



KNOCK EM DOWN SOUND SYSTEM

**September
2024**

**Dr Andrew
Belletty**

**Report on Research
Outcomes**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

CURRENT STATE OF LOCAL MUSIC SCENE

The local music scene in Darwin exhibits resilience and non-conformity despite facing challenges. A notable intergenerational dynamic exists, with older musicians mentoring younger participants.

"I think that the KEDSS Workshop is genuinely the most amazing thing that I've done."

KEDSS Participant Felix Hill

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- **Intergenerational Knowledge Exchange:** Younger participants demonstrated genuine engagement with elder musicians, facilitating valuable knowledge transfer.
- **Socioeconomic Challenges:** Underprivileged youth in Darwin face financial constraints limiting their participation in social activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Community-Led Initiatives:** Develop diversionary activities and creative outlets during school holidays to engage at-risk youth.

2. **Skill Development:** Implement programs teaching music writing, performing, producing, and post-production techniques.
3. **Artistic Expression:** Foster intergenerational connections and provide constructive opportunities for marginalized youth in regional areas.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

1. **Regular Workshops:** Conduct KEDSS workshops during every school holiday period.
2. **Ongoing Sessions:** Establish weekly sessions to build upon projects initiated during KEDSS workshops.
3. **Community-Driven Frameworks:** Develop activity frameworks based on community consultation to engage a wide audience across the Northern Territory.
4. **Youth-Centric Approach:** Tailor programs to youth interests, including DJing, remixing, singing, songwriting, rapping, podcasting, and audio book production.
5. **Monetization Focus:** Emphasize the importance of authorship and teach monetization strategies across various platforms.
6. **Comprehensive Skill Development:** Provide instruction on music creation, packaging, promotion, release, remixing, performance, podcasting, and audio book production.
7. **Local Engagement:** Establish regular weekly sessions at community centre's such as Bagot, Community Arts, or Browns Mart.

This approach aims to address the challenges faced by Darwin's youth while fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable local music scene.

THE PROJECT

ABSTRACT

KEDSS explores the historical and contemporary Darwin community street music scene through a series of community co-designed interviews, workshops, performances and site activations in Darwin 6-14 April 2024. Workshops include Stage Ready Band Skills, DJ Skills, Hip Hop Lyrical Styling and PA Speaker building, facilitated by Darwin-based experts. The activities culminate in an open access site activation at Charles Darwin University, where participants can perform and connect.

The aim is to reflect on creative actions and how they inform and are informed by the physical and cultural aspects of place. Vernacular music cultures reach out to a past where political, philosophical and dance floor energies meet, creating tangible and intangible connections between individuals and communities, with impacts on well-being.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Situated in the Northern Territory of Australia, the small town of Darwin is distinguished by its isolation, harsh tropical climate, and closeness to Southeast Asia. These factors have uniquely shaped its music production, cultural landscape, and sound system technology, differentiating it from metropolitan areas. The town's Indigenous custodians acknowledge a specific season in April, marked by the arrival of the Knock em Down winds, which flatten the spear grass heralding the onset of the dry season.

Dr Andrew Belletty is leading the Knock-em Downs Sound System project in Darwin from 8-14th April 2024 collaborating with elders of the scene including Ward Hancock's Speargrass Sound System, Colin Simpson, Todd Williams, DJ Charly T and James Mangohig. The events are supported locally by Charles Darwin University, The Darwin City Council, Northern Territory Youth Week and the Bagot Community. The research focuses on intergenerational knowledge exchange and community activation.

RESEARCH NARRATIVE

KEDSS explores the historical and contemporary Darwin community street music scene through a series of community co-designed interviews, workshops, performances and site activations in Darwin 6-14 April 2024. Workshops include Stage Ready Band Skills, DJ Skills, and PA Speaker building, facilitated by Darwin-based experts. The activities culminate in an open access site activation at Charles Darwin University, where participants can perform and connect.

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The project is funded by the European Research Council through Goldsmiths University, London, and the University of Sydney

BACKGROUND



Project leader Dr Andrew Belletty grew up in Darwin and formed a band *The Swamp Jockeys*, in the early eighties, who played original music which responded to Darwin's unique environment and culture. The band toured the length and breadth of the Northern Territory performing and doing workshops in regional and remote communities inviting local artists to share the stage with us. One such workshop led to Belletty forming the band *Yothu Yindi*.

The timing of the project was influenced by the tropical weather in Darwin, which is traditionally divided into two seasons: the wet season and the dry season. However, local Aboriginal knowledge divides the seasons into seven atmospheric events: Balnba (rainy season), Dalay (monsoon season), Mayilema (speargrass, Magpie Goose egg and knock 'em down season), Damibila (Barramundi and bush fruit time), Dinidjanggama (heavy dew time), Gurrulwa (big wind time), and Dalirrgang (build-up).



The fixed idea of a wet season and a dry season casts a long shadow on how Darwin operates as a city. For artists and musicians who often work across the Northern Territory in remote communities, the wet season is a time when work stops. Therefore, the dry season is traditionally the time for events, leading to a congested period where all concerts, festivals, and exhibitions happen.

When planning this project, you wanted to consider the rain but be more faithful to the dry season I grew up understanding. This dry season happens in April when the spear grass is 10 feet tall and golden brown, and Darwin gets a series of strong winds on clear days. It's at this time that the first dragonflies appear as the winds continue, and by the end of the week, the spear grass has all been flattened.

I scheduled the project to start on April 6th, and as if by clockwork, on the 7th morning, the dragonflies appeared, and the early morning wind had already picked up. The day after the final event, the spear grass was all flattened.

EARLY CHALLENGES IN DARWIN'S MUSIC SCENE

When I was first approached for this project, I wanted it to extend my work as a researcher, artist, and digital media professional. The obvious choice was Darwin, where I grew up, but it was a town that posed enormous obstacles to music and sound system culture during my youth.

The major challenge was socioeconomic, as Darwin was a frontier town built on the military, mining, and government administration. Its remoteness meant it was closer to Southeast Asia than Australian capital cities, impacting the population's makeup. Indigenous people make up 30% of the Northern Territory's population, with Darwin being a central point for government services and activities. The harsh tropical climate was also a significant factor for any outdoor music or sound system activity, as the humidity and heat wreaked havoc on musical equipment and sound systems. Wood swelled, circuits rusted, and dust caked the insides of any component with a fan. For young bands or sound system operators, half the challenge was getting the equipment working in this hostile environment.

Air-conditioned venues were part of a corporate scheme that didn't allow for original music activities. As such, we had to create venues within freely and easily accessible spaces, often community venues like recreation or religious halls or re-engineered sporting facilities like basketball courts. Most of these venues lacked air conditioning, and the electrical circuits deteriorated from the humid environment, meaning we had to fix power supplies or run cabling from adjacent buildings to power the sound systems. We also had to provide our own staging and lights, often using hay-bales to create a makeshift stage.



The Swamp Jockeys on Hay-bale stage, Charles Darwin University
1983

EMBRACING THE ENVIRONMENT'S CREATIVE ENERGY

As young artists, musicians, and sound technicians, we decided to work with the environment. This profoundly changed how we produced, performed, and amplified music, as the unique climate and environment became entangled with our creative energies. The main obstacle to putting on musical events was the profound lack of support from the corporate sector, which pushed us into makeshift venues closer to nature and the community.

The biggest obstacle also became the most liberating creative energy for our work. We became the organizers of events, collectively deciding who played what, where, when, and how. We used the profits from these events to reinvest in our instruments and sound

systems. As our energy to innovate grew, so did our capacity to deliver innovative performances, events, and venues. The innovation also extended to promotion activities, where we hand-painted billboards and screen-printed posters and T-shirts, allowing us unlimited control over how we projected ourselves and our events. The resulting work represented nature as much as the human involvement of musicians, bands, and sound systems.



THE CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES

Forty years later, it was amazing to see that Darwin has a thriving independent music and art scene, much of which is driven by the children of the elders who initiated the scene in the early 1980s.

However, when I thought about doing this project in Darwin, it wasn't out of nostalgia but born out of the adversity that has gripped the Northern Territory over the past few years. The media is rife with coverage of youth gone wild, countered by policing and justice systems that are punitive towards minors, with juvenile detention

centres like Don Dale in Darwin making national headlines for abuse of minors.

During my community consultation work in October 2023, I met with key stakeholders to understand what was happening with the 12 to 25-year-olds and how this research could provide diversionary and inspirational activities. Both the government and community sectors identified mobile phone technology as a key factor in disengagement, where platforms like TikTok are used to share hacks for breaking into cars and for live sharing of successful ventures.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE AND FINDING SUPPORT

The resistance I met in Darwin 40 years later was different from my youth. This time, the resistance was coming from within individuals, many of whom had no desire to go out as they had everything they needed on their phones, while other parents forbade their children from going out for safety reasons. Even the idea of putting on workshops and performances in makeshift venues suddenly looked like an impossibility, as the cost of health and safety measures and security would drain the funding before a single note was heard or played.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

"It's vital to the survival of the continuation of the tradition of community in Darwin...every single time that knowledge is exchanged, that foundation gets stronger. and we, as young people, get better for that."

KEDSS Participant Felix Hill

I reached out to Charles Darwin University, where I was a student in 1981 and where we started a band called the Swamp Jockeys in 1982, creating a makeshift venue in a disused classroom and somehow obtaining a university social club liquor license for one day a month. The Friday night sessions became more regular, with crowds spilling out onto the street, sometimes reaching four or five hundred people, despite none of us studying music.

Now the university has a music department and dedicated performance venues, but they lie largely empty as student engagement with this type of activity has all but disappeared. After unsuccessfully trying to engage with the university for many months, I eventually found a contact who facilitated engagement with other departments. Suddenly, in February 2024, it started looking like I had the key support needed for the workshops and performances to happen at the university.

I had also been talking to the youth workers at the Bagot community in Darwin, the main Indigenous community in the town centre. We held workshops and music events at Bagot in the 1980s, and the community had a substantial music program for many years. When I visited Bagot in October 2023, the facilities were in disrepair, and the youth workers told me that very little music activity happens now, as the young people from 12 to 25 are mostly disengaged. They were fearful that younger people can easily fall in with the wrong crowd and end up in a juvenile detention centre like Don Dale, and ultimately end up in an adult prison. The feeling was that if we did an activity there, it would be great, but there was no guarantee of much engagement from the community. The basketball court had lost its roof in a recent cyclone and was now an overgrown wasteland, and the arts and music activity centre were derelict, leaving only the church hall – a small, corrugated iron roof with a concrete floor and open sides. It was enough to work with, luckily, I have a childhood

friend who is an electrician, as there was very little chance of finding a working power-point.



Sound Engineer Colin Simpson finds the problem at Bagot April 2024

WORKSHOP PLANNING

"Andrew Belletty's story about the way Yothu Yindi started is still inspirational after all these years, you know, 45 years later, I still get a buzz hearing him say that. They just happened to be there with the right attitude ready to go all at the same time and they made Australian music history. Ultimately, I don't think they consciously sat down and wrote out a plan. So, this is how Australian music history is made and I think that's a good thing for young younger people to know that it can happen."

Elder and Technical Mentor Colin Simpson

While my history in Darwin presented both challenges and opportunities, I consciously avoided becoming nostalgic and enlisting the help of all my old friends, who are now Elders of the scene. Instead, I focused on engaging the best people to facilitate and deliver each workshop, bringing fresh perspectives and energy to the project.

After conducting community consultations, I proposed creating a schedule for workshops and activities aimed at engaging disengaged youth in Darwin. My engagement with stakeholders revealed the need for workshops that would captivate these young people's attention. Consequently, I decided to organize four distinct workshops.

COMMUNITY NEED

"So, there's a lot of untapped potential that just needs an opportunity and that opportunity is probably the most important step towards growing that community and making sure that it's stronger. So I think workshops are completely instrumental in how a community can flourish."

KEDSS Participant Felix Hill

The Australian 2022 National Arts Participation Survey says we're attending fewer arts events, but more of us are using them to support our wellbeing. Darwin's unique mix of people, culture and climate makes it an ideal site for collaborations and activations which can help to grow community music. Sound Systems play recorded music outdoors, which is an essential part of many popular cultures. They are more likely to be found at the margins of the cities and in regional

and remote areas where public spaces transform into street venues by the addition of loudspeaker equipment, which is often low-tech, re-purposed, hacked and customized.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Knock-em-down Sound System is a case study to investigate the idea that small urban interventions can seed large scale positive change. Darwin's unique culture, climate and intergenerational knowledge can inform sound system technology, design and performance to promote social and economic progress.

Data collected from the ***Knock-em-down Sound System*** will be used to explore if a vibrotactile floor can increase the sense of immersion in a virtual, collective Sound System experience such as a VR dome.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The ***Knock-em-down Sound System*** is a series of community driven activations designed around workshops, interviews and events. This practice-as-research is both a departure and a development from conventional university research models such as participant observation and ethnmethodology. Activations recognize making and doing as knowledge that is not exclusively epistemic, and that creative and other practices of the researchers themselves including organizing activities, can and do generate knowledge. This creates a circulation between "thinking/reading" and "making." Sound systems are a collective rather than individual creative practice, as part of a popular rather than high art or avant-garde cultural tradition which mainstream media have traditionally not recognized as having any significant value.

CASE STUDY: STAGE READY MUSIC WORKSHOP



EVENT INFORMATION



Mon 8th and Tuesday 9th April 10am-5pm CDU Music Dept

Enrolment cap 30

Actual Participants 36

<https://events.humanitix.com/knock-em-down-sound-system-stage-ready-band-workshop>

Rock the Stage: Full-Day Band Performance Workshop for Musicians!

Musicians, are you ready to captivate your audience and deliver a show-stopping performance? Join James Mangohig and his team for a Stage-Ready Band Workshop, a two-day intensive designed to transform your live act into a polished, dynamic experience.

What You'll Learn:

- *Expert Guidance: Our team of industry professionals will share their secrets to a successful set.*
- *Endurance Training: Practice playing through your entire set without breaks, ensuring a seamless show.*
- *Preparation Techniques: Create a comprehensive checklist to ensure you have everything you need for the big day.*
- *Cohesion and Memorization: Learn to stay in sync with your bandmates and have your material down pat.*
- *Stage Presence: Master the art of using the entire stage, engaging with your fellow musicians and the audience.*
- *Image Crafting: Decide on outfits and develop a style that reflects your personality and suits the venue.*

Workshop Benefits:

Live Performance Opportunity: Apply your new skills in a live public performance.

All Equipment Provided: From backline to PA system, we've got you covered.

THE WORKSHOP CONCEPT



James Mangohig with Rowan Dally on Drums Band Workshop April 2024

"I came in having no clue what this was about, so I showed up and it is exactly what I needed."
Abbey Rapkins

The first workshop would provide an opportunity for young musicians and performers to take the stage for the first time. I recognized the importance of having a versatile musician with experience in community work, mentoring, and excellent stage skills to facilitate this workshop. Additionally, I sought someone with a focus on Southeast Asia, reflecting Darwin's diverse population.

I met James Mangohig, a talented producer and musician from Darwin, whose affinity for diverse musical forms is driven by his Filipino heritage. We shared a common vision, and he agreed to facilitate the first workshop, suggesting the involvement of a core group of talented musician collaborators.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS



“The knowledge that was shared with me by my older peers, it is incredibly influential in the way that I frame my thinking around my music.”

KEDSS Participant Felix Hill

In the four-month period following the KEDSS workshop, notable outcomes have been observed among the participants and within the broader community. A significant number of workshop attendees have gained increased visibility in Darwin's music scene, securing performance opportunities at various local venues. Concurrently, James Mangohig, the workshop facilitator, has expanded his digital presence and increased the frequency of his live performances in the local area.

"I was fortunate to form a connection with Caiti Baker and Andrew Belletty... it's been amazing."

KEDSS Participant Abbey Rapkins

These developments suggest that the workshop may have had a catalytic effect on the participants' musical careers and public profiles. The increased engagement of workshop attendees in the local music scene indicates a potential enhancement of their skills, confidence, or networking capabilities because of the workshop experience. Furthermore, the amplified presence of the workshop lead in both digital and physical spaces may be interpreted as a reciprocal benefit of the workshop, potentially increasing the visibility and credibility of the KEDSS program itself.

This observed pattern of increased participation and visibility in the music industry following a targeted workshop aligns with established theories on the efficacy of skill-building and networking opportunities in creative industries. The outcomes suggest that the workshop may have successfully addressed some of the barriers to entry or advancement typically faced by emerging musicians in regional areas.

Participants performing at Darwin venues post workshop



TESTOMONIAL 1

An adolescent Indigenous participant, aged 12, attended the workshop despite lacking prior musical experience. The facilitators accommodated the youth's aspirations by providing access to recording equipment, including a microphone, headphones, and a computer running GarageBand software. The participant exhibited a strong preference for autonomy, opting to work independently in isolation throughout the duration of the workshop. Their creative

process involved recording rap vocals over internet-sourced instrumental loops. Upon the workshop's conclusion, the participant declined the opportunity to perform publicly but consented to a private listening session with the facilitators. The resulting material deviated from conventional song structures, instead consisting of brief, intense vocal segments characterized by explicit language and raw emotional expression. Notably, the participant showed no interest in preserving or revisiting their creations. Subsequent communication with the participant's guardian, their uncle, revealed significant contextual information. It was disclosed that the youth had recently experienced the loss of their father to suicide, and that music had been a passion of the deceased parent.

This case study highlights the potential of creative workshops to serve as outlets for emotional processing and self-expression, particularly for Indigenous youth facing personal trauma. It also underscores the importance of providing culturally safe spaces that allow for diverse forms of engagement and artistic expression.

TESTOMONIAL 2

The young musical artist Abbey Rapkins, aged 17, found creative inspiration in the conceptual framework of the KEDSS, which led to the composition of her original piece, "The Dry". On the second day of the studio sessions, Rapkins was observed in solitary practice, honing her newly crafted work on guitar. Throughout the week, she underwent a significant artistic development, culminating in the arrangement and rehearsal of a four-song repertoire with a full instrumental ensemble, marking her inaugural collaboration with fellow musicians. The culmination of this artistic process was a public performance at Charles Darwin University on the following Saturday. This event held particular significance as it marked the first occasion on which Rapkins' mother witnessed her daughter's musical presentation. In the subsequent months, Rapkins' burgeoning career

has seen her invited to perform at various venues in the local area, including a notable engagement at the prestigious Darwin Festival.



CASE STUDY: DJ WORKSHOP

EVENT INFORMATION



DJ Tools and Techniques Workshop

Sat 13 April 11am-2pm at CDU Red 1 Level 3 Student Lounge.

Enrolment cap 12

Actual Participants 17

<https://events.humanitix.com/knock-em-down-sound-system-dj-tools-and-techniques-workshop>

Sun 14th April 11am-2pm Bagot Community Centre

Enrolment cap 12

Actual Participants 39

<https://events.humanitix.com/knock-em-down-sound-system-dj-tools-and-techniques-workshop-bagot-community>

Unleash Your Inner DJ: Knock em Down Sound System DJ Tools and Techniques Workshop!

Get ready to spin the decks and master the art of DJing with Charly Templar's exclusive DJ Tools and Techniques Workshop. Whether you're a budding DJ or looking to refine your skills, this workshop is your ticket to the world of beats and mixes.

Workshop Highlights:

- *Delve into the rich history of DJing and turntablism with our engaging introduction.*
- *Get up close with the latest CDJs equipment and sound mixers in our comprehensive overview.*
- *Navigate the digital landscape with our sessions on DJ software.*
- *Learn the secrets of beat mixing, tempo manipulation, and crafting the perfect music set.*

Hands-On Experience:

Participate in interactive beat-matching exercises, using innovative methods like ping-pong balls to master mixing opposing beats.

Benefit from the guidance of expert instructors who will support you at every step.

THE CONCEPT



Charly Templar DJ workshop at Bagot April 2024

For the DJ workshop, I collaborated with Charly Templar, a French Cameroonian-born, Australian-based Professional DJ, Teacher, and Youth Mentor. I had heard about Charly's work in remote indigenous communities as a mentor and workshop facilitator. He had also established a program at the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre, where he trained young people to deliver workshops for inmates.

Charly possessed the right energy and passion for elevating young people to become trainers themselves, making him an ideal facilitator for this workshop.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS



The workshop conducted at **Charles Darwin University** experienced a decent attendance rate, particularly considering the institution's predominant focus on online learning modalities, which typically results in limited on-campus student presence. While participants demonstrated a moderate level of engagement, there was a noticeable reluctance among attendees to actively participate in the practical DJ demonstration on stage.



In contrast, the **Bagot Community** workshop exhibited significantly higher levels of participant engagement. The demographic composition of attendees skewed younger than anticipated, with numerous participants demonstrating aptitude for the technical equipment provided. The workshop commenced at approximately 10:00 and concluded at 14:00, at which point select participants were encouraged to engage in live performances on stage.

WORKSHOP COMPONENTS AND TECHNICAL ASPECTS



The event also served as a platform for Ward, Colin, and the Speaker Building Workshop team to field-test the refurbished Spear grass high-fidelity audio system in an outdoor setting. The location's relative isolation from residential areas facilitated high-volume testing of the system without acoustic disturbance concerns.

COMMUNITY IMPACT AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

The Bagot community DJ workshop held multifaceted significance, with its primary objective being the implementation of diversionary activities for youth, as advocated by community elders. This initiative was designed to function as an intervention mechanism for young individuals at risk of becoming entrenched in cycles of ennui and criminal behavior, potentially leading to juvenile detention and subsequent adult incarceration.

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

The workshop aimed to activate both physical spaces and community engagement, and preliminary assessments suggest a degree of success in achieving these objectives. The event's capacity to foster community participation and provide alternative recreational outlets for youth aligns with broader strategies for social intervention and crime prevention in vulnerable communities.

CASE STUDY: PA SPEAKER BUILDING WORKSHOP



EVENT INFORMATION BUILD YOUR OWN PA SPEAKER WORKSHOP

Thur 10th April 10am-5pm CDU Theatre

Friday 12th April 10am-5pm CDU Theatre

Enrolment cap 20

Actual Participants 37

<https://events.humanitix.com/knock-em-down-sound-system-build-your-own-pa-speaker-workshop>

Craft Your Sound: PA Speaker Building Workshop for Musicians!

Attention all musicians! Elevate your live performances with custom-built PA speakers tailored to your sound. Join sound system experts Ward Hancock and Colin Simpson for an exclusive workshop where you'll learn the intricacies of speaker theory, design, and construction, specifically focused on the bass speaker—a vital element for that perfect low-frequency response.

Workshop Features:

Speaker Theory Mastery: Start with an introduction to speaker theory, diving into driver types, frequency response, and the secrets of enclosure design.

Hands-On Construction: Roll up your sleeves and build your own bass speaker with step-by-step guidance from our experts, utilizing design software and precision tools.

Component Selection: Understand the synergy between speaker drivers and crossover components to produce impeccable sound quality.

Live PA System Integration: Experience your bass speaker in action as part of a full PA system, learning how to connect and test all components for a flawless performance.

Safety First: Engage in a safe workshop environment with a strong emphasis on safety protocols when handling woodworking and electrical tools.

WORKSHOP DESIGN



“Every day was like an event, or a series of events. I love events. Events are the exact opposite of going to school or a job you don't like. They're very motivating. So it's the exact opposite of having something where you know what you're doing, you know what the outcome is supposed to be. This one you come along there, and there's an element of surprise, and there's an element of we can make.”

Elder and Technical Mentor Colin Simpson

For the DIY PA speaker building workshop, I enlisted the help of Colin Simpson, an old friend and colleague who is Darwin's expert audio technician and can repair almost anything under any conditions. Colin is a talented musician, sound mixer, and live sound engineer with

over 40 years of experience. As an Elder from the scene, he has worked across diverse communities and towns in the Northern Territory, predominantly in makeshift venues.

Colin has a passion for reggae sound systems and suggested I speak with Ward Hancock, the co-owner of the *Spear Grass Hi-Fi*, the only reggae sound system operator in town. Ward is a talented musician, composer and producer who built the Sound System by hand in Darwin. Ward's energy and enthusiasm for creating the ultimate reggae sound system provided the perfect platform for building new components in a workshop setting.



"I was a mentor, but I also got mentored as well, you know, it was really cool."

Workshop Facilitator Ward Hancock

The workshop's facilitator, Ward Hancock, was commissioned based on his expertise with sound systems. Upon assessment of the existing setup, it was determined that enhanced bass capabilities were necessary to create an authentic reggae sound system. Consequently, the workshop was structured around the construction of two large bass bin speakers, each housing twin 18-inch drivers. In collaboration with sound engineer Colin Simpson, the G-sub design was selected for its:

- *High bass output*
- *Compact form factor*
- *Improved logistics and transportability*

This design choice aligned with the workshop's community-oriented nature, accommodating limited financial and human resources typically associated with non-commercial endeavors.

HANDS ON APPROACH



“Some of the participants will pick up that thing and run with it, and that to me is how the best knowledge is passed on, people love doing things for the love of doing them and there's also joy in giving the knowledge as well not about how much you're making out of it it's the joy.”

Elder and Technical Mentor Colin Simpson

The workshop, held at Charles Darwin University, unexpectedly attracted nearly 40 participants, showcasing significant community interest. Notable aspects of the participant demographics included:

- *Diverse age range (15 years and older)*
- *Inclusion of high school students*
- *Varied levels of prior experience in audio technology*

Participants engaged in hands-on construction of speaker enclosures and assisted with logistical tasks such as transportation and setup for performances.

COMMUNITY IMPACT



“we've all been very inspired, afterwards a lot of people from the workshops have been inspired to build speakers themselves.”

Workshop Facilitator Ward Hancock

The sound system was tested in two distinct environments:

- *Charles Darwin University campus*
- *Bagot community*

These demonstrations yielded several observations:

- *Participants expressed pride and amazement at the system they helped create*
- *Both university and community audiences were impressed by the system's aesthetics and audio quality*

- *The project fostered engagement among young people, particularly in DJ workshops at Bagot community*

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES



“Young people are figuring less and less things out for themselves, and they’re being told more and more what to think and what to do. I don’t think that’s healthy. I think that the type of knowledge and the type of experience that we do is a different reward, but part of that reward is the joy of giving it, part of it is to know that other people are going to take it and do their own thing with it and pass it on in a different way.”

Elder and Technical Mentor Colin Simpson

The project's success has led to several positive developments:

- *Planned future sound system events in the Bagot community facilitated by Ward Hancock and Colin Simpson with Speargrass HIFI*
- *Allocation of a dedicated space for music creation and rehearsal in the community facilitated by Ward Hancock and Colin Simpson*
- *Expanded vision for the facilitators regarding potential applications of sound systems in diverse settings*
- *Amplified presence of sound system culture within Darwin through the relaunched Speargrass HIFI*

“Because of just one workshop, avenues and doors open up to people that weren't normally there before.”

