

# Thorpie's Vision For Support Act



**BILLY THORPE WAS MORE THAN JUST A GREAT ARTIST - HE WAS A HUMANITARIAN. SEVERAL MONTHS AGO BILLY WROTE TO THE SAL BOARD AS SET OUT BELOW**

Dear Meryl and Jim,

As you know I have been planning an idea for an annual 'super benefit' to raise funds for SAL. This would ideally take place around Christmas and be of the same scale at LWTTT.

SAL is the obvious organization to be involved with the "super benefit" and quite frankly I have never considered doing it with anyone else. And I certainly don't want to go it alone. I have never considered the big benefit as means to raise funds to be dispersed at my sole discretion and it goes without saying that a healthy percentage of whatever is raised can go into the general SAL fund.

One of my main reasons for the benefit idea is to help fill SAL's coffers with some serious funds ASAP that can both elevate SAL and its effectiveness as an organization and be used to give applicants a more significant amount if money when needed. It was partially my experience with

SAL to get Lobby some emergency funds prior to his benefit when he was destitute and about to be evicted and seeing him allocated \$3K that made me realise the need for a much larger fund that is able to deliver sufficient funds to keep people going for an extended time if necessary. And I mean no disrespect about the \$3K donation. I have total respect and admiration for what you have been doing with SAL and for the fact that you set it up in the first place. And of course every penny helps when you are in need. But the fact remains that without the benefit Lobby would be in serious trouble now. Combined with the facts that there are going to be plenty more Lobby and Petes in the not too distant future and the public will soon grow weary of fund raisers for old musicians, I felt something needed to be done now that affords more meaningful grants to those who genuinely need it. Particular terminal applicants. And that takes real money. Hence the idea of a super benefit that produces a super SAL fund and negates the necessity of doing a benefit every time one of our musical brothers or sisters goes down.

The long term idea of a Musicians Home is just that at the moment. An idea. And one I believe needs to be examined from every angle before even committing to going down that road. There are so many variables. There's much thinking needs to be done and its a way off yet. But some of the money raised at the super benefit can go towards exploring it in a professional and effective way and in a manner that gets the attention of the kind of business players and politicians it would need to get something of that size up and running. The super benefit however can be in 2007 and with a bit of luck SAL could be sitting on some serious money by this time next year. The bank interest alone on a \$ 1mill is enough to keep several people going. And it could be more than \$ 1mill and we can do better than bank interest.

A large fund will change SAL, its operation and effectiveness dramatically. As we discussed, if the benefit was to be super successful, there may even be a need for an office/part time/full time salaried person (persons) to facilitate a large fund. I don't know. I'm just guessing because I haven't been down this road before. But if the benefit is successful things will definitely change at SAL and I would very much like to participate in those changes as a voting board member. Not as a Patron. And I would also like to explore your suggestion of setting up a Billy Thorpe trust fund under the SAL umbrella if for no other reason than as the brand name on which to hang the super benefit.

Meryl, your kind offer of the SAL chairmanship was somewhat overwhelming. I am both flattered and honoured but it isn't necessary. I wouldn't even know where to start. Just a say on the board will be fine. I am sure I will need both your and Jim's council, experience and guidance in the near future. I look forward to a meeting with you, Michael and Amanda prior to meeting with the SAL board. See you at Parliament house tomorrow at 12 noon.

Kind regards

Billy Thorpe



Billy Thorpe: Appointed SAL Director 19 Feb 2007

## **HELP US MAKE THIS DREAM COME TRUE**

The SAL Board is Meryl Gross (Chair), Michael Chugg AM, Alex Coroneos, Brett Cottle, Jane English, Sally Howland, Michael McMartin, Geoff Rudd, Billy Thorpe, Jim White, Lynne Small (Secretary)  
Patron: Renee Geyer

**Contributions can be made as follows:** Bank: St George Banking Corporation  
Account Name: Moneypenny Business & Taxation Services P/L Trust Account - Billy Thorpe  
BSB: 112-879 | A/C: 455015743

