

The BLUESLETTER

3RD EDITION - JUNE 2011

COL'S MESSAGE

I'm determined to keep it brief this time around and leave more room for the fantastic subjects of the feature and profile in this issue. I can't believe the support that keeps coming out of the woodwork for our humble festival, which kicks off on the last weekend of November 2011.

Since our media launch/fundraiser at the Basement Bar last September, we have put on and co-promoted a number of other musical events, not just our fundraisers like the one this weekend at the Goldmines Hotel, but we've been able to provide paying gigs to bands and performers who were previously not exactly swamped with opportunities to play. So it's been an extremely gratifying thing to be able to give a boost to the local music scene at a grass roots level, as a year-round project, on top of focussing on providing a top-notch festival program for the region come November. To me, that's a big part of what starting this festival was about... providing opportunities and inspiration for aspiring players to be able to ply their trade to appreciative audiences and get some recognition for their talents and their efforts.

We are locking in more and more solid bookings for this year's November festival as the weeks go on and I'm

absolutely stoked to be a part of something that will bring so many great performers (both known & unknown) to Bendigo. It's also exciting, as alluded to above, to be given the opportunity to shine a light on so much of the great talent that's right here under everyone's noses in our own region.

I've got to send a quick "shout out" of thanks to our newest financial and in-kind supporters: AFS and Associates; Bendigo Mazda; AD Media; as well as all the brilliant individuals who help put our fundraising shows together and the venues who continue to play host to them!

Aside from the regular musos and live music fans who repeatedly offer their assistance to myself and the BB & RMF committee, there are people from all walks of life who recognise the value in what we are building with this festival and want to do something to contribute to it. As much as we welcome more corporate sponsorship and we encourage more and more local businesses to consider forming partnerships with the festival in any capacity they might see as mutually beneficial, not everyone obviously has cash or in-kind sponsorship to offer. To those who wish to contribute but are unsure how, I ask that you please continue to spread the word about

our humble fledgling festival. If you're on facebook, find our event's page, hit the "like" button and then suggest the page to your friends. Share our website address with friends via email - it's not difficult and we're easy to find: www.bendigobluesandroots.com.au. If you see an event (on a poster, or on a website, or in the newspaper) that has our logo on it, please come along and check it out. For that matter, just get along to experience more live music as a rule. I've said it time and again, going to the effort of getting out to enjoy some quality live music is its own reward. There's so much more music in Bendigo than the average punter realises. This weekend for instance, there are at least 5 gigs I'd love to be at... all within 5 minutes drive of the Bendigo CBD! I only wish I could get to more than a couple of them. There are worse things in the world though than to be spoilt for choice.

Thanks again for all your support thus far. We (the BB & RMF Inc. Committee) still have a lot of work to do between now and November in order to bring you Bendigo's first ever fair dinkum Blues & Roots Music Festival, but we are enjoying the challenges as they arise and will continue to present quality events for your enjoyment along the way - so keep your eyes open and your ear to the ground! Cheers.



Colin Thompson | Photo by Bill Conroy



Our next fundraiser. See you there!

Drop us a line:
bendigoblues@gmail.com

Visit our website:
bendigobluesandroots.com.au



Geoff Achison | Photo by Mick Griffin

INTERVIEW
BY BEN CAMERON

GEOFF ACHISON

Passion, determination, conviction and a really good hat These are the key ingredients for a genuine blues artist, according to a man who would know, the sublime Geoff Achison.

The award winning, gritty yet soulful blues-smith is one of the big signings for the inaugural Bendigo Blues and Roots Music Festival in November. It's a major coup for the fledgling festival, as Achison's pedigree is unquestioned.

To go with the swag of awards, he's represented the Melbourne Blues Appreciation Society at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, winning the coveted Albert King Award for his guitar skills. He's appeared on BBC radio and the cover of Blues in Britain in 2009. He's jammed with the iconic Les Paul in New York City and was invited to join legendary R and B vocalist Delbert McClinton on board his annual Sandy Beaches music cruise. And in 2008, he was voted in Guitar Player Magazine as one of the Top Ten Hot New Guitarists.