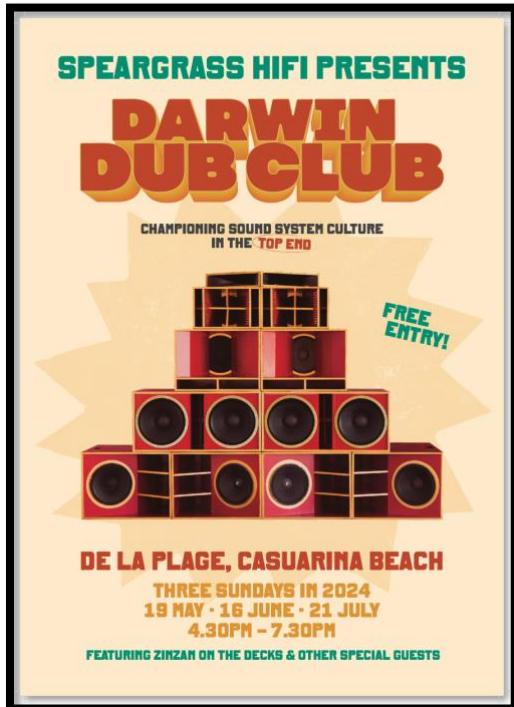
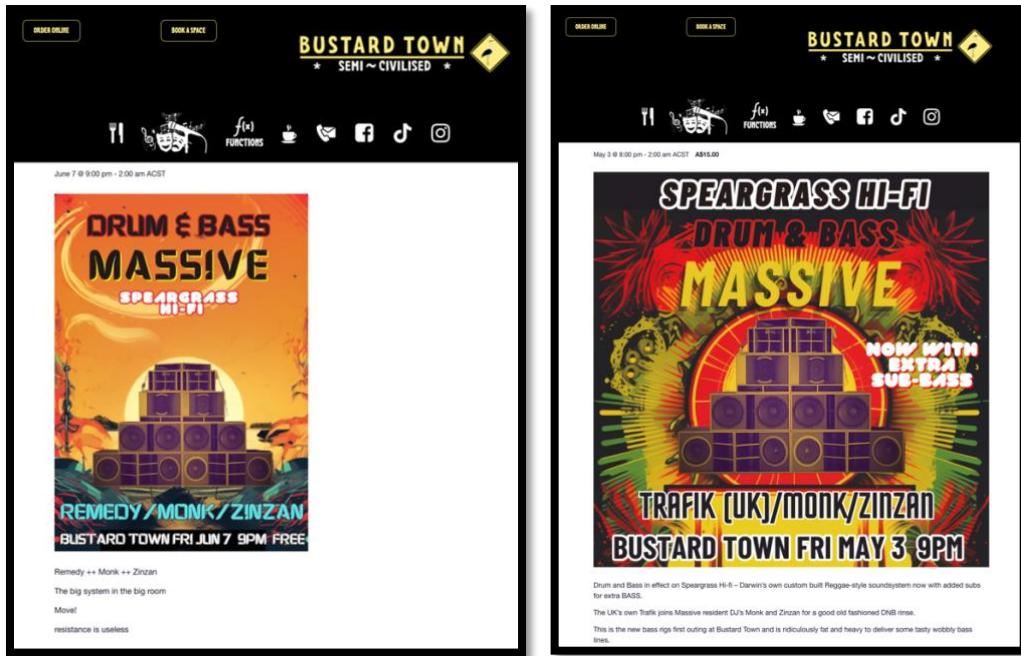
Workshop Facilitator Ward Hancock

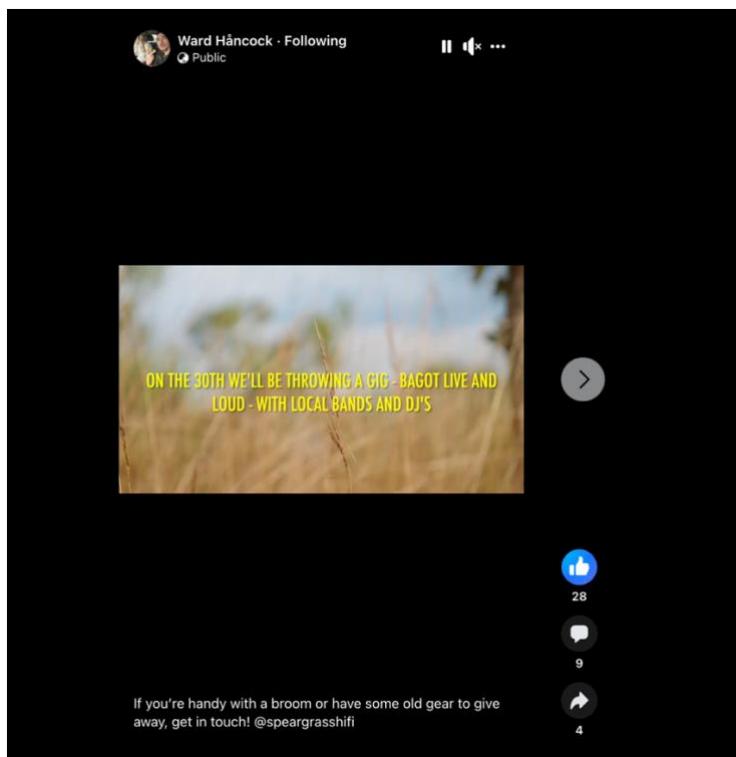
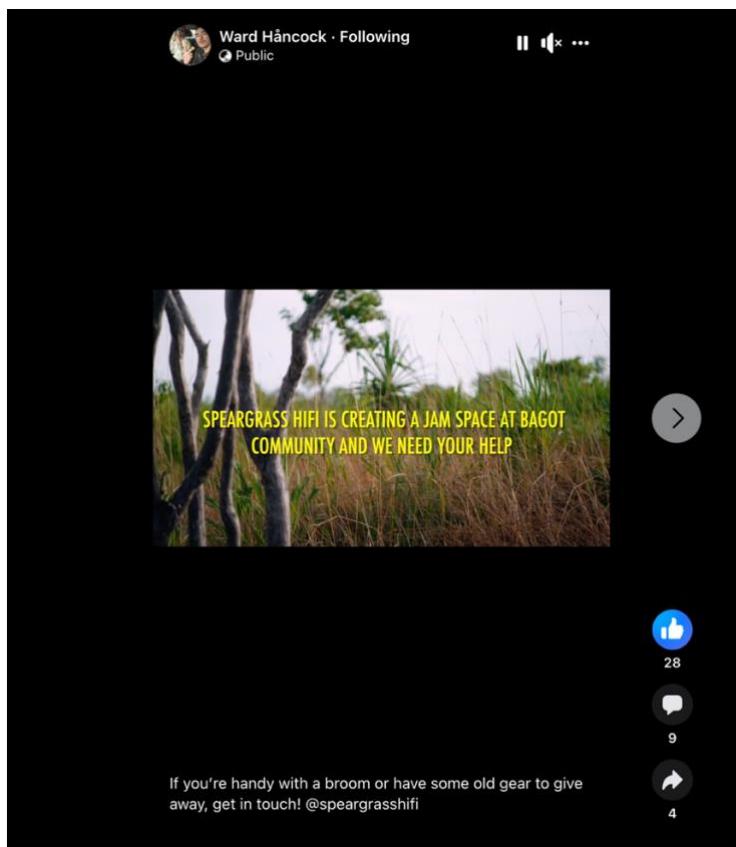
The project demonstrates the potential for community-driven audio technology initiatives to foster skill development, cultural exchange, and social engagement across diverse demographics in Darwin.

Speargrass HIFI has amplified Sound System Culture in the Darwin and Bagot Communities.

“I would love workshops to be held regularly. I think there's a dynamic there that as more people get interested, you know, I have a feeling that KEDSS has triggered something seeded or, you know, fertilised Ward HANCOCK'S SPEARGRASS HI FI, and he's in a wide circle of people as well who are already working on, you know, their own scene, making their own scene and enjoying and operating it.”

Elder and Technical Mentor Colin Simpson





CASE STUDY: VR WORKSHOP



EVENT INFORMATION

VR Music Masterclass

Wed 9th - Thurs 10th April 10am-5pm CDU Music Dept

Enrolment cap 16

Actual Participants 19

<https://events.humanitix.com/knock-em-down-sound-system-vr-music-masterclass>

Experience the Future of Music: Join Our VR Music Masterclass!

Dive into the immersive world of virtual reality and discover how it's revolutionizing the music industry. We're thrilled to invite staff, students, and the public to our hands-on VR Music Masterclass, where you'll learn the art of capturing acoustic performances in a whole new dimension.

Under the expert guidance of Andrew Belletty and Robert Dongas, you'll explore the innovative techniques of Ambisonics sound and 360 video to craft a virtual reality experience alongside recording artists James Mangohig and Caiti Baker. This workshop is your chance to experience firsthand how VR can amplify the musical experience from both the performer's and creator's perspectives.

Don't miss this opportunity to be at the forefront of music technology. Join us and see how VR is not just a tool, but a game-changer for musical expression and enjoyment.

THE COMCEPT

For the VR workshop we delved into the realm of virtual reality (VR) and its potential to revolutionize the way musicians create and experience their art. Collaborating with Rob Dongas, a PhD candidate from the University of Sydney's School of Architecture, Design and Planning, we embarked on an exploration of human-computer interaction and user experience within the realm of VR. The workshop aimed to enhance the VR experience by incorporating a surround sound environment and a vibrotactile extension, quite literally

making the earth move underfoot. The workshop also provided musicians with the opportunity to experiment with VR audio and video capture, using live performance as the source material.

OUTPUTS



The workshop was conceptualized to engender enthusiasm within Darwin's music and arts community regarding virtual reality technology. The primary objective was to demonstrate to musicians and audio engineers the methodologies for capturing Ambisonics recordings and subsequently reproducing them through a multi-channel speaker configuration.

METHODOLOGY



The research design incorporated participant observation, with the investigator assuming the role of observer as workshop facilitator Robert Dongus conducted the session.

The workshop encompassed:

- *Recording using high-resolution virtual reality cameras*
- *Capturing audio with Ambisonics microphones*
- *Playback via an external speaker array*

Given the predominance of musicians among the participants, it was deemed advantageous to incorporate the performance of original acoustic material, capturing both audio and video within a 360-degree spatial environment.

This approach was intended to:

- *Provide participants with experiential understanding of the medium*

- Evaluate the suitability of VR technology for musical performances
- Familiarize participants with the technical aspects of the equipment

OBSERVATIONS



The workshop was an opportunity for me to observe the facilitator and participants interactions with both the VR headsets and external speakers. This observation yielded broad conceptual frameworks that subsequently informed the development of a prototype multimodal sound system detailed below.

TECHNOLOGICAL COMPONENTS

The workshop utilized several key technological elements:

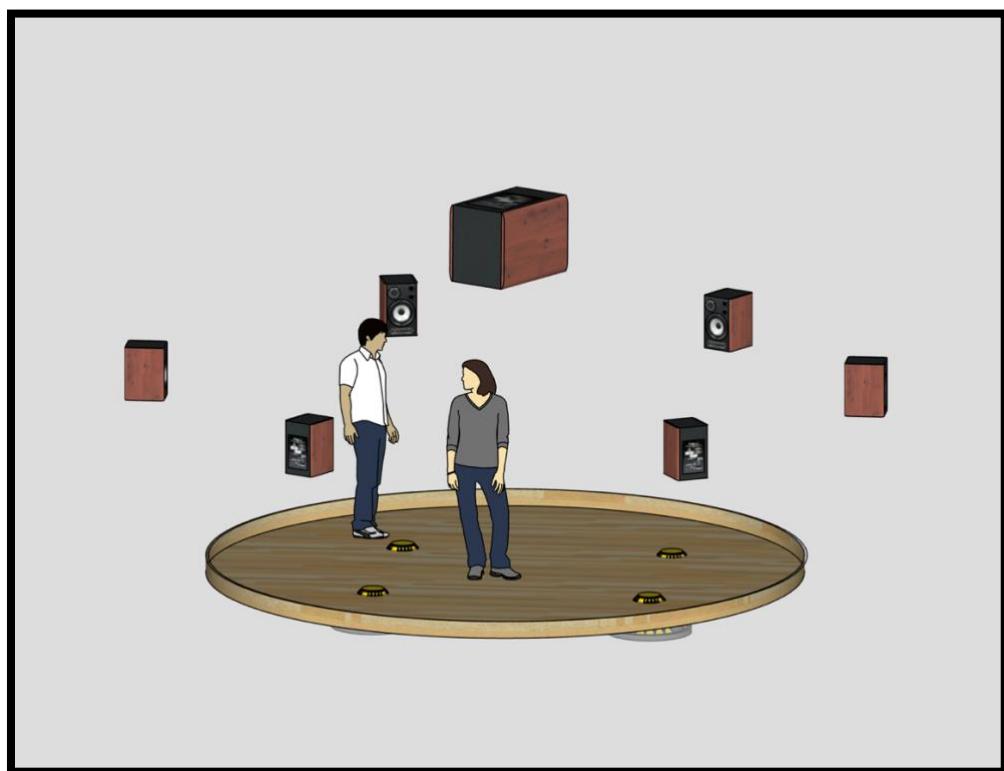
- High-resolution VR camera
- Ambisonics microphone
- Multi-channel speaker setup

- *VR headsets*

This combination of equipment facilitated a comprehensive exploration of immersive audio-visual capture and reproduction techniques within a virtual reality context.

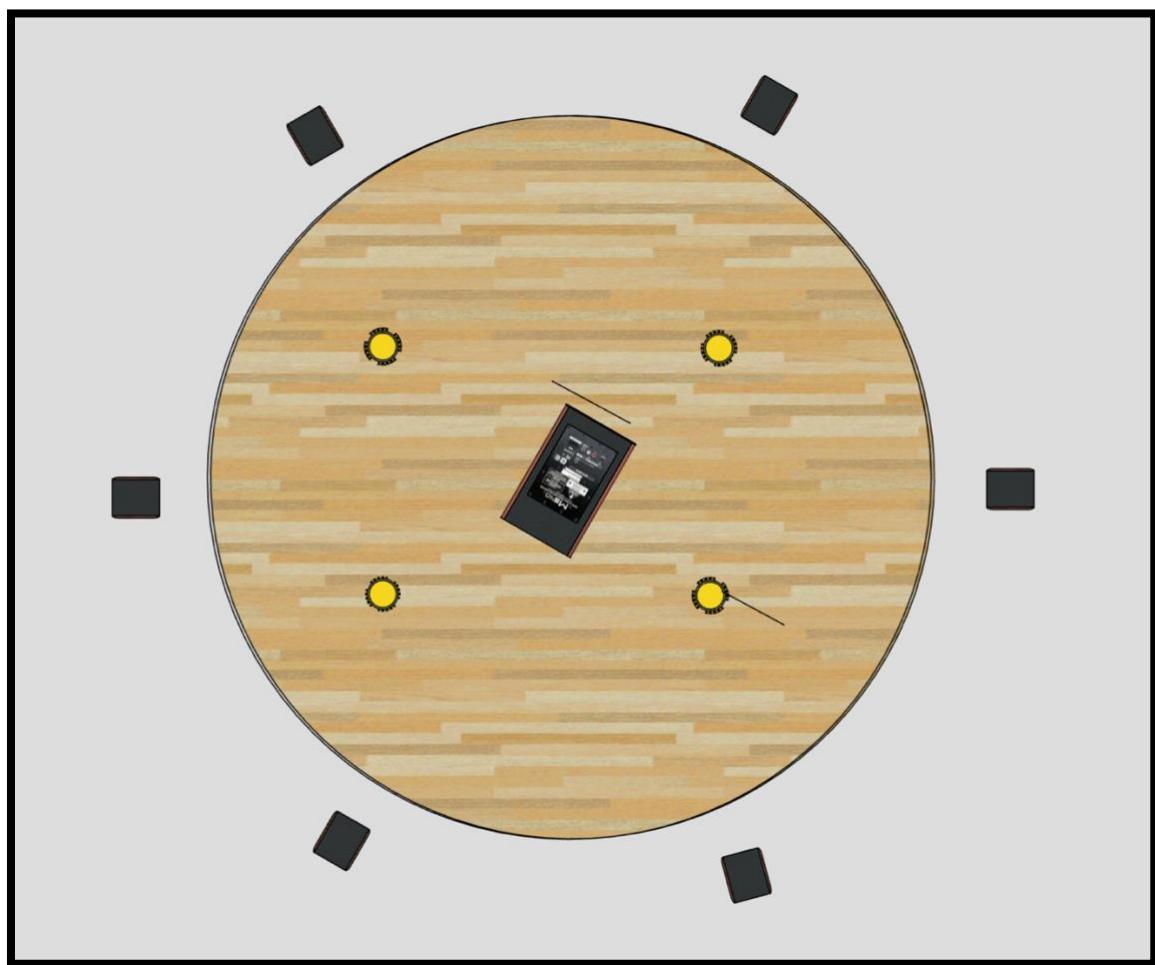


CASE STUDY: MULTI-MODAL SOUNDSYSTEM EXPERIENCE



This study proposes a novel prototype for enhancing shared enjoyment of 360-degree video Sound System experiences through a multi-speaker system with integrated vibrotactile feedback. The system aims to address limitations of traditional surround sound setups for 360-degree video content by maintaining a fixed point of audition while leveraging vibrotactile stimulation to augment immersion.

SYSTEM DESIGN



The prototype incorporates a 7.1 channel fixed speaker array combined with a vibrotactile floor surface.

This configuration allows for:

- Consistent surround sound presentation regardless of viewer orientation
- Enhanced low-frequency response (80-200 Hz) via omnidirectional bass coupling between acoustic and tactile domains
- Shared tactile experience to foster audience connection.

RATIONALE

Fixed speaker positioning mitigates audio-visual mismatch issues inherent in 360-degree video playback with movable listeners. The vibrotactile floor extension capitalizes on the bass-heavy nature of live sound system reproduction to create an enveloping multi-sensory experience.

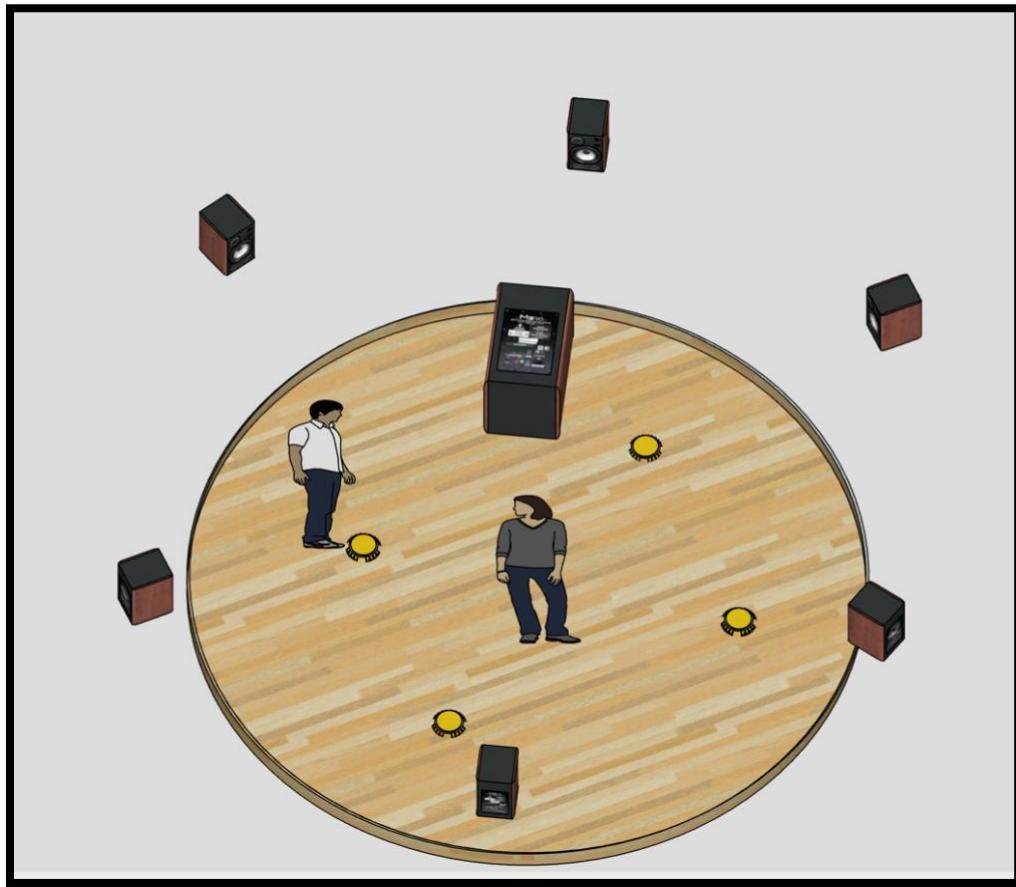
SOUND SYSTEM APPLICATION

- Enhancing engagement in shared 360-degree music video experiences
- Providing an accessible alternative to anxiety-inducing live music events
- Expanding immersive capabilities of art installations and public spaces.

FURTHER RESEARCH

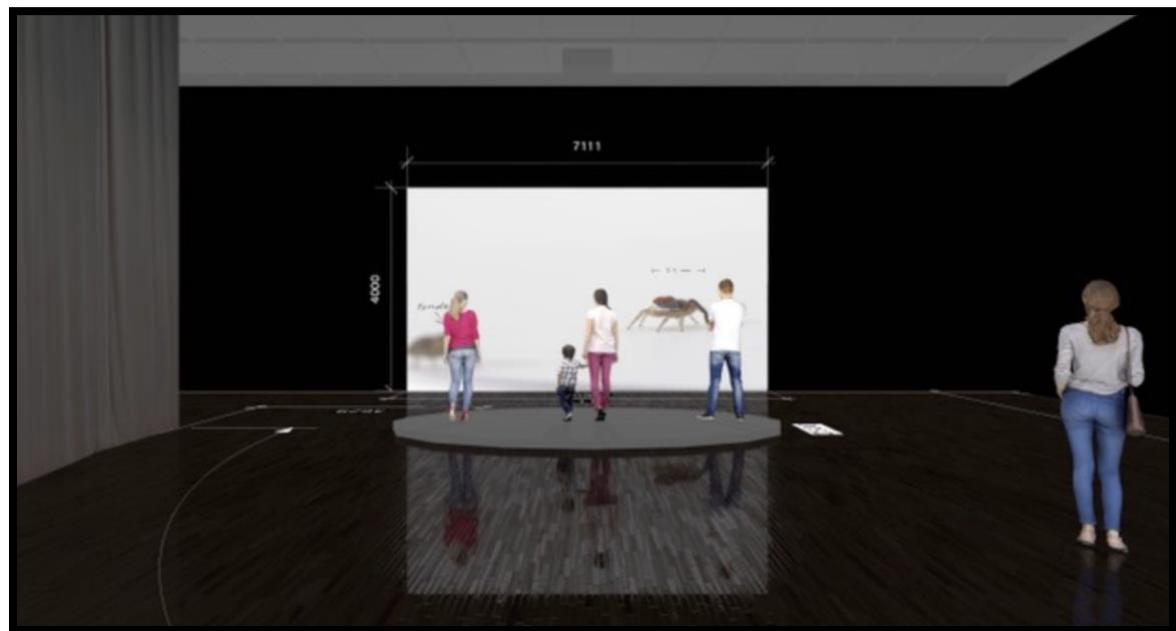
- Integration with game engines for dynamic audio-visual-tactile synchronization
- Development of non-traditional speaker array configurations optimized for 360-degree dome projection
- Empirical evaluation of immersion and shared experience through participant surveys

MULTIMODAL IMMERSIVE SOUND SYSTEM FOR 360 VIDEO APPLICATIONS



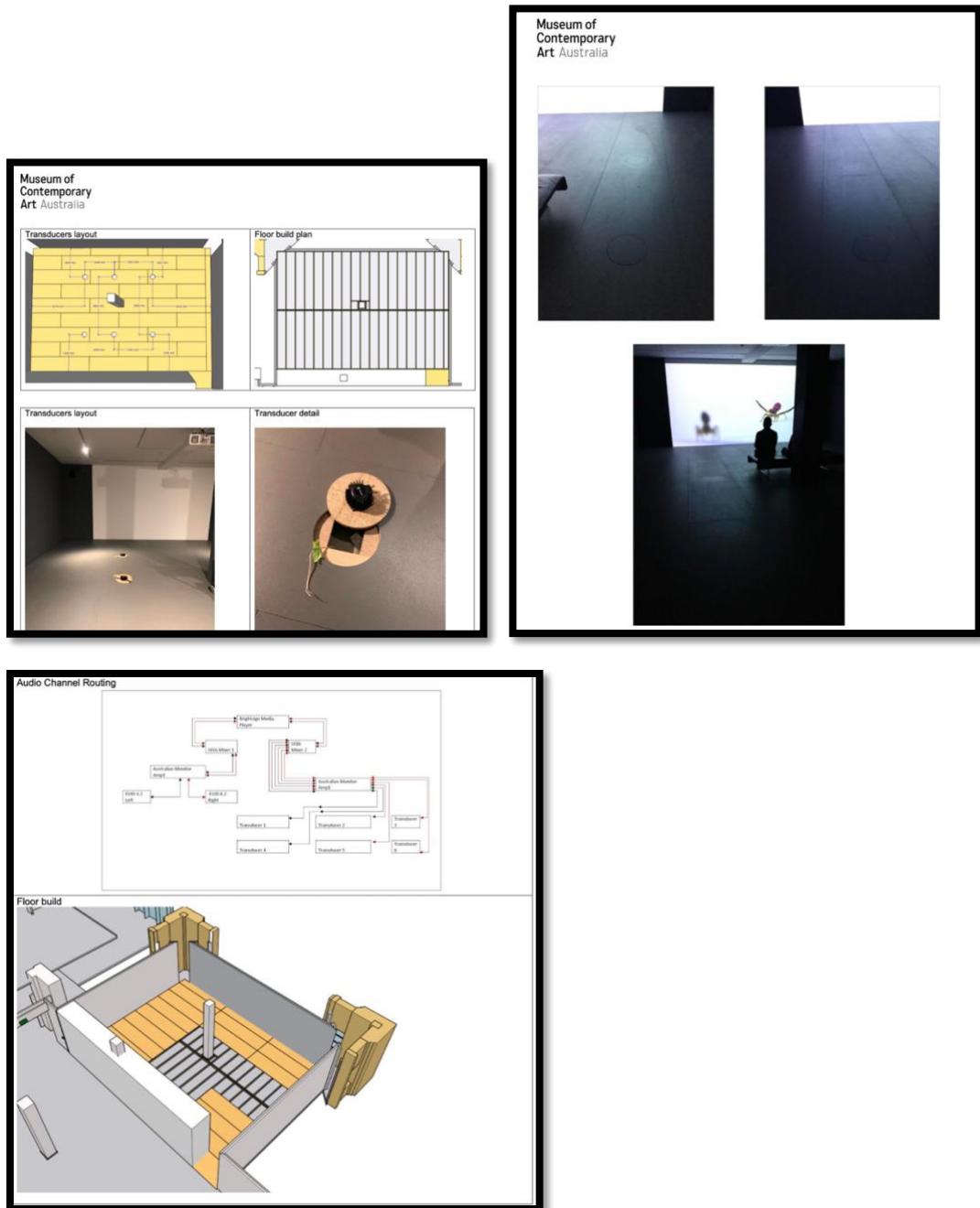
A circular array of 6 full-range loudspeakers positioned at 60° azimuthal intervals, mounted at 1.5m elevation. A single full-range loudspeaker positioned at the central axis, mounted at 3m elevation. Four low-frequency transducers installed beneath the floor surface, arranged in a square configuration at 90° intervals from the central point.