## Founding Members

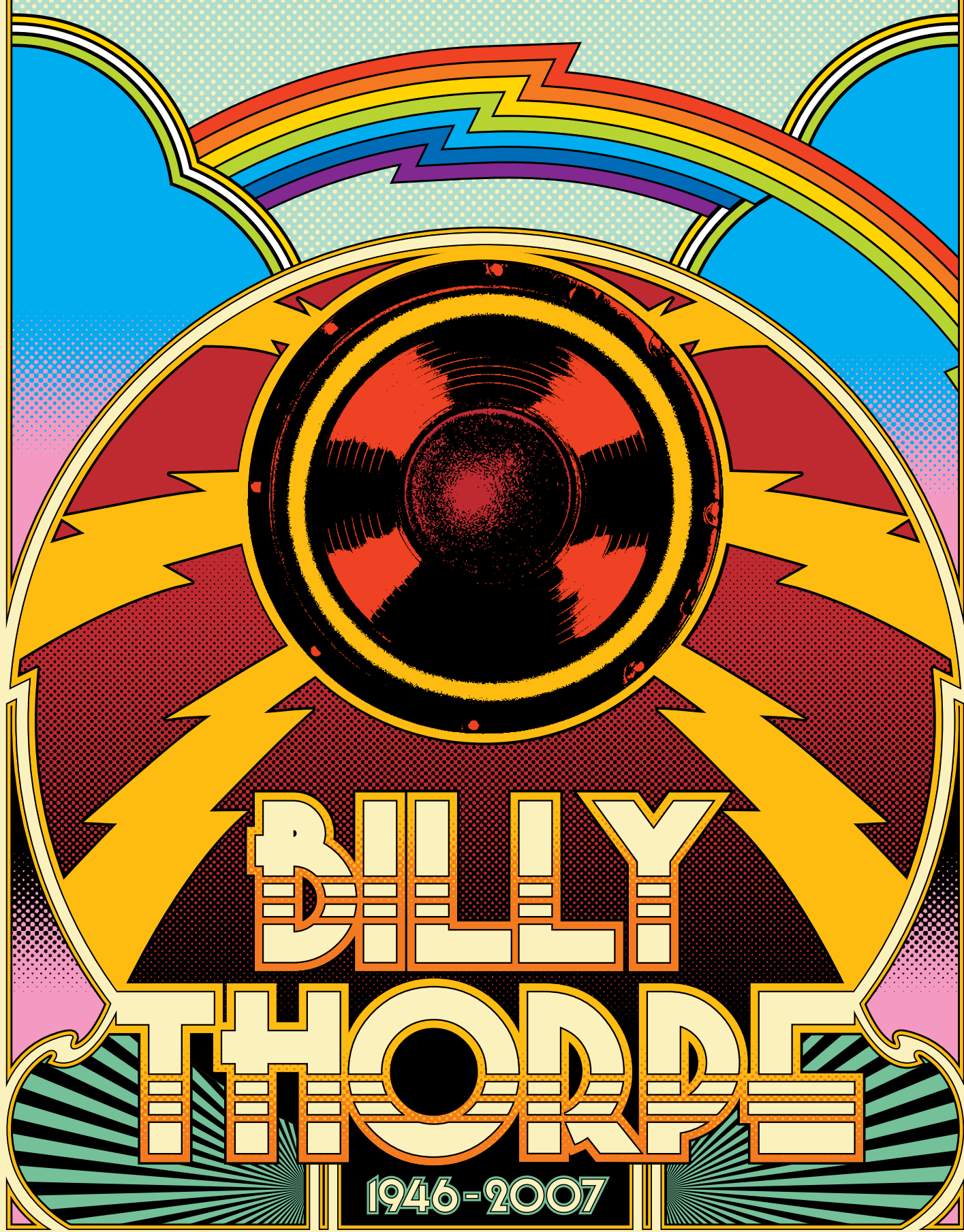
Solicitors:  
Tresscox



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Billy Thorpe



1946-2007


**OUR EARS ARE STILL RINGING**

**Festival.**

  
WARNER MUSIC  
AUSTRALIA



**RHINO**



"I occasionally find myself on stage playing this thing and looking at the crowd thinking, 'What is this?' I've met people that were conceived at my shows. At Byron I met two people and their families, and they were proud as punch that they were conceived during Most People I Know Think That I'm Crazy, one at Sunbury, one somewhere else. People that have memories of that and Over The Rainbow and different things of mine, where they've played them at funerals, where they've met their husbands and their wives. I think songs are references to a time and place that stick with people."

*Billy Thorpe on  
Most People I Know Think That I'm Crazy*

"I'm in the middle of something I've been writing ... since a trip to Morocco for my wife's 50th birthday. I wrote this musical piece called Tangier. With this tuning I'd never used before. It's an hour and a half suite for voice, acoustic guitar and orchestra. And it's f\*\*king great. It's Children of the Sun twenty years later. I'll do it here, hopefully with the Sydney Symphony and some Moroccan players and some Arabic players, some dancers. So I've just found that what I enjoy doing is writing musical works. Rather than having to stuff lyrics down the throat of every piece of music that comes along. Rather than having to stuff a back beat and a rhythm section down the throat of every piece of music. Some pieces of music and melodies are meant to stand alone, are meant to be orchestrated, are instrumental. I've been doing nothing but writing. I'm halfway through a third book as well.

What seems to happen is when I sit down to write a book, the musical muse arrives, and when I sit down to write music the book muse arrives. For the first time my creative life is in line with where I've known my life is for a long time but either wasn't mature enough or never had the desire to align them. The real me hasn't been seen or heard yet. With this album quite a lot of it will be heard for the very first time."

*Billy Thorpe on the Tangier album project*

*\* from Songwriters Speak: conversations about creating music by Debbie Kruger*

# Remembering a legend...

Words by Debbie Kruger

Not since the passing of Johnny O'Keefe has the loss of an Australian music figure engendered such a massive wave of grief, within and beyond the music industry. "This is so intense," one industry commentator said at the end of a long day of media interviews. "It's bigger than Michael Hutchence. It's bigger than Shirley Strachan. This is just SO BIG."

Big because Billy Thorpe was so genuine. Dead at age 60 from a heart attack last Wednesday, February 28, Thorpe wasn't a celebrity in the sense of today's tabloid-frenzied celebrity culture. But he was celebrated – for his genuine artistry, for his genuine prowess as a singer and musician, for his genuine humanity. And for his genuine volume. As the industry tributes flooded in, themes were repeated throughout. His aura. His incredible singing voice. His friendship. His love of family. His generosity. And his loudness.

"Volume is a wonderful tool," Thorpe said in the book *Songwriters Speak*. "Volume is a form of expression. The louder the loud, the quieter the silence. It's a dynamic. It's not just bombast for the sake of being loud. In the hands of the wrong people it's a nightmare. And in the hands of the right people and an expert – and I am an expert – it's a wonderful thing. Sound is electrical energy; it charges the air. It creates different patterns in the air, and different wave patterns in the brain. People used to come to Aztec shows to get a feed of that energy."

