

diviner of reality

I'm probably not the first one to make this comparison but for a journalist like myself, sitting in on a Pat Drummond show is a lot like reading a newspaper – there's stories on people, issues, a comic section and I can even get pictures materialising in my mind as he performs.

These are the marks of a master songwriter.

From playing in the folk scene in the '60s, Pat moved to playing solo in the emerging Sydney pub scene of the '70s and built up a tremendous personal following which continued into the '80s. He released his first album in 1979 and has followed up with over a dozen LP's, singles and CDs in the ensuing years.

Neither a country or city performer in the traditional sense, Pat Drummond's appeal seems to cross these sorts of petty barriers fairly easily.

The album that brought him to my attention was 'Tales From The Local Rag' in 1990 (which I still have in its vinyl incarnation) and it was around then that Pat adopted the on-stage persona of an old-time newspaperman (complete with a "PRESS" card in his hatband). That was a fitting touch that highlighted the narrative nature of many of his songs.

A track on that album, 'The Sao Song' ("Can you fit a Sao/ In your gob in one go?") was probably the track which first brought Pat Drummond to national prominence. I know we played it for at least six months on Perth radio and it was catchy enough to make airplay lists all over the country, and thoughtful enough to impress critics of the ilk of Philip Adams and Bruce Elder, who said of Pat: "... (he) is an excellent singer and writer of narrative songs; a 'dirty realism' short story writer who has happened to find his natural mode of expression in songs that hover between folk and country with just a hint of rock 'n' roll."

When sitting and talking to Pat be aware that whatever

you say may be used in a song at some stage. If you tell him a story, it may turn up on an album. Pat cannot help himself, he is a diviner of reality and that reality is the grist for his songwriting mill.

He is first and foremost a communicator who writes songs about characters that are instantly recognisable. Characters whose experiences reflect the lives of just about every Australian, from the sophisticated city-dwellers of the Double Bay social set to the no-nonsense bush people of The Outback.

Perhaps it's this common touch, this sense of what it is to be an Australian which runs through all his work, which makes Pat's songs so accessible. He is, at the same time, a performer with an innate sense of fun and an astonishing capacity to entertain and involve an audience, and a songwriter, whose passionate commitment to this country and its people, has produced songs which are often more like one-act plays, concise and self contained; detailed social snapshots of ordinary Australians caught in the act of living.

There is a passion in Pat that manifests best when he is performing and he will keep you enthralled for the entire show. If it's not his masterful songs, it's the often funny introductions – some of which have been known to run longer than the song itself.

Thirty years of writing and performing have honed his skills to such a degree that Pat is a 'must see' act and he performs at folk festivals, country festivals, arts festivals, pubs, clubs and community concerts. He draws his fans from people of very different ages and social backgrounds. His songs, which deal with fundamental human values like integrity, honesty, fortitude, independence, and enterprise are often funny, sometimes angry, but always hopeful and they are mirrors in which his audiences will see at least a little of themselves.

Although well known for his comic repertoire including 'The Sao Song', 'The Spider Song' and 'The Toilet Paper Linedance', it has been the 'power punch' lyric writing in songs such as 'Who Is That Refugee', '10,000 Miles Away', 'The Blessing', 'Vertelli's Wire', 'Margaret and Joe' and 'Good Morning Josie' which has so profoundly impressed both the critics and his peers in recent years.

Add all of that to lots of irresistible audience participation songs like '40 into 24', 'Marilyn Monroe was a size 14' and 'If I Die Before Keith Richards I'll Be Pissed Off To The Max', you have a show that leaves people humming for weeks after it's over.

Fellow songwriter Eric Bogle once summed Pat up as "an original and witty songwriter. His deft lyrical and melodic touch, allied to his clear-eyed yet compassionate view of the human condition ensures that his songs have a quality that sets them apart from, and above, most other songs you will hear. He plays a mean guitar and sings not too badly as well."

He has won a swag of awards for his recordings and songwriting and spends many days each year on the road. International tours to New Zealand and Japan, representing Australia, and a national tour with England's premier songwriter Ralph McTell, have further enhanced his reputation as a formidable writer and entertainer.

His latest album, a double CD set called 'The Chess Set' is a major work that seems to view Australia from very different perspectives.

"I suppose more than anything 'The Chess Set' tries to look very seriously at the big divisions that have now developed among Australians as we struggle to find a set of ideals that will allow us to



face this new and rather frightening century with some degree of confidence," Pat said. "On another and more personal level it explores the gulf between anger and acceptance that seems to mark so much of the debate."

For the most comprehensive evaluation of what 'The Chess Set' is about, there is no better place to go than Pat's own website, www.patdrummond.net, where you will find an interactive download.

On top of being a songwriter and performer, Pat also runs, along with his wife, an independent record company – Shoestring Records – that is

just 3,000 short of selling 100,000 units. By Australian standards this is a major milestone and one Pat is very proud of.

A major part of those sales has come from the very popular "Naked Poets" series, but many a Pat Drummond album is definitely included.

Pat has also served as The Entertainment Director for the Galston Country Music Festival, Sydney's Biggest Country Music Festival, since its inception. The festival is held in September.

You can see Pat tomorrow (Friday) at The Pub on Gunnedah Road. The show starts at 8pm, and I recommend that you get there early.

- Jon Wolfe

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