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'Suck more piss':
how the confluence of key Melbourne-based audiences, musicians, and iconic scene spaces informed the Oz rock identity

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Abstract

Australian pub rock began in Melbourne in late 1969/early 1970 and became the nation's most successful penetration into the international rock market and audiences. While commendable work has been written about Australia's scene spaces (particularly Homan 2003; Stratton 2007), most remain Sydney-centric and typically overlook the equally (if not more) important Melbourne rock scene. In all cases the fermentative period of pub rock—and especially the combined roles played by its early audiences, musicians and venues—remains under-examined. This article will explore Australian pub rock's beginnings through the lens of the career trajectory of Billy Thorpe & The Aztecs, and how that influenced, and was influenced by, the specific demands of Melbourne's fluid audiences and venues leading up to the Oz rock era, using the key case studies of Mulgrave's Village Green Hotel and Nunawadings's Whitehorse Hotel.

Keywords: Billy Thorpe & The Aztecs; Melbourne; Oz rock; pub rock; sharpies

In the beginning…

Oz rock was Australia's hegemonic style of pub rock from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s and arguably the first distinctly Australian form of popular music. It was developed in aggressive, male-dominated scenes and spaces and became the spearhead of Australia's most successful penetration into the international rock market. The diffusion of the Oz rock sound into the global idiom of popular music is best represented by AC/DC, whose 1980 album *Back In Black* consistently ranks as one of the highest selling albums of all time and one of the top three rock albums of all time (McGreevy 2009; Cashmere 2010). Oz rock

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audiences, contexts and environments have been integral to its identity and cultural function as performance and event (Turner 1992: 24). While commendable work has been written about Australia's scenes and spaces, particularly by Homan (2003, 2008) and Stratton (2007), most typically under-examine the Melbourne scene and its central importance as the city where Australian pub rock began. Therefore, this article looks at how the intermingling flows of Melbourne's musicians, audiences, performances and live music spaces interacted to feed into the inception of pub rock and the construction of the Oz rock identity. Specifically this article will explore the fermentative period of pub rock through the lens of Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs' career trajectory (who are commonly credited as the first iconic Oz rock band), and how that influenced, and was influenced by, the specific demands of Melbourne's fluid audiences and venues leading up to the Oz rock era. I will use as key case studies two hotels central to the development of Oz rock: Mulgrave's Village Green Hotel and Nunawadings's Whitehorse Hotel.[1]

To understand how the traditional adult sites of Australian drinking culture were infiltrated and eventually taken over by pub rock and its youthful and aggressive, male-dominated audiences, we must first briefly look at the pre-1966 era of the 'six o'clock swill' when strictly utilitarian pubs in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania would be filled to capacity from five o'clock to closing at six, with men racing from work to slam down drinks in linoleum-lined pubs (Horne 1970: 160). The publicans would just hose everything down after the carnage, an attitude that would continue well into the Oz rock age, with lino being replaced by tiles to aid the ease of cleaning up gallons of spilled alcohol, vomit, blood, urine and smashed glass (Turner 1987: 4; Cockington 2001: 187). Even after Victorian closing hours were extended from 6 pm to 10 pm on 1 February 1966, public houses were still essentially entertainment-free and the domain of 'the old guard'.[2] Steeped in decidedly adult masculine traditions, the classic 1960s Australian pub was a social-levelling, classless space which valued mateship and egalitarianism, and yet alienated women and younger male patrons (McGregor 1966: 136; Turner 1987). When Melbourne's pubs were suddenly given four extra hours to trade, those which began to provide light entertainment catered towards their pre-existing audience, favouring low-budget cabaret-styled acts that drew

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    1.   This will include some information regarding key dates and venues never previously revealed in academic or biographical texts.
    2.   In *The Mayor's a Square*, Shane Homan offers an in-depth documentation of the parallel history of Sydney's performance spaces, where the trading hours were extended past 6 pm on 1 February 1955 (Homan 2003: 28). Unfortunately, his discussion of Melbourne's live music scene from 1966–1972 is scant.

around 50 people a night (Engleheart 2010). After six o'clock these enormous bars built to cater for more than 1000 speed-drinking 'swill' punters were left largely unfilled. They would not become incorporated into the live popular music scene until the end of the decade.