That Thorpe could sustain that energy over a 45-year career and harness it for so many projects, even in the midst of middle age when others of his vintage might be slowing down, was almost taken for granted by his peers. Most people he knew thought he was healthy. While he was working tirelessly on benefit concerts for cancer-stricken Aztec member Lobby Loyde and Rose Tattoo's Pete Wells, the clock was already ticking. Wells succumbed to his illness last year, Loyde is still hanging on, and nobody can quite believe that Thorpe has gone before him. But like the full-on force that he was, Thorpe was working to the end – an acoustic concert tour, a new acoustic album, his Moroccan album project and his charitable work.

His concern for the welfare of fellow musicians led him to join the board of Support Act Limited. At the inaugural "Music in the House" luncheon held at NSW Parliament House last October, Thorpe outlined his vision to raise a million dollars to ensure SAL could continue to assist the "family" of musicians over the coming years in a meaningful way. SAL's Meryl Gross talks of Thorpe's commitment to this cause in her tribute in these pages and a letter Thorpe wrote to SAL outlining his vision is also published in this issue of TMN.

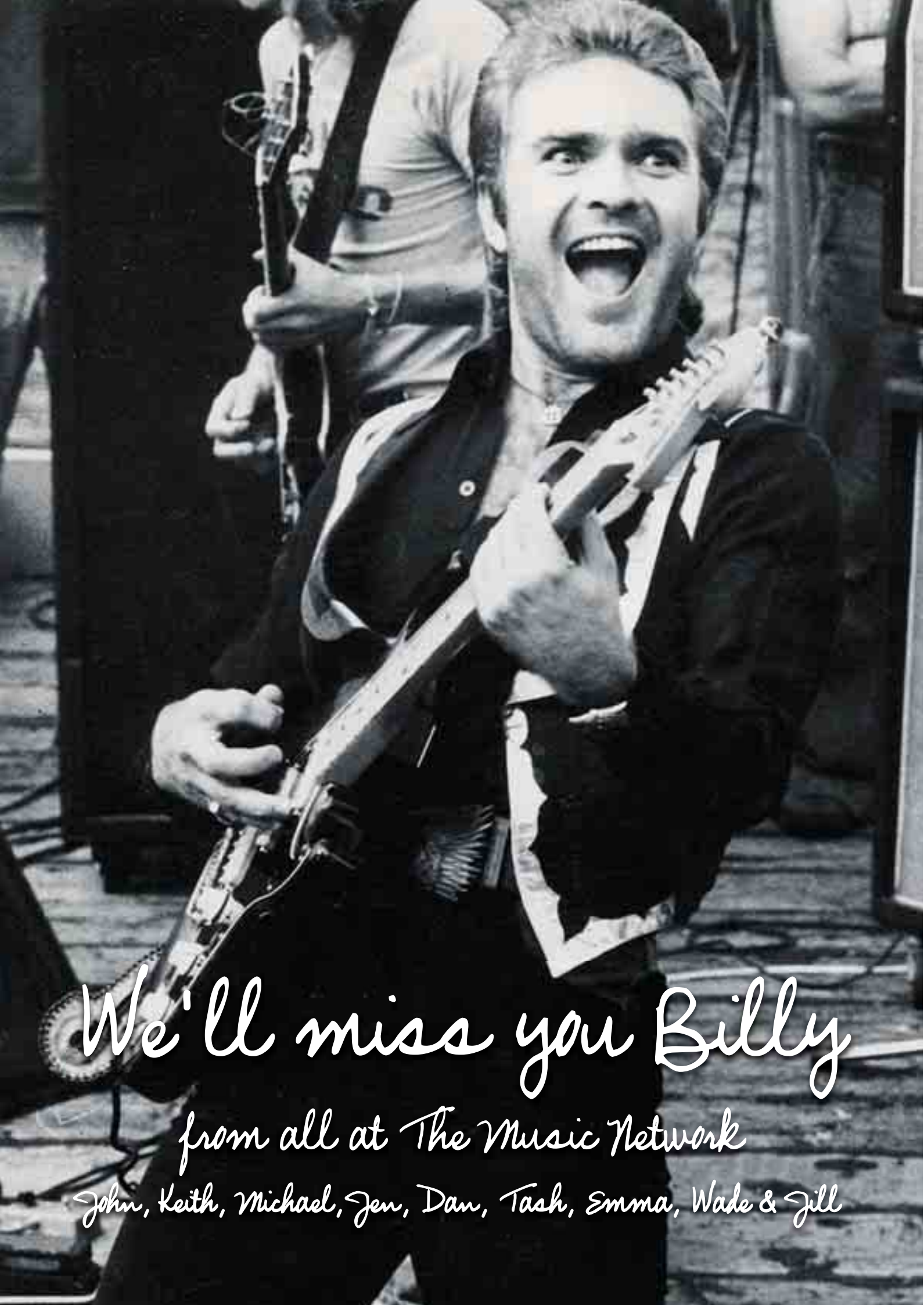
Thorpe was also involved with Corporate Countdown in 2005, an incorporated, philanthropic initiative to connect the corporate community, through music and entertainment, with charitable organisations that need it most. And he was often a riveting performing presence at the annual Golden Stave lunches that are overseen by his manager and long-time close friend, Michael Chugg.

