



# Do ya play any Chisel?

and Steve Prestwich pulled *Best Kept Lies* from out of his Merseyside hat. Phil Small surprised everybody, including himself, by writing Chisel's biggest selling single *My Baby*. And this was just one album. It was chock full of radio hits. But the classic tracks were once again written by Don Walker. His odes to the people locked out of polite society, *Cheap Wine* and *Choir Girl*, are still playing on the radio. It was during the recording for this album that Chisel, along with The Angels and Flowers (who mutated into Icehouse), set up their own Dirty Pool agency, bucking the entrenched musical system. They didn't give a hoot what the insiders were doing. In any sense. They were gonna do it their way. Their public was as earthy and as loyal as they were. The 'Youth In Asia' tour that followed the massive commercial breakthrough of *East* rolled through 64 dates covering all major cities and regional centres in 88 days right across the nation. Everywhere they were posting full house signs and breaking house records. And for once the agents and promoters weren't doing them in.

form that was a large part of my motivation. The songs he'd written were that good. Jim (Barnes) had written some good stuff. I hadn't written anything and I wasn't sure that...there was no guarantee that I could write for Cold Chisel because my writing had gone in another direction but, as I've said before, in the end I just wrote songs and gave them to the band and figured if the other four guys in the band like it and enjoy playing it then, that's what a 'Cold Chisel' song is."

Cold Chisel songs, at their best, captured for many people what it was to be young, restless and living in a contradictory land. They were one of the first bands who unashamedly, and without any cringe factor, placed names like Euston, Nambucca and Adelaide in the same sorts of contexts as Chuck Berry had done with American cities decades before. Don Walker also had a remarkable penchant for juxtaposing stylish accoutrements with what he calls 'gutter slang.' As Toby Creswell commented about Walker's linking of political themes to personal lifestyle 'if you're locked out of society you might as well be out of it in style'. Walker had grown up on a musical diet of his father's big band records, Scottish and Irish hymns and classic pre-fifties torch ballads penned by expert tunesmiths like Hoagy Carmichael. It wasn't until he was working with Chisel that he started writing tunes of his own.

"You know, for many years the results were dismal," he remembers, "but we were too young and arrogant to realise that. I got a lot of encouragement from the rest of the band. They all thought I was a brilliant songwriter right from the first song and, you know, I don't know if they thought I was as brilliant as I did (laughs)! But looking back now it was all crap. But it kept me, and us, going through a fairly long learning period as I slowly picked up this lesson and that lesson."

**Don't just learn the one lesson and try to eat off that for the rest of your life."**

While recording *East*, Walker was intently observing producer Mark Opitz's mastery of the pop format, which Opitz had learned from the Albert's production team of Vanda and Young. Around the time of their second last album *Circus Animals*, Walker started to play around structurally with his songwriting. At that particular point Steve Prestwich was coming up with hits like *Forever Now* and *When the War Is Over*, allowing Walker to leave that area behind and explore a little further himself.

"I wouldn't agree with that," he states assuredly. "I wasn't taking a real lot of notice of what they were doing. I was trying to plow this road and see where that lead. They were at different stages of their songwriting development. Steve was really developing as a great melody writer. Also Ian and Jim were developing as real mature writers at that stage too so probably in retrospect, if it had been left up to me that album would have no hits as far as radio pop hits go. After *East* I kind of knew how to do that and I wanted to find the next thing to do otherwise I could see myself very quickly becoming a radio pop hit writer. Not that there's anything wrong with that per se, as long as you don't do it the same way every time. Don't just learn the one lesson and try to eat off that for the rest of your life."

Not being one to rest on his laurels Don Walker realised that there are 'further lessons to be learned out there.' He's taken his lessons and his reputation as one of Australia's finest tunesmiths and applied them to his work on his solo project, Catfish. He's written regularly with writers in Nashville, penned hits for others, including Ian Moss, and written movie tunes like the moving title to *Empty Beach* recorded by the late Marc Hunter. Walker has also contributed significantly to the recent hit album *Charlie, Tex and Don*. He hasn't lost the musical drive that put him at the top of his field nor the desire to learn. His approach to his career could be summed up in the same way that he talks about the title of the new Cold Chisel album, *Last Wave of Summer*. "Well, it's not meant to be that specific in any direction. It's just meant to convey a feeling more than anything."

Cold Chisel play at The Newcastle Workers Club on Thursday December 17. *The Last Wave of Summer* is out now on Mushroom.

Chisel traversed this wide brown land summer after summer setting themselves up for a long career and a fan base that stayed with them to the end and beyond. They played their last shows just before Christmas in 1983. Now they're back together and their hard earned reputation, judging by the over the top pre-sales on their new album *The Last Wave of Summer*, is still intact. Don Walker, on the telephone line from his temporary abode in Sydney, wasn't too sure about exactly what was happening in the near future for the reformed band he helped steer to the peak of the Australian music industry.

