

SWEETWATERS

Daniel Keighley Interview

Peace, Love And Potatoes... Band Management, the Mutton Birds



Daniel Keighley at new Sweetwaters site

For the editor of *RiptUp*, one never strayed far from the main stage as one sought to ensure every act was reviewed. Writers could sleep through acts they were reviewing and writer-rage came before road-rage. Bands could get stropky reviews after a writer dropped a torch down a long-drop, fell into a swamp trying to get to the media enclave, got his campervan stuck in the mud or if an ill-dressed, shivering writer got freezing knees after the sun went down.

For a photographer, there was Bryan Ferry, God's gift to photographers, drenched in bright lights for the first three songs as he moved in designer slow motion. There were stage manager pricks who stopped you taking photos of bands late at night, for no reason and then Jimmy Barnes threw a mic stand, but if you're young and dumb you think it just fell off the stage and landed near you.

Thinking of one's favourite performance at Sweetwaters is hard — for me it would be Roxy Music or Toots & the Maytals or the Eurythmics, but Sweetwaters was also important for putting numerous new NZ acts on the big stage, and many new artists whether Toy Love or the Mockers blew people's minds and were as good as the imported stuff. Local bands started to build a significant audience after playing that crazed summer event. Sweetwaters was also a chance for Australian bands to win over a cynical Kiwi audience — some of us were even won over by Angry Anderson of Rose Tattoo, early one morning.

Talk of the return of Sweetwaters caught everyone by surprise. But the name that's synonymous with Sweetwaters, Daniel Keighley has given credibility to a concept that at first sounds somewhat crazed. The new urban and urbane Sweetwaters is taking shape for January 1999. The first foreign artist announced is Elvis Costello who played the first Festival in 1980 and acts appearing will vary from "nostalgia" artists who were popular when Sweetwaters was conceived, to younger artists who were conceived when Sweetwaters was popular.

At 45, Daniel Keighley's Sweetwaters years only number a total of five, so there's 40 others he has lived, both before Sweetwaters and after. After the 1983 Sweetwaters, Daniel Keighley moved to New York and then London and worked with expat NZ band Penknife Glides. In 1984 he

managed the Virgin UK band Pookah Makes 3 who were big in Germany. In 1985 Keighley worked with an unsigned band before moving to Australia in 1986 and co-founding the Mighty Boy indie record label (big act was Not Drowning Waving) and publishing the Sydney entertainment listings magazine *City Life*. Six months after arriving back in New Zealand in 1993, Keighley started managing the Mutton Birds and masterminded their near conquest of the UK and Europe. But first let's go back to 1979 as the Sweetwaters founders tried to make it happen.

Were they crazy times?

"Yes, they were wild times. We had a certain amount of capital but never enough to do the job properly. I recall booking Elvis Costello that first year, sleeping on people's lounge floors in London, catching a bus down to Chelsea to stand in the smell outside the Rockpool office to persuade them that Elvis should come here. I stood there for three days at one point after they'd refused me, because I just couldn't go back to New Zealand without having booked him. It was a pretty major effort persuading them."

Did you have a most difficult act to deal with over those years?

"Strangely enough, Roxy Music probably, it wasn't the act so much as the management and their booking agents. They were a fairly messy bunch in terms of the artificial aids and stimulants they used at the time. I recall them deciding that Roxy Music weren't going to go on stage until we had given them another \$10,000 that wasn't part of the contract. We ended having a tussle that night, that continued on even after they performed. There was a lot of odd situations that arose but that was the nastiest."

Roxy Music did deliver on stage.

"Fabulous. As I say it wasn't the band that were the problem but the management at the time."

What's your wish list of who you would like to see return?

Daniel Keighley is the name synonymous with the Sweetwaters Music Festivals of the early 80s that delivered line-ups of music makers that had city folk flock to the green, green grass of the Waikato. For some the Festival was at its best when Roxy Music or Split Enz or Eurythmics or Herbs with dancers or Cold Chisel delivered a spell-binding performance, and for some kids the annual Sweetwaters Festival was a coming of age ritual. For the *Sunday News* photographer Sweetwaters was the annual pair of tits shot.

"Elvis Costello, Annie Lennox but the likelihood is fairly minimal and I liked Richard Butler's Psychedelic Furs, he was a personal favourite. Simple Minds I enjoyed hugely, I'd like to have them back and obviously Talking Heads."

Did you always enjoy NZ music or was NZ music something you discovered when booking the festival?

"Probably the latter to a degree, I'd always had a certain amount of NZ music in my collection. I became a lot more eclectic musically as far as NZ music was concerned when I started to seek out what was there. I guess I hadn't discovered the South Island music as much as I could have until the festival arose, artists like Chris Knox, the whole Toy Love thing meant nothing to me until the Sweetwaters performance. They were actually on the first year."

In 1980 how did you find new artists like Toy Love or the Newmatics or did they find you?

"No I found them, through people who'd seen them. I made several trips to the South Island to see bands in 1979 leading up to the 1980 festival."

Split Enz played every year. Were they easy to deal with?

"Split Enz I think were easy to deal with but their manager Nathan Brenner at the time was a hard man, a very hard man to deal with. I remember once having to fly to New York to meet with [Melbourne-based] Nathan to discuss Split Enz, that's where he was going and he wouldn't talk to me unless I was there."

The five festivals over five years, that's actually a small part of your working life isn't it?

"It is, it's one of the more important parts for me in terms of my working history but you're right. I worked in the music industry for a few years before that and I moved on to work in it. Things like working in the States, the UK and Australia and working with the Muttonbirds were all equally important in my career."