That the Prime Minister, John Howard, felt moved to comment on Thorpe's passing was no less than such a cultural icon deserved. That the mainstream news media placed Thorpe's death at the top of all TV and radio bulletins and on the front pages of newspapers the following day was a fitting testament to a man who entertained and influenced generations over five decades. The press accounts detailed his music career including chart hits, Beatlemania-like crowds, memorable gigs at Sunbury and the Myer Music Bowl, and his transformation into contemporary adult artist, screen composer and songwriter-for-hire in the US before returning to Australia, staging the Long Way To The Top tour and reinvigorating the careers of his contemporaries. They mentioned his two best-selling memoirs and his upcoming album releases. And they fittingly described the brash, loveable music larrikin whose legacy will never be forgotten.

This we all knew. Yes, he left a huge imprint on Australia's cultural landscape, and subsequent Australian rockers have walked and played in his path. Yes, he was an Australian music legend and his passing is the end of an era. And yes, most people did think he was crazy. That is all reiterated in these pages but what you will also see is the intimate relationship Billy Thorpe had with his beloved music industry. His friends and colleagues in Australia and overseas sent reams of tributes, spoke at length over the phone – some didn't seem to want to get off the phone – and some cried as they shared their Thorpe stories. Here is a taste of the Billy Thorpe the industry knew and loved.



**Special thanks to the Glenn A. Baker Archive, Bob King, David Anderson Photography, CMAA and Peter Carrette for generously providing their treasured photographs for this tribute, and to all those who gave their time to contribute their precious memories.**



*We'll miss you Billy*

*from all at The Music Network*

*John, Keith, Michael, Jen, Dan, Tash, Emma, Wade & Jill*



## Michael Chugg, Chugg Entertainment

His reputation always preceded him as loudly as his amps turned up to 11. He gave 110 per cent in everything he did. His performance, his love of his family, his support of his fellow musicians was both passionate and selfless – he was the first one to put up his hand when anybody else was in trouble. It was the initiatives he took as a young musician, moving forward with his career, that laid the pathway for Australian rock acts such as Cold Chisel, AC/DC and The Oils. A great Australian has passed away today and no one will ever stand up again like my good friend, Billy Thorpe.

## Col Joye

I knew Thorpie since 1964 and he was always full of confidence, which sometimes could be construed as being brash or arrogant, but that was just part of his persona. He played very good guitar, harmonica, sung well, performed well and he just had that aura about him when he walked out on stage that he was going to win. And he was the boss.

We wouldn't see each other for a long time and then we'd meet again and it'd be like yesterday. It's a crazy kinship in this industry. With Long Way To The Top, early in the piece we decided we'd go to bed by 2am but we never made it, and it'd always be he and I and some stragglers.

In his 60 years he lived 160. He was the loudest guitar player I ever heard. He just loved what he did and he'd be so cranky at himself up there in heaven, because he had so many things that he wanted to do. It was the only way Billy Thorpe could have gone – suddenly, quickly without warning. But the boss upstairs obviously wanted somebody to play louder than anyone else. Only Billy could play louder than thunder.

## Michael and Sue Gudinski

Billy Thorpe was a great talent and a legend in the music industry. He built the road that Australian rock & roll drives on and has been an inspiration for our younger musicians and a major supporter of his peers – both on and off stage.

Billy Thorpe & The Aztecs performed some of the best (and loudest!) concerts that this country has ever seen. His performances at Sunbury and his awesome Myer Music Bowl show were history-making.

Spending time with Billy was always entertaining – his storytelling, sense of humour and his passion for life were so much a part of who he was.

We were very shocked and saddened by this morning's news and our hearts go out to Lynn and his daughters – Australia has lost a true "gentleman".

## Michael Browning, Michael Browning Management/former manager

I was Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs' manager in the early 70s (Most People Think That I'm Crazy Sunbury period). In the early '70s Billy turned up in Melbourne as a blues based rock trio. He was determined to shake of the pop tag and was prepared to start from scratch; I was in awe of him and his strength of commitment. We teamed up and put together a residency in the Melbourne beer barns (Village Green etc) as well as some city clubs I was running (Sebastian's and Berties). Combining his amazing sense of showmanship with his newly acquired rock guitar playing at levels never before heard, he and the Aztecs soon became Australia's biggest band, creating what became known as the Australian pub rock scene. A record deal was signed with Havoc Records (an independent Melbourne company) and recordings soon followed including Live at the Melbourne Town Hall, Live at Sunbury and Most People I Know Think That I'm Crazy, all of which were highly successful. Witnessing Billy at the now legendary Myer Music Bowl gig with over 200,000 people was probably the most amazing thing I have experienced. Billy could work a crowd like no one before or since.

His quintessential Australian sound and approach paved the way for AC/DC, Rose Tattoo and Cold Chisel and more recently Jet. None of whom, however, have managed to surpass his volume level. His settings were the original 11.

## Robert Raymond, former manager

To me Billy Thorpe was like a comet, regularly invading other people's space but continuously shining in the night as he came around regularly. He was always a professional performer who will no doubt be missed but to disappear as suddenly as he has will leave quite a hole in the Rock'nRoll ozone [sic]. Billy will remain burned into my memory, while at this moment in time my sympathies go to Gook (Lynn), his stoic wife, and their two lovely daughters, Rusty and Lauren. All three were for a good part of my own life... family. Rock on somewhere, Billy...

## Olivia Newton-John

Billy Thorpe was a very special man – unique both as a person and a performer.

He was always full of positive energy, humour, ideas and stories, and always excited about life – Billy was such a talented musician and composer – and along with rock legend Johnny O'Keefe I think Billy was the foremost original sounding and groundbreaking rock singer in Australian history. His version of Somewhere Over The Rainbow is a classic.

