



What's left of the van after the 'meat tray' incident.

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What Re-Mains?

Guitarist and singer/songwriter, Mick Daley, reveals the hideous truth about what it's like on the road in Australia's hardest working country rock'n'roll band.

by MICK DALEY

The bullock appeared suddenly in the middle of the road. There was nowhere for our van to go. It hit us like an Exocet missile, smashing the front end, shattering legs, organs and hipbones of the two men in front. We careered into the scrub, missing boulders to left and right and finally crashing to a halt ten metres in. Over the next few hours helpful miners and cowboys from nearby stations, ambulance officers and police worked till the shattered musicians were extracted and airlifted to Alice Springs.

That was in July 2007. The 'meat tray' incident, 140 kilometres north of Tennant Creek, ended The Re-Mains' six week national tour, a round trip of some 16,000 kilometres, before it properly began.

It was a low-point in a six year career that's seen some stunning highs and some heartbreaking lows.

The Re-Mains, Australia's hardest working country rock and roll band from the far north of New South Wales, were formed in 2001 by email. I was then working as a journalist in Europe, corresponding with musician peers back home. We'd all been through the treadmill of bands in Australia, permanently broke, trying to break some mainstream attention. We decided to circumvent this cycle by taking our band out west — to the drought-stricken country.

Country rock and roll combined our years of experience in the punk, heavy rock and folk fields to create a new, exciting style. It was to feature banjo and steel guitars — traditionally country instruments — with a rock rhythm section — and it worked.

We started out in Nimbin, Lismore and Byron Bay and rapidly gained a faithful following. With our touring circuit rapidly growing we began playing Tamworth, Bourke, Nymagee, Moree, Sydney,

March

20 – 30 March

 *Love the Paint* A group exhibition of local artists. **GRIFFITH** Regional Art Gallery. Tel 02 6962 5991

21 – 24 March

 *Lake Light Sculpture* Sculpture walk and exhibition at Lake Jindabyne. Sculptures will be exhibited along the lake foreshore with the Snowy Mountains and Lake **JINDABYNE** in the background. Tel 02 6457 8334

21 – 24 March

 *Four Winds Festival* Some of the best Australian and international musicians playing fine classical and contemporary works, in programs drawn from a wide diversity of musical and cultural traditions. **BERMAGUI** Website www.fourwinds.com.au

22 March

 Lightning Ridge Great Goat Races & Wheelie Bin Races Morilla St, **LIGHTNING RIDGE** Tel 02 6829 1670

Melbourne, Adelaide — finally Darwin and even Perth. But we never neglected the country — playing remote outback towns — often to indifference, sometimes hostility — with our potent mix of music, politics and booze-fuelled energy.

We've now played over 600 shows in 150 towns, in every state and Territory except Tasmania. We're a major drawcard for rebels and black sheep at the Tamworth Country Music Festival. We've played remote places like Coober Pedy, Marla, Nhulunbuy and Daly Waters to rare but sometimes extraordinary responses. At Karama, NT, we walked into a wall of hard-eyed stares from big truckies and builders who didn't look like they wanted their drinking interrupted. They soon warmed to us though, and by the end of a long night some were in tears of joy, helping us lug out, buying CDs and vowing eternal allegiance.

We've been shot at, forced to carry amps across swollen, croc-infested rivers while our van was towed and driven on the most unforgiving roads in the land. Music can be a tough love.

Meanwhile I've become engaged in another project with two visionaries — Andrew Hull and Tonchi McIntosh, the former a Bourke resident, poet and stalwart of the western arts scene, the latter one of the best singer songwriters in the country — who now resides in Melbourne.

The project is The Lonely Horse Band and its sole purpose is to play 'one-horse towns' with the express aim of distilling the oral and written histories of these often nearly deserted, drought-haunted communities into songs. Our first expedition, in August 2006, was to Nymagee, in the far west of NSW, where we stayed a week and wrote the album 'Pomegranates and Peppercorn Trees'. An ABC journalist, Andy Parkes, accompanied us and incorporated our songs, stories and interviews into a seven-part documentary aired on ABC Radio National's *Bush Telegraph* program later that year.

In 2007 we played another series of shows in remote places like Culgoa and Tilpa, Nevertire, Hermidale and, in 2008, we have just received a Regional Arts Fund grant for an epic tour of the outer west and recording of an album in White Cliffs, on the remote western Queensland border.

The Re-Mains just played far-flung Mildura and Pinnaroo, just over the South Australian border. In the next few months we're playing Bourke again, Bellingen, Federal, Byron Bay, Brisbane and Melbourne.

After the 'meat tray' incident, benefit shows put on by peers and friends in Melbourne, Canberra, Byron Bay and Tamworth raised staggering sums that paid off most of the medical bills and raised enough to put a deposit on a new van. Such outpourings of empathy have demonstrated that people love the idea that The Re-mains are out there, playing honest music against the odds. It's a sustaining thought in a very tough industry.

But the new van turned out to be a lemon and had complete meltdown on our last Victorian tour, forcing us to cancel lucrative shows.

There've been plenty such tough tours, lost girlfriends, much soul-searching and poverty-stricken angst. We've always fallen between the cracks of the mainstream country and rock industries, being considered too rock and left-field by the former and 'country' being a dirty word to the latter.

I'm the last man standing from the original line-up, and that's probably because I write all the songs, do the booking and management and have kept the original vision from the outset. The pull of home and careers has dissuaded all the others, but I've never had any trouble replacing them with eager recruits.

Next year The Re-Mains are undertaking a tour of Canada, playing festivals and big and small towns all over the country. We've been told to look out for moose on the back roads ... ■

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The Regional Arts Fund is an Australian Government initiative to support the arts in regional, rural and remote Australia.



The Re-Mains are, L-R: 'Grunter' Bedford, Tom Jones, Mick Daley and Dwayne Daniels

March — April

29 — 30 March

Kurri Kurri Nostalgia Festival and Cruise Classic cars and rock'n'roll. Bands, dance competitions and market stalls and classic car cruises. **KURRI KURRI**
www.kurrikurri nostalgiefestival.com.au

3 — 20 April

Parliament of NSW Indigenous Art Prize 2007. Touring exhibition featuring the winning entry by Milton Budge. **GRIFFITH** Regional Art Gallery Tel 02 6962 5991

8 — 12 April

Heroes Robert Alexander, Max Gillies and Dennis Olsen play three deliciously flawed WWI vets determined to embark on one last adventure in Tom Stoppard's wonderful comedy. IPAC, **WOLLONGONG**
 Tel 02 4226 3366

24 April — 25 May

Tag It — Graffiti Touring exhibition featuring some amazing graffiti art. **GRIFFITH** Regional Art Gallery
 Tel 02 6962 5991