Melbourne's live music scene had become so vibrant by 1966 that it had dethroned Sydney as Australia's rock and pop music capital (Walker 2002: 42–43; Keays 1999: 43–69; Walker *et al.* 2001a). From 1966 to 1969, Victoria's young punters frequented the state's all ages, unlicensed venues which had begun their transformation from modern jazz clubs into nightclubs and dancehalls following Australia's exposure to Beatlemania in 1964 (Zion 1988: 194; Walker *et al.* 2001a; Homan 2003: 72). The founders of leading venues such as the Fat Black Pussycat (run by Alex Sugarman) and the Thumpin' Tum (run by David Flint) have said they partly styled their clubs after what they knew about American discotheques, but with a greater emphasis on a 'party in your house atmosphere', and on alternating live music acts with records to provide continuous dance music for their patrons, unlike their US counterparts which only played records (Zion 1988: 194–96). On Saturdays, Australian discotheques were able to provide entertainment all night[3] and the lack of alcohol discouraged older crowds while attracting masses of ardent, teenaged music fans (Homan 2003: 78). The 'dry' nature of these venues did not exclude them from what Zion (1988: 265) has referred to as 'the growing ideological dimension of the confrontation between wowserism and the pop music scene which gained momentum and definition during the mid-1960s around the dance venues'. This concern peaked in 1967 when nightclubs were placed under constant (yet largely unsuccessful) threats of closure from the city council, the Health Commission, and residents (Zion 1988: 264–69). This pressure resulted in staunch opposition to special occasion liquor permits, restrictive legislation such as the *Sunday Entertainment Act* of 1967 which banned entertainment on Sundays;[4] and the passage of an amendment bill on April 9, 1968 which stipulated that public entertainment on Saturday nights must come to a close by 1 am.[5] The venue owners' repeated and failed attempts to gain liquor licences ensured that they would not be able to rely on liquor rev-

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    3.   Victoria Parliamentary Debates, Session 1967–68, 290: 4138-4139 (cited in Zion 1988: 269).

    4.   More accurately, the *Sunday Entertainment Act* prohibited public entertainment (which it defined as including virtually all entertainment for which an admission fee was charged) from being held or conducted on a Sunday without the written permission of a Minister. See the *Sunday Entertainment Act*, Victorian Acts of Parliament, 1967, Act 7634: 698–702. See also Thompson *et al.* (2001: 6).

    5.   Victoria Parliamentary Debates, Session 1967–68, 290: 4138-4139 (cited in Zion 1988: 269).

enue to help cover their ownership or rental costs (Homan 2003: 78). The refusal of liquor licenses also revealed the extent of the Melbourne City Council's Building and Town Planning Committee's suspicion of live music venues (Homan 2003: 78; see also Zion 1988: 270). This constant resistance to the incorporation of venues serving liquor within the control of Melbourne's city planning made them an increasingly unattractive business venture and would contribute to the rise of pub rock (Homan 2003: 78).

Waiting for Yobbo: Billy Thorpe's arrival and transformation

Before we can discuss the appearance of the licensing changes which would open the doors to pub rock, we must first turn our attention to the man who has most often been credited in Australian rock mythology as its most seminal early figure: Manchester-born Billy Thorpe. It was during his rigorous regime of gigging in Melbourne's unlicensed discotheque circuit from 1968 to 1969 that Thorpe would begin his transformation into the future 'King Yob' of Oz rock. It is to those foundational nightclub years in Melbourne that this article will now briefly turn. By 1968, the fame he'd enjoyed following his considerable success with the Aztecs in the mid-1960s was far behind Thorpe. His Seven Network pop music television show, *It's All Happening*, had been taken off the air in late 1966, the Aztecs had broken up in early 1967, he was declared bankrupt in 1967 and his last recording was a flop cover of Roy Orbison's 'Dream Baby/You Don't Live Twice' for Festival records which only got as far as number 36 on the Sydney chart in October 1966. By the time the solo Thorpe repaired to Melbourne in August 1968, he was considered a middle-of-the-road, has-been crooner and a far cry from the chart-topping pop icon who had dominated the Australian charts with 'whitened'-up R 'n' B from 1964 to 1965 (Stratton 2007; Baker in Spencer and Nowara 1993). Melbourne was originally intended to be a final solo tour 'pit-stop' for Thorpe, who was intending to try his luck in Britain under the guidance of Bee Gees manager Robert Stigwood (Baker 1990: 100). The tour was complicated when he was abandoned by his lead guitarist and drummer[6] on the eve of the trip, so Thorpe quickly assembled a new trio under the lucrative name Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs[7] with himself as lone guitarist (McFarlane 1999a: 636). This would prove to be a pivotal decision in Thorpe's career.

6. The outgoing solo band members were Mick Liber (guitar; ex-Python Lee Jackson) and Johnny Dick (drums, ex-Max Merritt and the Meteors) who had been with the band since January 1968.
7. This version of The Aztecs included 21-year-old Paul 'Sheepdog' Wheeler (ex-Affair) and drummer Jimmy Thompson (ex-Vince Maloney Sect).

Figure 1: 'Talking Aztecs Blues' article by Ed Nimmervoll, featuring Billy Thorpe & The Aztecs featuring Lobby Loyde (photographs uncredited), published in *Go-Set*, 5 September 1970, p. 9. Image courtesy of Ed Nimmervoll.