His presence on stage was charismatic – as my sister Rona describes, "He was like a wild stallion on stage." Yes indeed he was strong, powerful, sexy and wild – and funny – he always had a great and amusing story to tell.

I am very fortunate to have known Billy and to have had the opportunity to sing and perform with him. I will miss him very much.



## John Farrar, songwriter/producer, LA

Billy was a crazy, extremely talented loveable ball of energy, a rock solid musician and a devoted family man who jammed a really big life into his 60 years. I will always remember his laughter, his intensity and passion for music and will truly miss his friendship.

## Steve and Lizzie Kipner

Thorpie lived his music and life with the Volume on 11. Now there's a permanent big, empty hole that Billy filled when he and Lynn showed up in LA with his big smile and ready for whatever. It's strangely poetic (sad and appropriate) to know our last time together we were celebrating Johnny Farrar's birthday – Billy's electricity turned the Farrars' living room into an auditorium stage where we jammed and sang into the wee hours. We go back a loooong way – an acquaintance in the 60s, friends in the 70s. I sang backgrounds on his album Children of the Sun. Billy made you feel that age and time in no way limited the desire and hunger you need to have to make music your life. He made us expats proud to be part of the Gum-Leaf Mafia (Australian musicians who have lived in America at some point).

Billy Thorpe has left an unparalleled legacy and an amazing family – Lynn, Rusty and Lauren. Miss you, Billie.

## Glenn Shorrock

Richard Wilkins called me with the bad news from LA and now I say to people, it's a strange way to wake up but at least I woke up – and Billy didn't. If anybody deserved the much-used word "legend" it certainly was him. He had a charisma about him, both professionally and personally; he was larger than life. Occasionally we used to lock horns but it was never anything serious, just light-hearted banter. Billy would never be upstaged, he was always #1!

We won't forget him in a while, it will take a while to get over the shock but then we will start celebrating his life.

## Brian Cadd

I seem to always have been aware of Billy. When I first made serious attempts to learn to play rock & roll and join bands, Billy was already on TV and in the charts. All through my time with THE GROOP and AXIOM there was Billy, and we became friends.

Then in the mid 70s I moved to LA... and there was Billy right there again! And both of us spent twenty years there, moving in and out of each other's lives. Sometimes writing, sometimes partying big time, sometimes just hanging at Olivia's with all the other expats.



### **Warren Morgan, The Aztecs**

Billy was the only person that I know who could break a string tuning up. And if someone was having a lend of him he'd say, "My name is Billy, not Silly." The things that come to mind are silly things... a famous actor in the 70s, Terry Thomas from the Carry On series, was staying at the Sebel Townhouse when the Aztecs were staying at the Sebel. Terry Thomas had had his room painted out and a trampoline brought in, so a "star" was really there. And the next day he rang the concierge and in his very English voice asked, "Who in the bloody hell is this Billy Thorpe?" He was upstaged!

There are many precious memories. One thing I will obviously treasure is the recording I did with him, especially Thump'n Pig & Puff'n Billy. And his musical presence... When Billy walked on stage he had the ability to make things happen just by his presence. Billy's aura just walking into a room was notable. He stood out in a crowd. He took on a lot; Billy had the capacity to want to be the player, the umpire, the captain and run the boundary. He'd get himself involved in all aspects of everything.

Billy was like a brother, even if we fought. We had an understanding when we met, there was a natural bond we had in '66 and we never lost it. Even if we didn't see eye to eye, we stuck together regardless. He's like the brother I never had.

My most vivid memories of him were of a vibrant, loud, enthusiastic, dynamo, who was so positive about everything that I always seemed to leave with my batteries recharged. In a way, I suppose that was his big secret onstage! You were never left in any sort of doubt that you were there to rock and that Billy was going to show you how.

Billy has been a great inspiration to many younger performers over the years and the legacy that he leaves behind is his contribution to the truly unique way that Australian rock bands play rock. We're not as "pop" as the Brits and we're tougher than the Americans. And to a large degree historically, we were shown how by Billy Thorpe.

We're going to miss him, it's true, but for as long as we play hard driving rock & roll in this country he'll still be here with us.

### **Ian Couch, Senior Executive Entertainment Edge**

A very bright light has been turned out in the music industry, one that has no peer.

### **Gill Robert, Director, Strategic Marketing SONY BMG Music Australia**

In a world where the word "Star" is bandied around willy-nilly, Billy Thorpe was an absolute STAR, just about the best this country has had to offer. Billy had tons of charisma, a brilliant and distinctive voice, was an excellent musician, songwriter and one hell of a performer. Apart from knowing him for around 40 years, I thoroughly enjoyed working with him during his Festival recording days working on the release of It's Almost Summer (a classic) from Million Dollar Bill and the Children Of The Sun albums. May he Rock forever!

### **Ian James, Managing Director Mushroom Music**

I was watching the ABC News last night as the images of Billy flashed by. It was an era I grew up in. The early 70s festival footage was followed by the Long Way To The Top concert and the audience had aged considerably. Except for the guy with the guitar and the big voice. He came across as youthful and definitely plugged in to the power of rock & roll. At the end of his life, it was as if some roadie had reached down and flicked the 'off' switch on his amp – one minute blazing and then gone. That's the sort of ending all great rock & rollers should have.

### **Glenn Wheatley, CEO Talentworks**

We were both Brisbane boys. He was a true pioneer of the music industry. He could be obsessive but that's what made him a star, and that's what allowed him to survive in this industry as he morphed from pop singer to rock star to whatever. That's what I respected most about him, his enthusiasm and his passion and his drive. When it came to putting a benefit together for Lobby (Lloyd), it was he who made the call. He was the ringleader of It's A Long Way To The Top. He was always encouraging young musicians. During It's A Long Way, I had to miss some of the shows so (my son) Tim stepped in. At the first show, Billy said to Tim, "Welcome aboard, son, you're a much better bass player than your old man ever was!" How could you not love someone like that?

