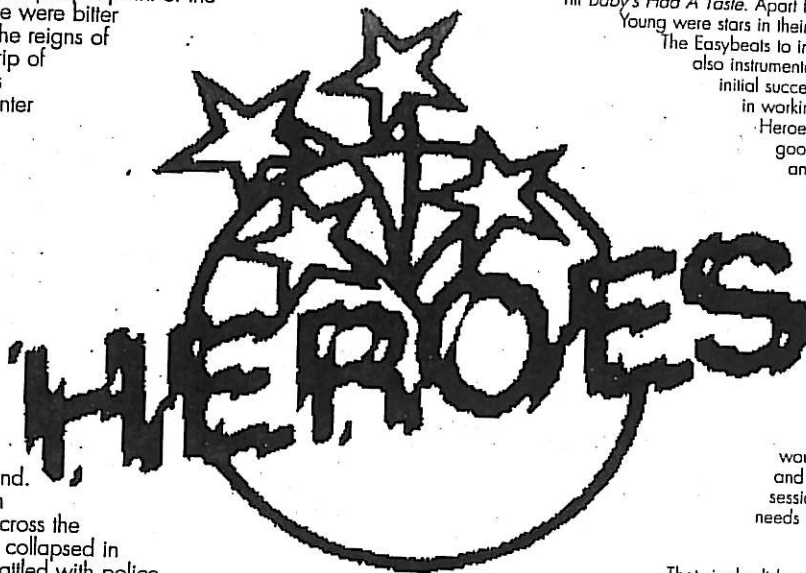


Don't be fooled by the rosy glow people paint of the late seventies. For many those were bitter years. Malcolm Fraser held the reigns of power and Australia was in the grip of divisive attitudes. Bob Hawke was fighting his preselection battle to enter Federal Parliament and about to embark on an historic turnaround in Australian politics. Post-Vietnam, the world was no longer such a comfortable and relaxed place. The decade was drawing to an end and the brave new world of the eighties was just around the corner. Australia was growing up but not without some teething troubles. We were in the grip of a recession. There were long queues for the young during the week and all manner of intoxicants to be had on the weekend. Right here in Newcastle on a warm September evening in 1979, just across the road from where the Workers Club collapsed in the earthquake years later, rioters battled with police in King Street. Imagine if you will two thousand, that's right two thousand, frustrated and angry rock punters overturning and burning cars, jeering and pelting police with beer cans, having firefighter's hoses turned on them and creating the anarchy most punks have only ever dared dream about. That night was headlined as 'Newcastle's Shame', investigated and analysed by the media, studied by sociologists and discussed across the nation. Neville Wran, then Premier of New South Wales described the riot as 'a shocking, disgraceful episode' and the Lord Mayor of Newcastle Ald. Joy Cummings could only offer platitudes about 'youth alienation' and the deeper issues involved. The riot placed Newcastle in the glare of international media attention.



hit *Baby's Had A Taste*. Apart from their own hits Vanda and Young were stars in their own right as well as leading The Easybeats to international fame. They were also instrumental in AC/DC's and The Angels initial success. Their forte has always been in working with the song and The Heroes were fortunate to have two good songwriters in Mark Tinson and Peter de Jong.

"We mainly worked with them on *Baby's Had A Taste* although they didn't rearrange that very much. They did have a little bit of a hand in the instrumentation. It's interesting, it's George Young that does all the work in that team, or appears to. He's always at the board, he's always conducting things he's always making suggestions but Harry Vanda would sit up the back on the couch and maybe three times in the whole session would go 'yeah, maybe that needs this or maybe that' and he'd be right. Just dead on the money."

That single did well enough for The Heroes to set their sights on bigger goals. "Well we did *Countdown* and we were able to tour nationally to a certain degree as a result. We didn't get over to the west coast but we certainly toured the length and breadth of the east coast and quite successfully in most areas. In Sydney we had a good following. Queensland we had a good following. Melbourne was a harder nut to crack. I mean people had heard of us everywhere we went. That was the beauty of *Countdown*. It's a pity it doesn't exist anymore. Once you were on that you had a national profile and you could actually tour nationally, which we did."

So after all that fuss and bother what happened to them? "Well basically the Heroes were never meant to be a recording band. Even the name of the band reflects that fact. Basically we went 'if we get the best guys out of the two best bands in town, which at the time were Rabbit and Armageddon we'll have a band that nobody can touch with a ten foot pole' and that's what happened. We were working seven gigs a week and took Mondays off. We did two gigs on Saturdays. It took us a while to get up to that level. I mean in two years we only missed one gig through sickness. Then we accidentally got involved in the Star riot and we'd written a few songs and we got signed up."

The lineup that went on to national fame also boasted Phil Screen on drums, who was a mainstay of the Funbusters for many years, and Jim Porteus on bass. "Well that's not the original lineup," commented Mark wishing to keep the record straight. "It's the lineup that made the album. It was probably the most successful or the most popular lineup. There were three previous bass players before Jim." They were Greg Dawson, Peter Grant and Allen Cook who also wrote their notorious tune *The Star and the Slaughter*. That tune was supposedly about the riot itself but was, according to Mark, written long beforehand. "Oh absolutely, despite claims by the police force that we wrote it in the back room in between going off at the end of the concert at the night of the Star riot. I mean we were supposed to have written it, arranged it, written the lyrics and rehearsed it backstage... I mean, we were wicked we were."