Thorpe was a rudimentary, chord-based player and the trio were unable to play his old repertoire convincingly (Walker 2009: 13, 105; Perrin 2006; Thorpe and Scatena 2010: 102). Their first Melbourne show was on Wednesday, 14 August 1968[8] at the popular, unlicensed inner-city venue Berties, where the untested trio were met by a hostile and abusive crowd (*Go-Set* 1968: 22; Thorpe 2002). Out of desperation, Thorpe responded by improvising an eight-minute, ultra-loud version of Gene Vincent's classic rock 'n' roll hit 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' (Walker 2009: 105). The response to

8.   *Go-Set* magazine indicates that his first Melbourne show was on Wednesday 14 August 1968 at Victoria and Albert, 1 Spring Street, Melbourne city (better known as Berties) (*Go-Set* 1968: 22).

the new Aztecs' style was enough to inspire the trio to explore the new direction further and, though it was not met with unanimous enthusiasm, they remained in Melbourne for an additional eight years (Walker 2009: 107; Thorpe 2002).[9] By December of 1968 the new Aztecs made a major leap forward when Thorpe talked respected guitar hero and old school friend Lobby Loyde[10] (of The Purple Hearts and The Wild Cherries) into joining the band. Loyde was a much-loved veteran of the Melbourne scene[11] who gave the band an immediate credibility boost and educated Thorpe about original American blues artists, riff-based guitar playing, and the virtues of volume courtesy of his pioneering, custom-made 1000-watt Strauss amplifier (Perrin 2006; Baker 1990; Walker 2009; Thorpe and Scatena 2010; McFarlane 1999a, 1999b; Engelheart 2010). The Aztecs' following grew substantially over 1969 and Thorpe describes playing from Thursday to Sunday as well as up to five gigs a night on Saturdays, commonly 'within the same square mile in the heart of Melbourne's inner city' (Thorpe 2002: 133).

While Loyde's tenure in the Aztecs only lasted until January 1971, it was under his supervision that their sound was consolidated and many staple ingredients of what would later typify Oz rock were established. Loyde's commanding influence over the Aztecs came across vividly in their various interviews with *Go-Set* during this time (see Figure 1). These include astonishingly high volumes, powerful vocals, a driving heavy blues and boogie base, a tough and muscular approach, and the characteristic 'Aztecs ending', which featured extended soloing and feedback-laden bombast (Walker 2002; Engleheart and Durieux 2006; Engleheart 2010; Roberts 2002). These features have since been transmitted into the global popular music idiom courtesy of their adoption by AC/DC, who cite the Aztecs and Loyde as two of the three key Australian influences on their music (Walker 2002; Engleheart and Durieux 2006; Baker 2007a, 2007b; Bozza 2009).[12] It is worth noting

9.   The Aztecs initially moved into 92 Gipps Street, East Melbourne (Thorpe 2002: 129–30).

10. For more on Loyde, see Oldham (2010, 2012).

11. Melbourne's thriving music scene had been well established before Thorpe arrived and its key acts were Australasian garage rock bands which had either relocated to Melbourne or frequently toured there. These included Melbourne's The Wild Cherries, Running Jumping Standing Still, and The Elois; Sydney's The Missing Links and The Throb; Lithgow NSW's The Black Diamonds; Brisbane's The Purple Hearts; Adelaide's Masters Apprentices, Blues, Rags 'n' Hollers and The D-Coys; and Christchurch New Zealand's Chants R&B. As Homan (2008: 22) has contended these mid-60s groups were the proper descendants of the initial rock and rollers and, as such, formed the most pivotal scene of their era in relation to its importance to Australian rock ancestry by combining 'the guitar virtuosity of Rock and Roll structures with a ferocious vocal style, but achieved limited commercial success'.

12. The third Australian band which AC/DC have cited as an influence is The Easybeats, featuring George Young, older brother to AC/DC's Malcolm and Angus Young (Albert 2010: 248–49; Tait 2010: 160–79; Engleheart and Durieux 2006: 45). Young was AC/DC's manager in their early

that the formative elements of Oz rock were in place before founding artists such as the Aztecs[13] made the move into the larger licensed venues later nicknamed as 'beer barns' (Homan 2003; Walker 2009: 132). This is clearly counter to the kinds of materialistic, deterministic narratives which might suggest that Oz rock developed because of (and was shaped by) those pub environments. While beer barns would become an important later influence, there were other factors in play in its inception.

Let there be rock: AMBO, the Village Green Hotel and the birth of Australian pub rock

When the *Liquor Control Act* came into effect on 1 July 1968, closing time in Victorian pubs was extended from 10 pm to 1 am, providing pubs with up to three further hours of business than they had enjoyed within the initial extension of closing hours on 1 February 1966. Despite some of the larger pubs having a capacity of 1200–3000 people, the cabaret-styled entertainment they provided failed to attract large enough crowds to make staying open during those extra hours economically viable (King 2010; Thorpe and Scatena 2010; Engleheart 2010: 30). After the drinking age was reduced from 21 to 18 years of age in late 1969/early 1970,[14] one of the directors of the Australian Management and Booking Organisation (AMBO, formed in 1967), Bill Joseph, saw how the changes in legislation could lead to the financial potential of these larger pubs as performance spaces. He began lobbying them to try live music events aimed at enticing the potentially lucrative younger market. The eight venues which took a chance on Joseph's proposition were: the Village Green Hotel in Mulgrave; the South Side Six Hotel in Moorabbin; the Doncaster Hotel in Doncaster; the Pier Hotel in Frankston; the Whitehorse Hotel in Nunawading; the Waltzing Matilda Hotel in Springvale; the Matthew Flinders Hotel in Chadstone; and the Croxton Park Hotel in Thornbury (Ian McFarlane i/v with the author, 15 November 2012; Clinton Walker, i/v with the author, 15 November 2012; Engle-

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years and he, along with fellow Easybeat and songwriting partner Harry Vanda, produced their first albums.

