

# SUNBURY

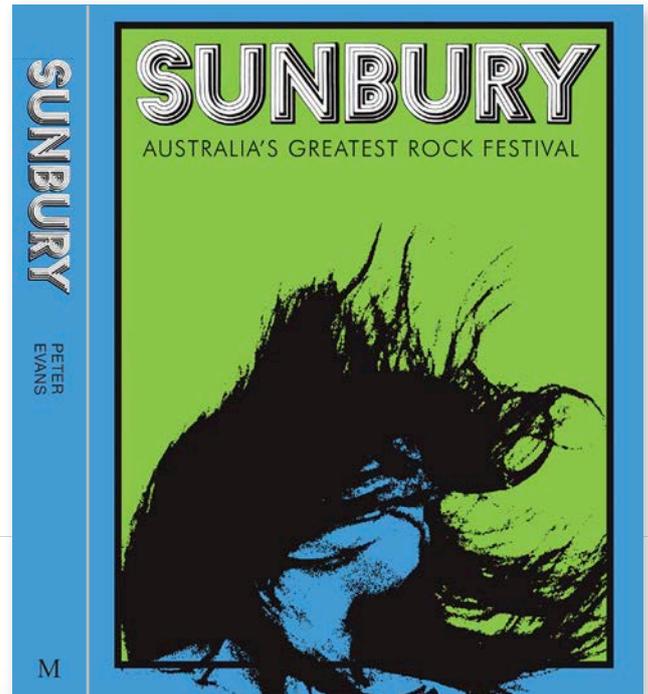
## AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST ROCK FESTIVAL

by PETER EVANS

**After 45 years, here is the first book on the SUNBURY rock festival, the festival that is often referred to as 'Australia's Woodstock' that heralded a revolution in Australian music and culture.**

This book explores the history of the Sunbury rock festivals which were staged over the Australia Day long weekends of 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1975. These, and the festivals which immediately preceded them, were staged at a time of renewal in Australian political and cultural life and a new awakening of national identity. The emphasis is on the first festival in 1972 as this was the ground-breaking event which, if it did not conceive Aussie pub rock was, at the very least, the midwife. In that birth can be seen the beginnings of Australian rock music transitioning from a poor cousin to that in America and the United Kingdom to an active export industry. The book identifies the strength of the Sunbury festivals in the organisation that lay behind them, which allowed them to be more than just a single event. It also explores the musical highlights of the festivals and the experiences of those who attended.

The book is heavily based on official documents and an extensive oral history program undertaken by the author.



**Peter Evans** was involved in the staging of the Sunbury Festivals from day one and designed and operated the stage lighting for the first three festivals. He attended the fourth and final festival as a guest of the organisers. He currently works part-time for a large regional museum. The remainder of his time is taken up with the writing of books, magazine articles and heritage assessments.

at, I can't tell you what music we played but man, I can tell you what happened afterwards." 72

Smoking dope wasn't confined to the stage. There were plenty of 'perception enhancers' going around backstage. With raw and stronger 'brands' of dope in town, it was too much for some. Thorpe's manager, Michael Chugg, fell paranoid after the first song of the Asteca set.

Thorpe had every amp he could muster on stage, all of them turned up to eleven. It was loud as loud could be and the crowd was going nuts. There was smoke and noise and lights. I couldn't handle it. All I could think about was how to get out of there fast."

If the experience left Chugg terrified, it was the opposite for the crowd. They loved Thorpe and it could be seen most clearly in the call-and-answer section of 'Clap your hands', where he delighted in extracting ever more ridiculous responses from the punters. Thorpe was clearly having fun!

Lebby Loyde remembered:

Thorpe's bigger than Ben Hur on stage. When he walks on stage and he opens that mouth and lets it out, he doesn't tell you something, he commands, he gives you a command. 'Clap your hands' and everyone claps their hands, because he's scared the Christ out of them. 'You're gonna sing now' and they will sing, believe me."

The Asteca stayed at the Travelodge at Tullamarine airport, spending time at the Sunbury site each day, having access to a shared band caravan an hour before each set. Billy was a little more indulgent than the rest of the band, and spent some time out in the crowd at the festival."

Leo de Castro remembered:

It was huge ... you were playing to huge crowds — 45-50,000 people. You got to go on, you get forty-five minutes to do your thing. I said to the guys, everyone is playing all this other shit, why don't we just do a rock'n'roll song and see how that goes? It killed it. I mean, these people just stood up and went 'more, more, we want more!' It was just incredible. We did all these Little Richard things, it was just a good time, you know what I mean?"

Leo's comments typified the tensions between 'hippie peace and experimental music' and a 'rocking good time'. Phil Manning, Mike Rudd and Bill Pux each played at three or four Sunbury festivals in various bands. Phil Manning remembered: I was a vegetarian hippie who still liked to smoke substances that eroded vast amounts of one's memory'. Today, he remains embarrassed about

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LEFT: Dingus' lead guitarist Barry Schultz, Sunbury 1974. Photo: Peter Evans.

MIDDLE: Dingus' bass player John Bick, Sunbury 1974. Photo: Peter Evans.

RIGHT: Dingus' keyboard player Neil Logan, Sunbury 1974. Photo: Peter Evans.

BOTTOM LEFT: Howard Page in conversation with Alexei inside Andy's Super. Photo: Peter Evans.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Howard Page in the bands mixing truck. Much of the critical success of the festival can be put down to the contribution of bands in supporting the bands. Photo: Peter Evans.