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RON CARPENTER

Ron Carpenter was in one of the earliest AC/DC lineups circa 1974. Having replaced original drummer Colin Burgess, and to later be replaced by Russell Coleman, Ron was part of the early-Dave Evans era line up during '74, and had previously played in the band Bogislav. He later was with the band Aleph during 1976-77 and has since been involved in a variety other projects mainly self compositions and his invention of PLEX technology.



Responses:

1974 ? – I’m not real sure. It was a period of 6-12 months somewhere between 1973 and 1975. I was teaching during the day and was invited to audition by a guy named Peter Panayi (I think) – he had something to do with William Shakespeare (see Alberts Vanda and Young) and owned a record cutting machine. He lived in Ashfield and I was teaching his son drums for free. I remember rehearsing in Town Halls around Haberfield and Croydon and a place called Cashmores (rehearsal studio) in Ashfield.

I had a van – a Ford Transit and used to pick up the guitarist and bass player from Kings Cross. I think their names were Larry and Steve/Peter. Dave Evans would meet us at rehearsals and I’m pretty sure this Peter Panayi guy used to organize the hiring and rehearsing arrangements. The PA was shit.

Band Members – I don’t recall who I replaced but I’m pretty sure the line up included Dave on Vocals, Larry and “Steve” on guitars. There may have been occasions when they added other guitarists (i.e. 5 piece) but I can’t remember any band changes.

I was married, teaching in a High School during the day, building a PA prototype in the afternoons and composing and playing at nights. I did not “hang-out” with the other members - except for quiet rehearsals with the guitarists at the Cross. We rehearsed a couple of times a week and the repertoire consisted of mainly Free songs and boogie/blues numbers.

The band had a good feel although Dave was a screamer and had a limited range – a bit like Ian Gillan. The guitarist had a Gretsch and a Gibson and knew some nice jazz chords. The Amps and PA were very poor-probably Lenard Amps.

My background was classical piano for 15 years as well as playing drums with my parent’s dance band from the age of 11. I picked up guitar and other instrumental techniques along the way. I formed my first rock band in 1965 and played gigs all through High School and then for 4 years at University.

Both my parents were musicians and my Grandparents were musicians; my mother was an accomplished pianist. Both my sisters are musicians and we were raised in a country town where my mother’s talent was recognized far and wide. I started composing at 12 and was recording on 4Track tape recorders by 1966. I was able to listen to music from anywhere on a giant wireless that had shortwave. My mother could listen to a song once and work out the chords and melody, she played jazz and could improvise. I would orchestrate and transpose my father’s saxophone music from sheet music. He also played drums – pig skins that required soaking vellum’s in the bath, cutting and tucking around a hoop after you broke a skin and warming in front of the fire and wrapping in blankets before they were put in the car for a gig.

Influences:

AC/DC was the first band I joined after the disbanding of Bogislav in 1973. **Bogislav** played heavy rock (Cream Traffic Zepplin Mountain, Bluesbreakers, Chicago, Santana, etc) and a stack of Original songs. Bogislav included Don Walker who would form Cold Chisel in 1974 in Adelaide. They could cut it with any “Sydney” band at the time.

During school I formed **The Generation, Early Hours** and the legendary **Paddywak** with Peter Sheedy. The “wak” played Hendrix and originals and won numerous Battle of the Sounds in the early 70’s.

At University I became interested in computers and synthesizers. At the same time I realized the importance of sound in music. Electronics and digital technology would forever influence my future directions in music. AC/DC was a part-time interest for me at that time.

Most of my spare time was spent with my 6 piece band **Aleph** – rehearsing an all original repertoire that included Mellotrons, moogs, Oberheim synths and elaborate guitar FX. Aleph consisted of ex-Bogislav members Dave Highett (Scot) and Dave Froggatt (English) as well as Joe Walmsley (Indian) and two female keyboard/synthesists – one of whom was my sister Mary-Jane.

At the end of 1974 I took Aleph to a recording studio in Currabubula and recorded 6 tracks over 3 weeks. I recall telling Peter Panayi that I would have to leave AC/DC for at least a month and telling the guitarists and Dave I couldn’t continue playing cover songs. The parting was amicable and I continued to see Peter Panayi over the next few years – Aleph blew up one of his trucks on tour to Melbourne in 1977!

The next time I came across AC/DC was in Albert’s King Street in 1975/76. They were recording the first album and I’m pretty sure they were still changing their line-up –Angus was just starting to get a sound out of his SG and Marshalls. This album was constructed by Harry and George who had a significant input into the songs, arrangements, sounds and eventual mix.

