the greatest writer Dostoyevsky or Kafka, and I thought Mick would find this amusing, but he didn't really, he found it, it wasn't a debate, it was a shit fight. So ah, I thought he would enjoy that, but he really didn't. You know it wasn't the proper way to talk to people about art.

Stephen Walker:

I think both of us believed in the art of conversation, which means more than how are you, what have you been doing, and things like that. And the other thing of course is, unusual for perhaps rock & rollers, that both of us had been and always were incredible readers. Like I think we worked out at one stage that Mick and I had both read about a book a week since we were 16 and continued to do that. And so there was quite a commonality of authors and impressions of books that we'd sort of developed over that period of time.

I actually seemed to receive more videos from Mick than I did music, he taped quite a lot of stuff on gypsies and things like that. He was interested in that sort of cultural kind of thing.

Henry Rollins:

He turned me onto people like Nelson Algren, a great American writer, Slim Gaillard, great Cuban-American musician, endless amounts of essays, and he would always send me Xeroxed articles from ancient issues of Down Beat Magazine, or old interviews with Coltrane and Eric Dolphy, and a really wonderful three hour documentary on Slim Gaillard. He once sent me a thing on Um Kalsoum, the great middle eastern diva, who he was completely conversant in. Where'd he get it all from is what I'd like to know?

MUSIC: Um Kalsoum - Ya Messaharni (Ya Messaharni)

LISA:

Next, more from Cameron Paine PBS colleague and sound engineer.

Cameron Paine:

I recorded some stuff for Lisa Miller quite some years ago and Mick, maybe around about '98, I don't know whether the term is managing, because Mick's not a great manager and Lisa's not a woman who'll be managed, but let's just say they had a professional relationship. Mick was responsible for a tour that Lisa did with The Cruel Sea, and so he invited me to do the sound on that tour. That tour was actually fantastic in the sense that Mick's stated aim was to convince me that Bob Dylan was a living God! We couldn't leave town for some reason until the evening of the day before. And so I rolled around to Mick's place in a hire car to pick him up and drive to northern NSW and he said "oh, just a second I've gotta do something". He was fossicking around in his, what we'll call his study where there's records strewn everywhere and cassettes and notes and stuff like that. I thought "Oh yeah, car tapes, that's cool".

And then there was a phone call, and I'm looking at my watch (thinking) "we've gotta get out of here" and, you could tell by his manner this was a person he was familiar with and that this was going to be a lazy 15 or 20 minute phone call. Anyway I wasn't really listening to the conversation but if you're in a room with a person who is having a conversation it washes over you. Anyway I worked out that he was talking to Nick Cave, and in Nick Cave's eulogy to Mick he talks about their relationship in terms of him reaching what I'll call writers block, not his words, but you know reaching a point in whatever he's working on, and picking up the phone and ringing Mick. Well, I was on the other end of one of those conversations and so I can attest to the veracity of Nick's statements in his lovely eulogy, and I can also attest to the fact that Mick Geyer when confronted with a friend who was posing that sort of a problem to him, would become oblivious to anything else going on in his life. Suffice to say the conversation eventually ended, Mick grabbed up his bag of cassettes and we jumped in the car and literally drove all night and most of the next day to get to the gig. Guess what cassettes we listened to all the way? I reckon I listened to 400 Bob Dylan songs, and it wasn't Bob Dylan performing his songs, so he didn't torture me with Bob Dylan's voice and guitar playing and harmonica all the way. He had some amazing artists doing songs that I perhaps even didn't recognise as Bob Dylan songs, but I remained unconvinced at the end of the drive.

MUSIC: Bob Dylan - Restless Farewell (The Times They Are A Changin')

Nick Cave (Birthday Party, Boys Next Door, Bad Seeds):

Well, his influence over me was immense. I work in an office, I go to the office every day and basically my day began with lightin' up a fag, making a cup of tea and ringing up Mick Geyer. And we would talk for an hour or so on the phone. He would be in Australia.

