

# birdman on a high

Radio Birdman's legend lives on, writes MARY BOLLING

**W**HAT'S the key to a cult status in Australian rock 'n' roll?

Just break up the band, says Deniz Tek.

Sydney band Radio Birdman rocked the Australian scene for four years from 1974 to 1978.

Influenced by Stooges and the Seattle punk scene, the band released one album, four 7-inch records and a live album, producing classic tracks that included *New Race*, *Burned My Eye* and *Aloha Steve and Danno*.

But Radio Birdman's legend has lasted much longer.

"It's probably because we had such a short lifespan that the band retains some sort of underground and subversive reputation," guitarist and founder Tek says.

"We had that sort of reputation in the old days and the band disappeared before we ever lost that.

"In a way, the best way to be popular is to disappear and come back later."

The legend lives on through new names such as Dallas Crane and the Casanovas, who wear the Birdman influence on their sleeves.

Others to declare allegiance include Silverchair and You Am I, who rocked the 1995 ARIA Awards stage with a cover of *New Race*.

Melbourne rockers the Specimens are also on the bandwagon and are supporting the re-formed Radio Birdman this weekend.

Singer Terry Opie and guitarist Tim Wold are both in their 20s and became fans well after the band broke up.

"A mate lent me *Radios Appear* when I was about 18 and everything they did was just so catchy and full



**Disappearing act:** Radio Birdman are back and flattered by the tributes, but what they really want is new music.

of energy," Opie says. "That's how a lot of people our age have got into them, just through word of mouth."

Since 1978, Tek has occasionally got the band back together for Melbourne gigs in the mid-90s and Big Day Out and Meredith Music Festival slots.

Though some fans have stuck with the band since the '70s, a new crop has sprung out of nowhere.

"We don't have any marketing. We don't go out and actively look for fans. We are just there," Tek says.

Much of the Radio Birdman

reputation is based on the band's tendency to go hard and crazy.

"On stage we used to totally destroy old televisions and we would do things with animal organs and meat. It was a sort of performance art," Tek says.

"In those days you could do things and shock people. It wasn't that difficult. Now there's not much left to throw off the stage or smash. All those barriers and taboos have been well and truly broken down.

"I think a lot of bands would prefer to be difficult to market and subversive, but how you do that any more, I'm not sure."

In the past few years, more than 50 bands from 10 countries have covered Radio Birdman songs. Many are compiled on a US three-volume album called *Flattery*.

Tek has listened to the tribute, but says he's more interested in new music.

"If other bands like the music and they want to do a version, that's great, but it's especially great if they come up with a completely original approach to it.

"I'd rather have these talented guys making new music rather than doing tribute albums. We desperately need new music."

The Specimens' Wold and Opie agree much of today's music borrows from the past, but say that fans and the industry demand new content.

"A lot of the Australian music scene is very derivative. There is so much recycled stuff out there," Wold says.

"We wear our influences on our sleeves, which can be an advantage, but we're also trying to add something. You've got to offer something new as well or you'll only attract fans in the short-term."

Last year, the Specimens released their second album *The Quick and the Dead* since forming in 2001. The boys are optimistic about the local music scene.

"The good thing about Melbourne is that, for the really good

**WE'D STILL LIKE TO CAUSE TROUBLE**

bands from here, there's not enough money in the industry to muck them up. I reckon that's why Aussie bands have always been really raw because there's less to corrupt them."

As for the modern-day Radio Birdman, they plan to remain, as always, uncorrupted.

Tek is playing shows with original band members Rob Younger, Chris Masuak and Pip Hoyle. Jim Dickson, the band's bassist since 2002, and You Am I drummer Rusty Hopkinson complete the line-up.

Tek says shows will involve new songs as well as plenty of familiar tunes. But don't expect the antics.

"We just get on with the music. And of course what seems really cool when you're 22 doesn't seem that cool when you're 52. Now we're happy to just play."

**Radio Birdman, Corner Hotel, Sat, \$37.50+bf, venue 9427 9198.**

## why akon's trouble is all talent now

CYCLONE WEHNER

**H**IP hop singer Akon is an unlikely candidate for pop star. At seven Akon, born Aliaune Thiam, migrated to the US from Senegal with his family but, feeling displaced in adolescence, he befriended gang members and fell into crime.

Akon spent three years in jail for stealing luxury cars, trading some to established names in the music business. He used the time in jail to plan his own career in entertainment.

"I tried to overcome this whole system, to find ways to do what I needed to do without any of it affecting me," Akon says.

He was determined he wanted a different life to that of a professional criminal.

"Everybody who comes out plans not to go back in. Nobody wants to go back to jail.

"It's just that a lot of times when you come out, there are no opportunities for ex-convicts.



**Reformed:** Akon served three years for car theft.

"You come out with a positive attitude and you want to switch your life around, but nobody is willing to give you the opportunity because you're a convicted felon.

"So you're forced to go back into the streets

just to do what you normally do for money, because you have to pay the bills every month.

"That's why a lot of people come out and they're going right back in because there's nothing else left out there for them.

"I was just lucky to have talent. Other than that, I would have been stuck, too."

This year the multi-faceted Akon — he sings, writes and produces — has not only demonstrated he's reformed but he's also achieved a childhood dream.

He has broken through with the hit *Lonely*. He now hopes to inspire others with his debut, *Trouble*, revealing his "dark secrets".

Akon is following his musical father, a noted percussionist. His concerned parents are proud of his turn-around.

"They're just happy to see me doing something positive," he says.

Akon connected with the Fugees as a high

school student but, being in jail, missed their becoming an urban-pop phenomenon. He remains on friendly terms.

"I was an original member of the Refugee Camp," he says.

"After high school I went to college to play basketball because I got a scholarship to go to Atlanta and, going away, they signed with Columbia and continued to do the full Fugees project and, shortly after that, I got locked up.

"So the whole time they were out, moving around and getting successful, I was in prison (laughs).

"The three years I was gone they were just getting bigger. They ended up selling close to 30 million records. As I was coming out, they were on the verge of breaking up, so we really couldn't continue where we left off. I just continued to do my own thing."

**Trouble (Universal) out now**