

# Little Bands Dog Mag.

## Revised Interview with Alan Bamford by James Buck

J. Did you go to the first L.B. at Climax records

A. Yup

J. Did you know the L.B. before that

A. My life was completely changed - It was quite a shock to me

J. What - That was your first encounter with the L.B.

A. Yeah - I had no idea about them at all. Cos I didn't know any of those people. I'd seen the P.C. twice but I didn't know them or hardly anyone there at all. I had a really exciting time.

J. When did you get the idea to actually start taping them

A. I can't remember why I started recording at hotels. The first time I ever did it was Whirlybird when they played in Richmond once. It was just I think to listen back. It wasn't planned at all. It just occurred to me that I had a radio programme at the same time. It was quite co-incidental. I'd had it for quite some time beforehand and I just started playing the tapes on the radio and it got out of hand after that. The potential for a certain kind of radio show dawned on me and I started taping the P.C and then L.B. I think the night Whirlybird played

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in Richmond was Christmas eve 1979

S - I was under the impression that you always knew Stuart and all of them.

A - I don't know the Calculators very well at all, or anyone in the bands around the time of the EP. I was never part of that social circle - I never saw those people regularly at all - I was very much an intruder in that sense. I was always a bit uncomfortable.... but that's my ~~background~~ just me

- When did you get the idea to put the L.B. EP out

A - Well I had nothing to do with that. I helped with the Calculators single cos I thought they should make a record before they left the country. Because the impression I got was that were going away as a band, a unit... which wasn't the way it turned out but I really thought they should make a record in Australia. I went to Stuart one day and asked him what he thought about making a record. And he told me he knew exactly what songs the group would record and just how they'd do them. They knew everything about the record they'd make. I suggested he talk to Keith Glass - I was just finding what he thought - and he said he found the idea of asking Keith Glass for anything repulsive. So I went away and rang

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up my father who lent me the money to pay for the recording of the single. I was a partner in a sense with Max Rabenstone who paid for the pressing of both records. With the L.B. record - because there were so many people involved in the four bands it only cost everyone \$20 to hire the studio for a day. So each group had about 2 hrs to make their song and it cost everybody \$20 and most people could afford that. But the Calculators couldn't afford \$250 so I paid for it and Max gave it back to me when they were released. Actually I took it in free records. So Max was keen on the L.B. was he?

A. The Calculators used to rehearse behind Climax and after them My L., which had Tom Hoig and Lee Smith in it both of whom were members of eventual little bands and lots of the people spent time in the shop.

After Climax folded cos it didn't make money Max had aspirations towards getting a venue and a label, which never came off. But he did make those two records and the space to play in at Climax was pretty important for a while

J - What were the people in L.B. impressions of making a record, and of you

A - I don't know. Only one person ever expressed

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an opinion to me about my involvement. All I did was float a little money but my view of things is that most areas of human activity are multi-faceted and some people have specific functions that suit them. I had a job at their time, no intention of giving it up. Nothing else to do. And I was capable of paying my father back really quickly. I didn't think it was any great sacrifice to pay for them to make a record. I knew just by looking at them - it's a fairly stuck up sort of thing I guess. I'm very different to them - the way I live is very different. And I could see that while they were in Australia they'd never get the money together to make a record, despite the fact that they really wanted to, I think - so I just decided that somebody else should give them the money. And I decided their friends probably wouldn't think of it either. So I was outwardly motivated.

J.- Do you think L.B. being on the radio made any difference to what L.B. became

A - I honestly have no idea at all. I think just going on crowd levels - there were two nights at The Champion that were standing room only affairs and after that, the first two in 1980, crowds really dropped off. I'm sure my radio programme

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had no effect on drawing people to it to any extent - and as far as how it affected those who were in bands - I think the only beneficial effect was that they had the opportunity to hear what they'd done on the radio. Which wasn't the point at all - I mean I sort of played it to get it into the lives of other people - that's part of why I'm making the records. I don't think my radio programme had any lasting effect on anybody. It made a lot of people turn off. To start with I got heaps of abusive phone calls and by the end I wasn't getting any. So I figured that those who didn't like it knew to turn off and that those who listened did so cos they knew what to expect. It was a very predictable show for the most part and I think it was largely a failure as far as any real change goes. But some of them were real good radio shows.