And like all great rock stories The Heroes had their share of management problems. "Well, he'd lied to us about our finances or just simply didn't know and didn't bother to find out. When we finally demanded answers we found that we were fifteen thousand dollars in debt with vehicle expenses or agency fees or whatever projected costs we had. We went 'this is stupid. We've never made less money than this'. This was supposed to be something we enjoyed and we were doing it for a living. So we went to Queensland and toured for about ten days, made the money back and said let's call it quits, now. Part of that too was the record company. They didn't support us in the second album. They were supposed to but they kept saying, and they may have been right in retrospect, that we didn't have the songs for a second album that they wanted to hear. I think half of that was their agenda in that they were too busy to devote any time to us. It was easier to say 'you're not ready yet' and we went 'Oh we musn't be.' We got incredibly frustrated and went 'let's not do this anymore'."

The Heroes nonetheless remain an entity in Newcastle, never really dropping from the town's consciousness. "Well that's very flattering. I think we still maintain a fair bit of credibility amongst the musical community simply because anybody that's followed in our steps, and that includes The Screaming Jets and Silverchair, have all benefited from our experience in one way or another. Particularly the Screaming Jets. Peter de Jong and I did a bit of mentoring for them. We weren't necessarily responsible for their recording contract but we certainly created extra interest to enable them to be signed up. I just think anybody that plays and aspires to anything in Newcastle will acknowledge the fact that we went before them. It's really a pity that there's never been a band following us that's been as popular as we were in Newcastle before branching out. Even The Screaming Jets. It's funny. They're embraced by Newcastle now but they really only had a small dedicated following at the Bel Air and The Cambridge and nobody else would give them a gig. They showed them! Even Silverchair had virtually no following in Newcastle except for their friends at school and now they've done incredibly well. In a lot of ways for a band to be that popular here before moving on has disappeared forever from Newcastle."

The Heroes, DV8 and Total Fire Band play a special one-off gig at Newcastle Workers Club on Friday December 5. Tickets for the night which goes under the title *BeAir Daze* are on sale now from the Club.

The Heroes Story By Johnnie Clott

So what the hell happened? Well... the single most popular venue in town, the Star Hotel, was being closed down and the kids, who were fed up, boozed up, pillaged and spoiling to let loose at anyone who was gonna give them any more aggravation, decided enough was enough. The story goes that the brewery that owned the pub decided they were closing The Star down as it needed renovations. But The Star had a reputation and it housed an odd mix of clientele from professionals to tradesmen. The front bar was a sailors' hangout, the middle bar was a transvestite's haunt and the back bar was the sort of place that only served beer in plastic containers and was hosed out after the numerous hot, sweaty and crowded rock gigs. Nobody dared say what sorts of things changed hands in any of those bars.

Mark Tinson was in a better position than most to remember some of the events of that night. Mark is now a respected part of the music establishment in Newcastle, owning his own studio, performing with Festival Records' country-punk act The Tex Pistols and occasionally touring with The Ted Mulry Gang. His rhythm guitar playing has earned him respect right across the country. He was also a member of the legendary seventies act Rabbit. But on that fateful night in seventy-nine, he was performing with The Heroes, the band accused of starting the riot. The Heroes lead singer Peter de Jong was charged with incitement to riot.

"I think they just wanted to blame somebody other than themselves," Mark said bluntly, "and they blamed us for whipping the crowd up into a riot when in fact it was already happening before we'd finished. That's as much as I'm going to say on that. I mean they charged Pete with inciting a riot which is treason. I mean that's a hanging offence... or whatever means of execution they use. It was eventually lessened to a charge of 'causing a reasonable person serious alarm' which was causing a policeman a slight amount of anxiety. I guess, for which Peter was fined two hundred dollars. He supposedly said 'the pigs want us to stop now' and I don't recall him saying that, but if they said he said it he must've. It was fairly chaotic. It's pretty hard to remember stuff like that. There was a riot going on..."

There sure was! But it wasn't all a dead loss, especially for the band. Out of the ashes of that gig The Heroes achieved enough notoriety for the record labels to come sniffing around because those companies definitely wanted a part of any band that could kick up such a media storm.

"Well, if the Star riot hadn't occurred chances are we wouldn't have created the interest that we did," admitted Mark, amused at the thought. "Basically we had two offers. One to go with Alberts and one to go with Rob E. Porter's label who had Rick Springfield and Air Supply and a few other acts. We decided to go with Alberts because of their history with AC/DC and Rose Tattoo and the Angels. We felt an empathy with that label."

By signing to Alberts The Heroes were given the opportunity to work with some of the best in the business. "Yeah. The first single was produced by Vanda and Young and that was a real thrill for us. I mean we were big Easybeats fans when we were growing up and they're probably Australia's most successful writers even though they aren't really Australians." I mean they came out here when they were in their teens and became the best pop act we've ever had even to this day. So it was a real thrill for us."

This experience gave them a first hand insight into the working methods of the highly successful pop producers Vanda and Young. This team produced The Heroes first major