He was the one person that I would actually sing things over the phone to, recite lyrics over the phone to, put the phone next to the piano and play the latest song that I was working on. You know, he was someone that I could bounce that off. And he would give advice about it, or say "Nicholas this is, you know it ain't that good" or "it's great" or whatever, and he was invaluable in that way for me. He was the one person that I did that with, that was involved in the songs as they were actually being written rather than being a person that I presented the songs to later on. And I don't have that now, actually. And I miss that, terribly.

He was extraordinarily patient, extraordinarily generous with his time and his ideas, there seemed to be no other agenda than that he was a friend and that he knew that it served me well to be encouraged by him.

MUSIC: Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds - No More Shall we Part (No More Shall We Part)

Mick Harvey:

Well, the project we really collaborated on directly together was the Bad Seeds album No More Shall We Part, which he was actually in the studio in the official capacity of kind of assistant producer through the entire thing in London in, what was that, 2000. That was good, but in a way that was a just a slight expansion of what he often did when he came into the studio when we were recording because he'd always just come in and sit on the couch at the back and hold forth on his opinion about what was going on and what we should be doing and blah, blah, blah. Which was sometimes you just wanted to tell him to shut up and other times it was really great because it was enthusiasm, it was opinions etc, etc, y'know, but it (he) was from a non-musician standpoint really so sometimes it wasn't particularly helpful what he was saying, it was far too esoteric for where you were up to with trying to get a recording done. But he was so often there in the studio over the years, through the '90's in particular that him being there in an official capacity was sort of a technicality in a way. I think he was actually credited as 'Guru' on one album (laughs) 'Our Guru, Mick Geyer'. Might've been the Murder Ballads album actually. One of the great influences he had on everybody was introducing them to so much different music, not only music but films and books and everything he just talked about constantly. And he was a fantastic source of material to consume, and that's always great to have someone like that around.

MUSIC: Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds - No More Shall we Part (No More Shall We Part)

Nick Cave:

You know, I think on one level that was kind of his mission, for a lot of us, was to kind of broaden our musical horizons, which he did. What was happening around the punk rock days I guess, is that we had a tendency to kind of throw everything out, and say look everything's bullshit except for what's happening now type of thing. And Mick was always "hang on a second, that's not such a good idea, there is this and there was this and this and this is great stuff, great music", you know 'don't throw the baby out with the bath-water' type of thing.

LISA:

Shortly we'll hear Mick Geyer as a guest on ABC Radio National's Arts Talk program, talking to Julie Copeland about the Meltdown Festival in 1999

MUSIC: Lee Hazelwood - Sand (Sand)

Nick Cave:

I then went on to work more closely on other things with him. I did the Meltdown Festival in London, where I directed a 10 day arts festival, which they do each year, they get a different personality to do this, and I did that with Mick. And it was in many ways, me and Mick's kind

of finest hour, because it was exactly the sort of thing that he should be doing, which was making suggestions of people that would be great to have over these 10 days, and he loved to do that, he loved doing that, and they were wonderful obscure glorious kind of suggestions. But we had Nina Simone on, we had Lee Hazelwood, we had Germaine Greer...

ABC Radio National Arts Talk program, Aug 1999: Mick Geyer interviewed by Julie Copeland:

MG: ... Indeed, she was "honoured to be the curtain raiser" in her own words, she came along and did a marvellous 5-10 minute introduction on the genius of Nina Simone and the manner in which each generation successively discovers the beauty and majesty of the music of Nina Simone, and then proceeded to read a series of poems which she said were sort of inspired by the themes that come up in Nina Simone's work. The first one was a song of Sappho's, or poem of Sappho's more correctly, which she read in Ancient Greek.

JC: That's pretty impressive.

MG: Well, she claimed that it was because it was Nick Cave's Meltdown she could do whatever she wanted, which was I am sure what he had in mind, and indeed she took the rope and succeeded to corral a number of very, very beautiful poems from women prior to the appearance of Nina Simone.