13. Loyde began using his customized high-volume 300, 750 and 1000 watt Strauss amplifiers in The Wild Cherries in early 1968 (Oldham 2012, 2010; McIntyre 2006: 73; 2010: 151–52; Engleheart 2010: 32; Walker 2009: 95).

14. This is the claim of rock historians Clinton Walker (2012: 21) and Geoff King (2010: 298–99). However, Drug Free Australia's Under Age Drinking report (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission 1999: 2) contradicts this, stating that Victoria has had a drinking age of 18 years since 1906. Western Australia did lower its drinking age from 21 to 18 on 1 July 1970 so perhaps it is to this they are referring. By 1974, all Australian states had reduced the drinking age to 18 years; see http://www.drugfree.org.au/fileadmin/Media/Reference/UnderAge-Drinking.pdf.

heart 2010: 30–31).[15] At this time Joseph was also the Melbourne booking agent for Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs and, after convincing the band to mount some shows at these venues, he engaged Thorpe and Loyde to assess the gig-readiness of these venues' cavernous 'entertainment rooms', which largely consisted of a two-foot stage, single spotlight and tiny PA (Engleheart 2010: 30). The infamously loud Aztecs decided that the larger rooms would require four times the usual amount of amplifiers and a bigger PA than they had used in the nightclubs. The scene was set for a cacophony but, according to Thorpe, the final push from the sublime to the sonically ridiculous came from the audience (see Figure 2):

> [Thorpe said] The first couple of gigs…were all packed, but people just talked [and got pissed]. I said, 'Fuck this!' The next time we played…when people talked, I [turned the amps up and] said, 'Right, talk over this, you fucking cunts!' And that's how it all started. If you let an audience talk, they will, particularly where there's alcohol involved (Thorpe cited in Engleheart 2010: 31–32).

It took a few months for the word to spread about these new licensed venues but soon many of the other Melbourne bands followed The Aztecs' lead, giving their youthful supporters access to sites which held little prior attraction (Turner 1987: 17). Other bands which the *Go-Set* gig guides cite as playing at the Village Green[16] included Lobby Loyde's three-piece incarnation of The Wild Cherries, Adelaide blues rockers Fraternity (featuring future AC/DC front man Bon Scott) and psychedelic prog-rockers Tamam Shud. As more young adults of drinking age followed their favourite bands from the unlicensed clubs into licensed hotels, pub rock culture began its ascendance with the Village Green Hotel as 'party central' (Engleheart 2010: 30–31; Patterson 2010).

The cheaply staged, loud rock gigs proved highly profitable for the participating venues, which saw a steady increase in punters and a marked upturn in alcohol sales due to the emergence of 'a vast music audience…of suburban yobs…who consumed frightening amounts of beer…[and had not previously been thought]

15. The addresses of these premises were: the Village Green Hotel, corner of Springvale Road and Ferntree Road, Mulgrave; the South Side Six Hotel, 630 South Rd, Moorabbin; the Doncaster Hotel, 855 Doncaster Road, Doncaster; the Pier Hotel, 508 Nepean Highway, Frankston; the Whitehorse Hotel, 274 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading; the Waltzing Matilda Hotel, 856 Heatherton Road, Springvale; the Matthew Flinders Hotel, 667 Warrigal Road, Chadstone; and the Croxton Park Hotel, 607 High Street, Thornbury.

16. The Village Green and the Whitehorse Hotel are the only venues out of these first eight pubs to take on live music to be mentioned in the *Go-Set* gig guides beginning in 1971. Even then they are featured infrequently making it difficult to be more specific about who else played. The first gig listing of the Village Green in *Go-Set* is in the issue for 3 April (*Go-Set* 1971a) advertising a month-long Thursday night residency beginning on Thursday 1 April 1971. The first listing for the Whitehorse Hotel (Easy Rider Disco) is for Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs on Thursday 20 May 1971 (*Go-Set* 1971b).