Little wonder a typical Achison gig is described as a spectacle, stemming from his belief that a musician should always try to make their instrument of choice, "talk". "If you think about human conversation, the voices go up, they go down, raised to accentuate the point, lowered to express empathy," he says "There's no single method for achieving it but in essence, all music is wanting to communicate."

From this sense it's been a full on conversation for Achison for many years, dating back to the family home in Malmsbury. It was under his parent's stairs when he first began to speak, finding a "beat up" 1950s Bellini guitar. "Has a 'Harry Potter' ring to it this story doesn't it? Achison laughs.

"It had two strings missing and a neck shaped like a banana. Anyway, for the first three to four years of playing that was my axe. My mum still has it." It proved to be the first of many self-discoveries for "Acho". "There weren't a lot of guitar players around where I

grew up," he remembers. "I did go for a few rudimentary lessons from a guy who showed me how to tune it up and form chords. From there I was pretty much on my own and picked up a lot from jamming along with Freddy King records."

His wasn't a typical musical upbringing however. "Early on I'd say I liked music as much as I liked Lego," he says. "We all knew the hit songs of the day and watched Countdown on Sunday nights but there were kids much more into music than me at school. "It wasn't until I was about 16 or so when music began to dominate my every waking moment."

He gravitated towards the sound of blues, and along the way, invented some of his own techniques, without the aid of pedals or gadgets. "I was never skilled at copying anything I heard," he says. "Therefore I was never any good in cover bands. "I was however good at jamming along or coming up with my own part.



Geoff Achison Photo by Colin Thompson.

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"I played jazz for a while but I struggled with the complexity of it. "When I heard blues for the first time I instantly knew it was where I belonged. "It got straight to the point. No fancy production, no fancy chords, just a rockin' groove and plenty of space for the musicians to play it how they felt on any given moment. "Partly perfect for my tastes but also perfect for my limited musical education."

Achison eventually moved to Melbourne, and became the lead guitarist with blues band Dutch Tilders and The Blues Club. Together with his in Alan Watson's Jazz Band, Achison learnt the importance of ebb and flow, which is probably why his sound has been described as "delicate one minute, explosive the next".

After five years of constant Australia-wide touring with Dutch Tilders, he broke away to create the Souldiggers—a band that would eventually pick up the Chain Blues Music Award for Group Of The Year. "The idea was to have a name that described the music and I greatly admired the blues philosophy - tapping

into one's soul for honesty and truth," he says. "That's what Souldiggers is meant to convey."

He formed his own Jupiter 2 Records in 1994 with fellow music enthusiast Nic Quittner, and early recordings, well received by fans and critics alike, encouraged Achison to take his music to other parts of the world. The first destination was the blues homeland of the US in 1995. "As a blues fan it was the natural destination to go in order to learn as much about it as I could," he says. "Let's face it, it's an American art form and so it's ingrained in the culture. "The most striking difference I think is the incredible enthusiasm that audiences have for the music. "I mean they're ready to rock right from the get go. They whoop, holler and shout encouragement from the very first note to the last. "For an artist it's wonderful and really helps you keep the energy up."

From there it was on to London in 1997, hoping to establish a UK following. He discovered the Brits were a totally different beast altogether. "Total opposite model of behavior," he says. "They love the music but

most audiences turn up to a blues or folk club to 'listen'. "So once you start playing they all shut-up and listen to every nuance of the performance. "They'll burst into enthusiastic applause at the end of the piece but not until the last note has completely died away. "It's incredibly respectful but to be honest I think I prefer the whooping and hollering. "Australian audiences are somewhere in between. "We'll party with the band alright but will listen a while to be convinced first."