J - A guy I know once said he loved the way you taped bands and then you went running off to the studio - sometimes literally - play it and then that was it - never to be heard again. Played, packaged, sold - and gone.

A - Yeah - I used to realise that. I had just two hours a week and I seemed to get a knock

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of finding some music I'd never played before that I felt I should centre each programme around. And any night there was a L.B. night that took up the following programmes. It was pretty good for a while I think.

J - You'd play the old favourites tho

A - Yeah, cos I actually got requests - The Kite - The Persons Brothers. But there was just so much new music each week for a 2 hr show I never had to worry, generally.

J - In that sense - as a radio proposition - L.B. was almost a social thing - over the airwaves to your friends

A - Aaah - that's an idea. But I think its impact was so tiny. I know nothing of what people think about my programme. The only comments I used to get about the programme were generally along the lines of "Gee we sounded shithouse" so I don't know how it was thought of in any terms wider than that. People often said it was a good idea but no-one ever really talked to me about the success or failure of it over time.

J - It used to always be thought - "Oh, L.B. Alan will be there to type it."

A - Oh - it was my job. My life was comprised of it and its cassette distribution spin off.

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J - Did any other bands ever take preference.

A - No. You can't really afford to miss any of them from my position. You don't know what you might miss.

J - Were there many bands around sort of interesting for you to record?

A - Some people actually felt my programme could assist their groups followings like I wanted to expose L.B. - not promote them. But I had quite a few invitations to come along and have a look at the band "we're pretty good" you know. I never got around to any of it cos I was too busy with what I already had to do.

J - But were there many groups in Melb that stimulated you enough to record them

A - Not to any extent. I taped Gqual Local on the basis of their pedigree and one of →<sup>↑</sup> "sets" that I really loved - their Formula Dice - and The Pastel Bats farewell concert. And Use No Hooks whenever they played. Use No Hooks I taped a lot. The only group not involved in L.B. I had any interest in was The Boys Next Door and I taped them the night the Primitive Calculators did the show that makes their L.P. cos I figured it'd be good to play some of their newer, unrecorded songs. And ↑

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Taped some groups from Sydney, mainly to play some music for from Sydney and my judgement went off centre once or twice. I felt obliged to provide sort of a "first release" each week. Which was stupid cos one night I played 22 Tactics songs altogether which did prompt a response for once. The one of the most satisfying things I did all year was to go to Sydney one weekend specifically to tape the Slugsuckers who hardly ever play.

J - When you said it was your job - why you.

A - Cos I initiated it.

J - Did it hold a particular interest for you?

A - No - it was a responsibility. I didn't enjoy it at all after the first few months. I couldn't really enjoy myself cos I was always worried about drunk people bumping microphones and people yelling out "Testing, 123 etc" It was often plain irritating And there were ~~two~~ <sup>3</sup> nights where I had prepared something to play and they were horrible cos I'm very self-conscious and I had too much to think about. But at the same time - well before I'd decided to make records - I always felt L.B was unique and quite special and should in some way be documented and that aspects like that don't occur to most people who are more selfish than me so I just accepted it. It gave me a lot of

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satisfaction but very little pleasure.

J - Do you think it was worth it.

A - I sure do. It was, to me, a necessary part of it all - as I think time may tell. And I've got the best music collection ~~had~~ in Melbourne.

J - I get the impression that a lot of the people in L.B. are cynical about them being recorded interviewed, taken seriously. They ask - "Why do you bother?" You're in it for your piece of history. Do you see that.

A. Yeah. I've got no illusions about the very real need to take care of your place in history. There is no greater example I've ever come across of a group of people who affect peoples lives by what they do taking the greatest possible care over the way history will portray them than the Primitive Calculators. They taught me that lesson. I think they're quite outstanding amongst all those involved in the care they take to do it right. But they're an exception - from my experience last year most people have an after the event perspective - like - they'll get up on stage and do their best and then wing it and transfer blame when the recording sounds nothing like what they intended - but they won't bother with a soundcheck, a talking to the mixer. It's just a

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slack, haphazard sort of attitude, I doubt why it was so common but it certainly comes across on the record.

