

# CAPTAIN MATCHBOX & BEYOND

## THE MUSIC & MAYHEM OF MIC & JIM CONWAY

CATHERINE FLEMING & JOHN TAIT  
WITH MIC & JIM CONWAY

This book uncovers the zany world of Captain Matchbox, but goes far beyond by following the extraordinary careers of Mic and Jim Conway. After Matchbox finally struck out, the brothers were intimately involved with the Pram Factory and Circus Oz. Jim Conway eventually broke free of 'novelty' to become one of Australia's premier blues musicians, while the name Mic Conway has become synonymous with 'new vaudeville' in Australia.

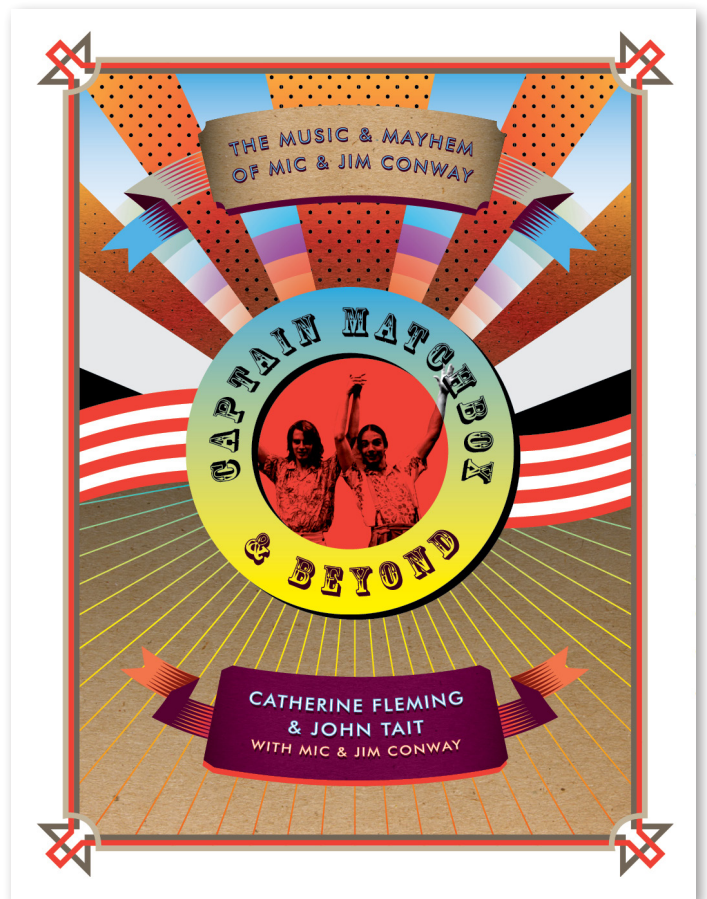
But beware, if you choose to climb aboard the Conway roller-coaster you will encounter gratuitous nudity, free love, tumultuous relationships, unashamed namedropping, tragic vehicle crashes, circus acts, an incurable debilitating disease, political satire, ungodly language, and a barrage of puns and bad gags.

This book, possibly more than any other, captures the spirit of the Australian 'counterculture' from the 1970s through to today.

*‘I smoked so much pot in the seventies that Bob Marley had a t-shirt with my picture on it.’*

### THE AUTHORS

**Catherine Fleming** is a researcher and writer in Tokyo. She has a Fine Arts diploma and a degree in English Literature and Performance Studies. Catherine has been a writer, subeditor, copywriter and proofreader for various companies, including Sony Music. She has known and worked with Mic Conway for more than twenty years. A highlight was as a Cazzbo stunt double in one of Mic's Junk Band music videos.



**John Tait** runs a record and book shop in Essendon. He has a Science degree and a Masters in Theology, neither of which are at all relevant to his work as a rock historian. John has had a hand in a number of music books, notably *Vanda & Young*. He assisted Dingoes bass player John Bois in publishing his music memoir *The Dingoes Lament* (Melbourne Books). He has had music articles published in *Shindig*, *Ugly Things*, *Rhythms* and *The Age*. John once had a breakfast show on community radio, until he played an uncensored Nine Inch Nails song by mistake.

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“ This book is an honest and entertaining look at the life and times of two iconic Australian musicians.

Jim Conway is one of our best harmonica players and Mic Conway is a distinctive and unrivalled, multi-talented vaudevillian, bohemian entertainer.