MUSIC: Nina Simone - Black Is The Colour Of My True Love's Hair (Quiet Now - Night Songs)

Cameron Paine:

Mick had a real thing for Nina Simone, as an artist, I hasten to add, and I think probably one of the most exciting moments of his latter years was meeting her and doing one of those interviews. He was just so excited, he wrote me a letter saying, "wow I'm going to do this thing" and when he came back to Australia he was so excited about the potential of the material he had. I don't think that excitement ever saw it's way into the material being used for anything.

ABC Radio National Arts Talk program, Aug 1999: Mick Geyer interviewed by Julie Copeland:

JC: The Dirty Three played another night at Meltdown, which was a night celebrating Arvo Pärt, the Estonian composer. Now Mick Geyer, this seems like a really serious festival, what a festival should be - Meltdown, because there's such a surprising and eccentric and risky kind of mix of elements and people. That's an unlikely combination Arvo Pärt and The Dirty Three. How did that work out?

MG: It was fantastic actually. At the end of the night you didn't know whether the audience had arrived for the Dirty Three or indeed for the music of Arvo Pärt, which is quite the way the festival is set up, by seemingly juxtaposing opposites, but the consistent element in all of these people is that the musicians and artists never actually see their music as being derivative from one particular form. It's also indicative that on another night, the person ostensibly known for being a country musician Lee Hazelwood, actually performed 1920's jazz standards, and he was supported by Harry Dean Stanton who is an actor who must be about 60 now, who basically did Chuck Berry songs, and turned the hall into like a beer joint. On that bill was Conway Savage, a local Melbourne musician who also plays in Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, as does Warren Ellis who also plays in the Dirty Three.

MUSIC: Dirty Three - Warren's Lament (Horse Stories)

Warren Ellis:

The Dirty Three was just starting out, sort of highly improbable as a concept, and I remember Mick helping us out with our contract, we had this record contract and he had a look at it and he said "well it's not a good one but it's the only one you've got, so that makes it a good one!" And, he made you feel that he was totally there for *you* and he seemed to do that for lots of people, I guess I sort of found that out more after he'd died.

Mariella del Conte

If you were Mick's friend, then you were that forever, because he was always very encouraging and interested in what you were doing and he never judged various things that were going on,

at the time, he kind of stood apart from it, and tried to inject his own creativity into his friendships with other creative people, and that was through music largely.

Warren Ellis:

Well he's probably one of the most musical people I've ever met in my life. I mean, he loved music and saw that it had the power to move people in a very spiritual way and a very profound way, and I certainly would talk to him more about music than most musicians I know. And you just sort of knew whenever he said have a listen to this it was either going to knock you out or not far from it, so. He was just attracted to I guess fine things, and things that really had a soul to them. And he had a real love for jazz, and that was something that I've sort of listened to since I was 16 or 17. We had this common thing there, and also liking different sorts of music, and some people will just stick to one area, and Mick tended to cover a really wide ground. Mick introduced me to so much stuff, I mean I wouldn't know where to begin.

MUSIC: Alice Coltrane - Shiva Loka (Journey in Satchidananda)

Mick Harvey:

Alice Coltrane he seems to have introduced a lot of people to. Certainly Dollar Brand, Abdullah Ibrahim, a piece of which was chosen by us to play at his funeral because it seemed to exemplify him. Everybody had this piece on half a dozen cassettes. The piece in question is called Whoza Mtwana.

MUSIC: Dollar Brand - Whoza Mtwana (African Market Place)

Mick Harvey:

I know at one stage I asked him if he might be interested in writing something about the Birthday Party, as a kind of retrospective thing, this was sometime in the, around 1990 I suppose, when he was living in St Kilda. And he promptly wrote reams, hundreds and hundreds of pages, which was essentially a kind of, in Mick's typical fashion, the sort of history of world culture with the Birthday Party as the reference point. It did need a lot of editing but, the computer he was working on, kinda crashed and he moved onto another one and then the biography came out, or was in the works, the biography of Nick which came out in the mid '90's, and it kind of got left behind and dropped.