### **Jim White, Support Act Limited/Vital Entertainment Solutions**

Even back in the 60s, Billy Thorpe knew exactly what he wanted as far as his music was concerned and there were no compromises allowed.

As this philosophy didn't fit with the Festival Records protocol of the time, we agreed to part company and Billy went on to do a deal with Warners. Paul Turner, who was running Warners at the time said to me a few months later that he was in a bit of a quandary with Billy as he had given him \$25,000 (a huge amount at that time) to make the new album (on Billy's terms) but Billy had run out of money and the album wasn't finished – what should he do? He agreed with me that there was no alternative but to top up the advance and hope for a great product – and it was.

I have always had great respect for Billy and his ability on and off the stage and recall seeing him recently on a flight to a country town with his band where he was to perform that evening. As we disembarked, he sidled up to me and asked was I staying in town that night and I told him no. He feigned great disappointment as he said he would really have liked to have "cleared out my ears"!!

To me Billy never seemed to change; forever young, new and exciting ideas, and great musicianship. His passing brings much sadness to all of us in the music industry and to the public in general, and our thoughts go out to his family at this time.

### **Denis Handlin, Chairman & CEO, SONY BMG Music Entertainment Australia & NZ**

Billy was a true legend of the Australian music industry. Although we grew up one suburb away from each other in Brisbane and I bought his records from the local music store, I did not meet Billy until I was also in the music industry.

He was a brilliant singer and musician who truly pioneered the shape of the Australian music scene for the artists who have followed. Billy truly had special qualities as a human being and was always the first to help and fundraise for others in need. He had an uncanny ability to reinvent and he was interested in all types of music and people.

In our recent discussions about a special music project he was working on, I was continually inspired by his passion for life, creativity, intelligence and charisma.

ROCK ON Billy. The memories and your music will live forever!

### **Kerry Roberts, The Roberts Network**

Arguably the greatest talent Australia has ever seen. And an incredible human being. One of the world's greatest guys.

### **Rob Potts, CEO Entertainment Edge**

A true pioneer of our business and a stunning and original talent, it was an absolute honour and a privilege to represent Billy Thorpe.

Loved his passion and his vision, and his absolute commitment to being the Best of the Best. Thorpie will live long in our hearts. His greatness is his legacy.

Our sympathy goes out to Lynn, Rusty and Lauren.

### **John O'Donnell, Managing Director EMI Music Australia**

The death of an Australian music legend... it's very sad... growing up with an older brother meant I couldn't escape Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs (thank goodness for older brothers!)... I was introduced firstly to Sunbury-era Thorpie and then later found out about Poison Ivy and Somewhere Over The Rainbow and then later again Billy's LA-era songs, which I think people know less about but which is important in looking at his career... I met Billy at various industry

functions and he always gave his time and his support to the industry and in particular his fellow musicians/mates... To see him in amazing form at last years ARIA Hall of Fame event, where he played and spoke in honour of Lobby Lloyd was a real highlight and to remember him speaking (and he was a great speaker) in Chugg's honour at the APRA Awards two years ago is a great memory... I met him in the studio couple of times to listen to his Tangier work as a work-in-progress and his passion and enthusiasm really blew me away... He was a true force of nature in Australian music... It was hard not to be touched by Billy Thorpe.

### **Ed St John, President & CEO, Warner Music Australia**

Billy Thorpe is one of the few true originals in Australian rock & roll. There is a straight line that runs from Johnny O'Keefe to Billy and from there to Bon Scott, Jimmy Barnes and every other great Aussie rock & roller that ever held a guitar or sang into a microphone. Billy was our tribal elder, our Big Kahuna. He was a vibrant, energetic, intelligent man who was driven by passion and love and volume. We all owe him a debt of gratitude and respect that can never be repaid.

I spent an unforgettable afternoon with him last year in his studio, just him and me. He showed me his brilliant and virtually unparalleled guitar collection. He spoke to me passionately about his forty-five history in rock & roll and about his new project Tangier. He played me his new unreleased music and blew my mind with his enthusiasm and drive. I hope I have that much energy at 60.

Australian music lost someone very special this week. We are all diminished by his passing. His music lives on.

### **Christie Eliezer, Australasian Bureau Chief, Billboard Magazine**

Billy was more than just at the forefront of the musical changes that took place in Australia in the late 1960s. He was also part of a cultural change where musicians stopped taking shit because they were economically at the bottom of the chain. Either he or Lobby were the first to introduce the concept of "taking the door", where the musician could expect to share in the profits of his or her own show. If the Aztecs were given a crap dressing room, he'd refuse to play and explain to his audience why. If a journo gave him attitude, he'd take him or her to task. He tested what he thought were outdated rules by dropping the four-letter word onstage, because that was a word his audience used. If the cops threatened to arrest him, he'd encourage the crowd to chant the word, and challenge the cops to arrest everyone. He used high decibel volume as a way to stick up his middle finger. He played so loud at Sunbury that the pub ten miles away complained. He played so loud at the Bondi Lifesaver that it killed the fish in the aquarium. His use of volume as an art form and social comment will be his greatest legacy.