I suggest the “sound” created by Harry and George at King Street and the overall feel and intensity of those first recordings DICTATED the eventual live manifestation of AC/DC. The songs were constructed around Bon’s vocals and laid the aural blueprint for the eventual “line-up” to develop an effective and powerful live presentation further propelled by the rapidly improving and visually exploitive Angus.

Aleph performed with AC/DC at a large concert in the Haymarket in Sydney in 1975/76. Our singer had stuffed his throat in the studio at Albert’s all day and we did a shortened set. I recall AC/DC got a terrific reception from the crowd and Bon being in excellent voice.

I also recall thinking whoever their drummer was – he was a lot more disciplined and appropriate – because the music required it and I’m sure he still had Harry and George’s demands for simplicity ringing in his ears. AC/DC didn’t need a John Bonham – they worked better with a Simon Kirke or Charlie Watts! I don’t think this line-up (with Bon and Angus) played many small pub gigs. They didn’t slog around the traps – Bon had for years – but Angus didn’t really get a lot of gigging experience with this line-up before they took off.

In the studio, George would show Angus a riff and they would both play it over and over – for many minutes. The room was concrete with Marshalls stacked against one wall- curtains back – the lift well in King Street used to shake when they were riffing. After 20 minutes of riffing – George would signal Harry or leave his guitar and go into the control room himself and record a few minutes of Angus. He’d then return to the studio and show Angus the next riff- the process would go on all day and night. After recording sufficient riffs Harry and George would mix/bounce them down to ¼ inch tape and then edit (splice) the arrangement – 16 bars of this -8 bars of that – middle 8 – 16 bar chorus – etc. The new song/arrangement would be presented to Angus the next day. Bon would then work the vocals with the band and they’d work on tightening the rhythm section ready for recording.

We spent a month recording the album *Surface Tension* for WEA in the adjacent studio while AC/DC recorded their first. I was fascinated by Harry and George's methodology and process. When I hear Bon and AC/DC I really hear the Easybeats reinvented. I was never close to any of the band. The last time I spoke with Bon was sitting on some stairs at Albert's King Street before they went to London again. Bon was having trouble getting his new teeth to settle and couldn't get over how much equipment the band was starting to carry. We talked about his time in Fraternity and I wished him good luck. At the time Albert's had just installed a new Harrison Console and MCI 24 track and we were have a lot of problems getting them to function properly.

In 1976/7 Aleph toured Australia, lost a lot of money, failed to convince Warner Bros *Surface Tension* needed to be re-recorded and sought a release from their contract after it was released. In 1978 Aleph lost their singer to injury and had their custom PA repossessed. \$400,000 in debt, I was asked to fill-in as drummer for Cold Chisel for a few months and organized for the members of Aleph and their families to move to Byron Bay. A five piece, then four and eventually three piece Aleph performed almost nightly from 1977-83 on the North Coast and Gold Coast – repaying \$300,000 in debt- taking no wages- carrying hired equipment in a double horse trailer towed behind an old Ford Station wagon. Punk and new wave, electronica and rock – impeccable repertoire BUT cover versions – to get the work to pay the debts.

I started singing after we gave-up auditioning singers for the original repertoire – these included Colin Hay from Men at Work and even female singers. I sang only because we couldn't find a better singer who would work for nothing, I sang and led the band from behind a drum kit that continually diminished..... I was learning to do more with less and started playing for ears.....not eyes.



In AC/DC I played a black Pearl/Rodgers/Tama/Premier custom kit. In Aleph I played a Billy Cobham 24" double bass drum kit with 12 toms and 9 cymbals. By 1983 I played with only a 20" bass drum snare, single tom, snare crash and hi-hat with a Roland SH-5 used for synth sound triggering.

During 1977-1979 I composed, performed and recorded original scores and soundscapes / music for film and television. ABC "A Big Country" and the award winning "First Contact". I worked as a session musician on commercials at Music Farm Studios and composed and recorded "Crunch Time Snax" under the name "Takeaways" on a 16 track tascam recorder in an old shed in Byron Bay. This album contained a track "Russia Rocks China Rolls" all synthesized. A video of this track was shot at Channel 7 in Melbourne – I remember the shooting because it was the night John Lennon was shot. The local radio station banned Russia Rocks from airplay because it was all synthesized; I sought a release from my publisher Chappell Music.

