

# **Writing Songs and Writing a Record: Inside the Composition of an Acoustic Pop Album.**

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Arnold', written over a horizontal line.

Greg Arnold

Date: November 13, 2013

## **ABSTRACT**

This project is a study of the author's creative practice as a songwriter, record producer and performer of mostly (but not exclusively) acoustic pop music. This project has been pursued through performance and composition and is documented in the folio of recordings and the accompanying exegesis. The folio of this submission is weighted at eighty per cent and the exegesis at twenty per cent. It involves the creation of a new studio album by The Swamp Dandies. For this album the author has been songwriter, vocalist, instrumentalist, arranger, engineer and producer. In recognition of the interdependence of component stages, the exegesis provides an analytical narrative account of the entire compositional journey of the album from pre-tracking songwriting through to mastering. Utilising reflective journals and participant interviews undertaken throughout the process it documents and analyses the deliberate and "intuitive" creative methods involved in all of these tasks. It engages with the emerging scholarly discipline of the art of record production, pursuing a holistic perspective. It also considers the significance of the author's biography, subcultural musical scenes and the contestable notion of authenticity. Throughout the exegesis the autoethnographic reflections are related back to corresponding academic and popular cultural discourses. Across the candidature the author has been active within the industry and as a Higher Education Music (and Music Industry) Educator. Consequently, the project documents and examines this specific four-year period in an ongoing musical career. In addition to the recordings specific to The Swamp Dandies project, the folio also contains additional record productions from both industrial and educational settings, the documentation of live performance work and a final live performance.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

All over the land the kids are finally starting to get the upper hand<sup>1</sup>  
(Chinn-Chapman, 1974)

When I was in primary school, I went to a concert by The Sweet. It was the 1970s. The band had recently stolen top spot on my private star parade from a dethroned Suzi Quatro. There was a glittering parade of glam rock bands across my wall. Like most rock concerts of the time they had the big lights, the long hair and, most importantly, they had the songs. Written by Nicky Chinn and Mike Chapman, the songs were short, exciting and catchy. They held the promise of a pop revolution for the kids: airbrushed iconoclasm. I should have loved it. However, at this show I realised the music was different. It sounded smaller and less dramatic, which was ironic considering the near overwhelming volume. Too young to deliver a sophisticated analysis of the sonic construction, I didn't realise that they couldn't replicate their sound outside of the studio. I just felt that this immediate true live representation was a lesser quality pastiche of the artwork I loved: the painstakingly crafted recordings. I loved the final transformation, even the intentional distortion of the real musical performances to bring about the complete aesthetic vision of the final record. William Moylan has observed, when recording music "one can witness magic and be part of something that surpasses the sum of all individuals of the project" (2002, 320). The record was the gestalt; the live performance was a re-delivered significant component part.

I have been a songwriter since I was a teenager and a professional recordist since 1992. The term "recordist" includes "the work of songwriters, arrangers, performers, engineers, and producers" and accounts "for the frequent overlaps among roles" (Zak 2001, xxi). During this time I have embraced this fluidity of roles. I have composed songs, co-

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this exegesis (depending on the context) lyrics and songs will be cited separately from recordings and appear in the references, not the discography.

composed songs, composed and performed collaborative instrumental and vocal parts and produced and co-produced entire albums. I have sung lead vocals and backing vocals; played bass, guitar, keyboards, glockenspiel and my daughter's three-stringed ukulele with a crayon in it. I have hit canoes and water coolers for percussion, shouted into the strings of a grand piano and opened a bottle of beer to heighten the comic effect of a lyrical joke. I have added near nuclear amounts of compression to performances and I have petulantly complained about the overuse of transforming effects such as compression. All of these, occasionally contradictory, tasks or performances were undertaken to compose a sound and enhance a feeling. They were recorded and placed within a highly variable soundscape to illuminate what I perceived to be the emotional intent of a song. All were composed with a view to make a contribution, at times almost subaudibly, to a particular song and sometimes, the album as a whole. I have employed an artistic method that embraces conscious technique and ostensibly unconscious creative intuition. I have applied systematic problem-solving techniques and I have also embraced what Mark Cunningham has described as Brian Wilson's grossly impulsive method (1996, 68).

I have examined my own creativity as a recordist and I believe the articulation of this research offers a unique, genuine and relevant contribution to this developing musicology. The weighting of the project is eighty per cent for the folio of recorded and live musical work and twenty per cent for the exegesis. To research these ideas I have undertaken a case study of The Swamp Dandies' *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). As a recordist I was engaged in the composition, performance and production of this album. I have examined my artistic method and what the art means to me. As an overarching research question I asked "What was I thinking?" From the outset I acknowledge that this question sounds very light and pop; however, I contend that it represents a strong and methodologically appropriate



starting point from which to drill down to uncover the intricacies of this particular recording project, and this particular moment in an artistic life.

### **Research Setting**

In his Doctor of Musical Arts exegesis Peter Knight has used the chapter heading “Situating My Research” (2011, 6) in the place of the traditional “Literature review”. The use of a non-traditional title is important in this type of research because the field of literature is so broad. While Knight has focused on the musical situation, the purpose of this chapter will be to outline the background of the study and the specific academic discourse trends. This is in response to the research context of any popular music study. A study such as this must embrace the omnipresent nature of research material. Research is being passively conducted when one simply turns on a television, radio or computer. One can accidentally research at the shops or at the traffic lights when stuck next to a particularly well-powered car stereo. It is ubiquitous. As Simon Frith has acknowledged, “Pop music could be defined as the music we listen to without meaning to; the songs we know without knowing we know them” (2011, 104). Consequently, every song and record I have ever heard (or half heard) is significant data.

Wading into a swamp of the non-specific is not useful in this context. This chapter will provide a journey from the general backdrop of popular music towards an outline of the highly specific academic literature. This journey might be considered like a painting with the study as the subject. The outer blur of pop music begins to take shape as it moves towards the subject in the form of popular texts that demonstrate the many phenomena involved in popular music composition, performance and recording. These texts themselves may be in many varied formats. For example, they may be in “rockumentary” form (Reiner 1984) such as *Walk on By: The History of Popular Song* (2001), or *Dancing in the Streets* (1995) in

which Jeff Beck has noted the inhibiting restrictions of the English class system and the seemingly inherent understanding of “grit” in American recording practice (Walsh 1996). Similarly, the casual anecdotal recollections across the *Classic Albums* (1992–2001) documentary series are highly illuminating. Whether it is the emotional Mick Fleetwood turning off the rest of the band just to listen to the rhythm section (Heffernan 1997), or Richard Wright recounting the use of harmonic quotation within song composition (Longfellow 2006) they have provided serious insight into the artistry and culture of recordists. Furthermore, *Anvil: The Story of Anvil* (Gervasi 2009) demonstrates the interpersonal mediations that occur in the life of a band and the shifting (and occasionally brutal) nature of subcultural trends. These are merely examples of a far longer list.

The publishable nature of the celebrity of recording artists has also contributed a useful catalogue of sources. Often these popular literature texts have the primary function of entertaining, and the intended audience is the fan not the scholar; however, they also contain significant insights into the practice and culture of recordists. For example, in Brian Wilson’s autobiography his chaotic and profoundly inharmonious life journey is juxtaposed against the rigorous pursuit of sonic experimentation and vocal harmony within his work as an artist (Wilson and Gold 1991). In Tom Wolfe’s “The First Tycoon of Teen” (1963) article on young Phil Spector we gain important insights into his method, while simultaneously gaining an insight into the sociological and entrepreneurial context in which this method was established. Bob Dylan’s *Chronicles: Volume One* (2004) has outlined the subcultural context of his formative folk work in New York, and Paul Kelly has answered the “What was I thinking?” research question in his expansive phenomena illuminating *How To Make Gravy* (2010).

Some artists are particularly significant within the discussion. The Beatles and their catalogue are the focus of a vast set of documentaries (Smeaton 1995), insider biographies (Brown and Gaines 1983) and detailed technical accounts (Lewisohn 1989 and MacDonald 1995). This list is by no means conclusive. They loom so large culturally (“if you want to know about the Sixties, play the music of The Beatles” [Aaron Copland cited in MacDonald 1995, 1]) that even their collaborative recordists have relevant published memoirs (Martin 1994 and Emerick 2006). Once again these texts are valuable in the articulation of the various aesthetic phenomena that occurred during the recording of this particular catalogue. For example, the rigour to achieve the illusion of spontaneity on “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” (1968) has been discussed in *Revolution in the Head*: “One of the most spontaneous-sounding tracks on The Beatles took a laborious forty-two hours to complete, its composer’s perfectionism provoking some ominously fraught scenes en-route” (MacDonald 1995, 236–7). This overall feeling was also enhanced by a “punchy sound (created by liberal use of compression and a heavily overloaded acoustic guitar doubling the bass line)” (MacDonald 1995, 237). Ethnological dynamics and specific recordist techniques have been featured in this short observation.

There are many more insider practitioner texts that illuminate recordist phenomena. Albin Zak has described such texts as “entertainingly anecdotal trade manuals for the casual reader” (2005). Such texts may not delve into the weightier ontological discussions; however, they do provide important triangulation resources by delivering observations of related phenomena from different songwriting and recording projects. While this varied popular and anecdotal literature provides an important cross-referencing tool, the major focus of this chapter must be the academic texts. What separates these texts is their pursuit of a deeper analysis of the art. They share the pursuit of an appropriate musicological framework upon which a broader understanding of the process can be built. The three academic areas that this

exegesis will examine are creativity, the scholarly investigation into the art of record production and the sociological context and meaning of popular music. This broad selection is necessary to cover the compositional material and the understanding of meaning across the entire work.

### **The Creativity Discourse**

The web was spun before the winds  
I watched as all the words fell in  
And for this they only asked  
That I should not betray their trust. (Arnold 1994)

In 1994, Things of Stone and Wood released “In This Thing Together”. While the central literary meaning is based on a confessional anti-record company whinge, it seems to suggest that the process of songwriting is arcane; with visits from muses, and lucky dips in a cosmos filled with tunes and words waiting to be sung into form. This Romantic mysticism is in no way restricted to the early 1990s “neo hippies”. If Romanticism has been traditionally and stereotypically concerned with “the daemonic, subjective, personal, irrational, and emotional” (Wright, 1968, xi) then it would seem many popular songwriters were enthusiastic new Romantics well before Duran Duran and their peers affected the scene’s title and Byronic pose. Paul McCartney has claimed that “[Yesterday] fell fully formed out of the sky ... like an egg being laid, not a crack or flaw in it” (cited in MacDonald, 1994, 124). Similarly, Arlo Guthrie has half joked that “songwriting is like fishing in a stream; you put in your line and hope you catch something. And I don’t think anyone downstream from Bob Dylan ever caught anything” (cited in Zollo 2003, 71). Paul Kelly has observed that the marriage of words and music is “utterly simple and deeply mysterious” (1991, xi). Rickie Lee Jones has been explicit on the subject: “There’s no doubt that music is dealing with alchemy and magic things” (cited in Zollo, 2003, 481). It could be concluded that, at the very least, some songwriters view this mystical description of the process as useful, attractive and

worthy of broadcast. Yet, as Simon Dawkins has argued, it is not uncommon to describe the beauty of the universe in mystical quasi-religious language (2006, 32). They are all joining a discourse that is deeply ingrained in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The act of creation is associated with divine mystery in the first sentence of the Bible (Genesis 1:1).

Recent discussions have moved away from accepting the arcane or genius model as an explanation for creative phenomena. Donald Schön has invited a demystifying discourse about an accepted premise that practitioners seem capable of unlocking action intuitively (1991). Jack Perricone has articulated such a “knowing-in-practice” by describing the manner in which theoretical knowledge appears in his work “faster than thought ... like driving a car” (2000, vii). Guy Claxton has also examined creativity as psychological phenomenon, arguing that the modern tendency towards fast thinking (“deliberate conscious thinking—d-mode” [1998, 2]) robs the mind of the slow contemplative intelligence: “There are mental places one can gain access to by loafing which are inaccessible to earnest cognition” (Claxton 1998, 14). He has suggested that “poets have always known the limitations of conscious deliberate thinking, and have sought to cultivate these slower, mistier ways of thinking” (Claxton 1998, 3). Jean Cocteau (1954) refused to indulge any notions of the divine in the description of his own creativity: “I do not believe inspiration falls from heaven” (cited in Claxton 1998, 59). Rather he attributed it to “profound indolence” aided by “elements of daily life” (cited in Claxton 1998, 59). Claxton has argued for the recognition of “unconscious perception” (Claxton 1998, 102) and that increased “self-consciousness” inhibits the capacity to capture the fleeting moments of unconscious inspiration (Claxton 1998, 128).

Utilising a particularly poetic tone, Paul Kelly has described such unconscious perception as a foundation of his songwriting method:

Music comes first, usually stabs of phrases sung over a band jamming or melodies mumbled late at night into a small tape recorder, no proper words yet but a kind of proto-language somewhere between sounds and words (swords? wounds? swoons? The language of little deaths); and then the fall from grace, from possibility to actuality, from dream words to real words, the real words always a little disappointing at first, bald and skinny until they are sung over and over again and the dream words disappear and the real words approach sound again. (1999, xi)

Philip McIntyre has argued that legends of mysticism and the genius are misleadingly steeped in the arcane excesses of Romanticism and should instead be understood as part of the modern psychological discourse of “system models” (2006, 201). He has used the well-documented mystical compositional example of “Yesterday” as his basis for this argument. Citing Weisberg, he has debunked the “aha! Myth” and has suggested that “major creative achievements are generally logical extensions of existing ideas, involving long, hard work and many small, faltering steps forward” (McIntyre 2006, 202).

Instead of a genius he has proposed McCartney should be viewed as “an exceptional creator” (McIntyre 2006, 203). This more “rationalist” (McIntyre 2006, 203) position represents an argument for caution about any journeys into the mystical ether and it delivers an attempt to understand, articulate and demystify the phenomenon. He has tracked the musical precedents that would have been a part of McCartney’s experience and the personal context of being one of The Beatles, and consequently a very busy musician. He has further argued that all of these experiences established the scenario in which he may have had such a rewarding dream. He has based his theories on those of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has proposed a three-part system of creativity comprised of “Domain” (1997, 28), “Field” (29) and “Person” (29.). McIntyre has argued that the lone genius view does not recognise the expression of an artist’s sociocultural context. It is his central contention that “Yesterday” could be attributed to the highly explainable interaction between “McCartney’s deep well of experience, his intensive immersion in the domain of popular songs, and the product of long

reflection and persistence” (McIntyre 2006, 215). An examination of the songwriting process of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) has been undertaken with these contemporary creative perspectives in mind.

### **The Art of Record Production Discourse**

The academic discourse surrounding the art of record production is in its “infancy” (Zak 2005). Recordings are complex to analyse, particularly from traditional aesthetic positions. The name “record” itself suggests realistic representation, not interpretation. Hence, from the outset the art seems to carry a foundational burden of “mere craft”. Arguably, Edward Kealy has been a little hasty in his definition of a record producer as a “music marketer” rather than a “music maker” (1979, 5). He has argued that the amount of aesthetic decisions made by sound engineers has increased across the development of popular music (1979, 7). The original recordist culture was performed in the “craft union mode” (1979, 9) and the improvements in technology facilitated by World War Two initially enhanced sonic accuracy, not creativity. “The primary aesthetic question was utilitarian: how well does a recording capture the sounds of a performance?” (1979, 9). The craft union mode met the “entrepreneurial mode” (1979, 12) and the collaborations between craftspeople who understood the mysteries of “studio magic” (1979, 22) and the innovative performers who recognised the artistic potential of the medium gave birth to the new “art mode” (1979, 15). Kealy has observed that the engineers’ immersion in the musical subculture has been traditionally and symbolically limited by the sheet of glass that separates them from their collaborators; however, he has concluded that when recording artists get access to “resources that reinforce their aesthetic beliefs... it can result in movements to transform craft materials into art and craftsmen into artists” (1979, 27).

Records also carry the burden of their near lifelong relationship with commerce. It has been argued that this synergetic relationship fundamentally erodes meaning and that it almost signifies an anti-art *mens-rea* in the artists themselves. Theodor Adorno has condemned Joan Baez on these grounds:

When somebody ... [accompanies] maudlin music by singing something or other about Vietnam... I find...it ...unbearable...in that by taking the horrendous and making it somehow consumable, it ends up wringing something like consumption like qualities out of it. (n.d.)

This position is refuted by Georgina Born who has argued that “his portrait of music’s assimilation by the culture industry ... brook[s] no contradictions” and when “held up against historical realities, his analysis of the dynamics and output of the music industry is woefully reductive” (2005, 6).

Paul Clarke has observed another conundrum facing the aesthetic analysis of the art. He has argued that it is hard to categorise as either a “making art” or a “doing-performance-art”. A record is “a made thing, certainly—a round, black object stored in its sleeve on the record rack; but it is also, when introduced to the appropriate equipment, a matter of performance” (1983, 199). This conundrum has been of particular relevance to the categorisation of this composition and performance PhD project. Clarke has further proposed that to adapt to developments and effectively analyse the art we must consider three perspectives “appropriate to the medium (aural recorded), the form (musico-linguistic) and (the ethno-) musicology” (Clarke 1983, 211).

Albin Zak has cautioned against journeying too far into “philosophical abstraction” (2001, 22) when analysing the art, but he does pursue the ontological discourse for its “practical implication” (Zak 2001, 21) in that by “contemplating the nature of an artwork’s identity we are forced also to deal with the nature of its medium and the workings of the



interface between medium and artistic practice” (Zak 2001, 21). He has concluded that a record is autographic (un-forgable) and contains allographic art (amenable to notation). However, the ontological “authenticity” does not require the unique “instance” but “a unique arrangement of elements” (Zak 2001, 19). He uses the somewhat hippy and ethnologically appropriate phrase “transferral of aura” (Zak 2001, 20) to represent the essential ontological aspect of recorded performance. His determination to focus on “sound” as the “essential and irreducible element of the art” (Zak 2001, 23) is more a corrective insertion of recording artistry into the discourse than a scholarly vivisection upon the gestalt. His analysis is holistic and his theory is inclusive, not exclusive. Additionally, he has described the notion of quotation within recording practice and apprehension of meaning from this practice as “resonance”; where “records are commonly interpreted in terms of other records. Meanings accumulate through a continual process of interaction that connects individual works to a field of works past, present and future” (Zak 2001, 184). This interpretation is of considerable significance in a project where lyrical, melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and sonic material has been knowingly quoted.

In his thesis, Andrew Kania (2005) has been similarly cautious about the removal of component parts from the discourse. While acknowledging the cultural primacy of the record, he has argued that live performance skills and the aesthetic decisions that accompany them remain of significance within the art and should not be overlooked. Simon Zagorski-Thomas has argued that as seekers of a musicology of record production we should “delineate our area of interest” (2008, 192) to draw the musicology under a “single banner” (Zagorski-Thomas 2008, 192). It is the central contention in this dissertation that a musicology that leans too heavily on the analysis of component parts risks ignoring the interdependence that ultimately provides the ontological independence of the artefact. Although Zagorski-Thomas has acknowledged that “a musicology of production is meaningless unless it is seen as an

interactive component within the musicology as a whole” (2008, 192). It could be contended that any delineations between parts should be marked in pencil, not pen. A record is made up of many components, some of which (song and performance) possess their own ontological independence. They should not be removed from the discussion because of this. A song, whether written before the session or in the studio, is an allographic gestalt comprising lyrics, melody, harmony (and arguably) implied rhythm. A performance captured on record is an allograph transformed into an autograph by the process itself. The artistry of recording (while fundamentally inseparable from the artefact) is both technically and performatively allographic made autographic by the uniquely variable nature of performances and inexact recall<sup>2</sup>. This dissertation will pursue Allan Moore’s concept that an appropriate musicology would address “all aspects of the Production process” (cited in Zagorski-Thomas 2008, 191) from composition, arrangement, performance and technical mediation. It is also worth noting that the significance of each contribution to the final artefact of each process is highly variable and that a song may certainly be significantly enhanced in its appeal by the subsequent artistry.

*The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field* (Frith and Zagorski-Thomas 2012) is a particularly significant text for this area as it draws together many of the discourses in one compilation. It provides a holistic overview with history, contemporary theoretical approaches and relevant case studies. William Moylan has argued that the “art” in the artefact is the “sensitive application of the recording process” (2007, 3). It is a major contention in this dissertation that successful artistic sensitivity is more compositional than passive. It is the appropriate and creative interdependent

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the near impossible coincidence of an artist sounding exactly the same the following day and standing in exactly the same place and delivering exactly the same performance. If such performance were possible it could also be argued that the very purpose was to impersonate, rather than freely articulate rendering the performance inherently unique.

performance of all of the contributing artists with one another, from the songwriter writing records to the mastering engineer enhancing the literary content of the lyric.

### **The Meaning and Popular Music Discourse**

The attribution of meaning to popular music is complex as it (generally) possesses both literary and musical components. Laird Addis has argued that music and meaning are joined both inherently and causally. The scope of this exegesis does not stretch to an examination of the former, but it does examine the two versions of causal theory: “composer causal” (1999, 12) and “listener causal” (1999, 12). Missy Higgins has suggested that “it’s not really a finished song until someone hears it” (2012) and Imogen Heap has concurred by articulating that the listener is “the person who makes the song complete” (2012). It is important to examine the discourse surrounding the ideas of meaning and popular music and the way in which a listener might appreciate and understand *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011).

Philip Tagg has argued for a holistic and non-dichotomous or “split brain” (1982, 20) method to analyse the production and apprehension of meaning in popular music. He has acknowledged that the modern listener both actively and passively decodes musical meaning. The idea that audiences are passive receivers has come under increased scrutiny in the discourse surrounding meaning in pop. Joli Jensen (1992) has suggested “Fans are neither regressive, obsessed, alienated individuals nor a manipulated collective mass” (cited in Negus 1996, 26). Instead, she has posited that they are “imaginative, discriminating people who are capable of making a number of fine distinctions” and that they “actively participate in creating the meanings that become associated with popular music” (Negus 1996, 26). Similarly, Keith Negus has paraphrased Richard Middleton (1990) and Lawrence Grossberg (1992) who have argued that popular music study should not be restricted to the notion of

“linear communication” (Negus 1996, 134) from producer to receiver, and that the communication should be viewed as a “web of mediated connections [in which] performer, industry and audience ‘articulate’ with each other and with the surrounding culture and socio-political system” (1996, 135). Richard Middleton has reiterated this by observing that “Pop styles (are) neither simply imposed nor simply self-generated but ... a form of ‘negotiation’ over constantly shifting cultural terrain” (2001, 214).

One highly significant consideration in the attribution of meaning to records is the idea of authenticity. The word appeared with great frequency during the recording sessions of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011), with its companions: “taste” and “appropriate language”. Like arcane and romantic notions of creationist composition, the idea of authenticity is so ingrained within pop culture that it is tempting to believe that such a thing actually exists. Even serious new fiction such as *Freedom* (Franzen 2010) and *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (Egan 2010) feature aging characters conflicted by the troubling life journeys of their own “cred”. Richard Middleton has argued that such ideas are highly contestable and represent a reinterpretation and continuation of a classic classist conflict in which “pop values are caught within the overarching discursive dialectic of High and Low, which runs the musical field as a whole” (2001, 224). He has further suggested that “‘Authenticity’ has also struggled for intellectual credibility, contaminated as it is by romantic wish-fulfilment and political exploitation” (Middleton 2001, 215).

Similarly, in their study of the “consequences” of the “quest for authenticity” (2007, ix) Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor have argued that the relentless search for the “‘authentic’ musical experience” (Barker and Taylor 2007, ix) has played a significant role in constructing meaning. They have defined authenticity as the rejection “of music that is labeled contrived, pretentious, artificial or overly commercial” (Barker and Taylor 2007, ix). Using two

significant examples of The Monkees and Supergrass they have challenged the restrictions of such definitions and examined the notion of authenticity in an inherently inauthentic genre. The Monkees' relationship with authenticity was particularly comical as they were not real, they were a construct. They were actors not musicians. Micky Dolenz articulated his confusion at why they were unfavourably compared to The Beatles (the "pre-fab four") arguing that it was not an "apples with apples" comparison. He has argued that comparing The Beatles to The Monkees is like comparing NASA to *Star Trek*: one is a real space program while the other is a television program (2011). He has added that the likelihood of them becoming a real band was comparable to Leonard Nimoy becoming a *Vulcan* (cited in Kennedy, 2004). Barker and Taylor have argued that the development of seriousness into the analysis of pop has meant there needed to be an exclusive insult for all inauthentic pop, and that insult was "Bubblegum" (Barker and Taylor 2007, 160). At this point, the more mature and discerning pop fan began to lose the capacity to recognise a charming pop song as a "simple thing of beauty" (Barker and Taylor 2007, 160).

These authors have also argued that the career of British band Supergrass has been stuck in a reactive cycle of denial in response to their instantly charming early pop work. Appearing at the tail end of the earnest grunge era they released a single "Alright", which "directly recalls the best moments of The Monkees" (Barker and Taylor 2007, 190). They then spent the remainder of their career "trying to play down the song and its cheesy appeal...and stressed...that they were a serious rock band for whom 'Alright' had been a one-off aberration" (Barker and Taylor 2007, 190).

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an overview of general relevant popular literature and the academic context of the work. In particular, it has given a more specific overview of three scholarly fields: creativity, the art of record production and

meaning and popular music. The various discursive threads established here will be further explored at the introduction of each subsequent chapter and through the labyrinth of emergent themes within the specific chapters of the project.

### **Methodology**

This project is grounded in practice. Consequently, it is crucial that a “music first” approach is taken. The theories are grounded in the work itself. It attempts to get to the heart of the work by contextualising and articulating the art and the artistic process, by answering “What was I thinking?” The major vehicle was the composition, performance and recording of an album. Marcel Cobussen has argued that the art in such a project is “itself the statement and the conclusion” (2007, 19). It is what Robert Stake has described as an “intrinsic case study” (1995, 3). A study such as this is bound to the artefact itself and is motivated by my particular interest and desire to further understand my own artistic practice. As only one album is to be thoroughly examined in this project, it would be over-reaching to suggest that the ideas could be entirely extrapolated (or achieve result reproduction) on other recordings. As an articulation of this individual artistry is the central purpose of the research, the idea of result reproduction would seem to be of contestable worth. By revealing the detailed process and my thoughts and motivations, the readers should be able to draw reasonable conclusions or “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake 1995, 20).

From the outset it is easy to see how such a research project could be viewed as a simple exercise in narcissism and auto-hagiography. There is the potential for gratuitous subjectivity inherent in the notion of “I have studied myself at great length and found myself to be indisputable proof of whatever I think”. The challenges to scholarly tradition and objective logic are clear; however, the study must also avoid the imposition of quantifiable

measures where such measures have no place. Fortunately, there are accepted methodological frameworks for such studies that utilise subjectivity as an important research perspective.

This study adopts what Colin Robson has described as a “flexible” (2002, 163) mixed-method approach from an overarching autoethnographic perspective, but also including an ethnographic perspective. The project design included natural shifts from solitary work through to highly collaborative teamwork. At the songwriting and song demo stage the perspective was autoethnographic or, borrowing from the fields of linguistics and anthropology, “emic” (Headland, 1990). It is research from the inside. As Margot Duncan has observed, in an autoethnography “the researcher is not trying to become an insider in the research setting. He or she, in fact, is the insider” (2004, 3). It seemed appropriate to employ this perspective across the entire project considering my involvement in the album as songwriter, performer, band member and producer. I was artistically present at every stage from songwriting to the final mastering session. The satisfactory gathering of total data required this method, and inherent in this technique is the acknowledgment and analysis of my biases. As John Creswell has observed, a project such as this is an “interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation about what they see, hear and understand. Their interpretations cannot be separated from their own backgrounds, history, contexts, and prior understandings” (2009, 176).

At the band tracking stage the perspective became more ethnographic. I studied “a group who share a culture” (Robson 2002, 187). Consequently, my role as a “participant as observer” (Robson 2002, 187) became more complex. If, as Ruth Behar has suggested, a significant feature of a worthy ethnography is its “pathos” (1999, 476) it is worth noting that I was also an insider of the immediate recordist culture in which I was practicing, so that pathos was foundational. As a central theme I have suggested that the recordist culture in

general, and *The Swamp Dandies* specifically, place considerable faith in their individually subjective interpretations of subcultural notions of good taste (and the contestable notion of authenticity). While there is the pursuit of an ontological examination of the artefact this culturally relative faith has invited a phenomenology. Colin Robson has described phenomenology as research focusing “on the subjective experience of the individuals studied...How can one understand and describe what happens to them from their own point of view?” and as an “attempt to understand a particular phenomenon” (2002, 195). The phenomenological complexity stemmed from the mediations between the two roles of empathic and subjective participant within the creative scene and the requisite critical analysis of the researcher. It was required that these roles were undertaken simultaneously.

Yet, as a scholarly work it is important to go further in the pursuit of data. Duncan has argued that for an autoethnographic study to be legitimate it must deliver “justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence...accounts ... [must] ... not consist solely of the researcher’s opinions but ... [must] ... also [be] supported by other data that can confirm or triangulate those opinions” (2004, 5). The multiple sources of evidence for this project are: the recordings, the literature, the reflective journals and interviews with the collaborative recordists.

Throughout the exegesis the relevant literature has been used as themes have emerged. The reflective journals, which were kept across the entire recording process, were significant in that they provided “tangible evidence of mental processes” (Kerka 1996, 3). They, and the participant interviews, have been quoted with as little editing as possible to reveal the true voice of the artist/s. This decision was made following Kathleen Coessen, Darla Crispin and Anne Douglas’ suggestion that “the artist researcher will have to develop from the resources of existing and possible languages his or her own ‘parole’ or ‘speech’ ”



(2009, 74). This approach embraced the language of the participants as that language possesses naturalistic credibility. As David Carless and Kitrina Douglas have warned, it is important to avoid committing “ ‘symbolic violence’ to a creative process that arguably has a degree of disorder and chaos at its core” (2009, 36). It is a central contention of this chapter that this represents an ethnographically appropriate approach. It should also be noted that the font and reference style has remained the same across all types of citations to avoid any imposition of “high-low” hierarchical value assumptions between the published literature and participant comment. This method embraces F. Joseph Smith’s battle cry of letting “the phenomenology of [this] music emerge spontaneously from the journal entries” (1995, 21) and interviews.

The interviews were conducted with the participant recordists.<sup>3</sup> They commenced with loose conversational open-ended questions before and during the recording sessions and continued through to the conclusion of the album, with increased specificity as themes emerged. The recorded interviews were taken from the recording sessions and transferred to CDs from which they were transcribed. The key participants were band members, contributing recordists, co-composers and conceptual touchstones (detailed in Chapter Four). These various communications have been used for what Keith Sawyer (2007) has described as an “interaction analysis” (cited in Morrow 2012, 5).

