

THE RADIATORS

celebrate 30 years non stop



The Radiators
Mark Lucas,
Fess Parker,
Geoff Turner
& Brian Nichol.

As far as legendary Australian bands go, there is none other that has kept working continually for thirty years with more than half its original lineup. While they lost a keyboard player and replaced a drummer, the three foundation members are still out there on the road. These days The Radiators are tighter than ever, and can tear up a corporate or a pub gig with originals that spawned 15 albums – two platinum and two gold.

Interview by ANDY MACKENZIE

They are a classic Australian touring rock band who've probably poured ten million dollars into the production industry since they started.

CX caught up with the band as they launched their Musician's Survival School on their 30th anniversary. A fitting way to see in their fourth decade!

Andy Mackenzie asked the questions while Mark Lucas (drums), Fess Parker (guitar) Brian Nichol (vocals) and Geoff Turner (bass) laid out the good and the bad, the rip-offs and the highlights of life on the road.

The Radiators have been going 30 years now, what are some of the strangest things that have happened?

MARK: I think it's strange we've been going 30 years!

GEOFF: We thought we'd just be together a couple of months...

MARK: I joined the band 20 years ago!

And after 20 years do the other guys still call you the new kid?

MARK: Exactly, I'm the Ronnie Woods of The Radiators! That's why I'm still

in the band, it makes me feel young!

Do you still have to make the coffee?

MARK: Coffee, drive all the time, carry their bags into hotel rooms.... The way they treat me is abhorrent, really. I reckon the strangest thing, though, was the meteorite

The meteorite?!

GEOFF: We did a gig in Toowomba, I was coming back to Brisbane with our sound guy and we were in the Lockyer valley and suddenly ga boom – it went from sideways and smashed across the bonnet of the car, a giant glowing

Brian and Fess on stage.



orange ball. We went 'what the hell was that?' It looked like some kind of bird on fire, I thought maybe it was a flaming owl or something. We should have pulled up and looked for it, because apparently they're worth a lot of money! The trouble started when we took the hire car back – they said 'what happened?' and we said we got hit by a meteorite. They said sure, right. We'd already been in trouble – the road crew had written off one truck and three cars, we were running out of hire car companies. We were on our last one.

BRIAN: It looked like someone had got a flaming axe and it was dented in.

FESS: It was all down to the metal.

GEOFF: Another foot and it would have been in my lap...

MARK: So if you had have accelerated a bit, you could have had something steaming hot in your lap...

GEOFF: Yeah, that had been travelling for 800 million years!

MARK: Not like he's got something steaming hot in his lap already!
(Much laughter)

BRIAN: And then it would be, 'so you guys have been around for twelve years...'

What about the UFO story?

BRIAN: True story. We played in Canberra, I was driving back and at Lake George, which was always a bit spooky because sometimes it's full of water and sometimes it isn't – and we were just travelling along and I looked out the side and it looked like an aeroplane and my first thought was it had all its cabin lights on. I looked at it, back at the road, and it was still there. Other people noticed it as well, and then it went up a little and then zoof – it went off with a little trail. Everyone was stunned.

Have you lived the rock and roll dream?

GEOFF: At some stage, bits of all of them.

MARK: And nightmares.

BRIAN: The dream's tempered by long stays in motels, hanging around airports, and driving for twelve hours.

What's the biggest gig you ever did?

BRIAN: 120 thousand people. Steps of the Opera House, Concert of the Decade at the start of the 80's.

GEOFF: It was a massive gig, it seemed to cover all of

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Sydney.

BRIAN: We met at the Bondi Lifesaver, got on the bus and when we got to the edge of the forecourt it took us half an hour to get in. Took everyone by surprise.

GEOFF: There were three new bands on the bill – Misex, Mental as Anything and The Radiators.

Did you think 'Well, we've arrived then'?

GEOFF: It was a couple of years later, 80,000 people at Narara all as one behind what we were doing. A celebration of Aussie music.

What about the Spinal Tap moments?

GEOFF: Every night really...

MARK: I saw that movie at a tender age, and now I look back and every scene

has happened to me. Including the record store appearance... Not only where no one turns up, we did one in Kalgoorlie where the store didn't even know WE were turning up! We roll up and say 'Hi, we're The Radiators' and they say 'Sorry we're closing, closing...' We'd flown in to WA and driven out in a hire car, we were doing 200kph.

FESS: Someone told us there was no speed limit. But that was in the Northern Territory, so we were only out by 3,000 kilometres.