In 1980 I was awarded a scholarship to study digital recording techniques and holography in the USA. In New York, Los Angeles and Bearsville I became interested in Holography and Laserology and returned to Australia in 1980 as a convert to the emerging digitalization of sound and music.

In 1984 I returned to Sydney and as singer/drummer formed "The Pound" with some ex Cold Chisel and Autumn players. Proficient with computers, synthesizers, PA technology, acoustics and audio engineering I discovered Ambisonics and the writings of Michael Gerzon. In 1987 I moved my family back to the country and developed a one-man band concept on the Atari 1040 platform utilizing MIDI.

I began performing as the definitive one man band. I pre-programmed complex backings and accompanied "myself" on Roland electronic drums, digital piano, synths, electric guitar and fx, bass and bass pedals as well as providing all the vocals via a headset mike. The sound of an 8 piece band and only one musician. Equipment could fit in a station wagon and for 7 years I held the unofficial title of "fastest band in the land" –averaging 130 kph and traveling up to 150,000 klm per year -solo. My composition now focused on "immersive" music and designing a recording, performing and reproduction system that would allow me to work in true three dimensional sound – to enlarge the soundfield from stereo to 360 degree spatialization. The emergence of Google allowed me to keep abreast of technical and innovative developments in the multichannel audio field.

PLEX:

In 1994 we returned to Sydney and I continued to work as a “one-man-band” at nights and research the fields of Ambisonics, ambiophonics, B-Format, spatialization and related sonic matters. In 1997 I rejected the use of commercial surround sound formats such as Dolby, THX and DTS and the 5.1 / 7.1 compression codec’s and built a customized 16.2 full bandwidth 3D system that incorporates height speakers and allows me to move and position sound sources ANYWHERE in a 3D speaker matrix. By 2002 I had composed and recorded 8 hours of experimental music in a number of genres to conduct 100’s of hours of experimentation. In 2003 I secured sponsorship from Electro-voice (Australia) and demonstrated the system privately using sixteen SX300 speakers, two Dynacord 800 Sub-woofers, 2 kilometres of wiring and 60,000 watts of amplification.

As a composer I have total control of the soundspace. By employing wireless in-ear monitoring it is now possible to “spatialize a live band” – as long as each musician plays an electro-acoustic instrument so that NO sound is produced on the performance stage. This system re-empowers the composer. The best music you have ever heard is usually composed by one person. The tunes that remain in your head until you die – are generally the creation of one person. I am not a good songwriter, for me, music is about sound – the brain is distracted by lyric. While it is possible for me to convert my large multichannel sound files to Surround 5.1 and 7.1 formats I have refrained from releasing any music.

It is now 25 years since I released any music to the public and I have original material that covers 1980-2005 (the equivalent of 19 Albums) sitting on my hard drives – in 16.2 format, 10.2, 7.1, 5.1, 5.1MP3 surround, stereo, mono, MP3, real audio and windows media formats.

Plex is for live performance. It is best experienced by sitting. It is the antithesis of iPod! – its sound being experienced in a real time event – its sound (full range) that your body also experiences NOT compressed signals pumped through tiny speakers into the side openings of your skull. I have approached only Cirque du Soleil – this is the type of experience that can best exploit the features and capabilities of live spatialized sound. It’s now 30 years since I performed my own music in public. If I could not afford to present (production) my music in the manner it deserved and I desired –it would not be released.

I am very stubborn – its goes with my uncompromising and independent nature. It’s my adventurous ear that sets me apart from my peers. I listen to anything I haven’t heard before- I don’t necessarily enjoy listening or listen like most people – I’m an analyzer and I listen critically and analytically – this has helped me to continue being creative and experimental. This is how I want to express myself because complexity (plex) is fundamental to living modern and future life – composers haven’t been able to afford musicians for decades now digital technology is enabling and re-empowering them. Sophisticated baby boomers might now appreciate one of them cared enough about his work and art to know they all deserved a better product.

I have never regretted leaving AC/DC. In fact, if all our circumstances were revealed I would be surprised if ALL of them DIDN’T envy me! It’s the money and fame Vs great family and artistic integrity scenario. In the context of my extensive career, my time with AC/DC is insignificant. I may have contributed to their existence by being on drums for that period but my own pursuits were given priority. I consider my departure over their lack of enthusiasm for originality and Malcolm’s realization that DE was stultifying and retarding the bands vision were significant contributors to AC/DC seeking the assistance of George and Harry. AC/DC could never realize my musical ambitions in 1974 though they provided me an opportunity to “play with city muso’s”, satisfy my performance ego and “keep my chops and ear in” while I worked on other projects and started a family. In music I do what no one else can do. I compose and perform music in 3D and it has taken me 30 years to learn the skills required...to do it all myself. I have more than “paid my dues” to performance and continue to sing and play in the knowledge ALL of my talents and skills will be required to successfully “convert” traditionalists to spatialization and the concept of immersive music. The future is not stereo, it’s multichannel and live performance arts can exploit the opportunities presented by this technology.