J. You're bringing out a record of the P.C. Live. Are you happy with it?

A - I was listening to it and Dave Light once said it would be the best Australian rock and roll record ever, and that I should go ahead and make it. Which was nearly a year ago. The reason for the delay in starting it, cos I'd always wanted to, was that they nearly always got crummy sound mixes + Stuart never really liked any of the recording I got so I figured he'd never approve of an album. But well after they'd left Dave Light told me not to worry and I should do it if I still wanted to.

Its technically inconsistent, its not a very slick performance but I still think its a good record

J. Were the P.C. very popular?

A. Not really. They never had time for a start. I'm sure their friends will always remember them but I doubt if many people who saw them once or twice will remember enough to bother with the record. I don't know who's going to buy it. There aren't very many - oh it'll probably sell.

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J - And are you happy with the Little Bands record  
A - Oh - I'm in two minds. As it stands its a good record but there were more L.B. nights after I decided - right master the record this weekend - and there's lots of much better examples of music by people who are represented on the record. It's unavoidable, but it bugs me never the less. It's not the best possible example of what was done but it's pretty good.

J - Will we see a new, improved? - L.B. Pt 2.

A - Never! Regardless of what happens this year I'm never going to make another record, nor am I going on the radio again and tho' I'll do a little recording for the 2-Tapes cassette label it'll be nothing like last year.

J - Are you going to keep the record local or do you have g/s sales in mind.

A - I've perused lots of record labels and what they have released and I doubt if anyone in Gugleland would be interested due to the taste displayed by most labels currently and the fact that they are technically substandard which I don't apologise for. Its no criticism, just a fact. But I am going to post copies to Lust Lust Music in N.Y. because they seem to

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be the only conceivable likelihood

S - Would you like to see it take off.

A - As long as someone else looked after it. I'd love to see them in Billboard and I'm going to personally deliver a gift wrapped present of them to Ian McDonald with a reallyappy note cos I'd go into orbit if he held me at them up on Countdown. Somehow it really appeals to me. But in fact I want as little to do with them as I can manage this year cos I've got lots of newer, more exciting things to do. I'm a little bitter about them and how they're so overdue for which I can take no responsibility. Christmas time, a plant malfunction in Sydney, the enormous demand for Shreddies you face and the minute amount of revenue it means to the manufacturers are responsible. So I just want them out of the way. But should I just express an interest then I'll just post them the tapes and it will be their record over there. I'm not interested in any money deals because I'm completely sick of being obsessed with money as a result of getting sick and not working for 6 weeks which has meant selling lots of things I own to make up for lost savings. It's the wrong attitude to have because making a record is more than purely

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economics but releasing a record is a business proposition no more or less and I've learnt that.

But I would feel really good if they took off beyond expectations but I really doubt it.

J - Were you idealistic about making a record in the beginning.

A - I was that and I was ignorant which adds up to stupid. I know nothing about it. I have no capability to be enthusiastic about money at all. I don't even know what they will cost. I have a rough estimate of \$2500 and I'm going about getting that amount and if they want more I'll just have to get more. I sort of keep telling myself I should ring up to learn for sure but I never have. I'm not really the right person to take this sort of thing on and I hope they don't fall apart as a result of my incompetence. I don't think they will tho cos I've got really good help from one or two people.

J - You've come in for a lot of flak from some of the people on it with their artistic temperaments. Has that been a pain in the bum?

A - Like what - about the choice of things that make up the record.