Figure 2: 'Billy Thorpe Attacks Volume Critics and "Gutless" Bands' article by Ed Nimmervoll (photographs uncredited), published in *Go-Set*, 29 January 1972, p. 5. Image courtesy of Ed Nimmervoll.

to exist' (Baker 1990: 99). The enterprise spilled out further into the surrounding suburbs and soon the possibility of residencies and gigs on almost every night of the week became a reality for many bands. Joseph made plans with 17-year-old AMBO employee Michael Gudinski and Thorpe's manager Michael Browning[17] to form a new booking agency, Consolidated Rock (ConRock).[18] ConRock monopo-

17. Browning had run the Australian Entertainment Exchange agency since 1967.
18. ConRock was headed by Gudinski and Browning and by 1972 had absorbed both the

lized Melbourne's entertainment booking to the extent that in his corporate web-site biography, Browning admits that such dominance would be considered illegal by today's standards (Milesago 2002).[19] The 'classic' line-up of legendary Austra-lian blues rock act Chain,[20] managed by Gudinski,[21] had formed in August 1970 and ConRock quickly established them alongside The Aztecs as the biggest draw of early pub artists (Walker 2012: 22). Chain guitarist Phil Manning was less enthu-siastic than Thorpe about the inebriated crowds and extreme volumes of licensed venue gigs, arguing that pubs shifted the focus of live music events from being a social environment where people gathered to enjoy creatively potent music, to become places where the bands were valued by venue owners solely for how much money their audiences spent on alcohol (Engleheart 2010: 31). For Man-ning, drunken audiences also preferred increasingly basic, loud rock music, or as he famously put it, 'moronic entertainment for yobbos' (Guilliatt 2012).

Beer drinking and hell-raising: the 'suck more piss' crowd at the Whitehorse Hotel

The red-letter year for Melbourne's music scene proved to be 1971 when, for more than a year, Australian bands consecutively sat at the number one spot on the charts of the city's most popular radio station 3XY (and has not occurred since).[22] 1971 also marked a dramatic shift away from the dominance of the nightclubs towards the hotels, as well as civic centres and town halls as the central locations where live music was played and received. It also marked a change in the music's audience. Many of the texts describing this era (particularly rock biographies)[23] highlight the aggressive and demanding nature of the working-class suburban

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Australian Entertainment Exchange (AEE) and AMBO (*Go-Set* 1971k; *Billboard* 1972: 64). Joseph appears to have been phased out of the industry.

19. This information is written by an anonymous author on the Milesago website at: http://www.milesago.com/industry/browning-michael.htm. According to Stratton (2007: 209), Mile-sago is 'is an Australian Music Industry project and usually accurate'.

20. The classic line-up of Chain was harmonica-playing frontman Matt Taylor, guitarist Phil Manning, drummer Barry Harvey (Little Goose) and bass guitarist Barry Sullivan (Big Goose). These were the musicians who played on the ground-breaking *Toward The Blues* album.

21. Matt Taylor suggested to Gudinski that he take over management of Chain before he had even left Brisbane to join the band (Burrows and Riseborough 2009: 111).

22. Spectrum held 3XY's number one position for nine weeks with their debut single 'I'll Be Gone', followed by Chain's hard-edged 'convict blues' rocker, 'Black And Blue', for 18 weeks, then Daddy Cool's 1950s throwback 'Eagle Rock' for 22 weeks, and finally in 1972, Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs' 'Most People I Know (Think That I'm Crazy)' for 10 weeks (Burrows and Riseborough 2009: 114).

23. Including Thorpe 2002; Walker 2002, 2009; Keays 1999; Burrows and Riseborough 2009; Engelheart 2010; Engleheart and Durieux 2006; Arrow 2009; Jones 2001.

audiences that were increasingly outnumbering the scene's other key rock audience demographic: that of middle-class, educated hippies who were followers of more sophisticated bands such as popular prog-rockers Spectrum,[24] Mackenzie Theory, art-rock mischief makers Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band, and even wry 1950s rock 'n' roll throwbacks Daddy Cool, who were more comfortable playing in the student and bohemian scene typified by the Too Fucking Much Ballroom situated in Cathedral Hall on Brunswick Street, Fitzroy.

The most notorious and raucous crowd of all were the intimidating, closely cropped sharpie youth culture which existed in Melbourne from 1964 to the early 1980s (Oldham 2012, 2010; Cockington 2001; Walker 2002; Thorpe 2002; Jones 2001).[25] Sharpies were bored, working-class teens who hung out in street gangs across Melbourne's many suburbs, and prided themselves on their 'sharp' continental fashions. Sharpies made no secret of their love of alcohol and contempt for 'long hairs' and hippies (Cockington 2001; Walker 2009; Taylor 2004). The Aztecs developed a kinship with this youth culture after they were booked into a Thursday residency at famed 'sharpie bastion' the Whitehorse Hotel from November 1971 through to the end of March 1972 (*Go-Set* 1971c–j, 1972a–n;[26] Engleheart 2010: 44-45; see Figure 2).[27] It is notable that the first musical affiliation cited in the lore of the otherwise fashion-oriented sharpies is with The Aztecs and Chain[28] who were also Whitehorse regulars, alongside acts such as Doug Parkinson In Focus, the three-piece Wild Cherries, La De Das, Fraternity, Pirana, Blackfeather, Syrius, Ronnie Burns and Tamile, Colleen Hewitt, Johnny Young, The Mixtures, and Carson County Band, among other lesser known acts. The sharpies had first started following the new version of The Aztecs at the

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24. While Spectrum are best known for their folk-blues pop single 'I'll Be Gone', the majority of their catalogue is best described as non-commercial prog-rock, as witnessed on their startling *Spectrum Part One* (1971) and *Milesago* (1972) albums released on EMI's progressive subsidiary label, Harvest.

