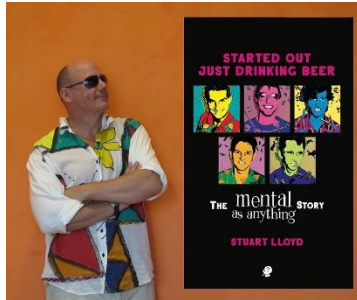


Mental As Anything Book

Written by P.G Fitzgerald

Originally in the July 2024 Songsmith

When I was in Cronulla for the June long weekend (Before I found out I had CoVid!) Jocelin and I popped into The Best Little Bookshop In Town as it has mineral specimens and a good selection of books.



One book I brought was “*Started Out Just Drinking Beer: The Mental As Anything Story*” by Stuart Lloyd. The author’s name did ring a bell, but I didn’t think anything of it at first.

After the blitzkrieg of CoVid, Influenza A and Mycoplasma Pneumonia I’d decided to have a more restful holiday. One of the things I did, apart from playing a number of gigs, mixing my new album, feeding wombats & quokkas, attend a number of birthday parties, etc, etc was to start reading the Mental As Anything book.

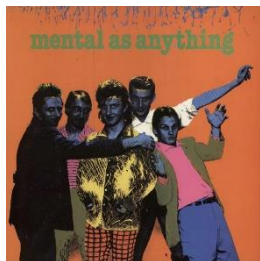
The first part whizzed me back to either 1977, or 1978, when we had school dance and one of the blokes invited some mates of his to play at the dance. It wasn’t a big thing, and they were mates, with the band playing covers. Not sure if they had their name they were known by then, yet.

My year was pretty wild, with students absconding from school to go to the pub, etc. Even the quiet ones were on the lam so to speak. The school wouldn’t let us have a Year 12 Formal at school in 1978, so we had to have one after we’d left school after the HSC. It was held at the Randwick Racecourse and of course we got the band we liked from our school dance, who’d become Mental As Anything.

I have lots of memories from that Formal, including me on guitar in the band’s break using the Mental’s amp, playing mainly covers, although my colleagues got me to play “*Shit City*” one of the first songs I’d written on guitar – they still ask about that song at our Old Boy’s Reunions, even the one we had last year for our 45th! The other memory was walking into the Gents to see all the surfers puffing on the green with the Mentals.

Move forward a few months and I was at Sydney University in 1979, at St John’s College, and a few of my mates from school were also at the college. We’d heard that the Mentals were playing at the Civic Hotel, so we headed there to support them. The book seemed to say that their Civic gigs were always packed, but the night we went we were the only ones there! Greedy even shouted us a beer for coming along and supporting the band.

Then the band released the single “*The Nips Are Getting Bigger*” in July 1979 and they took off into the stratosphere. I remember going to yet another B & S (Bachelors & Spinsters, enormous country parties for the under 25s, which had bands, thousands of people and unlimited alcohol – I used to go to many!) and someone had the radio on and “*The Nips Are Getting Bigger*” came on and someone said “Yeap, that’s Mental As Anything’s new single.”



Then in November of 1979 they put out their album “*Get Wet*” and it was played with the plethora of Ozrock issuing out of the college rooms, including The Angels, Cold Chisel, Radiators, etc, etc. The nearby pubs like The Grove and The Student Prince had their juke boxes worn out playing all the great Ozrock of the day, including Mental As Anything’s material.

My last big memory of Mental As Anything was they were one of the first bands to play on the Saturday morning of the 1983 Narara Rock Concert. We had a tent right at the front of the hill overlooking the stage and we started laughing when we realised Greedy had picked up the wrong harmonica for I think it was “*The Nips...*” as it was so out of tune.

Then songs like “*Live It Up*” sent them international, being a big hit in the US, UK, etc. It returned to the charts in 2020 as No.1 on the iTunes hits chart! The band had gone by then as Greedy, the sole remaining member left, had passed away at 63 in 2019.

From 1977 to 2000, the original line up of Mental As Anything was like a comfortable jacket, always reliable for a good time. They kept releasing many hits, I think 26 big ones – in comparison INXS only released 17!

So, from my youthful memories I was keen to read the book, and I will do an article in the future on the songwriters in the band. However, reading the back of the book I was startled to read about Stuart Lloyd: “Stuart Lloyd had interviewed the likes of Paul Kelly, Bic Runga and REM, on songwriting. His travel and music features have appeared in publications such as *Variety* (US), *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Songsmith...*” WTF, I thought, they must mean something else then I remembered why Stuart Lloyd’s name triggered a memory – he used to be a member of the Society and contributed articles for our Society magazine, *The Songsmith*. “This is his 19th non-fiction book, and *The Telegraph* (UK) described him as ‘The Perfect Storyteller’” I checked online just in case, and we are the only publication so the Society thanks Stuart for remembering us.



Two of the members of the band, Reg Mombassa and his brother Peter O’Doherty are still playing around the traps in the band Dog Trumpet, which is playing at Camelot Lounge (19 Marrickville Rd, Marrickville) on Friday the 18th of October. I’ve got a number of their albums after catching them one year at the Byron Bluesfest and I’ve seen them a number of times at the Camelot Lounge.

