

Getting To Know Your Local Muso

Rob Pippan

By Sue Hedley

Rob Pippan has worked in the Australian music industry for over 40 years, as a musical director, lead guitarist, songwriter, producer, manager, educator and studio owner. He is one of Australia's most sought-after lead guitarists, and has collaborated with an endless list of Australia's greatest musicians, backing over 100 artists in his career. Rob was founding member of 'The Zep Boys', Australia's first major touring 'tribute' band.

He was inducted into the SA Music Hall of Fame on November 2nd, along with The Twilights (feat. Glenn Shorrock) Bobby Bright (from 60's rock and roll legends 'Bobby and Laurie'), James Black (Mondo Rock/Rockwiz), and Laurie Pryor (Twilights drummer – posthumously) at the German Club.

MEGAscene caught up with Rob Pippan just before his induction into the SA Music Hall of Fame to chat about his life in music and his induction.

You are about to be inducted into the AMC SA Music Hall of Fame. How do you feel about this?

Well, it's a huge honour firstly and a surprise! I wouldn't have expected anything like this to happen when I first started playing. Like anything, you just do your thing and hopefully



Rob Pippan Band
Photo: Sue Hedley

people or the industry like it enough to come and see what you do. It's all a bit surreal as I first started doing gigs in 1976, which is such a long time ago, and my whole life has been invested in what I do; it's been one long continuum.

You have played with many of the Hall of Famers. Who have you played with and what are some of your fond memories of playing with them?

There are so many acts I've had the great pleasure of working with over the last 42 years – and so many stories behind each of them – it's hard to pick amongst so many moments. I had a chance to play with **Skyhooks** for a day in 1988 at the Grand Prix with Red, Greg and Shirley – that's definitely one of my fondest memories.

Working with **Graham Bonnet** is another highlight. He landed in SA and the rumour got out that he lived here. Anyway, one thing led to another and **Zep Boys** became his backing band – an amazing musical experience and life opportunity, and Graham is still a good friend and we are still in contact after 30 years. I also got several pages in his book, which was very flattering. You photographed us at the time extensively Sue!

When **Glenn Shorrock** called me to work with The Twilights, I was absolutely stoked.

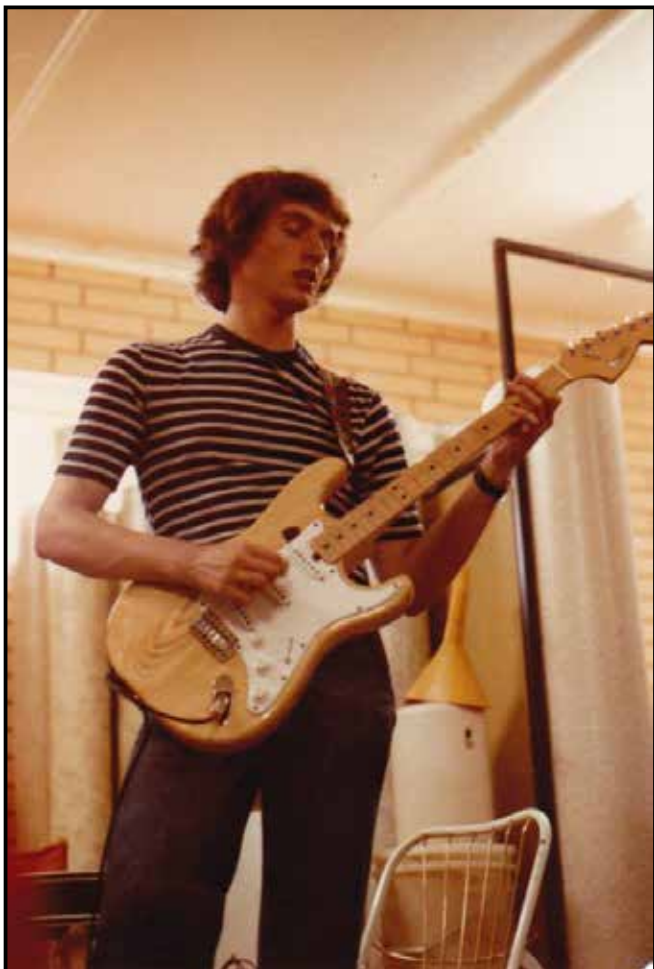




The Zep Boys
Photo: Sue Hedley

Terry Britten was coming out from UK and it was the first time the band had reconvened since 1969, so that was an absolute honour.