EXAMPLES OF PREVIOUS WORK IN MULTIMODAL IMMERSIVE SOUND SYSTEMS BY ANDREW BELLETTY



A speaker array and vibrotactile floor installed at 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, October 2024 for the work *The Origins of Art*, for Maria Fernanda Cardoso.

A speaker array and vibrotactile floor installed at Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2018 for the work *The Origins of Art*, for Maria Fernanda Cardoso.



CASE STUDY: CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE



Bass Blast Concert

Sat 13th April 2pm to 6pm CDU Basketball Courts

<https://events.humanitix.com/knock-em-down-sound-system-bass-blast-concert-cdu>

Knock em Down Sound System Showcase at Charles Darwin University!

An All-Star Cast Performance featuring bands and DJs mentored during the workshops promises to be an unforgettable showcase of talent and music mastery. With a lineup that includes both emerging artists and seasoned artists, this event is set to dazzle

audiences with a diverse range of musical styles and performances. This event marks the beginning of the much-anticipated Dry Season with a bang!

Event Highlights:

Star-Studded Line-Up: Experience an unforgettable day featuring the bands and DJs who have been honed to perfection during our workshops, alongside our renowned facilitators and local music legends.

Seasonal Celebration: Embrace the spirit of Darwin's Knock em Down Season with music that resonates with the energy and vibrancy of the Dry Season's arrival.

Versatile Venue: Hosted at the Charles Darwin University's basketball arena, our event is prepared for any weather with both indoor and outdoor areas.

Community and Diversity: Aimed at attracting a wide audience, our line-up includes a mix of genres and styles, ensuring there's something for everyone.

Family-Friendly Fun: With food and beverage vendors catering to an open-access, all-ages event, bring your family and friends along for a night to remember.

Join us for an evening filled with rhythm, melodies, and the magic of live music!

THE CONCEPT



I wanted to create a platform for participants to perform, utilizing the sound system that the community had actively built. The venues were intentionally informal, with the first event focused on bands held at the indoor basketball court of Charles Darwin University. Subsequently, the sound system was moved to the Bagot community for a DJ-focused event. The main aim was to inspire and give confidence to young musicians and DJs, encouraging them to use their creative energy to make musical spaces within the community.

COMMUNITY IMPACT



The selection of the basketball court at Charles Darwin University as the venue for our music workshop and performance was based on several strategic considerations, with the primary factor being the historical efficacy of such spaces in regional and remote areas. Basketball courts typically offer essential amenities, including shelter, sanitation facilities, and electrical infrastructure, making them ideal for hosting cultural events.

"I think that it's important to remember that Darwin, whilst it is isolated and 100% needs these opportunities, it is not the only place in the NT that is in desperate need of these opportunities... And if you can have a travelling workshop that does the NT for six months of the year, and you get to do an annual workshop every year that continues, it would be truly amazing."

KEDSS Participant Felix Hill

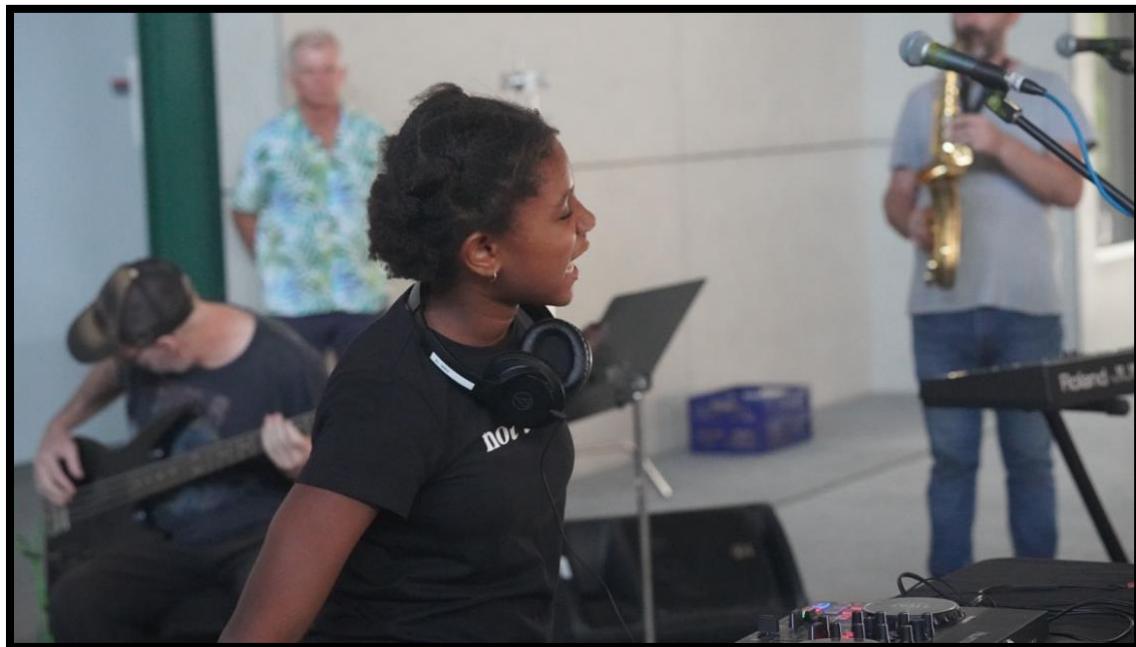


The university's indoor basketball court proved to be an exemplary location, boasting superior facilities. The institution's support was instrumental, as they provided air conditioning and carpeting, thus enhancing the venue's suitability for our event.

We were cognizant of the potential challenges in attracting an audience, particularly given the limited on-campus student population at Charles Darwin University. However, the primary objective of the concert setup was to demonstrate the transformative potential of underutilized spaces. Our aim was to illustrate how a vacant area with basic amenities could be repurposed into a viable performance venue through the addition of a sound system.

This demonstration of accessibility is crucial for fostering a mindset of possibility among musicians, DJs, and sound engineers. It tangibly showcases that elaborate staging, lighting, and high-end audio

equipment are not prerequisites for creating a functional performance space; a basic public address (PA) system suffices.



The event commenced with performances from the DJ workshop participants, which served the dual purpose of engaging the audience and verifying the functionality of the audio setup. Subsequently, musicians from the stage-ready band workshop presented their

repertoire, culminating in a 90-minute concert.



This event also served as a practical application for the speaker-building workshop, allowing participants to witness their creations in a live performance context. The collaborative nature of the event was evident in the substantial assistance provided by workshop participants on the day of the concert, effectively integrating elements from the DJ, stage-ready band, and speaker-building workshops.



"That whole sense of self -empowerment, I believe, would bring people joy. Some people may not have much of it and may never get much of it, but there's a chance with programs like KEDSS. The people that came along proved how worthy and wonderful an experience it is, because everyone enjoyed it. Everybody comes away feeling like a winner. You cannot pass knowledge on without them, they're absolutely essential."

Elder and Technical Mentor Colin Simpson

In retrospect, the impact of this initiative on the participants has been significant, as evidenced by their increased visibility and engagement within Darwin's music and festival circuits. This outcome underscores the success of our approach in empowering local talent and fostering community engagement through accessible, multi-faceted cultural events.

CASE STUDY: BAGOT PERFORMANCE



Bass Blast Concert

Sun 14th April 2pm to 6pm Bagot Community Basketball Courts

<https://events.humanitix.com/knock-em-down-sound-system-bass-blast-concert-bagot-community>

Knock em Down Sound System Showcase

An All-Star Cast Performance featuring DJs mentored during the workshops promises to be an unforgettable showcase of talent and music mastery. With a lineup that includes both emerging artists and seasoned artists, this event is set to dazzle audiences with a diverse range of musical styles and performances. This event marks the beginning of the much-anticipated Dry Season with a bang!

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Family-Friendly Fun: With food and beverage vendors catering to an open-access, all-ages event, bring your family and friends along for a night to remember.

COMMUNITY IMPACT



"I can feel young again. I feel young for a little while when I'm involved in this program."

Elder and Technical Mentor Colin Simpson

The culmination of the DJ workshop, PA building workshop, and VR workshop manifested in a performance at the Bagot community, an urban Indigenous settlement located in the heart of Darwin. Historically, this community of 300-400 residents boasted a vibrant music and arts scene. However, in recent years, many of the public spaces within the community have fallen into disrepair.



"At Bagot community we are helping to set up a space for young people to come in and play music and that all came from the KEDSS workshops."

Workshop Facilitator Ward Hancock

The basketball courts, which previously served as the primary performance area, lost their roof due to a cyclone, resulting in the entire area becoming derelict and overgrown. Consequently, the only viable venue for the performance was the small church hall. Community members engaged in preparatory efforts, clearing spear grass from the perimeter and cleaning the facility. Essential infrastructure, including a roof, freshly cleaned sanitation facilities, and three-phase power (restored through the assistance of a local electrician), was made available.



This setting provided an excellent opportunity to test the capabilities of the PA building team, as outdoor locations typically present challenges for bass-heavy sound systems. The spatial constraints necessitated the use of the sound system as a single, large stack, which inadvertently resulted in a reggae sound system aesthetic.



I took the opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of 360-degree camera virtual reality (VR) recording techniques and Ambisonics audio capture during the performance. The data collected from these

experimental recordings was subsequently analyzed to inform the development of my multimodal speaker system design. This approach allowed me to assess the viability of immersive audiovisual technologies in capturing and reproducing the performance environment. The 360-degree video recording provided a comprehensive visual representation of the space, while the Ambisonics audio capture enabled the preservation of spatial audio information. The integration of these two modalities aimed to create a more holistic and immersive representation of the performance, which could potentially enhance the listener's experience when reproduced through a multimodal speaker system.

"It's hard to get into the Bagot community, but out of this workshop we're now doing another sound system performance there in a couple of weeks."

Workshop Facilitator Ward Hancock

The event revealed a surprising lack of familiarity with the Bagot community among young musicians, DJs, and sound engineers from the surrounding area, despite its proximity. This realization served as a significant cultural insight.



Community elders demonstrated their support by organizing a large-scale barbecue, which successfully attracted both children and adults, fostering a family-friendly atmosphere.



A key outcome of the event emerged from discussions with Natalie Harwood, the community center manager. She expressed a desire to revitalize music within the community, particularly considering the

currently underutilized recreation rooms. This conversation led to further collaboration with Ward and Colin from the PA workshop.



In late August, these discussions culminated in a concert featuring the Speargrass Hi-Fi DJs and rappers. The event's momentum was harnessed to renovate and repurpose the recreation room into a band rehearsal and jam space.



This initiative represents a potential catalyst for community rejuvenation, particularly given the importance of diversionary activities for Indigenous youth. Such small-scale interventions have the potential to effect significant positive change within the community.



WHAT IS A SOUND SYSTEM?

By placing the community at the center, the *Knock 'em Down Sound System* became an abstract concept, extending the idea of what a sound system is. It suggests that a sound system can exist purely in the mind of the individual, transforming when community energy is applied. The musicians who participated in the stage-ready band workshops were transformed by the experience of being thrown together with random musicians and by actively participating in building a PA system. These simple activations can precipitate enormous change in the minds of artists, allowing them to take control of the entire process, creating new pathways for innovation and thinking beyond corporate schemas.

At the Bagot community, the freshly minted DJs rapidly gained confidence as they performed in front of their peers and community, with the bass traveling through the entire community, competing with the loud buzzing of cicadas, and the tin roof of the hall rattling with acoustic energy. The hand-built, bright red *Spear Grass Hi-Fi*, assembled directly onto the concrete floor of the community hall, is a powerful reminder that small urban interventions can seed large-scale positive change.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the evolution of Darwin's live sound system and music scene, I see a persistent undercurrent of **non-conformity** despite changes over time. The scene remains largely **non-commercial**, with many DJ's and musicians performing for free rather than for profit. While younger musicians are emerging, older generations continue to play a crucial role in mentoring and supporting them.

A significant theme in the discussion is the **intergenerational exchange** of knowledge. Younger musicians, aged 13 to 18, actively engage with older musicians, fostering a sense of respect and recognition among different age groups. This relationship contrasts with my own experiences at that age, where learning was often about avoiding certain paths rather than collaboration.

The KEDSS activities highlighted unique challenges affecting young people in Darwin:

- **Economic Disparities:** Young people face high living costs in Darwin, making it difficult to participate in social activities. This economic strain can lead to disengagement and frustration.
- **Government Response:** The local government's approach has been punitive, increasing police presence rather than addressing underlying issues through community engagement.
- **Disconnection from Community:** Many youths feel disconnected from live interactions, often resorting to virtual engagement via mobile phones and gaming instead.

Addressing Social Issues

- Workshops provide an alternative to the government's punitive approach to youth issues

- They offer diversionary activities for young people who may otherwise get into trouble due to boredom or lack of resources

Participation and Engagement

- Darwin's high cost of living makes it difficult for many young people to participate in social and cultural activities
- Workshops provide free, accessible opportunities for creative expression and skills development
- Regular workshops should be held during every school holiday
- Continuous programs allow participants to build on their skills and projects over time

Skill Development

- Teach a range of skills including music production, performance, remixing, podcasting, and audio book creation
- Focus on authorship and distribution skills to help participants potentially earn money from their creations

Cost-Effectiveness

- Investing in creative programs can be more cost-effective than increasing policing
- A year-round program with weekly sessions and intensive holiday workshops could potentially run for the cost of hiring one police officer
- By providing these opportunities, workshops can help engage young people, develop their skills, and potentially reduce social issues in regional areas like the Northern Territory

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Further research is proposed to develop an innovative prototype aimed at enhancing the collective experience of 360-degree video Sound System content through a multi-speaker array incorporating synchronized vibrotactile feedback. This system seeks to address the constraints of conventional surround sound configurations for 360-degree video by maintaining a stationary auditory perspective while utilizing tactile stimulation to augment immersion. The proposed virtual system represents a potential approach to mitigating socioeconomic barriers to participation in physical music scenes, while offering alternative modes of engagement for individuals facing challenges in attending public live music events.

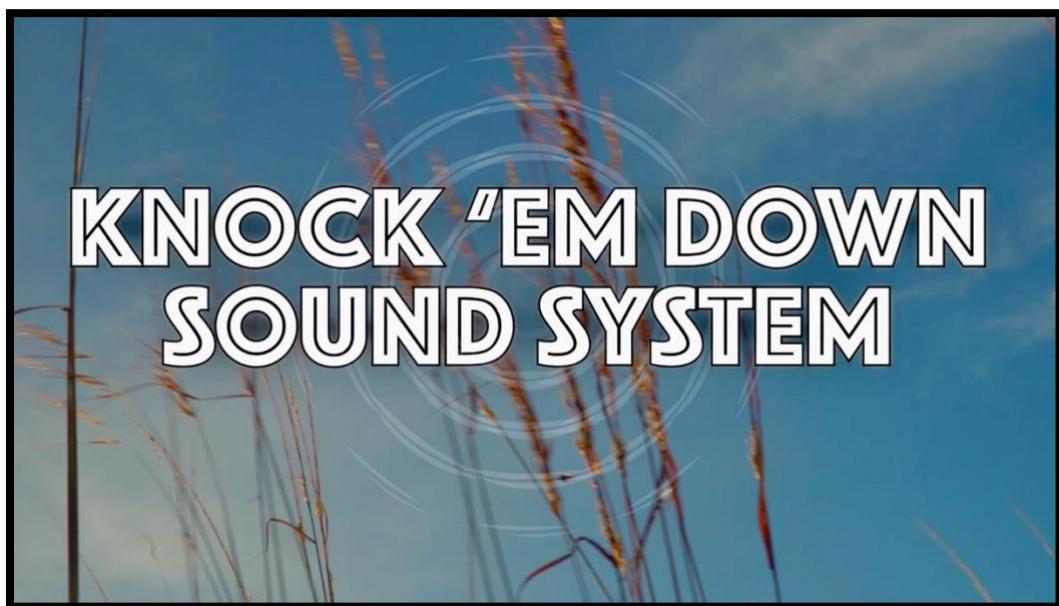
The primary objectives of this research initiative are to:

- *Develop a functional prototype integrating spatial audio and vibrotactile feedback*
- *Evaluate the system's efficacy in enhancing immersion and shared enjoyment*
- *Assess the potential for increasing accessibility to music experiences*
- *Explore applications for remote participation in live events*
- *Potential Impact*
- This research has the potential to contribute to the fields of immersive media, accessibility technology, and virtual social experiences. By offering an alternative means of engaging with music content, the proposed system may help bridge socioeconomic divides and provide inclusive options for individuals with mobility or sensory limitations. Additionally, the findings may inform future developments in remote concert experiences and virtual music communities.

RESEARCH OUTPUTS



RESEARCH OUTPUT: DOCUMENTARY FILM



Secure link to KEDSS Film

<https://youtu.be/oEqZUf1fldc>

PLEASE CONTACT FILM PRODUCER ANDREW BELLETTY FOR HIGH RESOLUTION 5.1 DCP AND STEREO SCREENING COPIES OF THE FILM.

Duration 11.50

Release September 2024

Directed by Mitch Drescher

Produced by Andrew Belletty

The Knockem Down Sound System documentary film follows a group of Darwin musicians, DJ's and Sound technicians as they build a sound system. Based on a series of music workshops and concerts designed to inspire people to get on stage to play or create music, motivated by the challenges faced by producer Andrew Belletty as an 18-year-old trying to play original music in Darwin. The film focuses on the unique environmental and cultural factors that influence music creation in Darwin, such as the intense heat, humidity, and the 'knock 'em down' season and the challenges faced by young musicians in Darwin in getting their music heard and expressing their creativity. The film highlights the importance of building a community around music and providing mentorship to the next generation of artists. The workshops included music production, DJing, virtual reality experiences and the construction and testing of a pair of large, handmade G-Sub speakers to be used for the concerts and workshops. The workshops show how the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills, where experienced musicians sharing their expertise with younger participants can have a positive impact in bringing people together and fostering a sense of community.

COMMUNITY IMPACT



"I think the documentary allowed me to separate any anxieties I had, the video was amazing, and it was a really good experience and just made me happier."

KEDSS Participant Felix Hill

The decision to produce a documentary film as part of the research project in Darwin represents a strategic shift in methodology, aimed at maximizing the impact and reach of the study. This approach aligns with the broader objectives of the Sound System Technologies Research Project while addressing the specific needs of Darwin's music community.

RATIONALE FOR DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION



The documentary serves dual purposes:

- **Research Documentation:** *It functions as a comprehensive record of the workshops and events, providing rich audiovisual data for analysis within the context of the larger sound system technologies research program.*
- **Community Activation:** *The film acts as a catalyst for revitalizing Darwin's music scene, offering a platform for local artists and community members to showcase their contributions and experiences.*

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS



The documentary format was chosen for its:

- **Extensive Reach:** *It has the potential to engage a wider audience beyond academic circles, facilitating knowledge dissemination and community engagement.*
- **Longevity:** *The film provides a lasting record of a specific period in Darwin's cultural history, serving as a valuable resource for future researchers and community members.*
- **Participatory Approach:** *The production process itself becomes a form of action research, involving community members in the documentation and representation of their experiences.*

RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND COLLABORATION



To accommodate the documentary production within budgetary constraints, the researcher:

- *Streamlined operational expenses, taking on multiple roles in workshop organization and documentation.*
- *Leveraged local networks, collaborating with Mitch Drescher, a skilled filmmaker with deep community connections.*

This collaboration facilitated:

- *Cost-effective production*
- *Integration of intergenerational knowledge*
- *Enhanced local context and perspective in the documentary*

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION



The documentary's impact will be assessed through:

Immediate Feedback: A screening event was held at Happy Yess in Darwin Friday 13th September 2024 at 6pm. 23 people attended including participants and facilitators.

TESTIMONIAL HIGHLIGHTS

"For me it's impacted my performance. I now have a lot more courage and like I'm just stronger in myself because I know what I kind of deserve now and how I need to just be myself and not cater to other people's choices."

Abbey Rapkins

Short interviews were recorded by an independent researcher after the screening to gather initial responses from participants and community members.

Participants Felix Hill and Abbey Rapkins shared how the workshop allowed them to network, gain confidence, and learn from mentors across different age groups. The importance of knowledge exchange between generations and the benefits of in-person workshops, especially in regional areas like the Northern Territory, are highlighted. They express the need for such workshops to be held regularly, at least annually, to foster talent and provide opportunities for growth in the music industry.

Facilitator Ward Hancock shared how the workshop introduced him to more people in the local music scene, fostering connections and friendships. He highlights his mentorship relationship with Colin Simpson, which he considers one of the best connections from the workshop.

Ward emphasizes the importance of intergenerational knowledge exchange for preserving community and culture and expresses his commitment to passing on the knowledge and guidance he received from mentors to younger generations.

Ward believes workshops like 'Knock Em Down Sound Systems' are essential for regions like the Northern Territory, as they provide opportunities for aspiring musicians and sound engineers to interact with and learn from industry professionals in a practical setting. He discusses the challenges of accessing and connecting with experienced professionals in the industry without such workshops.

Ward shares his experience of leading a speaker-building workshop, despite not being an expert in that area. He highlights the value of the workshop in demonstrating that anyone can pursue their interests and goals, even in a place like Darwin.

Ward advocates for consistent and regular workshops to facilitate long-lasting skill development and change and emphasizes the importance of nurturing and supporting ongoing growth, rather than relying on one-off events.

The workshop led to further collaborations, such as an upcoming gig at Bagot and plans to establish a jam room and PA system for young people in the community.

Ward discusses the importance of providing spaces and opportunities for young people to engage with music and see local bands perform.

Elder and Mentor Colin Simpson expresses his delight in seeing young people engaged in community arts and performing arts programs, which makes him feel youthful. He emphasizes the importance of intergenerational knowledge exchange and self-empowerment through these programs, contrasting it with the current trend of being told what to think and do. Colin values the joy of giving knowledge and seeing others take it and make it their own.

Colin advocates for regular workshops as an effective way to pass on knowledge, especially in Indigenous communities where lecturing is less effective. He believes workshops allow for meaningful dialogue, participation, and a sense of achievement for all involved. He sees workshops as essential for regions like the Northern Territory and hopes for future workshops to include remote area participants.

Colin suggests that the 'Knock 'Em Down Sound Systems' program has sparked interest and inspired others to create their own scenes. He believes there is a natural dynamic to the community arts scene in Darwin, where people come and go, and new ideas emerge organically. Colin draws inspiration from Andrew Belletty's story about the origins of the band Yothu Yindi, which he sees as an example of how history can be made when the right people come together with the right attitude.

Long-term Impact: The film's contribution to community building and sound system culture maintenance will be evaluated over time.

Research Integration: The documentary will be analyzed within the broader framework of the Sound System Technologies Research Project, contributing to understanding the role of such events in community cohesion and cultural preservation.

RESEARCH OUTPUT PODCAST 1

ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION WITH TODD WILLIAMS



LISTEN TO AUDIO RECORDING: A CONVERSATION WITH TODD WILLIAMS

Duration 51m

Release April 2024

Produced by Andrew Belletty

An interview with Todd Williams, an artist, singer, songwriter, director, producer, and mentor involved with the VAMP TV project. The discussion covers a wide range of topics related to the VAMP TV project, including its origins, goals, and impact on engaging Indigenous students in remote schools through music, arts, and performance. Key discussion points include the project's aim to keep Indigenous kids engaged in school, showcase their talents and cultures, provide pathways for aspiring musicians, build capacity within communities, and foster a sense of representation and pride. The conversation also delves into Todd's personal journey as a musician with the band Swamp Jockeys, their experiences navigating the local music scene, recording challenges, and the importance of original music and Northern Territory.

RESEARCH OUTPUT PODCAST 2

ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION WITH
CHARLY TEMPLAR



**LISTEN TO AUDIO RECORDING:
A CONVERSATION WITH CHARLY TEMPLAR**

Duration 59m

Release April 2024

Produced by Andrew Belletty

A conversation with Charly Templar, an international DJ, producer, and mentor from Cameroon. The discussion covers Charly's journey to Australia and his work mentoring and empowering young people, particularly Indigenous youth, through music, sports, and various community projects. Key topics include Charly's background and what initially sparked his interest in Indigenous Australians, his experiences working in remote communities like Gapuwiayak and Yirrkala, the challenges faced by disengaged youth in urban areas like Darwin, and his current initiatives like Dream Impact Inspire aimed at providing career pathways and opportunities through music and mentorship.

RESEARCH OUTPUT PODCAST 3

ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION WITH COLIN SIMPSON



**LISTEN TO AUDIO RECORDING:
A CONVERSATION WITH COLIN SIMPSON**

Release April 2024

Duration 61m

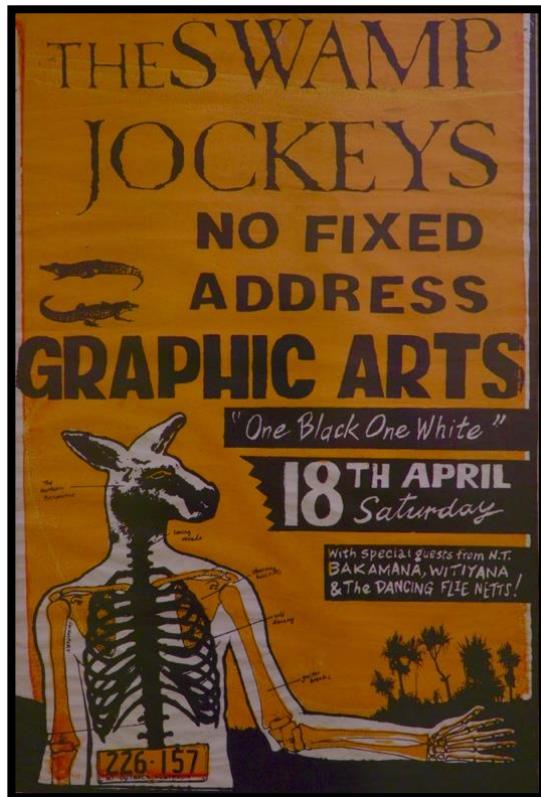
Produced by Andrew Belletty

A conversation between Andrew Belletty and Colin Simpson, discussing their experiences in the music scene in Darwin, Northern Territory in the 1980s and beyond. They reminisce about the challenges they faced in finding venues for original music, leading them to organize informal gigs in unconventional spaces like basketball courts, verandas, and even living rooms. They talk about the diverse audiences they attracted, from bikers to lawyers, and the inclusive, community-driven spirit that characterized their events.

The interview also touches on Colin's role as a sound technician, repairing equipment for bands, and his experiences working at significant events like the Barunga Festival. They discuss the evolution of the music scene in Darwin, from the informal 'Swamp' venue at the university to the establishment of spaces like the Darwin Music Development Centre (DMDC) and Happy Yess. The conversation highlights the resilience, creativity, and passion that drove the underground music scene in Darwin during that era.