When he's watching from the safety of the crowd, the blues will always be number one also. "Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love jazz, I adore rock music of all kinds and I even have a number of favorite pop groups," he says. "You can get the same feeling from music no matter what 'genre' it is. "The blues for me was simply my portal into the realm of musical expression. "In some other universe it could have been Indian Raga music. It doesn't really matter. "As a guitarist and singer though, I like to play whatever makes sense for the moment we're in."

MUSICIAN PROFILE BY BEN CAMERON

MARC LEON

Full name: Marc Leon
(actually, my Birth name is Fred Himmelsbach but name was changed in 1966, because my manager at the time suggested a shorter, more pronounceable name)

Date of birth: 2nd of January, 1942

Nickname: *Sir Marc* lol...courtesy of Roy Webb and Mick Griffin

Born in: Bavaria, Germany - migrated to Australia in 1954

First musical instrument played: Piano
Accordion at age 10...hated it - and the teacher

Other occupation apart from music:
Disability Worker (retired from that now) I was a Professional Musician for 30 years and am still active in that capacity now.

Biggest influence on music career: Ray Charles, in 1962. His music just hit the right chord for me...soulful, original and superb musicianship. BB King was my other one in 1966. His unique sound and playing inspired me to take up Guitar.

Favourite Bendigo musician:
It's a toss-up between Chris De Araujo and Andrew Watts...they're both great guitarists.

Favourite World musician: Robben Ford is my ALL-Time fave, because he has Everything a musician would ever want to aspire to...fantastic guitarist, great tone, which is instantly recognisable, superior musicianship, song-writing ability, musical diversity...and he excels in whatever he is required to play (Joni Mitchell, Miles Davis, Steely Dan and Little Feat are just a few examples). I also admire is attitude and humility.

Three dream dinner guests: Robben Ford, Derek Trucks and BB King. I would really be humbled by their presence and we'd be talking *Shop* all night over a nice meal...and hopefully do some jamming later :)

Describe yourself in three words: Dedicated, Creative, Persistent

Describe your music style in a sentence: Melodic, with elements of Blues, Jazz and Rock infused.

Favourite song of all time: *Born Again Human* by BB King. I love the soulful groove, the superb playing of all the musicians involved and the message in the lyrics is a positive one.

If you had one wish for the world what would it be? For every one on Earth to hug one-another and get stuck into making this planet a more cheerful and

sustainable place to live on.

Why are you excited to play the Bendigo Blues & Roots Music Festival?

The concept of Bendigo having its own Blues Festival in itself is Exciting, to be able to participate is exciting, to be able to play my original Blues and music to like-minded people will be surreal! :)

If you could jam with any one musician who would it be? Hmmm...any of the three I invited to dinner earlier - but, OK, one - I'd say Derek Trucks (He also plays a Gibson SG, like I do, hahah!!)

Best gig: Supporting Jose Feliciano at Festival Hall in 1973. It was initially scary, because I was awed by his expertise on guitar, but it was great playing in front of a few thousand people...and getting a Standing Ovation and Encore from an audience who'd actually came to hear a far better - and well-known musician play.

Strangest experience you've had on stage: Falling asleep on stage at a gig in Perth, LOL!!...It's true!! We were on a Marathon Tour in Perth WA, doing 48 gigs in 3 weeks and only averaging 2 - 3 hours sleep a night. We were in the middle of *I got My Mojo Working* - and while the sax player took a 24 bar solo,



Marc Leon Photo by Calvin McClure.

I nodded off!! I remember (through the sleepy haze) hearing a woman say, "Hey Look, The Singer's Asleep!" I was carried off-stage and put in the dressing room, but couldn't get back to sleep, so I was back on stage after a couple of songs.

Favourite venue to play:
The Goldmines Hotel, because people really appreciate our music. The Gold Dust Room at the Hotel Shamrock is another one of my Faves. I also really dig the Blues Jams at the Newmarket, but I guess that can't be classed as a gig...

Strangest song request: Oh God!!! Too Many, LOL!!...but I do have a pet hate for people yelling out *Chisel!!*--

THE BENDIGO BLUES & ROOTS MUSIC FESTIVAL IS PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY

