



Shining ode to McComb



CONCERT

The Triffids — A Secret in the Shape of a Song
 Friday, February 20
 Beck's Music Box
 Review: Ray Purvis

The way we honour our fallen pop heroes here in WA is a bit tragic. We commemorate AC/DC rock god Bon Scott with a pint-sized statue at Fishing Boat Harbour and we remove the heritage listing of David McComb's Peppermint Grove family mansion The Cliffe, condemning it to the wreckers' ball or life as tea-rooms.

But some partial amends were made at the weekend with PIAF bringing to Perth this sprawling celebration of the life and music of the frontman of post-punk band The Triffids.

McComb has earned international acclaim — yet is hardly recognised in Australia by the INXS set — for his amazing ability to have written songs soaked in the brilliant sunlight and wide open spaces of the Australian landscape.

"It's been 20 years since we played in Perth," announced drummer Alsy MacDonald at the start of the show. "If it feels strange for you, imagine how strange it feels for us."

The audience, scattered with long-time friends, including early member Will Ackers and fans who go as far back as the band's first showcase at the Leederville Town Hall Punk Fest, were there to soak up the nostalgia and toast McComb's long-awaited spiritual homecoming.

Here, almost 10 years to the day of his untimely death from congenital heart disease, the five remaining members of The Triffids, joined by a bevy of back-up musicians (notably piano player Bruce Haymes) and an ever-changing tableau of celebrity guests, were intent on full recognition at last for the underexposed catalogue of Triffids' songs and McComb's place as a hometown hero.

Somewhat uneasily linked by cabaret-like MC "Handsome" Steve Miller, a tag-team of talent, including dynamic

Steve Kilbey, Rob and Mark Snarski of the Blackeyed Susans (a band formed by McComb in WA in 1989), Toby Martin, Melanie Oxley, Mick Harvey (the former sparring partner of Nick Cave since the days of The Boys Next Door) and local outfit the Kill Devil Hills were among the performers standing in for the absent vital element of the band.

Over the ensuing three hours, melodic gems such as Place in the Sun, Too Hot to Move, Bright Lights Big City, In the Pines, Kelly's Blues, Raining Pleasure, Leaning and I Want to Conquer You (the last two from McComb's overlooked 1994 solo album Love Of Will) emerged as real winners.

Keyboard player Jill Burt's voice lent proceedings a ghostly hue and the eerie violin of Robert McComb sent shivers up the spine.

David's elder brother John took the stage to reminisce about McComb's beach-combing childhood, family holidays in undeveloped parts of WA and the importance of The Cliffe as an escape from the pressures of life.

He read an excerpt from McComb's notes that traced the evolution of The Triffids, as well as an early poem, found in one of his school exercise books, about a toilet seat.

Things started to cook with the Church's Steve Kilbey's intense reading of the sun-parched classics Wide Open Road, Lonely Stretch and Stolen Property — all from the band's 1986 masterpiece Born Sandy Devotional. Out front of the full band (with Mick Harvey on xylophone), Kilbey's sheer domination of the stage was the highlight of the night.

Not far off the pace was Mark Snarski's strong version of Bury Me Deep in Love and Youth Group's charismatic singer Toby Martin, who found the emotional core of early single Beautiful Waste, as well as A Trick of the Light and Steal It All. This was a night to remember David McComb, the songwriter, through his music.

When heard back to back, the songs spanning his career present as a formidable body of work whose beauty and power have not diminished with time.



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Devotional: Triffids Rob McComb, top, Jill Burt and Graham Lee in action. Picture: Daniel Wilkins