Greg Geyer:

Yeah well in that period when he was trying to write a book about The Birthday Party, I think he got a bit close to those guys and therefore couldn't finish the book. But at that time he spent an enormous amount of time doing that.

MUSIC: Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds - Lyre of Orpheus (Lyre of Orpheus / Abbatoir Blues)

Mick Harvey:

This Bad Seeds album was dedicated to Mick, and we were all very grateful that he um held off dying until we'd finished the basic tracks because it would've been very difficult to keep up the vibe I think. I was aware of that when we started out, because we were getting news that he was really about to go and we'd started recording and so we were sort of half way through the basic tracks, and I think I even said to Warren at one stage "oh gee, I hope Mick doesn't die before we've done the basic tracks!" I said I know it sounds like a weird thing to say, but I just knew it would've just derailed the record, completely. And then we finished all the basic tracks and then the next day we basically heard that he'd died.

Warren Ellis:

The last thing he said to me, the very day we'd finished recording, I called him up and he was like "how's it going" and he was barely, you could barely hear him. I said "We've just finished, we've done 19 songs" and he said "well what happened to the 20th?!" And uh, I mean it still strikes me as incredible that he'd even actually have the thought for that at that time.

Nick Cave:

I sent him the lyrics at some point, he wanted the lyrics, I sent him the lyrics, but by the time he got them he was in no condition to be able to really read them. But the record's very much for him, it's dedicated to him and I think that when we were in the studio we very much did our best with this record in that we knew that it was for him.

MUSIC: Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds - Abbatoir Blues (Lyre of Orpheus / Abbatoir Blues)

Warren Ellis:

Since he's died, I always knew he knew a lot of people but I had no idea that he'd touched so many people in the same way that he touched me. He just encouraged so many people to pursue their art. You probably look at a lot of the records made in the 90's and Mick will be thanked in some capacity on them. He's so encouraging, and I think seems so kind of invaluable in helping people realise their projects in some way. And I think that was very specific to each person.

Barry Palmer:

Everything I was ever involved in, it was unwritten, but it was in my head, that I was going to have to play it to Mick. And I suppose I'd never really feel.., that wouldn't be the decider whether I was happy with it or not, I'd always like to have his opinion.

LP: Yeah. Do you think you would've found yourself in the same place, if you hadn't been mates with Mick?

BP: No, absolutely not. Without a doubt. Mick's like a walking radio station, I don't think you'd find anybody else who could have that much influence over so many people. He could be a bugger too you know!

Chris Wilson:

People should be reminded it's just not the people who strut or stumble about on stage that form our culture. That he was a great synthesiser of ideas, and he taught people the rules of the game, that if you want to be other than just a knucklehead you've gotta head in this direction and this is what you're really taking on when you start creating music. He was also a great leveller, you know, you couldn't get above yourself, or he'd soon let you know.

He demanded that when you walked on a stage, you played with real endeavour and real intensity and you strived for some sort of excellence and that wasn't an academic sort of tight-arsed excellence it was like, you threw yourself in and you came out the other end spent or you hadn't done anything.

Warren Ellis:

As Mick used to say - it takes pressure to make diamonds!

Hugo Race:

If he thought that you weren't delivering whatever potential that he perceived that you had in you he could really give you a good caning as well but he would do it in a friendly amicable way, so that you wouldn't really get annoyed about it until afterwards! When you're actually in the grip with him there, you'd have to concede things, because he could outfox most people that he grappled with, yeah.

Henry Rollins:

To almost the point of tears, where I can just sit on my own and just kind of do my head in, I really miss Mick. He was a real friend, and completely rare, just unbelievably special, completely irreplaceable, as people like Nick Cave and all these other people I'm sure have told you different versions of what I'm saying now. Just this amazing find, you know, and you're so glad that you got to be his friend.