The exegesis is a layered text chronological narrative. It begins with *Fall’s* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) cultural and subcultural context. In this chapter it is also contended that biography should be considered as a significant determinant of aesthetic decisions and consequently there is an autobiography attached as an appendix. Chapter Three has dealt with the composition of the songs and the song demos. This chapter delves deeper into the

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<sup>3</sup> This received ethics clearance at Griffith University in the first stage of the project (GU Ref No: QCM/03/10/HREC August 3, 2010).

phenomenon of creativity and examines Guy Claxton's notion of deliberateness (1998). At this point the research question seemed to be challenged to include the subquestion: "How consciously was I thinking at all?" Chapter Four has examined the composition of the recorded artefact largely in the context of the art of record production discourse. As a point of difference, this chapter argues that studies of popular music artefacts should scroll back to the earliest stages of composition in recognition of the interdependence of the musical stages in such a project. It also documents the recording sessions and includes a great deal of triangulating data from the participants (mostly conversations recorded during the sessions themselves). Chapter Five has examined the construction of meaning within the music. It considers the album's reception and it again engages with sociological studies to question the contestable notions of authenticity and taste. Finally, the narrative concludes with a discussion of the immediate resonant contemporary folio work and the independent ontology of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011).

This chronological narrative structure is justifiable from several perspectives. William Moylan's (2002, 340) chronological outline of the album recording process is a basis for this model. Similarly, as Carolyn Ellis has argued, a narrative is a form of analysis: "A good story itself is theoretical. When people tell their stories they employ analytical techniques to interpret their worlds" (2004, 195–6). The exegesis employs the technique of three of Heewon Chang's four types of autoethnographic writing: "Descriptive–realistic, confessional–emotive and analytical–interpretive" (2008, 149). It is worth noting that the exegesis will not contain "imaginative–creative" writing (Chang 2008, 149). This will be limited to the recording itself. This choice does not dismiss the interpretation that the recording, based on largely biographical, imaginative and socially observant lyrics could easily be viewed as an autoethnographic text in its own right.

This particular method is not without relevant scholarly musicological precedent. It is a technique in Stacy Holman Jones' "The Way We Were, Are, and Might Be: Torch Singing as Autoethnography" (2001), Peter Knight's "The Intersection of Improvisation and Composition: A Music Practice in Flux" (2011), and throughout Brydie Leigh-Bartleet and Carolyn Ellis' (eds.) *Music Autoethnographies: Making Autoethnography Sing/Making Music Personal* with Douglas Carless and Katrina Douglas' (2009) "Songwriting and the creation of knowledge" being of particular relevance. Another particularly relevant work is Guy Morrow's case study of Boy and Bear's Nashville studio experience (2012). The piece deals with the interpersonal creative dynamic of the session from a participant observer position, with a particular focus on conflict, flow and creativity. While Morrow's participant position is different (co-manager not producer/artist) he has examined similar material with the inclusion of industrial and subcultural influences on the artistic outcome. He has also employed interviews and maintained an approachable tone in his writing style, ensuring comfortable segues between the author's academic analysis and the participant material.<sup>4</sup>

While there is the presence of multiple triangulating data sources and the use of scholarly method, this project ultimately comes down to the truth of the testimony it delivers. In research terms it might be asked if it allows the possibility for Stake's "naturalistic generalization" (1995, 20), and in more casual language the test may be simply: Do you believe me? Has the project delivered an artistically honest album? Has this exegesis delivered a truthful account of the process and reasonable conclusions based on that testimony? I freely acknowledge the subjectivity of truth in this context. Due to the nature of the project, subjectivity and how it occurs is a central feature of the multilayered creative phenomena that is being studied.

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<sup>4</sup> This approach was used in this exegesis. Morrow's participant material is not different in its font or format and it sits comfortably alongside the academic writing.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT

### Biography and Criticism

When will she see that I just can't change?  
Why [doesn't] she know that I don't write the words?  
The words write me. (Arnold 2003)

Things of Stone and Wood released the song "Angeline, forgive me" in 2003. The central character has given up. He is defeated by his addictions, and he sings of his sorrow that his lover still, ill-advisedly, has faith in his capacity for redemption. It is fiction. However, it does pose an interesting question, particularly to a generally confessional writer: Where is the line drawn between artist and song?

The relationship between art criticism and biography has long been complex. Victoria Dutchman-Smith has suggested that "Twentieth and twenty-first century critics are more self-conscious about making overt connections between literature and biography" (2009, 4), and that they fear that "by reading lives through work . . . [they risk] . . . allowing moral judgements to override aesthetic ones" (Dutchman-Smith 2009, 1). Alan Shelston has also argued that the concern with using biography as a critical source can be attributed to T.S. Eliot's (1920) view that "honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry" (1985, 71). He has further contended that this aversion to biography was shared by many twentieth-century critical schools who felt that "biography meanwhile is held to satisfy a more vulgar emotion than critical austerity can allow" (Shelston 1985, 71). However, he has also cited William Empson's (1984) view that "a student of literature ought to be trying all the time to empathize with the author" (cited in Shelston 1985, 71).

I would contend that a songwriter's life should not be excluded as fraught territory from an analysis of their art. Citing Keith Negus and Michael Pickering (2004, 160) Phillip

McIntyre's "holistic" (2006, 203) view of the songwriting process is that songwriters "cannot be isolated from the ordinariness of human life" and they are . . . fundamentally located within "changing biographical circumstances, social relationships, economic imperatives, stylistic conventions and historical traditions" (2004, 161). Similarly, Albin Zak has contended that "artists are listeners as well" (2001, 186) and that they create "in terms of their own experience of the world" (Zak 2001, 196). Biography holds not just the formative personal influences, but also the direct and attributable musical influences. Consequently, I would contend that the inclusion of an autobiography within this exegesis is essential to provide the holistic context of the work. It will provide a foundation for the autoethnographic analysis. It should further be noted that of the twelve tracks on the album, nine are lyrically documenting and/or reinterpreting specific events within the biography. It is intended to provide a suitably pop "Don't bore us get to the chorus" (Roxette, 1995) version of my life, which restricts itself to the explicit influences on my art. This approach does not exclude the possibility of further influences. It simply recognises that the inclusion of a full autobiography does not support the purpose of this exegesis. The autobiography will tell my artistic story as I have observed it, in my own language (see Appendix 1).<sup>5</sup>

It would be reasonable to conclude that, based on the autobiography, I am an artist whose most significant songwriting and sonic influences come from childhood and adolescence. These influences were developed into a type of "novelty" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 29) during the pop cultural "retro" phenomenon of the early 1990s. During this period I had some chart and critical success within Australia that also greatly influenced my adult character and consequently, my art. It is also evident that I am both conscious of and self-conscious about my middle-class upbringing. I write largely confessional (or autobiographical) songs with occasional journeys into fiction (*Lost Marie*, 2006). This

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<sup>5</sup> For the narrative approach to contextualise the work it is important to read this appendix at this point.

confessional style has had notable examples of the celebratory (“Happy Birthday Helen”, 1992), the autoethnographic sociopolitical (“Wildflowers”, 1994) and the autotherapeutic (“On the White Wall” 1999). While I have dabbled in power pop (*Whirligig* 1996 and *Super* 1999) my central artistic pursuit since 1989 has been acoustic-based pop-rock (which was also still present on both of these power pop albums). The marriage of these two genres, in my own view, has not always been artistically successful.

Immediately preceding the making of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was a short break from my own writing and self-record production. I was listening to a much smaller amount of popular music and the two major recordings of influence preceding this work (Bob Evans’ *Suburban Songbook* 2006 and Josh Pyke’s *Memories and Dust* 2007) could be seen as consolidating career-long interests, rather than challenging them. On commencement of this recording I was living a happy middle-class family life, financially secure, and no longer carrying the self-conscious emotional “university-bred Marxist” conflict of my twenties.

### **The Scene**

And another thing I’ve been wondering lately . . .  
What’s my scene? (Faulkner 1987)

As with the inclusion of biography within critical discourse, musicology has been hesitant to embrace the societal context and subcultural affiliations of both musicians and listeners. As Philip Bohlman has observed, “music and culture broadly speaking are not convenient discursive fits” (2003, 45). Lawrence Kramer has argued that “there has been a consensus that enforces a certain silence about music by requiring that any meanings ascribed to it be both vague and modest as befits their origin in mere subjectivity” (2003, 125). As an appropriate analytical technique he offers “cultural musicology” (instead of new musicology) (Kramer 2003, 125) which, like autoethnography “answers the charge of the interpreters’ subjectivity by taking that very subjectivity as the object of inquiry . . . [it] is not an obstacle

to credible understanding but its vehicle” (Kramer 2003, 126). While a more detailed analysis of the ideas of meaning and social context will happen in a later chapter, it could be argued that the outcome of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) has been significantly influenced by my immediate musical-cultural context, or scene. This scene pre-dated the recording and writing process. The influence of creative canons (The Beatles) and recent aesthetic (but not personal) contemporaries (Bob Evans 2006 and Josh Pyke 2007) has been documented in the autobiography. It is also necessary to acknowledge the influence of those who I know personally and have worked with. As Howard Becker has noted “maybe the years I spent playing piano in taverns in Chicago and elsewhere led me to believe that the people who did the mundane work were as important to an understanding of the art as the better known players who produced the recognised classics of jazz” (1982, ix). There is a risk that the study of this art could become celebrity-bound, and that the domination of the discourse by the cultural and commercial icons may limit the articulation of the experiences of the vast majority of artists.

Before discussing the influence of the scene it must first be loosely defined. As discussed earlier, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has posited that creativity should not be viewed as the product of the individual alone. “Creativity does not happen inside people’s heads, but in the interaction between a person’s thoughts and a socio-cultural context” (1997, 24). If we apply his Domain, Field, Person model, the domain in this case would be the arts, the field would be the contemporary music industry and I am the person. He has rated the influence of the field as particularly important, suggesting that “no matter how gifted a person is he or she has no chance to achieve anything creative unless the right conditions are provided by the field” (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 330). The field “select[s] what new works of art deserve to be recognised” (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 29). He has further suggested that “creativity occurs when a person . . . has a new idea or sees a new pattern, and when this novelty is selected by

the appropriate field for inclusion” (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 29). To extrapolate this theory to my creative life it could be said that the gatekeepers to the field were James Black and Sony Music (*The Yearning* 1993) and that the novelty was the blend of acoustic instruments, melodic pop traditions, “politically correct” and emotional lyrics with an exciting live band (Things of Stone and Wood). Yet, in this specific application, the idea of field needs development to consider a long-term career. While it should be duly noted that the strongest recognition from the mainstream field came at those stages when the novelty was actually new, it should also be acknowledged that I have also served in the role of gatekeeper for many acts that I have produced. Similarly, many of those acts have in turn been gatekeepers for me, allowing me to cross back into their subcultural field of music. In this scenario it could be argued that the field is more fluid and should be more regarded as a scene (as defined within contemporary sociological theory).

Andy Bennett and Richard Peterson have suggested that “the concept ‘music scene’ . . . is increasingly used by academic researchers to designate the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians and fans collectively distinguish themselves from others” (2004, 1). Preferring the term “scene” to “sub-culture” (Bennet and Peterson 2004, 3) because of its flexibility (it does not assume the homogeneity of the “mainstream” culture and it does not overstate the influence of the subcultural allegiances) they present three distinct types:

The first local scene corresponds most closely with the original notion of the scene as clustered around a specific geographic focus. The second, translocal scene refers to widely scattered scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive form of music and lifestyle. The third, virtual scene is a newly emergent formation in which people scattered across great physical spaces create the sense of scene via fanzines and increasingly, through the internet. (Bennet and Peterson 2004, 6–7)

To extrapolate this concept to *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) it could be argued that the local scene consists of Melbourne acoustic-folk-rock-pop recordists. They are loosely



part of the local scene as defined by myself as producer and Atlantis Sound studio; but they are also independent, branching off into more specific scenes depending on their separate local, translocal and virtual scenes. The translocal scene could be said to include the scenes of alt-country, alt-folk, acoustic and pure-pop. Finally, the virtual scene could be seen to stretch out to the various touring maps of the participants and the similar local Nashville scene of Brad Jones, Alex the Great studios and Jim Demain at Yes Master. All of these scenes intersect in this recording, and they begin to appear as what Becker has called “an art world” (1982, 1). The art world uses “symbols of [the] given domain” (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 29) and yet it is not strictly bound by them. The scene helps direct, but does not necessarily dictate communicative language and artistic decisions. As Becker has contended:

People who cooperate on a piece of art usually do not decide things afresh. Instead, they rely on earlier agreements now become customary . . . Artistic conventions cover all the decisions that must be made with respect to works produced, even though particular conventions may be revised for a given work. (1982, 29)

Producer Justin Neibank has articulated a similar view specifically on the recording process arguing “it’s not about the producer . . . or even the artist or the musicians around him or her—it’s about creating a circle of art that is bigger than everyone involved” (cited in Massey 2009, 11).

Immediately preceding *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) I produced three albums for other artists that were highly influential on my art: Carus and the True Believers’ *Three Boxes*<sup>6</sup> (2007), Chloe Hall’s *Outside* (2009), and Skipping Girl Vinegar’s *Sift the Noise* (2008 co-production). The albums are exemplars of my scene and its consistencies and disparities. They helped develop the relevant conventions. All were self-funded independent albums (not made for major record companies) and were recorded with no external commercial pressures.

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<sup>6</sup> This album was used as case study in my RMIT Masters project, however, there is no significant overlap in its use here and the participant interview is new.

All were largely based on the central writing of one singer-songwriter, all had acoustic instrumentation as their core foundation, all were tracked to some degree at Atlantis Sound, mixed by Brad Jones at Alex the Great and all were mastered by Jim Demain at Yes Master. From the production perspective they all also shared the aspiration to take the “indie” concept of recording to a new level of major label production standard outcome. All represented significant turning points in the career of the recording artists.

In 2006, Carus and the True Believers were a national and international touring act performing to comparatively good numbers on the pub and festival circuit. They had enjoyed some early success on JJJ<sup>7</sup> and were described as a “roots” act. Their style was heavy on jams and reggae. As a producer I believed that while the live shows had been successful (built mostly around Thompson’s charismatic showmanship) his albums had not yet developed into a satisfying ontologically separate art. They had been mostly documentary phonographs of live performance. There was not a clear aesthetic. To extrapolate my production intentions into an academic-style research question, during the production process of *Three Boxes* (2007) I was asking: Can Carus and the True Believers make a satisfying singer-songwriter and band album with stronger songs and neater arrangements that might increase the act’s appeal outside the roots genre? Can we make this sound like a major label release and yet still maintain indie-roots credibility? I believed we achieved this outcome, however, not without caveats. While we took substantial steps to improve the songwriting through rigorous pre-production and we edited the band performances to make them neater (for example, removing conceptually incongruous funk bass solos), I felt I could have pushed a little harder in both of these areas. For example, on “The Last Days of Winter” (2007) we left the sound raw, at the expense of lush harmonic interplay. This decision represents the producer yielding to some aesthetically restrictive band self-image issues that negatively influenced the final outcome

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<sup>7</sup> The Australian Public Broadcaster youth station widely regarded as a significant “tastemaker”.

(Thompson and the band were still occasionally suspicious of recordist enhancement arts). I ignored my professional judgment to enhance what I perceived to be the central ache in the song. I backed down and, in retrospect, I would view this yielding as a production mistake on my part.

Choosing the most appropriate mixer for this album was also a highly influential decision for the development of my production style during this period. We listened to many albums searching for something that sounded good (hi-fidelity production values), warm (not overtly trebly and more communicative for acoustic artists) and “cool/hip” (something that could conceivably be played on JJJ). These scene-based decisions were self-evidently subjective and unquantifiable, yet they were significant in the production discussions of all three of these albums. The pursuit of a cool/hip sound was made in the conscious pursuit of the attention and approval of the field. After listening to albums by John Butler (2004), Pete Murray (2003), Lior (2003) and Josh Rouse (2005) we felt that the Josh Rouse sound represented what satisfied all of our artistic aspirations. This decision was confirmed when we heard Bob Evans’ album (2006), which had also been mixed by the same producer-mixer: Brad Jones. We mixed the album in March 2007 with Jones, who added additional music (strings to “Missing the Point” and hi-hats to “Last Days of Winter”). I was greatly influenced by his use of additional musical information (and his additional editing of songs) to enhance his sonic vision for the album. The album represented a significant development for myself as a producer (particularly in the applied rigour) and for Thompson as a recording artist. However, I feel we have enjoyed the artistic fruits of this labour more on the subsequent albums: *Creature of Habit* (2009) and *Caravan* (2011).

Thompson recalls the album in a very similar way. He believes we were trying to capture the:

mix of singer-songwriter type of storytelling songs with a sort of pub rock, live band intensity. The challenge with THREE BOXES was to capture both these element[s] in the “record” setting . . . not giving into any of the temptations from the live arena such as tempos being too fast and “over-singing”. (May 17, 2011, email message to author)<sup>8</sup>

He has recalled the production method (and my production style) as:

When we started THREE BOXES, because we’d come from the live setting and the folk rock world all our arrangements were too long with too much dead wood. Greg used “pop ethic” to really trim things down, which in the end makes the core intent of the song that much more direct . . . we spent a lot of time working on the songs in their most simple form—guitar and vocal . . . Just working on having the best, most compact and direct, definitive version of the song before we went into the studio. (May 17, 2011, email message to author)

He has also documented the central artistic issue and outcome:

Sometimes we held back on artistic decision[s] because we were curtailing where something could have gone production wise in order to keep the “band” sound going. But looking back now I feel there wasn’t really a band sound; it was me and my band. On the next two records we’ve done, just under my own name CARUS THOMPSON, these decisions became no-brainers as there were no artistic restrictions, or rather the only ones there were ones we imposed ourselves—as artistic decisions. (May 17, 2011, email message to author)

I would argue that the similarity in our retrospective analysis of the album accounts for the successful continuance of the producer–artist relationship. We are still participants in the same scene.

Chloe Hall’s *Outside* (2009) was another important scene-establishing album. Hall was hoping to reach further into the international touring folk scene. As a producer, I was particularly mindful of the artist’s relationship with the field. To again translate the production aspiration into an academic-style research question I was asking: Can we make an acoustic singer-songwriter album that communicates the emotional honesty of the songwriter without being too folky? I wanted to make a simple acoustic album that was more hip than

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<sup>8</sup> I have edited small ‘typos’ out of these emails, but left the bulk as written to most accurately represent the integrity of the artists’ ‘voice’.

Hall's previous album (*White Street*, 2006), which I felt had been a very strong neo-folk album but had not displayed sufficient engagement with the contemporary recordist culture. I continued to appreciate Hall's intense dislike for regular rock drumming, but I had been concerned that the more intercultural music approach to the percussion had overcommitted the previous project to the sonic palette of the folk scene. I believed Hall had a very strong set of songs for *Outside* (2009), some of which documented and responded to the loss of her mother.<sup>9</sup> I wanted more people to hear the album and I did not want to restrict our potential audience or the members of the field who might give the album their approval. I feel the finished album realised my aesthetic ambitions. It is a more hip version of Hall's aesthetic, and I am still deeply moved by it. My retrospective analysis of the album is uncomplicated. I am artistically satisfied with the outcome. However, Hall does not share that uncomplicated satisfaction. I felt Brad Jones was the ideal mixer again, but Hall found the additions of more musical information, particularly sampled sounds, to be contrary to her original acoustic purist intent. She has recalled the changes to the vision as "intense":

During mix-down, the production direction changed. Samples and electronic elements were introduced, and the album became less acoustic. So while the album exceeded my expectations in terms of creating an exciting sonic landscape for the songs, it didn't meet the original vision for creating an entirely acoustic record. (April 2, 2011, email message to author)

While she still believes it is a "beautiful album" and that it "has helped me take an artistic step forward, and laid the foundations for further beautifully crafted recordings in the future", she is more keenly aware of the "compromises . . . we all made" (April 2, 2011, email message to author). Her perspective is more reminiscent of the Boy and Bear Nashville production discomfort experience (Morrow, 2012). I was unconcerned, even Machiavellian about the digital sampling method versus acoustic organic performance purity debate (particularly as the majority of samples were simply well-recorded acoustic instruments),

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<sup>9</sup> Participant clearance confirmed by email January 17, 2013.

believing the additions enhanced the pre-existing tracks. As I found this particular mix-down stage highly rewarding, I do not carry a sense of retrospective “yield that leads to problem” on this album as I did on *Three Boxes* (2007). It is also worth documenting that *Outside* (2009) reinforced the importance of having a strong set of songs. This strength made achieving a cohesive sonic narrative much easier for the production team and clearly helped the critical response (at <http://www.chloehall.com.au/press/>).

The most significant influence (from the period immediately preceding the album’s composition) on *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was Skipping Girl Vinegar’s *Sift the Noise* (2008). As a co-producer, many of the more significant global decisions such as the sound and instrumental styling were taken by somebody else (Mark Lang, co-producer). My role was more as a contributory musician and general musical “ideas guy”. From the early demo stage there was a clear vision in relationship to the ultimate sonic aspiration. I played extra parts on the bass and keyboards, which would often be replayed by the band members to enhance and extend their instrumental skills. I represented the increased musical language of the established field. I would also contribute riffs or new chord progressions, which would lead to the augmentation of pre-existing compositions. The burden of achieving a cool album was much more pronounced in this instance. The scene was more overtly referenced during the recording process. The sounds of other albums were analysed more thoroughly. In the indie scene this time expenditure would be considered an epic undertaking (2005–2008), with many songs being recorded numerous times only to be reworked again from the beginning (occasionally to be left off the album anyway). Lang’s vision stretched beyond the master tracks to encompass the artwork and the video clips. As a question, with this album we asked: Can we make a cool album?<sup>10</sup> Can we make a warm “hi-fi” album out of non-conventional

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<sup>10</sup> This question acknowledges the subjectivity of such a notion. However, such a notion was clearly tested externally by the capacity for JJJ play- listing.

“lo-fi” materials? Can we make a great (acknowledging the “scene” subjectivity of the definition of “greatness”) debut album?

It is interesting to observe that of the three significant scene albums, *Sift the Noise* was the most favourably received by the field, being play-listed (“One Chance” 2007 and “Sift the Noise” 2008) on JJJ and synchronised onto SBS television commercials. However, in recollection, Lang has referred simply to the aesthetic aspiration and the rigorous construction of novelty, ignoring the conscious pursuit of the approval of the contemporary scene. He has recalled: “We hoped to dig deeper creating a holistic and classic piece of melodic indie-pop with its own sense of thought and sound” (May 31, 2011, email message to author). He also notes that a significant contribution was that as a producer:

Greg [author] was heavily involved in many long ramblings about the ‘Hobo Pop’ aesthetic we were chasing after. This idea, which at times felt like a phantom, was something that was extremely delicate but central to all of the tracking and sonic choices of the album. He was an encouraging force for me, affirming that I was on the right track even when other engineers who were involved did not understand. This ‘Trashy Hobo Pop’ sound was also referred to as ‘Lo-fi Hi-Fi’ during the making of the album. (May 31, 2011, email message to author)

It is also significant to note for the next chapter that he has viewed the “season” of dedicated songwriting as a crucial, and conceptually inseparable from the ultimate “holistic” (May 31, 2011, email message to author) outcome of the album. The influence of this particular scene exemplar on *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was most profound in the area of holistic vision. As a producer, I became more conscious of the interdependence of the songs, the performances and the sounds on a finished album. It also challenged many of my preconceived ideas of good quality sound. While I brought the more traditional field skills of instrumental part construction to *Sift the Noise* (2008), it simultaneously invited me back into another subfield with differing and evolving criteria of worth.

Ethnomusicologist Michael Bakan has observed that “music comes into existence at the intersection of sound and culture” (2007, 11). The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an outline of that intersection in the form of the biographic and subcultural scene context in which *Fall* (2011) was composed, performed and recorded. To continue with a visual arts analogy, the background has to be detailed enough to contextualise but not so detailed as to distract. Both the biography and the scene could receive longer and more detailed analysis, but they are not the only subject of this exegesis. The manner in which these contextual aspects contribute to the construction of meaning within the recording will be examined in a later chapter. However, before such an examination can take place the chronological narrative of the entire process from songwriting to mastering must be detailed. The following chapter will examine the composition of the songs.



### CHAPTER THREE: COMPOSING SONGS

Within the discourse surrounding the art of record production, examination of the song is complex. Their inclusion within the discussion and the amount of that inclusion is the subject of debate. This complexity stems from the multitudinous possibilities of the actual compositional moment. Songs can pre-exist in a very full form before a recording session, and they can be written entirely in the session itself. Additionally, nearly every available point on the continuum is possible. A “million dollar riff” (Macainsh 1975) may be added at any point, with highly contestable authorship, and a final record may simply realise a carefully crafted version of an aesthetically autocratic composer’s demo tape. Defining the moment a song first draws ontologically independent breath (and when it begins a life of royalties) is so vexing an issue that it has burst from the comparative calm of academia into courtrooms the world over. As Richard Middleton has observed:

Popular music pieces can only rarely and in heavily qualified ways be attributed to a single author: a composer. More commonly, their production is a collaborative process, which may involve lyricists, songwriters, singers, instrumentalists, arrangers, orchestrators, producers, engineers, set designers, video directors and more. (2000, 60)

While his view is arguably too broad (with the inclusion of set designers) it does highlight the problem of authorship attribution. The judgments in legal cases such as *Stuart v. Barrett* (1994), *Prior v. Sheldon and Others*, (2000) *Beckingham v. Hodgins*, (2004) and *Fisher v. Brooker and Ors* (2009) have moved steadily towards the recognition of the compositional contributions of participants in the performance and recording of a song in addition to songwriters. It is not the purpose of this exegesis to engage in this particular debate. However, it should be noted that the legal battles embody the complexity inherent in attributing ontological independence and consequently, copyright prematurely. Songs clearly

possess such independence in that they are words and music together in form. They can and do exist separately to their recording. As to whether this form is appreciated independently from its recorded context is the foundation of the conjecture.

Moylan has acknowledged that songs are a “primary element”, an “aesthetic and artistic element . . . of sound that directly contribute to the basic shape or characteristics of a musical idea” (2008, 66) and that they provide the recording with its “literary meaning” (Moylan 2008, 70), yet he chooses to leave the discussion of “the setting of texts to music” as “out of the scope of this text” (Moylan 2007, 71). Zak has cautioned against the distraction of examining the literary meaning at the expense of the entire recording when observing that it is common to discuss what records “contain not what they are” (2001, 23). While he seems to suggest that it is the sound that provides a recording’s ontological independence, he has also observed the gestalt formed by the “three distinct compositional layers: the song, the musical arrangement and the track” (Zak 2001, 24). In Zagorski-Thomas’ analysis of the vocal “staging” (2008, 194) the discussion seemingly stops before the consideration of any primacy of the song within the process. He introduces important ideas about how the art can be used to manipulate the audience’s perception of vocal performance. Zagorski-Thomas has observed that while a vocal may possess similar placement in the mix (2008, 194), it may send different messages to the listener. Whitney Houston (1992) emotionally belts out the final chorus of “I Will Always Love You” while Jarvis Cocker delivers “Common People” (Pulp 1995) with a “world weary lack of effort” (Zagorski-Thomas 2008, 194). He leaves the discussion at the point of debating the perceived performance intensity of the vocalists. Both are loud, yet only one is singing loudly. I would argue that this discussion should extend beyond the examination of the performances of the vocalists and technical crew that have delivered them onto record. At this point I would suggest that the songs themselves, as well as the recordists’ interpretation of the songs, would need consideration. In “Common People”

(1995) Jarvis Cocker’s cynical and detached singing style and his placement in the mix both heighten the believability of the central character of the song. From composition through to performance, through to the technical sonic capturing and adjustment of these components we, as listeners, are encouraged to believe and empathise with the cynical “common” person observing the “slumming it” affectations of the “well-heeled” girl who wants to “live like common people” (Banks, Cocker, Doyle, Mackey and Senior 1995). All of these aesthetic decisions seem to reinforce the central literary meaning of the song. Similarly, in Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You” (1992) the vocal, which moves across a more dynamic range of performance, reinforces the literary meaning of the song. The more whispered sections enhance the sadness of the inevitable separation and the chorus enhances the direct “heart on sleeve” sentiment. Once again the audience is encouraged to believe, and empathise with the central character who is singing, with strident unambiguous emotional commitment, “I Will Always Love You” (Parton 1974). For the staging of a recording to “create meaning” (Zagorski-Thomas 2008, 195) the audience has to emotionally believe the aesthetic interpretation of the literary message by all of the recordists involved.

As Leiber and Stoller have said “we write records not songs” (cited by Palmer 1980 in McIntyre 2009). Those records often reach the listener as a song interwoven with a full cast of supporting sounds and additional harmonic and rhythmic information. It is the central contention of this exegesis that the literary meaning—and core melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structure—of a song will be a major aesthetic consideration in any record production. So, to begin any analysis of a specific artefact such as *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011), the analysis should begin with the process of songwriting, regardless of compositional moment, as that is the foundation upon which the entire enterprise has been built.

## The Composition of the *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) Songs

It is difficult to locate a definitive starting point for a narrative account of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). As discussed in previous sections of this exegesis, the album's creative process is beholden to its subcultural and biographical context. However, it would be reasonable to assert that it took the first steps towards form with the composition of the first song. The first song composed was "You're Not Coming Home" (Arnold-Helm 2011)<sup>11</sup>. Following on from a preceding solo album *Lost Marie* (Greg Arnold 2006), an album of entirely fictional lyrics, it is a character based story song. It was co-written with Chris Helm from Skipping Girl Vinegar as we worked on the tracking of their first album at a beach house in Aireys Inlet. I recalled the significant creative moment:

As Chris played he stumbled upon a simple finger-picked chord progression (C E Am D), as he rambled I just heard the melody and began singing along. Almost immediately the opening line appeared to me: "It's been six beers since the first, everyone just makes it worse and I can't believe you won't be coming home no more." . . . and at the risk of belittling any of the remaining song I had that feeling that is often joked about . . . "well the rest just wrote itself". (Author April 17, 2009)<sup>12</sup>

In an email message to the author Helm recalled the same moment:

The progression caught your ear and you started to sing out some melody ideas over the top. As often happens, the melody and the chords began to influence one another, and the songwriting dance was on. The early melody and lyric ideas seemed to be birthed at that stage, entirely from you, as the chord progression provided a basis and context. (April 19, 2009, email message to author)

While clearly both embracing the mystical idea of song "quickening" it is significant to note that we were both engaged in a specific and purposeful musical project at the time. The song writing was not *ex nihilo*. It was in the musical context of the recording process of *Sift the Noise* (Skipping Girl Vinegar 2008). We were actively participating in work in the

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<sup>11</sup> For all *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) lyrics see Appendix 2.