The **Glenn Hughes** call was also amazing – his managers called me asking if I could put a tour together and perform with Glenn and **Jon Lord** as well! Being a massive Glenn and Deep Purple fan that was a dream phone call. In time **Jon Lord** dropped out, but I put an Australian tour together for Glenn with **John Zak** on kit and off we went.



Rob Pippin 1976
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I've known **Orianthi** since she was 14! She was coming out to Australia and she and her parents asked if I'd produce her 2 visits – the first with **Richie Sambora** – both shows are great highlights.

The **Zep Boys** still hold many fond memories too numerous to list - I think selling out the Palace in 1988 to over 1800 people was my total highlight. We were in the top 8 touring bands of the late 80's to mid 90's, and set new attendance records and forged the tribute band industry. We were selected to be one of the last four bands to play at the Ballroom in St Kilda before it was demolished – **Zep Boys, Crowded House, Divinyls** and **Black Sorrows**.

What age did you start learning guitar?

I got my first guitar Xmas 1969 – that day was my blessing as it changed the course of my life but I didn't know it! Being self-taught it was a long road in front of me – I have no idea how I did it! Pre-internet, music was my hobby and passion – and nothing's changed all these



Flame - Christmas 1978
Photo supplied



Copyright
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years later. I still buy music weekly and listen and learn from it.

What was the first band that you played guitar in and how old were you?

My first band was called **Flame** – we formed in mid 1976 and played rock covers of the day. I was 15. They were great days indeed – all the band guys were English immigrants and we gigged all over Elizabeth at the time. My heroes then were the biggest acts of the time like **Little River Band, Cold Chisel, and TMG.**

What guitars do you prefer to play?

The Les Paul I love as my some of my favourite players used it – like **Mick Ralphs** from **Bad Company, Mick Jones** from **Foreigner, Ace Frehley, Jeff Beck, Joe Perry** and particularly **Gary Moore** who was my biggest influence. If I'm looking for sheer crunch on a song you can't beat it!. I also love my 62 reissue Strat as many strat players influenced me – my favourites being **Ritchie Blackmore, Ian Moss, Rory Gallagher, Jan Akkerman (Focus)** and especially **Tommy Bolin.** It's a different and classic sound that's hard to beat along with the Les Paul.

What other bands have you played in over the years?

I've played in bands constantly since 1975 Sue! I was semi-pro until 1985 then full-time



Serious Moonlighters
Photo: Sue Hedley



Timepieces 1993
Photo supplied



Spys - 1981
Photo supplied



The Zep Boys 1986
Photo supplied



with Glenn Shorrock
Photo: Sue Hedley



Eve - with Karen Grace
Photo: Sue Hedley



with Shirley Straachan
Photo: Sue Hedley



The Nazz
Photo supplied

time ever since. Including **Flame** 1976-1981 **Copyright** 1979-1981, **Spys** 1981-1983, **The Movies** 1984, **Look Out For Trains** (studio project 1982-1984 with **Karen Grace** and **Tim O'Connor**, **Frente** founder).

On becoming full time the bands were **The Nazz**, **Brenton Roberts Band**, **The Zep Boys**, **Serious Moonlighters** Bowie Tribute, **Eve** (1990 - signed to Polygram with Glenn Wheatley), **Patrick McMahon**, **Graham Bonnet** Band. From 1999 during my TV journey I got back into regular weekly bands including **Hothouse**, **East The Cold Chisel Show**, **Rumours** Fleetwood Mac Show and **Swanee**. I've played well over 2500 shows in my life so far and still do around 1-2 per week. It's part of my weekly routine!

By 1988 I was beginning my session MD/guitar career in tandem to my regular bands - other artists I have backed include **Mark Holden**, **Mark Gable**, **Angry Anderson**, **Jim Keays**, **Normie Rowe**, **John Paul Young**, **Daryl Braithwaite**, **Bev Harrell**, **Lisa Edwards**, **Joe Camilleri**, **John Schumann**, **Mick Pealing** (Stars), **Russel Morris**, **The Twilights**, **Doc Neeson**, **Phil Emmanuel**, **Robbie Porter**, **Kate Ceberano**, **Doug Parkinson**, **Kevin Borich** and **Dave Gleeson**.