25. The sharpie youth culture has largely been overlooked or under-investigated by academia and popular culture historians but for more information on them see Oldham (2012, 2010) and Taylor (2004).

26. Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs' five-month-long Thursday night residency at the Whitehorse Hotel commenced on Thursday 4 November 1971 and lasted until Thursday 30 March 1972 (*Go-Set* 1971b–i; *Go-Set* 1972a–n).

27. *Go-Set*'s 1968 venue advertisements and 'Know Where' gig guides reveal that the Whitehorse Hotel had staged several gigs at least as far back as 1968 prior to the Thorpe and Chain bookings. This most notably includes a Battle Of The Bands at which 26 bands played; the Grand Final of which was staged on Wednesday 18 June (*Go-Set*, 5 June 1968).

28. The nicknames given to Chain's rhythm section of Barry Sullivan (Big Goose) and Barry Harvey (Little Goose) were given to them by the sharpie audience (Burrows and Riseborough 2009: 104–105).

Catcher nightclub[29] and the Village Green. While most bands avoided playing to the volatile sharpie audiences, The Aztecs and Chain had no such qualms (Cockington 2001: 181).

As a regular attraction at the Whitehorse, the combination of The Aztecs' uncompromising sonic juggernaut and the sharpies' demands for satisfaction made for a hair-raising, heady mix, intensifying the already rowdy nature of the audience. These shows were commonly packed to capacity and have been celebrated in three recent biographies on Thorpe:

> The Whitehorse Hotel was a place where very few bands could play. But a fucking loyal audience... There were fights every night at every gig for at least a year... they were really lower working class [hard] kids...who were begging, borrowing and stealing to come and support bands like us. We earned their respect and they earned ours (Thorpe cited in Engleheart 2010: 45).

It was at the Whitehorse Hotel that the sharpies first coined the rousing cheer 'suck more piss' which they would chant *en masse* as if at a soccer game.[30] The 'suck more piss' chant was to become synonymous with Thorpe and The Aztecs, and, as discussed later, the ferocity and danger typified by crowds such as the threatening, alcohol-fuelled sharpies would be closely entwined with Australian pub rock mythology.

Australian pub rock audiences' reputation for being fearsome, 'screaming, shit-faced masses' (Cockington 2001: 184) was established in this era and its long reach through the 1970s and 1980s is best summed up by the following three oft-quoted descriptions. The first comes from Doc Neeson (cited in Cockington 2001: 184; Walker *et al.* 2001b), vocalist of Oz rock band The Angels, who was interviewed for ABC's *Long Way to the Top* television series and accompanying book:

> The phrase I hear at most gigs in Australia—you hear guys talking at the bar, and they're always saying they've come for a rage...or...a sort of catharsis. We always feel that there's this implied confrontation between band and audience. They're saying, 'Lay it on! Do it to us!', and it's like a veiled threat that if you don't, you'll get canned.

Here Neeson outlines the aggressive nature of the audience and confrontational danger inherent in live Oz rock shows in pubs. The second quote, from

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29. The Catcher was an unlicensed, and notoriously rough, three-storey nightclub located at 471 Flinders Lane in the city.

30. 'Suck more piss' is 1970s slang for 'drink more alcohol'. Former Aztecs manager Michael Browning has stated: 'It's hard to imagine...that something like chanting "suck more piss" could actually create a whole scene. But that's what happened... It became a huge cult thing to go to the Whitehorse and get up on your friend's shoulders and chant the words "suck more piss". That became the Billy Thorpe chant' (cited in O'Donnell, Creswell and Mathieson 2010: 186).

1985's *Big Australian Rock Book*, shows how Englishman Andy Partridge, front-man and main songwriter of XTC, differentiates between English and Australian pub audiences:

> Australian bars... [are] a little menacing...very intimidating... [and] much more boisterous than English bars, and then there's the disturbing fact that they are tiled as if it were some kind of place where you expected a lot of excreta or unwanted mess and they intended to swill it down easily with a hose or what-ever... I can remember walking past a pub and looking in to see it knee-deep in glass (cited in St John 1985: 29).

Partridge's report recalls the 'six o'clock swill' culture of which he can have had no experience.

In the final quote, also from 1985's *Big Australian Rock Book*, Midnight Oil vocal-ist Peter Garrett stresses the importance of the relationship between the pubs and Australian rock performers: 'every Australian band comes from a different pub, and it's there they define what they're about. Every band remembers that pub, and it's more than sentimental value; it's something much stronger' (cited in St John 1985: 37). There is a connecting line between these descriptions of the Australian pub rock culture which resonates through to the Oz rock entry in the *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, where Bronius Zumeris (2003: 495) describes Oz rock as 'a purely Australian subculture in which rowdy, irreverent social behaviour and male bonding are inherent'. These quotes—which have also been used by academics such as Stratton (2007) and Turner (1987) to describe Australian pub rock audiences—are a testament to how much the formative char-acter of the early pub rock venues and audiences is imbricated with, and has per-haps even influenced, the overall character of Oz rock.