<sup>12</sup> This will be the reference for the reflective journals; while the date is attributed to the release date, the journal and the discussion of the composition clearly observe an earlier date.

field and in the perfect position to pursue and develop a seemingly intuitive “flash” into some sort of form. We were making music anyway, artistically journeying into our unconscious minds while simultaneously using our deliberate minds. It could be argued that such a moment actually lands at a mid-point between Claxton’s bookends of the unconscious and deliberate mind in the form of a semiconscious practised intuitive creativity.

The idea of the remainder of the song “writing itself” (Author April 17, 2009) is not merely “skiving-off” from the responsibility to accurately detail the process. Rather, it represents the acknowledgment that the literary meaning of the song was built into this moment of the songwriting journey. As a songwriter I heard the as yet unwritten remainder of the meaning in the opening line:

In this case I intuitively felt that the lyrical line, the melody and the chord progression and the synergetic relationship all three components possessed had such a simple emotion and such a clear visual image that, from that point on, I simply had to not ruin it. Although, clearly one lyric line, a melody and a chord progression do not ‘a satisfying song maketh’, so I had to complete the song in the mode of reiterating that feeling, rather than adding a whole lot of new emotional material. (Author April 17, 2009)

I perceived that this song was about:

. . . an indefinite sense of loss (we’re not really sure what has happened) but with a central character with whom we empathise. When married to the music I believe the lyric possesses a strange sadness, not gut wrenching- strange. He’s got his friends, his beers and his dogs, but no ‘you’ . . . ‘you’ . . . the eternal ‘we were happy then’ or ‘we will be happy then’ missing character. (Author April 17, 2009)

It would be reasonable to conclude that “You’re Not Coming Home” (Arnold-Helm 2011) is a sad narrative song journeying from loss and denial to realisation built upon a foundation of uncertain personal tragedy and that I, as composer, believe the marriage of the lyric to the melodic and chordal structure of the song enhances this literary meaning.

Providing a clear chronological narrative for the composition of these songs is complicated, as some songs made a slow march towards form while others reached near conclusion very quickly. The next song to appear was “Tomorrow” (Arnold 2011). It is an exemplar of a phenomenon I have referred to when lecturing as the “every new instrument has a new song in it” theory. Missy Higgins has observed that “new instruments” help you “write different songs” (2012). This phenomenon is also noted on songwriting “how to” sites. David Jackel has observed that while he is not a bass or piano player his lack of familiarity with the instruments forces him to leave his “four chord” patterns, caused by his fingers acting by “instinct” on the guitar. The change makes him more “exploratory” and consequently he discovers “new ideas” and things that he “wouldn’t have done otherwise” (2011). If one changed “bass guitar” to “ukulele” this could be a description of the melodic and harmonic compositional moment of “Tomorrow”. In the journals I noted of this song:

I got it for free . . . or at least for the twenty bucks that it cost me to buy Lexi (my son) a cheap ukulele. This was my ‘one free song’ with that new instrument . . . like with a new tuning on the guitar I did not have any preconceptions about where my hands should go next I just had a very clear melodic chordal path in my head and I had to work it out. The new drones created by the . . . uke . . . helped me construct this chord pattern that would not appear on a standard guitar. (Author August 12, 2009)

Such a technique reflects the desire to avoid what Janis Ian has described as “Your own boring routines” (cited in Zollo, 309). However it should be noted that the pursuit of the song still followed the same semiconscious practised intuitive creativity paradigm. Melodically and harmonically the song clearly demonstrates its musical influences. As noted in the journals: “It has Beatles’ tragic written all over it, but in a way that I like . . . like Crowded House or Oasis it is a love that dare speak its name (or sing its name in lush doubled harmony)” (Author August 12, 2009). It is also worth noting that this borrowed musical language does not diminish the song to this particular composer, it enhances it:

I really love this song, largely because I think it is a BIG BIG melody and that will always win any race for me artistically . . . The ‘it’s been so long . . .’ section is a big melody chord dance for me, and if I heard this song by someone else I know I would love it. (Author August 12, 2009)

The song’s literary meaning is highly autobiographical:

I get a very Sydney feeling from this song, largely because I wrote it when living there, and because it looms large in the lyrics. [It] . . . is generally inspired by the slow burn melt down of Things of Stone and Wood part two. I was co-managing the band and, as can inevitably happen when a band doesn’t go well externally, things fall apart internally. This is not the forum to go into a lot of dull detail about this except to say that my role as co-manager placed me in an unusual position to the rest of the band (not that this is [necessarily] unusual for the singer-songwriter). I felt a little personally set upon, and extremely stressed about the demise of the business. So walking along the cliffs without a care is a reference to my first couple of years in Sydney, which had been carefree. I walked happily along the incredible walks of the eastern suburbs (particularly between Clovelly and Bronte, where we were living). However, at the height of TOSAW<sup>13</sup> [Things of Stone and Wood] related stress I could no longer lose my troubles on these walks . . . and I resented the encroachment on my previously blissful life. The night of the conspiracies is a reference to a band conversation which I felt was little heavy on the conspiracy theories, and consequently in the song I am starting to make light of the scenario . . . well hey . . . it’s the only time I’ve ever been to a party with JFK, the mob, Di and Dodi, the Catholic church or any of the other classic conspiracy theory cast. After the cold night meeting I felt the dam burst and I could see my way through again. It is the tone of calm that I love in this song, the acceptance. It is the resistance to the traditional singer-songwriter urge to slag off in song . . . The tone has no bile. It is not acrimonious. (Author August 12, 2009)

“Tomorrow” (Arnold 2011) could be seen as another example of semiconscious writing where the initial melodic and harmonic inspiration “appeared” with the application of the consciously applied technique of a new and unfamiliar instrument. The song’s literary content is autobiographical, with true details being imaginatively enhanced for the purpose of the song. It is also an example of therapeutic songwriting for the author, by the author. In this instance, “You” is “I”. Additionally, the song enjoys a little favourite child status to its composer. The song quotes The Beatles, not only in melodic and harmonic style, but it specifically quotes George Harrison:

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<sup>13</sup> A regular abbreviation of the band’s name.

It finishes with a small lyrical tribute to George Harrison, quoting his album title after the Beatles' demise. I hadn't given much thought to how big the George factor was in this song. He had recently died and in the many articles around this time I had read that he loved ukuleles and that if a journalist wanted a good chat it was advisable to have a uke lying nearby. Similarly, at this time I was touring as a guest guitarist and piano player with Hirst and Greene and Rob [Hirst from Midnight Oil] said that I played guitar, and looked like George Harrison. There are worse things to have an iconic Oz rock legend say about you publically. Also I had started thinking about George's contribution to my life. No George. No "Here Comes the Sun" (The Beatles 1969), no "Something" (The Beatles 1969) and also importantly, no *Life of Brian* (Monty Python 1979). So I guess here is as good a place as any to articulate the feeling that seems to be humming sub-sonically throughout "Tomorrow". Thanks George. (Author August 12, 2009)

Jimmy Webb has noted that "knowledge of and respect for the work of others is the first essential ingredient in the development of a truly effective technique" and that, as songwriters, we "walk in the footsteps of colossi" (1998, 9). As observed earlier, technical cross-checking should not be restricted to the "colossi" alone. This is particularly pertinent to the composition of "Fall Into My Hands" (Arnold 2011). The song first appeared when:

I was producing an album by Chloe Hall. I had composed the guitar part for her song . . . "Dance With Me" (2009) . . . and from that guitar part the melody and chordal development appeared. I wrote the basis of the song between recording the tracks on that album . . . this starting point underlines how the moment of inspiration can happen at very different times and that at one minute a guitar part is just a contributing instrumental part to another song, and then suddenly after the spooky moment of inspiration it is the backbone of an entirely new song. The general calling into being was pretty effortless with this one . . . the lyrics appeared quickly, and the chorus and verse were in place from the outset. (Author August 19, 2009)

It should also be noted that the guitar part from "Dance With Me" (2009) was heavily influenced by the acoustic guitar parts on "You Can't Always Get What You Want" (The Rolling Stones 1969) and "Into the Mystic" (Van Morrison 1970). As observed above, the distance of time between melodic harmonic shape and lyric taking shape was not large.

This song has been around since 2006. It was written for my daughter when she was two. (It) . . . came from a time when we were all readjusting to life in Melbourne after moving home from Sydney and it documents when our communication was more about vibe and intuitive responses as opposed to



language. It is a perfect relationship to document in this process. This song is all about the love. It is by a ‘stay at home Dad’ for his daughter. . . . For both of them . . . for the whole family. The sentiment is pretty clear I think. I understand Hannie when she is having trouble communicating her ideas . . . and basically chucking it. This song says: I get you. It is an attempt at tantrum healing for all parties . . . she was two at the time. It is not subtle writing, and I think it says something about me that I feel I have to argue for the virtue of a straight emotional lyric which does not have any real artistic complexity. Why do I feel the need to justify this? Surely this is how good honest confessional writing should be? (Author August 19, 2009)

“Fall Into My Hands” (Arnold 2011) could be seen as a song written both intuitively, springing unintentionally from another guitar part in another artist’s song and consciously, using learnt guitar techniques from the colossi to evoke the nostalgic emotional “resonance” (Zak 2001, 184). It could also be seen as the outcome of semiconscious practised intuitive creativity. The emotional sonic language that to the composer evokes warmth and soulful depth is an appropriate home for the lyric. The literary content is honest confessional writing from a father to his daughter. It is a true unambiguous love song.

“Everybody Stands in Line” (Arnold 2011) was largely written on my first mixing trip to Nashville in 2007. From the outset the quoting is clear and the use of a new, albeit familiar in tuning, instrument is evident:

A [Bob] Dylan fest, the whole song appeared to me sitting in the studio playing one of the old guitars that they have laying around at Alex the Great (the studio). The one free song theory strikes again! I was definitely very mindful of Dylan on that trip as we had been to see a Dylan tribute with Al Cooper playing Hammond, which struck me as pretty dang legit! In that spirit I just purged the majority of this song and lyric. I think it has a bit of that phrasing which is new for me, and also it retains my pop melody sensibility. (Author August 30, 2009)

The literary content of the song appeared in a clear response to the atmosphere in Nashville.

There was a general level of stress that I picked up on that first trip, and it was something that struck me as not unique to Nashville. The differences were pronounced between Nashville and Melbourne (the fried food factor and the fact that everybody drives everywhere), but so were the similarities: particularly the

stress of the modern west. Essentially, I just worked the angle of everybody being stuck in a queue waiting for something they don't really want, from somebody who is indifferent to the delivery of the aforementioned unwanted item . . . but it's a race to get it. (Author August 30, 2009)

The conclusion to the narrative of the song is a “hippie-ish-slacker” revolutionary call to discard shoes and hit the beach [“the revolution’s barefoot in the sand” (2011)]. It borrows a line from fellow “Roadside Attraction”, and co-subscene member, Pete Arthur (from a yet to be released song). This quote illustrates the elasticity of quote sources: from the cultural colossi and the author’s personal private collegiate colossi.

This song is also evidence to a semiconscious compositional moment employing a conscious songwriting technique (the use of a new instrument). The technique seemed to help the comparatively fast birth and completion of a non-specific, generally “modern culture suspicious” protest-ish literary content, which quotes the tone and phrasing of Bob Dylan and the specific language of a subcultural colleague.

The next series of songs were written in the wake of the first three Nashville trips and the move into academia. “Olivia” (Arnold 2011) was:

written in my office at NMIT. I think this is significant, as I found the trips to Nashville and my starting to work a day job really inspiring. It injected a whole new enthusiasm for my writing, even though the step to take the job had essentially been to take a break from myself. I was over myself and my songs, and suddenly, with no planning, the songs just started coming back. (Author August 30, 2009)

In addition to this significant biographical influence the song literally refers to a story from the first Nashville mixing trip: It was inspired by the main waiter at “The White Trash Café”:

He has always made a real effort to be warm and welcoming whenever I have been in there, and at first I thought he was just enjoying talking to the ‘auzzies’ . . . but I began to realise that it was our proximity as a group (by being Australian) to one particular Australian that really got him enthused. He is BIG

fan of Olivia Newton John and he is not just interested in her country rock background or her movies or her general prettiness, it is total belief. It is a belief that includes the conviction that Olivia's latest album actually possesses healing powers. The song attempts to capture this crush, giving it a more romantic angle that works in the song . . . and to be fair . . . any spooky stalky undertone is an invention of mine . . . the actual character is definitely more focused on Livvie's spirituality. But . . . a crush . . . such a good inspiration for a pop song! Achy, pretty and impossible. (Author August 30, 2009)

The song is also heavily descriptive and nostalgic:

The Nashville shroud of Turin line is about a mirror that was rusting [and] our main character was convinced [that it] was turning into an outline of Jesus. *Alabama* is a huge 70s country band that never really hit it big in Australia, but their big beardy smiles served as an excellent juxtaposition for the many soft focused Livvies that adorned the walls . . . I mentioned the snow because it snowed on [one] trip, and that American coffee tinged warmth against the cold has a really cinematic feeling. The 'let her be there' shtick is a reference to one of Livvie's big country rock hits: "Let Me Be There" (Olivia Newton-John 1973,) which was on one of the first records my brother and I owned (one of the first we really wanted anyway—not the Young Talent Time records my Mum convinced us to buy instead of *Daddy Cool* (1971) . . . 35-year-old buyer remorse there!), *Fantastic* (1973) a K-Tel compilation of hits, near hits and misses . . . (Author August 30, 2009)

Melodically and harmonically the song carries the clear influence of two particular songs that encapsulate this mood to me: "Message in a Box" (World Party 1990) and "Sister Golden Hair" (America 1974). Whenever I play a B minor chord as a significant chord during a song in G it is a fully conscious resonant reference. While the song appeared pretty quickly it did undergo an unusual compositional journey:

This is the rare example of a two chorus song. I wrote the first chorus, and then forgot it, which seems weird to me now, as the chorus is way more hooky than many other chorus[es] I have had no problem remembering. I then wrote another chorus which I also liked. It was a genuine battle between the two chorus[es] and I was tempted to try and glue them together with backing vocals (which I still may do), but ultimately chorus one prevailed . . . the closest melodic chorus v. chorus smack down I have ever presided over—a fitting metaphor for a song set in the White Trash Café. (Author August 30, 2009)

This song also came from a semiconscious writing session, with the initial compositional moment occurring while "fishing" on a guitar. Melodically and harmonically

the song references America (1975) and World Party (1990), while being an exemplar to the author of a melodic acoustic pure pop song. It also provided the author with an overarching emotional direction that stretched beyond the song itself and began to shape the aesthetic narrative of the entire album:

The song is a bit of a flagship for me, not just as it seemed to give the album some sort of defining character, but because of its essential song features. I think it is very melodic, and has a big harmony in the chorus, but it also seems to possess all of the 70s country pure pop ache that is so important to me in the genre. (Author August 30, 2009)

The literary content is inspired by a biographical event. It is then imaginatively shaped into a fictional narrative to enhance the melodic and harmonic feeling. The lyric also quotes from another specific song, nostalgically and consciously seeking literary as well as sonic resonance.

“The Deal” (Arnold 2011)<sup>14</sup> was aberrant in its compositional moment because it was commissioned for an art project. Photographer Stu Spence (2008) sent several songwriters a series of photographs and asked them to write a song “to” them. I was inspired by a dark grainy photo that seemed to depict a waterfront drug deal.

I took my artistic lead from the title. A deal . . . a deal going bad? It is hard to imagine a seaside deal not going bad isn’t it? With its cultural heritage that stretches back to ancient Greece, and has been plumbed ever since (“Don’t Pay the Ferryman”, Chris de Burgh 1982), the deal at the water’s edge always seems to come burdened with an even greater sense of urgency. The people are making the deal because they need to put water between themselves and something/someone. I took this idea of anxiety and attached it to the coincidental moment I was experiencing at the time of a deal going a little weird, and wrote the song around a simple premise. Who is the dodgiest person I might need to do a deal with down by the water front? Myself. (Author, October 1, 2009)

While still appearing in from the melodic-harmonic fishing mode, the pursuit of the song was far more conscious. I set out to write it, for a purpose. The entire process was far

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<sup>14</sup> See at [http://stuspence.com/asyet\\_collection.html](http://stuspence.com/asyet_collection.html) (accessed October 15, 2013)

more “d-mode” (Claxton 1998, 2). It is relevant to note that its role on the album is much more purposeful and that the author believes the song: “while melodic it is not as pretty as its companions, it is the strangely attractive interesting friend” (Author, October 1, 2009). It is weighted differently to the author, serving a more functional role compared to the “flagship” or “favourite child” status of other songs. It could be argued that the lack of “brilliance” in this creative moment has affected the perception of the song in my authorial response. The literary content, while inspired by a specific visual image, is an imagined narrative with the added personal authenticity of a true biographical deal going bad.

“Tumbling Down” (Arnold 2011) is a duet. As Paul Kelly has observed: “I might not know what it’s like to be a woman but I know what they say” (2010, 430). The central characters in this song are fictional, and one character carries the burden of being “cross” gender written (Kelly 2010, 428). However, this idea can in itself be inspiring to a writer inhabiting their own fictional world. As Kelly has concluded, his experience of cross-singing (in “Sweet Guy” 1989) helped him embrace these possibilities: “I was up and flying I could be anything I wanted in a song” (Kelly 2010, 430). Once again the song appeared during a loose acoustic guitar fishing session, this time referencing “Back on the Chain Gang” (The Pretenders 1982) as the original source for a chordal move I have employed elsewhere (“Ship of the Damned”, Arnold 2002). “It was written quickly and effortlessly, particularly after I had the duet idea.” (Author August 29, 2009). From the outset I felt the melodic, chordal and lyrical material enhanced the central lyrical content, believing it possessed a “70s melodic ache that I feel works well with the sentiment, which is, a story song: Rock Boy and Girl face uncertain future as they move into their 30s” (Author August 29, 2009). The original release plan for this song was for Carus Thompson’s *Creature of Habit* (2009), and the liberation from my own performance character appears to have liberated the writing from the fear of

perception. Once it was back within my own release intentions I began to feel an artistic discomfort:

I am slightly concerned that this song may be construed as a conversation between me and Helen. I fear that people will assume this is autobiographical. It isn't, our life has been a surprisingly smooth journey from folk-rockdom (where life is controlled by tour schedules) to middle-class parenting and looming middle age . . . in fact we laugh at the line . . . 'I've still got fire left in my belly, don't want to fall into the couch and watch telly' because, while the character I am playing is still determined to ROCK, I actually quite like falling into the couch and watching telly . . . I quite like it a lot. (Author August 29, 2009)

The literary content was formed out of a biographical observation:

(Early) 30s<sup>15</sup> seemed to be a pretty serious crossroad for a lot of musicians . . . the fun didn't seem so fun no more . . . and the prospect of waking up on strangers' floors when touring had lost its beatnik romance. I have met a lot of musicians hitting this 'reality bites' (Stiller 1994) moment. (Author August 29, 2009)

However, while based on the observance of a social phenomenon, it is still fictional. It is a "story song, and I hope to get that old ache feeling that a duet can evoke . . . a good 'he-said she-said'. I hope it has ache and empathy, and is a moral position free zone" (Author August 29, 2009).

"Tumbling Down" (Arnold 2011) should also be seen as the product of semiconscious creativity, appearing from the musical pursuit of playing guitar. It was quickly transformed into song form once the melodic and harmonic content was married to the biographically inspired, but fictionally rendered, duet featuring a gender-cross written character. It should be noted that this song possesses some favourite child lyrics:

I never lost the vibe on the lyric, largely because of one particular line: the 'Wendy' Springsteen/Peter Pan ref. Essentially this line is one of those lines that I know very few people will understand, but it rocks my world . . . I think it is moving and clever . . . . Personally I love the ref. to 'Born to Run' (1975) and the half quote of Dire Straits' 'Romeo and Juliet' (1980) which is on turn a quote

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<sup>15</sup> This refers to age not date.

from *West Side Story* (1956)<sup>16</sup>. I feel particularly in the Springsteen case, I am fairly shamelessly borrowing from that particular pool of romantic credibility. (Author August 29, 2009)

Although the enthusiasm has been tempered by:

a slight concern about the drugs line; it is borrowed from a scene in *Trainspotting* (Boyle 1996) where the central character's girlfriend informs him that there are other drugs than heroin, and that there are other bands than the Stooges. I always thought this moment really captured the totality of tribal youth subcultural allegiance . . . that the drugs, the music and the language are all linked. Intellectually, I understand my reference . . . however, I am slightly concerned that it may come over as a little 'try hard' . . . affected middle-aged man makes tragic reference to drugs in . . . attempt to toady up to cool young groovers. (Author August 29, 2009)

It should also be noted that the central lyric for the chorus was changed from "Falling Down" to "Tumbling Down". This change was significant in that it marks the moment that the idea of an "album" narrative as a separate form began to enjoy primacy over the individual narratives of the component songs from which the album was formed. There were simply too many songs with the word "fall" in them ("Fall Into My Hands", Arnold 2011; "Until You Fall", Arnold 2011; "it's been so long since the rain it stopped falling" from "Tomorrow", Arnold 2011).crossroads

"Follow the Sun" (Arnold 2011) was another song written while employing the fishing method, only on this occasion the initial moment happened at the piano, which accounts for its inherent rock and roll stomp. From the outset the specific nostalgic reference was apparent:

*Fantastic* (1973) has yielded some late but significant presence in my current writing. (From) the moment I wrote this song I was worried that the chorus was a little too close to Slade's (1973) 'Come on Feel the Noise' which was on the album . . . I think this area is always interesting for songwriters, we like 'cap doffs', quotes and the style of sonic conversation between . . . yet we don't want to rip off other artists, we don't want to plagiarise. (Author, October 1, 2009).

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<sup>16</sup> "a place for us"

The literary content is explicitly autobiographical, and there is very little imaginative addition:

It is pretty uncomplicated in its sentiment. A celebration of the sun. The general gist is let's have fun summers, although I moved from the more general 'Schools Out' (Alice Cooper 1972) starting point into a happy middle-aged description of our family holidays at Beech Forest (reference number two on the album). (Author, October 1, 2009)

Consolidating the idea of the album narrative becoming more conscious in the compositional intent I noticed that "I was keen to give my son Lexi a bit of a mention on this one as I was feeling shabby that Hannie had a song to herself and Lex didn't get a mention (Author, October 1, 2009)". This is a clear embarkation point for a question that has dominated my compositional consciousness since 1994: Are my personal and family priorities "actually compromising the purity of my artistic intention?" (Author, October 1, 2009). It is also interesting to observe that the treatment of autobiographical material is interactive: The author engages with the subject's former self:

I also have a bit of a roundhouse slug at my old moody artist self, who was filled with a very Melbourne sense of superiority about the superficiality of sun worship. I take the slug because I deserve it . . . much in the manner of those t-shirts which proclaim: 'Cheer up emo boy', I want a t-shirt which proclaims: Lighten up snobby life denying black top wearing Melbourne arty git. (Author, October 1, 2009)

In summary, this song is also a product of semiconscious creative pursuit with the same technique usually applied to guitar being applied to the piano. The melody and harmonic structure is specifically resonant of nostalgic material and the literary content is autobiographical and celebratory.

Jim Jarmusch has observed that:

Nothing is original. Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination . . . Select only things to steal from that speak directly to your



soul. If you do this, your work (and theft) will be authentic . . . and don't bother concealing your thievery, celebrate it if you feel like it. (2005)

David Lesser has lamented the outcome of the *Men at Work* copyright case observing the “music has always been an act of homage and a plundering of the past” (2012). Citing classical composers, he has concluded that modern pop music simply follows the broader compositional tradition of “one grand larceny” (Lesser 2012). In this spirit it is important to acknowledge the very specific debt that “Until You Fall” (Arnold 2011) owes to “Let It Be” (Lennon and McCartney 1970). Employing the “new instrument new song” technique:

I wrote this song recently on a piano loaned to us by a friend . . . The piano is slightly different (to a different guitar tuning) but the same phenomenon occurs. I assume that the slight change in the sonic texture is enough to make my reactions to my own playing slightly different, and consequently to slightly redirect me to a new place, and song. I started with the chorus. I felt it was melodic (Let it be-ish without crossing the dreaded theft line) and the lyric just fell across the chords and melody almost immediately. (Author April 23 and 24, 2010)

The literary content was specifically autobiographical, dealing with a major life event of situational depression. I have opted to include some of the reflective journal (reiterating and augmenting a considerable section of the appendix autobiography) with the songwriting process of this song as it provides the clear biographical influence, and a significant contextual understanding for the entire album:

I loved the Zenish truism quality to phrase, which I think comes from the reversal, the naïve . . . switch-a-roo: ‘Until you fall, you never know where you’re going to land’ as opposed to ‘You never know, until you fall, where you’re going to land’ or ‘You never know where you’re going to land until you fall’. The melody and chords of the verse and the middle eight appeared straight away in the that first writing session (probably no longer than ten minutes—such is the need for speed that comes with being a parent of young children). I continued working on the song the following day with my daughter playing along hitting any notes she felt like in the upper octaves. I was happy for her to do so as I got to rough out lyrical ideas. All the while she was giving me the ‘gee Dad you’re fantastic’ (a Leunig cartoon depicting a father playing a banjo to his family in a rubbish tip with the family saying ‘Gee Dad you’re fantastic’ [1974, 35]) smile which was pretty cool . . . and [this] probably accounts for the global

tone that I hope the whole song gives out. I was hoping that it would give the feeling of being happy (and more particularly . . . calmly reconciled) with where I have landed after a fall. This song is a confessional song, and an attempt to capture an emotional truth from my own life. I have not imagined the character, I am the character. The “fall” is something to which I often return as a writer and a person reflecting on [my] . . . life—with a little bit of discomfort and a profound sense of perplexity. (Author April 23 and 24, 2010)

This fall is documented in the autobiography as the period of situational depression that followed the success of *Things of Stone and Wood*. In the journals, the self-analysis of my character has revealed that I believed myself to be an unfortunate blend of “hubris and paranoia” (Author April 23 and 24, 2010). However, this song does more than document the fall again, it illustrates the self-mediation and conciliatory journey that has occurred since:

Over the years the ‘fall’ time has dissipated in my mind and I have become reconciled with my behaviour—still perplexed, but reconciled. I am a happy forty-two-year-old father of two in a happy marriage living in a house originally purchased off the back of a hit pop song, and the whole time is more than a happy memory—I truly recall it as an absolute blast. Dinner party gold—and I can recognise it for exactly what it was: an amazing experience, and one that I was fortunate to have. (Author April 23 and 24, 2010)

This song, along with “Tomorrow” (Arnold 2011) enjoys considerable favourite child status with certain features standing out further still:

I particularly like the ‘ordinary plague’ for depression . . . and nothing says ‘I am ignoring your advice’ quite like flushing it down the toilet. I also think these lyrics sit really sweetly against the melody partly because of the prevalence of rhyme and strict meter. I am usually not very committed to either, preferring to bend the melody to the lyric. (Author April 23 and 24, 2010)

In summary, this song was first composed while semiconsciously noodling on a new instrument. The melodic, harmonic and lyrical journey was comparatively fast and the composer feels this song is a particularly strong marriage of the component parts. It is entirely autobiographical, with the actual biographically true narrative being imagined into a new metaphorical narrative form, which the author believes provides a new symbolic truth. Significantly, this song also became the defining compositional moment of the gestalt album

form: ‘It was not until “Until you fall” (Arnold 2011) appeared that I felt I had a complete album’. (Author April 9, 2009)

Like Leiber and Stoller, Brian Wilson (1991) has claimed “you design the experience to be a record rather than just a song. It’s the record that people listen to” (cited in Zak, 2001, 24). It could be argued that this idea of a record should not be limited to discreet tracks or songs, but rather the whole compiled album. The album is an edited selection of songs, joined together not by their mere existence but by the conscious choice of the recording artist to pursue the separate narrative form of the album. Such decisions should not be only understood in terms of the “concept album”. This argument is particularly pertinent when considering the composition of the final songs on *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). “Are You True?” (Arnold and McCarthy 2011) was written while fishing, only this time the fishing was much more consciously directed. I was playing an electric guitar, on a very specific sound. I was dropping a line in a very specific part of the song river. This song was written after my own analysis of the original set of song demos and in conscious response to some feedback from my local scene. I felt the album as whole was “a little dandy [pop] heavy with not enough swamp [grit]” (Author, July 1, 2009). Similarly, Mark Lang felt the original song selection was too melody-centric and that I had ignored my own wordsmith tradition. In an email message he expounded:

I am interested in proposing the idea that an exploration to make a significant (‘Great’) Greg Arnold piece of work might look to explore his strong capacity of language and revisit its links to melody. I believe that these are not mutually exclusive and would personally love to hear the melodic capacities that he has developed in recent works with the weight of language he explored earlier in his career. (November 9, 2009)

With this in mind I passively pursued “Are You True?” (Arnold and McCarthy 2011):

Not purposefully trying to write the swamp feeling on the album, but not entirely looking away from it either, I went into a rehearsal room here one day last summer and plugged in the electric guitar for some loud guitar therapy. There were no students around so I got an amp and had a vocal mike and let rip. I was just getting into the volume. I had the guitar tuned down a tone (a good swamp vibe), and I put the tremolo on and played an old riff from a recording I did for a band called Lucid that was never released. Out of the riff came the first line ‘Are You True’, and the chords followed. The entire music was written in that session. (Author, July 1, 2010)

I took the opening line from “something my son used to say when he was a preschooler in Sydney . . . I always thought it sounded like a line from an old 50s rock and roll song . . . he meant are you telling the truth. It just has a ring to it . . . are you true?” (Author, July 1, 2010)

However, the literary meaning of the song took a while to consolidate:

I just couldn’t work out what I was saying. Then a few phrases began to appear, because they had no burden of meaning they all landed really comfortably in the song—they were more about their music than their literary meaning. However they were the backdrop for the finished idea. ‘But what if you’re just lying?’ And ‘But I can’t read your mind’. Then the chorus began to take shape over the themes of religious fraud. ‘Hey you got the sight, water divine here in the wasteland’ and ‘You’ve got the cards you know how to play ’em, but can I believe a word your saying now?’ And the hoodwinked cult member narrator took over the story. (Author, July 1, 2010)

Finally, three specific biographical details directed the narrative:

The water divine image was hovering around from a story a friend of mine once told about his time in a cult, and I . . . had this issue on my mind due to the work I had been doing on Georgia Fields’ ‘Seven Years’ (2010). Her song details life in a cult [in] a much more emotional and vulnerable way, and it has really got me thinking about the difference between my imagination and her reality. How does an imagined song stand up next to a true confession?<sup>17</sup> Another key lyric was the ‘I knew a man walked in the desert, just cos’ you said it’. (This too) is a reference to an real life cult experience hovering in my work, an observation, although the conclusion to that line has a more imaginative turn to it, I have abandoned truth for the song . . . ‘Head full (of) rust mouth full of dust’ . . . not necessarily what I think . . . just what I think sounds good in a song and adds weight. (Author, July 1, 2010)

“Are You True?” (Arnold–McCarthy 2011) is another example of semiconscious writing; however, the mood of the song was pursued much more purposefully than the

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<sup>17</sup> Participant clearance confirmed by email January 15, 2013.

majority of the album. The compositional moment was further along Claxton's deliberateness continuum. The literary content sprang from an unrelated child's phrase and was transformed into an imagined character narrative using true biographical information. The lyric also represents the conscious pursuit of a darker theme to enhance the weight of the album as a whole. In the journal it is also noted as a positive that the album's title does not appear in this lyric: "This song is doing a good job bringing a swampy rock flavour and a dark lyric and importantly—it's not in C and nobody 'falls' anywhere" (Author, July 1, 2010). Finally, it should be observed that as the original compositional moment came from a playing a specific pre-composed and pre-recorded guitar part over a specific pre-composed and pre-recorded set of chords of another person's song and recording. Compositional credit was negotiated in this unusual scenario.

