

TRAVELLING

Music & Migration in Western Sydney

5 December 2020 – 29 May 2021

Fairfield is a place where cultures meet and sounds travel. This exhibition explores the connections between music and migration in western Sydney. Finding belonging in music, *Travelling Sounds* celebrates local talent who combine their diverse cultures with the shared experience of life in Australia.

From rock 'n' roll legends to hip-hop pioneers and today's up-and-coming musicians, western Sydney's sound has been shaped by young people with a story to tell. *Travelling Sounds* provides a soundtrack to the changing social and cultural landscape of suburban Sydney from the 1960s through to today.

SOUNDS

the EASYBEATS

A REAL Australian Sound

Australia's most popular rock band of the 1960s, The Easybeats, consisted of one Scotsman, two Englishmen and two Dutchmen. George Young, Stevie Wright, Gordon Fleet (Snowy), Johannes van den Berg (Harry Vanda) and Dingeman van der Sluijs (Dick Diamonde) met in 1963 at Westbridge Migrant Hostel in Villawood. In the hostel's laundry, they began playing music together inspired by the bands they had listened to back home, where the sixties were swinging.

The Easybeats and their families came to Australia through the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme after World War II. In order to 'Populate or Perish', the Australian Government promised the working class of Britain and Europe a land of sunshine and opportunities for only 10 pounds per adult.

Many of these 'Ten-pound Poms' initially spent time in a migrant hostel to support their settlement. With little organised to entertain the many children and teenagers, music was one way these young immigrants could express themselves and find belonging in this new and sometimes hostile environment.

In 1964, The Easybeats, now practicing in Dick Diamonde's family's garage in Chester Hill, started performing regularly and signed a record deal with Albert Productions. Writing their own lyrics and music, the band created a distinct Australian sound. 'Easyfever' spread to the UK, Europe and the USA and The Easybeats scored international hits with songs like *Friday on my Mind* and *She's so Fine*. Despite their success, the band split up in 1969.

Two of the band members, guitarists Harry Vanda and George Young, went on to work for Albert Productions as prolific songwriters and producers. Shaping the careers of many Australian artists - including John Paul Young and the band formed by George's younger brothers, AC/DC - it is difficult to understate the influence Vanda & Young have had on Australian music.

John Paul Young

Yesterday's Hero

1970s pop icon, John Paul Young, arrived in Australia as an 11-year old on board the SS Canberra from Glasgow, Scotland. The Young family, unrelated to the other musical Young family of The Easybeats and AC/DC fame, spent two years at the East Hills Migrant Hostel in Sydney's South-West before settling in Liverpool.

In 1965, the family moved to a brand new housing estate on Tasman Parade in Fairfield West, where the colourful fibro houses were still largely surrounded by bushland. John attended the newly opened Westfields High School and got a job at the local service station on Polding Street.

Influenced by American and British music and fashion, a distinct youth culture took hold in Australia in the 1960s and 70s, making its way into suburban homes through popular magazines, radio and TV programs. Western Sydney kids grew their hair long and played rock 'n' roll records on jukeboxes in the local milk bars.

In 1969, John and his friends from Liverpool formed a band called Elm Tree. John was one of two singers and they had relative success playing gigs at local western Sydney venues. However, John's rise to fame took off when he went solo, recording the top 20 hit *Pasadena*, written by Harry Vanda and George Young.

Leaving his apprenticeship as a sheet metal worker, JPY launched into stardom, performing in the rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* and making regular appearances on ABC's *Countdown*. His fruitful relationship with Vanda & Young led to international hits like *I Hate the Music* and *Love is in the Air*. JPY was crowned King of Pop in 1978.

Jon English

Ol' Black Eyes

Legendary singer, songwriter, actor and musician, Jon English, was, as his name suggests, originally from England. Born in London as Jonathan James English, Jon immigrated to Australia in 1961 when he was 12 years old. His family lived in an old timber house on Coventry Road, Cabramatta, which was a quiet area at the time with only one row of shops.

They were among many 'New Australians' settled in the area, because of the nearby Cabramatta Migrant Hostel. In the 1960s most immigrants to Australia were British, along with large numbers from European countries such as Italy, the Netherlands and Croatia.

Jon played basketball and rugby league at the local high school and you could often find him at Cabramatta PCYC on Railway Parade. He began playing music whilst at school and joined the band Sebastian Hardie as a singer and rhythm guitarist. They were the backing band for legendary Australian rocker Johnny O'Keefe in 1969 and built a reputation in the Sydney pub scene covering popular rock songs. Jon left the band in 1971, but did produce their first, ARIA award-winning album, *Four Moments*.

Jon became a national celebrity when he took on the role of Judas in the rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Another member of the cast, John Paul Young, lived just down the road from him in Fairfield West, and they would travel into the city together for their daily performances.

A highly successful career followed, seeing Jon star in many more musical productions and TV shows, release numerous albums and perform tirelessly, entertaining crowds in Australia and abroad.

Sadly, Jon passed away unexpectedly in 2016. Since 2018, Cabramatta High School has presented an annual encouragement award to musically gifted students in Jon English's name.