### **Glenn A. Baker**

Close your eyes and you can still see him in that first incarnation, the killer stance. Hands clasped behind his back, legs apart, head thrust forward with a look of cocky confidence plastered all over his face as he ripped through beat era classics like Poison Ivy or Sick & Tired with his first set of Aztecs. It was indelible and when he repeated it on the Long Way To The Top tour – which he conceived and co-produced – the roar of recognition that greeted it nearly tore the punters from their seats.

When it happened for Thorpie early in 1964, when he was drawing vast crowds to Kings Cross' Surf City, it was relentless... It was Beatlesque, at times it was beyond Beatlesque. In Melbourne the Fab Four had played to 52,000 shriekers. Billy and the Aztecs played to 63,000 at the Myer Music Bowl. Within 18 months they had nine gold records and were a household name.

It could have been over by the end of the 60s, as the teen idol boom faded but Billy was too musical for that... There was a chameleon quality to the man. As rock evolved he changed with it and by the dawn of the 70s he had reinvented himself as a bluesy, ballsy, blustery power rocker of the first order. Outdoor rock festivals were the place to see Thorpie at his growling, menacing best. Pony tail flying, vocal chords quavering, decibels mounting he seized his audience by the throat and gave them the ride of their lives... The doors the Sunbury Aztecs opened were accessed by the young AC/DC, by the Angels, Rose Tattoo and Cold Chisel, indeed by any band that has ever delivered a storming set in an Aussie pub.

We all knew he was as crazy as he declared himself to be in his timeless hit and we loved him for it. The respect and admiration was ceaseless no matter what



### **Melinda Schneider**

I first met Billy about eight years ago at the Emerald Country Music Festival where we were both performing. He had invited all of the other acts on the bill to get up on stage with him and join him on his last song I Got My Mojo Working. Everyone took a verse but I felt Billy was waiting for someone to really rock. When it was my turn, something inside me snapped, I grabbed the mic and started singing throwing in some wailing blues/gospel licks between each line. I looked over at him and he had a big beaming smile on his face, nodding his head and yelling "Yeah!" In that moment, through music, we had connected. We traded a few licks, the song ended and after the show he came up to me and said, "Who are you?" I said, "Melinda Schneider". He told me he had known my mum in the 60s, he'd met her on a Brisbane TV show called Teen Beat. I had heard her speak fondly of Billy my whole life.

Then he paid me the biggest compliment: "You sound just like my good friend in the States, Bekka Bramlett." Well, I idolise Bekka, so that was the highest compliment he could have paid me from another singer's point of view.

From that day we vowed to write together. It didn't happen for a couple of years, we just didn't get around to it. Then one night I bumped into him at an APRA function and we made a date. In early 2002 I turned up at his studio in Surry Hills and I must admit, I was a little nervous. He was larger than life, very strong and I wanted to deliver the goods as a writer – after all, he was one of the best. We sat down with our Maton guitars and started to strum and talk. We spoke about life, as I always seemed to with Billy, and he was telling me about when his wife Lynn and he were living in LA and their daughters left home, they had suffered a bit of empty nesters and as I recall it was the catalyst for them moving back to Australia. I can't remember who came up with the title When The Last Child Leaves Home but as soon as we had that, the rest of the song quickly followed. It was a simple, heartfelt country song and a real tear-jerker.

I recorded it on my album Happy Tears and soon after Billy and I did it as a duet. Again, a day of recording I won't forget, he got his part in one take and nearly blew up the microphone with his power! We performed it at the 2004 Golden Guitar Awards, as always he was impeccably dressed, in fact he was probably the first person to don a dinner suit on stage at Tamworth.

His elegance, confidence, originality and positive outlook will stay with me always. His unwavering belief in me I will draw on whenever I lose faith. His brutal honesty is something I aspire to. Thank you Billy for all your words of wisdom and advice, stories about life and for your friendship. I'm gonna miss you.

the phase or era of orientation. Whether it was the languid tone of It's Almost Summer, the soaring space rock of Children Of The Sun or the recent intricacies of his Moroccan-inspired Tangier, it had a credibility and a unmistakable passion.

For almost 45 years Billy Thorpe was a part of our lives. His terribly, terribly sad passing will not change that. He gave us more than we had any right to expect. RIP Thorpie.

### **Ian Molly Meldrum**

It was around 1965 and a bunch of us had come up to the "big smoke" from Melbourne. Seeing Billy perform live that night, long before I was working in the industry, was a life-altering experience and one I've never forgotten. If Johnny O'Keefe was the Godfather of Australian rock then Billy Thorpe was surely its Chairman of the Board.

### **Max Merritt, singer/songwriter**

He was one-of-a-kind and while I never had a brother, I loved him like a brother in so many ways. He walked the walk and talked the talk but underneath that



### **Meryl Gross, Support Act Limited/Vital Entertainment Solutions**

Last year after taking a major role in organizing two major benefits (Pete Wells in Sydney and Lobby Loyde in Melbourne), Billy realised there would be "plenty more Lobby and Petes in the not too distant future and the public will soon grow weary of fundraisers for old musicians".

This obvious future need fuelled Billy's passion to take a leading role in helping his musical brothers and sisters in a meaningful way. Not known for doing anything in a small way, Billy contacted Support Act Limited and offered to stage some "super benefits to raise a million dollars" for this music industry benevolent fund and he had some specific ideas on how the money was to be used. Billy's unabridged letter to SAL is published in full in The Music Network's Billy Thorpe tribute.