The last two pieces appear entirely for their album narrative impact ("Swamp Theme" [Arnold 2011] and "Swamp Thing" [Arnold 2011]). Compositionally, they are the same piece simply rearranged. They are a:

simple melodic piece which could serve as a bridge leading into the song 'Fall Into My Hands'. It's [a] simple 'Satie-ish' French movie soundtrack style piece. Originally hovering around as an unfinished verse for another song, I can't say what gave me the idea to leave it as a brief instrumental, it was mostly the realisation of how sweetly the following song would land off the finishing unresolved 'f' chord. I had started just noodling around on this piece in the summer of 2008–2009. From there I realised it could also be 'swamped up' with a Hammond and tremolo guitar later in the album (maybe fiddle) and an extra solo. It would provide a crucial break from my voice, and give a weird little thematic sense to the album. I had this latter idea when walking past a rehearsal room and hearing a band playing some gypsy instrumentals. While the style will be different I have taken a lot of the rhythmic cues from that half-heard rehearsal. (Author, July 1, 2010)

These two instrumentals were composed semiconsciously, but were transformed into recorded form with the deliberate purpose of album narrative enhancement. They were abandoned as potential full songs at this stage. They are compositionally resonant of Erik

Satie's "Trois Gymnopédies" (1888) in style rather than specific harmonic and melodic material. This debt is sonically referenced in "Swamp Theme" (Arnold 2011) and explicitly abandoned in "Swamp Thing" (Arnold 2011).

To summarise, the ten songs and two instrumentals form the most significant melodic, harmonic and literary content on *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). They were all composed while "loafing" (Claxton 1998, 14) somewhere on the continuum between deliberate pursuit and unconscious intuition, with the significance of the deliberate pursuit rising as the separate narrative of the album became apparent to the composer-producer. The melodic and harmonic content represent a language resonant of the canons of the field, with The Beatles being most apparent. This language had been well established before this album. The literary content has been influenced by biographical information, and that biographical information is also presented in various stages along another continuum. Biography has appeared in honest emotional "true story" confessions and in imagined fictional metaphors employed for the overall effect of the songs. There are also entirely fictional stories. The influences and the method have clearly represented the contemporary discourse in creativity and reveal a system. They have been fished out of unconsciousness. This ostensibly romantic but ultimately explainable creative moment has been crafted by a "working stiff" (Leonard Cohen cited in Zollo 2003, 334) into form. They are the product of a knowing-in-practice method. They are a gestalt unto themselves, and they also form the major component part of the gestalt of their own individual recordings and of the album as a whole. It is also significant to note that the scene was not as influential at this stage of the process. While the research process may have demystified the process of the creative songwriting epiphany, it is still worth noting that the feeling of discovery that accompanies a new tune in the river has remained thoroughly joyous. That surprising jolt from semiconsciousness is the reason Ella Hooper has described the new song moment as "better than sex" (2009). It isn't magic, but it

does feel like something magical. It feels like an occasional and unreliable glimpse of a world full of clear emotional communicativeness and insight that seemingly hovers just beyond the reach of our deliberate consciousness.

## CHAPTER FOUR: COMPOSING SOUND

When Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877 its purpose was to accurately record sound. However, with the corresponding invention of the gramophone in 1887 the phonograph developed an illusory quality. As Virgil Moorefield has observed the aim of recording developed to “create the illusion of a concert hall setting. The idea was to bring to the living room the sensation of being at a live performance—a metaphor of presence” (2010, xiv). By 1930 Les Paul was experimenting with overdubs and the possible artistic applications of recording technology. He “let the (multi-tracking) genie out of the box [on] ‘How high the moon?’ with Mary Ford” (Moorefield 2010, 5) in 1951. As an exemplar of Csikszentmihalyi’s creative notion of “novelty” (1997, 29), Mitch Miller contributed to the augmentation of performance realism when he added “the sound of a snapping whip on Laine’s 1949 ‘Mule Train’ ” (McLellan 2010) and a barking dog to the 1953 Patti Page single “How Much is that Doggy in the Window?” Driven by public appetite for these novelties, the journey away from phonographic accuracy towards transformed product sped up. A new artist, the producer, began to choose the material and direct the performers and engineers towards purposefully achieving hit records and, simultaneously, ontologically independent artefacts. As Zak has observed, such an outcome is inevitable considering:

Record production is a mode of creative expression. And indeed, turning musical utterance into electrical current requires, by the projects very nature, an intervening aesthetic, which may in turn impinge on the final result. Recording does not simply capture sound, it transforms it and in the transformation lies an array of decisions informed by artistic intuition as well as experienced technique. (2005, 1)

In the 1960s the art took significant steps forward. Robert Toft has observed that during this era “artists committed to tape [and] enhanced the stories they told in their lyrics through a web of interpretive gestures designed to engender, sustain, increase, or resolve



emotional and musical tension, the ebb and flow of which established the sonic surfaces of the recordings they released” (2010, vii). Phil Spector pursued Romantic sonority with something “Wagnerian (Williams 2003, 77) . . . little symphonies for the kids” (Williams 2003, 53). He created his “wall of sound” (Brown 2009, 114) by combining popular songs and performers with multiple instruments playing the same parts. While awed by the multitasking, contemporaries struggled to understand the ostensibly disproportionate expenditure of effort when compared to the brevity of the material. Tom Wolfe has observed that Spector put his fellow recordists “through hours and days to get the two or three minutes he wants. Two or three minutes out of the whole struggle” (1963, 66). Wolfe has recognised the intertwined relationship of the art with the commercial industry. Following Spector were two other highly innovative producers: Brian Wilson (with The Beachboys) and George Martin (with The Beatles). Both The Beatles and Brian Wilson had independently abandoned the forum of live performance to focus on the new art of record production. With Martin, The Beatles challenged accepted orthodoxies of instrumentation and structure. They embraced intercultural instrumentation harmony and literary ideas (“Tomorrow Never Knows” 1966). They began to use the technology as an instrument. They also introduced the idea of an album as a gestalt, a narrative significant beyond its mere collation of songs (*Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* 1967). Similarly, Wilson built upon the Spector sonic foundation with experimental use of instrumentation and structure (“Good Vibrations” 1966) and a signature command of complex vocal harmony. He also symbolised the “composer, arranger . . . [performer] . . . and producer [being] . . . melded into one person” (Moorefield 2010, 19). This new artist model is the clear foundation for the entire composition of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). It could be argued that the 1960s generated a perfect storm of creativity for this new art, with a sociological zeitgeist for free expression married to a deep commercial appetite for such appealing new work. As Moorefield has argued the era possessed a “general

permissiveness and encouragement of all sorts of experimentation and alternative everything, even the commercial marketplace was a viable forum for presenting challenging sounds reflecting the tumultuous spirit of the decade” (2010, 27).

The art continued to develop with a hungry marketplace and technological change leading to Brian Eno identifying “the studio as a full-fledged musical instrument” (Moorefield 2010, 53) and compositional tool. However, it should be noted that as the art became sophisticated a more traditional rock and roll “kick against the system” spirit crept back into the aesthetic to protect the art from a permanent graduation into adulthood. With punk, a “corrective” energetic lo-fidelity sound re-emerged in response to “a six-year hangover of complacent grandiloquence which had palliated the energy of pop culture” (Macdonald 1995, 3). Such mood swings have had a profound influence on the ongoing vibrancy of the recordist culture. With the technical potential for big production comes the inherent potential for over production. The pursuit of technical perfection has created an alternative subjective set of values that are highly pervasive within the sonic subcultures. As Zak has observed, the example that “gates” may be heavily used to enhance clarity, yet “such clarity is not a universally desired quality, but a rather a stylistic option” (2001, 126).

The aesthetic method of looking in the rear view mirror as the art drives forward is not limited to punk. Sonic referencing is commonplace across many genres. Mitchell Froom has freely acknowledged the conscious decision to quote “Whiter Shade of Pale” on Crowded House’s “Don’t Dream it’s Over” when composing his Hammond organ part (Bourke 1997, 76). The sound and the mood are clearly cross-referenced even though the notes are different.

Technologically, the art has now developed to such a state where nearly every beat or note can be time or pitch corrected and the potential for digital accuracy is more of a possibility than it is an aspiration. This development has increased the need for aesthetic

decisions to ascertain when perfection represents an erosion of charming human imperfection. Mark Cunningham has delivered an apocalyptic conclusion, hitting the Caps Lock in the manner a lead guitarist might step on a distortion pedal for a solo: “Technology . . . IT IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS THE MUSIC. Unless we grasp this very important point there is every possibility that future generations of musicians and producers will be no more than computer programmers with the musical sensitivity of robots” (1996, 338). However, such fears have been moderated by Trevor Horn who has observed that “whatever happens with technology, people will still like nice songs that they can listen to in the car. There will always be demand for a good album, regardless of fashion or technological advance” (cited in Cunningham, 337). Similarly, Moorefield has suggested that the human aesthetic spirit is safe for the time being in that, “far from removing ‘sacred cow auteurs’ modern technology has simply shifted the metaphor from exceptional accomplishment on paper by ‘composers’ to exceptional accomplishment on hard disk by producers” (2010, 111).

It is also worth observing that the art form has also undergone an accessibility revolution. Before the ubiquity of affordable home recording systems the privilege of making records was largely restricted to those who had major recording contracts. This, when combined with the open broadcast resource of the internet, has delivered the potential to deliver and promote high-quality recordings from home without the need for big expensive studios and major record labels. It is ironic that the art of record production, considering its long and successful marriage with vigorous commerce, has now placed the “means of production” (Engels, F and Marx, K, 1848 Ch. 1) in the hands of the sonic proletariat.

### **The Composition of the *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) Sound**

Then I heard the drums filling up the spaces  
Knocking me out taking my head to brand new places  
I felt a low note sweep me off my feet  
There was method in the madness. (Arnold, 1999)

In 1999, Greg Arnold's Tricycle released "Method in the Madness". The literary content of this song serves as good introduction to this section, as it suggests a practitioner perpetuation of romantic mysticism within the process of the art of recording. Creativity is ostensibly at the mercy of happenstance. However, McIntyre (2009) has continued his thesis that scholars should approach such mysticism with caution by further examining notions of creative genius in the studio in light of the systems model of creativity. The central focus of this chapter will be to outline and analyse the creative phenomena of the recording process from the same perspective as the creative phenomena of the songwriting composition.

Moylan provides a comprehensive chronological outline for such a study:

1. Pre-planning
2. Tracking
3. Edit bed tracks
4. Overdub sessions
5. Processing and mix prep
6. Mix down rehearsal
7. Mix
8. Master. (2008, 340)

However, it should be noted that his outline requires additional material and emphases for this particular recording. In addition to the already discussed "pre" pre-planning stage of songwriting, the demo stage needs to be given more attention. In the sonic composition of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) the song demos provided much more than mere sketches of the songs. They were the first step in the process of achieving recorded form and many of the compositional features of the final mastered record appeared on the song demos (Appendix Four).

## The Song Demos

To analyse the significance of the song demos we must first discuss the very purpose of the process. In the reflective journals the question was asked and answered:

Why demo? As I will be making this album with a band I hope to provide them and other ‘touchstones’ with a glimpse of the songs that is full enough to excite them and give them an idea of where I hope the songs will go, but not be so full as to limit the potential input of others to imagine new rhythmic/harmonic/melodic parts . . . [to] outline the songs and send a simple sonic message of the emotional direction of the songs. (Author April 9, 2009)

This purpose has been illustrated by Pete Townshend’s demos for *Who’s Next* (The Who 1971), which were considered to be profoundly influential on the final outcome. The producers responded to “the meticulous pre-production work on *Behind Blue Eyes* . . . and followed the musical direction Townshend set out in the demo” (Toft 2011, 107). Then the entire recordist team “augmented the persuasiveness of the song by reinforcing, amplifying and refining the basic elements of the demo” (Toft 2011, 108).

Additionally, the idea of the holistic *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) album narrative was present on the first day of this process:

I chose two songs to demo. ‘You’re Not Coming Home’ (Appendix Four)<sup>18</sup> and ‘Until You Fall’. I performed and recorded the demos entirely myself. The reason behind this choice is that I feel they will make excellent opening and closing songs respectively . . . and at the risk of getting a little ‘prog. Rock’ and indulging in a bit of a dreaded ‘concept’ I have included the opening chord sequence of ‘You’re Not Coming Home’ at the end [of] ‘Until You Fall’. In a conceptual sense gluing the album together and in a practical sense ensuring that if the album gets a repeat play it will segue in a pretty cool circle. (Author April 9, 2009)

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<sup>18</sup> As these versions have not been released there are no references to these recorded works, the song and band demos appear in “The Folio”: Appendix Four.

Only “Olivia” (Arnold 2011), “Fall Into My Hands” (Arnold 2011) and “You’re Not Coming Home” (Arnold-Helm 2011)<sup>19</sup> had been performed live before the song demo process. In the majority of cases the song demos were the first versions of the songs to be heard.

On the “Until You Fall” (Appendix Four) song demo the intent was:

to set up for Beatle-esque style piano ballad, essentially running with general rule that it is pretty hard not to make a piano ballad sucky . . . (mawkish). By keeping the feel simple and adding authenticity with the acoustic guitar I feel I have kept the song out of the dreaded land of MOR-AOR-AC<sup>20</sup> into which such a song could descend . . . every step will involve intricate decisions being made so as to develop the harmony and make the most of the melody and the ‘Spector-esque’ production of the rest of the album, without becoming too nice. (Author April 9, 2009)

From the outset, the production vision to avoid mawkishness clearly demonstrates a scene-driven aesthetic and an attempt to direct the perception of the audience away from another scene. As an early contribution to the sonic composition, it should be noted that far more than “implied rhythm” appeared on this stage. The journals reveal the production analysis of a manually composed drum part, which began with intuitive semiconsciousness and was then methodically pursued:

A particular “mojo” (happy accident) moment . . . is the absence from the drum track of hi-hats. I feel this leaves room for a more charming and flamboyant acoustic rhythm guitar track . . . it is hat free and stronger for it. If there were constant hats the acoustic [guitar] would compete for a bit of rhythmic attention. (Author May 11, 2009)

On “You’re Not Coming Home” (Appendix Four) the intent was:

to set up a boozy gospellish love lost lament. By employing a simple honky tonk-esque piano with a fortuitously croaky vox I set up for the reiteration in the

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<sup>19</sup> Occasionally when the discussion refers specifically to the song as opposed to the demo the original compositional citation and recording date is used.

<sup>20</sup> Middle of the road, adult-oriented rock and adult contemporary are considered unsatisfactory subcultural resonance.

New Orleans funereal style with a bigger rhythmic feel and a dodgy, but symbolic of the direction, melodica solo. I believe the band will catch my fairly simple sonic messages and run with them (Author May 11, 2009).

Also in this session, the quasi-mystical appearance of a compositional–conceptual idea appeared when tracking the demo. Without conscious intent “I got a free . . . nice surprise at the end. I was originally planning a fade or a faster conclusion, but now I like the ascent on the F (I just played this in as I went by on the recording, no plan—just a bit of free arcane love/mojo . . . thank you god of happy accidents” (Author May 7, 2009). This accidental semiconscious compositional idea also contributed to the album narrative. This enabled a strong segue into “Tomorrow”. From a production perspective, I felt that: “the next song . . . starts in the same key (C) on the uke/banjo which I suspect will be dang charming . . . Pink Floyd-esque concept folk I hope” (Author May 11, 2009).

Additionally, the more global issues for the recording aesthetic were articulated, particularly subcultural notions of authenticity and contestable perfection:

on the vocal but I went for croaky love over accuracy, and when I tried the auto-tune plug in to correct my wayward notes the sound of the plug in was too present. I lost more than I gained so I turned it off. I believe such decisions are crucial to not become a slave to the accuracy of the technology at the expense of the vibe. Croaky drunk works . . . pitch accurate croaky drunk robs the character of his authenticity. (Author May 11, 2009)

Similar observations occur about the rhythmic accuracy:

While I think the general tempo is pretty good, the time accuracy of this track really suffers with a metric grid . . . from here on in it will be no click track for this song. In general I like a click track as an artist and as a producer, it saves hours of debate both internal and external about time . . . you can simply see on the screen where time is . . . not to say that one can’t still avoid the click for musical expressive effect . . . it’s just nice to know where time is . . . exactly. However on this demo I feel the click really stiffens up the fundamental feel of the song . . . the foundational drunken aesthetic that is meant to pervade everything seems at odds with the grid. I’ve had six beers and suddenly I have excellent metric time . . . it’s a conceptual clanger, subsonic and subconscious possibly, but a potential clanger none the less. (Author May 11, 2009)

A melody and an outline of its sound were composed for the solo at this stage:

Designed to simulate any number of possible spooky sounds that may end up doing this job on the finished record. It is me singing ‘ooo’ with [re]verb at 49% in a large hall, auto tune set to C major, TDM Voce spin stereo plug-in at the tremolo setting (a ‘pastiche’ plug-in of the rotating Leslie cabinet speaker that is most commonly used for the Hammond organ) and a Sans Amp plug-in, designed to sound like another distorted amplifier . . . This is to mess up the sound and create dirt. Aesthetically all of these effects have turned a soft ‘ooo’ into an ethereal spooky sound . . . implying Hammond organs suggesting harmonics on a fiddle and Theremins . . . what is going to win the battle for a place on the album? (Author May 11, 2009)

This melody is used for this solo (on fiddle) on the finished album and in the outro of both this song and “Until You Fall” (Arnold 2011) (on Theremin) and it has served the purpose of enhancing the conceptual album narrative.

“Fall Into My Hands” (Arnold 2011) had been performed live and demoed before the song demo stage and had already been augmented with the additional composition of melodic and harmonic parts. The journal has highlighted the emotional aesthetic intent and the method to achieve that intent:

In the demo of this song I just wanted to capture the big melody and emotion of the song. The emotion is pretty simple. It is a father’s song for his daughter. I have been keenly aware of conflicting aims for this song from the outset. The song inherently runs the risk of being too sentimental and consequently un-cool and yet, to try to cool it up would contradict the fundamental heart on sleeve emotion. In this version I feel I got lucky with a very raspy voice on the day which seemed to enhance the straight emotion, although I will definitely check with the team if this approach is possibly too much. It will always be a sensitive area, at which point will the audience lose the emotion—is the song fundamentally emotional enough as it is without any performance ornamentation? In this version I have tried to enhance the soulful feeling (pushing the Dylan-esque moment in intensity) and I have tried to use the harmonic/melodic parts to exaggerate the chord melody relationship, which I feel is pretty strong in this song. The melodica intro part is one which I have been hearing for a long time now, and am pretty sure will make an appearance on some instrument on the finished record. All parts have been constructed to enhance the melodic strength and the emotional core of the song. For example, the electric guitar part that starts in verse two largely outlines the chord moves, however it is meant to deliver a resonance of sixties guitar parts (it is a loose quote from ‘Brown Eyed Girl’ (Van Morrison 1967) . . . So in two different parts



I have, with self-awareness, evoked different guitar parts while plumbing the same general time—the sixties. They (and the bass-like Paul) are a mash up of a loose series of conceptual, if not strict musical, quotes. The overall effect was working for me on the day, and the tears were flowing freely, although I would have to acknowledge that any sense of objectivity is simply not there with this song. The foundational emotion is my love for Hannie and I would be disappointed in myself if I didn't let this emotion overwhelm me. (Author August 8, 2009).

It is the demo of an emotional ballad designed to move the listener and inspire the musicians to help communicate this sentiment. It displays clear sonic experiments to help augment this mood such as the guitar and vocal style quoting and composed melodic parts.

The journal has given scant details about the song demo intent for “Tomorrow” (Appendix Four), dwelling more on the composition of the song and the method of the demo recording:

I also recorded the bulk (without ukulele) of “Tomorrow”. Then I added piano and electric, of which I only kept a little. Then I played shaker and added a sampled kick from Georgia's album. I also added some glockenspiel to outline the big chord moves. . . . And a weird old church organ sample that I would normally describe as ‘poxy’ . . . however on this demo I messed it up through an effect to make an otherwise ‘naff’ sound darker. (Author August 8, 2009)

It could be argued that the intent was simply to record a nice version of the song, and that the demo accidentally delivered the backbone of the finished release. Many of the additional melodic-harmonic compositional ideas such as the harmonies, the kick drum idea and the melody of the solo all survived onto the album replayed. Additionally the “poxy” (Author August 8, 2009) organ sound, the glockenspiel and the guide acoustic guitar all made it to the final album from this recording session.

The song demo recording of “Tumbling Down” (Appendix Four) was difficult. Recorded immediately after “Tomorrow” (Appendix Four) it was:

a bit of a come down to pursue ‘Tumbling Down’ . . . for some reason I was not confident about the song as I recorded it. The tempo has always been tricky for

this one, as I felt it was hard to find a comfortable mid-point between the chorus and the instrumental hook. However I felt both belonged in the song. Also, as it is a duet, I was pretty unconvinced by my ‘Girly Greg’ voice that I used to rough up the vocal for Georgia Fields to learn. For some reason my enthusiasm for the song was waning as (I) went through the maths of constructing the parts. I heard all the parts before I did the demo, so there were virtually no surprises all day, just a battle to get the feel right, and a few electric overdubs to reinforce key melodies. Once I added the hand claps and the glock. late in the day, it felt like a last minute dash that really helped establish the late 60s [early 70s] Neil Diamond-ish vibe I was going for . . . and I slowly began to get re-enthused. I also added a heavy electric octave part under the solo section, to give it some Pretenders/ Cure vibrations as well. (Author, August 29, 2009)

With the lack of semiconscious compositional work during the session the production enthusiasm was low for this demo. The central hooks were all loosely in place requiring simple augmentation—or playing into form. The “vibe” for the track returned with a series of seemingly disparate sonic quotes, including non-specific early Neil Diamond, non-specific The Cure and highly specific (song and guitar quote) of The Pretenders (1982). Additionally, the production was never going to receive a lot of enthusiasm until the lead vocal achieved the appropriate characterisation:

Georgia came in and sang her vocals, and to my taste the song really began to fly. Of course it makes sense that until the girl part was sung in by a girl, it was always going to struggle a little. Interestingly enough we discussed whether the song was little low. Georgia had a slight concern that by singing it so low she may ‘sound like a man’, and this artistic instinct is obviously highly appropriate in duet that requires a clear sonic/aesthetic demarcation between the characters. While I am very happy with the demo, and feel that Georgia brings a wonderful quality to the track, I think we should experiment with making it higher next time, even if this makes me a little less ‘man’ in my sound. Essentially I think the correct aesthetic choice would be to ensure that Georgia is free to lay her character on thick, as she has the performance capacity to do so . . . I’ll sound ‘characterful’ wherever I am in the key . . . but I’ll never sound that ‘good’. . . and me sounding crappy and Georgia sounding soft, high and sweet would probably enhance the inherent drama of the song. (Author August 30, 2009)

It was at this point in the process that the song first took on the form of a genuine duet, it had only ever been an idea before this.

“Why Don’t You Come Around” (Appendix Four) was demoed twice (song and band), but was always under question in an album narrative sense. In the journals it is noted that:

this adds a raw emotional honesty to the album. I also think it will live or die on the performance, and that blending this in with the melodic pop fest will be a little tricky . . . it is much more folksy. I am imagining pursuing an *Astral Weeks* (Van Morrison 1968) sound, maybe brass (as pastiched by the melodica), double bass and softer but driving drums (heavy on the ride cymbal). I like the change in mood . . . but is it a goer? Realistically I feel I would have to keep the options open on this . . . not because I don’t like the song, but because the emotional honesty could, in this context, come over as too frank, particularly when married to the folk tuning. I will see if this gets any comments either way in the demo discussions. I am a bit suspicious that the emotion comes from the (autobiographical) nostalgia not the song. (Author August 30, 2009)

The next song “belted out” (Author August 30, 2009) was “Everybody Stands in Line” (Appendix Four). Performance energy was considered crucial for the communication of this song:

I kept the whole performance pretty loose, recognising that such a song should howl it out. The asthma harp (as I have termed it in a sad hope that it becomes industry standard phrase) is a straight quote of the Dylan-esque non-virtuosic approach to the instrument. Having been in a band with a serious harp player I know the style is not for everyone, but I think it immediately gives such a rant a cultural reference point and resonance . . . a wheezy harp over an acoustic carries a certain sociopolitical protest cred. courtesy Bob Dylan. The aesthetic choice was very similar conceptually to the slap delay on the vocals giving it a ye olde singer-songwriter (Lennon again) weight. Although in this case I also wanted generic old room sound . . . rock and roll America . . . I wanted the full bag of tricks that a slap delay can bring. I tried a few extra rhythm parts but dumped them . . . the only note I left was a tambourine hit after the ‘trickle’ lyric . . . that edit is for anyone nerdy enough to notice how incongruous it is . . . in the silence the solitary tambo. hit. A secret amusement . . . that could very well end up on an album. Such an inclusion would be a very art rock message to the serious listener. I once put the sound of a beer bottle opening after the line ‘as he opens his second Crownny at half past eight’ (Arnold 2004, ‘Flay by the Water’). Only one person ever mentioned it . . . still one person is enough . . . it’s nice to be understood. To finish the song I added another melodica part with a view to accentuating the sweet harmony of the middle eight, I think a Hammond organ could do this job with the same harmonic sweetness, but a heavier sound . . . let’s see what happens . . . I’m voting Hammond. The melodic solo is through a Leslie speaker plug-in, which is the standard speaker for a Hammond, so I am sending this message loud and clear. (Author August 30, 2009)

The “howl it out” intent of this demo was translated very definitively onto the finished recording with the harp and melodica solo (being replayed on mandolin). The same secret “close listener joke” appears as well on the harp instead of the tambourine.

The song demo of “Olivia” (Appendix Four) enjoyed an ease of delivery, both in performance and in the satisfaction of the “pure pop” artistic intent:

I think the demo is a success. It has the feeling I want. Essentially it is simple stereo acoustic pass, with a shaker and tambo outlining the groove. There is a glock. part ‘locating’ the track in its . . . [indie] . . . pop world . . . Once again the slap delay says 70s, and the doubles harmonies are going for the America (the band) sweetness. I think this song rests entirely on the chorus melody and that big harmony above it . . . this song is VERY to my taste . . . The pure pop angle can also detract a little for any weight that one might want to achieve in the lyrics. However, when it comes to a big pop melody and harmony, I’m just a lapsed earnest folky who can’t say no. (Author September 30, 2009)

This “flagship” (Author August 30, 2009) also had a great deal of harmonic and sonic compositional material retained and enhanced on the finished track. Significantly, the tempo was felt to be more appropriate than the band demo version. The harmony on chorus was first delivered here, even though it had been conceptually present since the song’s original composition. The demo also engages general 1970’s harmonic and neo-folk-pop sonic quotes (glockenspiel).

On the “Follow the Sun” (Appendix Four) demo:

I was aiming for a Beachboys-esque sound, although the uke sounded more like a tippie, and so with that and the Cajun melodica it all sounded a little more Louisiana than California, but I think that all helps it fit onto the album. On the first session I spent considerable time arranging some sampled drums for a big ‘feel’, but I chucked them out on the second day, and felt the song really came alive again. Good Ol’ slap delay is on the vocal, and doubled pretty harmonies abound. I think the ascending notes of part two in the chorus in the bvs are some very sweet Beachboys shtick that really hits the summer button, as does the mock Theremin (vox through a Leslie cabinet plug in). Double handclaps say beach party; although one always has to police any descent into ‘Kumbaya’ territory . . . I think I’m safe. Globally I was very nervous about the song until I removed the drums, and I remain a little unsure as to whether it is all a little too

pop . . . although I do like the lift it brings to the end of the album. (Author October 1, 2009)

The intent was for this song demo was to allude to summery joyousness in the hope the band would pick up the feeling. The Cajun-styled melodica melody survived (being replayed) onto the final recording, as did the “Leslie speaker Beachboyish” backing vocals (being sung in by Georgia Fields through a real Leslie cabinet at Atlantis Sound). The additional melodic, harmonic and sonic compositional aspects first appeared at the demo stage without a preconceived plan and they are representative of both “writing records” and semiconscious creativity.

“The Deal” (Appendix Four) was the final song demo included for *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). As it had already been recorded for a separate project, the intent of this inclusion was entirely driven by album narrative:

I was little concerned about the overly sugary tone of the record. I had a few songs in minor keys ready to go, but at this point they just seemed to exaggerate the problem, for while they were minor, they still swept across big melodies and I felt that the album was at pop breaking point. As I re-learnt the song to play it at the launch (*As Yet Unclear*) I began to suspect that this song was the missing mood on the album: some grainy darkness. (Author October 1, 2009)

The song shares some sonic similarities to the other songs on the album in that “while melodic it is not as pretty as its companions . . . the glock. fits it in with the album and it is acoustic based with big harmonies, but it is noticeably different” (Author October 1, 2009).

### **The “Touchstone” Consultation**

The next stage in the demo process was to seek the opinions of both the band and “touchstones” (“three other singer-songwriters whose opinion I value” [Author, August 12, 2009]). As composer, performer and producer it was felt that they were ready for scrutiny as

the foundation of an album. It was also felt that it was time to move the discussion beyond the unarguably self-absorbed world of a singer/songwriter performer producer:

The demos have delivered on my artistic aim. They are a selection of songs that I feel hold together as a cohesive whole. Also the production on the demos makes subtle suggestions about arrangement ideas without being overtly autocratic (plenty of time for that later). However there are a few ideas that I am very attached to, and I will probably be arguing for their inclusion on the finished album. At this stage I am happy to have the band pick up or leave whatever ideas they want, knowing that the band demos will probably give us extra ideas to choose from. (Author, August 12, 2009)

The songs were “compiled . . . into a rough order and placed . . . in . . . some rougher artwork” (Author, August 12, 2009) and delivered up for discussion. The five people whose opinion invited to the discussion at this stage of the project were:

1. Warwick Davies: A long-term and constant peer singer-songwriter with whom most albums have been discussed in this manner since 1987. His similar approach to melodicism and his more studious tendency towards the “hip” have always made his contributions valuable.
2. Georgia Fields: A songwriting student, and new recording artist. She brings a very strong melodic and orchestral arrangement sensibility, and also, a more contemporary view of acoustic pop.
3. Mark Lang: Co-producer, singer-songwriter and artwork designer for *Skipping Girl Vinegar*. (Lang made significant similar contributions to *Lost Marie* 2006).
4. John Bedggood: multi-instrumentalist and backing vocalist in The Swamp Dandies.
5. Ian Kitney: drummer and percussionist in The Swamp Dandies.