AC/DC

It's A Long Way To The Top

In 1963, William and Margaret Young emigrated from Glasgow with seven of their eight children; the two youngest being Australia's most famous rock musicians, Angus and Malcolm Young. The family initially lived at Villawood Migrant Hostel, where their son George formed rock band The Easybeats. Soon after, they moved into a semi in the suburb of Burwood where Angus and Malcolm attended the nearby Ashfield Boys High School. To this day, its school uniform features as Angus' trademark stage outfit.

After briefly playing in the Marcus Hook Roll Band with older brother George and friend Harry Vanda, Malcolm and Angus started their own band in 1973, called AC/DC. Mentored by George the band developed a loud, simple, guitar-driven sound. Their first album, *High Voltage*, produced by George Young and Harry Vanda, was released in 1975.

The band toured extensively to promote their music, including performances at Fairfield Showground and a rock festival at Warwick Farm. Their rough rock 'n' roll would become the pinnacle of Aussie Pub Rock, played live at suburban and inner-city pubs in front of young, energetic crowds. In the early 1970s liquor laws were relaxed in Australia, extending pub trading hours, lowering the legal drinking age and finally allowing women to drink in public bars. Vanda and Young were masters at capturing the energy and sound of a live performance on tape and their production work for AC/DC as well as other bands like The Angels and Rose Tattoo would become legendary.

AC/DC gained international success in 1976 and despite the tragic death of front man Bon Scott in 1980, they went on to produce many more hit records staying true to their rock 'n' roll roots. AC/DC are perhaps the ultimate success story of working class migrant kids growing up in Sydney's western suburbs making it to the top.

HIP-HOP

Culture & Community

Australian hip-hop has strong roots in Sydney's western suburbs, where youth of diverse backgrounds have used it as a way to oppose mainstream Anglo-Australian culture. There is a long tradition of stigma associated with living in western Sydney. In the 1980s and 90s, hip-hop offered a tool for local young people to address these negative social stereotypes, expressing their reality often ignored by the media and popular culture.

From the 1970s a growing number of migrants from South-East Asia, the Middle-East and South-America settled in Fairfield and surrounding areas, often escaping war, persecution and political unrest. Over time, these suburbs became a melting pot of cultures and languages: a place where ethnic minorities formed the majority. Young people from migrant backgrounds, as well as Indigenous Australians, were attracted to hip-hop because they could identify with the multi-cultural origins of the music in the USA.

Hip-hop is more than a music genre; it is often referred to as a lifestyle or subculture. The foundations, or four elements, of hip-hop culture are *DJ-ing* (on turntables), rapping or *MC-ing*, *graffiti* and *break dancing* or *B-boying*. Crews from Cabramatta, Fairfield, Liverpool and Blacktown gathered in public spaces and parks to make music together, rap, dance and hang out.

Hip-hop has often expressed the struggle and the racism experienced by migrants and non-Anglo Australians, but can also be used to connect to culture and create social change in the community. Pioneers of western Sydney hip-hop activism are MC and producer Peacefender, who emigrated from Lebanon escaping the civil war, and MCs Trey, originally from Fiji, and Mexican-born Maya Jupiter. Through their outreach projects and workshops with disadvantaged youth and women, they have proven hip-hop to be a positive expression of identity and empowerment.

HIP-HOP

Sound Of The Underground

Much of the pioneering hip-hop in western Sydney was low budget and strictly underground. From the early 1980s, self-taught DJs would be 'digging the crates' (searching through second-hand records) looking for music and 'beats' to sample, recording their sound on cassette tapes in suburban garages. Largely inspired by American hip-hop, the early music scene relied heavily on the emerging sub-culture of b-boys, graffiti and rap crews.

One of the first Australian hip-hop songs, or 'tracks', released on vinyl was *Combined Talent*, independently produced by western-Sydney group Just Us in 1988. It included a lot of 'scratching', where the vinyl is moved back and forth on the turntable to create a rhythmic sound.

In the 1990s western Sydney hip-hop developed a distinct sound, raps were delivered in an Australian accent, containing slang and references to the local area and issues. Def Wish Cast, a crew from outer western Sydney (Mt Druitt and Penrith) released the first full-length Australian hip-hop album, *Knights of the Underground Table*, in 1993.

Sounds Unlimited, with Chilean-Filipino and Russian members, released *A postcard from the Edge of the Under-side* in 1992 with Sony Music, the first Australian hip-hop group to sign an international record deal.

Another pioneering crew, South West Syndicate, formed in the early 1990s and has since been known for their authentic music addressing real issues such as Indigenous rights and racism. Their diverse collective has included Aboriginal, Pacific Islander, Croatian, German, Lebanese and Anglo members at various times.

Despite the lack of recognition by the mainstream media and music industry, hip-hop thrived in western Sydney. The movement grew bigger, evolved and became harder to ignore. Thanks to the dedication of these early hip-hop pioneers, attention shifted gradually from the City to the suburbs, bringing recognition to western Sydney hip-hop and paving the way for future generations determined to share their story.