J - What you said before - They won't do a

soundcheck and then complain about the results You seem to be in a position where you can only do bad and no good

A Yeah. Well... its not as bad as that but - see a lot of musicians are terribly shortsighted and they get a piece of music that's finished - the making of it is over and - like the making of it started with an idea and it wasn't fully realised in the playing, or in the amplification which lead them to pronounce it worthless. Whereas as to a person who is unaware of what was in mind - and that's who the record is for - takes it as it comes - that's the approach of most people who listen to music - they apply their judgemental criteria to what is there. And taken as it comes it's a record full of remarkably effective music of all kinds. These records aren't for the people on it - they're for total strangers who didn't see it or hear it on radio. Obviously with 500 pressings it's no great deal of people. But the records that are sent to radio stations and put into general programming, rather than the first two hours of a Friday morning, will be the most used of all the records.

Like - There's obviously a fuzzy dividing line depending on your personal standards between

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an offensively substandard recording where the extent of the deficiencies overcomes any positive characteristics and a recording that has faults of far less sort of distracting nature. The Orotan Boys for instance repeatedly suffered from mixers driving the vocals and nothing else thru the P.A resulting in lots of distortion and inaudible instruments. I thought I'd have to leave them off but finally, by the skin of their teeth they got a good mix at the Oxford which relieved me cos they deserve their inclusion.

None of the music on the record fails to get across a fair proportion of what was attempted and certainly none of it is "unlistenable." There are faults in every single track but the success of the music outweighs these faults

J- Is most of the music on the record the bands choice

A- Every group who had one member still in Melts. was asked to come and listen to whatever of theirs I had, to decide which one they preferred and to tell me how they would have it improved cos I went to a person with equipment that reduced his and could do fairly precise alterations to these mixed tapes, and I generally got really precise instructions which I wrote down and was

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very glad to have cos I dreaded having to decide myself. Tho I did in the cases where I didn't know any of the members - like the Klu - who only appeared once - or if I didn't know the whereabouts. I didn't know how to contact Marion about Thrush + The Cents.

But I did all I could. It was done in a bedroom so it wasn't possible for everyone to choose their song and besides it had to be done very quickly and for sure they wouldn't all have turned up. But everyone I could find decided for themselves and I did as much ♫ as was possible according to their instructions.

J- Do you think those who bought the GP will buy the album and find it to be in the same vein. Do you see a link there.

A- Well they bear no conceptual relation. My reasons and aims are different to those that I have come across amongst the people who made the GP which centred around having a record that was yours. Whereas my motives are less strictly ~~personal~~ personal, more concerned with documentation. But its not important really - why they are made - There is a strong link in the music - the spirit in which its all done and the feeling generated - far more important.

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The they will have black labels.

J - Any reason why you want to stay anonymous?

A - Am I?

J - Just having Alan on the records + black labels.

A - Oh - Thers a black label because.... I never really found out why there were black labels. There were black labels on the first two so I just figured... actually I wrote to Stuart in Holland + he replied saying he had some ideas for continuity but never wrote again telling me what so I just figured that had to be one of them so I kept them.

And my name is on the cover in full in amongst a whole lot of other people who have made significant contributions to the making of it. But I'm certainly not featured in any way like, Alan would like to thank... I dunno - I try not to think about it cos I have a weakness for unjustified ego's. I tend to be overly self critical keeping that in check. But I would like to be anonymous mainly to avoid putting up with various people who I was forced to deal with last year as a consequence of the public nature of what I did. Then it really intrigues me to hear of an opinion held by

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person who has never met me. I was called  
every once and I have the most moderate  
bland nature of anyone I know. And I think  
I'm aware of what I do.

J - Do you have any comments on L.B. from  
your position as the recorder of L.B and its  
conscious of its place in history?

A - I don't think what I did implies I had a  
unique angle to observe from

J - You haven't the average viewpoint on L.B.  
You recorded them, played them on the radio  
had people making obscene phone calls and  
now you're making a record of them. From  
that standpoint do you have any impres-  
sions that weren't generally had

A - No - not really. Aside from purely personal  
reflections on the methods of others involved  
and how they affected my function, none of  
which would serve any purpose appearing in print.  
As far as what I can remember I think  
the most impressive thing I ever saw was  
Tom Hoy with a tape recorder, castanets and  
Indian chants. That really excited me a lot. And  
the funniest thing I ever saw was the Perkins  
Brothers. There was so much my memory is  
pretty blurred. The one unfortunate miscon-

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ception that I hope the record doesn't strengthen is that the Melbourne Little Bands are a movement with the characteristics of a whole lot of people united and packageable. Phone calls to the radios and talking with people in Sydney I get this impression. When to me the only common factors are mutual disinterest in playing music the same old ways and a common common interest in working together in order to be able to play music in public. Just common sense really, as well as being genuinely interested in what other people are doing. But as far as some united front committed to changing the face of music it's not true.