The response from Davies was important in that he examined the idea of a good album, arguing that a sequential series of songs with an overarching mood was more “transporting” than a “greatest hits” collection, and within that context he felt that this collection is an “album” because:

. . . the songs are worked to create a certain melancholic, romantic yearning sustained throughout . . . It is a good album primarily because of its melodic instincts. It is incredibly consistent in its delivery of melodic punch track after

track. This extends to the instrumental instincts as well. (October 1, 2009, email message to author)

His only query was about the inclusion of the song “The Deal” (Appendix Four), as he felt it didn’t share the lightness of touch of the other material.

Fields’ response (October 6, 2009, email message to author) was highly positive with “The Deal” (Appendix Four) getting a special mention in its potential for further string augmentation. Positive responses were received from both Kitney and Bedggood, yet there was not a great deal of additional discussion. At the song demo stage, they liked the material and were looking forward to making the completed album. This observation was been confirmed at the band demo stage of the project during recorded and catalogued conversations that took place between performances (January 27 & 28, 2010, interview with author).<sup>21</sup> Arguably, the most significant discussion that sprang from the demo email question was from Lang. The question was answered not in the email format, but in a conversation at a Georgia Fields’ gig (August 23, 2009). The big questions were answered with questions. Firstly, he felt that, although the album would sit perfectly in the Greg Arnold catalogue, he wondered why I was not “digging deep” (Author October 1, 2009) and trying to make a “great” album and not a merely “good” album? Inherent in this question was another question: What is a great album? Secondly, he felt that I should revisit my commitment to the lyrics which he felt was more evident in my early Things of Stone and Wood albums. In response to my conversational input, that my focus was more on the melody now, he queried why I would favour that part of my writing over the more poetic tradition of my lyrics. He too picked out “The Deal” (Arnold 2011) as a good example of a more traditionally idiosyncratically “Greg Arnold”, “heavier” lyrical poetic approach. Lang’s questions were very “record producer” in their angle. This conversation picked up substantially on emergent

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<sup>21</sup> These interviews were recorded as a part of the recording session as opposed to a formal and separate interview.

themes in the journals. For example, as he was querying the current motivations in comparison to the past, so was I. Both the journal, autobiography and a separate autoethnographic piece (written September 6, 2009) had exposed a new big question. The question dealt with the centrality of music in this specific stage of artistic and personal life. The question appeared independently for us both:

At this point of my life do my personal life decisions override my aesthetic decisions? To be honest, I would not the wish the personality of Greg circa 86–96 onto my family or friends again . . . that guy was kind of a pain in the arse. Inspired, and willing to travel unaccompanied down the dark laneways of the soul to find a pop song . . . sure . . . but man . . . did he know how to bring everybody down or what? The fact that I have reacted like a jolly good sport, like hippy Biggles to Mark’s critique rather than railing against the suggestion that my artistic commitment has waned, confirms any suspicions either of us may have in this area. It’s true. Pop music doesn’t mean as much to me as it used to, but that doesn’t mean that it has lost all meaning either. (Author October 1, 2009)

To summarise, it could be argued that the first series of song demos provided valuable directional and final release additional composed material in melodic, harmonic and sonic realms. The parts and sounds were written to augment the original form of the song and help direct the journey into recorded form. The compositional method was similar to the original composition of the songs themselves, relying heavily on nostalgic quotation and semiconscious holistic creative processes. The journals reveal a faith in more mystical notions of creativity that this study has significantly (and successfully) challenged. The response to the song demos was positive with “The Deal” (Appendix Four 2011) providing the only controversy (negatives from Davies [October 1, 2009, email message to author] and Bedggood [April 13, 2010 email message to author] and positives from Fields [October 6, 2009, email message to author] and Lang [October 15, 2009, email message to author]). This controversy reflected my production uncertainty of the song’s inclusion. Importantly, the song demos set up a template for the album as a whole narrative and they were examined as



such. This became the major issue for examination at the next chronological stage of the recording process.

As noted in the song composition chapter further songs were considered for the album at this stage. The song demo for “Into Your Sea” (Appendix Four) was the same recorded track as appeared on Kelly Pettit’s (2010) album (co-written Arnold-Pettit) with a lead vocal by myself. While it enjoyed a highly appropriate lyrical feel (“It has a threatening frontier quality to it, making the love story more resonant” [Author July 9, 2010]) it just didn’t seem to fit in with the album narrative. The song demo for “Are You True?” (Appendix Four) was retro and the journal has displayed total self-awareness of the resonance: “On the demo I went a little more Lenny Kravitz than Nirvana . . . all sonic allusions . . . are reinforcing the nostalgia” (Author July 9, 2010). As the band version developed, this song demo directional approach was felt to be successful as “Bedgy really picked up that spark and is playing a very *Let Love Rule* [1989] Hammond part” (Author July 9, 2010).

### **The Band Demos**

The band demos introduced a significant new discussion into the project. In light of developments in recording technology in both quality and transferability, and that the project was to be demoed in the same studio and by the same core team as the actual album recording session, the idea of pursuing band demos seemed of contestable worth. Traditionally, demos were a standard feature of a specific recording’s development in a band context. There was a clear delineation between the results because the technological potential for the demo was usually restricted by the smaller tape size, the smaller room of the studio, the cheaper desks and, consequently, the globally smaller sound. In general, they were too noisy or too quiet, and difficult to transfer onto any further recordings of the same material. In the contemporary

studio setting there is a far greater technological capacity to take all or part of a song from a home recording or any other studio that uses a similar platform and move it to the finished recording.

David McCluney, owner of Atlantis studios and engineer on the project, refused to refer to the session as a demo session arguing that it was a professional studio, we were professional musicians, the songs were in shape, why would there be a limit on the aspiration? He very clearly stated that “we don’t do demos” (January 27, 2010, session interview with author). This could be interpreted as defending both his studio (Atlantis Sound), which is clearly a record standard studio, not a demo standard studio by the old tape machine and desk-driven definitions, and his own record engineer credentials. Additionally, it could be argued that this hesitation to even refer to the session as a demo session was actually a clear attempt to ensure that the performers did not miss the opportunity for a “keeper”. He was (unintentionally) employing a production technique that has been articulated by Phil Ramone: “Experience tells you, never waste your time by not recording” (cited in Massey 2000, 55). It could be argued that McCluney’s contribution at this early stage was demonstrable of the fluidity of roles. He moved from his traditional tracking engineer role (recording the sounds as effectively as he could) into a more global musical production role ensuring that the potential for a final recording not be overlooked at this stage. He was also keen to ensure that we did not become stuck in a game of what Elliot Scheiner has described as “chase the demo” (cited in Massey 2000, 7). This position proved to be very productive as the drum track demos from “You’re Not Coming Home” (Appendix Four), “The Deal” (Appendix Four), “Follow the Sun” (Appendix Four) and “Until You Fall” (Appendix Four) were used on the final release.

The band set up in the studio and played the songs largely as they would be played live by the three-piece band. There were no click tracks to lock in the time. There were clear sight lines whenever available, yet separation was established to ensure that if anybody delivered a keeper it would be transferrable without complicating spill. The songs were rehearsed on the spot with the majority of performance parts being composed as they were played. The drum sounds were intentionally roomy as the foundation sound for the album. The order of tracking was chosen by convenience. If a song shared the same set up it would be recorded next. Kitney played live drums, Bedggood played violin, mandolin or keyboards depending on the song and I played acoustic guitar and sang with the exception of “You’re Not Coming Home” (Appendix Four) on which I played piano and sang. Conversations were recorded during the session. The songs were first tracked on two-inch tape (Otari MTR) via a vintage Calrec UA 8000 desk to establish a nostalgic sonically “old school” resonance. The tracks were then transferred to *Pro Tools*<sup>22</sup>. Overdubs were still recorded through the desk but did not go to tape.

The key participants at this stage described their performance and artistic decisions during and at the conclusion of the session. Bedggood has described the process of his instrumental part composition as “trying to bounce off (the) guitar” and “I’m just making sure that I’m out of the way of the vocals in the verses” (January 27, 2010, session interview with author). By this method he pursued melodically and rhythmically complementary parts, clearly displaying compositional process interdependence with the pre-written written song (lyric-vocal) form. Ian Kitney has concurred with the conscious application of this technique: “I’m being very sparse in all of the verses because most of the rhythm is coming from the acoustic”. It is interesting to note that Bedggood was also conscious of the narrative of the album in his construction of the mandolin composition of “Olivia” (Appendix Four). When

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<sup>22</sup> Industry standard recording software program.

encouraged for his choice of a non-melodic hook part, as this would be a standard Arnold production technique, he has noted that he avoided such a part because “we’re doing (that) in a lot of other songs” (January 27, 2010, session interview with author).

To further demonstrate the elasticity of the roles on the project David McCluney’s production contribution was clearly displayed in this first session. After setting up an easy and non-interventionist recording scenario he scrutinised the performances and the sounds together: “I don’t have to worry about playing, so my only job is to listen to the sounds and the performance, I’m just listening for an overall performance thing; the excitement in the tempo, and feel of the thing” (January 27, 2010, session interview with author). Performances were also checked after the delivery by the participants. Some for simple accuracy, as Bedgood has observed: “I think there was something in the middle . . . That I strayed . . .” (January 27, 2010, session interview with author) and some for whether they would work even when accurately delivered. In producer mode, I queried a rhythmic interplay between drums and guitar on “Tumbling Down” (Appendix Four): “I feel a slight clunk on the ‘ba bas’, between you and I. And I know if we were looking at it on the screen, I’d go, “right, something’s gotta give there” (January 27, 2010, author cited in session interview with author).

Both instrumentalists have also applied the more semiconscious fishing technique. In a clear marriage of method and quasi-mysticism Bedgood has observed:

You’re in D and G shapes, and I know that these harmonics generally work because they’re out of that sphere. They’re in different octaves, and I know the 1 and 5 work well against those. So, it’s just a little rhythmic thing on top of it. I was actually just stuffing around with it . . . mucking around and seeing what would happen. (January 27, 2010, session interview with author)

His technique in this instance (“Tumbling Down” [Appendix Four], mandolin part) displayed a clear conscious reference to his musical context and a semiconscious fishing

around a known and practiced set of possibilities. Similarly, Kitney has described the abandonment of clear structured plans as “letting my freak flag fly” (January 27, 2010, session interview with author).

Sounds were also auditioned and chosen with the finished album in mind, particularly drums in consideration of the possibility of releasable performances. The bass drum was adjusted for both sonic and aesthetic purposes by McCluney who has observed:

Ian has brought in his first bass drum, which is tuned like a marching drum, with both bass drum heads on it. It’s very resonant in the room, so we’ve pushed [it] up close to the bass drum that he’s playing [in his kit], so that it will resonate in sympathy, and we’ve miced it, and it sounds fantastic. We’ve thrown a blanket over it to reduce the cymbal and snare spill, and it’s adding a nice note to the bass drum. (January 27, 2010, session interview with author)

And the snare drum was changed mid-session to a deeper drum, which has evoked the 1980s for both Kitney and McCluney (January 28, 2010, session interview with author), while from my producer/singer-songwriter perspective (when married to the composed parts in songs such as “You’re Not Coming Home” [Appendix Four]) the nostalgic reference was “this huge, 70s, Elton John feeling . . . (and really good Elton John), basically Elton of the ‘Levon’ (1971) era, and that’s really exciting to me” (Author February 18, 2010). The concluding journal made after the editing gives an overview of where the project “was at” after the session. It was noted that from when the band first became involved in the rehearsals that “the songs instantly came to life in a very different way, and my whole sense of what the band were all about (and the project, consequently) really started to come together” (Author February 18, 2010). Reasons for this include:

the legitimacy of the ‘swampy’ factor that Bedgy (Bedggood] brings with the fiddle in particular, but also his rhythmic angle to the mandolin. And Ian’s very heavily constructionalist set of ideas for drumming really started to give me a whole new angle and lease of life on the song(s) . . . this particular line up [has] got its own creative character. It’s a bit like the time and fashions of acoustic

music have really lined up to make this band feel like now is its moment to make this record. (Author February 18, 2010)

This notion of a band having a voice further consolidates other gestalt notions within the process. From the production perspective I felt that this was a band (an artistic entity unto itself) worth recording. While the demos provided the foundation and map for a band version of the global album narrative there was still doubt hovering over the overtly sweet melodic core:

I'm left wondering if we're missing a couple of things. I would like to hear some sort of swampy instrumental, just a little theme to interest and hopefully delight as we go past. Something that really presses that button . . . And I also feel we need a rocking, dirty, swampy, sexy track in there. Something that's got a bit of darkness. If there's one thing I'm a bit conscious of at the moment as it stands, it is there's a lot of melodic, tuneful pop songs in C. While I love a melodic pop song in C . . . Gee, there are a lot of them on this record. And it's a tension between the pop spirit—the dandy spirit of this record (it is a don't-bore-us-get-to-the-chorus genre, and I'm into that, so I love melody frenzy . . . But I think there is something, and I really get this when I listen to ABBA a lot, that there's a point where you just 'melody out', it's just enough. You need some sort of leavening from that. (Author February 18, 2010)

Also, while “The Deal” (Appendix Four) consolidated its place during this process:

Gee, the little song that could . . . I originally put this on just for leavening, as a song to have a bit of a moment's respite from the prettier melodies . . . [now] everything about that is really dark and fantastic as a band. And the drum construction, which is something we worked out on the spot, there's just some killer bits in that, Bedgy's just on fire delivering that satanic violin thing there, and really perfectly fulfilling that vibe. I'd really have a look at keeping some of that stuff for the record; I think that was just one out of the box. I'd have to re-sing it and play the guitar again, but that's pretty good Swamp Dandies' stuff, and for me really importantly, dark. Really important to have something dark there . . . The band have just taken all those cues and . . . run with them to the limit. And I think that is why that track is really exciting at this point and doing a huge job on the album. (Author February 18, 2010)

However, after reflection “Why Don't You Come Around” (Appendix Four) was abandoned at this point.

In summary, the band demo session was an example of what Mike Alleyne attributes to Nile Rodgers as “a celestial navigation . . . the foregrounding of organic human creativity . . . with technology supporting this objective” (Alleyne 2007). David McCluney articulated this outcome clearly: “That’s why you play with other people, I reckon . . . like-minded people. It always comes out better than you think. If you get the right people, that is” (February 28, 2010, session interview with author). The band demos became the second important step in the sonic composition of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). While the original intention was to develop ideas and audition parts, the process was so successful and the engineer so prepared, that many finished and ultimately released performances were achieved during the session. This outcome underlines the change in potential outcomes in the traditional recording process facilitated by advances in recording technology as epitomised by *Pro Tools*. The sonic intention was to capture the live band sound with performance integrity being audible. Some sounds, such as the snare drum, were consciously chosen for their nostalgic reference. The composition of instrumental parts and sounds occurred in a similar manner (a blend of fishing and conscious intellectual methodical pursuit) to the composition of songs; although it should be noted that the participant instrumentalists seemed to be far more conscious of their constructionist role, responding with deliberate clarity to the job that was required of them. This displayed their knowledge of their scene and their long and practiced immersion in the field. They found a place for their compositional work in the context of the pre-existing composed context (guitar rhythms, chords and melodic hooks). The demos are demonstrable of the interdependence between recording stages with clear links between song composition, live band performance, instrumental part composition and sonic composition. The band demos augmented the song demos and became an additional template for the remainder of the recording process.

## The Tracking

The tracking was originally intended to be not just another session, but the main event. It was to be more like the era when recordings were more like what Daniel Lanois has compared to a Saturday night date in the 1950s, an era where people bothered to get dressed up. “People were really excited to be in the studio and it was an amazing day to look forward to . . . now every day is a day in the recording studio: there’s less mystique to the recording process” (cited in Massey 2009, 15). However, the band demos possessed a certain thunder stealing quality. The album was well under way, and stored and saved on hard drives before the first planned day of actual tracking. The pause between demos and tracking had confirmed that there needed to be new songs and that one song needed to be removed.

I have doubts about the inclusion of “Why Don’t You Come Around” . . . it just seems like a Things of Stone and Wood song, not a Swamp Dandies song. Also the band demo didn’t feel great rhythmically, and I feel we are crossing some scary AC lines . . . the prognosis is not good for this song, I worry that it just possesses a totally different emotional essence which distracts from the global feeling of the album. This feeling comes from the open E tuning on the guitar (very Celt *tosaw* [Things of Stone and Wood]) and the straight recounting of anecdotes from my recent life, it has a troubling earnestness (even with the John Butler gag). (Author July 9, 2010)

The session seemed to be much more like an overdub sessions with a clear plan for time and human resources. The plan in the journal has illustrated that this album was to be completed, not started in the next series of recording (Author July 9, 2010).

Across these two days of band recording many of the same themes were discussed. After accepting the “very energetic” (July 17, 2010 author in session interview) rhythm track of “Follow the Sun” (on The Swamp Dandies 2011) a floor tom was added to the chorus. I had the idea before the session. For Kitney it was:

a la Keith Richard’s floor tom on the *Some Girls* album by The Rolling Stones [1978] . . . just primal, primitive, naïve . . . Thump, thump. Thump, thump,



thump. For some reason that is an incredibly exciting little pattern. (July 17, 2010 session interview with author)

From my production perspective it was reminiscent of:

glam rock . . . very much that era where the sounds are surprisingly little, but they were just working those tribal drums. . . . [like The] Glitter Band (1974). . . . drums are exciting . . . there was something about not going the big roomy sound on that, but coming in a little closer, that . . . evokes that 70s thing. Will I ever leave that decade? Will I ever grow up? (July 17, 2010 session interview with author)

In a clear sign of support for the use of sonic and cultural quoting from this era, Kitney answered this question: “There’s no need to” (July 17, 2010 session interview with author). To further embellish the theme of sonic and mood quoting Bedggood described his piano part on “Until You Fall” (on *The Swamp Dandies* 2011) as “channeling Paul McCartney” (July 17, 2010 session interview with author), but also trying to catch the feeling of the demos on the full instrument. There was the need to be “a bit tricky with it, because we didn’t realise we were going to grab such great drum takes in the original version. We didn’t have a click or a count-in” (July 17, 2010 session interview with author). As McCluney observed in our attempts to recapture the demo that we were attempting “channel” ourselves (July 17, 2010 session interview with author).

Bedggood also articulated the compositional work that he pursued as the songs moved from demo to album form. While concerned with certain aspects of the delivery of the fiddle solo on “You’re Not Coming Home” (Appendix Four) he was satisfied to release the demo performance after:

we just adjusted a little of the timing. There was one note that didn’t quite slide up to the note that it was meant to, so we adjusted it pitch-wise. There are a couple of entries that seemed a little bit hesitant. It comes out really strong at the start of the solo, but then tends to peter away in a couple of moments. When we changed the timing of them slightly it came back to the original ‘bravado’. (July 17, 2010 session interview with author)

He was keen to fix some earlier work, such as the piano playing in “Follow the Sun”

(Appendix Four) because:

with the stuff we did on the demos, I felt like the ‘whitest’ man alive trying to play ‘black’ music. And I started off doing that little part, but it pretty much rewrote itself as we went along. And then there was this awesome ‘Joe Jackson’ bit in the middle, which was Greg’s idea, which I love. (July 17, 2010 session interview with author)

The collaborative nature of many of these parts was a significant feature of composition of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). Many of Bedggood’s composed parts were embellishments upon pre-existing melodic parts from the demos or originally conceived by me as the producer. The following conversation illustrates the way these parts were embellished. The parts were recomposed with not just additional notes, but with idiosyncratic playing:

Arnold (Author): Something I was keen to talk about was the way that you construct your parts; how you fit in that slightly different melodic voice, where you have taken things from the original demos—be it the solo in ‘Stand in Line’, or the intro riff here. I really like the fact that you take one or two bars, and then build your own world around it.

Bedggood: I think it’s a natural thing with how I play. I play completely differently from how you do—everyone plays differently—so it’s just what my fingers naturally do. I think about it, but it’s a bit of a natural thing as well.

Arnold (Author): So a bit of an instinctual thing, where you translate and you’re working the song . . .

Bedggood: And it’s the notes, but it’s also just the feeling, and rhythm . . . Where you place the notes . . . I think that’s just individuality of playing.

Arnold (Author): I like that a lot. With the role you play in these recordings, I get this real authenticity, and it happens each time on a different instrument. So the mandolin will have authenticity, and the organ . . . But it’s important, because it brings this different trip. It’s like yesterday, when you were talking about picking up a lick . . . Would you say you [start with] a general idea of how the song is . . . ?

Bedggood: So I have an outline of what I want to do, and it’s about knowing what the most important notes in the part are, and then working around that. Making sure those notes are in there, but not spelling them out necessarily by putting them in. Putting them in there, but masking them a little bit, or making them sound a bit different.

Arnold (Author): Playing them your way.

Bedggood: And each time playing them a bit differently, if it’s not a really specified lick to do. So it doesn’t sound like we’ve just ‘cut and pasted’ stuff in.

Arnold (Author): When I hear these lines, when they get into your ‘language’, they lose the thing that is so heavily featured in what I do, which is to write the straight melody and then walk away from it, and take out ornamentation. And I don’t have the capacity to deliver on the ornamentation either, which is possibly why I walk away . . . But it’s just a really interesting dance, as a creative thing. That you see a piano part like that build up each time, incrementally . . .

Bedggood: But when you build it up, you’ve sometimes gotta come back . . . It can get a bit ‘jazz’ at times, so you’ve got to be a bit careful. (July 17, 2010 session interview with author)

This conversation underlines the considered use of technique and the reliance on intuitive creative practice. Bedggood trusted in his technique and scene to help deliver the necessary augmentation to remove the more digital age cut and paste quality. Similarly, Kitney further articulated his creative process and his acknowledgment of interdependence in this stage of recording. In general he observed:

The hardest thing to do is to intellectualise and verbalise that. Because some things come from instantaneous, spur-of-the-moment, instinctive, gut reactions. Most of it, though, comes from an evolutionary process of reading the song, and where it’s going, and where it’s coming from, and so where it should be. And it’s a matter of marrying those two things. Marrying that preconceived ‘what am I going to do with this song’ with ‘what kind of magical little spur-of-the-moment things can happen’ . . . it’s 99% what you’ve worked out in previous takes, and rehearsing, and preconceived things . . . And then there’s that instinctive 1%—the thing that you think of in milliseconds prior to doing it. ‘What if I do this that I’ve already done before?’ ‘What if I do this, but I’ll just try a slightly different angle on it?’ That thought process happening when you’ve actually started doing the fill, and sometimes you can pull it off. Most of the time you can pull it off. (July 17, 2010, session interview with author)

This observation has reiterated the central contention of the exegesis that instrumental composition in this process is a blend of purposeful application of the technique of a practitioner applying the knowledge of the field, and the risky technique of fishing. As discussed earlier, it was felt that the drum part of the band demo of “Tumbling Down” (Appendix Four) was not really working. For the album this was corrected with clear use of musical technique. Kitney purposefully straightened the chorus feel: “Rather than following every anticipation that the acoustic is doing, just straightening it out half the time, and catching every second acoustic guitar anticipation piece” (July 17, 2010, session interview

with author). However, in the process of straightening the feel and moving from brushed to sticks he invented a highly “melodic” verse part. His observation on this composition reveals both intuitive musical feel and studied instrumental quoting:

I was feeling like possibly visiting that little interesting space that Brian Wilson was dealing with in '66, '67 . . . Using . . . Hal Blaine who was just great at doing colourful patterns with toms, and just hitting things here and there . . . I mean, it just sounds ridiculously stupid but . . . hitting things in the right musical place. (July 17, 2010, session interview with author)

A significant addition at this stage of the project were the string and brass parts. The parts were arranged by Georgia Fields. They are comprised of new composed melodic and harmonic material. Fields’ description of the process has revealed a very “songwriter” approach in the fishing for melody. However, it also reveals a very purposeful awareness of the role the orchestrations play:

I tend to do most of this stuff by ear, and then tidy the melody up on manuscript as I go . . . I found that I tended to naturally hear more higher and ornate melodies, which then needed to be reigned back in for the bass [tuba]. I start by singing along with the track, and trying to get countermelody or accompanying idea going, and then I develop it from there. With these Tuba parts the ‘development’ was actually to rein it back, rather than add more in. (July 17, 2010, session interview with author)

This same method was further elaborated with Fields’ composition of a new harmony part in the chorus of “Follow the Sun” (The Swamp Dandies 2011). While the note choice was simply something she “just heard” (July 17, 2010, session interview with author) it was a direct reference to The Beachboys and their “viva harmony” spirit:

when you played me this the other day just on the piano, it reminded me a lot of The Beach Boys. My Dad gave me their greatest hits when I was eight, which I listened to a lot . . . And I guess they have a lot of harmonies, so I thought, ‘One more can’t go wrong!’ (July 17, 2010, session interview with author)

David McCluney’s engineering technique continued in the same manner as the demos. He articulated that because the production team had made so many records together

in the past that many decisions went past without comment: “We just know the moves, we’ve worked them out” (July 17, 2010, session interview with author). However this left important room to:

take a bit more care when you know what a good sound should be. And it’s just a matter of when you listen to it, knowing when to reject it. And saying ‘that’s not right, let’s get it better’. But that’s just experience. (July 17, 2010, session interview with author)

The daily immersion in the field for years had helped McCluney refine his judgment in relation to compression in particular, observing an important recent discovery in his professional practice:

It’s easy to get wrong. Something I’ve learned in the last six months more than ever is about the attack and release of the compressor, and how it affects the feel of the instrument that you put it on, and how it sits with the track that you put it on. The way that it breathes, in a way . . . I just used to hit everything hard, and lots of times that works great, but lots of times it doesn’t—you have to be a bit more careful, and think more about it. (July 17, 2010, session interview with author)

The additional significance of scenes and how they contribute to artistic decisions was revealed in the following conversation:

McCluney: Well, you listen to the sounds, and the style and the genre . . . I think the idea of a language is good. Because thinking along those lines . . . It just puts you in that frame of mind, and you’re listening to the sounds in that context.

Kitney: And a language sets parameters. I’ve got an entire drum kit set up here, but I didn’t touch the toms at all for that song. Restricting your parameters, or working within restrictions is really good.

Arnold (Author): Genre restrictions, in the realm of infinite possibilities. You go—‘good, we know not to go [shreds on guitar].’

Kitney: Restrict your language to a certain amount of words, and you have to make the most of those words.

McCluney: There is another word for that, and it’s ‘taste’.

Bedgood: Appropriateness. (July 13, 2010, session interview with author)

The restriction of available choices as dictated by the (non-specified) scene and knowledge of the field was seen by all contributing artists as a good thing, and attributed very positive descriptors such as “appropriate” or good “taste”.

The elasticity of roles in the studio was further underlined by the reflections on the process of playing the finished acoustic guitar parts and singing the lead vocals. The journal has documented this interesting conflict between roles within the one person. When playing the guitar there was clear psychological disengagement from those performances, with the production role winning the battle for my attention. The focus was on the finished album and the interplay between parts more than the actual moment of delivery:

I wasn't really concentrating or emotionally engaged in my playing here . . . very purposeful 'doing the job' . . . I was very engaged in the producer role . . . thinking, thinking, thinking. 'What have we got here?' (Author July 16, 2010)

However, when singing, there was a total immersion into the emotional performance with a view to capture the essence of the song. This underlines the interdependence of stages. It was a return to the conceptual starting point—the song and its meaning.

I was just loving singing . . . singing the songs . . . no thoughts about mic. levels. 'Olivia', 'Follow the Sun', 'You're Not Coming Home' live with the piano, 'The Deal'. All just singing, being a muso. All thoughts of album production out of my mind . . . just back into the songs trying to 'emote' . . . catch the feeling and meaning of the song. Occasionally concentrating on pitch, deluding myself that I was all over it . . . Really looking forward to getting into the really raw emotional ones for me . . . 'Until You Fall', 'Tomorrow' and particularly 'Fall Into My Hands'. (Author July 16, 2010)

It became a theme across the lead vocal performances that I would abandon my own clear production perspective of seeking emotional clarity above all else in search of straight pitch accuracy. As Justin Neibank has observed:

Many people don't realise this, but vocal style is about pitch versus time: the way an artist bends the note actually defines who they are as singer. So when you auto tune someone, you're actually taking away all their style. (cited in Massey 2009, 6)

Consciously, from a production perspective, this would absolutely represent my position; yet when applying this production overview to my own vocal performances self-consciousness became an impediment:

I'd rather have that feeling, and then edit than miss out on the emotion . . . Funnily enough I don't seem to feel this way about my own performances—emotion schmotion. On the day when I was singing I made a big song and dance about how auto tune had actually helped my pitch as a singer, believing that my rhythmic playing was getting worse due to lack of actual gig practice, but that my lead vocal pitch was vastly superior . . . Well . . . sadly, I have to say I'm not hearing it in the vocals . . . all I hear is death by out of tune. Bedgy and Dave felt these vocals had a great deal of emotion . . . possibly they do . . . but . . . whoa . . . . PITCHY! It was when I requested that auto tune be applied to all vocals all the time [while monitoring] so I didn't get grumpy at the whole song that Dave observed that I am 'a lead singer after all'. I can still deliver some quality 'I'll be in my trailer' petulance when required. (Author July 30, 2010)

This conversation also reiterates the flexibility of roles, when I became more of a “lead singer” it became important for Bedggood and McCluney to produce the performance, using their own judgment as to what was emotionally communicative in relation to technical accuracy.

In summary, the tracking stage of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) has demonstrated the interpretation and additional composition of pre-existing songs into recorded form. The phenomenon of creativity as practiced by the participants has displayed similarities to the songwriting process in the use of semiconscious fishing combined with the deliberate pursuit of sonic and instrumental quotation. The participants also used their deep immersion in the field to help direct their aesthetic decisions. The roles of the participants were elastic, depending on the situation, and the definition of the main event status of the session was also elastic due to technical developments that enabled a great deal of the demo material to be used on the finished recording. Ideas of taste and appropriateness were articulated by the group and this too was informed by the immersion in the field in the form of a subcultural scene musical lexicon.