You have made a living working as a Guitarist, Producer, Musical Director, Promoter, Teacher and Songwriter. Which do you prefer being the most and how do you fit it all in your life?
I suppose my favourite is playing, promoting and producing. I've expanded Rob Pippan Productions to a team of six including myself that shares my workload overall. That said I'm always busy and I love working hard at what I do - life's never boring as I'm always working with a diverse mix of people and musical experiences which is enormously rewarding. The next best part are the friendships and teams I work with - great long-term friendships have formed over decades. Every day is split into slots where I move from one project to another. In the last two years, song writing has dropped off a fair bit as no one project is happening so my focus has shifted. My last major song project was for a Korean artist - I co-wrote a song 'IOU' that was a single. That said, it could all change in 2019 as a new TV series has come in that I will be the Musical Director for.

You have been Musical Director for many projects.. What are a few of them?

My MD work has been in 3 areas – music for television, live bands and as a record producer. Each role is subtly different. In my television work I have to compose and create the final sound recording of the song for release. That meant finalising the arrangement, plus in many occasions, playing all the instruments on a track bar with vocals. Then the singers would come in and I'd sing the song to them and they replicate the tune, but as I'm not a singer they bring the extra factor to the song. This is super hands on as I shape the entire song of the song. I've built a catalogue of over 1000 works due to my time in TV where I recorded 60 songs and alternative versions plus per series plus stingers for a ten year period.

With live bands I distribute the song list and correct song versions, then everyone copies the parts. I then guide the band if needed to sound 'correct' in terms of structure, speed and feel. My players are all top notch, so I just guide the process and make the final call with the artist in mind. We only get one rehearsal sometimes with a lot of acts so getting it right before they walk in the room is imperative. The gig is we HAVE to know it in one rehearsal with them or there may not be a return show, so the pressure is on! – I just take it for granted. As a record producer I record many acts in my studio. In this situation, an artist brings only words, melody and chords in, and my role is to play all instruments and create a final sound recording. Here I create all instrumental parts, then perform them live or via midi programming. The pressure is on as every note any musical performance is in my control. The artist does the lead vocal but I usually direct takes to find the best performance, and I usually construct the vocal harmonies, unless my regular session singers - **Ian 'Polly' Politis**, **Deb Brunotte** or **Nanette van Ruiten** - are doing the session and they are lightning quick at finding parts.

I've always considered myself a musical organiser more than a musical director but I suppose it's the same thing. Someone has to call the final creative shot of how a song on a recording or a show being performed live has to sound to be 'correct'. My role has always been to guide as needed great players to an end result in a collaborative way. Great players don't need to be told what or how to play, and I've certainly worked with the best local and national – my role is more 'shepherding'.

Your band "The Rob Pippan Band" has backed various interstate artists for quite a few years now. How did this come about?

It's a funny story Sue! The journey began early 1987. The Serious Moonlighters Bowie show was doing Fezbah. My agent Brian Gleeson came along with Phill Stewart who was head of the entertainment committee for the Grand Prix. They liked the band and asked if I'd MD a major Grand Prix event 'The Rock of Ages' with Ross Wilson, Jim Keays, Russel Morris and Swanee. That begun my Grand Prix MD journey that then moved to Clipsal events for many years where I Md'd their major events. I can't thank Brian enough for this opportunity as it opened a door to the next 30 years of work – its because of him that my session MD career started at all. Then in 2000 I was working with Glenn Shorrocks and during the show he went to introduce the band – but we noticed we had no real name – so Glenn goes ...' and here's ... 'The Rob Pippan Band' We all had a laugh and it stuck as I always ran the acts so that how it began. Thanks Glenn!

What has been the highlight of your music career?

There are so many! Forming the **Zep Boys** in 1986 was a life charging moment – I called Vince Contarino with the idea which he liked and off we went. It's amazing to see the band still a going concern after 33 years, and all power to Vince and Warwick for carrying the torch. I'm still very much known all over the country for the work we did together which is a blessing.