BRIAN: So I got booked. By a copper who'd seen us at Dapto Leagues club!

So, after 30 years what's the best thing about still being together?

FESS: Not having to audition new guys!

BRIAN: It's a great job because it's

the only job in the world where they INSIST that you drink before you start work!

GEOFF: They say 'Come on boys, drink up – get some Tequila into you!'

MARK: You always feel like you're going somewhere – it's almost like the whole country becomes your backyard.

So which of the lessons from those thirty years do you wish you'd learned a whole lot earlier?

BRIAN: The one about the money! We just earned millions and millions of dollars, and are still renting.

GEOFF: In the old days our manager would walk out with bags and bags of cash, there'd be 1,300 people on a Tuesday night at a gig. Ten, fifteen thousand in cash, and that'd happen six nights a week. They kept you that busy you never had time to check. Then it would be 'Sorry boys, it's all gone!' Recording, whatever, confused, bedazzled...

BRIAN: Three or four hire cars, a semi trailer, 18 road crew...

MARK: There were twice as many crew as band, they'd turn up in new cars and we turn up in our old bangers...

GEOFF: Then they'd proceed to roll them...

MARK: And do donuts in ovals with guys hanging off the roof!

How many people have you seen in this business get ripped off by shonky managers and agents?

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FESS: Everyone! All the best bands!

MARK: You have to get ripped off!

FESS: In our case, you're concentrating on being creative and writing and the shows and all the rest is being looked after.

BRIAN: What about the year we did 367 gigs – more gigs than there were days!

GEOFF: If you got a day off, you drove a thousand Ks... if you had a day off you didn't want to go and check how things were going you wanted to spend it with your family. It was silly, we trusted too many people. We were just cruising along on a wave. They just tell you we've got heaps of money, it's all going good, leave it to us boys, people you believe and trust in as brothers end up shafting you. It's a real shock to the system.

MARK: One day you wake up and your taxes haven't been done for three years.

BRIAN: That's what it got down to – we had this massive bill, a hundred and seventy thousand bucks after working fifteen years already. So back out, boys, around the country a couple more times. So it was either that, or go to jail.

GEOFF: Five states in three days.

MARK: Drunk, sober and stoned!

GEOFF: That's right, all those states! We didn't waste it all though - we spent four hundred thousand on partying, four hundred thousand on fun and mucking around. We must have wasted the rest!

How much has technology changed what you do?

FESS: Lots, heaps, cheaper, smaller.

MARK: Telephones! In the old days you had to give the missus the phone number at the motel and be there at a certain time, you couldn't call out because it cost too much so you waited for a call. Sat nav: gold! Four guys with a torch trying to find a motel. Not good.

FESS: We had huge crews, they had to carry huge PA's.

GEOFF: In the old days every Rad had a roadie.

MARK: And an assistant. The drum tech would turn up and he wouldn't set up the drums – he'd direct people to set up the drums! Tune them up, and go and hang with the band!

What is it about your new school that excites you the most?

MARK: It's a great opportunity to put something back. I've taught music privately for a long time, but there's a million musicians that never get out of the bedroom. It's the music business, half music and half business. If you're good at the music and hopeless at the business, you're not going to get anywhere. Hopefully we can bridge that gap. And get some quality songs out there.

BRIAN: I've taught a couple of choirs in recent years and the feeling you get from helping is amazing, and to be able to do that in an environment I know inside out is a great thing!

GEOFF: What I like is that I live nearby...

FESS: My daughter is a really good

singer and I would have liked something like this to exist to help her get through.

GEOFF: How to recognise double talk from agents. Ho to recognise bullshit. I failed that course the first time.

MARK: There's lots of people who can play really well in the bedroom at low level, you put them on stage and they turn it up and have a bad experience. There's a lot that goes into it on stage. They go back to the day job. We'll have a whole lot of people out there who know what they're doing. **CX**



DISCOGRAPHY

- Feel The Heat – 1980 (platinum)
- Up For Grabs – 1981 (gold)
- You Have The Right To Remain Silent – 1982 (platinum)
- Screams Of The Real – 1983 (gold)
- Life's A Gamble – 1984
- Nasty Habits In Nice Children – 1987
- Gimme Live – 1988
- Hard Core – 1991
- Radiators – 1994
- In Their Element – 1995
- Stone – 1995
- In The Roar – 1997
- Radiology, The Complete Anthology – 2000
- Smoke And Mirrors – 2000
- 25th Anniversary CD - 2004

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