### **The Edit**

So keep the poison down  
Don't give the voices sound  
Because things won't look the same

In the cool light of day. (Arnold 2005)

By 2005 I seemed to be suspicious of paying too much heed to mystical voices. Ostensibly, the editing process is a “cool light of day” enterprise, providing more clinical correction to the excesses of more emotionally charged creative meanderings. However, as with the delineation between other stages, there is a circumstance-driven blurred line. For, in addition to providing the opportunity for clinical reflection, it also contained many new compositional performances. As observed earlier, William Moylan has referred to this stage as the “mix down rehearsal” and that it has become of increased significance as recordists can now “hold time in their hands” (2008, 340). With such unilateral power the editor’s role in sensitively shaping the aesthetic must be considered, particularly as notions of perfection are so contestable within the culture (Zagorski-Thomas 2007, 197). From my production perspective in the composition of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) the editing stage was used to add additional parts where a major studio was not deemed necessary. Performances were adjusted to best communicate the central artistic message and parts and sounds were neaten up. Most significantly, this stage was used to examine the entire narrative of the album and the success of the three tracking stages.

To begin with bass parts were added across the whole album. This was delivered with a very similar disengaged technique as the acoustic guitar parts:

I always enjoy playing the bass, but it was interesting that because I was . . . focused as a producer . . . I didn’t really let go . . . I’ll re-examine these parts, but I expect that a certain disengagement from the artistic highs of the last couple of weeks is important to regenerate my long-term plan for the album—a marathon not a sprint and all that. (Author July 30, 2010)

To further underline the commitment to simple augmentation of the gestalt narrative (instead of my own performance) it was noted that:



I felt this role was very ‘get the job done’ . . . if the bass is too present in the front of a track . . . too flamboyant, it would distract from the song . . . so it’s fill the bottom end and make the ‘feel’ feel good physically . . . that is the most important job . . . I think perhaps I play a lot of bass on a lot of recordings because I have no bass ego. I am thoroughly satisfied in other areas. Basically, if bass Greg has any great chops . . . waiting for their moment to shine producer and singer-songwriter Greg has got them thoroughly hidden away. Save it for your bass solo record Greg. (Author July 30, 2010)

With this more purposeful approach the clarity of sonic and instrumental quotation was direct. In “Are You True?” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) a Lenny Kravitz approach was pursued and on “Until You Fall” it was played in the clear acknowledgment of “McCartneyish bass being the biggest influence on my playing” (Author July 30, 2010). Similarly, on “The Deal” (The Swamp Dandies 2011), “I began heavy on the McCartneyisms, ultimately adopting a much more spartan part. Chord outlines and a few octave embellishments, nothing fancy . . . do the job” (Author August 27, 2010).

Although the quotes were occasionally ruled inadmissible by a gestalt considering, scene conscious “self-hanging judge”:

“Tumbling Down” began with grand visions of Carol Kaye and Paul (McCartney) before I realised that I just needed to cool it and that I wasn’t sounding like a 60’s melodic bass genius, I was sounding like an inappropriate wanna be. So back to the tonic with a few deviations for me. Once again . . . doing the job. It has to feel good, and it has to support everything that is at the front of the listeners mind. (Author August 27, 2010)

The additional recorded parts were often delivered with similar purposeful disengagement. A great deal of the compositional work had already been done. When Bedggood was asked his artistic vision for the backing vocals he quipped: “sing in tune, sing in tune, sing in tune” (cited in Author August 9, 2010). However, it should be noted that this simple approach was made possible by a longstanding working relationship where the vocal blend with the lead singer had been worked out. This journey had been undertaken across

several years of both vocalists working together, and separately within the field. It was noted in the journal that:

In the early days I felt Bedgy blended by softening his sound. I have always liked a harmony to hit hard and he has developed this blend over time. Recently he has been singing out more in his band The Wilson Pickers and it means the harmonies are much harder in their attack. It's a big step forward, and after this session I don't feel another vocalist will be required for the hard hitting harmony. I clearly remember the first time this happened with Bedgy when working on Carus' *Three Boxes* (2007). He hit the harmony coming out of the middle 8 in 'Last Days of Winter' in a manner I had never heard before (full tonal note heavy) and instantly the harmony was more powerful. By now this technique has become a great feature of his backing vocals, and he can always go back to a softer sound if I have sang the lead vocal more softly. (Author August 9, 2010)

It is significant to the discussion to contrast this purposeful journey to a vocal blend across a career with the happenstance account given to the vocal blend in Elton John's band (Smeaton 2001).

For the fiddle part in "Swamp Thing" (The Swamp Dandies 2011) the process had more co-compositional similarities to the other instrumental parts across the album:

I sang a note [I] imagined the solo starting on and away Bedgy went—ripping a couple of solos out. One was charmingly drunk and melodic sounding which says everything I want that track to say, so we are going to run with that. (Author August 9, 2010)

An important aesthetic issue became apparent as the editing took place. Due to the visual ease of the computer program in ascertaining the accuracy of performances it became increasingly important that the grid lines of the track (and the potential to tune everything) did not influence the editing decisions. Using a Brad Jones technique it was determined that editing should be done "with my ears rather than my eyes" (Author August 9, 2010). Evidence of using inaccuracy to enhance feel and subcultural authenticity was present in the editing of "Follow the Sun" (The Swamp Dandies 2011): "I tended to let a slightly late bass

part stay but would adjust any parts that were a little pushy, I feel this tends to make the global feel cooler” (Author August 9, 2010).

Yet, not all inaccuracy is cool. While the original band demo of “The Deal” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was felt to demonstrate a great amount of vibe and authentic band character, it had a significant mistake which crossed a production value line. The journal documents a certain war of attrition factor with this difficult edit, and the method employed to fix the problem demonstrated problem-solving deliberateness.

I fixed up the giant timing debacle that was happening in the middle 8. I played the bass in time and then edited the track to that (shifting the entire band). Step by step I think we’re getting there with this. (Author August 27, 2010)

With the reflective and often solitary nature of this process it became the stage where the most uncertainty crept in. While there were certain creative highs, such as the sonically quoted and naïve performance of the harmonica on “Everybody Stands in Line” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) that reinforced the idea of using a new [ish] instrument for inspiration:

I just bunged down a suck and blow part. I had no idea what notes I was playing, I just played the E harp (which I don’t know how to do) and edited out anything that sounded really bad, which wasn’t much. Hard to play a dud note really. I think this adds an obvious Dylan-esque sound, while helping with rhythm . . . This song has the mood, Steve Earle meets Dylan—and that is fine by me. (Author August 28, 2010)

The Theremin overdub was conceptually purposeful, sonically referenced and added novelty. It reinforced the global narrative through melody repetition. However, the doubts that were present during this stage also appeared:

The reason I put this on the track [“You’re Not Coming Home” The Swamp Dandies 2011] was to add a . . . (dare I say it) . . . random . . . quality to the track. I think this introduces a strange ethereal swamp alien schlock feeling just at the conclusion of the ‘trad-ish’ New Orleans funeral section. I enjoyed the performance but I will have to check it doesn’t interrupt the otherwise successful

mood. We then added the same part an octave down at the conclusion of 'Until You Fall' [The Swamp Dandies 2011]. Same again . . . nice music . . . is it right? For all of the charm of the instrument and other worldliness . . . is it too much? I am definitely doing a 'Brian' on this . . . gross conceptual impulsiveness . . . Watch this space . . . inspired pop cross reference ("Good Vibrations" 1966) or cheesy inappropriate electricity? (Author August 20, 2010)

The waning of production confidence is also revealed by the list of: "demons of doubt"

1. Is Olivia too slow? I didn't think so when I heard it back well balanced by Dave, but it seems to be a bit of a kill joy when it kicks in now. Bad mixing by me or bad tempo by me? Either way . . . I'm in trouble. I'll run this by Brad and see how he reacts. I have immense trust in his first artistic instinct and as this is version number three for me . . . I am starting to lose perspective. Fixable, but kinda scary.
2. The drum feel in verse one of "Are You True?" a bit pushy. Once again early good rough mixes were fine. But now it seems uncomfortable to me. Brad? What say ye?
3. "The Deal" I'm glad we thought the demo had a 'vibe' because it is as rough as guts. I had to do some major time editing in the middle eight to remove a crazy speed up. I think I've fixed it, but this is an example of where the 'vibe' has some serious issues in the cool light of day.

In some ways this is an enviably small cast of demons at this stage, but I notice I feel very differently when it is my record. When producing others I 'back my arm' with much more gusto. (Author August 20, 2010)

The journal at this point has clearly demonstrated a conflict between the roles in a self-production. It must be noted that in a production for another artist I would take a pastoral care role as well. While there were comparatively few doubts, those doubts loomed larger due to the absence of a calm mentor. I could not access that part of my standard producer character.

In summary, the editing stage provided much more creative material than a mix audition. However, these creative performances were biased towards the purposeful rather than the impulsive. An emotional disengagement was applied as a technique to provide more

disciplined scrutiny. It was at this stage when uncertainty moved to the fore in my production perspective. Decisions were informed by subcultural notions of appropriateness. The application of sonic and pop-cultural referencing was continued as a technique.

### **The Mix**

As Moylan has observed “the mix is a performance of the recording” (2002, 303). Such performances have changed a great deal with the advances in recall potential. A mix can now be revisited and tweaked over and over again. While this has given recordists more options, it has arguably robbed them of decisiveness. The mix of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was spread across a month, with all of the tracks being sent overseas in advance of my arrival. Travelling to Nashville gave the mix the psychological Lanois event (cited in Massey 2009, 15) quality:

I spent the day walking around Nashville while Brad sat on a panel. I ate my own body weight in burrito form and then walked it off in the heat. Strolling past big ol’ southern houses (they all look big compared to Melbourne) through the leafy streets. Occasionally people were sitting out on their porch . . . seriously . . . was that Ice tea? I walked past two young blokes who said ‘Woss up y’all?’ And the trains keep on rolling out of town. I have to remind myself I am in the real Nashville not Nashvilleworld—a construct of my subconscious. (Author September 9, 2010)

It also added an important, time stipulated, decisiveness. There was no commercial deadline, just a “short time in Nashville” directive. The mix was done by Brad Jones mixing at Alex the Great (studio). As discussed earlier, this decision was made in response to subcultural influences and production values. To reiterate, it was felt that Jones provided the best possible blend of acoustic warmth and hipness without any hi-fidelity compromise. An additional motivator for the decision was the extra compositional material he regularly adds to his mixes, which was discovered during the mixing of *Three Boxes* (Carus Thompson and the True Believers 2007). By 2010 the decision was made with complete confidence in a longstanding professional relationship. A scene as part of the greater field had been

established. Missy Higgins (2012) has observed the influence of the same scene on her recent recordist practice. In particular, she has articulated the creative significance of working with Brad Jones and his surrounding non-mainstream-country Nashville scene at Alex the Great. She has expressly acknowledged the importance of her immersion in that highly particular art world.

Jones pays a great deal of heed to his first listen of a song, trusting that any song narrative issues will be revealed at that moment. His technique is far more message and meaning focused than sonic. He approaches the mix in the manner a contributing musician might “jam” or fish for an approach. He has observed:

I do my mixing in two stages—the first stage I don’t try to do any volume or eq stuff, I just sort of roam around the mix with no rhyme or reason, randomly trying stuff as it occurs to me. The idea in this stage is to move fast, work sloppy, and keep the overview. The best ideas come in the first 2–3 passes. After I’ve free-associated a bit, THEN I get into the actual mixing nitty-gritty of volume and tone. I think guys who first thing jump right into the eq’ing of the snare are missing a huge window of creativity, which won’t open up again once you’ve heard the song a half-dozen times. (February 7, 2011 email message to author)

The further editing of “Olivia” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was an example of this technique: “I haven’t mixed it yet—before I do I’m sending you your rough with one lap taken out of the outro—seems to end classier that way for me—you know, the perfect paragraph without any extra sentences” (August 23, 2010 email message to author). Bruce Swedien has also noted that the “the best recordings are very intuitive” (cited in Massey 2009, 45) and that: a “mix is done when the music feels complete . . . when the song has successfully made its statement” (cited in Massey 2009, 48).

It is also significant to acknowledge that many technical decisions were consciously exploiting comparative subcultural notions of authenticity. When queried about his avoidance of top end (in the sonic spectrum) Jones observed “top end would be great . . . if we were

making a fucking Enya record” (cited in Author September 9, 2010). While a new age artist such as Enya was used as an exemplar of how not to compose the sound, positive sonic quotation remained a significant determinant of choices. On “Tumbling Down” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) Jones clearly referenced 1990s’ indie-pop darlings The Sundays in his approach to the guitar sound, which was in turn (as noted earlier) a clear sonic quote of The Pretenders by Myself as the guitarist (Author September 10, 2010).

To further add to the notion of elasticity of roles, Jones composed several additional instrumental parts. While the bass harp on “Everybody Stands In Line” (The Swamp Dandies 2011), the baritone guitar augmenting the riff beneath the solo on “Fall Into My Hands” (The Swamp Dandies 2011), and the vibes beneath the glockenspiel in “Tumbling Down” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) all augmented pre-existing melodic harmonic parts, the harp trill in the middle 8 of “Tomorrow” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was entirely new music. Interestingly, this part was first greeted with uncertainty: “I think I just had a little Paul McCartney moment on hearing Phil Spector’s version of long and winding road (legendarily he called and abused him for his over the top arrangements)” (Author September 7, 2010). Such introductions late in the process demanded a leap of faith and a clear yielding of the individual production position. The ease to make this move was clearly documented:

I have never experienced such a natural global aesthetic affinity for a record of mine with the mix engineer. It is amazing how little I have to add to mixes, because I[‘m] so happy with the brick work of the mix . . . no . . . hey let’s start again, we’re off track here. How about a different eq on just about everything? We’re screaming through it! Warm acoustic instruments big drums, perfect vocal eq, overarching production sensibility happening. It’s worth noting that as Brad is such a happening producer it is nice to liberate myself from certain judgments and run with his observations. I’ve not really stepped back in this manner since working with James Black back in the *tosaw* [Things of Stone and Wood] days. (Author September 7, 2010)

The only real contentious points were over the string entry into the second verse of “Tomorrow”. Much in the manner of “chase the demo” I had been so happy with the desk

mix that it was hard to be flexible. A contributing factor may have been that this song enjoyed favourite child status with both producer and mixer:

The last edit was bit of horse trading over the string entry I still wanted the strings to appear at Vs 2. Brad didn't like them recognising that the message I was hoping to get out was not that of a quartet but about seven strings with another seven further up an octave 'all "vibratoing" at different times'. I took this point and stored it away for use down the track (I will live this dream one day). He also felt that the clear entrance and the little organ entry to the chorus was undermined by the high string. As a compromise we left the room sound hovering in the background. Usually I would be suspicious of a compromise worrying that ultimately nobody will really be happy. However, in this case, I am happy so perhaps it is not really that much of a compromise. Brad freely acknowledged that this is his favourite on the record. What can I say, as we printed this and I had a chance to listen I said 'this is the best thing I have ever done by miles'. And I believe it. 'You should be proud' (said Jones) . . . Well thanks Brad. (Author September 10, 2010)

Freed from any technical involvement the production method became much more intuitive in an attempt to ensure the album would have a regular listen-a-ability. To ensure this a semiconscious "beer enhanced half scrutiny" was applied:

I gave the mixes thus far the beer test. I drank a beer and listened loud. . . . for kicks. I just let myself enjoy the album. (Author September 9, 2010) . . . (and) . . . In the evening before dinner I gave the album the beer test again. I drank beer and danced around not really concentrating, just enjoying. It's a pretty good test because if I do notice something in this setting then I feel I have to deal with it, it must be significant. (Author September 10, 2010)

In summary, the mix stage provided all of the anticipated technical balancing, equalisation and compression expectations, but it also delivered extra musical information and further narrative enhancing edits. The mix engineer's method was more similar to the role played by contributing musicians and the producer, with demonstrable displays of fluidity in roles. In this instance with edits, new music and clear decisions to not correct out of tune vocals due to their personable and "conversational" quality (Author September 11, 2010) the mix engineer decisively stepped into the production chair. To reiterate the central themes of this exegesis, the composed mixed sound was informed by a deep subcultural



scene understanding learnt from the immersion in the field. The method displayed deliberate problem-solving techniques (such as the reduction of harmony parts for clarity in “Are You True?” [The Swamp Dandies 2011], and the simple turning up of a piano part in “Follow the Sun” [The Swamp Dandies 2011] [Author September 11, 2010]). It also displayed semiconscious fishing at the river of the mix engineer’s first listen. The process demonstrated that this mix was far more than the crafting of the component parts, it delivered a significant new contribution to the global aesthetic realisation of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011).

### **The Master**

Jim Demain has been described as the “go-to mastering guy in Nashville” (Clark, R 2007). As the album’s mastering engineer his role was brief but significant in the composition of the global sound. Moylan (2002, 317) has described mastering in terms that are quite technical and craft-like. It seems to be the final polish of a finished artefact, correcting minor inconsistencies and track placement task. However, Demain’s method demonstrates greater creativity and a global aesthetic perspective that once again blurs the line between participants. In interview he barely mentioned specific equalisation or compression techniques. He has described his method as:

much more emotional than technical . . . Sometimes I don’t know what I’m doing . . . I push it around the canvas to see what feels right. The creative process is a difficult beast to wrestle, you know it’s going to take work and you know things will usually change and you will discover stuff along the way . . . I don’t know if I respond to the song on a conscious level. Sad doesn’t mean I don’t put tops on it. I don’t know if I think it through. I’m in a subconscious swami or meditative state. You have to let it soak in and see what happens. I don’t want to find out half way through where I should have gone. I have to find a place (by experimenting first) I try it out . . . I ‘a b’ them by pressing the button so many times I don’t know which is which . . . If it’s cool I run with it. (September 10, 2010, interview with author)

This technique is reminiscent of all of the creative compositional stages of the recording process.

Similarly, Demain has utilised his immersion in the field to apply aesthetic decisions that are clearly informed by subcultural taste determinants. For example, his further addition of warmth to augment Jones' taste in this area is underpinned by a dual aesthetic purpose. Firstly, it is to desire to clarify the vocal: "I've learnt a lot about mastering from my photography. Everything has to have a subject and the vocal is the subject. The vocal is what everybody listens to in vocal music" (September 10, 2010, interview with author). This opinion is demonstrable of the interdependence of stages. He has refocussed the entire project on the vocal as both the primary performance and as the inherent possessor of literary meaning. Secondly, he has ensured warmth to make it cooler to his own notions of the scene. He applies another positive descriptor from the subcultural lexicon:

I like the bottom to be at -16 and the tops (10k) to be at -47 in general. While there is clear broad sonic range the bass is more present. (Why? With more bass) Listen to how sexy that is! It moves! (September 10, 2010, interview with author)

Demain felt it was important to articulate that from a mastering engineer perspective he was hoping to bring the focus away from volume in mastering. He added in the interview that he was concerned about "the increasing trend to towards volume" (September 10, 2010, interview with author) in the mastering process. In this discourse he has been an active participant in the public domain as well, he has argued:

Country music that's distorted? That's just wrong . . . Every mastering engineer would breathe a sigh of relief if we could just dial it back. There's not one mastering engineer here thinking, 'I can't wait to trounce this record into oblivion.' (cited in Cooper 2008)

This view has also been expressed by Steve Fishell: "the problem with listening to those kinds of records where everything is coming at you like a brick wall is that after five tracks you're exhausted you just don't want to listen to music anymore" (cited in Massey 2008, 5). It is demonstrable of a deliberate response to a highly particular subcultural

discourse between mastering engineers in general and Nashville mastering engineers in particular. This debate represents an important clarification of the mastering engineers' role in the process. Demain clearly questioned the aesthetic worth of compressing the dynamic performance out of records. He has also revealed a significant opposition to such commercially motivated directives that might compromise the finished artefact.

The role of the mastering engineer in the sonic composition of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) has demonstrated semiconscious creativity and highly deliberate technique that both contributed to the global sound. Aesthetic decisions were informed by subcultural scene determinants and a deep immersion in the field. The interdependence of stages was also revealed in the engineer's deliberate decision to foreground the vocal and consequently literary meaning.

In summary, the composition of the sound of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) demonstrated great fluidity of roles between performers, engineers and producer. Human performance was consistently in the foreground. Musicians used their technical immersion in the field and their own subjective interpretations of subcultural scene perspectives to inform their performances. It should be noted that while there was great deal of interdependence between stages, the musicians did not articulate their engagement with the pre-existing literary text, yet they consistently considered the pre-existing musical content when adding additional composed performances. This significant silence in the free interviewing process should be considered significant within this particular composition and invites further discussion about band performers and their relationship with the literary text.<sup>23</sup> The engineering team displayed clear aesthetic technique that was far more indicative of art as opposed to "mere reproductive craft". Considering that all participants collaborated in this

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<sup>23</sup> Beyond the scope of this exegesis.

composition, it also seems to be an exemplar of the systems model of creativity as presented by McIntyre:

this creative action occurs within specific structural frameworks, legal, technological, artistic, social and cultural, that can be seen, at one and the same time, to be both constraining and enabling for ‘record writers’. This process can be exemplified by the systems model of creativity which . . . accounts for both individual and collaborative action on the part of record writers. (2009 n.p.)

Further reflection on my production style requires a return to Moorefield’s (2010, 19) Brian Wilson model. While a producer is generally understood to focus on the delivery of a finished artefact, the expertise to achieve this outcome can vary considerably. My journey from songwriter and performer to producer is demonstrable and it is inherited from Wilson. There is a comparative silence on “black letter” sonic construction (microphones, room placements, effects and equalisation) throughout the journals as I do not consider my engineering to be a significant expertise. A producer who had journeyed from studio and live engineer into this role would probably display a totally different perspective in their pursuit of a similar end. I would always choose to augment my rudimentary engineering with another dedicated engineer in the studied view that they would not only have the capacity to make the album sound traditionally better but would also contribute to the entire production. In this case, David McCluney and Brad Jones<sup>24</sup> stepped into this role demonstrating recordist fluidity. Generally, my production focus is on the composition of songs (melodies, harmony and lyrics), the “comprovisation” (a pop version of Knight’s [2011, 2] citing Michael Hannan’s [2006, 1] improvisation and composition intersection) and of instrumental parts (including collaborative comprovisations with other participants), arrangement of song and album narratives, and the application of appropriate subcultural musical language.

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<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that Jim Demain (Personal Communication September 10, 2010 confirmed email January 15, 2013) considered adding a “tape flutter” effect to Swamp Theme to augment its “Satie-ish” sound but decided against it feeling that he was creatively overstepping as a mastering engineer. He considered this to be too production-compositional for his role.

Consequently, the reflections are more concerned with these areas. They show a producer who is pursuing the type of artistic invisibility or “absence summon[ing] presence” as documented by Michael Jarret (2012). Clearly this aesthetic modesty is not present as a songwriter or performer and the desire to be visible in these roles before my role as a producer demonstrates this foundational bias.

Across the album process all participants demonstrated, to varying degrees and with differing emphases, a methodological reliance on semiconscious fishing and the deliberate application of learnt methods. A significant feature of these field-learnt methods was the use of sonic and instrumental quoting to create an artefact that displays a Zak-style interactive “resonance” (2001, 184). The connection to works past and present has been acknowledged by all participants, and it is hoped that the album will in some way contribute to discussions with the records of the future. In consideration of these records and in consideration of the many subcultural cross references and autobiographical details it becomes important to analyse notions of meaning attached to this specific artefact.

## CHAPTER FIVE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

### The Reception

Like all albums, *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was released into a culture where its worth was measured against a series of subcultural conventions with elastic and multiple authenticities looming large at the front of the highly subjective critical mind. It is important to examine how the album was received and perceived, although it should be reiterated that this represents only part of the interactive composition of meaning. This section will focus largely on the critical response to *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) and the demonstrable popular reaction in new media. The critical response was positive with an arc from “damning with faint praise” at worst, to highly enthusiastic at best. It is significant to note that while I was concerned that a certain “sameness” would limit the narrative of the album, that decision seemed to trouble some critics. In *Rave* magazine Claire Rosenberg noted that:

Mostly . . . the band strike gold with their country and folk-inflected songs. Brass, fiddles and mandolin partner perfectly with The Swamp Dandies’ quirky melodies, and if the band keep to their country-folk path we can look forward to more tracks that inspire memories of holidays and good times. (2011)

The whole feeling of the album was praised; however, the inclusion “Are You True?” was deemed to evoke inconsistent resonances of “poodle rock” (“which unfortunately causes bad flashbacks to Bon Jovi” [Rosenberg 2011]) creating a contradiction of “Rock Pyrite” in comparison to the successful “folk gold” (Rosenberg 2011).

Similarly, in the *The Mag* “Roots” review (Wilks 2011, 56) it was “The Deal” (The Swamp Dandies 2011) with its dark sonic atmosphere that received the most positive review. This review was impressed with the band’s application of its longevity “combining the bands’ ten-year experience with the ‘look at me’ exuberance of a first recording” but

lukewarm about the general acoustic pop thrust saying that while “Olivia (was) a bright infectious mandolin laced love song . . . indicative of many tracks on the album . . . *The Swamp Dandies* really shine on darker acoustic fair such as . . . The deal” (Wilks 2011, 56). This slight criticism clearly underlines the potential discord between the album’s two outer markers. It seems a reasonable response from a more subcultural roots purist to be discomfited by the shameless exploitation of pop melodicism and harmony for its lack of edge and acoustic authenticity as understood by roots subcultural conventions.

Yet while these reviews seemed to express a mild concern at the marriage of pop and acoustic earnestness, it seemed that for Jeff Jenkins the greatest strength of the album was the crucial darkness lurking beneath the pop smile:

Arnold still knows how to write a nifty tune. ‘I still got fire left in my belly,’ he sings in the sparkling *Tumbling Down*, a duet with Georgia Fields. Later, he declares ‘he’s leaping into life like he’s crashing through a wave’. The mood is carefree, but the songs are deceptively dark. Arnold has crafted a classic. (*Stack* 2011)

More diligent in his research than most, he also mentioned the academic link. “This new album is part of Greg Arnold’s PhD project . . . But there’s nothing academic or formulaic about the songs” (Jenkins *Stack* 2011). He has reiterated his enthusiasm for the deceptive darkness when including the album in his annual top ten (“Albums of the Year” 2011). Critically, he understood the compositional intent and appreciated the narrative journey across the whole album.

In *Rhythms Magazine* (2012, 65), Martin Jones noted that with “Arnold’s knack for Beatle-esque pop melody” and the “old timey instrumentation . . . it’s not power pop, it’s horse-power pop”. Similarly, he has noted the connection with *Things of Stone and Wood* while observing that there is more freedom and technical capacity “to roam stylistically” (Jones 2012, 65) on this album. Ultimately, he concludes that “strings and horns are used in

classic pop form and Bedggood's talents zip in and out all over which help overcome the odd compositionally predictable moment to render a nimble pop record" (Jones 2012, 65). Jones also notes that "Arnold lets rip with another epic female-name chorus" in "Olivia" (Jones 2012). The song was also described as a "veritable foot tapper" ("Homebrew", 2011) and as "one of those beautiful little Beatles-esque simplistic 3 and a half minute songs Greg seems to throw out so easily" (Lost Songs.Co.UK 2011). It briefly appeared at number seven on the AIRIT "Great Southern Chart" (November 8, 2011).

While the use of a female name in the chorus was also mentioned in high profile interviews by both Robbie Buck (2011) and Lindy Burns (2011), it was not the lyrical resonance from the big hit "Happy Birthday Helen" (Things of Stone and Wood 1992) that gave the song a surprising modern viral (or at least cyber sniffle) life, it was Rachael Lucas' film clip ("Olivia" 2011). Utilising mimed performances by the band (with new drummer Monique Zucco), the clip tells a story (refashioned out of the story of the song's actual literary biographical inception) of a bachelor whose sad world is haunted by a ghost of the many classic personae of "Our Livvie". The clip had been popular anyway but it gained a significant boost when it received Olivia Newton John's imprimatur via the official website and "Facebook<sup>®</sup>" (January 10, 2012). She has described the clip as "sweet . . . and hilarious" and the song as "catchy" and also, clearly understanding the "crush" spirit of the song, reiterated her enthusiasm by "tweeting": "Awww thanks Swamp Dandies!! Sooo flattered! Hilarious! Catchy too!" (2012). She also chose to promote the clip and song in her promotional appearances for the film *A Few Best Men* (2012), which included the mainstream Channel Ten show *The Circle* (2012). As a consequence, her many followers in the cyber realm started visiting the clip and leaving comments, creating a genuine response in the press with feature articles in *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Dwyer 2012) and "Industrial Strength" (Eliezer 2012).



The responses in the comments section beneath the clip (Lucas 2011) include international quotes such as: “SOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO Great. . . Congrats from Lima, Peru!!” (victorvilleperu 2011), “I loved the music plus homage to Olivia. I cried to see this clip”<sup>25</sup> (giselle4695, 2011) and “Absolutamente GENIAL!” (6vst4v0 2011) Additionally it was felt that this was an “Homage to Olivia at its best . . . simple fun nostalgic quirky . . . luv it” (weezieolivia 2011). It was “a delicious treat!” (gooty64 2011) and jimster23 (2011) “Love(d) the song, the retrospect. . . . . and of course . . . Olivia!” With no “dislikes” (as at February 15, 2013) and a surprise personal invitation from Newton John to perform at the launch of her Cancer and Wellness Centre (see Appendix Three) it seems we had been understood in the new medium.

The response to the clip and the song were fleeting and did not result in a significant change in fortunes for the album; however, it demonstrated that the public as represented by Olivia Newton John fans seemed remarkably unconcerned with the marriage of organic acoustic instrumentation with pure pop melodicism, they just joyously consumed the clip for free in a very pop cultural manner. They interactively composed new meaning for the material after being invited to do so via their subcultural scene allegiance to Olivia Newton John. They responded without deep consideration to “Olivia” (Lucas 2011) in a manner that would be approved by Barker and Taylor as an appropriate reaction to a “simple thing of beauty” (2007, 160).

### **What *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) Means to Me**

I could not escape a plea from the heart  
 You know what it means to me  
 She said don't walk away I'm down on my knees  
 Please don't be mean to me. (Finn 1984 “Mean To Me”)

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<sup>25</sup> Translated from Portuguese.

There is an implication that the form of an album such as this (inextricably linked to a product for broadcast and sale) is defined by the relationship with the audience or market. Its meaning is determined by how it is received. I would contend that all popular recordings should also be examined from the artists' perspective as if the work was meant for them alone. The significance of Csikszentmihalyi's "person" (1997, 29) as creator, consumer and critic should be considered. While the art is almost inevitably made with the intent of broadcast, it does not necessarily follow that the aesthetic decisions were informed by the desire for it.