This book also gives an insight into much of the interesting underground art, music and politics produced in Melbourne and Sydney since the late 60s. There is also a great selection of photographs of people, posters and record covers. ”

— Reg Mombassa

RATTLING JAFFAS AT CIRCUS OZ



**LEFT**  
L-R: Tony Burkys, Gordon McLean, Mic Conway, Peter Mahleisen, Rick Ludbrook, Jim Conway, Colin Stevens

**MIDDLE**  
L-R: Jim Conway, Mic Conway, Colin Stevens, Rick Ludbrook, Gordon McLean, Peter Mahleisen

**RIGHT**  
L-R: Mic Conway, Rick Ludbrook, Gordon McLean, Tony Burkys, Colin Stevens, Jim Conway, Peter Mahleisen. Photos by Fouch Hawkes

“Once you’re over the fear, it’s nothing really,” said Rick. “You want to use wooden dowels so you can grab the torches in your mouth.” Sue wrapped the cloth around the end of the stick and dipped it into water.

Mic put the stick into his mouth and curled his lips around the cloth.

“Okay, now let’s try hydrocarbon. Some people use shellite, pure hydrocarbon. It doesn’t taste as bad as most fuel. And you’re less likely to burn yourself. You could use lamp oil for spits.”

Rick lit the stick and Mic drew it closer to his mouth. He paused. Rick and Sue waited. In a flash, Mic sank the flaming ball into his mouth and snapped his lips around it, then whipped the extinguished stick away. Adrenalin flowed in the instant buzz.

“Perfect,” said Sue.

*Not so bad. Maybe a few small blisters.*

“You always want to have a fire extinguisher close by,” Rick said.

Violin player Jack Sara faded from the Circus Oz carnival scene and joined the Hare Krishnas. Graeme Isaac also left, and Tony Burkys from the Uncle Bobs Band replaced him.

After a Circus Oz matinee show, Mic slapped a sheet of paper on the table. A new song, Tony. What do you think?

Tony poured beer over his cornflakes, examining the lyrics. ‘A hallyaby?’

‘Something like that. It’s called “Sleep.”

‘A kids’ song?’

‘Not necessarily.’

‘Let me work on it.’

Rumblings within the band started to stir.

‘Mate, it’s pretty hard to keep up this circus gig,’ said Peter. ‘Setting up the tent is cutting up my fingers.’

‘And when we’re playing, we’re just starting to cook the music and we have to stop for the acrobats,’ said Colin. ‘It’s kind of stopping the flow, man.’

‘Sometimes it just feels like we’re a pit orchestra,’ said Gordon.


‘Yeah, I know it is a challenge, but we’re having fun, aren’t we? And we’re doing something culturally relevant,’ Mic said.

‘Mmm,’ hummed Tony through a mouthful of cornflakes and beer.

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SUNBURY WAHINES AND COUNTDOWN WACKERS

**CHAPTER 12**  
**SUNBURY WAHINES AND COUNTDOWN WACKERS**



**Y**ou’re a male chauvinist pig,’ new housemate Hanna49 declared, leaning against the kitchen bench in Mic’s Albert Park share house.

“What are you talking about?” Mic said, peering from behind his *Hawaiian Club of Australia* magazine.

“It’s disgusting what you did last night. You have complete disregard for women.”

“Oh. Well, actually they called me. They asked to stay with me. Those two women, *my friends*, wanted to sleep with me.” Mic laughed at a headline in his magazine: *Wahines in Wangaratta* above an image of two blonde women in grass skirts and bikini tops.

“So they come all the way from Perth just to sleep with you?”

“Hiang!”

“What?”

“No, ah ... Patty called me last week, needed somewhere to stay. It’s none of your business, really.”

“I just think it’s a terrible way to treat women. Objects, that’s all they are to you.”

A story filtered into Mic’s imagination: *My Wahine* — an invented story of my life on the road. “I like Patty. She’s fun. We can enjoy each other’s company if we want to. I hadn’t been with two women before. It’s a novelty.”

Hanna’s wired eyes stared into Mic’s.

*Maybe humour will help in this awkward moment.* “Did you hear about the guy who was getting it on with his girlfriend and her twin?”

Hanna spun on her heel and stormed off down the hallway.

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L-R: Fred Othrei, David Elliott, Jon Bayles, Jim Conway dressed as spam, Mic Conway, Geoff Hales, Jim Niven, Mick Fleming, with the back-drop that was stolen during a gig