RESEARCH OUTPUT PODCAST 4

**ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION ABOUT
SWAMP JOCKEYS**



LISTEN TO AUDIO RECORDING:
A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE SWAMP JOCKEYS

Release April 2024

Duration 64m

Produced by Andrew Belletty

The interview discusses an unreleased demo tape recorded by the band in 1985-1986. Todd Williams provides insights into various songs from the tape, including their inspirations, live performances, and deeper meanings. Touching on themes of indigenous culture, cyclones, mining companies' impact on Aboriginal land, homesickness, poisoning incidents, rural life, and toxic masculinity

APPENDIX

DR ANDREW BELLETTY ACADEMIC PROFILE



Andrew Belletty is an academic, sound designer, and artist whose research and pedagogy are informed by three decades of professional media design practice, workshop facilitation and performance within Indian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures. He has a strong commitment to community engagement and currently a Post Graduate Researcher at the Design Lab, University of Sydney, in Sonic Street Cultures.

A founding member of the Indigenous band Yothu Yindi and a career spanning over three decades in fine arts and media. Belletty's art is influenced by Indigenous Indian knowledge, and He is known for creating intimate, tactile, and site-responsive listening experiences that transform acoustic energies into flexible, experiential forms.

SONIC STREET TECHNOLOGIES: CULTURE, DIASPORA AND KNOWLEDGE

Sonic Street Technologies (SST) is a European Research Council (ERC) funded research project (2021 – 2025) examining the role and value of bottom up, subaltern and Global South uses of recorded music technologies. Jamaican sound systems, Brazilian aparelhagem, Mexican sonideros and Colombian picos provide good examples. The project aims to map the distribution and history of these SST worldwide; to investigate the social, economic and cultural conditions from which they are born; and to achieve a deeper understanding of the nature of technology itself and its uses for social and economic progress. SST adopts a practice-as-research methodology as a respect for the knowledge embodied in current sound system and similar street cultures and to help build capacities for their autonomous development.

Sonic Street Technologies (SST) spring up around the planet as a web of collectively engineered audio vibrations. They often originate in the Global South and its diaspora, where playing recorded music out of doors is an essential part of many popular cultures. They are more likely to be found at the margins of the cities – usually, on the

ghetto streets, not the high streets. The equipment is often “low-tech,” re-purposed, hacked and customized to generate an intensive auditory experience for their audience. For more than fifty years SST have fostered music evolution and technological innovation. They have stimulated identity, building and collective empowerment, and provided a source of income to disenfranchised communities, not to mention inspiring forms of popular music worldwide.

This project is the first project to be able to map the global distribution of SST. It will also provide numerous local in-depth investigations of the social, cultural and technological contribution that sonic street technologies make for their communities. The project aims to raise questions about what the relationship between technology and society can and should be. It claims that SST provide a new, productive and urgently required understanding of the social, cultural and political nature of technology.

The SST project is designed to involve not only researchers, but also sound system and other street technology professionals – engineers, selectors, MCs/ DJs, owners and others. It also must include the support, participation and collaboration from the many regular followers attending the dances and sessions. These music street cultures are a huge well-established and rich cultural resource in which a wide range of people play an important part.

Over the five-year period of the project (including a start-up and write up at the beginning and end) we will cover in

Year One: summer 2021 to summer 2022 – sound systems: Jamaica, Caribbean, Jamaican diaspora and Jamaica influence across Europe and North America

Year Two: 2022 to 2023 aparelhagem, radiolas, trio electrico, funkeiros etc – Brazil

Year Three: 2023 to 2024 – sonideros: Mexico; los picos: Columbia and Spanish speaking Latin America

Year Four: 2024 to 2025 – sound systems: Africa, Australia, China, Japan

We will work with local researchers, organisations and agencies to create safe spaces (actual and virtual) for knowledge exchange between professionals and between them and researchers for the benefit of each and all. The SST project calls for participation from:

researchers on sound system and other street cultures and technology more generally

professional engineers, selectors, MCs/ DJs, owners and others

supporters, followers and enthusiasts

Research will be done with gatherings, conferences and events in different countries and online, as well as profiling the contribution of technologies, sound systems and scenes. This website and our social media channels are designed to curate, archive and provide accessible resources for ongoing activities across sound system and other street cultures and scenes. We aim to gather, share and amplify the vast amount of knowledge held across the scenes and cultures in

the form of photographs, videos, technical tips, anecdotes and stories.

As a research project funded by the ERC our research in progress will be reported on in our blog and the results published in journal articles and books as well as performances, documentary videos, installations and exhibitions. Our research process requires that we build local capacity wherever possible. We intend to support and collaborate with those who have been promoting sound systems and other street cultures over many years.

The project builds on the work of the Sound System Outernational research group at Goldsmiths, University of London and their many collaborators including Unit 137 and Young Warrior sound systems in the UK, Lets Go Yorkshire, Bababoom Hi Fi (Italy) and DeskaReggae (Brazil).

The SST project will also build on our relationships with associated universities including, Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica; L'Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale, Italy; Universidad Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil and others.

FULL TRANSCRIPT KNOCK EM DOWN SOUND SYSTEM DOCUMENTARY

Secure link to KEDSS Film

<https://youtu.be/v2CReoa-suQ>

Duration 11.50

Release September 2024

Directed by Mitch Drescher

Synopsis

The aim of Knock 'em Down Sound System was to inspire people to get on stage or create music, motivated by the challenges faced by the organizer as an 18-year-old trying to play original music in Darwin. It aimed to provide a platform and support for young artists to express their creativity through music.

Theme

The main purpose of the meeting was to host a series of music workshops and concerts in Darwin, Australia, aimed at inspiring and empowering young local artists and musicians.

The key discussion topics included:

- 1.** *The unique environmental and cultural factors that influence music creation in Darwin, such as the intense heat, humidity, and the 'knock 'em down' season.*
- 2.** *The challenges faced by young musicians in Darwin in getting their music heard and expressing their creativity.*
- 3.** *The importance of building a community around music and providing mentorship to the next generation of artists.*
- 4.** *The construction and testing of a large, handmade sound system to be used for the concerts and workshops.*
- 5.** *The various workshops conducted, including music production, DJing, and virtual reality experiences.*
- 6.** *The intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills, with experienced musicians sharing their expertise with younger participants.*
- 7.** *The positive impact of music and sound systems in bringing people together and fostering a sense of community.*

Chapters

Here are summaries of the key sub-chapters:

Sub-chapter 1: Introduction to the 'Knock 'em Down' season and the motivation behind the project, which aims to inspire people to create and perform music, drawing inspiration from the local environment and challenges faced by young artists in Darwin.

Sub-chapter 2: Recollections of memorable gigs and the impact of Darwin's weather on music, with anecdotes about intense heat, rain, and the need to tune instruments to the sound of cicadas. The unique environmental factors that influence the local music scene.

Sub-chapter 3: The core principles of the Darwin community, emphasizing the importance of music, dance, sound, and energy in bringing positivity to people's lives. The aim of the 'Knock 'em Down Sound System' project to provide a platform for young artists to express their creativity.

Sub-chapter 4: Details of the workshops conducted as part of the project, including music workshops to prepare young artists for performances, a VR workshop, and the construction of a large sound system with 18-inch subwoofers.

Sub-chapter 5: The history of the band 'Yothu Yindi' and how it emerged from a workshop conducted by the 'Swamp Jockeys' in the 1980s, highlighting the importance of such workshops in nurturing talent.

Sub-chapter 6: Reflections on the impact of the workshops, with participants expressing how their confidence and skills improved, and the sense of community and support they experienced.

Sub-chapter 7: The process of building the sound system, including the challenges faced, the knowledge exchange between generations, and the pride in creating a visually striking and powerful system.

Sub-chapter 8: The testing and deployment of the sound system at various locations, including the Charles Darwin University and the Bagot community, and the positive response from the community, particularly the engagement of young people and their families.

Full Transcript

Andrew Belletty

When I was given the opportunity to do this project, I figured what's a really interesting time of the year in Darwin and to me as a as a kid it was always this season called the knock -em -down season which is when the spear grass is at its tallest these storms come and knock it over and bend it down and then the dragonflies appear and that's the perils the first days of the dry season and I thought instead of waiting for the dry season to come as per the official calendar we should just get in and do something according to the actual calendar.

James Mangohig

It's great to have people from out of town who also know the place like yourself come from here as well and then I think that really, I guess it almost I guess affirms what we're doing here...Humble Northern Territory musicians, wouldn't see that in Melbourne would you?

Andrew Belletty

For six months of the year, it's oppressively hot and wet. The worst possible conditions for electronic equipment. When I look back at the songs that Swamp Jockeys and Yothu Indi were singing, a lot of environmental factors were being brought into the music.

Andrew Belletty

One of the most memorable gigs I've ever played was at a place in Darwin at the Beach Comus Hotel. It was an outdoor indoor venue; it had a roof, but it was all open on the sides. We had about 1,300 people there one Sunday afternoon, it was called the Rage in a Cage.

Andrew Belletty

It got so intense, it was so packed, and people were dancing so wildly that it rained inside. People having to tune their instruments because the cicadas are so deafening that you must tune to that same note.

Andrew Belletty

I mean, Darwin weather affects music.

Felix Hill

One of the core principles of Darwinist community.

Andrew Belletty

The aim of Knock 'em Down Sound System is to inspire people to get up on stage or to get into their bedroom wherever they're creating music and to do it. Motivated by me as an 18 -year -old who we faced so many challenges to playing original music in Darwin, the younger

people now face equally horrific challenges to getting their music out or getting their creativity expressed.

Abbey Rapkins

He's a bloody countryside.

James Mangohig

So, we must really think about why we do this, and you guys made it about community, and you did it back in the 80s and 90s.

Andrew Belletty

We did five days of workshops followed by two days of concerts. The workshops ranged between music workshops where we got young artists ready to get up on stage. We also had a VR workshop then we built the 2G subs.

Ward Hancock

G subs, the sub boxes with two 18 -inch drives and it's part of a big sound system that I've built with a frame called spare grass by far.

Andrew Belletty

The reason that I love doing workshops is that Yothu Indi came out of a workshop we did with the Swamp Jockeys in Yirakala in the early 1980s. We met a schoolteacher who had written a couple of songs, so our guitarist Kel Williams, bass player Stuart Callaway and I had a jam with them and came up with a set of songs that sounded pretty

good...The band started sharing a stage with the Swamp Jockeys and it was soon evident that they were the real superstars.

James Mangohig

We're just doing this for us anyway, and for our own development and our own skills, you know. And I think that's a really great thing to do and, you know, appreciate it.

Andrew Belletty

What I was really knocked out by was that I was working with these people who were the sons and daughters of my friends. If you think about the swamp jockeys, we just kind of cracked the door open a little bit but then when I'm hearing and seeing these people that I'm surrounded by in this workshop they've just kicked it wide open...They're so much more focused, so much more talented than we were. We just had raw energy and enthusiasm.

James Mangohig

I said to Ward today, I said, we've got to make sure these weeks aren't just like a thing that happens for a week. It's got to be something we think about ongoing. We've got to keep those races going with the University, where they have said you basically literally be fired at the whole University and all the students are buzzing...And I literally watched people from Monday morning 9am to yesterday, their whole vibe changed and felt safe that they had people who were great musicians and were willing to play with them and support them and make them feel supported.

Abbey Rapkins

I started writing songs when I was 12, the first day yesterday that I came here to do this workshop I didn't know what to expect but all I knew was there to be other musicians and I was so stoked to be around people who knew how music can mean everything to someone...And then I went to see the sunset last night like I do every day except I had a weird feeling to bring my guitar with me and then all of a sudden I started picking and lyrics kind of just flowed out.

Andrew Belletty

and the sound system, I mean, built by hand.

Ward Hancock

I've been building this system with a friend the past, like, a year. So, I've been telling you all about what it's like building a system in Darwin. I can tell you about all my mistakes because half the process is just learning from mistakes.

John Gooley

When he came to me he had very little idea, he had some internet plans and he said, well what do you think about this and I said yeah and we just kept it low budget and I made it simple so that they could assemble...I was pretty keen, I had no idea actually what he was trying to achieve until I seen one painted up.

Colin Simpson

In a sea of black boxes, you look at Ward's PA and it is just a thing of beauty.

Natalie Leysley

as a whole system when you see it all together it looks incredible and it's gonna just like pull over people's minds yeah

Andrew Belletty

So, there's this huge knowledge exchange that goes up and down the generations. It takes a community to build a sound system...We first tested it in a basketball court at the Charles Darwin University, then we took it to Bagot and Bagot hasn't had a lot of music there over the last few years. We used to do concerts there years ago like we're talking in the 80s but it's been very quiet for a while so we put this massive PA system in the church hall and we blasted out some beats...We had DJ Charlie Templar and his crew doing workshops and it was just like this really amazing experience because the kids were just getting on the decks and they were getting up on stage.

Charley Templar

Teaching young people how to DJ and with those skills they learn is not really sufficient because a lot of young people here are faced with the shame and fear factor, so we did add the mentoring aspect which is very powerful...So when they do that and they enter a point where they can perform on stage, in return they can empower their own people so that we don't break the link that keeps going on.

Andrew Belletty

The DJE workshops and the DJs were a major part of the whole sound system experience.

Abbey Rapkins

I prefer to do workshops and keep my version of music to my live music, but every now and then I do have a bit of fun and go and DJ, but yeah, live music's my life.

Andrew Belletty

So, at Bagot I felt that the base brought people out of their homes, it got them away from their screens and they turned up and Charlie had all the DJ decks set up.

Charley Templar

and you can see the engagement of the community, not just the young people, but the parents coming to support.

Andrew Belletty

The sound system was like just rocking, it was rocking so hard that the roof and the walls were shaking, it was so beautiful.

Ward Hancock

It was amazing to see all the people that were involved in the workshops, 15 -year -old kids to 50, 60 -year -old mums and dads. It's a nice little feeling to see what a sound system and a system that I partly own as well has done to bring people together.

Natalie Leysley

When you find a song that feels right and your body's like yeah, I can jam to this that song vibes with you like the vibrations are right.

Charley Templar

So, a lot of young people are starting to realize that, hold on a second, I'm talented. All I need to do is just that commitment, work, and maybe somehow guide you. Pause that one.

James Mangohig

community. I think it about the way that people exist, about the way that music and dance and sound and energy bring positive things to people's lives.

Andrew Belletty

If that's it, that's what you need to do. If they can see themselves doing that, that's where all these kids come from and that's where superstars are made.

FULL TRANSCRIPT ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION ABOUT SWAMP JOCKEYS

Audio Recording:

A Conversation about the Swamp Jockeys

Release April 2024

Duration 64m

Produced by Andrew Belletty

Listen

<https://youtu.be/dDMN0zjl6TQ>

Summary

The interview discusses an unreleased demo tape recorded by the band in 1985-1986. Todd Williams provides insights into various songs from the tape, including their inspirations, live performances, and deeper meanings. Touching on themes of indigenous culture, cyclones, mining companies' impact on Aboriginal land, homesickness, poisoning incidents, rural life, and toxic masculinity.

1. Flaming Speargrass
2. Min Min
3. Knock Em Downs
4. Sippin White coffee
5. The Fall
6. Northern Territory
7. Strychnine
8. Humpty Doo
9. Land Below
10. Cast Iron Motive

⌚Thu, 07/04 15:27PM · 54mins

FULL Transcript

Andrew Belletty

And we're just going to talk about an unreleased demo tape that we did in 1985. Yeah. And, you know, I've got hold of those through Todd's brother, Cal, who was the guitarist in the band.

Todd Williams

Yeah, so the very first track is called Flaming Speargrass. We always were conscious of the fact that we were on indigenous country. And we invited a female Yidaki player to record the song itself led beautifully into Shadow Setter Free, Min Min.

Todd Williams

And we used to do that live, go from that track into Min Min. And yeah, what else can I say about that? It's about all.

Todd Williams

Min Min was written by Michael Wyatt who was working as a pilot at that time flying light aircraft and had an up -flying co -pilot here, DC -3, between Darwin and the Tiwi Islands for Air North.

Todd Williams

And he had met a lot of people in his time then. He was only learning the guitar himself at that stage and it was a very, very powerful live song. I played harmonica at that time, and you know I remember the song being such a cracker live.

Todd Williams

It just got everyone up on their feet and a really, really kind of strong song.

Tracks played:

1. Flaming Speargrass
2. Min Min

Todd Williams

Knock 'em Down was a cover written with Michael and I. Michael had originally written it from the point of view of a female who was hooked on heroin and was blacking out. And we were encouraged by Andrew McMillan, the producer, to go, well, you should write really something about the top end.

Todd Williams

So, Michael took it away and started writing about the onset of a cyclone. And I think the first line is mine. The weather is melting another quite beautiful day, which in the top end people know about because every day starts off beautiful and then becomes so bloody hot, especially in the wet season.

Todd Williams

So, we talk about the cyclone approaching, the cyclone hitting the city and what's that like. And then what the aftermath is, we counted the people and counted the telegraph poles. And that worked really, well in a live situation too, because my brother Cal just literally played up a storm as the cyclone came through.

Todd Williams

And yeah, it was just great to play life.

Track played:

Knock Em Downs

Todd Williams

Sippin Coffee was written by Michael and it's a two-chord song. It goes from A minor to D minor to A just all the way through. A bit of a silly song really is it doesn't have any, the words don't have that much depth for me, but they did capture a lot of people's imagination because Iced Coffee was, and I think still is to a certain extent a really that outsold Coca -Cola in the Northern Territory.

Todd Williams

I used to have one every lunchtime at high school and it was a great song to play live, and we did a recording of this song at a very kind of bass recording, and we somehow got together with a filmmaker who shot our performance of it at the amphitheater supporting Australian Crawl, I think.

Todd Williams

Dragon maybe. Dragon was one of those bands. We supported them and he shot it on film, and he had a 16-mil camera. Steve Biggs was his name, and another fellow called Albert Kuman who I'd gone to high school with did a series of animations for the song and it got put together by Mark Knudsen at Channel 8 at the time and it was put together there, so we didn't have a recording contract.

Todd Williams

We only had this song. It was made into a film clip, but we set the film clip off to the ABC and the show Rock Arena hosted by Susan Dowling, her of the Big Hoop hearings. It used to be a show on Tuesday evenings at 10 o 'clock that used to showcase some real kind of cool music from around the world.

Todd Williams

Somehow, we ended up on Rock Arena. As I said we didn't have a contract. We were just this kind of very much an outlier from the Northern Territory and the clip itself is a good clip. It's beautifully edited and the recording of the song was great, and it did help us get us a bit of a profile because film clips was so important to represent a band and do some great shots of us jumping off the rocks at East Point.

Todd Williams

Marvin, the Blue Heeler, a lot of it was shot at Managers House in Down which was one of the few pre -war buildings that were still around. That house still exists today. He still owns it and designed by C. G.B.

Todd Williams

Burnett in 1936 or something like that. It had a great down feel and it still stonkers me how we even got on to Rock Arena when it was screened on that night. We had a bit of a party to see it live and we were just so stoked to suddenly have to be on the same show as people like the Go -Be tweens and Public Image Limited.

Todd Williams

So, it gave us a lot of encouragement to think that guest we could be amongst the best.

Tracks played:

Sippin White Coffee

Todd Williams

The Fall was a song that was very, very topical at the time and it's still topical now because it was about Aboriginal people being humbugged by mining companies to mine on their land. And at that time, mining companies were permitted to approach traditional owners to present them, like, oh, we want to mine in your land.

Todd Williams

And if the traditional owners said no, they weren't allowed to ask them again, I think I remember it was five years or 10 years. But just the persistence of these multinational mining companies to come in and really harass traditional owners to mine on their land, which, if you talk to a lot of traditional owners, it's almost the direct opposite of what they want on their country, because it's to mine,

Todd Williams

to dig it up, to disrupt it, to pull the guts out of the country. We know that, you know, the most famous example of that is Arnhem Land, where mining company Nabalco came in and with the federal

government's support, established a mine there against the wishes of the traditional owners.

Todd Williams

The traditional owners still got royalties, but they didn't like of country. It wasn't underground pit. It was just taken at the top meter and a half. And it's like peeling off the skin of a body and how physically horrendous that is.

Todd Williams

That's exactly how they felt. That's why they signed the, they presented to the parliament the bark petition. It's still hanging in the old parliament house to this day Dr **Yunupingu**, as a young man who was about 19 or 20 at the time, him and his father and Roy Marika were all signees to this.

Todd Williams

And it was just like the injustice of countrymen being overridden by mining companies. And as we know, there's a whole slew of legacy mines, which have just, you know, once the mining companies have been, they just leave a total mess.

Todd Williams

The waters poison, the lands are disrupted. Yeah, that was written in 1985 and things still the same, still the same.

Track played

The Fall

Todd Williams

Yeah, Northern Territory was written when we were on tour in, we were living in Sydney for six months and trying to crack the industry and we felt homesick and during that winter and in Sydney it was cold and as Territory top -end boys having to wear shoes all day.

Todd Williams

It's like having to wear shoes because it was cold, it was just a revelation, you know, we're kind of thongs or bare feet kind of people. So, the song, the main chorus covers Northern Territory, Northern Territory, north of the border, south of the sea, keep all your winters far away from me, you'll find me living in the Northern Territory.

Todd Williams

And the choruses address aspects of Territory life. It talks about mining, it talks about tourism, it was written in the same year as the Bicentenary and we had witnessed first-hand, we took part in the march from Redfern down to Circular Quay

Andrew Belletty

It was the first Australia Day, the invasion day, survival, I don't know what it was called in those days.

Todd Williams

It was a massive protest the celebration of what, in effect, was a celebration of the beginning of the massive disruption to Aboriginal life and culture and land. And to have all these white fellas just dancing on the graves, as Paul Kelly put it, was just awful.

Todd Williams

So, you know, part of the verses is like, so don't you celebrate because examination is due time to question everything that we do. Northern Territory, it's a very up-tempo, happy sounding song that just always was a killer on stage.

Todd Williams

It was, you know, my brother Cal wrote a beautiful riff for it. Cal and I principally to this day, something that I'm really proud of, actually, because it's, you know, we used to call it here, it was the unofficial national anthem of the Northern Territory, you know, and put your left hand over your right heart, you know, and we'd go into the song and people would just jump up and dance.

Todd Williams

And it was one of our biggest songs, but it had a lot of serious messages in it as well. It was fun, but it was serious as well.

Track played

Northern Territory

Todd Williams

Strychnine came, Michael wrote this song, well I contributed it too, but it was a Michael song after an incident where someone deliberately left a flagon of wine laced with Strychnine on the Todd Riverbed for it to be found by countrymen who were just camping on the Todd Riverbed.

Todd Williams

Someone to have murderous intent to leave poisoned Strychnine and I think two people died from that and a lot of people got very sick and almost died. It was a very kind of very serious issue for us to put in a song, but it resonated, it ended up being on a compilation called Building Bridges in 1988 that was kind of very humbling for that to be in that company.

Track Played

Strychnine

Todd Williams

Humpty -Doo, we ostensibly formed at my brother's block. He had a 20 -acre block in Humpty -Doo. It's part of what's known as the Solar Village, which was an experimental group of blocks where they shared resources such as a backhoe and water tanks and materials to try and live with, you know, way before their time in a way that was not on the grid.

Todd Williams

They used their own water, their own power, generate their own power, and so on. But yeah, Cal had a block down at the Solar Village. And we used to go down there and jam around a campfire in his shed.

Todd Williams

That's where we started really coalescing as a band and writing songs. And Humpty -Doo was a fun song, because if you want to put it in terms of hillbillies without hills, we played up on that idea of all these rural people, these blockies, being a bit mad, growing their own dope, being in touch with kangaroos.

Todd Williams

They were just living a different kind of life. And it was a very one - two kind of beat. So immediately, very, very simple song musically, but with funny lyrics. And the song got faster and faster. And then it just broke down.

Todd Williams

And then it got faster and faster again. In a live setting, that was a real popular song. And probably the one I remember the most, the performance of that wasn't by the Swamp Jockeys. It was by Minot Oil.

Todd Williams

When the second last, or the last time of that tour that we did with Minot Oil, Pete Garrett invited Michael on stage to sing it with them

as they thanked us for being their support for that. And that was very fun.

Track Played

Humpty -Doo

Todd Williams

Land Below was written by Michael after two young station workers died after their car broke down in the middle of nowhere and again it showed the schism between white knowledge and Aboriginal knowledge of the land.

Todd Williams

These boys were inexperienced in the country and suffered their deaths mainly due to the fact they didn't know how in an emergency to survive their situation. And it was really all about if they had knowledge from their traditional people, they may have survived their ordeal, but they died, and it was a terrible it was a well -known story at the time and yeah it was just gently about the difference between black fellas and white fellas in that situation.

Track Played

Land Below

Todd Williams

Cast On Motive was a song that really came back from when I was 13 and at Nightcliff High before the cyclone when a member of the Motlop family challenged me to a fight. And I was a skinny, weedy, very white boy.

Todd Williams

The fight went nowhere because I went, what, what? And he just kind of looked at me and said, I'm not going to get much satisfaction here. He just walked off. But it was really addressing how those kinds of situations arise between kind of, especially teenagers and older men too.

Todd Williams

And it tends to be, you know, men and boys who get into these scuffles and so on to either make a name for themselves or a power play or maybe because you're a bit of a smart ass. And I don't recall being a smart ass in this situation.

Todd Williams

I just remember him coming at me and, you know, shaping up. And I just kind of, my eyes probably almost popped out of my head, and he thought, oh, God, okay, I'll leave this guy alone. But just addressing that, what I perceive as what can be very toxic masculinity and the way that men and boys feel they must express themselves physically and impose themselves upon others.

Track played

Cast iron motive

FULL TRANSCRIPT ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION WITH CHARLY TEMPLAR

Audio Recording

Duration 59m

Release April 2024

Produced by Andrew Belletty

Listen

<https://youtu.be/HIE05MiZcyQ>

Summary

The interview is between Andrew Belletty and Charly Templar, an international DJ, producer and mentor from Cameroon. Charly shares his journey of how he became fascinated with indigenous Australians

after seeing the music video for 'Yothu Yindi' by during the 1990 World Cup. This led him to eventually move to Australia in 2011, where he worked as a mentor for at-risk youth in remote communities like Gapuwiyak. He used music, sports and community projects to engage the youth and instil values like caring for the land. Charly then founded 'Dream Impact Inspire' to empower young people through DJ skills, mentoring and providing career opportunities, currently working with both indigenous and non-indigenous youth in Darwin and Palmerston to divert them from crime. The interview discusses the different challenges faced in remote communities versus urban areas, the importance of role models, and the need for a holistic approach involving families and organizations to tackle youth disengagement.

KEDSS PODCASTS OCT 2023 CHARLY TEMPLAR INTERVIEW

 Thu, 07/04 15:28PM · 59mins

Transcript

Andrew Belletty

Good morning, my name is Andrew Belletty and today I'm in Darwin talking with international DJ, producer and mentor Charlie Templar. Good morning, Charlie.

Charly Templar

Good morning, Andrew.