As discussed earlier, the history of popular music production is closely linked with commerce. Industrial success has afforded a few fortunate artists greater access to expensive resources to pursue increasingly elaborate productions. As Ed Cherney has suggested, we "hopefully make something where . . . commerce and art meet . . . at the same intersection" (cited in Massey 2000, 9). It is tempting to make our assessment of the worth of any popular music artefact utilising the word in the genre's title: popularity. This worth would be rendered quantifiable by sales alone. This test would instantly remove the majority of recordings from the discussion. Reiterating an earlier observation, most records are not hits. It is crucial in this particular analysis, and I would contend in the analysis of nearly all recorded popular music, that "popular" should be used as a descriptor of style not commercial viability. It is very important to note what the album is not about. It is not, and was never about "the money money money, the Cha-Ching Cha-Ching . . . the Ba-Bling Ba-Bling" (Cornish, Gottwald, Kelly and Simmons 2011). No aesthetic decisions in the composition of *Fall* (2011) were motivated by any hopes for material gain. This observation is not a surprising descent into comical subcultural rant ("it used to be about the music man!"). It is a reiteration of the central aesthetically serious intent of the pop musical pursuit and my own long-established artistic values ("the day a band starts thinking about demographics and

markets is the day that band should give up” Arnold [Author] cited in Dwyer 1995 [b], 22). The project was undertaken in the full understanding that it would, like the majority of other recordings, be a financial folly. “Demographic” and “drive time” imperatives were never mentioned in the journals. Any perceived catchiness was present due to the love of catchiness itself, not the love of any financial or status benefits that catchiness might afford its author.

It is important to reiterate that the autobiography reveals considerable “Supergrass style” anxiety at the time of Things of Stone and Wood’s pop success and that *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) explicitly documents this conflict (“Until You Fall” The Swamp Dandies 2011). The album not only deals with some of the lingering emotional issues, it also takes a position. It is celebratory of pop. To achieve the type of “soul baring” (Barker and Taylor 2007, 191) required for serious introspective art it is essential that album pulls back the curtain and reveals, not only the true complexity of a character, but the uncomplicated love of pop music as part of the authentic expression of self. Barker and Taylor argue that there is an increasing trend towards using “how successfully the artists expressed themselves” (Barker and Taylor 2007, 191) as a criterion for the assessment of rock, and they fear that while this criterion has led to some great work it has also been responsible for some “truly self-obsessed music” (Barker and Taylor 2007, 191). It could be contended that the love of pop and the “authentic recesses of the artists’ mental processes” (Barker and Taylor 2007, 191) are in no way mutually exclusive.

*Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) represents myself and my collaborative recordists in acoustic pop form. It is literally autobiographical as demonstrated by “Fall Into My Hands” “Tomorrow”, “Follow the Sun”, and “Until You Fall” (The Swamp Dandies 2011). It is also how I imagine the world. It is fiction as demonstrated by “You’re Not Coming Home” (The Swamp Dandies 2011). Yet that fiction often springs from a true biographical incident as

demonstrated by “Olivia”, “Are You True?”, “Tumbling Down”, “Everybody Stands in Line” and “The Deal” (The Swamp Dandies 2011). All of these stories and their recorded forms, independently and together, broadcast my character. They represent the coincidence of biographical, cultural and subcultural influences that have informed my character. These literary stories have been augmented with additional melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and sonic compositional material. This material also represents the major influences of my life, specifically the musical influences. Significantly, the marriage of direct acoustic organic instrumentation and pop melodicism (which could seem to be contradictory and definitely troubled some critical perception) is an absolutely authentic representation of my musical self. Had I compromised this honest artistic desire in the pursuit of some perceived (and highly contestable) subculturally ethnocentric notion of authenticity it would have actually compromised the true personal artistic authenticity of the work. Without the artistic will to personalise, *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) would have been no more than fad following and artless generic re-representation.

Similarly, the album represents the subscene of which I am a part: the band The Swamp Dandies. When listening to the album now, it is impossible for me to extricate the music from the process of making the music. The scene is held together by personal relationships. “This machine is made of people” (Wild Pumpkins At Midnight 1989). Consequently, the album is also a representation of all of the participants’ characters and all of their influences. It represents the coincidence of a group in a creative moment. It is a purposeful and chaotic union of multiple biographies and subcultural alliances that form a new elastic scene of their own. The project brought all of those influences together for a productive purpose. In addition, the making of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was fun. As Phillip Tagg has observed:

One of the initial problems for any new field of study is the attitude of incredulity it meets. The serious study of popular music is no exception to this rule. It is often confronted with an attitude of bemused suspicion implying that there is something weird about taking ‘fun’ seriously or finding ‘fun’ in ‘serious things’. (1982, 37)

It was also emotionally significant in the life of this band as the drummer moved to Japan at the album’s conclusion. In the journals it is noted that, after the final Hammond overdub: “We finished with this and it left us with a really nice feeling . . . texts back and forth afterwards . . . lovin’ ourselves sick” (Author July 16, 2010). The album has seemed to successfully represent Sawyer’s notion of “group flow” (2007, 71 cited in Morrow 2012, 3). We were a group happily “performing at the top level of its ability” (Morrow 2012, 3).

Simon Frith has argued that “any attempts to draw a clear distinction between authentic and inauthentic popular songs, using musicological or sociological criteria, are pointless” (2001, 106). It could, however, be argued in this context that an album’s authenticity should not be measured against a series of highly contestable, subjective and ethnocentric scene determinants. It could be measured against the honesty with which the art has been created. *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) is a true representation of myself, even if that truth has been imagined, on occasion, into a new fictional form. To reiterate the “Listener-causal” theory (Addis 1999, 12), there is an additional layer of emotional projection when I listen to the album, I can hear the “love” in the grooves. I hear the band as people, I recall the event, and I hear my family life. My motivation was to make what I believed was a great album and I drew from a well of personal experiences and musical skills to pursue this. The album is a succinct sonic narrative collating the collision of my present life, my future hopes and my memories. While it may be too pop for the folkies, too folky for the indie-hipsters and even too short for the prog-rockers, it is just right for me. Its broader cultural footprint has been light at best, but the journals reveal that *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) does pass three aesthetic “Polonius” tests. It possesses “brevity”, which “is the soul of wit”

(Shakespeare *Hamlet* Act 2, scene 2) and there has been “method” in the creative “madness”

(Shakespeare *Hamlet* Act 2, scene 2). Most importantly, as documented in the journals, I have to my “own self” been “true” (Shakespeare *Hamlet* Act 1, scene 3).

Time to sign off now. I have (a) record, I think it’s beautiful. I think it has delivered a great journey across a short period of time and I think it has my highest songwriting and recording peaks within the journey. Good luck out there little album called *Fall* . . . remember . . . no matter what happens . . . your father loves you. (Author September 11, 2010)

## CHAPTER SIX: WHAT HAVE I DONE?

I miss the eyes filled with believing  
And now I'm here just dreaming  
What have I done? What have I done? (Pettit and Fearon 2010)

To return to Zak's somewhat Dickensian "ghosts of records past, present and future" notion of resonance, it is important to acknowledge the significance of the recordings in the folio (2001, 184). The majority were made at the same time as *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011), and display demonstrable conversations between recordings. As co-producer for Carus Thompson's *Caravan* (2011) the importance of cohesive album narrative was particularly important. Some of the tracks were recorded in Europe with different line-ups in different studios, while others were recorded in Atlantis Sound in Melbourne with various members of his usual touring band. This presented significant challenges to cohesiveness. By choosing the same mixer to mix the whole album, and by judicious editing of the more idiosyncratic performances, I would contend that this hurdle was cleared comfortably to achieve a highlight within his catalogue. The album also provided some breakthrough broadcasts for the act with BBC Scotland (November 11, 2011) playing the co-written "Red Sky" (Arnold-Thompson) and BBC2 playing the co-written "You Can't Find Me" (Arnold-Thompson) ("Bob Harris Sunday" December 18, 2011).

Kelly Pettit's *These Days* (2010) was a country rock pop album. For the production, I felt that we needed to provide a simple and honest blue-collar band sound that augmented the charming nostalgic simplicity of his writing. This required playing the role of lead guitarist, Hammond organ and piano player, bass and backing vocalist in a very non-intrusive way. It was also important that this not sound like one person. It had to sound live and energetic. This was achieved by playing the songs live with The Swamp Dandies' drummer

Ian Kitney and then re-characterising into each of my instrumental roles to compose appropriate parts. I also felt that we needed to avoid his prior tendency to soften his essentially “blokesy” sound and style. This process was significant in that it reiterated the importance of artistic honesty and the emotional power of direct communication. The production received a great deal of positive responses from critics ([http://www.kellypettit.com/fr\\_home.cfm](http://www.kellypettit.com/fr_home.cfm)).

While credited as co-producer on Skipping Girl Vinegar’s *Keep Calm Carry the Monkey* (2011) my production role was much smaller than on their debut. I still engaged actively in the aesthetic discussions, but was less hands-on. The band had a strong vision and an excellent sense of sonic construction. I was utilised for my traditional musician/recordist language. I oversaw a few bed tracks, but mostly came in and played “random stuff” without any planning. They wanted more licks. The thumping piano on “Here She Comes” (Skipping Girl Vinegar 2010) demonstrated this technique. The seriousness of the aesthetic rigour applied to this album continued to inspire me, as had their debut, and once again it received a strong response from JJJ. It also received excellent reviews and helped establish the band’s presence on American College radio (<http://www.skippinggirlvinegar.com/>).

The purpose of the *We Went Down to the River* (2009–12) series was to provide a link between pedagogy and practice. New to music education, I felt it was important that students learn how to record their songs, with a particular emphasis on establishing an aesthetic vision. It was a response to my own observation at the comparative absence of songwriting and contemporary recording practice within the academy. The pedagogical studies of Lucy Green (2002) also contributed to this idea. These promotional NMIT promotional CDs are the outcomes of students working with a producer for one seven-hour session to establish their songs in recorded form. Across this series I taught myself to



engineer and contributed as a producer and instrumentalist. Significant outcomes of this series were the establishment of a production team and method for Georgia Fields (2011) and the establishment of Stonefield as a recording act. In a surprising subcultural link the group (comprised of mostly teenage sisters) was pursuing a 1970s' rock aesthetic very close to what I was pursuing in *The Roadside Attractions*.<sup>26</sup> After recording their demo in a very "live" session at Atlantis Sound, the song "Foreign Lover" (2010) was uploaded to "JJJ unearthed high" and was play-listed within days. It then won the competition and since then the band has signed to Warner's and played at Glastonbury Rock Festival in 2011.

The Roadside Attractions' album was the culmination of ten years' planning. When working on the folk rock debut album for Junior (2001) we noticed a shared passion for "southern rock" as exemplified by The Black Crowes. The album was intended to be a very 1970s' "dirty hippy love rock" album with an overriding naïve and inclusive philosophy. Live performances with uncontrolled spill and minimal digital correction were part of the method to achieve this aesthetic outcome. The album sounds very "valvey" and frozen in the 1970s, even though it was tracked direct to *Pro Tools* via an SSL desk; a desk I would normally associate with the bombastic excesses of the 1980s. This experience served as an important reminder to resist retro purist dogma. In a George Martin approved production technique, all I needed was ears (1994). My ears were more important than my analogue-centric bigotry.

Finally, the most significant contemporary recording on the artistic outcome of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) was *Georgia Fields* (Georgia Fields 2010). As a producer I neatened up the rhythm tracks and played a few additional instrumental parts but, most significantly, contributed to an already strong overarching aesthetic purpose. Pursuing a

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<sup>26</sup> Yet to be publically released.

blend of quirky pop, clever lyricism and lush orchestral arrangements we recorded the album in the same studio and used many of the same people on both albums. While I was thanked in the credits for contribution to “all production matters big and small” (Georgia Fields 2010), it should be observed that for a student recording it was profoundly influential on the work of the teacher. Fields was hired to arrange strings and brass for *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) and to sing the duet. Most importantly, Fields’ artistic commitment to providing little moments of wonder within every track reinforced the will to pursue the essential pop spirit in the recording of *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011). It was a reminder that every track had to possess something “amazing” as a song and a record together. This was achieved by blending very serious autobiographical lyrical content with a “viva pop” whimsy, giving the entire album a “the ship is sinking . . . champagne anyone?” feeling. It was demonstrated with the use of unusual instruments (cordless drills, vibes and megaphone sounds) and the joyous embrace of quotation in “This is Not a Drill” (Georgia Fields 2010), in which cellist Judith Hamann creates a one-person pastiche of the famous end of The Beatles’ “A Day in the Life” (1967). This new, younger subcultural scene of Fields and her companion recordists contributed not only actual performances, but also an important validation of the pop aspiration. The use of strings, brass, Theremin, “Leslie speakered” backing vocals and stomping drums have all demonstrated the conversation between these two companion productions and the celebration of pop artistry that they represent. The significance of the achievement of this debut album was recognised by both *The Sydney Morning Herald* who included Fields (along with Stonefield) as one of their “next big things” of 2011 (Olding and Palathingal 2011) and by ABC Radio National who made it their album of the week (2010).

Additionally, the continued engagement with another related subculture: Melbourne’s performance poetry scene, has continued as evidenced by the inclusion of two of *Fall*’s (2011) lyrics (“The Deal” [Arnold 2011] and “Until You Fall” [Arnold 2011]) as

well as “The Whisky Tango” (Arnold 2006) in *The Paradise Anthology 5* (Crane and Stuart 2012). This represents an achievement of a longstanding aesthetic aspiration (also achieved in 1994 in *Rolling Stone* with “Silent No Longer” [Arnold 1994]) that the lyrics can be appreciated independently in literary form unto themselves without their musical context.

While the focus of this exegesis has been on one specific recorded artefact it is important to acknowledge the artistic conversation that has taken place between live performances and recordings across the project. While the recordings are much more than mere phonographs of the live performances, I have still maintained a (decreased) role on the touring highway that was a significant part of my livelihood for the years preceding my return to study. This ongoing work represents a continuation of notions of authenticity attached to the capacity to play live that are so pronounced within the acoustic subculture. The arrangements composed for this setting often add to the creative journey of the material. In the case of my current live sets (solo and The Swamp Dandies) the songs have usually been developed in the studio in such a fashion to audibly present a live band playing music together. The songs are then augmented with additional improvised parts and sounds. It is a conscious pursuit of live performance communicative directness. After the recording, the songs are then refashioned and arranged into simple three-piece or solo “best of” versions for the live performance. This has been a constant feature of my artistic work since *Junk Theatre* (Things of Stone and Wood 1995). However, the requirement for honest reflection needs to add an important new discussion to this particular moment in my journey. I do enjoy playing live but I am much more sensitive to the career outcomes in this area. The room filling, PA toppling crowds of enthusiastic jumping hippies are no longer there for me. I cannot help but remember those days when playing now. It is in this context that I am most aware of a growing feeling that must accompany any artist on their (almost inevitable) journey away from the bright lights of the top ten to comparative obscurity: I’m still talking but people

aren't necessarily listening. Consequently, I manage the live performances judiciously in an attempt to avoid having this unhappy reality reverberate throughout quarter-filled rooms all over the country (Appendix Three).

So what have I done in this context? What is *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011)? *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) is a succinct ontologically independent gestalt. It is comprised of original composed songs, band and individual performances and additional sound recording compositional contributions. Most of these component parts represent ontologically independent gestalts unto themselves and are interdependent within the album. It was composed in such a manner as to create a non-conceptually themed narrative out of the subnarratives of the songs. The songs were composed using a semiconscious fishing technique, displaying knowing-in-practice. They also clearly demonstrate the holistic biographical, cultural and subcultural influences upon the author, and the author's immersion in the field. They were all composed music first, with the possible exception of "You're Not Coming Home" (The Swamp Dandies 2011), which was almost simultaneous. They were also all composed as songs before the recording session by myself, except for "You're Not Coming Home" and "Are You True?" (The Swamp Dandies 2011), which were co-written. There was additional compositional "writing records" material added by myself and the contributing recordists. The aesthetic decisions were made expressing the recordists' perceptions of good taste, appropriate language and authenticity. There were no binding recording rules, just the recordists' subjective interpretation and application of appropriate sonic and musical conventions to create a unique example of acoustic pop or even "horse power pop" (Jones 2012). It could be viewed as part of a scene, yet the scene is unofficial, highly elastic and comprised of all of the recordists involved and other like-sounding artists, unbeknownst to them. Additionally, each recordist has applied their idiosyncratic interpretation to the material to make it unique. *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) is not just

the songs in form, it is the product of an “art world” (Becker, 1982, 1) collision of multiple biographies, cultural and subcultural influences in a recording studio to create form.

*Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) has been released and it is going to be presented to radio in the U.S. in late 2013. The radio “plugger” feels it is appropriate for the AAA<sup>27</sup> format, which is “alternative but with an adult slant” (Stephen Green November 2, 2012 email message to author). So while the promotional and radio life of the album is not over,<sup>28</sup> the compositional and production processes have been articulated and analysed. The years spent on this project have been highly productive and artistically rewarding. They have become an unusually well-documented point on the continuum of my musical life. I hoped at the commencement of this project to understand my practice. Initially, I feared that by looking directly at the light source of my practice that I might lose the “sight”. As evidenced in the journals, I believed in mojo and chaotic happenstance. I had spent my “life” in the “thrall” . . . of “romantic” creative “shibboleths” (McIntyre 2012, 160). This project has provided important insights into these phenomena, yet it has not robbed me of any “shining” (King 1977), because the shining is not a real thing. Nor has it robbed me of any appreciation of pop music. Pop does not need the veil of mystery to augment its beauty. It does not so “fail” to “hold [my] attention that [I] have to diminish it with the invention of cheap, man-made Myths and Monsters” (Minchin 2008).

As documented in this exegesis, I have been a passionate fan of pop music since it was first made available to me and I have never grown out of it. I must awkwardly embrace this reality. Frith (1981) has argued that while there seems to be no cultural, class or national restrictions on “pop interest . . . the sociology of rock is inseparable from the sociology of

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<sup>27</sup> Adult Alternative album.

<sup>28</sup> Still on daily rotation at Dig radio as April 10, 2013 (<http://abcdigmusic.net.au/played>. Accessed April 10, 2013)

youth” (cited in Hamm 1995, 21). In 2006 I returned to university to complete a masters degree with the slight hope that I might find a path to a new more grown-up life, yet I seem to have found myself even more deeply immersed in the world of pop. The reason for this is simple. I do not believe it is a childish thing that must be put away. I take it seriously. I believe it is an overwhelmingly powerful art delivered in an ostensibly simple, yet surprisingly rigorous fashion by serious artists with a profound grasp of economical emotional communication.

In the early stages of this process, when in the first full flush of a scholar crush on the methodological potential for autoethnography, I wrote a poem that I hoped would conclude this exegesis. I hoped it would express my deep commitment to popular music and be a cigarette-lighter-in-the-air finale. I read over it later, and after applying the cool light of day editing techniques expounded in Chapter Four, I quickly recognised that my poem was histrionic rubbish. So instead, I would like to cite Lior (Attar 2005) who said what I want to say in a much better way.

To popular music I say thank you and

We'll grow old together  
We'll grow old together yeah  
And this love will never  
This old love will never die.

## Appendix One: “All Part of the Fun of a Life in Folk Rock”

She drew thunderstorms out of the keys  
We lay in wonder at her feet. (Arnold 1995 “I Stole Fire”)

I loved music before I really knew what it was. My brother and I would sit at Mum’s feet and listen as she played “storms” on the piano (Rachmaninoff 1892). I responded to the drama of it, the association of the rumbling piano with a storm. I responded to the sonority. Mum had been a talented teenage pianist but had given it away for work, to help support her own family and then to be a mother and housewife. She met Dad at a Young Liberals meeting in the Menzies’ era. Our life rattled along on a small business rollercoaster that provided thirteen years of private schooling, two BMWs, one Porsche and an eight-year stint in a mansion. It also provided an ever-present shadow of financial anxiety with lurking shadowy menaces in the form of banks (who might say “no more”) and Labor Governments (who might say “no more”). My middle-classness has been a big feature in my writing. It began with a series of sanctimonious lefty rants in my twenties (“Single Perfect Raindrop” 1993) and was followed by a more compassionate correction of my former excesses (“Single Perfect Raindrop” 2004).

I grew up in suburban Heidelberg, Melbourne. As a family we watched *Young Talent Time* (1971–1988) and my brother and I bought K-Tel albums such as *Superbad* (1973) and *Fantastic* (1973). Such purchases were happily endorsed by our parents as they represented extraordinary value. As Patrick Mondout has “infomercially” observed “between 1971 and 1985, K-Tel International blessed us with inexpensive records filled to the brim with the best music they could license” (2011). The songs were jammed into the grooves. All

were sonically sacrificed upon the altar of “more is better”. Still, we listened to them with such frequency that even the misses became local hits in our house.

Glam rock appeared like an Orwellian shiny high-heeled boot to crush all of the more soft country rocksters and singer-songwriters. Suzi Quatro, The Glitter Band and particularly The Sweet dominated our stereo until they in turn were overrun by the simple denim charm of Status Quo, who were nothing if not reliable. This list is not merely a stroll down kitsch memory lane. The sounds of this time have a deep charm to me that comes from their nostalgic resonance. On the subject of retro palette Brad Jones has quipped in conversation: “we all just want something that reminds us of Momma?” (September, 2010).<sup>29</sup>

Another significant influence was *Countdown* (1974–1987). On Sunday nights it delivered pop music into our home with appropriately religious regularity. It was also suitably catholic in its taste. I would sit in a tiny sun room in front of a small blower heater and see blue-collar rock sitting with surprising comfort next to synth. pop. Cold Chisel drank “cheap wine” (1980) and Visage (1980) “fade[d] to grey”. The inter-pop-cultural tribal marriages on this show inspired a faith in the capacity for such unions in my musical life. I loved “slumming it” with the honest grit of the rock and I loved the moody loftiness of the New Romantics. I loved dirty guitars and I loved pretty pop melodies and harmonies and, most significantly, I heard them together every Sunday night. This general “hooray for everything” critical perspective was reinforced by the show’s host Ian “Molly” Meldrum. He seemed to love every act and every song. While *Countdown* and its radio companion 3XY delivered me hit after hit, I put in a pretty dismal effort at learning the piano. I grudgingly delivered the scales on the page waiting for the treat of being able to play “Ring Ring”

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<sup>29</sup> Conversation confirmed by email January 18, 2013.



(ABBA 1973) if I was a good boy. Punk came and went as a novelty to be mocked on *The Goodies* (1970-1980). It never reached our house on the suburbs.

For a brief period the ever changeable cast of pop-rock stars and their records (Cheap Trick and The Knack) took a back seat to cricket. However, in Year 9 that all changed when I became overwhelmed by my own cricket-playing-suburban-lad version of “Beatle mania”. The source of this fascination was two-fold. At a boozy family lunch in the Adelaide hills an English uncle told us of the singing at the end of “Hey Jude” (1968) and after the lunch his daughter and I listened to *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* (The Beatles 1967). Before we could play it we had to clean the vinyl surface with alcohol. Thus, the journey from record sleeve to record player had suitably ritualistic gravitas for such a life-changing moment. My two best mates at school were both into them as well, but I took their enthusiasm to a weird new level that is embarrassing to recall. I didn’t really think about much else. I bought a picture disc of *Abbey Road* (The Beatles 1969) (which sounded terrible and made me nauseous if I watched it spin) and got *The Beatles* (“The White Album”) (The Beatles 1968) for Christmas 1980. With a myopic teen romanticism that was fuelled by the murder of John Lennon, I would listen in delighted disbelief at the flamboyant imagination married to overwhelmingly charming melody and harmony. I also listened at a level of rotation that would put any commercial station to shame. This was an epiphany moment of taste, and nothing has come close in musical influence since. I wanted to be a blend of John, Paul and George, and I wanted early 1980s’ Heidelberg to be the mid-late 1960s’ London. We had a copy of *The Beatles Complete for Piano* (Connolly 1977). I began playing the chords and singing along. Occasionally, I would be disappointed when I actually heard the recorded song (“Here, There and Everywhere” [The Beatles 1966] always seemed a little lighter than my version—I never bothered reading their actual melody) but usually I recognised that The Beatles were better at being The Beatles than I was and adjusted my

performances accordingly. The book was also filled with “trippy” illustrations that evoked an altogether freakier and mind-expanded universe than I seemed to be channelling in suburban Melbourne.

When not hammering out Beatles’ songs (with odd visits from Billy Joel, Elton John and Peter Allen) I would write my own songs. Playing nearly every song in the style of “Imagine” (John Lennon 1970) and “Let it Be” (The Beatles 1970), I began to build a catalogue of ballads that were usually so pompous as to render them unlistenable. However, every now and then I would write about something of which I had a genuine experience, or a deeper real feeling about, and if I could let it come out simply before murdering it with affectation, it would be okay. The process was simple. I would be playing something else and I would hear something in the chords, a new melody and then a new chordal development. Amidst that musical information words would appear and, if I didn’t intellectually override them with a consciously enforced meaning I would be directed from gibberish to what felt like a “true” meaning.

In Year 11, after a few false-start band attempts, which rarely got past rehearsal stage, I joined the school review band. The school review was a show filled with Monty Python and Peter Cook and Dudley Moore sketches and pop songs. I had taught myself the basics of guitar and could play some half decent rhythm on an electric. This decision was inspired by raw vanity. I simply thought guitars looked cooler and no dazzling synthesiser hand moves during the New Romantic years (“I Ran” Flock of Seagulls 1982) could convince me otherwise. Whenever I imagined my impending superstardom it was always with a guitar around my neck, with a possible side trip to the piano to deliver a knock-out punch: the “not-a-dry-eye-in-the-house” ballad. Still, I was better at the piano, and I wrote my songs on the piano, so, in addition to performing in the band, I performed a song called “Turn Out the

Light”. It was a song about my friends all having fun without me being present. The teen anxiety was raw and genuine, the language was simple, the chords, the melody and the harmony supported the sentiment and it worked. After throwing my first artistic “hissy fit” (I wanted to play it on a real piano instead of a Fender Rhodes, which was way too “80s” for me and didn’t evoke my Beatle fantasy at all), I played and sang and the audience genuinely enjoyed it. I got my first hit—not in a musical sense, in a drug addiction sense. I loved the attention and I loved the applause. I loved inhabiting the lights. I loved the bigger amplified sound of myself coming back through the monitors. Deep down, I also loved that for a brief period, for three nights in a row, the girls looked at me exclusively, before drifting back to the altogether-more-good-looking Ian Jordan. I loved it too much really. It was all very innocent at sixteen, but I’m highly suspicious of it as a character trait now.

I finished High School in 1983 with a list of middle-class accomplishments (marks for Law school, cricket captain and prefect) that provided me with both pride and embarrassment (at the pride) in equal measure. I was simultaneously arrogant about what I was and constantly defensive about what I wasn’t. I had started a band with my brother, a mate from school and an old primary school friend. We delivered an onslaught of sonic and conceptual inconsistencies that included light heavy metal, folky ballads, cabaret humour, arts prog. and guitar pub rock. It didn’t last long and an era of fierce determination to “make-it” followed.

There’s nothing so sad as someone who tries too hard  
When it comes to you I’ve got no shame. (Arnold 1999 “On the White Wall”)

If there is a crime against my own taste in fashion and music that I did not commit during this era, I’m not aware of it. A dancing blond-tipped mullet (sometimes “permed”—or “body waved” as the hairdresser reassured me) in a big coat delivering pompous self-absorbed maudlin quasi-Goth epics over a backing track of synthesisers is something I would

otherwise walk out on, if it wasn't me doing it. This era culminated in my first release with *Thirteen at Midnight* (*Warring Tribes* 1988). Our album looked just like a bought one. A black and white church spire was on the front cover and four eye-linered misery guts were on the back.<sup>30</sup> Such affectations were very nearly de rigueur and it felt like all of that effort was going to pay off. Yet, all the reverbs and gelled up hair-dos couldn't save us from my tightly controlled, unachievable and overly intellectualised vision. We ended up sounding small and I just wasn't writing good enough songs. The band folded and I decided that I was giving any musical ambitions away.

The buttons burst on suburbs  
and we all moved into the city. (Arnold 1993, "The Rain Fell Down")

There was more to life than depressing gigs at pubs. My wife and I got together at university and she changed everything. She was a poet and, having grown up in 1970s' Eltham, well versed in all things hippy. In addition to being a great muse, Helen was also a great literary influence. I started attending poetry readings and began to understand the honest communication of ideas through language. It changed the way I viewed my own songwriting. Words were no longer a mere conduit for melody; a thing to be endured as a necessary evil. Along with most of our friends, we had moved out from warm, comfortable suburban houses into cold student houses in Carlton and Fitzroy and the world seemed to be a romantic and poetic wonderland. Along with neo-hippy sunniness, a new set of values dominated my world: "Political Correctness". It began with an optimistic challenge to traditional values. These ideas were very exciting at the time and I felt strangely free within their constraints. Later, the inherent moralistic ferocity was turned inward, sending me into a spiral of self-loathing, but in the beginning of my "great moral project" (James Black, personal

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<sup>30</sup> On a promotional tour in Germany in 1993 one journalist only wanted to talk about *Thirteen at Midnight* rather than *Things of Stone and Wood*. His interest was entirely provoked by the album cover.

communication 1994)<sup>31</sup> it was mostly clear skies. I was like Pip to my family's Magwitch (Dickens 1861) in relation to my own suburban middle-classness, and I came to regret this; but apart from the sneering excesses, this era still accounts for the majority of my adult views and the entire politicisation of my art.

In my final year of university (1989) I started a new band after repeated requests from the bass player from Thirteen at Midnight: Michael Allen (Mikey). He would appear on my share house doorstep with beers in hand and harmonies in head. We would sing with no gigs to hustle and no recordings to make. We sang and drank for the fun of it. I didn't really want to play in bands anymore; yet, ever since I had stopped trying so hard, I had been overtaken by a new creative spirit. Partially in a rejection of all things 1980s "tech", and partially attributable to an increased spike in my acoustic playlist (Suzanne Vega, The Waterboys, Cat Stevens and Van Morrison) I had started writing simple songs on an acoustic guitar. With glimpses of the loftiness I loved in U2 (*The Joshua Tree* 1987) and embracing the honest bloksey Hunters and Collectors and Paul Kelly, I had started writing a new set of songs with no intention of doing anything with them.

For Helen's twenty-first birthday party Mikey and I joined up with Tony Floyd and Cameron McKenzie (now Mark Seymour's guitarist and producer) and played some of these new songs. Not since the Year 11 School Review had I experienced the genuine feeling that the audience actually liked the music and performance. There was something about this new sound and songs that people didn't have to try to like because they were my friends, they actually did like them. Unbelievably to me and Mikey, Tony (who was something of a jazz wunderkind) wanted to be in the band and he knew someone who played harmonica, violin and mandolin (Justin Brady). Our first rehearsal was at a crappy studio in Brunswick and it

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<sup>31</sup> Confirmed by email January 15, 2013.

remains the most “see god” moment of my musical life. We plugged in and started playing with no directions beyond the song’s key. It sounded effortlessly good. It was the band dynamic I had always wanted but was too controlling to ever let happen. Mikey’s beaming smile was only interrupted when he sang. The “organic” acoustic sounds, the good rhythmic feels and the big pop harmonies were “greater than the sum of the parts”. We became Things of Stone and Wood, taking our name from a cooking hut in the coastal Cumberland River campground. While the name was first mocked when it appeared on JJJ (“Is that a craft exhibition?”) it was a genuine statement of artistic intent. This was going to be an earthy, folksy honest band.

