

Lighthouse Keepers

The **Lighthouse Keepers**, initially the **Light-Housekeepers**, were an Australian country and indie pop band formed in 1981 in Canberra. In November 1984 the group issued their debut studio album, *Tales of the Unexpected*, and a single, "Ocean Liner". In 1985 the band toured the United Kingdom supporting Hot label mates, The Triffids. The Lighthouse Keepers combined a "loosely rehearsed, casual ethos" with humour, punk attitudes and pure pop song craft. The ensemble disbanded in 1986, releasing a compilation album, *Imploding*, in November that year. According to rock music historian, Ian McFarlane, their "tasteful, jangly brand of country-tinged folk rock was at odds with prevailing trends on Sydney's early 1980s, Detroit-besotted independent scene. The band nevertheless issued a number of albums and singles, and always lived up to audience expectations".

Formation

The Lighthouse Keepers (initially known as The Light-Housekeepers) founders Greg Appel on acoustic guitar, bass, keyboards and vocals, and Stephen O'Neil on drums, bass, guitar and saxophone were members of Canberra-based groups The Grant Brothers and Guthugga Pipeline. The pair were joined by Juliet Ward on vocals, bass guitar and keyboards as Tex Truck and the Semis, for a University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) student talent quest. In 1981 augmented by Michael "Blue" Dalton on slide guitar, dobro, bass guitar and harmonica they formed The Lighthouse Keepers. Dalton was a vintage music enthusiast who contributed a country blues style to arrangements as a foil to multi-instrumentalist O'Neil's nifty and melodic bass, drums, guitar and C melody sax playing, further complementing the rich timbre and interpretive abilities of vocalist Ward, with Appel's understated but skillfully rendered jangling Maton brand 12 string guitar. All members rotated to bass playing duties both on stage and also in the studio to facilitate various song arrangements.

Musical influences

The Lighthouse Keepers' repertoire was initially steeped in country, blues, folk, pop and jazz which later infused Appel's melodic and lyrically engaging songs melded with emotionally charged vocals by Ward. Along with subtle somewhat larrikin humour, stories dealing with suburban teenage angst and interpersonal relationships, were bitter sweet love songs, a couple of instrumental contributions from O'Neil and Appel, plus a sprinkling of cover versions highlighting their musical influences, for example, 'St James Infirmary Blues' and 'Big Noise from Winnetka'. Other diverse influences included Australian country musician, Chad Morgan, American C&W songs such as 'A Dear John Letter' and Sun Records era rockabilly artists including early Narvel Felts, as well as the newly emerging and more contemporary British American and Australian independent bands of the time.

Career highlights

The Lighthouse Keepers received airplay through the alternative radio stations 2SER, 2JJJ and similar community radio networks interstate. They garnered glowing reviews in the British music journals, *NME* and *Sounds*. They supported international artists touring Australia such as Jonathan Richman and John Cooper Clarke (1983) and The Violent Femmes, as well as the Brisbane band The Go-Betweens (1984). They built up a loyal following whilst performing regularly along the

Australian east coast with occasional treks westwards across the Nullabor Plain to Perth. The Lighthouse Keepers undertook a low key tour of Europe in 1985, which included an outdoor festival in Rotterdam headlined by The Triffids and The Woodentops, as well as gigs in Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Austria, returning to England to support The Triffids at Leeds University, the Clarendon Hammersmith and other shows in and around London.

Imploding (1986)

Early in 1986 The Lighthouse Keepers returned to Australia and disbanded after a career including over 350 performances. On 28 March they held a farewell show at the Graphics Arts Club, Chippendale. In November, Waterfront Records released their compilation album, 'Imploding'. The runout groove on side-B read "*Would the last person to leave please turn-out the lighthouse*".

Reunions

Since disbanding, The Lighthouse Keepers have reunited sporadically to play private parties, launch their own 2x CD compilation, "Lipsnipegroin", at the Annandale Hotel in Sydney (1992) and help launch the 2x CD various artists compilation, 'Tales from the Australian Underground' at the Metro in Sydney (2003). ghts of the final leg of a Laughing Clowns reformation tour at the Basement in Sydney (2009).

In August 2011, a further compilation of The Lighthouse Keepers' material "ode to nothing" was issued as a 15-track remastered "best of" CD. They were joined by Perth-based drummer Hugh Veldon for a well attended and reviewed live show at the Sandringham Hotel Sydney September (2011) followed by a string of suburban gigs during January and February 2012 in Melbourne, Canberra with the final performance in Sydney at Marrickville. Some of these shows featured ex-Widdershins left handed drummer Peter Timmerman as well as original drummer Steven Williams returning to reprise his role on some songs with extra excitement generated when he and Timmerman played drums simultaneously. The shows were unique in featuring a "guest speaker" each night.

Adapting to the new media LHK, old fans, and an emerging modern audience interacted via social network services which saw releases of additional self-produced DIY video clips^[39] from the band, and had the unexpected reciprocal benefit of generating a number of videos, captured by audience members of live performances from the reunion tour, using a variety of devices ranging from hand held mobile phones and cameras to digital video recorders and then uploaded to YouTube.

Members

- Greg Appel – acoustic 12-string guitar, bass guitar, keyboards, vocals (1981–2012)
- Stephen O'Neil – drums, bass guitar, guitar, saxophone (1981–2012)
- Juliet "Jet" Ward – vocals, bass guitar, keyboards (1981–2012)
- Michael "Blue" Dalton – slide guitar, dobro, bass guitar, harmonica (1981–2012)
- Steven Williams – drums (1983–2012)
- Hugh Veldon – drums (2011)
- Peter Timmerman – drums (2012)