

## **Reproducing Music; a discussion with Robert Moss written by Brian Punt**

Robert Moss has been composing and producing music for over twenty-five years. His first commercial success was producing "See You In Spain", the hit song that established the Cockroaches (now The Wiggles). He has created the music for many high-profile national advertising campaigns and his screen composition work has won him numerous awards.

I caught up with him recently and as our discussion unfolded it came to reveal a musician, who in questioning the value of recording had been led to a stronger connection with music and a turning point in his career.

B: Robert I understand you have strong views on the whole concept of what happens to music when it's recorded.

R: A confusion arises when you compare reproduced music with live music.... I've had countless arguments (laughs) it's really about the difference between two art forms. In my opinion experiencing a couple of notes played on a piano in a room is far more satisfying than listening to a tinny electronic reproduction of say, a Beethoven sonata."

B: But would you acknowledge that our ability to record and distribute music makes it more accessible?

R: Recorded music has become a distraction. Like computer games or Internet porn. Since the arrival of sampling, CD burners, MP3 and Internet file sharing, the bubble has burst. I think we've been fooled for nearly a hundred years that recorded music is you know, 'it', but now that anyone can download a couple of samples from the internet, assemble them on a computer and say they wrote it, or copy any recording and send it to anybody else it's been exposed for what it is, it's lost its value and in a sense I think that's really appropriate, especially for the people that have sold us the notion of recorded music being this 'great thing,' (laughs) you know...record companies etc.

B: Could that be why the live music scene, in Sydney at least is seeming a little healthier these days... maybe people are trying to reestablish a deeper connection with music.

R: Quite possibly. A few years back I was at a Brett Whitely exhibition opening, I knew Brett, before he died obviously (laughs) and he asked me how the music was going and I said, "good" and he said, (dropping into an impression of an intense, visionary Brett Whiteley) "Music is so strange, one minute it's there and then its gone, whereas a painting, you work on it. And gradually it appears.... then it's there forever". That made me think about the 'true event' of someone, or a group of people playing some music.... they play it, it lives in that piece of time where its being played and then its gone, whereas recorded music is a copy of

an event and if you've used samples its an event that didn't even really happen.... weird. Look that's all just a rave and it sounds like I'm launching some bourgeois elitist argument that music can only be something that real people play on real instruments when actually (pauses), there's a whole other aspect to my talking about this and its much more real to me but maybe not so..'cool' to discuss.

B: Do it, lets go.

When I was a kid, even before I went to school, I sang and played musical instruments all the time, it was just an automatic thing. My family moved around a lot through my early life, traumatic moves for a kid, you know, being torn away from friends. So the only consistent intimacy I had was with my musical instruments...I played...I made stuff up... its what I did and I kept doing it.

When I was in my early twenties I was commissioned by a studio owner to compose and play on an ad he was working on. So there I was, having to play my stuff, you know, from myself, to sell a product and the person who commissioned me is going, "No it needs to be more like this, it needs to be more like that.... I don't like the bass..." Suddenly I had to actually change... everything.. for a recording. At the time I had all those normal, you know, affronted feelings of - 'its a travesty against my true creativity' or something (laughs) but as I tell you now, it feels like I'm talking about not being allowed to have a relationship with an intimate friend anymore.... I've never said that before... I went on to make quite a bit of money, I got really good at playing what other people wanted and that took over.

B: And led to a successful career in music....

R: The point I'm trying to get to is that when I get on the whole 'real music versus recorded music thing' I now recognize it as a mask for a more intimate truth, its actually my head trying to fathom what I really need right now which is to get back the pure connection I had with music which has been severed by my relationship with commercial recording.

B: So where does that leave you career wise and what does it mean for your music these days?

R: Now I occasionally do a job for someone if they ask nicely (laughs) but most of the time I'm working in a completely different field, I'm working in the corrective services at the moment, with criminal offenders, which is really satisfying and music for me is back to where it started out which is this thing that I do in a room with whoever's there, just playing and slowly evolving something...something that's mine.. and I think there is a 'marriage potential' between those genuine relationships with music, you know..playing instruments in a room in a space.... in a moment.... and recording it... but I haven't quite embarked on that journey yet. Probably something I should have fuckin started doing when I was nineteen...(laughs).