On the topic of Nick Cave for a minute, a runaway staggering genius, when you see how much

reverence Nick has for him, when Nick calls him a mentor, and Nick Cave is one of the most informed, blazingly dangerous minds I have ever been around. I mean that's a big place that mind of his, and when you see that Mick had a real impact on Nick, that's saying something.

Nick Cave:

I think most of us define ourselves by what we do and I just thought Mick was definable by what he was and that was someone with extraordinary generosity, discretion, courage, especially in his final years, his final days. He displayed enormous dignity and courage. And he was a very special person because of that.

Chris Wilson:

And it wasn't that he was just simply a mentor or an educator, he was a friend as well. He loved people, and he loved being around people, but he was also a very private man.

MUSIC: Dollar Brand - Whoza Mtwana (African Market Place)

Sasha Geyer:

Well, my name is Sasha Geyer, and I am Michael's nephew and I'm ten. My connection with him was music and literature, and he was introducing me to literature more than he was introducing me to music. First I was into fairy tales like Hans Christian Anderson and Charles Perrault, and this was when he was in Switzerland so I was emailing him and calling him, and he brought me back a French version of a Hans Christian Anderson book and I also got him to introduce me to things like Oliver Twist and children's literature.

I was introducing him to the modern hip-hop industry, but he would never actually get me to listen to the music you would expect him to get me to listen to. I would've liked him to play me a bit more jazz or a bit more of Nick Cave or even Frank Sinatra.

LP: So what did you introduce him to?

SG: Lots of Missy Elliott.

MUSIC: Missy Elliott - Outro (This Is Not A Test)

Sasha Geyer:

Oh he really liked Missy Elliott. I introduced him to Beyonce, which I was more into, sometimes he was very judging of most of the hip-hop artists, so I was kind of teaching him music where he was supposed to be teaching me music.

If Michael was still alive, I wish he could judge my inspirations, because when I grow up I would like to be a musician, a serious musician, about serious music, and I get a lot of inspirations every day. So I wish he could, I wish I could actually tell him the inspirations, that I'm not sure if he gave me them but he definitely is a part of something that brought the inspiration to me. And I play the trumpet, which he tried to do. So that's my story.

And I will remember that, when you know him you always should know that there are many things you don't know about him. So that's it.

Tex Perkins:

In his latter years he kind of became quieter, maybe he knew he was ill, but over the last six, seven years I knew him he was, you never knew exactly what he was doing, it was always sort of rumoured that Mick was here but he wouldn't appear on the scene as he did. But I remember him being very annoyed and sort of impatient with everyone, like, "What you're still here in Melbourne? C'mon, do something! Get out, do something with your life!" It actually sort of shat people who had lives to live, but yeah he expected everyone to really make something of their lives and get the hell out of Melbourne and go and live in some obscure country or something, and alienated himself from his old friends. But yeah I guess that was probably due to the fact that he knew his time was limited and he could see the mortality of everybody really and everybody's time was limited. But, we'll still love him!

LISA:

Mick Geyer worked closely with Dave Graney and Clare Moore, managing the Coral Snakes for several years.

Clare Moore & Dave Graney:

CM: It was amazing the amount of stuff we learnt about him after he had died, all of the stuff about the cricket and the forming of the union in that place that he worked, just a whole lot of things that we had no idea about.

DG: His brother's eulogy was incredible, at the funeral.

LP: Yeah he seemed to have a lot of stuff going on, you know like a lot of levels, and not everybody knew about all of them. (CM: No.) I mean there is common stuff, but a lot of people seemed to have a different little piece of Mick.

Stephen Walker:

He appeared to never do a days work in his life and yet he never seemed to have any problem with money, and he always seemed to have cigarettes and alcohol, and yet somehow or other he never managed to have any gainful employment. Although I can remember that once I lived off the ground, in a block in St Kilda and one we were out on the balcony at about three in the morning talking, and I can remember being surprised, he just dropped into conversation that he had been a window washer on high rise buildings and how dangerous it was and if you dropped a 20 cent piece you could put a hole through someone's skull, and it was just a little bit of 'What the ..?!'