We started slowly, playing gigs around Melbourne and fitting in with everybody’s travel plans. I remained on blissful high that people were so happy to come to our shows. I didn’t have to beg my friends anymore and a bit of a scene built up. Uni friends and other bands’ friends and fans all began to morph into what could be called a fan base. It was not long before James Black appeared in our camp, having heard a demo played to him by Justin Brady. After some excellent patient production and sage management counsel he took us (accompanied by a record deal with Columbia records) from being an exciting “corner of the pub” folk rock band to being a strong radio and chart presence.

Under James’ guidance I got to make my first “real” record (*The Yearning* 1993). Months in all of Melbourne’s major studios were spent fine-tuning an acoustic rock aesthetic underpinned by the retro mood of the hour (Lenny Kravitz and The Badloves) and our Melbourne pub band energy. The songs were a blend of lefty political rants (“Share This Wine” Things of Stone and Wood 1992 and “Is This Where I Must Lie” Things of Stone and Wood 1993), middle-class university student social reflections (“Heidelberg”, “Rain Fell Down” and “Single Perfect Raindrop”, Things of Stone and Wood 1993), hippy party starters

(“They Won’t Know Why” and “Rock This Boat” Things of Stone and Wood 1993) and heart on sleeve love songs inspired by Helen’s absence in the summer of 1991-2 (“Beg” and “In Our Home” Things of Stone and Wood 1993). While the early the early signs of self-loathing (and Brit pop) made a brief appearance (“Barkly Street”, Things of Stone and Wood 1993) the album was an honest communication of what I felt and thought about for the preceding years. The earnestness and the joyousness made a surprisingly happy odd couple. *The Yearning* (Things of Stone and Wood 1993) looms larger than any other work I have done both artistically and commercially. While I feel some discomfort listening to the record now, largely because I don’t like my “shoutiness” as a vocalist (if you’re such a nice hippy why are you shouting at me?) I still recognise the depth of the undertaking and the contextual truth of the sentiment and its realisation.

Our gigs turned from happy vibey swirling tie-dye pub parties into big venue, PA falling-guitar-crushing (The Club, Richmond 1992) “rock” shows. Hippies jumped and sang along as we threw ourselves around like feral grunge moshers; all flying hair, sweat and acoustic fangin’. They were fun, filled with adrenaline and even genuinely physically dangerous. We released “Share This Wine” (Things of Stone and Wood 1992), which got a lot of radio play and some small chart action, and followed that with “Happy Birthday Helen” (Things of Stone and Wood 1992), which became a bona fide top ten hit and changed our lives forever. It is a love song. It is unashamedly celebratory. This song was written as Helen’s 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday present, and it is filled with “in” references to such a degree that I remain perplexed by the universality of the response. I would now argue that the audience felt the truth of the emotion, and that while they couldn’t possibly have experienced the same “two person memory catalogue” that was on the radio, they translated those experiences into their own. And with the belting acoustic rhythm, big harmonies and wailing harp; it sure did folk-rock.

Helen and I got married when the song was still in the top forty and we learnt of our ARIA win while on our honeymoon. The album went gold quickly. The band toured relentlessly and I still had that unassailable feeling of being in a great live band. In my head I imagined a sinister army of hipsters criticising “Happy Birthday Helen” (Things of Stone and Wood 1992) with its heart on sleeve emotion, but I always felt we could silence them with the live show. The band toured to Europe and I was named APRA Songwriter of Year 1993. This was the “coup de grace” in an onslaught of too many great things happening and I had a major meltdown. The bubble of the touring band was a warm fun place, and the level of camaraderie was beautiful, but I was irreconcilably conflicted by our success. I was embarrassed that I had enough money to buy a house. I loved being recognised when walking down the street and I hated it as well. I was uncomfortable with celebrity, but was resentful whenever it was not duly noted. It was an impossible quandary and the more politically correct I became, the more racked with self-loathing.

This era still looms large in my artistic life. I now find the strange self-destructive rage unknowable. I felt I did not deserve my good fortune. I returned to my own character in the mid-late 1990s by which time I had written a dark grungy follow up album (*Junk Theatre* 1994) and destroyed the band’s career. The album had moments of Things of Stone and Wood charm, but while some may have admired it (Dwyer \*\*\*\*Rolling Stone review 1995 [a], 86–7 and Frick 1995, 130–1) nobody seemed to love it and it was all downhill from there. The most interesting chapter of the plummet was the turning point song “Wildflowers” (Things of Stone and Wood 1994). It sits there as uncomfortable success–failure, indie-spirit-triumphant and pompous simultaneously. I stood up to Columbia’s fear of the incomprehensible lefty rant lyric in a “mob style sit down” with the company Head and “A and R” guy, and insisted on its release. Then I listened in disbelief as it became one of the most radio played songs of the year (APRA 1994). I had never really thought it was a hit



single, I thought it was an important single. While I may have been suffering from a mild situational depression I was certainly not suffering from a hubris deficit. I believed this was “The folk rock song the society needed to have”. I didn’t think it was a very hooky song and was always surprised when anybody picked it out as a potential single for release. I have recently wondered if my failure to recognise its inherent hum-a-ability was why I added such a complex and heavy lyric.

While I might still listen to the songs “Fingertips” or “Lullaby” (Things of Stone and Wood 1995), I would never listen to the album again. It is the sound of me being depressed, crazy and also, a little cowardly artistically. I flirted with darkness in “Churchill’s Black Dog” and “Wild Man Shouting” (Things of Stone and Wood 1995) but I still held back, only honestly focusing the self-destructive rage in one poorly hidden track (hidden after the last track—where everybody hides their hidden tracks. It’s like playing hide and seek with a four-year-old who always hides behind their hands): “Farewell True Self” (Things of Stone and Wood 1995). While it was an honest expression of an emotional excess, I deeply regret writing and recording this song (a literally backward recording and even darker version of the already dark “Hello Crazy Shadow”, Things of Stone and Wood 1995) as it upset Helen and if I could remove it from my back catalogue I would. Ironically, the only remnants of self-loathing in my character now are directed at the narcissistic excesses of the self-loathing of this period.

After that things were never the same and the band began its slow march to smaller rooms and financial problems. We released a little acoustic album recorded around one microphone (*The Man With the Perfect Hair* 1996) and we released an erratic punt at Brit-pop (*Whirligig* 1996) where I tried to deliver the cross-genre harmony I had grown up with on Countdown. Folk rock and jangly guitar-pop were not comfortable bed-fellows and this

little trip just “weirded” people out. After this release the band folded. I landed back at home after a five-year trip in a van that had propelled me and my mates to Europe, Canada and around and around Australia in a seemingly endless series of all gigs big and small. While the break up hurt, I had to concede that we simply didn’t make sense any more. I had to adjust to a life where I promoted my own shows, produced and paid for my own recordings and hustled up my own touring highway. I also began producing albums for other bands. I started with a folk act (Dalriada 1997) and began to develop a specialty of sorts with acoustic singer-songwriters. Early on, my work was very influenced by James Black, but after a while I began to find my own sound and personal style. I worked mostly with David McCluney at Atlantis Studios. There were some highlights (Junior’s *Restless* 2001, The Lost Weekend’s *Feel the Way* 2002, Splurge’s *Heavy Weather* 2002, Things of Stone and Wood’s “Safe in Sound” 2002, “Goodbye Cruel Girl” 2002 and *Rollercoaster* 2003, and Chloe Hall’s *White Street* 2006) and a few occasions when it didn’t quite gel, but overall I felt like my productions were on the way to somewhere but had never quite arrived.

“It’s all part of the fun of a life in folk rock” began falling out of my mouth with increasing regularity during this period. It was the “glass half full” version of its contemporary companion: “It’s all good”, which tended to be used more when it was not in fact, “all good”, but had in fact “all turned to shit”. My own gigs got worse: PAs didn’t show up, people didn’t show up, the money got tighter. However, in stark contrast to the big years of 1992–6, I was much happier. I had found my lost sunniness and I could shrug off the most humiliating of shows. I felt I was fighting the good fight. I felt I was a true artist, winning a fan by fan war of attrition.

I released an album with a new band: Greg Arnold’s Tricycle (1999) and even though the song “Their Own Show” (1999) was play-listed on the ABC network I was still

overwhelmed by just how aggressively an album could be ignored. I was still used to hitting the release sheets with the Sony promotional juggernaut behind me. During 1997–2006 I produced a lot of records and I played a lot of shows. Things of Stone and Wood got together for a brief reunion and folded again after an even deeper journey into irrelevance. It felt like a slow march off the map. I noticed at this stage that I began to say if anyone asked: “I used to be in band called Things of Stone and Wood”, even though I still was (and am) in a band called Things of Stone and Wood.

Yet, happy I was. I felt I was myself again. The reason for this was essentially the same as the reason for my first Things of Stone and Wood writing burst: “There’s more to life than depressing gigs in pubs”. We had two kids (Lex in 2001 and Hannah in 2004). Helen was working for the International Committee of the Red Cross and we moved to Sydney for three and a half years. I spent long days kicking a ball around on the foreshore at Bronte beach, swimming and walking along the cliff tops, letting the Pacific burrow deep into character. I was a primary carer and it was a gig of which I was extremely proud. Music drifted into the background. Occasionally, something would leap out of the radio waves in a manner that got the tear ducts working again, or hit the “pleasure centre” (Jones, B personal communication, 2007)<sup>32</sup> (“Landslide” Dixie Chicks 2002 and “This Old Love” Lior 2005) but in general I was drifting away from my obsessive love of pop. It was becoming tangential to my life story. When Helen and I had lunch I would almost intentionally choose music that didn’t engage me lyrically or promote too much emotion via melodicism (Frank Sinatra and Air).

In 2004, I recorded *Lost Marie* (Greg Arnold 2006) an album of story songs. While my own character had a few cameos (such as the “guy” being car-jacked in “The Man I’d

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<sup>32</sup> Conversation confirmed by email January 18, 2013.

Been” 2006), I was hoping to avoid my own character through fiction—I was sick of myself (No, no tell us what you think about yourself some more Greg—that would be great to hear...really). The album had some important artistic steps with the songs being more crafted to accommodate the new perspective, and I stopped leaning on some of my old moves, like big lush backing vocals. This was largely in response to an important discussion with Mark Lang (personal communication, 2004) from Skipping Girl Vinegar, who single-handedly updated my production approach to help me embrace new “acoustica” with all of its quirky charms.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, I was touring around doing solo shows and playing as a guitarist and pianist for Hirst and Greene. Being a “gun-for-hire” musician at this level was not something I’d done before, and it was liberating to be so carefree. I’d play the shows, do my bit and hope for the best for the lads, but I wasn’t hurt if a gig went pear-shaped (as I was with a Things of Stone and Wood show). In 2005, at 39, I did a solo tour to Perth and finally made a good clear profit and I could see how to make the touring solo act viable. Hardly surprisingly, the tour had one terrible show, two okay shows and one cracker. However, this time the shocker hurt more than the cracker felt good and I realised I just didn’t want to do it anymore. I didn’t want to be a miserable middle-aged man sitting backstage scoffing endless free Heinekens complaining about my lot—and that was where I was heading. I didn’t want to miss every weekend with my kids. I never thought that it may be related to the looming significant birthday, but I came home and applied for my masters degree that week. I was giving away the dream of being a full-time performing writing producing musician...and loving it.

Everywhere I went it was just music, music

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<sup>33</sup> Conversation confirmed by email January 18, 2013.

I felt warm again, like I belonged. (“Why Don’t You Come Around” Arnold.)

Over this period, as seems to be a theme throughout this autobiography, I stopped trying and good things began to happen to me. The masters degree went well, and three artists whose records I was working on took the indie production values to a new level: Carus and the True Believers (2007), Chloe Hall (2009) and Skipping Girl Vinegar (2008). All were pre-produced and tracked with rigour, and all were mixed in Nashville with Brad Jones. I attended the mixing sessions and found a whole new lease of life for music. I had the feeling that my production style had finally arrived. Brad Jones mixed the records with a nuanced understanding of both pop music and acoustic instruments. He understood what I had always been trying to do without me having to articulate it. The records were warm, lush and hi-fi, but not unhip. I had also begun lecturing at NMIT; “Business management for musicians” at first and then “Songwriting” and “Music and Culture”. When looking at my experiences through the eyes of my students they began to look as exciting and magical as they had been. I began to write again. There was no pressure to deliver anything: no tours planned, no festivals to beg and no arbitrary timelines dictated by that false god: “career”.

*Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) began to take shape in this period. Josh Pyke (2007) and Bob Evans (2006) represented modernity on the old school CD player (with Sarah Blasko [2008] present for sonic inspiration), and any nostalgic song I could find from my childhood from “The Spy Who Loved Me” (Carly Simon 1977), to “The Night Chicago Died” (Paperlace 1974) to “Hot Legs” (Rod Stewart 1978) was on my iPod™. My iPod was a pocket-sized demonstration of guilty pleasure and secret shame. It was powerfully unhip and beyond and beneath kitsch. I was a happy Dad; a middle-class middle-aged man enjoying a middle-class middle-aged life. I was a record producer, occasional performer and a lecturer in music. We were living in a nice house that we had literally bought (mostly) for a song. The

earlier conflict within my character about my middle-classness was overrun by the kids and the joyous exhaustion that accompanied their parenting. I kicked the footy more, I played the guitar less. I still loved pop music, and it still delivered the surprise tears, but with far less frequency. I had begun, if only slightly, to hear pop music as other people might; as a soundtrack to the moving pictures of a broader life.

## **Appendix Two: *Fall* (The Swamp Dandies 2011) Lyrics**

All lyrics written by Greg Arnold (Rondor Music Australia)

### **“You’re Not Coming Home”**

It’s been six beers since the first

Everyone just makes it worse

And I can’t believe you won’t be coming home no more

All of my friends say that you won’t call

And I should take your pictures off the wall

But I can’t believe you won’t be coming home no more

I’ve been waiting such a long time

I can wait a little bit longer

It’s quiet

Not even the dogs are barking

You’re not coming home

## **“Tomorrow”**

All these things inside of your head

You’ve got to get them out there

It seems like a thousand years

Since you walked along these cliffs without a care

### *Chorus*

*It’s been so long since the rain it stopped falling the cracks appearing in the walls*

*These tears will wash that pain away, it won’t come back again*

### *Tomorrow*

It was cold the night you found yourself wrapped up in conspiracy

Why don’t you just have a laugh, you’ve never found yourself in such grand company

### *Chorus*

And the wise man says “all things must pass”

### *Chorus*



**“Olivia”**

Waiting tables at the White trash Café

I’ve got Alabama on the wall

I got nothing against all those beardy smiley faces

I just want a little more

So I keep staring at the door

You know who I’m waiting for

*Chorus*

*Olivia*

*Won’t you sail across the oceans from those golden sands*

*With those healing hands*

*Olivia*

*You know she’s the only one who’ll ever understand*

*Maybe I could be her man*

I’d let her be there in the morning

I’d let her be there in the afternoon

When the sky got dark and the snow started falling

A cup of coffee to keep her warm

The phone is quiet on the wall

But I keep waiting for the call...from...

*Chorus*

And it ain't because she's so pretty

And you know it, you know that she is

And it ain't because she sings so sweet

I've got the Nashville shroud of Turin

It's been talking and I've been listening ...about...

*Chorus*

*Chorus*

## **“Are You True?”**

Are you true?

I caught the spark want to believe in you

Are you true?

All of my hope just seems to stick to you

Are you true?

You’ve got the eyes calling fire

But I can’t read your mind

Week after week

Six days I’m lost, one day I’m chosen

Month after month, all my old love in winter and frozen

Year after year I keep my bags all packed

But what if you’re just lying

*Chorus*

*Hey you saw the signs water divine here in the wasteland*

*Hey you got the sight finding design in the chaos now*

*Hey we fight off the night sing of the light so pure*

*You’ve got the cards you know how to play ’em, but can I believe a word you’re saying now?*

I knew a man walked through the desert just ‘cos you said it

Clutching your map, followed the lines right to the letter

When he returned mouth full of dust, head full of rust and the sun came up and the dead  
stayed sleeping

*Chorus*

*Chorus*

## **“Fall Into My Hands”**

Today was such a long one  
And we've got so far to go  
If you're wondering what I'm thinking  
I think it's time you should know

We're in this thing together  
And we're in it for the long haul  
Even though the ride might get bumpy  
I'll be there for it all

### *Chorus*

*When you're talking and no-one seems to get it  
I will understand you  
So take that leap of faith into the sky knowing that  
You can fall into my hands*

You feel cold  
Like the walls are closing in  
Take a look at these three faces you've got in here with you  
Well they've got nothing but love for you, they've got nothing but love for you

### *Chorus*

*Chorus*

Take that leap of faith into your life knowing that

You can fall into my hands

## **“Tumbling Down”**

*30 Something Boy:*

I still got fire left in my belly  
Don't want to fall into the couch and watch telly  
The amps are plugged in, you know the show must go on

So come take my hand right here on the sand  
Can you see that on the horizon?  
It's not our hope in smoke, that's our ship coming in

*Chorus*

*So we spin round*  
*We spin round and round and round*  
*Tumbling Down*  
*Tumbling all the way down*

*30 Something Girl:*

I know this feeling another cold dawn  
We wake up on some stranger's floor  
Where they don't have the same records  
Or take the same drugs any more

It's not like I'm losing faith with the plan but I feel it's time you understand

I'm not Wendy to your Springsteen, I'm Wendy to your Peter Pan

*Chorus*

*Girl:* I found a cute little place in the country where you can see the sea

*Boy:* I found a cheap flat in town

*Together:* I finally found a place for us

*Chorus*

*Chorus*



## **“The Deal”**

I met myself in the dark, down by the water

I did not like, that look on my face

I felt like lamb to slaughter

*Chorus*

*Drink the poison down with the meal*

*With Judas kisses we can seal*

*The rest of our lives we won't even feel*

*But at least we've got a deal*

I said “Here's your boat, there's your map go find those calmer seas

You can trust me, this blanket for the cold, it's not laced with disease...no”

*Chorus*

I looked back to shore, I was waving, was that a tear in my eye?

Or was I just a little too glad?

At the edge of my mouth was that a smile?

*Chorus*

### **“Everybody Stands In Line”**

Well the coffee's cold, the waitress kinda surly  
She resents that everybody wants a lovely girly  
So she's going to take it slow, and she's every right you know  
But deep down inside you can tell it's slowly killing her  
And everybody stands in line and waits to get some

So you jump into your car, drive to the city  
And you kid yourself the smog looks kinda pretty  
So you tune into a show, two more dickheads on the radio  
You know they hate each-other's guts while the songs are playing  
And everybody stands in line and waits to get some

So you think the fat cat's laughing,  
Well he's running out of things to laugh about  
He's screaming into his mobile phone, desperately trying to skip two places

Well it's quiet now, the white noise just a trickle  
There's one star in the sky it's shining like a miracle  
So come on join the plan  
The revolution's bare foot in the sand  
It's free and stocks are never going to run dry  
So everybody cut the line and come and get some

## **“Follow The Sun”**

I've been hanging 'round, got my head in the books  
Something's goin' on I might go take a look at the fun  
Follow the sun  
The cricket's on the radio the family's asleep  
I'll dive into this middle age like bombin' in the deep

### **Chorus**

And the summer burns burns burns  
But we don't fade away  
Hey now planet turn turn turn  
Cos' we've had thunder and rain and hail but we ain't had no sunshine  
  
That guy's got it goin' on he's gold against the grey  
He's leaping into life like he's crashing through a wave  
I'm going to follow my son

### *Chorus*

And when I was young I believed in the cult of shadows  
And I'm wondering now why I was such a pompous ass couldn't find the love in a  
good day

### *Chorus*

## **“Until You Fall”**

I felt I'd walked for years

To make my camp

Just beneath the summit

I don't know why

It was then I chose

To cut the ropes and plummet

### *Chorus*

Until you fall

You never know

Where you're going to land

I fell asleep for days

Wandered 'round that haze

Danced the ordinary plague

The Doctors fair and true

They knew what to do

But I still flushed those pills away

### *Chorus*

### *Chorus*

## **Appendix Three: The Live Performances**

### **2009**

*March 14, 2009*

Adelphi, Fitzroy VIC (with Skipping Girl Vinegar: Two shows as guest: Hammond organ and piano).

Thornbury Theatre, Thornbury VIC (with Georgia Fields as guest: piano)

*March 18, 2009*

The Troubador, Brisbane QLD (with Carus Thompson as backing vocals, acoustic guitar, piano, ukulele and percussion).

*March 19, 2009*

The Sound Lounge, Gold Coast QLD (solo support show and with Carus Thompson as backing vocals, acoustic guitar, piano, ukulele and percussion).

*March 22, 2009*

The Republic Bar, Hobart TAS (with Carus Thompson as backing vocals, acoustic guitar, piano, ukulele and percussion).

*March 26, 2009*

The Grace Emily, Adelaide SA (with Carus Thompson as backing vocals, acoustic guitar, piano, ukulele and percussion).

*March 29, 2009*

Mojos, Fremantle WA (solo support show and with Carus Thompson as backing vocals, acoustic guitar, piano, ukulele and percussion).

*April 3, 2009*

The National Hotel, Geelong VIC (with Carus Thompson as backing vocals, acoustic guitar, piano, ukulele and percussion).

*April 4, 2009*

The East Brunswick Club, East Brunswick VIC (solo support show and with Carus Thompson as backing vocals piano, ukulele and percussion).

*April 5, 2009*

The Vanguard, Newtown NSW (with Carus Thompson as backing vocals piano, ukulele and percussion).

*June 1, 2009*

The Red Beard Bakery, Trentham VIC (as solo acoustic headline).

*July 16, 2009*

*As yet unclear* launch Mars Gallery, South Yarra VIC (as solo acoustic performer).

*August 23, 2009*

The Toff in Town, Melbourne VIC (with Georgia Fields as guest: piano).

*November 15, 2009*

Princes Hill Primary School Bazaar, Princes Hill VIC (The Swamp Dandies.)

*November 18, 2009*

Harvester Moon, Bellarine VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*December 12, 2009*

Torquay Hotel, Torquay VIC (with Carus and the True Believers: backing vocals, Hammond organ and piano).

## **2010**

*March 20, 2010*

Private Function, Beech Forest VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*April 23, 2010*

Private Function, Geelong VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*June 27, 2010*

The Union Hotel, Brunswick VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*July 30, 2010*

The Sandbelt, Moorabbin VIC (Greg Arnold Duo with John Bedggood supporting The Sharp).

*August 6, 2010*

Norwood Live, Norwood SA (Solo supporting The Sharp).

*August 27, 2010*

The Esplanade Hotel, St Kilda VIC (The Swamp Dandies supporting The Sharp).

*September 2, 2010*

The Yarra Edge Music Centre, NMIT Fairfield VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*September 7, 2010*

The Bluebird Café, Nashville TN, USA (Solo).

*November 14, 2010*

Princes Hill Primary School Bazaar, Princes Hill VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*December 4, 2010*

The Great Victorian Bike Ride, Lake Eildon VIC (with Carus and the True Believers: acoustic guitar, backing vocals, Hammond organ, mandolin, piano).

*December 5, 2010*

The Port Melbourne Library, Port Melbourne VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*December 9, 2010*

The Northcote Social Club, Northcote VIC (with Carus Thompson: acoustic guitar, backing vocals, Hammond organ, mandolin and piano).

*December 10, 2010*

Harvester Moon, Bellarine VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*December 12, 2010*

Private Function, Bacchus Marsh VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

## **2011**

*April 16, 2011*

The Corner Hotel, Richmond VIC (*Caravan* launch with Carus and the True Believers: acoustic guitar, backing vocals, Hammond organ, mandolin, piano).

*September 21, 2011*

Private Function, Prahran VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*November 4, 2011*

Harvester Moon, Bellarine VIC (*Fall* launch The Swamp Dandies).

*November 4, 2011*

The Thornbury Theatre, Thornbury VIC (*Fall* launch The Swamp Dandies).

*November 13, 2011*

Princes Hill Primary School Bazaar, Princes Hill VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*November 26, 2011*

Queenscliff Music Festival, Queenscliff VIC (with Carus Thompson: backing vocals, electric guitar, Hammond organ, lead vocal, mandolin, piano).

*December 2, 2011*

Sydney Livehouse, Lewisham NSW (*Fall* launch The Swamp Dandies).

*December 3, 2011*

The Powerhouse, Brisbane QLD (*Fall* launch The Swamp Dandies).

*December 8, 2011*

The Northcote Social Club, Northcote VIC (The Swamp Dandies and with Carus Thompson: acoustic guitar, backing vocals, electric guitar, Hammond organ, lead vocal, mandolin, piano).

## **2012**

*January 14, 2012*

Laver's Hill Town Hall, Laver's Hill VIC (*Fall* launch The Swamp Dandies).

*February 19, 2012*

The Butterfly Club, South Melbourne VIC (solo with Monique Brumby).

*March 3, 2012*

Youlden Parkville Cricket Club, Parkville VIC (The Swamp Dandies duo with Monique Zucco).

*March 10–12, 2012*

Port Fairy Folk Festival, Port Fairy VIC (with Carus Thompson: backing vocals, electric guitar, Hammond organ, lead vocal, mandolin, piano).

*April 4, 2012*

Kent Street Bar, Collingwood VIC (solo acoustic, duo and quartet).

*June 23, 2012*

Olivia Newton John Cancer and Wellness Centre, Austin Hospital, Heidelberg VIC  
(The Swamp Dandies)

*July 27, 2012*

The Bended Elbow, Geelong VIC (acoustic duo with Carus Thompson: acoustic guitar,  
backing vocals, electric guitar, lead vocals).

*September 15, 2012*

Neerum Creek Folk Festival, Neerum Creek QLD (The Swamp Dandies).

*September 28, 2012*

Northcote Town Hall, Northcote VIC (with Dominique Brown: acoustic guitar, backing  
vocals, electric guitar).

*September 30, 2012*

Northcote Social Club, Northcote VIC (The Swamp Dandies and with Carus Thompson:  
acoustic guitar, backing vocals, electric guitar, Hammond organ, lead vocal, mandolin,  
piano).

*November 1, 2012*

Revolver, Prahran VIC (with Dominique Brown: backing vocals, electric guitar, lead vocal).

*November 18, 2012*

Princes Hill Primary School Bazaar, Princes Hill VIC (Greg Arnold and Graduates).

*November 24, 2012*

The Flying Saucer Club, Elsternwick VIC (acoustic set solo, duo and trio and with Diana  
Clark and the Sunny Set: backing vocals, Hammond organ and piano).

*December 12, 2012*

Revolver, Prahran VIC (with Dominique Brown: backing vocals, electric guitar, lead vocal).

*December 15, 2012*

Youlden Parkville Cricket Club, Parkville VIC (Greg Arnold and the Graduates).

## **2013**

*March 5, 2013*

Revolver, Prahran VIC (with Dominique Brown: backing vocals, electric guitar, lead vocal).

*March 23, 2013*

The Eel Festival, Lake Bolac VIC (Things of Stone and Wood)

*May 25, 2013*

Private Function, Johanna VIC (The Swamp Dandies).

*June 6, 2013*



Bella Union, Carlton (with Diana Clark and the Sunny Set: backing vocals, electric guitar  
Hammond organ and piano)

#### Appendix Four: The Folio Recordings.

(\* Denotes included in submission)

\*Carus Thompson, 2011 *Caravan* Australia: Mind's Eye Records. MGM. CAR 010. (CD Album).

*Roles: co-producer and co-writer and acoustic guitar, backing vocals, bass guitar, Hammond organ, lead vocal, mandolin and piano.*

Dominique 2012. *Dominique*: Australia: Decibels Records. DB004 (CD E.P.).

*Roles: co-producer/contributing engineer and acoustic guitar, backing vocals, bass guitar, electric guitar, Hammond organ and percussion.*

Diana Clark and the Sunny Set. 2012 "Sunny Daze". Australia: Independent. Online single <http://www.dianaclark.com.au/> [accessed April 4, 2013]

*Roles: producer/contributory engineer and backing vocals, bass guitar, Hammond organ*

\*Georgia Fields. 2010. *Georgia Fields* Australia: Pop Boomerang. PB 068. (CD Album).

*Roles: producer/contributory engineer and acoustic guitar, Hammond organ, piano, ukulele and percussion.*

\*Kelly Pettit. 2010 *These Days*. Independent. 374490. (CD Album).

*Roles: producer/contributory engineer and co-writer and acoustic guitar, backing vocals, bass guitar, electric guitar, Hammond organ, mandolin, piano and ukulele.*

Crane, M and Stuart, F (eds.) 2012 *The Paradise Anthology 5*. Melbourne: Independent Publication.

*Role: Contributing lyricist.*

Radio Star. 2010. "Goodbye, Goodnight". Australia: Byrnesdie Records BYR014. (CD E.P.)

*Role: Co-producer*

\*The Roadside Attractions. (Yet to be released) *You Rock!* (Promotional CD Album).

*Roles: co-producer and co-writer, acoustic guitar, backing vocals, electric guitar, Hammond organ, lead vocals, water cooler percussion and hand claps.*

\*The Swamp Dandies (not released) Song and band demos. (Demo CD).

*Roles: producer/engineer and writer and acoustic guitar, backing vocals, bass guitar, electric guitar, glockenspiel, Hammond organ, harmonica, keyboard, lead vocals, melodic, percussion, piano and ukulele.*

\*The Swamp Dandies. 2011. *Fall*. Australia: Strum Pop Records. Mind's Eye Records. MGM. SP001. (CD Album).

*Roles: producer/engineer and writer and acoustic guitar, backing vocals, bass guitar, electric guitar, glockenspiel, Hammond organ, harmonica, keyboard, lead vocals, melodic, percussion, piano and ukulele.*

Tom Strode and the Tour Guides. 2011. *The Cat & The Fiddle* Australia: Independent. (CD E.P.).

*Roles: producer/engineer and melodic and piano.*

\*Skipping Girl Vinegar. 2011. *Keep Calm Carry the Monkey* Australia: Pop Boomerang/Secret Fox Records. MGM. PB 078. (CD Album).

*Roles: co-producer, piano, keyboards and bass.*

Skipping Girl Vinegar. 2012. “Chase the Sun”. USA: Secret Fox Records. SF.007. (CD E.P.).

*Roles: co-producer, piano, keyboards and bass.*

Skipping Girl Vinegar. 2013. “Making our Way”. Australia: Pop Boomerang/Secret Fox Records. MGM. SF008. PB092. (CD Single).

*Role: Co-producer*

Stonefield. 2010. *Through The Clover*. Australia: Shock Records. SF01. (CD E.P.).

*Role: Co-producer.*

\**We went down to the river. Volume 1–4.* 2012 Melbourne: NMIT. (Promotional CD Albums.).

*Roles: producer/engineer [and mastering engineer on Vol. 1], writer on Vol. 3 and 4 and acoustic guitar, backing vocals, banjolin, bass guitar, electric guitar, percussion, piano, sampled string arranger and ukulele.*

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