Sunbury and Aztecs Energy

The public ascendance of Billy Thorpe to the throne of 'yobbo' pub rock was made before 45,000 people at the first annual Sunbury Pop Festival, inaugurated on the Australia Day long weekend in January 1972.[31] Even though it was referred to at the time as 'Australia's Woodstock', as Engleheart (2010) has remarked, Sunbury was defined more by brawling and beer-drinking than peace, love and dope.[32] The

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31. The first Sunbury Pop Festival took place on 29-31 January 1972. Sunbury is located on the outskirts of Melbourne on a 620-acre private farm along Jacksons Creek, on the southern out-skirts of Sunbury, between Sunbury and Diggers Rest.

32. While sharpies took part in the outbreaks of violence at Sunbury, most of the reported fighting was among the newer fanatical following of long-haired, pot-smoking beer drinkers which also sprang up around Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs. Some of these were former sharpies (Taylor 2004: 74).
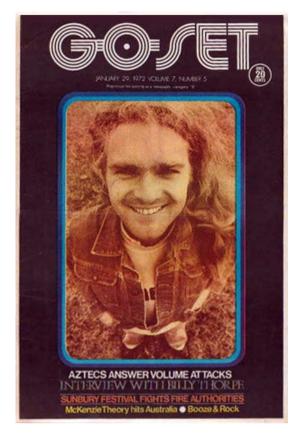
Figure 3: Billy Thorpe on the cover of Sunbury Pop Festival issue of *Go-Set*, 29 January 1972, p. 1. Image courtesy of Ed Nimmervoll.

cream of the Melbourne music scene made up most of the Sunbury bill, reflecting both the importance of the pub rock scene and bohemian student hippie acts, with Thorpe and The Aztecs as headliners (see Figure 3).[33] The rise in popularity of Australian music across 1971 is highlighted by the surprising amount of attention Sunbury received from the national media which had previously shown little interest in local live music (with the notable exception of ABC's *GTK* (*Get To Know* television programme).[34] In particular, Channel Seven covered Sunbury over an

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33. Some of Australia's original pub rock acts to play the inaugural Sunbury Pop Festival were Chain, The Wild Cherries, La De Das, Blackfeather, Tamam Shud, Carson and Pirana. Some acts typified by the Too Fucking Much Ballroom scene to play at the first Sunbury included Daddy Cool, Captain Matchbox, Spectrum, Wendy Saddington and Mackenzie Theory.

34. *GTK* was the ABC's progressive, 10-minute black and white pop culture show for 'chil-

entire Saturday afternoon as if it were a major sporting event (Engleheart 2010: 46). It was also the subject of a Festival Records triple album and the feature-length 1972 *Sunbury Rock Festival* documentary film produced and directed by John Dixon (Engleheart 2010: 46).[35] Notably the sharpie phenomenon reached its peak in the two years following the first Sunbury festival, when the sharpie style became the 'number one teen fashion in Victoria' (Taylor 2004: 85).

At Sunbury, Thorpe debuted his anthemic signature tune, the autobiographical and commanding 'Most People I Know (Think That I'm Crazy)', which Stratton (2003: 343) contends has provided a template for much of the Australian rock that followed. It has become a perennial Oz rock classic and remains a staple of 'Classic Hits' radio to this day (McFarlane 2008: 15–16).[36] 'Thorpie' had become a heroic figure among his working-class audiences by the time of the festival, in part due to an increasingly outspoken attitude, which led to him being twice jailed for swearing onstage in New South Wales (Clarke *et al.* 2001; Maclean 1971: 2).[37] The second of these arrests occurred just eight days before the festival commenced (Phillips 1972: 2). The thunderous hero's welcome which greeted The Aztecs at Sunbury highlighted the significant upturn of public interest in Australian rock acts, fuelled in no small part by the rapidly growing grassroots audiences cultivated in licensed venues such as the Village Green and the Whitehorse. It can also be read as the climax of chapter one in the history of Australian pub rock.[38] Thorpe would later claim that 'every kid that went to the Whitehorse was at Sunbury. Not

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dren' which screened four times weekly at 6:30 pm from 1969. It paved the way for the highly popular and more generously budgeted colour pop music programme, *Countdown,* which was introduced in 1974 and very quickly drew audiences of two million people, half of whom were aged from 10 to 17 (Inglis 2006: 297, 356).

35. I thank Jon Stratton for pointing out that these commodifications were clearly modelled on what happened to the Woodstock event and it may well be that calling Sunbury 'Australia's Woodstock' was a marketing ploy.