If I’ve been wrong for the past 20 years so to be the inventor of MP3 – Karlheinz Brandenburg – check out IOSONO !!!!! The Fraunhofer Institut works with Wave Field Synthesis and requires 100’s of speakers – my

system is based on Vector Based Amplitude Panning (VBAP), requires only 18 speakers, less processing power and is a fraction of the cost to build and install. Immersive music is not surround music.

The stuff on DVD's at present is mainly stereo recording masters re-jigged for surround 5.1. The music was never intended to be reproduced in 3D or surround and therefore was recorded using stereo techniques. SACD and DVD-A offer better audio quality but it's the CONTENT that we lack- music specifically designed and prepared for surround replay. Immersive music works best if the composer is integrally involved – from initial conception right through to the live performance or recorded product.

It is stereo that is artificial – humans hear sound from all directions – NOT simply from front Left and front Right! We need to skill young musicians and composers to fully exploit the creative possibilities of space. Sculpting sound in space with its psychoacoustic implications is a powerful tool. I've been using German hardware and software by Creamware, Steinberg and Z Plane Developments since 1997 to build the platform for my system. I also remember Can, Gong, Kraftwerk, Klaus Schultz and Tangerine Dream – Klaus is still pumping out product! I intend to have a web site up and running in the next few months.

No recordings were made during my time with AC/DC. There may be photos but I have none. If you Google Bogislav Paddywak and Aleph images you may get lucky!..... I've never bought an AC/DC Album and have never wanted to hear any particular track. These days they're used to sell vehicles in radio and TV commercials. I've never played AC/DC as a cover – in fact I have never done a cover of any Australian artist or band. I have used AC/DC riffs to teach my students guitar but I find it most awkward when they Google my name and want to know why I left AC/DC – it's a long way to the top only few can understand. I hear the boys are releasing a new album this year, I really hope you enjoy it and get to see them on tour. They're still fucking loud and kick-ass – not the sort of music that should be experienced through iPod earphones!

I cherish my privacy and underground status. It allows me to do what I want. I have been a band leader since I was 15, I was always the best musician in the band and drove all band members hard because they were playing my music. The machines do what I want and when I want it and can handle my intensity. I still act as musical director and conductor for musicals and revues – but that's other people's music. Until I can find the proper resources to showcase what I do best – the world must wait as I'll continue to work alone. I have a studio in the garage of my newly rented home and my school holidays for the past three years have been spent locked up inside empty school halls and auditoria with a stack of sponsored speakers, amps and wiring. I've just upgraded the system to run on XP but refuse to patent my designs. I only built the system so I could continue my composition, it's the content that's important to me not the system. The Japanese have just finished work on their 22.2 audio system for HD (Google 22.2 sound system) AND it includes height speakers. If IOSONO and the money behind the MP3 developers can't interest the world in immersive content and spatialization this year what can little ol' me do? I am prepared to develop a one-man-performance that would showcase my unique talent and skills and entertain audiences of around 400 -600 seated within a 3D speaker matrix. My system is designed for me to occupy the stage of a conventional performance space and immerse the audience. I Do NOT need to be inside the soundfield or speaker matrix. I KNOW what the audience is hearing. Should I decide to incorporate musicians playing in real-time it is imperative they NOT make a sound on stage-except for vocals – the resultant mix can be spatialized – wrapped around and over the audience – rather than blasted from the front, mixed for the middle and too loud up front and too soft at the back. AC/DC can't use a spatialized system – Kraftwerk can! The guitar back-pack lets Angus move around the arena whilst performing – the sound still pumps from the giant line arrays – with Spatialization you can focus the sound to emanate from where Angus is!- you can separate the instruments and harmonies- spatialize the delays – spread the sweet spot. The Chemical Brothers promote an ambisonic sound system – it's loud but it's only an 8 channel matrix system that works in the horizontal sound field reproducing dance music that has little need for the subtleties of dynamics.

Best wishes

Ron Carpenter

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