Andrew Belletty

And I find myself in jingly and jingly is where I grew up and where your beautiful house is. This is amazing because yeah, this is my neighborhood. Thank you very much. Now it's wonderful to see you and I know you're busy all the time, but yeah, I think we have a great opportunity to just talk about some of the things that you're doing and for a start, what are you doing in Darwin?

Andrew Belletty

And can you please tell me a little bit about where you come from and how you got to this point in jingly?

Charly Templar

That might take a long time, but look, I just want to say thank you first for having me and a shout out to all those who are listening to this interview. My name is Charles Roger Mbuti, and everyone knows me as DJ Charlie Templar.

Charly Templar

I was born in Cameroon, which is a tiny country in Central Africa area. So, the story goes back to 1990, during the football World Cup in Italy. There was a football match on and during halftime, a video clip came on and that video clip was You Too Indie, 3T.

Charly Templar

And Andrew, I was 13 at the time and that was my very first time to see black people with, you know, different color type. And I was so flabbergasted, and I asked my mom, and she gave me a brief, you know, history of indigenous people.

Charly Templar

She didn't know much at the time. But ever since I watched that video, I have always said in the back of my mind that one day I will visit these people because I was very intrigued as to why these people are black, but they don't live in Africa.

Charly Templar

And later, I went to university. I studied history. So, I did a dog a little bit and I did a bit of my research. And I started traveling the world, Paris, moved to Thailand. I met an indigenous person in Thailand back in 2007.

Charly Templar

He was from Tenant Creek. So, you know, he spoke to me, and I knew at that stage that I would end up one day here. And fast forward 2011, I had the opportunity to work in Annam Land. I was in Kuwait at the time when I applied, and I just took it.

Charly Templar

I left Kuwait after being in Kuwait just for six weeks. I left and I flew here in October the 10th. I landed in Lake Evella, **Gapuwiyak** in East Annam Land. So that's my story, how I had to come here. In

Australia, you went straight to **Gapuwiyak** in East Annam Land, that's insane.

Charly Templar

Well, but also because I had been previously to Australia in 2009 as a professional DJ that flew me to DJ in Melbourne and Sydney. And when I was in Sydney, I met an indigenous man playing Yidaki under the bridge.

Charly Templar

So, I came back in 2010, and I had a three -month DJ residency in Melbourne and I met a few indigenous, but that's not what I wanted. I wanted to, you know, suck up that culture. I wanted to be in a setting where you see a lot of culture, you see a lot of indigenous people, those stories and communities.

Charly Templar

So, when I landed here in 2011, I knew straight away that I don't have anything to do with big cities, I just want to come here. So, I started in Lake Evella and after three months, the job that I did was to mentor a group of young people that were at risk and very disengaged with my experience, my cultural background, very similar to a lot of indigenous here.

Charly Templar

You know, we got that understanding and we solidified the relationship that we have built. And East Arnhem Shire told her the

job I did in three months was fantastic. So, they decided to move me to Yirrkala.

Charly Templar

And guess what? I was staying next to the founding father of the Yutu in this house. And I told them my story. And this was in February 2012. I told them my story and I couldn't believe it. And a few months later, my mom came to visit, and she told them the same story.

Charly Templar

So, in this way, you know, my work with indigenous people went from, you know, good to better and it became great. You know, I was adopted, and I was working closely with indigenous people for the next six years while I was in Arnhem Land until moving to Catherine for another four years.

Charly Templar

And I left the country. I moved to Dubai, where I was solely DJ for two years. And then I returned to Australia last year and I'm continuing my job as to answer your question as to what I do. I'm an educational aficionado.

Charly Templar

So, I used to teach at school. I'm a martial artist. A lot of people know me as a professional DJ and as a mentor. So, the job I do in Darwin at the present time is to empower and mentor a lot of young

people to provide them with career path with opportunity through the organization that I created, which is called Dream Impact Inspire.

Charly Templar

So, yeah, I hope I answered that question.

Andrew Belletty

It's quite a, yeah, that's an amazing journey and especially to come to it through, you know, as you said, through Yothu Yindi and somewhere that I started doing workshops, you know, in the probably early to mid -1980s before, you know, the inception of Yothu Yindi, so before we started the band when we first met, Dr M and Witiyana and others.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, so that was, that was a long time ago and amazing that you heard the song and saw the film clip and went, wow, I need to find out more. So, when you were working elsewhere doing mentoring, were the people or the youth that you're talking about that are disengaged or disaffected, were they, was it a similar type of work or did you come to Australia and find a different set of circumstances?

Charly Templar

Oh, look, the circumstances in a remote indigenous community might be like what you see somewhere else. But the main difference is that those countries where I worked before, like Indonesia, Thailand, they are part of the third world countries.

Charly Templar

So, they don't have the opportunities that people may have here. So, the level of motivation is a bit higher. Like, if I take the example of myself, I come from a very poor background. So, I had to motivate myself at a very young age and become very responsible because I realized back then that if I don't work hard, I will never make it out of there.

Charly Templar

And that's what is probably lacking here, that level of motivation, work ethic, commitment and dedication. So, yeah, but the work was kind of similar. I used to go to the Philippines in Cagayan de Oro and work in remote Cagayan to help mentor kids, raise a bit of funds to build like a shed where the farmers would store their crops.

Charly Templar

I did a similar thing in Indonesia and in Thailand. But here, the kids are disengaged, they lack guidance and direction. And most of the time, they are very role models in communities. And that's where the problem arises.

Andrew Belletty

What you're saying is that the motivation, I mean, because I've done similar work when I went back, you know, I started in the music industry, but then I ended up in the film industry for most of my professional life.

Andrew Belletty

And it's also one of those industries that is very, very to the letter, to the minute schedule-based travel. You must be very much on point all the time. And when I went to Bombay, which is my ancestral home in India, I started working with local indigenous sound people there who were working.

Andrew Belletty

They were incredible kind of in their work, but they were not at, you know, a very highly competitive level professionally. So, I started working with these guys 25 years ago, and they're indigenous to Maharashtra, so the state of where Bombay is.

Andrew Belletty

And I started, you know, properly mentoring them and saying, like, you, you have the capacity to be number one, you know, and we were doing, I was doing from, you know, my reputation at that time, I had already a big CV from this country, so I had some very big films on my CV.

Andrew Belletty

So, there I was, I went in at the top level. So, we were doing big films with all the big stars. And you know what Bollywood's like? Yeah. So, they were like, wow, suddenly. And I said, well, you're not only working with the big stars, but you must be as professional as these big stars.

Andrew Belletty

You see how spot on that they are. And then soon, these guys like now when I go back, I still I barely must mentor anymore. It's just a phone call every now and again, because they're, you know, you see their passport and they've been around the world 15 times.

Andrew Belletty

You know, my main, the main guy I started with Shashi, he's been around now it's going on 25 years, and he is mentoring himself a whole bunch of young people as well. And he's economically very, very well -off.

Andrew Belletty

And he's putting his kids through university, you know, his daughters in studying medicine, which is something that's never happened with his community before ever. They've never even been to school.

Andrew Belletty

So, and it's an amazing sort of sense of empowerment, but he knows that by being utterly professional, you know, whether it's with, you know, we've shot with Ben Kingsley with all these, you know, huge actors and they always come over and say, you have such an amazing team because the guys are very, very spot on.

Andrew Belletty

They're there. And I think what you what you're saying is that is that what you do as a professional requires travel. It requires commitment. It requires organization, equipment, maintenance, setting up packing properly.

Andrew Belletty

So, you have everything got such organizational skills and, on the night, or on the day of the workshop or on the night of the performance. You got to be there every time because if you stop if you start falling over or canceling then your phone stops ringing.

Charly Templar

There's no way back.

Andrew Belletty

So that's what you're talking about is that you were trying to get that level of professionalism and say that if you can play at this level, then there's no stopping you. And that's exactly what we did with Yothu Yindi.

Andrew Belletty

We took a very small band, and it became literally into the mainstream. We took it mainstream and that was a huge thing at the time.

Charly Templar

That's incredible because when you're putting it that way, I'm just realizing that if you hadn't started that, I probably wouldn't have seen that video clip on TV. And that's what I love about mentoring and empowering others is to give them those skills so that in turn, they can empower their peers.

Charly Templar

So, thank you very much for that.

Andrew Belletty

And so, working in, initially when you worked in **Gapuwiyak** with younger people you were saying that on looks you were very surprised that people looked like you, but they weren't in Africa. And I know in Australia it's very similar because I think a lot of people have never really been to the top end and especially to remote communities like in East Arnhem.

Andrew Belletty

So yeah, that would have been, you would have loved it, the beaches.

Charly Templar

Well, I did, although Lake Evella didn't have any of those. But I think it was a blessing because the fact that Lake Evella was three hours away from Nhulunbuy, which was the nearest community, it refunded people from abusing alcohol.

Charly Templar

So, what I was dealing with was a group of a bunch of kids that were sniffing petrol at the time. And the previous youth worker had done everything in his capacity. And he couldn't quell the problem. So, when I came, for me, the first step was to get to know people, tell my story, where I come from and what I did, what were the steps that I took to become who I was, traveling the world.

Charly Templar

But I think my luck at the time and my luck till these days, the fact that I traveled the world as a professional DJ, and I met some of these superstars that all these kids dream of. So suddenly the relationship became solidified, you know, whenever I called them, they would come because they see me as, you know, one of those superstars.

Charly Templar

So, whenever I was saying something, they would listen. So, I started by simple tasks such as one of the problems that we had in community, apart from Petro Sniffy, it was consumption of Coca Cola consumption.

Charly Templar

It was huge and not just that, the kids will dispatch all their bottles in the community. So, I told them, why don't we collect all those bottles, wash them and make icy cups and sell them? So instead of spending your money buying Coca Cola, you're making a revenue using those bottles.

Charly Templar

So simple things like that. And then I have never thought of it. So, I remember in December 2011, we cleaned the whole community, and we collected 350 Coca Cola bottles and then we washed them, just a bit of cordial and water.

Charly Templar

We started making icy cup that we were selling for a dollar. So, we were able to save \$350 that in turn we used to buy gifts that were given to kids during Christmas of that 2011, you know, simple things like that.

Charly Templar

They started realizing, oh, so I can develop business skills by doing what Charlie is doing. And that was fantastic. And yeah, a lot of different little projects that we did like that. And one of the most important was talking about the concept of I love my land.

Charly Templar

What do you mean by you love your land? If you're tarnishing your land, if you're throwing your rubbish on the floor. And they will ask me, what do you what do you guys say back home? And then I would tell them when I mean I love my land back in Cameroon or in Africa.

Charly Templar

It means I look after it and make sure that it's clean. And back then, those kids didn't have any concept because they were just following what adults were doing. They'll buy a packet of, you know, chocolate and they would just throw the plastic on the floor because everyone is doing the same.

Charly Templar

But just by telling those little stories that came to the realization that, oh, we can clean our land and protect it. You know, and from that point on, that relationship combined with sporting activities we were doing just to input those skills that I had at the time, we started doing wrestling, judo and wrestling, basketball, tennis.

Charly Templar

And the community became very vibrant. And by becoming vibrant, you refrain the kids from going to sniff because they were just too busy playing sport, doing this little project. And yeah, my experience when I think of it, I become emotional.

Charly Templar

My experience in Lake Evella was powerful. And till this day, I still have strong connection with people out there because from time to time I go out there to visit and spend two or three days in a community.

Charly Templar

And yeah, my last visit was just two months ago.

Andrew Belletty

I think what you're talking about there is a really beautiful concept because when I do workshops, I mean, I know especially being based in New South Wales, you know, workshops, I think these days is there's so much, what would you call it, bureaucracy and imperatives to meet KPIs and all that type of kind of stuff that can, you know, restrict your freedom.

Andrew Belletty

But I think what you're talking about there is that not only were you doing the workshop that you were employed, you know, that you somehow got the money to do, but all these other activities like community building.

Andrew Belletty

And I think that's an interesting way of going about it because community building, as soon as you start building community around what it is that you are and what it is that you're doing, buy all these other little activities.

Charly Templar

that's in positive impact, slowly, slowly. And at times, we think that is impossible because it takes so long. But in a community service environment, we always say, if you're empowering a group of 100 people and you see two or three that have made a change in their lives, it's an achievement.

Charly Templar

So, and that keeps me motivated. I've seen a lot of people walking into a community, trying hard for the first six months and giving up. I don't think that's enough because you're dealing with a group of people that for the past 10, 15 or 17 years, they haven't been taught those little skills.

Charly Templar

So, you will not expect them to change in a matter of six months or a year. So, yeah, it takes a lot of time, dedication, but it's just beautiful when you see the end results.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, I think it's a really, you know, for me, it's an eye opener when you're talking about the sport and the IC cups and all these are kind of very abstract, but also the kind of lateral, you know, they're on the edges of what it is you're doing.

Andrew Belletty

But in the end, you're talking about working together through sport, you're talking about entrepreneurial activities with raising some \$350, you're talking about caring for country by yeah, but just that awareness, like when I know the same thing, when you when you physically find a bin or create a plastic bag and put it on the chair and say this is where we put all the rubbish.

Andrew Belletty

By example, with anybody who's not really used to doing that India is the same thing. People are very used to throwing things on the ground. But when they see you not doing that, it becomes, you know, a motivation for them.

Andrew Belletty

And I remember, as far as this kind of intergenerational impacts of this type of stuff is that, that these little things that you're talking about, they might be little things that you did, but they're they grow into big things.

Andrew Belletty

And I remember, you know, when we first started going to communities, the only way we could get to communities was courtesy of usually a mining company, or sometimes a school that had some money, and they would say, oh, come and play at the club.

Andrew Belletty

If it was a mining company, or come and play at the school, if they had a little bit of community money, we would go there. And then we would kind of say, are you we're gonna play tomorrow night, we'll get in a day or two early, then we'll go and unpack the PA system from the from the truck and put it on the basketball court at the community.

Andrew Belletty

And then we would just start playing. And in the early 80s, it was, you know, early beats. So, it was run DMC or whatever it was at the time, as soon as you turn the volume up on a PA system in a community that's never really heard a PA system, you know, it's always been like a ghetto blast or something small, yeah.

Andrew Belletty

So suddenly you hear these big beats coming through the end, just on the ground, like on the basketball court, it's usually dirt or grass or something. It just had an effect, people came. And so, we'd set up all the equipment.

Andrew Belletty

And then I just remember looking at one point in New Color on ski beach, just looking to my right. And there was, I think there's about 13 kids under the age of 10 just lined up waiting for a turn on my drums.

Andrew Belletty

I was doing I was playing the Djapana, which is a real fast on the high hat's kind of beat. And they thought that it was the best beat they've ever heard. And they just went, I want to see how that's done.

Andrew Belletty

So, I showed him it, you know, and they just kept then one kept teaching the other one and teaching the other one. And even now 40

years later, some of these kids have grown up and their kids and they still talk about that beat.

Andrew Belletty

So, it's like, you did Djapana. Oh, yeah, that's, and it's kind of got this legendary kind of, it was such a small thing at the time, you know what I mean? It was a small effort that we made, as you're saying, your kind of just make a little effort.

Andrew Belletty

But when you engage people in an activity that kind of inspires them, then that kind of is a very important seed. It's a very important

Charly Templar

that you're planting, and you resonate with them, and they keep it going. So, one of the questions that you previously asked was about the job that I do, and what do I do? So, I did a lot of little projects like that in community.

Charly Templar

And that's what led me to create Dream Impact Inspire, because I thought to myself, OK, I'm a professional DJ. I travel around the world. Why not empower kids through the medium of music, boxing, drumming, and sporting activities?

Charly Templar

And that's how the birth of Dream Impact Inspire started 80 years ago. But at the time, I was doing it unofficially, meaning I had a full-time job. And on the weekend, I would just load my truck with some of the turntables that I had, and drive to a homeland, and have a disco night, a movie night, and just have fun.

Charly Templar

So, I officially started running this as a business last year. And that's where I started getting calls from regional councils across the NT. Now, I empower young people in Darwin and Palmerston that are into mischief, stealing cars, breaking into homes, and empower them.

Charly Templar

And in return, we go to communities that tell their story, and they empower their peers, telling them why they're running away from the crime life, because they want to make a positive impact in their lives.

Charly Templar

So as of now, from January of this year till this day, we have already been in 27 communities, and we have worked with over 1,000 young people. So, in my little team, I have five young people working with me.

Charly Templar

Three are indigenous, two are not indigenous. You have three males and two females, and they're all under the age of 18. So that was my main idea, is to empower these young people when they turn 18,

they can take over this business and empower their peers, and hopefully grow it so that it becomes a big company across Australia, because I noticed a lot of young indigenous are extremely good with music.

Charly Templar

Oh, my word, it's unbelievable. You teach them something, and within the next five, 15 minutes, they can replicate that. So, I thought to myself, yeah, this is beautiful, and it's just an activity that not many people are familiar with.

Charly Templar

So yeah, that's mainly what I do at this stage, creating positive change and providing direction to young people through music, sporting activities, and a lot of mentoring for them to be able to stand in front of that stage, in front of the crowd to perform, because teaching them the skills associated with the craft of DJing is not enough.

Charly Templar

They can learn how to DJ, they can do it. Then comes the time to perform, and they see the crowd, they're like, I can't do it. And that's where the mentoring comes in place and becomes very helpful.

Andrew Belletty

So, the mentoring extends to performance, which, you know, that's why they look up to you is because they see this kind of international

DJ who not only has a good life, but has, you know, the whole personality, the whole, you know, rock star kind of veneer.

Andrew Belletty

That is very attractive, you know what I mean? And so young people can go, well, that's something that I aspire to. And it doesn't, it seems to be a fairly kind of low impact. It's not like you must exploit anybody on the way through.

Andrew Belletty

You can just get up there and make people dance. And that's an interesting thing, because performing for young, and I suppose from my experience, young indigenous kids, the biggest barrier for performance is shame job.

Andrew Belletty

And for maybe some of the indigenous girls we found, especially under 18, would absolutely, that was almost a no -no, like to even, yeah, to present in front of any crowd with males in it, let alone their peers, it's like anybody else.

Andrew Belletty

So, there was significant barriers.

Charly Templar

The shame and fear factors are big here. So, for you to be able to quell that, there needs a lot of mentoring, a lot of support. And that's what we do with Dream Impact Inspire. Once we teach you those skills, we associate that with a lot of mentoring.

Charly Templar

And of course, the videos of my performances overseas help because they all aspire to become like that. But how do I become like that if I don't want to perform in front of people? Because I'm afraid.

Charly Templar

So yeah, so far so good. Slowly, slowly we're building the company and the business up and we're recruiting more people. And we came to the point where we go to the youth detention facility to mentor young people when they're in there, in the hope that once they release, they will join our team and work with us.

Andrew Belletty

The detention center is at in Darwin.

Charly Templar

That's the Don Dale Youth Detention Center in Darwin, correct.

Andrew Belletty

Right. So, you've got, when you work on community, it's much simpler, isn't it? Because the communities are much, much smaller.

And the kids there have, as you said, they have petrol sniffing. That was an issue at the time.

Andrew Belletty

But when you come to Darwin, I mean Darwin's getting quite big. So, the set of, can you just talk about that a little bit? The set of, not problems, but the set of conditions that kids, the kids that you're working with in Darwin are facing, a different set of circumstances to the community.

Andrew Belletty

So, you're talking about three or 400 people in a community, like **Gapuwiyak** and probably 70, 80, I don't know, whatever, thousand in Darwin.

Charly Templar

So, the main problem here is the youth crime and it is on the rise, and I think the government is trying the best they can do by throwing funding at various organizations to try to tackle the crime problem.

Charly Templar

So, we at Dream Impact Inspire, we try to bring our little contribution to quell that issue. So, what we do is those young people that have committed a crime that are sitting at the table, and we talk to them, and we say, listen, this is the business that we start.

Charly Templar

We teach you the skills associated with the craft of DJ, but in return you must promise us that once you start working, you're going to stop committing all those mischiefs and you're going in return and power your peers because there is opportunity.

Charly Templar

There's plenty of opportunity and on top of that you start making money. So, we try to create a healthy relationship between working and making money as opposed to not working and just breaking into somebody's house.

Charly Templar

So steady, steady, slowly and it's working because the problems that the young people encounter here, when I talk to them most of the time, they're like, I'm bored. There's nothing to do. I need money.

Charly Templar

My dad doesn't give me money because he's probably drinking all his Centrelink money. So, we tell them, listen, there's opportunity here, but you must commit to it. You must dedicate yourself and work and it's something that they like.

Charly Templar

That's what we found because they love music so much. You know, 90% of young people in Darwin and Palmerston area, they're rappers.

They write their own lyrics. They love music. So, when we bring this activity, the DJ workshop and lyric writing, they just embrace it.

Charly Templar

So, we hope that this will contribute to turn the crime rate from what it is now to reduce it considerably. But in community, the kids don't have those problems like you find in major cities because they're in families, they're in clang settings.

Charly Templar

So, the problems usually are tackled faster than they are in big cities because they live in that setting where if there's an issue that arises, the parents can get on top of that quickly.

Charly Templar

Whereas in the big communities, the kids most of the time roam free at two o 'clock, three o 'clock, you can find them in the street like kilometers away from where they live. So, which usually is not the case in community.

Charly Templar

So that's why there's a really, really, it's important to tackle the issues in a big city so that in return they can empower the peers. And that's why we try to do as much as we can.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, it's I mean, I haven't lived in Darwin for a long time, but I have spoken to quite a lot of people. And it does appear that the level of disengagement by young people and you know, I'm hearing as young as 12 is and they're saying there's a higher level of disengagement.

Andrew Belletty

And so the option is, as you say, a bit of crime to get some money end up in the detention, you know, Don Dale, and then, you know, that that becomes, you know, a hamster wheel where you just see you go you just as a revolving door, you go from there and then as soon as you become old enough, you went you went to the adult judicial system and it's not a good Yeah, it's never a good outcome.

Andrew Belletty

So diversionary activities. Yeah. And I think what you're talking about now is not only diversionary, but they kind of a little bit more holistic activity. So, it's not just well, we're going to kind of divert your attention, but we're going to this is aspirational.

Andrew Belletty

I mean, you know, the thing about wanting to be involved in music, whether it's a rapper, a hip-hop artist or a DJ is that's aspirational to be the next Baker boy to be the next Colin Stingray, you know, to be the next the next and we

Charly Templar

use those simple examples you know when I talk to people young boys here I tell them about the Baker boy story because when I live in Annam land 15 years ago Baker boy was a young kid I used to do DJ disco night and Baker boy used to come and dance because the way young people in remote communities when there's a disco there's a circle someone will run inside the circle and dance for three seconds and run out and Baker boy used to come and he would just sit stand in dance the whole time he didn't care people will laugh and then I tell the boys today where is he at sea he never backed down he was never scared or a shame of what he was doing he believed in himself and because and once again he goes back to that fear and shame factor that we friend people to expressing you know their full potential full capabilities so and I use those stories with a lot of other young people that are starting to do quite well for themselves I can take the example of J Mila and young Mila who are brothers born and bred in Palmerston they started writing their lyrics they got into some mischief but you know really quickly they got out of that because they were so focused on writing the lyrics and now they're becoming you know little stars and legend in Darwin young Mila he's really big here as a rapper and he's just 21 and his brother J Mila has tracks all over the world you know in Spotify and all these you know online music platforms and he lives in Adelaide so to the point where he was the first indigenous to be livestream on TikTok just to bring peace to a community in Wade and that was two months ago because you know Wade is prone to a bit of a lot of violence so he's coming back on November the 4th for another concert at the EDE festival in Wade just to bring peace and he was just born here so I take those little examples like that just to motivate young people be like listen once you put shame and fear factor aside the world is your oyster you know

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, it just reminds me of a long time ago in the early 80s, probably early to mid 80s, and we were in Yirrkala and doing some setting up or some kind of recording, and somebody brought in a young blind guy and said, oh, this guy's really, he's probably only 17, 16, 17 at the time, and he sat down on one of the chairs in the studio, and pretty much whatever anybody put near this guy, he could play.

Andrew Belletty

So, the drums, the guitar, the bass, and we just kind of went, what the hell's going on here? So that was Gurrumul, and by the time, he was not at all probably not even interested in the whole scene because he didn't really know any, he was too young, he didn't really have any exposure to it at that time, but when he did some tracks, like contributed to some tracks, it became a thing.

Andrew Belletty

He's like, wow, and that led to him actually being on stage with Yothu shortly after that, but yeah, that was one of those, and that's just word of mouth in Yirrkala, like those guys are in, some guys in the studio should go and check him out, and oh, that guy over there knows how to play a little bit, and turns out that he knew how to play everything in the room.

Charly Templar

And that's what I always tell people. When I go overseas and perform, and people start asking me, what do you do? And I'm like, oh, I live in an aboriginal land. And they're like, oh, they're very fascinated.

Charly Templar

They're like, oh, we have always wanted to travel there. And they start asking all these questions. And I tell them, indigenous people are some of the most talented people when it comes to either sports or music, because they pick up those skills so fast.

Charly Templar

It's impressive. And I'm just joining what you said regarding let go of them all. I see that all the time here with young people. I see that all the time. But like I have always said, the one thing lacking is that dedication, the commitment, the work, ethic.

Andrew Belletty

And that that only comes through personal is the same with anybody you know personal motivation is the key and role models and I suppose in places like Darwin where you know it's a very kind of on all levels of people.

Andrew Belletty

It's dysfunctional So, you know that there's a lot of things going on here and it's a very complex situation But it is you know, it does Upset me a little bit to hear that that people as young as 12 You know the City Council and the communities are recognizing that people as young as 12 are disengaged and that's You know, that's kind of something

Charly Templar

Yeah, it's saddening, it's saddening. And like I keep saying, we can just keep plugging away and every organization should come together, try to do the best they can to quell those issues because if we don't do that, it's just gonna become worse and worse.

Charly Templar

And it has in the past few years, like when I left in 2020 to move to the Middle East, I said that in the meeting in Catherine, people got mad at me. But it's because I understand, I come from the street.

Charly Templar

Look at those kids, I see myself years ago, I was just like that. And I know what made me change. So, and I see all the things, strategies that I put in place. And I'm like, but this is not efficient.

Charly Templar

This is not empowering enough to make a kid change his mindset. And I said those things and people were not happy. And then I came back two years later, the crime rate is high. So, I had another opportunity to move back over, but I was like, no, this is where my heart is.

Charly Templar

This is my passion because over the years, even when I was overseas, I was still in touch with all these young people that are mentored here. So, we will be talking, I'll be in Dubai, playing a set in the club.

Charly Templar

And at 4 a.m., as soon as I finished my phone rings, it's x from x who's calling me. We'll be on the phone for an hour, just talking to him. And then I realized that I needed to come back because my heart was here, and this is my passion.

Charly Templar

It's something that I started years ago out of passion. So, I will just exhort, you know, beg all the organization to come together and share those ideas, you know, to find solution, to quell those issues and refrain kids from offending because there's a way out.

Charly Templar

There's a way out. It's also young people and their parents to realize that we live in a country that provides multiple ample opportunities. Look, for someone like me coming from Africa and coming here and doing what I'm doing, there's plenty of opportunities.