36. That the chorus-less 'Most People I Know (Think That I'm Crazy)' is the only song from this formative period that provided the template for Australian rock is a contentious issue. While it remains a landmark release, I argue that a clutch of other pop/rock singles from the era have also had a noteworthy influence on the ethos of this music to varying degrees. These include 1971's trio of hits from Spectrum ('I'll Be Gone'), Chain ('Black And Blue'), and Daddy Cool ('Eagle Rock'); and in 1972, the La De Das' old-school rock hit, 'Gonna See My Baby Tonight'; and the Coloured Balls' defiant, recognizably boogie-based rock anthem 'Liberate Rock'.

37. Under the headline 'Thorpie's dirty word bust', *Go-Set* journalist Stephen Maclean reported that Billy Thorpe was arrested on Thursday 7 October 1971 for swearing in Chequers Nightclub in Sydney (Maclean 1971: 2). Under the headline 'Thorpe arrested again', *Go-Set* journalist Steven Phillips (1972: 2) reported that Billy Thorpe had been arrested for swearing once more on Friday 21 January at the Mosman Hotel in Sydney.

38. The importance of Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs' triumphant appearance at the first Sunbury Pop Festival has been discussed at length in ABC's *Long Way to the Top* documentary series and its accompanying book (Clarke *et al.* 2001; Cockington 2001).

just a few, every one of them' (Thorpe cited in Engleheart 2010: 47).[39] Thorpe's manager Michael Browning said of the Whitehorse sharpies: 'that crowd, from that hotel, really made Sunbury and made Billy Thorpe the star of Sunbury. I guess it really paved the way for the whole pub rock thing [that followed]' (O'Donnell, Creswell and Mathieson 2010: 186). As can be heard on the *Billy Thorpe & the Aztecs: Live at Sunbury* record (1972/2005), Thorpe acknowledged this connection by pausing mid-set at Sunbury 1972 to 'give a special cheerio to the guys at the Whitehorse that are here… Suck more piss' just before launching into the punishing fan favourite 'Momma'. Intended or not, Thorpe's gesture signified the close link between the resurrection of his career, the massive popularity of pub rock and the loud and raucous beer-drinking audiences such as those from the Whitehorse which had been such an integral part of his ascent.

In the years following the inaugural Sunbury Festival, the genre of Oz rock became Australian pub rock's dominant form, providing many of the most popular acts in the country. Pioneering bands such as The Aztecs, Chain, Blackfeather, the trio version of The Wild Cherries, The La De Das and Pirana were followed by The Coloured Balls (1972–1974), Buster Brown (1973–1975, featuring future Rose Tattoo frontman Angry Anderson), AC/DC (1973–), Madder Lake (1971–1979), and Skyhooks (1973–1980, with sharpies featured on the back cover of their massive 1975 hit record 'Living In The 70's' [*sic*]). All were considered to be favourites of the sharpies and would play at Sunbury from 1973 to 1975 before the festival collapsed under financial pressure after the disastrous 1975 event. Oz rock's national popularity continued to grow throughout the 1970s and 1980s, supported by ABC TV's popular, pop music programme *Countdown*, sizeable radio airplay, and a proliferation of 1000+ capacity 'beer barns' which would soon include sports clubs and RSL (Returned and Services League) clubs which were being adapted for live entertainment. This size venue was required not only to meet the demands of rising numbers of thirsty suburban live music punters but also to deliver 'sufficient alcohol sales to make…[such entertainment] extremely profitable for publican, musician and booking agent' (Homan 2008: 24).

Conclusion

As I have shown, early Melbourne-based pub rock audiences and venues have been integral to its fermentative cultural function as performance and event. This

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39. According to Aztecs bassist Paul Wheeler, the youths getting harassed by the police at the pub outside the festival in the *Sunbury* movie were Whitehorse regulars out looking for a beer (Engleheart 2010): 'they were right in the thick of it for our performances and they really got it going for us' (Wheeler cited in Engleheart 2010: 47).

article has examined how the intermingling flows of pub rock's ecology (its performers, audiences, live music spaces, supportive industries and socio-historical contexts) interacted to form an approach to live rock that is specifically Australian. It has traced that relationship from the pre-pub rock days of the 'six o'clock swill' culture and the vibrant unlicensed nightclub scene of the mid- to late 1960s to the triumph of the 1972 Sunbury Pop Festival. It has shown how pub rock's first audiences and venues (such as the Village Green and the Whitehorse) provided the surrounding influences for development of the tropes which have characterized the genre ever since. This article has used the 1968–1972 career of early pub rock's most famous figure, Billy Thorpe, as a case study to chart the ascendance of Oz rock through its first phase, from Thorpe's humble yet seminal gig at Berties unlicensed nightclub in 1968, to his legendary performance before 45,000 people at Sunbury. The confluence of key Melbourne-based audiences, musicians, and iconic scenes and spaces which informed the shape, sound and attitude of Australian pub rock is integral to its success, and, as such, deserves to be better served by the dominant narratives of Australian rock.

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