J - Have you got any opinions on the likely effect of the record being heard in 5 yrs time. Do you think it will have an appeal in 5 yrs time - like say Pebbles.

A - Well unfortunately its small number will mean it'll be a moderate collectors item fairly quickly and should it gather critical praise, maybe sooner. This bugs me but albums are very expensive to make. So there's that. But the L.B. record and Pebbles are very different records. Pebbles were put together with the aid of 15 years of hindsight. And like

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that it's dead easy to compile a record certain to be popular. And nostalgia enters into the appeal of Pebbles cos those groups very have been pretty obscure but they come from a time extensively documented and affectionately remembered Whereas the Little Bands record has been made with the point in mind of documenting the range of music played over the period of time involved as well as trying to give some idea of what it was like to hear the little Bands play- Sandys film will convey what it looked like and may maybe they'll both go some way towards showing how it felt. No, this record is a far more ~~less~~ vulnerable sort of thing than Pebbles.

J- Do you think that in 5 years or so it'll get a more favourable hearing, in the light of history? Less cynical?

A- Well that depends on what developments flow from it, what history attributes to it. And I have no idea at all in guessing. As far as today goes, I think the reason for the interest levels of those two nights at the Champion fading away is in the nature & the way the music was organized, as far as forming a group a learning a few songs and the way it was

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presented, and the transitory nature of group lineups and names - I mean it just flies in the face of every notion of rock + roll fanism. I think that most of those who went the first couple of times and then didn't stopped because they were rock fans who wanted to be entertained and became fans and they could nt cos L.B. had none of the elements of rock fan consumerism like long sustained image, role playing intra-group personalities and the same music time after time. L.B. crushed its nose, most L.B. soulsbed their noses at that + the ~~or~~ notion that they were obliged to entertain onlookers. And so I dont expect the album to be very influential cos I believe it to be a fairly honest reflection of a thing that was rejected by most of those who could have supported it.

But, if the P.C. record gets pressed - and I have <sup>confidence about that</sup> no ~~expectation at all~~ + I'm not planning as it at all But if it were released somewhere else and if they issued more than a pissy little 500 copies then it could seep through in the time it's taken groups like the Velvets and New! to assert their weight. And change from our secret into a name to drop and perhaps eventually

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they'll become a seminal influence. I shouldn't be so self righteous but I just can't see it stemming from this record. But it's just that when somethings' as special to you as (this will sound nausées) - not as a musical group because I never knew them - as The Calculators became - then you want the thing recorded so it's not just lost. More importantly so people don't write - The Primitive Calculators - chaotic synthi-punk who failed - you know + that's what a lot of people think cos I've been told it. Pissed off of course they couldn't crack it - cause essentially they weren't any good. And that sort of thinking comes from not playing for very long or as many occasions and playing music that's not easy for a newcomer to assimilate and begin to understand and enjoy. I know it took me 3 or 4 times before I caught on + enjoyed listening and with a group as adventurous as The Calculators that's perfectly reasonable. And that's part of what the records for. It's a permanent thing so history won't sort of make its judgement from a fleeting glimpse. It's probably oversensitivity on my part but I get really annoyed when I see an opinion on

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music - or anything that is specific to me  
for one reason or another - an opinion so far  
wide of the mark that it's obviously been made  
by someone who's just - basically ignorant at  
the subject matter. Like, like - billing The  
Pastel Bats as an electronic band

So I hope these records do something towards  
avoiding that and maybe even increase the  
general knowledge about what happened

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Oh Tim - some bits are gone  
+ some bits have joined. Edit it  
but I like it now. Quite a few  
things I've never had the right  
place to say them in I guess.

See you,

Alanax

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