Charly Templar

The kids just to be made aware that, listen, you don't have to do what you're doing because there's plenty of opportunity. Search one in this or search one in that. There are career pathways. People can guide you and direct you and support you.

Charly Templar

You know, help is always available in Australia. So, yeah, that's my take on that.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, look, there's one last thing I want to touch on and that's the work that you know, like this level of work in places like Darwin, which, you know, as I said, coming back here, as I do every now and again and seeing the changes since when I was a child when Darwin is a very kind of different place.

Andrew Belletty

It's across the board. It's quite different these days. There's a lot of different pressures being exerted here and I think that any town where you've got a lot of people, you know, you've got the military industrial complex here, you've got the mining industrial complex, you got these people who are probably, you know, reasonably well off with pretty good jobs, who have the capacity to participate in,

Andrew Belletty

you know, fine dining and, you know, cocktail bars and, you know, activities, holidays and whatever. But the majority of Darwin doesn't live that way. You know, they're not kind of earning those big dollars and they're not driving those fancy cars and all that.

Andrew Belletty

So, the majority of and that wasn't like that when I was little, everybody was the same. You know, the people were all working

class, and they were working together. So, there wasn't these big divides is socioeconomic divides.

Andrew Belletty

But now it appears that there's a lot of pressure because there's a very high-end veneer to Darwin. There's cocktail bars and restaurants and all this fancy stuff. But then most people can't participate in that.

Andrew Belletty

It's only there for a few who have the capacity to. And I think that that will always drive the sorts of things that you're talking about, which is, you know, and for me, the theme around that is social justice.

Andrew Belletty

I mean, and what you're doing at some level is, you know, you're like you're becoming you're using your experience from your own past to become a social justice kind of warrior in a new environment. But also adapting your tools and skill sets to the new environment and the new people.

Andrew Belletty

And as you're saying, Don Dale, how do you go with the kids? Like if you've got mentor or mentored three indigenous boys and two non - indigenous girls, have you taken those young people who what are they 16, 17?

Andrew Belletty

Have you taken them into Don Dale?

Charly Templar

The three male boys used to be in Don Dale, yeah, they used to be in Don Dale and the two females, they have never been in Don Dale. And so, the three boys, not that I'm providing workshops or activities at Don Dale, they don't want to go back because for them, that's part of the past.

Charly Templar

So, the two females, they go to Don Dale to provide the workshop, yeah. So, it's a new environment, they have never been, but they get along with the other young boys and the mentor, the peers, you know, they tell them stories, positive stories.

Charly Templar

And it's funny because yesterday I was at Don Dale myself to do the workshop, it was a Sunday and some of the boys were telling me about the two females, they're like, yeah, they come here, they're very nice and I like one.

Charly Templar

And then she told me, I can't date you because you're here, you must be out and be a good boy. And then I ask him, so what are you going to do? He's like, oh, I'm compelled to change, I must know.

Charly Templar

And I say, oh, if that's positive, that's good for you, buddy.

Andrew Belletty

That's a really, it's a really, it's a really different take on, because the, you know, Don Dale's got such a terrible, I mean, even in Sydney, we hear some very, not very good stories surrounding Don Dale, but what you're talking about, to take young people in there who can actually have the fortitude or the courage to go to a place where other young people are being locked up, that's, I think that's quite powerful.

Charly Templar

It is, it takes courage, and that was the whole idea when I was studying Dream Impact, because when we talk about jobs, opportunities, we always think about plus 18. But what about those young people that are committing these crimes because they want \$100 to buy this and that, that parents are not giving to them?

Charly Templar

So, I thought to myself, listen, start taking 13, 14 up to 17, between 14 and 17, empower them, teach them the skills, and then give them jobs. So, I started doing that. I will take all the 20 tables and 20

computers that I have and rent a hall and make design a flyer, free DJ workshop, and identify kids that wanted to do it.

Charly Templar

And what happens next is that these young people, they realize that, oh, I'm good at DJing, I can do that and make money. So, I put them into all these youth festivals, all non -alcoholic event, where they go, I set up the DJ and I step back and I look at them, how they're having fun, playing music, and they get a bit of cash.

Charly Templar

And in return, what happens? They don't go and break to anybody's, they don't want to, they don't go and take anybody property because the reasons are, oh, I'm working, I'm making my own money. So that's where the idea stems from, for providing job opportunity and career partners, opportunity to young people, for them to realize you're not just doing that for fun, you can develop this as a career partners opportunity.

Charly Templar

And one of the females, she's the most experienced, she's 16. She's been working with me for a year, and she has already DJed a lot of events, like youth events, to the point where she traveled 45 kilometers away from her home to DJ a kid's party.

Charly Templar

So, kids that came youth camp from Melbourne came up here, like young people came up here for a youth camp and she went to DJ the events. She did a DJ workshop by herself to a group of 10 young people from Melbourne.

Charly Templar

DJ workshop, she packed up, she set up the PA system and run the disco. So, this is, it makes me happy. It makes me happy because if we all put our hands together, like we say back home, one hand will never be able to tie a package.

Charly Templar

You need two hands. Therefore, if we have all these youth organizations, organizations that come together, there's just so much we can do rather than doing things separately. We come together, we sit, we discuss potential ideas that can refrain kids from offending or reoffending.

Charly Templar

And there's just so much that we can do, but they must be practical solution where a young person can realize that if I do this, there's a way out straight away because having done a certificate one in something and then not having a job for the next few months, what happens?

Charly Templar

His mind starts roaming. And before you know it, a group of boys will come and call the black, come on, let's go. In a stolen car, what happened? You know, in a bottle shop, what happened? Next thing you know is juvenile youth detention.

Charly Templar

So, these are the things that happens. And we see them daily, you know, and people, like I said, we just need to come together and have those practical solution as to what we can help, what can be efficient.

Andrew Belletty

I think, you know, you touched upon something that's really interesting to me because when I was first started this kind of mentoring, similar organization in India with the sound team for films and movies, one of the things that I saw was very bright, very able, reasonably young people who had no capacity to enter the formal workforce because they had no schooling whatsoever, but they had incredible smarts.

Andrew Belletty

So, they were already working, you know, within the industry, but on the peripheries of it. And when you have literally no schooling, there is, there is no opportunity to enter. But what, what my, you know, as I said, Shashi, the main guy who's been with me for almost 25, 26 years now, what he realized and what I kept telling him was that I know you can't read, and he could even barely speak any English in those days.

Andrew Belletty

So, I used to meet him halfway with a bit of Hindi, a bit of English. But he, I said, don't get scared because in India, in Bollywood, on the big films, everything runs via English. So, the call sheets, the schedules, the scripts are all in English script, right?

Andrew Belletty

So Hindi script is totally different. So even if he could read Hindi, which he couldn't, it would have been tricky. But reading English was just something completely foreign to him. And I said, you don't have to learn anything.

Andrew Belletty

But as long as you can, and I showed him, I said, you don't have to read the whole script. It's 150 pages. But every day that see that person over there, she's the, you know, there's a young girl and she was a script supervisor.

Andrew Belletty

And I said, every day she will have extracted the pieces from the script that we're going to be doing for that day. And you'll see that it's only one and a half pages. So that's the only thing you learn every morning is you look at that.

Andrew Belletty

And you ask me ask somebody about what it is. And then you learn the English associated with what you need for the day. And then the

schedule, the call sheet, what time is it tomorrow? How to how to understand how to decipher all that information on the call sheet, which is confusing to anybody.

Andrew Belletty

And you know, now he reads English script, he reads Hindi script, he speaks six languages. Beautiful. And he is totally informal, because he has no educational qualifications. But as I said, his daughter, you know, we bought computers for her when she was little and everything.

Andrew Belletty

And she is now enrolled in medical school. I mean, it's just unheard of. But this informal kind of education, because I know what's happening in Australia is I'm getting I'm getting to the point here, what's happening in Australia is, is this, there's this focus on job ready graduates, but graduates of what graduates of university?

Andrew Belletty

So, what about Okay, so to you to do university, how much do we need \$25 ,000 a year, so \$75 ,000, a debt of \$75 ,000, then after that, you will potentially have a pathway to a job. So that's been the focus of our kind of the overarching government focus.

Andrew Belletty

But what you're talking about is if kids are disengaged at 12, they're not going to have any type of you can't say let's just go back to grade

12, because they haven't even done grade nine. Correct. But what you're talking about is the skills needed to, to kind of circumvent that in an informal way, like what I did, the guys in India, the team, they just got straight to a very high level through an informal way.

Andrew Belletty

And I think what you're showing these young people is the same pathway, which is like, you need to learn certain things to get to this next level.

Charly Templar

But also, just to touch on what you said, that's the national, I don't want to say curriculum but go to university and get a job. That's what nationwide, that's how people see it. But the Northern Territory is a bit different in that instance, where people have realized the government, the anti-government has realized over the past years that it doesn't work here, because English is basically the second,

Charly Templar

the third or the fourth language for many indigenous people here. Therefore, what do we put in place? It's just this vocational, educational training for them to be job ready. And I think the Northern Territory has been doing a lot of effort just to get the kids job ready by providing them with those opportunities and those courses so they can get a job.

Charly Templar

There are so many organizations here that provide those short courses that will lead you to a career path with opportunity. So yeah, in that instance, we're very different in the Northern Territory compared to other states or territories across Australia.

Andrew Belletty

and yeah just to finish up here I think that is the key what you're what you're saying there is that the kind of space that you're working in is to me so important for exactly that reason you know like there's no formal kind of you know it's kind of almost like music which is such a big economy I mean the twat the tat I don't even know they call it the swift diverse or something like Taylor Swift is so big that she's her own economy music is an economy you know what I mean like that there is this whole thing around it and participating in that is as valuable and as useful and possibly way more useful than many other kind of avenues of ideas.

Charly Templar

And that's true, and I think once again, the government understood that, because there's a package going around for funding to organizations that are willing to take that step in training young people, you know, music -wise.

Charly Templar

So, and that's beautiful, that's fantastic, that the anti -government is recognizing those issues and trying to put the fundings available just to train young people. But once again, like I said, all the organizations coming together and proposing or suggesting those practical ideas to help young people, but also a call -up onto parents, you know,

parents to do the best they can to help at home, because education starts at home before you even leave your doorstep.

Charly Templar

If you don't get the proper direction, guidance, support from home, it makes it very difficult for an astronaut person to come and change, you know, to come and change the person that you are. So, education must start from home.

Andrew Belletty

That's great, and I think the Council's moved in with their chainsaw, so we might have to call it a day, but we're looking forward to, you know, we're working together on Knock Em Down Sound System, which is going to happen in April next year, 2024, and we're just getting that in shape at the moment, but I'm pretty excited.

Andrew Belletty

It's going to be an awesome opportunity, and I'm really, grateful that we have you on board.

Charly Templar

Yeah, no, thank you very much for that opportunity. I'm looking forward to it as well. And I just want to remind the listeners that if they're curious enough to check the work that we do, it's dreamimpactinspire.com.

Andrew Belletty

Yep, I'll put that link in the description. Thank you very much. No worries. And thank you for your time today, Charlie.

Charly Templar

Thank you, Andy.

ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION WITH COLIN SIMPSON

AUDIO RECORDING:

A Conversation with Colin Simpson

Release April 2024

Duration 61m

Produced by Andrew Belletty

Listen

<https://youtu.be/fIAztHFCCSM>

Summary

The interview is a conversation between Andrew Belletty and Colin Simpson, discussing their experiences in the music scene in Darwin, Northern Territory in the 1980s and beyond. They reminisce about the challenges they faced in finding venues for original music, leading them to organize informal gigs in unconventional spaces like basketball courts, verandas, and even living rooms. They talk about the diverse audiences they attracted, from bikers to lawyers, and the inclusive, community-driven spirit that characterized their events. The interview also touches on Colin's role as a sound technician, repairing equipment for bands, and his experiences working at significant events like the Barunga Festival. They discuss the evolution of the music scene in Darwin, from the informal 'Swamp' venue at the university to the establishment of spaces like the Darwin Music Development Centre (DMDC) and Happy Yess. The conversation highlights the resilience, creativity, and passion that drove the underground music scene in Darwin during that era.

KEDSS PODCASTS OCT 2023 COLIN SIMPSON INTERVIEW

 Thu, 07/04 15:28PM · 61mins

Full Transcript

Andrew Belletty

Good afternoon, my name is Andrew Belletty, and I'm still in Darwin. And today I'm talking with Colin Simpson, who is an audio handyman. He's a sound mixer. He's an extraordinarily talented guitarist. He designs PA systems, and he's pretty much the go -to technical, like a real proper schooled audio technical person in Darwin.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, good day, Colin. Good day, Andy. What do you think? If I was to ask you what your thing was now, and I know what you've done over the past, but how would you describe yourself now?

Colin Simpson

Well, I'm a happy all -rounder. I will do some gigs maybe in Darwin in a local club like Happy Yes or the Railway Club. I like independent bands. I've got a lot of experience with independent bands, indigenous musicians.

Colin Simpson

It's great. That's a part of what I do, travel out to communities to work on festivals, music festivals and so forth and workshops. And in Darwin as a backstop, I guess, I repair electronic equipment, audio things, guitars, amplifiers, sometimes microphones, make leads, all that sort of stuff.

Colin Simpson

And I've also done a few recordings, but not too many lately.

Andrew Belletty

So, tell me before you got to Darwin, what was what was happening and what you know this kind of sound system, community, this drive

that you've got for doing community stuff and stuff that doesn't fit the mold.

Andrew Belletty

Where does that come from?

Colin Simpson

I left sort of cold, depressing Melbourne in 1979 to go to Perth, which was sunny, and everybody seemed to be happier. But to get work, the easiest way to get work was to take PA systems and bands around the regional areas.

Colin Simpson

And the idea being that after you'd done that for a year or two, you could start breaking into the city circuit. But I enjoyed travelling around regional places and country towns and stuff so much that I never really got serious about the city.

Colin Simpson

And one of the early things I remember is they used to have moon dances on the full moon down in places like Albany and Denmark, in the southwest of Western Australia. So, we'd turn up in a van with a small PA and some lights and take all comers, any bands in the district, any musicians could just get up and there would probably be a headlining band coming down from somewhere.

Colin Simpson

But the spirit of it was we'd make our own entertainment, the bands would make their own entertainment, we would do things at a low price and just for the enjoyment as much as for the money and then we'd move on and do something else.

Colin Simpson

So, after a few of those, I lived in Albany for a while, there was a surprisingly good scene, there was a great folk club down there. The waifs eventually came out of that folk club. Ross Ryan, who's a real old-time legend from the 70s, came out of that Albany folk club.

Colin Simpson

Fantastic little music scene down there, a pub rock scene, these moon dances and plenty of opportunities to just pack up the van and travel. So that gave me my taste, so we went everywhere, all the way up to Broome eventually.

Colin Simpson

I did that for about four and a half or five years and after which I went back to Melbourne. Again, the scene over there in the early to mid 80s was, I was a bit restless after all the country and I wanted to go bush again so I came back to Darwin to have a look around and then look around the NT and I liked it, so I've pretty much been here ever since the mid 80s when I first met you.

Andrew Belletty

And before that, because when I first met you, you had used to talk a lot about Jamaica. So how does that fit into things?

Colin Simpson

Well, I've always loved reggae music, and I was a big fan of Bob Marley and the Wailers. I had worked on a Peter Tosh gig in Perth in 1980, which was great, and I had it in the back of my mind. I liked to go to Jamaica.

Colin Simpson

I didn't pull that off until 1991, and my partner and I had got to go. We were excited. We'd been saving up for a long time to go, and we got to go over there for the summer festival season, which was fantastic.

Colin Simpson

We loved the PA systems over there. Every little place that had music would have an interesting home -made PA. The big festivals had big professional PAs, but again, they had that spirit of doing it themselves.

Andrew Belletty

Okay, so we need to go back to when you first got to Darwin, then. So back to the, because I think that was kind of the first part of the 80s. So maybe 84 or something that I first ran into.

Colin Simpson

context of us making our own entertainment and making our own gigs and that, that's one of the things that attracted me to you guys, to the Swamp Jockeys, that you had a great we're going to do it, we can do it ourselves attitude, which I found a bit lacking in the bigger music sense.

Colin Simpson

Melbourne, Sydney, Perth were getting very specialized and so we put on a lot of gigs as you know, sometimes under people's houses or in their living rooms with whatever gear we could put together and some excellent gigs at the University which I don't think have ever been equaled or surpassed.

Colin Simpson

The vibe in the mid to late eighties out there, they were ready for it, and we came and did it. We had great gigs at the Uni, we didn't have huge PAs, but we had enough gear and heaps of people used to come and like it and I think that that launched quite a few bands out there.

Colin Simpson

My band at the time, your band at the time were regulars and lots of other musicians surely came along and got a bus out of it too.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, and I think what was interesting about the stuff that we were doing was, it was not part of the conventional network. So when, and I know when we've, and this is out of a couple of factors.

Andrew Belletty

One is, you know, environment. So, you know, indoor kind of pubs were, you know, they had their clientele, they wanted to preserve their clientele. And if they had a band, because of the air-conditioned pub vibe, they wanted it to be, you know, like something that was on topic.

Andrew Belletty

So, they wanted it to be a cover band. And in those days, we were pretty much playing almost 90 something percent original material. Yeah. And as you guys were, and a whole bunch of other bands were, you know, this burgeoning early 80s kind of original scene, but we had nowhere to play because the venues did not want to know about us.

Andrew Belletty

That's right. And that was, and by necessity, we were forced into unconventional venues like Scout halls, Greek halls, the University where we commandeered a demountable, but the band couldn't fit inside. So, we had a makeshift stage outside.

Andrew Belletty

So again, you know, outside sound systems, the rooftop of the workers, you know, the rooftops, basketball courts, outdoor areas were predominantly where we could play and unorganized or part of the not part of the organized music sector.

Andrew Belletty

So, we existed outside of that, which is, I think, what made it interesting and challenging. And when you jumped from stage and put your guitar down and then jumped behind the mixing console, which Simo's gone, and then he just appears behind the mix.

Andrew Belletty

And he's like, oh, you know, but yeah, so you mixed and played constant, you know, constantly, there was that kind of interchange between the two roles. But there were all those challenges of, you know, you're fighting the environment at times, the cicadas were louder than the guitars, you know, you're fighting an environment that's kind of, you know, oppressively hot, the equipment's blowing up, it's overheating is an understatement.

Andrew Belletty

But you know that that type of stuff.

Colin Simpson

Yeah, absolutely, it's true. And you're right, because it would have been much easier to just play the covers and make the money, but none of us wanted to do that. So yeah, and exactly as you say, so

sweaty, horrible sounding resonant tin sheds with hard floors, sound man's nightmare.

Colin Simpson

Somehow, we had fun, somehow the audience had fun. We did all that. We did car parks standing on hay bales, if you remember more than once. Yeah, that's true, we did. And under people's houses, but one of my favorites is in somebody's lounge room.

Colin Simpson

There are so many people in an upstairs house that the house looked like it was shaking so much, it was going to come off its peers. And I thought, I'm never going to see this anywhere else in the world.

Speaker 4

That one was a buzz.

Andrew Belletty

It was great. The idea of one of the activities before sound check was to swing by Delaney's and pick up some hay bales, like Delaney's was the produce and livestock store in town. We used to have to go by and get a dozen or 18 hay bales for whatever, you know, to put under the boards on the stage or for people to sit on or to prop up amps or whatever it was.

Andrew Belletty

But hay bales seemed to be part of the, you know, the staging that we did. But yeah, I think those challenges are what made that whole scene really kind of vital and interesting and, you know, the fact that we would just randomly get together to kind of print posters and publicize things through word of mouth.

Andrew Belletty

And again, it has a lot of tie ins with this kind of grassroots kind of activism stuff. I remember we played, you know, for East Timor, we played for the unions, we played for, I mean, obviously, Aboriginal bands in those days, just bringing Aboriginal bands that we knew on stage was an activist thing, you know, because it was just not done at all.

Andrew Belletty

And the pubs or the venues or wherever we were, we'd often have to lie about our true intention. You know, oh, no, the, you know, the people who own the Greek Hall, we just blatantly told lies before we staged probably one of the most memorable gigs in Darwin.

Andrew Belletty

I mean, I think we almost yeah, the floor almost gave away there as well.

Colin Simpson

Yep. And you know, he could name drop. But really, if you're talking about putting on people like Colored Stone, which we did, and the

Rumpy Band, and it's amazing to think now because they're such legends.

Colin Simpson

But at that time, they really couldn't get a gig in Darwin Barks.

Andrew Belletty

the Mill Sisters, Soft Sands, I mean when we had shown we would always look for who can be given a hand up onto the stage to perform and T. We Wailers over at the Grand Final, I mean there was always um and again that was to me that that felt like kind of the natural thing to do because that's what we wanted to do but in hindsight it was activism I mean it was like what are you guys doing and a lot of the time you know when you did it you know as a clandestine activity you know you kind of got people in because don't forget in those days I mean especially in Darwin I know a lot of Aboriginal people felt very uncomfortable in venues because the people would be trying to kick them out you know and that was the sad fact of the day um so you know like getting people up on stage in those in those venues either organized or disorganized

Colin Simpson

It was very rare, and it did feel like this, well, this is different for Darwin. People would look at you in surprise, like you've got Aboriginal band on stage, like that's people in those days in Darwin.

Colin Simpson

It really was iconoclastic; it was sort of like everyone had their little scene and it was all locked up.

Andrew Belletty

But I think that's what made it so exciting and that's what made us so motivated to do stuff.

Colin Simpson

Yeah, and for me personally, like it was so much more interesting and exciting to do that, given my other background. Before I got to Darwin, it was just totally natural for me to join that. I wasn't going to get stuck in a pub and grow mold, you know, in the corner as a mixer in a pub.

Colin Simpson

It was just so exciting and so much more interesting.

Andrew Belletty

You provided basically essential services for a lot of bands as well, so apart from all the rest of it, I always remember your ability to repair guitars that various bands have, you know, in the middle of a performance or straight after the performance, the guitar turns up or the amp turns up on your doorstep with a note.

Andrew Belletty

Broke the headstock, this overheated makes funny spitting sound now and we need it for the gig tomorrow night, so you'd be their whatever time of day or night repairing stuff for bands across the spectrum.

Colin Simpson

That's right and at the time it's just what you did because it needed to be done and it came in really useful when I started going to Arnhem Land regularly because there's always a pile of broken gear out there and it's fantastic because it means the show can happen and all of a sudden you've got more than enough guitars and amps instead of none or hardly any yeah so but and the same in Darwin I mean for the local musicians as well it made no difference to me in that in this that if it was broken I'd try and fix it and my track record was pretty good I managed to fix a lot of stuff

Andrew Belletty

I think you're underestimating. You have the technical skills to glue guitar headstocks back together, you know what I mean? To fix amplifiers that have been destroyed. I mean, that's not a kind of an average skill.

Colin Simpson

I'm definitely a handyman.

Andrew Belletty

So yeah, so that part of, you know, that real kind of hands -on repair, getting stuff together, helping keep bands on the road, I think that is a huge part of the scene as well.

Colin Simpson

It's, yeah, I agree it is, not only from necessity, but from my point of view, I found it exciting because the range of skills that I had, I could use them all. And I felt, it just made me feel like this is the right place that I should be.

Colin Simpson

So, as I said, when I came from Melbourne, Sydney, and then Perth, they were getting very specialized. So, if you were like the solder monkey, you'd spend most of your days repairing electronic equipment.

Colin Simpson

But in the NT, across the NT, and in the bush, in other states, I suppose, but I could do all those things. So, I could be fixing amplifiers, getting PA's together, or getting them working or repairing them, guitars, restringing them, putting new electronics controls, jacks in them, whatever, straightening bent necks, all that.

Colin Simpson

So, this range of skills really made for an interesting life. I had 25 or 30 fantastic years where everything was never run out of things to

do. And you never knew what was gonna happen next week or even tomorrow sometimes.

Andrew Belletty

And I also remember the necessity, because at the time, you know, we were kind of doing stuff that didn't have much money or didn't have any official support. And I know, especially the very first Yothu gigs, I mean, they were part of Swamp Jockey gigs.

Andrew Belletty

And there was no money, there was no support, there was no grants, there was no ability to do anything. So, we had to kind of do all sorts of degree poker, even to get stuff happening. But you know that that also led to these great opportunities.

Andrew Belletty

But one of the things was just with purely just with the PA system. And I remember at the time, there was one, let's call it a corporate hire facility in Darwin. And that, you know, they used to kind of hire out to PAs to houses of worship, which were kind of very big at the time, there was the four-square church that probably had, you know, most of the kit on hire, the lights and sound, they had lots of people there,

Andrew Belletty

lots of money each week. And they did corporate events, and you know, the more the pubs that had the money, they did the PAs for

that. So, when it came to us, they literally used to laugh in our face and say, so you want what?

Andrew Belletty

And you're going to drive down to where, so you need it for two weeks, but you've only got like \$300. And they were just laughing our face. So, you know, we had not only you, but we also had a guy called Blair Laid, who's a true legend.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah. And his PA was kind of, I mean, I might say it was do it yourself. It was a decent PA. But it came with

Colin Simpson

And he was a great operator, he was also a great technician, and his prices were affordable. And I think he scared the big guys sometimes, because he was prepared to put himself out and do that stuff, help bands like us.

Andrew Belletty

He used to drive down to wherever it was, you know, and sleep in his swag or in the front cab of the and roll out this PA that often-needed repairs.

Colin Simpson

on the road. And then when I got a chance to do a gig with him, I always enjoyed it. Always learned something. He's a knowledgeable person. To me, he's probably the best audio tech I've ever met in the NT.

Colin Simpson

He hasn't been in our field for a while because he decided to go off and do other things in electronics, which is more than capable of, you know, making rocket guidance systems or something. He's that good at electronics.

Colin Simpson

But while he was in the game, while he was in the PA and production game in Darwin, he was just an absolute joy to work with. And it was a golden time for us because we could put on larger events, and he had enough quality PA gear to do it.

Colin Simpson

Whereas if we had to go to the major production company, they would have charged five times as much or more. And so, we could put on shows to 2,000 people or whatever at a price we could afford. So maximum respect to xx.

Andrew Belletty

And the show always went on, so no matter what happened with the unregulated generator power supply, or if the generator itself

crapped out during the afternoon or evening, because don't forget some of the heat and humidity and dust that we had to endure.

Andrew Belletty

So, something like that, if the power source itself went down or if part of the PA went down, Blair would be out the back of the truck, and he's got his soldering iron in his meters and he's getting it working.

Andrew Belletty

And so, with Blair, the show always went on. And I don't know who would roll out electronic gear to that extent on a basketball court or under a mango tree in the dirt or on a beach or wherever we used to make him go to.

Andrew Belletty

It was quite extraordinary. Like it was it was next level effort, and he did grumble, but he always delivered, and he loved it. It was it was a kind of he used to grumble a little bit, but at the end of the day, he'd go.

Andrew Belletty

That was just awesome.

Colin Simpson

So, he was a mentor to me because we were there to keep going. And when we did go out bush, we would do pretty much what Blair did. He set the mold. He was a pioneer of putting on quality production in the bush at a price that people could afford.