One of my greatest highlights was signing to **Alberts Productions** as a songwriter in 2001 – Alberts are AC/DCs publishers and have an amazing history of acts such as The Angels, Rose Tattoo, TMG, John Paul Young and more. I was working in TV at the time doing music for children's shows the '**Music Shop**' for Channel 7 and '**Here's Humphrey**', and composing hundreds of songs - I needed a company to look after the publishing rights. I was offered deals with Universal and BMG but Alberts was really keen and their CEO **Fifa Riccobono** (who was and still is part of AC/DCs inner sanctum) took me on board – I've been with them ever since. I've had many great memories of going to Alberts Studios and writing and recording there and getting know **David Albert**, **Phil Mortlock** and **Sam Horsburgh** – being welcomed into their organisation was mind-blowing and

I'm so grateful. Soaking up Alberts history and sitting in their tape vaults writing songs while seeing the original master's tapes next to me for **AC/DC**, **Rose Tattoo** and **Angels** on the shelf was totally inspiring. Alberts later recommended and introduced me to **The Angels** (as we were label mates) who were looking to do a symphony project – which became **Symphony of Angels** which I produced for them. We just reprised it with the **Adelaide Symphony Orchestra** to a sold-out Festival Theatre recently. **John Brewster** and I became close friends as a result, which has been a blessing.

Another big highlight was **Ross Wilson** approaching me to form his first solo band after he folded **Mondo Rock**; this came about after we worked together at the **1988 Grand Prix** and him seeing the **Zep Boys** in Melbourne – I remember Ross turning up with Eric McCusker to check us out late 88/early 89 at The Corner Hotel, which **Zep Boys** had packed out – that was a pretty nerve wracking moment when your hero turns up to check you out! Anyway,



Rob with Humphrey
Photo supplied



Rock Of Ages
Photo: Sue Hedley

Ross loved the show and hired me to produce and MD his band, so off we went. I still get to promote Ross when he comes to Adelaide, so it's been an amazing 30-year relationship which continues to flourish.

Another cool highlight my albums for Channel 7's 'The Fairies' program that I was Musical Director for. I received ARIA nominations for 'Best Children's Album' for 4 consecutive years from 2006 – 2009. I got to walk the red carpet with Pink next to me no less! 2009 ARIAs were amazing as I was with the Alberts table as **AC/DC** got multiple wins for 'Black Ice', so it was awesome to share in the moment as part of the label.

Becoming a Fringe promoter has been a great ride. Rob Pippin Productions staged 52 different events in 3 years and will announce 14 more for 2019 so it's a hectic period. Lastly the recently reformed **1965 Masters Apprentices** has been awesome and exceeded everyone's expectations.



Rob with John Farnham, Mick Peeling and Jim Keays, Swanee and Karen Grace
Photo supplied

Anything you would like to add?

I'd like to acknowledge some people that influenced my beginnings as without them I wouldn't be here. My first big influence was **Steve Kaye** the guitarist in my first band – we lived 2 doors apart in Salisbury North. From 1971 we jammed on acoustics and it lit the fuse. Next at 14 was a guy called **Jon Cooke** who was with Cunnig Stunts a local band who became Swanee's first band. His brother was in my class. One day I was at Jon's place watching him play through blazing Marshalls and I was blown away – he was so good and I thought 'thats what I want to do'. Next at 16 in 1977 **Flame** supported **Cold Chisel** at the Legtrap Hotel and they were phenomenal! I'm still not over seeing Mossy that night – he was incredible and totally influenced me to do what I do.

Lastly in 1983 **Brian Gleeson** became my

Rob Pippan in the 1965 Masters Apprentices . . .

longest serving agent and offered many opportunities – if it wasn't for Brian I'm not sure I'd be here. There's a lot of my work and career that many people don't even know about. A lot of it was things that just happened at the time and everything moved on. One of the best things over the years is the wonderful friends and connections I've made, people I wouldn't have had the pleasure of knowing if it wasn't for the bond of music between us. These friendships over many decades and having the chance to share experiences with others is a huge plus. My hobby became my job so I'm truly grateful for this amazing journey that I have had.

Photos of Rob's induction night will be in the next issue of MEGAscene.