LISA:

Obviously it wasn't widely known that at one stage, Mick ran a window cleaning business with a team of cleaners called 'Coltrane Clean'.

Cameron Paine:

He used to tell me stories about his time spent, I gather in his early 20's, as a window washer on one of those gantry things that go up and down the outside of buildings. And I just wonder if, he seemed to have a knack of being able to make money by doing things that were not particularly intellectually demanding, and I think it was a deliberate strategy and I think it paid the rent and it gave him plenty of time to think about stuff.

One of the things we liked about each other is that, we could walk out of a pub at two o'clock in the morning, having been at each other like terriers for two hours, and would encounter each other three weeks later, three months later and would return almost to the sentence that we had broken off the previous conversation. And so he was a great mate, because he was always a low maintenance mate and I trust that he saw me much the same way. Regrettably that worked against me towards the end of his life, because I was unaware that he was ill. It would've been nice to say goodbye, thank him for what he's given me.

Penny Ikinger:

PI: Mick was also like an international character in his influences with other musicians and also the fact that he did live in other countries and did a lot of travelling. Just before he died I told him I was going to Seattle and he was reminiscing about how when he was about twenty he moved to Seattle and he used to work on the wharves there, and I was fascinated, I didn't know that about him, I can't imagine Mick Geyer the eloquent,

LP: The man in the suit working in the wharves.

PI: ...working in the wharves, it was fascinating. And I think he lived in Seattle for about a year or more. Yep. And that's where I was when I heard that he died, in Seattle.

When he died it made me reflect on my own life and sometimes you think, "Ooh things are a struggle, it's hard", but it made me realise that I've got a lot to be grateful for. Not just in the immediate sense of being healthy and being alive, but also in the fact that I have been able to get my music into a material form, meaning a CD, or do gigs and get it out there to people.

Mick was someone who was extremely talented and also as you know an aspiring writer, and I sort of felt, well it's a shame that he hasn't left something as solid as what he's capable of behind, like a whole book or something like that.

But then he certainly left a legacy hasn't he?! Because I mean I'm sitting here and you're interviewing me and you've been interviewing other people and as well so what does that tell you? That tells you something too.

Nick Cave:

I think that Mick's influence over the Melbourne scene is untold. He wasn't in a band, he didn't do stuff like this, but his influence was massive.

MUSIC: Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds - Janglin' Jack (Let Love In)

Nick Cave Interviewing Mick Geyer in 1996:

NC: Um, there's a question I wanted to ask you. Do you like the Bad Seeds? Do you think I'm a good singer?

MG: You're a unique singer. You're a pretty expressive singer.

NC: In terms of, including the Bad Seeds, Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds, what do you think they've done for Australian music?

MG: They haven't taken any notice of Australian music and in my opinion have taken a perception of music as not belonging to any one place or time, and in that sense they just offer an example that you shouldn't stick close to home in terms of your references.

NC: Exactly. Well said.

LISA:

Mick Geyer being characteristically cryptic and very diplomatic with Nick Cave in a video interview recorded in 1996, bringing to an end this fourth program paying tribute to Mick.

Thanks to the many people involved in this project, including Sophie Best, Levels Audio Post in Los Angeles, Rachel Willis and Mute Records in London, Greg Geyer and Graeme Osborne for material from their archives, Nick Cave for the use of his interview with Mick and to Julie Copeland and ABC Radio National for use of the Meltdown Festival feature.

'Mick Geyer: Music Guru' was produced for PBS-FM by Moira Drew. Audio pre-production by Bill Runting, post-production by Garry Havrillay, with interviews by Jenni Crowley and me, Lisa Palermo.

And we'll leave you with Janglin' Jack from the Bad Seeds, featuring Mick Geyer on backing vocals, in one of his rarely recorded musical adventures.

MUSIC: Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds - Janglin' Jack (Let Love In) •



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