Colin Simpson

So, whoever's putting on the gig might be a community, might be a group of bands, there might be some government money involved for a festival, but that's what we tried to do. And Blair set the bar for that.

Colin Simpson

He was so good at it.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, and the idea of having a stage or a carpeted auditorium or air conditioning was not even on the radar really was it.

Colin Simpson

So, we did a lot of gigs with the performers just standing at one end of basketball court and the people at various distances from the stage, usually the kids would come in first and start dancing, the bands, one of the bands or the other would pick up the challenge and play Wipeout or something like that and the kids would go crazy.

Colin Simpson

After dark, you know, an hour after dark, people would start moving in and then older people would start dancing, teenagers and that. So many times, those basketball gigs were just pure magic because it would be full of happy people.

Colin Simpson

They didn't care at all, you know, it's like we gave them a PA that sounded good, I hope. We gave them bands they liked and that was all they were asking. And after that everyone had a great time.

Andrew Belletty

And I often think about that idea that, you know, being on like, because traditionally when you perform, you're on a stage, so you're elevated, and then the PA is elevated above that. So, your kind of looking up and it's kind of a bit of reverence or whatever.

Andrew Belletty

It's you know, it's a kind of a, you know, it's a theatrical troupe or whatever. I mean, it's the idea of the stage. So, when you're on the same level, and often when you're on the dirt or on just a piece of concrete, you know, everybody's on the same level, they're all access gigs.

Andrew Belletty

That's the other thing. There were never gates, never security, never fences, it was. come one, come all. Sometimes in Darwin, when we

did gigs, we would, you know, we'd have somebody kind of standing around the door to make a few dollars for whatever we were doing.

Andrew Belletty

But generally, it was an all-access type situation. And, you know, once, because often we would be, you know, involved in the bands and the setup and all that. So, by 10 or 11 o 'clock, we're finished, you know, exhausted.

Andrew Belletty

And then the PA would be still there. And it would be left to, at the time, Blair's tape or somebody else's mixtape of whatever dance music for the kid and then all the kids would come out and just dance and dance and dance till the PA was packed up at, you know, one in the morning or whatever.

Andrew Belletty

So those kinds of informal discos, you know, from the early to mid-eighties, you know, now are a really big thing. Like if you go to Barunga now, they have discos after the bands that start at 11 o 'clock and all the kids sleep during the rock and roll.

Andrew Belletty

They come out at 11 and dance till three. But yeah, in those days, it was just somebody would put on a mixtape and just leave the PA set up for a few more hours. And, and yeah, that was kind of informal.

Andrew Belletty

But I think that level playing literally a level playing field that we played on and set up on and all that no staging, no fancy, it was accessible, you know, and people could see what we were doing.

Andrew Belletty

People there was no barrier between the performers and the and the PA and the audience.

Colin Simpson

that's true and at modern Barunga of course they got much better production and of course it's lovely to hear that great sound and they can have a much bigger audience in front of the PA now I've been there and there's 5 ,000 people recently 5 ,000 people on Friday or Saturday night so they need a bigger PA system but back in the day when we started it I was at the first three Barunga's and there's very little money for PA and lights I can tell you that and I remember your band Swamp Jockeys being I think at the first or the second one pardon my memory but um and we were doing that on the smell of an oily rag as well you know and at the 88 Barunga when Prime Minister came and talked about a treaty that was done on the football field on the Arts Council PA which the Arts council yeah and that channel you have a pair of desk

Colin Simpson

for both speakers on polls and the Arts Council headlined it as a former sponsorship to the festival for the festival and that's what everybody heard.

Andrew Belletty

everybody had to give us such a small little PI everybody had to gather around and well, I had to stay quiet to hear anything at all.

Colin Simpson

and the African dance troupe had just been, yeah, so yeah that was good. And that's the other aspect of my job that I love because I've been in places where there's clearly history in the making, you know, and the Song Treaty came from that promise at Barunga in June 88.

Colin Simpson

But just being in that time in that place it's and then it felt like important, you know, you could feel the electricity in the air and every good gig you're always going to feel electricity in the air.

Colin Simpson

That's what mixers live for. That's the reason I suppose it could be the difference between people that really love live sound and people that love recorded sound. And I'm not knocking people that love recording.

Colin Simpson

I've done a bit of it myself but on a night where good music, good performers and the crowd are into it, you get this electricity in the air

that you can't really describe it. But and then, you know, that's to me that's part of a big part of where you do it.

Colin Simpson

If you don't get that do something else.

Andrew Belletty

But I do remember sometimes, you're talking about Barunga, but there was that gig and there was a couple of other kind of festivals that were happening in the 80s where, you know, a stage of some sort was needed because the crowds were a little bit bigger, and it was all outdoors or whatever.

Andrew Belletty

But the stage often just ended up being the bogey of a flatbed of a truck.

Colin Simpson

yeah did a few gigs on the back of trucks didn't we and hay bales which you guys made famous standing on hay bales at least one of your singers was usually barefoot so you must have had good tough feet but uh yep and uh you know there's one thing I do like about even the more recent festivals in Arnhem Land when I see footage because um of them is they still have that um that kept a traditional life of they might be on the veranda you know out in the school or whatever just an any nice little place where they can have a performance space um and that's to save the worry of having to bring

in a big production and a big you know come up with 25 or 30 000 dollars to put on a festival so um I love it that they can have a great festival and lots of people play lots of people come and it's not a big deal it's not oh my god where are we going to get 30 40 50 000 dollars you know to have a pa company come out here with big stuff so I'm not prejudiced against big gigs with big equipment but it's great they I sort of feel like they're doing what we did when I see them up there with a small pa and that's their festival and they're loving it yeah and rocking it

Andrew Belletty

And I think, you know, I just remember playing on the verandah of the so many schools. But yeah, and then, you know, you're trying to try to get the power lead into the classroom after hours because it's locked and it's the weekend.

Andrew Belletty

So, one of the kids comes over and goes on added, you know, Jimmy those louvers and just to get the power lead in so you can fire things up. But, you know, I think the beautiful thing about informal gigs is that when you go into the community, no matter what that community is, they feel part of it.

Andrew Belletty

So, when you're setting up, they're all around you. You're not locked away in a venue where you've got this kind of scientific, clinical kind of way of setting up and running leads and putting cable ramps down and testing it with tones and whatever.

Andrew Belletty

You're basically setting up and people are asking you questions over your shoulder. What's that? What are you doing with that? And, you know, when you go into community, you become part of the community and then they sit on you and then they look at you.

Colin Simpson

and you're often asking people for help because you're saying do you know have you got two power points nearby can you show me um do you want do you mind giving me a hand lifting this speaker you know just teenage young men or whatever um so yeah there's that thing there because you're not taking that approach if you just sit over there and we'll call you when it's already it's like everybody is going to be there so you get involved you know

Andrew Belletty

It's like, to me, it's the ultimate co -design because you don't go in there with a set idea of what the gig's gonna be or the performance is gonna be or even the music. You know, like we used to literally carry cassettes like, you know, run DMC or whatever in your pocket and, you know, pop it in while you're setting up the PA and you'd get feedback from the kids to park a bit later, you know,

Andrew Belletty

you'd be playing some of that. And, yeah, it was, you know, you figured out what people wanted, and you did it their way. I mean, in that way, even the music of the band we're talking about, The Sawman Choc is, was kind of designed within, you know, it spoke to

the, it was not the best music on the planet, but it was interesting, and it spoke to the environment.

Andrew Belletty

It was informed by the environment, and it spoke to the audience that listened to it in a very real way, you know.

Colin Simpson

I thought so. I liked it a lot, but I'm not going to praise you too much. But it was like nothing else in Darwin, and it fit. And you guys were just great. You were just like my favorite band pretty much from the first gig, Swamp Chucky gig I ever saw.

Colin Simpson

I thought, well, that's my favorite band in Darwin. And I had seen a lot of bands and worked with a lot of bands down south and my feeling was you're as good as anybody. And history probably treat Swamp Jockey's kindly, I hope.

Colin Simpson

But to me, you were one of the big features of me deciding to live back in Darwin. I thought, this place is happening. You know, I knew what was happening in Melbourne and Sydney and Perth for that matter and the country around Perth, but I decided to stay in the territory.

Colin Simpson

My family's here. My mum was sick at the time, and it made it a pleasure. It really made it great to come back to the territory and live up here. And so, with Swamp Jockeys, you're being very modest, but there's no point, you know, being too modest.

Colin Simpson

And but the Swamp Jockeys, there were a few other unusual groups of musicians around at the time. And luckily, we acted like our scene acted like a magnet. So, we got to meet them all and work them on and figure out how we're going to put them together and scout halls, whoever it was, occasionally.

Colin Simpson

you guys would arrange a gig in an actual pub or something, so we'd all have to go along and see how that went. Sometimes not so well, sometimes it went okay. So, you were like trailblazers for us because we weren't the type of bands that underground, original, postpunk, whatever, you know, psycho country, whatever we were doing.

Colin Simpson

We weren't the type of bands that were gonna get gigs in the pubs up here because it was 100% covers, you know? As you said a while ago. So, it made it interesting, and it is surprising now thinking back.

Colin Simpson

I could list, if my memory's having a good day, I could list 30 bands easily in that era that were doing original music, and Sub -Lab would only last a few weeks, and some bands would split up as they do and come back in with different people for another incarnation or trying a different approach.

Colin Simpson

You or I played in probably four different variations of what was really one band, just try something new, do you sing a new name or whatever, see what happens, a few new songs.

Colin Simpson

It's all part of the fun. And in a scene, in a way, Darwin, everyone says Perth is the most isolated capital city in the world, but if you accept that Darwin is a capital city, in other ways, I think we're more isolated than them.

Colin Simpson

But if you regard the, if you're not troubled by what happens out bush and in small towns and regions, it's not a problem, because there's always exciting stuff going on out there. And so, every time I've been to like, you know, Lajamanu or Kalkaringi or Timber Creek or Barunga or Beswick or whatever, there's always something happening, yeah.

Colin Simpson

And the grapevine works well. So, if there's a new band in one of those places, you're gonna hear about it sooner or later. And in my

situation, the last few years, had a few serious health scares, pretty much in good shape now, but I step back and let the younger guys take over all that grunt work.

Colin Simpson

I can't work 27-hour days anymore. And so, I know there's some great young people out in the bush because we had a good course at university for a while there, and we trained some absolute wonderful people. So, I know that legacy, if you want to look at it that way, of having good people going, doing gigs in bush, Arnhem Land, regional towns, I know we've got people that are doing that now.

Andrew Belletty

I think the other thing that I always think about is that when I was, you know, in Sydney and Melbourne, especially, I suppose, in the 80s and 90s where the bands or music scenes were very, you know, as you were saying, you know, there was the music scenes, scenes plural, were very compartmentalized and everybody had their own thing, whereas, you know, in this strange band that I don't think any of us actually had a great handle on,

Andrew Belletty

it was just kind of a bit bigger than us, but also it was really shaped by the audience, but our audience was who? It was just the most, like, we started getting, you know, I mean, we quickly outgrew the four or five hundred seeders, we quickly grew to, you know, playing to, you know, five hundred to a thousand people in Darwin.

Andrew Belletty

And some of those people were bikers at a block. Some of those people were the yearly hospital party at Christmas. The lawyers, sorry, the judges and lawyers down at the trailer boat club, all the unionists, so the rooftop rage where there were thousands of people and, you know, the Timorese, the Aboriginal gigs we were putting on at the time, the anti-mining gigs, there were all these different communities.

Andrew Belletty

You got this kind of, you know, at the time we're hippies and then we got lawyers, and we got doctors, we got bike, just such a diverse range of community that supported this really ram shackled band.

Andrew Belletty

And, you know, and we somehow managed to keep them all happy. And I don't, I still don't understand how that used to happen. But, you know, and sometimes when you're staring at a sea of bikies and you're out in the middle of the bush in the middle of the night and it's pitch black out there, you kind of think this, if this goes wrong, we might never leave.

Andrew Belletty

But, you know, and somehow the bikers loved it.

Colin Simpson

Yeah, you guys you just had this great vibe but this energy that you guys had someone once told me that Doesn't matter what's in front of you in the way of an audience The bands that are going to make it are the ones that just Go, okay It doesn't matter where there's five people there and they're not interested or where there's five thousand and they seem to know all the words to our songs You still give a great gig and I never saw Your band the swamp jockeys bottle at once no matter which audience you're in front of the energy was always there and As you'd be by that stage You know by the time I'd realized How diverse your audience reach was um,

Colin Simpson

I'd been a fan of yours for a long time So I wasn't too surprised but that's the key ingredient That's what bands like Yothu Yindi or whomever also had and right from the first time ever heard Yothu Yindi Which was on the arts council pa under a palm tree near the Darwin high school um Very basic very simple and but they had this energy and there's that 150 commitment They knew what they wanted to do.

Colin Simpson

Yeah, I knew of course were heavily involved in with them, But I didn't know the younger guys at that point and the first time I ever met them They just popped up to us when we were doing a three-band gig Under a house, and they said can we play I said why not?

Colin Simpson

And they just blew me away And I'm not at all surprised that they've become Australia legends because they had that Um ingredient right

from the start. They just put it out there. Just gave it everything and 150 commitments

Andrew Belletty

So, I want to just get into a little, it's not a sidetrack, but talk a little bit more about the University, because I know at the early 80s, I was enrolled at the university, and so was another founding member of Yothu, Stuart Callaway.

Andrew Belletty

We were at the university at the time, we were trying to get the swamp jockeys off the ground, we were struggling with venues, and somebody helped us get access to this demountable building, you know, this relocatable building, and we got in there, and then somebody said, if you do it every now and again, you can get a liquor license as a social club.

Andrew Belletty

So once a month or something, you know, first, it was just the one gig. We kind of had an informal stage, I think Blair, and everybody was, and I don't know how many bands, but a few bands were on that night.

Andrew Belletty

But then after a few months of this kind of happening, it started becoming this informal thing on the side of the swamp there at CDU, which it was the community college in those days, but now it's CDU.

Andrew Belletty

And it was this informal venue that I just remember on one gig, and I was just looking around, and there were people on the street outside who couldn't even get in. The inside was packed, the outside was packed, they were all around the back of the stage.

Andrew Belletty

There's probably about 500 or 600 people there. It's just extraordinary. And then that kept going. I mean, I know that I kind of, you know, moved on and went to Sydney and started doing different stuff, but it became known as the swamp, and it became a decent venue.

Colin Simpson

yeah it was and they had all sorts of gigs there like some larger and some smaller it ended up with three demountables in a u -shape so and all the all the verandas of each of the three demanders will be packed and the quadrangle in the middle would be packed and yet down on a smaller night just on a routine Thursday night they might just have a duo in the corner and in fact one of my bands just we rang up at maybe lunchtime on a Friday saying can you guys come and play tonight in the corner beside the pool tables with you know very small pa couldn't get everyone the band together we just asked a couple of friends and we just got up and played you know three sets in the inside in the corner looking at guys playing pool and the bar at the far end of the demandable just because someone else had bailed out and we felt like doing it and we got a few free beers so yeah it was fabulous and um that um lasted right up until they decided to change to a big new venue above the gymnasium but it

didn't have the new venue didn't have the atmosphere because it was all brand new squeaky clean and I think this was a really friendly space there's a couple of trees to chill under it was fabulous on a dry season night you could sit on the veranda sit inside and in the sort of dodgy air conditioning or sit out under the stars or stand around talking or whatever um so yeah they it was basically a very inviting space and uh very inviting people running it the student union that that time were incredibly friendly and supportive of just about anything going so we could have a you know performance poet there I remember once they got up ostentatious up when he had a hit and we had to sort of be his backing band you not sure if you remember that one but um all sorts of stuff went on out there and uh in you know in a way I see more of that now in the in the hip -hop scene and um the street art scene in darlin than the music scene the mainstream music scene has moved away from that um for better or for worse everyone likes good production and you know wants to make some money but um the front lines now have moved to a young generally younger group people and the hip -hop scene up here is amazing it's way bigger than what you'd expect for such a little town and um so rap hip -hop street art are all really big up here and they're the people I think who are doing closest to what we did back in the 80s because they do it they just take it out and do it in the park you know at the skate park or wherever they get an opportunity

Andrew Belletty

I think that's, I don't want to give too much away, but I think when we first started the venue there at the community college, I mean, it wasn't really, you know, without people's knowledge. I think a few people in the main university knew about it, but I think there was this general, the top FM, the university or the community college radio station was in on it, the student union were in on it,

Andrew Belletty

but there was only a couple of people in that. But generally, people, the people that needed to be in on it weren't formally part of it. They just turned a blind eye. So, there was like a building manager who just didn't ask too many questions.

Andrew Belletty

There was the security guard who used to come around at the start of the night and I still remember that car and somebody used to have a conversation or whatever went on. And the security guard would go off and he'd say, so what time are you finishing up around one o'clock?

Andrew Belletty

I'll come back just after that to make sure everything's locked up and he would disappear. So, a lot of the stuff happened. You know, people were complicit, but they turned a blind eye. It's not as if we did anything bad.

Andrew Belletty

I mean, you know.

Colin Simpson

and it's amazing you know because now on a really big night as you say there might be 500 people there and three bands in maybe but it's amazing considering we're pretty much looked after security ourselves and I can't remember having one bad security incident in

like two years you know so but I think in context the hotels that did have covers all the big hotels were firing at that time as well Darwin was a post -cyclone Tracy reconstruction boom so everyone was kind of catered for and they figured I think the powers that be at the University they figured there was a little niche there for us a group of people who didn't fit the mainstream and I think that's a good thing and you know in Darwin we've got a couple of small venues like Happy Yess still and Railway Club who still have that that approach like you don't fit the mainstream but we'll give you a go you know

Andrew Belletty

Can I just ask you to just backtrack a little bit, so the informal venue of the Swamp was one thing, but then I wasn't around much after that, but the DMDC was kind of the next...

Colin Simpson

The DMDC was a bit of a find in the sense that there was an old building in the city which was just being used to store records for the police I think, so cardboard boxes full of old obsolete records, and they really hadn't got around to putting them in proper archives because it was just easier to leave them there, but anyway, one of our dear friends or the other discovered this and started knocking on doors until someone finally gave in and said,

Colin Simpson

well, you know, okay, well, you can have a lease on the place, a peppercorn lease on this two -story building located on the edge of Darwin City, not a particularly attractive building, it was just an old concrete two -story building, but it did have a great area out the

back, which with a few working bees, we turned into a grass area, a couple of the committee had green thumbs, and before you know it,

Colin Simpson

it was a nice place with trees and stuff, and we called it the Petrochemical Love Club initially, but we needed an official name to put to the funding bodies and the government so we could get a peppercorn lease, so we called it the Darwin Music Development Centre or DMDC, so that ran from a roughly 1990 to December 1995, and we did get involved in East Timorese politics for the last couple of years of its life,

Colin Simpson

and that the government at the time didn't like it, they were not interested in having a place where strong political views against the Indonesian government and etcetera, etcetera, you can figure out the rest, so they started to climb down on us, but we put on so many gigs there, large and small, again you might have a Monday night gig where anybody could come and play, absolutely anybody, yeah,

Colin Simpson

and you just, you might one week, you might get five people turn up, the next week you might get 50, anything could happen there, so the DMDC had the old atmosphere back, it was very Darwin, very tropical night, dry season, you could lie on the lawn and look at the stars and the band would be under the covered way at the back of the building, so yeah it was great, five years of that, so there's the thread,

Colin Simpson

that's what kept us.

Andrew Belletty

And that was fairly open access as well too, wasn't it?

Colin Simpson

year there was at least two sometimes three nights a week where there was no cover charge so it was just like a jam mentality or a friend gathering of friends mentality so it's a great place to try out your new ideas or your new band and you might get a free beer or two and then maybe on a Friday that two or three bands would plan a bigger gig and charge a fiver at the door but I don't ever remember the door charge being more than five dollars and we had some really big bands play there from various parts of the world not just Australia and locally because so it was kind of like a workers paradise and we really tried to keep that as affordable as possible I think we succeeded

Andrew Belletty

Umm, what's the story with Happy Yes?

Colin Simpson

After the Dunn Music Development Corporation, DMDC, Petrochemical Love Club were shut down in December 1995, there was a bit of public outrage from the musical community. So, the

government agreed to fund a body called MIDI, which eventually morphed into Music and Tea.

Colin Simpson

They were tasked with finding a performance venue for live original bands. Sadly, that hasn't happened all this time later, but somewhere along the way around 10 years later, well, an inspirational fellow from Nuland Boy called Chris Keogh was among our group of friends, and he was hunting for a venue probably from about the late 1990s.

Colin Simpson

And in 2004, he found a place that he thought would make a good venue, and that was the original happy yes, but unfortunately, we only had one gig there. And because this had a burst sewer main, the landlord said, oh, look, this is not suitable for a venue, and, you know, too many people, only one toilet, that type of thing.

Colin Simpson

So, then we went back, or Chris went back, and a small group of his other friends went back to looking for another place, and they found an old shop in Bennett Street, and opened Happy Yes in there. That had a license for 50 people, it was so small.

Colin Simpson

And there was a bit of spillover into the empty car park at the back on gig nights, which was not strictly legal. So, every now and again,

the licensing commission would give us a warning about that, because people would like to go out the back and enjoy the night air.

Colin Simpson

But again, that was the backbone of the Darwin underground and indie scene, and that was a take all comers as well. So, we welcomed rap, hip hop, right through to death metal, and all points in between.

Colin Simpson

We're just completely non-denominational. So, any type of music was welcomed there. And if you behave yourself, because again, the bands would, the performers and their friends would be responsible for running the gigs.

Colin Simpson

We didn't have any money for staff. And it was like a community or type of run event. And then initially, by 2007, it got big enough that we the committee was starting to look for, which I wasn't on at that time.

Colin Simpson

But the committee were worried about growth, and they decided to look for bigger premises, which they did for the next two years. And eventually they moved in with Brown Smart, where they still are in about 2010 from memory and maybe early dry season 2010.

Colin Simpson

So that's been still is pride itself on being open to all comers.

Andrew Belletty

I think that I'm seeing that in contemporary Darwin is that there is stuff happening but the cost of participation generally, so the cost of going out, there's lots of fancy bars, there's lots of fancy kind of restaurants, cafes, whatever, but their next level of money that needs to change hands for you to participate in that type of life.

Andrew Belletty

And yeah, as far as entertainment goes, the same type of thing, that there is a threshold to participate in that, that a lot of people in Darwin just don't seem to have, unless you have those jobs that are paying very, very decent money.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, I think that's right.

Colin Simpson

So, too much aimed at people with good disposable income and not enough for the rest and for many of us, we just do not have that financial base.

Andrew Belletty

back to the you know open participation and community driven designed events

Colin Simpson

I will say though, if you just look at it as a music industry, it is the statistics up here for what it's worth are phenomenal. The sheer number of performers that we have up here doing some sort of gig or another for the size of our population is phenomenal.

Colin Simpson

Nobody probably has the answer to why that is, except arguably that Darwin's always been a more welcoming place. Certainly, when I got back here in the mid 80s it was much more welcoming than Melbourne or Sydney where you sort of start looking for a manager from the time you get 10 songs together in the hope that you can break in and get a few gigs for free beers and you know on a waiting list for six months to get in and play.

Colin Simpson

back in those days. So that welcoming atmosphere that Darwin had I hope we haven't lost it completely because that's what made the place magic. In the beginning we felt like we could make up at you and I and all our friends and people we knew we felt like it was worth having a go you know, and we enjoyed ourselves.

Colin Simpson

I'm here to tell you know I didn't do it. I wouldn't have done it this long if I didn't enjoy it.

Andrew Belletty

We're going to be working together on Knock Em Down Sound System April 2024. Thanks so much for your time today, Colin, it's been a real pleasure.

Colin Simpson

Yeah, that was. Thank you.

ANDREW BELLETTY IN CONVERSATION WITH TODD WILLIAMS

KEDSS PODCASTS OCT 2023 TODD WILLIAM INTERVIEW

Duration 51m

Release April 2024

Produced by Andrew Belletty

Listen

<https://youtu.be/wxyBmLYBRp>

Q

An interview with Todd Williams, an artist, singer, songwriter, director, producer, and mentor involved with the VAMP TV project. The discussion covers a wide range of topics related to the VAMP TV project, including its origins, goals, and impact on engaging Indigenous students in remote schools through music, arts, and performance. Key discussion points include the project's aim to keep Indigenous kids engaged in school, showcase their talents and cultures, provide pathways for aspiring musicians, build capacity within communities, and foster a sense of representation and pride. The conversation also delves into Todd's personal journey as a musician with the band Swamp Jockeys, their experiences navigating the local music scene, recording challenges, and the importance of original music and performance in the Northern Territory.

 Thu, 07/04 15:27PM · 51mins

Full Transcript

Andrew Belletty

Good morning, my name's Andrew Belletty and today I'm in Darwin talking with artist, singer, songwriter, director, producer, mentor and long -standing Fred Todd Williams. Good morning, Todd. Good morning, Andrew.

Andrew Belletty

Did I miss anything there? No, I think you covered it a lot.

Todd Williams

So, uh...

Andrew Belletty

Now, I just want to talk initially about where we are and what it is you're doing here and how that kind of came about and pretty much kind of big picture stuff.

Todd Williams

I have been involved in the VAMP TV project now for the last 11 years. What VAMP stands for is Video Arts, Music and Performance. It's a project that was developed after the Minister for Education approached the music school to engage Indigenous kids at school because getting bums on seats and keeping kids at school in communities was, is and was an issue.

Todd Williams

There were ways of engaging kids through the sports, through contact, but the education minister approached the school to say, well, how can we engage kids in remote schools through the arts and the, or through music?

Todd Williams

Music and our principal at the time gave him a list of ideas and he basically chose the VAMP TV idea. Now the idea is to create a magazine style show, which would be a combination of material that we would generate, but also invite schools to send in material to let other schools know what they're doing and to showcase what they're doing in a fun way.

Todd Williams

And then we'd have hosts, and we'd package it all up together and then be able to distribute it via the internet into schools and as part of classroom activities. So, in a lot of ways, it gave kids an opportunity to see themselves, to see themselves in a classroom.

Todd Williams

At that time, there wasn't very much representation of indigenous people for stock, but particularly indigenous kids available so they couldn't really see themselves. So, this was a really good feedback loop for indigenous kids to see themselves and feel positive about who they were and what they're doing about their culture, about what they're doing at school and to have a little bit of fun with it.

Andrew Belletty

Okay, so that's, it's a lot to unpack. But yeah, what I'm seeing is like, it goes well beyond kind of diversion. This is, you know, you're getting kids who are still in school or potentially should be in school, to be more engaged and more interested in both music plus also building capacity within communities to produce stuff and what from what I've seen, I've seen quite a few episodes.

Andrew Belletty

Just seeing kids presenting and to me, that's a huge thing because it has spoken about this before, but shame job is such a big factor here, you know, and just to see what you guys do, which is like when it's being produced by community people on within that community for that community, and to see young kids of school age in front of the camera and like even if they're doing a little Q &A or if they're introducing a bit of sport or music,

Andrew Belletty

it's awesome.