"I mean, I think everybody's amazed that as just a once off get together it's lasted this far," he cautiously ventured, "and it's culminated in a successful album and a tour. Since about September we've been so bogged down in the day to day aspects of promoting what we'd recorded, rehearsing for a tour that was booked in quite late and also maintaining all sorts of quality control over everything from the production through to, you know, art work on T-shirts and programs and stuff like that. I haven't lifted my head up to look beyond, you know, what's going on in the next week. In the Christmas break I'll get to look at it. I never had any intention of Cold Chisel getting back together till we die! I never real saw it as an ongoing thing. I saw it as five people with separate things, quite separate things, going on. I mean everybody's built a life since Cold Chisel broke up and we just got together for a belt out of curiosity to see if it still worked."

It was a conversation that Walker had with his manager Rod Willis, who also managed Chisel in their heyday, that set the seal on the re-union. Willis presented Don Walker with a scenario that Walker could walk away from at anytime.

"Yeah, well, that was the only way it could work. But, really, it's always like that. I mean you can always walk out of anything. As soon as he put it like that to me it made the whole thing a lot less intimidating...intimidating's not the right word.... a whole lot more palatable. Because, in the first ten years that the band was together I was very much locked in and committed to it - couldn't walk away. And that led to me putting up with a lot of stuff that, in anybody's case, you can only put up with when you're young and stupid."

Despite being hesitant Walker understood that this sort of reunion could do more harm than good, especially to a band whose fame was, and is, as extensive as Cold Chisel's.

"Yes. We'd split up with our reputation intact and in some ways it's grown since 1983. I was afraid that a bunch of old blokes would, you know, puncture that. I don't think that's happened. The acid test was always going to be live because anybody can go and make a record. The question was how much energy did the band have live and I think since the first warm up show at Bathurst we stepped up a gear and I think we have all the energy that we had in 1983. Also when the whole prospect of this reunion was raised other people in the band had already written very good stuff. In particular Steve (Prestwich) had written a whole raft of songs which were largely responsible for me getting involved. It was hearing those songs done beyond demo

**J**esus Christ, it's hot outside!...And the north-easterlies have just started to blow. Know what I mean? Not a cloud in the sky and it looks like the only place to be is in the shade. I can just about smell the humidity. Some fire engine is winding up its siren and racing past my office window and I can feel the sweat trickle down my back. Whenever things like this happen my mind wanders back to the north coast. Whenever summer comes. Whenever I rub in the first smear of zinc cream. Whenever...sometimes I forget what it was like to be a kid in a one horse town with not much to do but swim in the river, fight with each other over at the back of the oval and look up and down the four lane highway watching the traffic passing through. Two lanes heading north to banana and sugar cane country, to Ballina, Byron, Brisbane and beyond. Two lanes heading south to the fleshpots of Sydney and the big bright city lights. Right there in town at the Manning Hotel on the Pacific Highway was where I first saw them. Well actually it was across the road at the all night Golden Fleece servo that everybody used to go to, to grab a burger and a last chance at company for the night. That's where I first saw them! The band was cramming into a tour car and heading further on up the road while the road crew, hot and sticky from a hard day's night, was across the road loading out from the pub. The next time I saw them, I was old enough not to be hanging in the street. I was legal and could force my way right up to the front of the stage inside the big room near the beer garden and in-ground pool of the Bellevue Hotel in Forter-Tunccurry. It was hot, humid and loud. It was also tourist season and the place was chockers. Summer was upon us and Cold Chisel were in town again.

## Cold Chisel story by Johnnie Clott

The band formed in Adelaide in 1973 under the dubious moniker of Orange. A year later they found the name that would carry them to fame and fortune. They had so much faith in each other that the entire band relocated to Armidale in country NSW when Don Walker moved there to complete his honours degree in physics. They slogged it out living from hand to mouth, all the while honing their craft, gig after gig after gig. Finally, moving to Sydney and signing to Warner Bros, Cold Chisel's first album was released in 1978. Recorded at the now legendary Trafalgar Studios in Annandale, Sydney, it contained the classic Don Walker penned track *Khe Sanh* which was initially banned by radio stations around the country for its explicit lyrics. It sold like hot cakes and, twenty years later, *Khe Sanh* is still one of the most requested songs on radio and in the live arena. The band then set about building a colossal reputation for themselves, supporting seventies legends like Foreigner, Peter Dinklage and Rod Stewart and finding time to write and record their second successful album, *Breakfast at Sweethearts*.

However, it was their work with Mark Opitz, now the A&R manager at Mushroom, that put them well and truly on the map. Opitz was the producer of their third album *East*. It was the first album on which all the band members wrote. Jim Barnes wrote *Rising Son*. Ian Moss penned *Bow River*