Only two weeks ago Billy joined the Board of Support Act Limited and was excited at the prospect of being involved with the charity at the grassroots level, but more particularly in working towards setting up a Billy Thorpe Trust Fund under the SAL umbrella. At the Board meeting he spoke passionately about building the SAL funds and setting some dates for his "super benefits" ASAP. Billy's can-do attitude was a great tonic to the Board and we all looked forward to working with Billy to achieve his dream.

Sadly he won't be around to supervise the team but we are determined to follow through on the ideas and dreams he had to help those of us in the industry who are doing it tough – our target is one million dollars!!

brave, strong exterior beat the heart of a caring and loving mate. There are so many occasions we shared the stage and the odd sip or two, and I will never forget both the good times and the hard times we spent together.

He always encouraged me, advised me, worried about me and berated me, but most of all he wanted the best for me. We all know that Billy Thorpe made a gigantic impact on Australian rock & roll but in my mind, it all pales into insignificance compared to the impact he made on me, both as a person and an entertainer.

I will treasure the memories but ache knowing that Billy Thorpe has Slipped Away From Me.

### **Peter Noble, Director East Coast Blues & Roots Festival**

When I first got into the music business I was 16 and playing in bands, and I used to go to the Here in North Sydney. Thorpie would be there and it would be electric. blues-based rock. It was the creation of an Aussie sound that was based on a principle of volume that you actually could feel it in your body, it was so hard. It created Australian rock as we know it. From AC/DC to Rose Tattoo and through to Wolfmother, we have Billy Thorpe to thank for that. It's a style of rock music that is distinctly Australian. You can hear it. It's that hard take-no-prisoners rock.

I don't know how you could say enough about Billy Thorpe. He played the Blues Festival three times. The first time he played the Bluesfest was '96 and the police came 15 minutes after he went on stage to issue a noise violation. They came back 15 minutes later and gave me another one. It was the first time the festival ever got a noise violation. But nobody told Thorpie what to do.

I was at the ARIA Hall of Fame last year and Billy was up there backing Lobby Loyde, who was inducted that night. I said to Billy, "Why don't we go to Lobby and book him at Bluesfest. Will you back him?" Billy said, "Yeah, and we'll tell him he has to get better so we can play at the festival together." We didn't even know if Lobby would still be around. Well, now it's Billy who's not around.

The death of Billy Thorpe represents the passing of an era in Australian music.

His footprint is all over it, and there's nobody else like him. But there are other legends still out there, like Normie Rowe, who is a great singer. We just lost the best but let's not forget about the rest.

### **INXS**

The members of INXS are saddened to hear of the loss of one of Australia's greatest talents. We grew up listening to Thorpie. The first gigs we ever snuck into were Billy & The Aztecs pinning us to the back wall with their power and extreme volume. Kirk and Tim have fond memories of when they hitched their way to Melbourne to see the Aztecs legendary Sunbury performance, where they blew Deep Purple off the stage.

We finally got to meet Billy in the early 1980s and were more than impressed with his intelligence, graciousness and passion for music. He was always pushing the boundaries of the Australian music industry.

Billy often came to see us at our LA shows when he lived there, and we finally got the chance to play with him at a charity event some years back and you could not wipe the smile from our faces. Billy was always there for others and will be remembered as one of Australia's greatest music ambassadors.

Our thoughts are with his family, and also with his many fans, of whom we are proud to count ourselves apart of.

### **Jack Thompson, actor**

It's like someone's torn a hole in my universe.

### **Gary Rabin, New York resident and self-confessed and proud Billy Thorpe friend and fan**

I got a phone call on Monday with very sad news.

I've known Billy since I was about 21; and I'm a lot more than that now. We had dinner that many years ago, just before he was heading off to live in America and I was moving to London.

We always kept in touch and when he was in New York late last year, we got together a few times. We went to at a black tie function and we grabbed a bite of lunch at his favourite steak place here. He was great; full of enthusiasm about everything and talking about his new project.

Billy had more charisma than anyone I have known. He was a great singer and without meaning to sound cliché, he really lit up a room; as soon as he entered it, everyone knew he had arrived. Billy was also an eternal optimist. No living off past glories. He always had a huge story to tell and it always came true. And when it came to writing, instead of writing a bad biography, Billy wrote two great bestselling books.

Billy was a Star. But far more important than all his professional success, record sales, concerts and fame, were his personal and private achievements. In all the time I knew him, it was always a pleasure to be in his company. And his marriage lasted longer than almost any music genre and longer than most careers.

If he had never sung a note, Billy was a great person.

Billy will be sorely missed by me and many others.

### **Brett Cottle, CEO APRA**

Most people knew Billy Thorpe as a master showman; a charismatic presence on the stage who could work a crowd like no other performer. Billy was also an exceptional songwriter: over his 50-year career, he crafted and performed iconic Australian pop and rock songs. Songs such as It's Almost Summer and Most People I Know... are part of our national history as much as they are part of the personal history of any music lover in the 60s and 70s. Billy's songs inspired and influenced generations of Australian songwriters and musicians. His talent, enthusiasm and genuine passion for the Australian music industry will be greatly missed but never forgotten.

### **Jan and Trevor Smith, Aloha Media**

Billy Thorpe was the greatest vocalist, musician and entertainer of the rock & roll era in Australia. He was the inspiration of a generation of musicians and fans alike. No-one had more power more energy and more guts than Billy. He excelled at everything he did and could blow anyone in the world off the stage. Time never wearied him and he stayed contemporary till the last.

His generosity of Spirit was amazing. He was the Field Marshall of Australian rock & roll.

Billy Thorpe was a legendary human being and we were honoured to have him in our lives. We will forever miss his friendship.

Love strength and blessings to Lyn, Rusty and Lauren.