Todd Williams

Yeah, an exchange job is a big kind of cultural thing and it's something that we try to overcome when the team go into a community. We know that within school that there is a lot of people who are going to waggle their fingers and almost shout at them to behave or to do this.

Todd Williams

They almost immediately can sense that we're not like that. We're very relaxed. We try to put them at ease and to give them the confidence to be themselves and even rise and to perform, whether it be on camera or to go and record music and so on.

Andrew Belletty

And whereabouts do you guys reach in the Northern Territory?

Todd Williams

Well, the whole of Northern Territory is our backyard. Initially, my colleague Rodney Balam and I, when we started out, we went all over the territory. But now, for the last four years, five years, we've had a team member based in Alice Springs who services the southern areas, goes out to schools and does stories within schools there.

Todd Williams

He's just working on a story right now out of Papunya where one of our programs is called Beat School. And that is about encouraging or teaching teachers how to teach beats on iPads, giving them the confidence to engage kids so they can sit there and spend an hour, a classroom, an hour developing just with their headphones on beats and how to overlay a baseline on that and how that can open a world.

Todd Williams

Because with technology, we know that kids just climb into that stuff so quickly. And out of that, if it all goes well with the teacher and the teacher's really into it, that leads on to lyric writing, which helps with the confidence in English and so on and literature.

Todd Williams

They can also then, if it gets to a stake, and we've got about five, six actual songs which have come out of the Beat School project, which has only been up and running for the last couple of years. And sometimes the school makes a film clip of that.

Todd Williams

Sometimes we go out and make a film clip with them. The Numbulwar one was fantastic. I'll show you that later. But it seems we're trying to work out appropriate ways to engage or to deliver music education in very remote schools because the tyranny of distance is a terrible thing.

Todd Williams

It's very expensive to go out and to send teachers out there specifically for that. So, by having the teachers teach beats, they're supported by one of our teachers back here. We can go online, and they can do a session online and the kids can show our teacher what they're doing and then get encouragement that way and to support the teachers that way.

Andrew Belletty

So, it's, I mean, you're building capacity at one level, both within the student body or the potential student body, plus also the teachers. And that's an interesting thing. And you're also, you know, whenever you're doing things like this, where it's a, it's a community, but it's a big community platform, because you're saying NT wide, you're seeing people from all over the NT, and they're seeing themselves,

Andrew Belletty

they're seeing others. And that's a big, not only individual community building thing, but it's a, it's a kind of a statewide, it's almost a nation kind of building exercise, isn't it?

Todd Williams

Yeah, it's kind of holistic. And when we started out, we were concerned that, you know, kids in, say, Arrrayonga weren't going to be necessarily interested in what kids were doing in Yirakala. But that's not the case.

Todd Williams

They love seeing kids do, you know, seeing their life and seeing what they're going through. And it's, it's educative in that sense, because otherwise, they may not ever see what each is, what each other are doing, and what various schools and their programs are doing across the territory.

Todd Williams

And that's also inspirational for teachers to go, oh, I like that idea. I'm going to do that with my kids. And that's really kind of sharing knowledge, sharing inspiration and sharing, yeah, role models.

Todd Williams

Yeah.

Andrew Belletty

And the capacity building, the visibility that you were talking about before, you know, just the thing of seeing Aboriginal children on screen, but on a regular basis and from a diverse, you know, set of communities, that must be really empowering.

Andrew Belletty

I mean, have you seen kids that you've started with and that have now gone through some path and become a performer or a dancer or they've joined somebody or...

Todd Williams

Well, I can give you two cracker examples. There is a young fella that we met in right at the beginning of the project who's was hanging around our mobile studio at Gama playing guitar. And he was in a local band.

Todd Williams

He was only 15 at the time. He's working with his good friend Theo DiMitea. And they went through various bands. We also caught up with him at the Battle of the School bands. We have this program that's been ongoing since, I think, about 2011.

Todd Williams

And they entered the Battle of the School band as the Neil Boys, Northeast Arnhem lads. And they then became the seven-star band.

And they went through. Now their latest gig is King Stingray, the two front men of King Stingray.

Todd Williams

And DiMitea started off as a drummer and gravitated to writing his own songs, then being the front man occasionally for Yothu Yindi. Now he's the front man for the Yothu Yindi project full time. And being the front man for King Stingray.

Todd Williams

So, we've seen his journey from a kind of shy, skinny little boy to national and soon to be international success of King Stingray. And they won Battle of the School band. So, they got to perform at Basin the Grass, a major music event up here.

Todd Williams

So that was a mind-blowing experience to them. And gave them a taste of what it was like to have big production and so on. And so that is a good example of how through VAMP and through our programs here at the anti -music school has gone on to bigger things.

Todd Williams

The other example, which only came up last year, again through Battle of the School bands, was a very, very small school called Mulga Boar, which is just northeast of Alice Springs. You're nodding your head; you know the story.

Todd Williams

Mulga Boar saw Battle of the School bands being advertised and saying, you know, get your entry and if you want to be part of this. They didn't have a band at that stage. It was bass player, never picked up a bass.

Todd Williams

But they entered the Battle of the School bands and the Heat in Alice Springs. Blew everyone away at Alice Springs. And for those who don't know, they were very, very influenced by their parents' taste in music, being Kiss and Status Quo and those 70s bands to the point where they performed with Kiss -like make -up in school colors on their face when they performed.

Todd Williams

So not only did they win the Heat, but they also went on to win the Battle of the School bands last year. They were invited to play at the Beat Festival in Darwin. So, they came up and played three nights there.

Todd Williams

Oh, sorry, two nights, because on the third night, they had to fly down to the Gold Coast to support Kiss. No. They got the opportunity to play with Kiss and to meet their heroes at the Gold Coast. And that just was totally mind -blowing for them.

Todd Williams

So, within six months of them deciding to enter the school bands, they were on stage with Kiss. One thing I will say is Alvin, who is the front man and the songwriter for the... He is an amazing musician.

Todd Williams

He's only 17, 18. He's still at school now. And he has coalesced the band into a very, very powerful rock unit. They recently used their prize from Battle of the School bands to record a new song called Fame Not Shame, which ties into that.

Todd Williams

I love it. That ties into that shame job and overcoming that factor. And our colleague in Alice Springs, Stuart Liddell, did a film clip for them. And we put it on the last episode of AMP TV. And it's a cracker.

Todd Williams

It's absolutely a ball terror. So, they are a really, good band. And they're still at school. But since last year, they've been invited to perform the Tiwi Islands in Melbourne. I think they went down to Sydney as well.

Todd Williams

And a lot of those images from their performing are in the latest clip. You'll see it's like The Adventures of the Mulga bore Hard Rock Band.

So that was enormously satisfying to see that journey. It must be said, it's a tiny school.

Todd Williams

There's one teacher. And everyone in the band's related. And the community itself is maybe 50 people. And the whole community got behind the school. The principal or the teacher, Peshala, a Kiwi lady who just really, really got behind Alvin and the rest of the band to further themselves, supported the band to go to Alice Springs in that first instance.

Todd Williams

And she certainly has recognized how music really engaged the kids and is able to teach other things in the curriculum about how much their instruments cost and how they're going to afford this and the logistics and how being in a band has a flow on effect to other parts of the curriculum.

Todd Williams

And so that's a huge success story. Look out for Mulga bore Hard Rock and Alvin because they're going to be huge.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, I've seen the clip and yeah, I totally agree. I can't believe that they weren't they weren't a band.

Todd Williams

No, before last year, yeah.

Andrew Belletty

That is crazy because they're so confident and competent and I think you couldn't epitomize the work that you guys are doing more than presenting the possibility, presenting their aspirations.

Todd Williams

Pathways, we like to kind of think of as pathways and you know, not everything that we do is going to resonate with a lot of kids Yeah, we like to think of as light bulb moments that You know someone sitting there going I could do that You know and in seeing themselves and as my colleagues Courtney says if you can see it You can be it and so representation is really vital And important for kids to see People like themselves up there and doing it and There's you know ever since the day,

Todd Williams

you know, the breakthroughs of bands like Warumpi Band and Yothu Yindi Indigenous Representation is in music and so on is has gone from leaps and bounds and you've got people like Baker Boy from **Milingimbi** Has come to the voice got his own success story and It's just amazing to see and there were so many incredible First Nations performers That are making their way in the world singing in and language wrapping in languages is You know,

Todd Williams

it's really bringing home to people outside The Northern Territory because we know How many communities English is the second third fourth language down the list. Of what they can speak and for the wider Australian community still I don't think have twigged that Aboriginal peoples still speak their language, you know and to see people like Baker Boy bringing that to the fore and proudly singing in language,

Todd Williams

it's just you know, I really an important step forward in Acknowledgement of the power of indigenous music and language in our country

Andrew Belletty

There still seems to be an over -representation of bands in the Northern Territory. Just on the average weekend, there's a stack of original bands playing in such a small town to hear that there's three bands here, there's six bands there, there's another act on this night.

Andrew Belletty

They're all original bands and they're all playing as we speak, but you're talking hundreds of bands, aren't you?

Todd Williams

Yeah, every community. You go to, say, the Barunga Festival that's held in June every year, and the Saturday night. Yeah, there's a sensibly list of, okay, you've got six bands, but then it blows out to 10 bands, because we want to get up and do some songs too, and it goes until two, three o 'clock in the morning.

Todd Williams

And the power and the strength of community bands, because they're family, family, there's such a strong connection within music and families. I kind of point to someone like the Large Amount of Teenage Band, when they started off in the...

Todd Williams

They were teenagers. They were teenagers, and now they're the Large Amount of Middle -Aged Men, but in that band, now they've got their sons and their nephews and stuff in the band, learning keyboards and so on.

Todd Williams

And the older people are really encouraging, passing on those skills and that knowledge and that confidence to make original music. And that's just awesome.

Andrew Belletty

it's one of those scenes that I think when you're inside of it you don't fully appreciate how rich, diverse and as I said how overrepresented musicians and bands are in the top end because in New South Wales

for example the amount of actual bands playing is it's just plummeting to record lows you know your lack of venues and all sorts of issues are affecting that but there's not a lot of live music and up here it does still appear that there's lots and that's an incredible thing and it's to me to get young people and I mean what the project that this is a part of is focusing on 12 to 25 year olds who are disengaged or you know at some level they're kind of still finding their way and you know this type of activity it's beyond diversion it's community building its capacity building it's aspirational

Todd Williams

It's culture too, both you and I were there when we saw that crossover with Yothu Yindi bringing Yolngu culture, a manikay language within a rock context that was very, very new in the 80s. I think the very first rock song to be sung was out of jail art by Warumpi band back in the day and now we're seeing such confidence and strength right across the board.

Andrew Belletty

So, I want to just reach back into the past now. So, you've been doing this for the Vamp TV thing for how long?

Todd Williams

This is 2011 here. We're on our 169th episode. Each episode is half an hour long and it's a magazine style. We've got hosts and we keep it moving along. We don't have too many talking heads. We try to make it very visual and as much as we are very conscious of the fact that again ESL, even if you don't know English, you'd probably

understand what's going on because it's all being told in a visual way and there's lots of music in it and that's really,

Todd Williams
really important.

Andrew Belletty

When I first met you in 1983, sometime around then, you were a visual artist, a photographer. I was doing Uni, yeah, I was doing a finance degree, yeah. And that was, you know, you were doing kind of visual art stuff.

Andrew Belletty

And I had no idea that you were also a songwriter. I had no idea either. And a photographer, because you were... I was majoring in photography, yeah. In those days, one of the few people who had cameras and the ability to develop the film and to buy the film and all that, it just wasn't.

Todd Williams

Well, I started three, kind of, I got enrolled in three different university courses. They're all kind of science -based and then decided to go with finance. Almost, not out of desperation, but yeah, I really had an interest in, in finance and, and as anyone who's done a finance course, it just changed my world and the way that I look at the world.

Todd Williams

And, and especially when I started doing photography, you start to almost frame images just by looking around. You start to look at the world very, very differently. My brother and I were always very, very interested in music.

Todd Williams

My brother, Cal, who ended up being the guitarist and youth, the Indian and the swamp jockeys. So, we always were engaged in music. And my brother used to live in a block down at Humpty Doo, where we used to go down there and, and just jam and muck around.

Todd Williams

And we were big Johnny Cash fans and, you know, sing a lot of, a lot of songs together, not only visually, but with sound and so on. We were doing radio at the time as well. And that really kind of fed our interest in music and what was happening and, you know, listening to bands like the Gun Club and the Beast Suburban and so on and the Violent Femmes.

Todd Williams

They were really, instrumental in stoking our interest in music. And when we did form a band, that was, that's where our touchstones were, as well as kind of wanting to make it very, very particular, top-end Northern territory sound, if you could put it that way.

Todd Williams

It was kind of a mixture of all those things. And, and the bands are funny things. The chemistry within a band, all the different members bring a different thing, a different element to it. And if it works, it works, you know, and you have one member of out and suddenly it doesn't work anymore.

Todd Williams

So, over that time, when we joined the Swamp Jockeys and we had those four years, four or five years of throwing ourselves at the world, we were very ambitious. We wanted to take ourselves, we did very well up here.

Todd Williams

We created, we had a lot of followers who came to our gigs regularly and did some wild dancing and some of the best memories of my life is being at the, at Lim's Hotel in that room. And from the stage all the way back to the bar was just absolutely packed.

Todd Williams

Everyone was dancing and, you know, the Irish got that expression, the clique, you know, and the cliques in the room, everyone's got a big dopey smile on their face. And we're all in that, that whole vibe together.

Todd Williams

And that, if you can get to that stage, that's just, yeah, that's just enormous. So, you know, we made contact during that Blackfella - Whitefella tour with Minot Oil. Two of our manager and other lead singer were pilots and they flew Minot Oil on the top end of that Blackfella -Whitefella tour and we got to know Gary Morris and the Oil's guys.

Todd Williams

And so, when we went down to Sydney, they gave us the opportunity to not only play with them, but bands like Spy vs Spy, even Jimmy Barnes. And so, we had a lot of great opportunities and in the end, we ended up touring with Minot Oil for six weeks on a major tour.

Todd Williams

And that was enormously educative as far as going to the next level was concerned. One of the things I always say from a fine arts point of view and how that kind of crossed over to what we were doing, I learned how to screen print at Fine Arts.

Todd Williams

And so, we developed our own promotional materials, our posters, our t -shirts. We printed them ourselves. We had control over that. We were very, very excited to be able to do that, to establish our own personality, you know, running around Sydney in the middle of the night, putting up posters for illegal gigs that we put on at the warehouse.

Todd Williams

You know that kind of flows through. It was to be able to contribute, not only musically, but visually to how a band perceives and was very, very important to us.

Andrew Belletty

I think, yeah, again, there's a lot to unpack there, but a couple of things is you're talking about the limbs gigs, which were kind of, for Darwin people at the time, they were the holy grail of gigs because they were played in a cage, in a barbed wire enclosure, and that started on a Sunday afternoon at around one o 'clock and finished around six or six thirty in the evening.

Andrew Belletty

So, it was an afternoon gig, which you can imagine in a venue that had a tin roof and, you know, like a basketball court mesh on the sides.

Todd Williams

Concrete, yeah. Concrete.

Andrew Belletty

floor capacity, probably about five, six hundred. I think the some of those shows that we played there we got above twelve hundred people. And I remember what one day was getting towards the wet season, probably October.

Andrew Belletty

That was kind of one of the end gigs. And it was not only was it packed, but it was so packed and so sweaty that it was raining inside. We had created a weather system in Limbs. So, this is kind of microclimate going on.

Andrew Belletty

So, the connection that you're talking about is not only the kind of vibrations of the music and the bodies within the room, but it was kind of interacting with the climate and with everything else.

Todd Williams

And we were a very performative band. Both Michael and I as front men really wanted to show people how to engage with the music. We just danced and danced. And I waved my arms around and shouted a lot.

Todd Williams

Michael spun around doing the Goanna. And we like putting on a show. And I think that was an important part of our success in that. We really wanted to show people how to enjoy our music because we were enjoying it ourselves.

Todd Williams

And in fact, my wife saw me perform before she even met me. And she loved my smile and wanted to meet me. And so out of that, I got my wife of 35 years. So, it was a really, really, really, really important time.

Todd Williams

And the 80s was nationally a really, big time for pub music. And the audiences there were there for us if we were good enough. And right across Australia, the pub scenes were just pumping with the amazing bands that came out during the 80s.

Andrew Belletty

Now, can I get back to another thing you talked about? And it's right on topic. So, we were then talking about a gig in a pub, which in a town that when we first started playing, the hoteliers and the people who managed bars like Limbs or The Vehicle or the Nightcliff Hotel or whatever, they would not entertain the idea of a band that played original music.

Andrew Belletty

Very resistant, very resistant. As in, no, you can't play here. So, for years, I think, and even at the point where we had, you know, such a proven following. I mean, we played on the roof of the Workers Club for May Day and there were thousands and thousands of people.

Andrew Belletty

And I think that's what turned it.

Todd Williams

Bye, yeah.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, so I think that those huge crowds finally turned the pubs
Towards a band that played original music but before that it was
absolutely a no, so we existed outside like a you know, kind of
vernacular Music venues and you know, we were making stuff up,
you know booking a scout hall booking a Greek hall

Todd Williams

If you just go to the Greek Hall, this is a perfect example of that
because there was during the precursor to the Darwin Festival, the
Bougainvillea Festival, they said, well, we're going to put on a concert
down at the Amphitheatre, which was the major gig in town.

Todd Williams

It's a beautiful venue, natural amphitheater, it's where all the big
bands played. And they basically chose a whole lot of cover bands to
play that. So, we just reacted against that and within a week, we had
organized several bands to play at the Greek Hall, which was just a
big hall in Darwin and with all original bands and we packed out the
place and we called it Dance in Hell.

Todd Williams

I've still got a poster of it somewhere. And it was, yeah, look, you made your own luck, but I do have to kind of give credit to you, with bands to get ahead, they do need an outside, well, you need your own sound guy for a start or person, sound woman, sound guy, and you need a manager.

Todd Williams

And we had a very savvy manager who was just as ambitious as us and ended up being the, he was the manager of the India and who took them, who ended up taking them all around the world. Alan James is his name, and I do allay a lot of credit to, at his feet because he was very important in our development and kicking us up the ass and making things happen.

Todd Williams

And he was the sixth member there.

Andrew Belletty

Absolutely. And just thinking back to the Greek Hall, which is another kind of literally just a big barn with a wooden floor. And that that was just one of those, again, one of those overly crowded gigs.

Andrew Belletty

And it was kind of thumbing our nose at an established festival which should have supported us and so profoundly rebuffed our advances, just said absolutely no. And we, you know, at that time we were getting that from every single avenue.

Andrew Belletty

So, the reason why I painted up my van, remember it had in red house paint, dance in hell written across the side of the van. You know, we parked it on street corners and left it there all day. We printed posters.

Todd Williams

We hand -painted a big banner outside the Greek Hall and the night before the gig someone set fire to it, and we thought we said what was Satan just reaching out and says I want that banner for myself.

Todd Williams

Thank you

Andrew Belletty

But it was just like a reaction to, you know, it was a small town at the time, probably only 60 ,000 people, maybe, Darwin. And to be kind of still, after proving yourself, we had proven ability to draw a very big crowd, you know, so there was no actual reason to stop us.

Andrew Belletty

But it seemed like at the time, every single avenue was shut to us. So, we reached out to make our own, you know, the Alawa Scout Hall. But we also just wanted to get on the idea of how we were all politically motivated at the time, too, which was kind of, you know,

not only, you know, getting Indigenous bands up on stage in avenues and at occasions when that was never really done, but also, you know,

Andrew Belletty

like supporting East Timor at a pivotal time in the mid -80s and holding gigs where we, you know, kind of said, well, so is there anybody who wants to come up on stage and getting people doing traditional stuff outside Brown's Mart?

Andrew Belletty

The unions loved us every May Day, you know, on the rooftop, we brought the house down. Again, one of those memorable gigs where thousands and thousands of people. So, there were all these kinds of, you know, vernacular spaces that we inhabited and made a success of them, whether it was somebody's lounge room that we almost destroyed the entire house.

Andrew Belletty

But you know, these other spaces were interesting because they were kind of political or, as I said, the bikies or the doctors or whatever, they were interesting spaces. And somehow, we made them into something.

Andrew Belletty

So, it was like the mainstream venues and festivals and all that didn't want anything to do with us. But all this kind of vernacular stuff was opening, and we made it open.

Todd Williams

Yeah, activated. It's a whole lot of different spaces. You know, we played that nurses gig out at the hospital just on the stage at the back of the near the generators and so on. And, you know, our ethos, we mentioned that the term while dancing, I used to put while dancing on all the posters is like, we want people just to let themselves go, not to be cool, but just to let themselves go dance like no one's watching because that's what we did on stage.

Todd Williams

We wanted everyone to say, come on down, let's just go off our heads. And that was a good thing. I still believe in that myself. I get frustrated with bands who just, you know, don't engage.

Todd Williams

Just come on.

Andrew Belletty

And we play, was it the Geno and Lina going away gig?

Todd Williams

at the behind the Roma Bar Cafe.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, in the car park. I don't think anybody knew that car park was there. Yeah, it was behind the mural of the palm trees and There was a suddenly a door opened, and we went what the hell's that? So, we knew we couldn't play inside the Roma bar, which was our favorite cafe at the time.

Andrew Belletty

But yeah, the Disused car park for one of a better word

Todd Williams

activating spaces and you know we were good at putting on shows and that required a whole lot of logistics and risk as well quite often and we didn't you know make money out of it. Money wasn't really the driving reason for what we were doing we were just really enjoying what we're doing and developing our skills and trying to get better.

Andrew Belletty

Though the money would have been nice.

Todd Williams

And, you know, yeah, I think we learned a lot, I mean, a bass player now is now managing his son's band, King Stingray. And through, I think, Stuart's experience with the Swamp Jockeys and Yothu Yindi, because he was the bass player in Yothu Yindi, he made sure, he makes sure with King Stingray that not only do they get paid well and control their recordings and so on, but he knocks back so much work now because he's just concerned,

Todd Williams

he doesn't want to fry the band. He just wants to make sure that the band have got enough time to decompress, especially for the younger members of the band who are really connected to country, to allow them just to go, yep, I'm going to go back to Yirrkala now and just chill out.

Todd Williams

Yeah, Stuart's telling me that they knocked back tens of thousands of dollars just to say, well, no, no. So yeah, that was, yeah, I'm so happy for not only Stuart, but for Roy and Dimitay and Yirringa and the rest of the band to have the success that they're having but doing it on their own terms.

Andrew Belletty

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. And what was that 40 years ago or something that the time that we're talking about? So, in some strange kind of extrapolation, it's, it's, it's an ongoing kind of thing from both the original members of Yothu and the original kind of swamp jockeys.

Andrew Belletty

So, it's an interesting kind of combination of those two things. So, I think what to me, I didn't fully know what was happening with those lyrics. And I kind of understood that the music was, was, was, it was a product of the environment in many ways.

Andrew Belletty

It was hot. We used to rehearse outdoors because you had to, we had to play in blinding stifling conditions. And you know, yeah, motivating people meant you, you know, because people just in the afternoon or the early evening, they didn't want to dance.

Andrew Belletty

They wanted to sit back and drink beer. But when you look out and you see 1200 people sweating and dancing, you realize that you that that the, the environment, the climate, the weather, the people, the types of people who are there, regular people, but somehow, we had to provide them with something that was going to make them dance.

Andrew Belletty

And that was, I think, one of the keys.

Todd Williams

Yeah, the kind of sound that we came up with is a kind of combination of, you know, country and rock and loose term swamp, but there's

also reggae thrown in there. So, it was a bit of a mélange of things and Michael was a good songwriter, Kel and I worked on tracks together, Stewie and I worked on tracks together.

Todd Williams

Yeah, that was kind of really, interesting. We wrote a song about being hit by a cyclone and the build up to that and the actual cyclone when Kel would do this amazing guitar solo and just create these whale noises which felt like you were inside the tumult of an actual cyclone and then it would die down and it was like the aftermath and then we sang a verse about the aftermath.

Todd Williams

And to write about things which are particular to your place did resonate a lot because people recognized it and they owned it and they identified it and said, yeah, I know that a bit like Skyhook's talking about their life in Melbourne at the time and that was, you know, that hadn't been done before.

Todd Williams

Like, what do you mean? You can write songs about your own life, what? And so, there was, we were mad keen on getting people on the dance floor because that's a party and if you can combine, you know, like Minot Oil so successfully did, getting people just to rock out to important messages, you know, every time they play Power and the Passion.

Todd Williams

When we went on that tour, I saw that song every night for six weeks and never failed to just be moved by how much people engaged with that and that was just so powerful.

Andrew Belletty

I'm just thinking, yeah, back to the actual recording and how difficult it was for us to do this recording, because I mean, in those days, there was Rod Louis -Gung, wasn't it? His studio.

Todd Williams

Yeah, that was it. And when we recorded Mango Dingo, that first set of recordings, it was still being built around us. It hadn't been finished.

Andrew Belletty

It wasn't finished. It was a 16 track that he had, I think, so that was a big deal. But it was a quarter inch or one inch or a half inch machine. It wasn't the best.

Todd Williams

It was a terrible street. Let's put it that way.

Andrew Belletty

and there was a lot of noise on the tracks.

Todd Williams

with the drums in, ah.

Andrew Belletty

Awful. Cardboard boxes. But yeah, so the conditions that we're recorded under, I don't think we had much or any money. I'm not even sure how much we wrote.

Todd Williams

bad money and that was bad it.

Andrew Belletty

Even now, when I talk to Stuart Callaway, who manages King Stingray, just the cost of getting a single artist from Nhulunbuy Airport to Sydney Airport is, at times, four to five thousand dollars return, which is just extraordinary.

Andrew Belletty

That's one person.

Todd Williams

No, it was, you know, yeah, like all the young bands, our first recording, so we had no idea. Yeah, we had no idea. And we had a

for a producer, a music journalist who had no idea either to get the best sounds.

Todd Williams

We had an engineer who was just still building his studio. And we probably didn't have the mics. We didn't have the wherewithal. And I was a useless singer back in those days. And still not great shakes now.

Todd Williams

But they, yeah, we were quite nascent and demos and so on. We had the Tascam four track. And literally four tracks to work with on cassette. And if you wanted more, you had to bounce stuff. And once you bounced it was unmixable and, and so on.

Todd Williams

So, it was great for putting down songs immediately. And in some ways, I still love those earlier recordings better than the ones that ended up being the so -called better recordings because they had such a lovely homespun feel in the immediately you can pick up from those early Tascam recordings were just it was just lovely.

Todd Williams

But it's humbling, you know, and you've got to go through the really, tough times to get to the good times. And if you don't have, you know, the tough times and you're missing out because, you know, it

really helps galvanize your sound and your determination to go well, this is the low point anywhere up anywhere is up from here.

Andrew Belletty

But I just want to say, and I really look forward to working with you on the Knock Em Down sound system project in April 2024.

Todd Williams

No worries. It was very exciting. Absolutely. I'm here.