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"But I saw him when I was a kid, when I was in school and I had forgotten about him. Later on, when I came back to play this sort of music, a friend of mine from down the pub got me one of the songs of Tex's called 'Sargeant Small', which is on the album, 'Roaring Days', and it sort of rekindled an interest in him and I remembered going to see (him) when I was a kid...and that's what the song is about."

It was no "Crocodile Dundee" life in the outback for Mick Thomas when he was young. He grew up around country Victoria; his father worked for the State Electricity Commission, so they moved around a lot. But most of his relatives lived in Melbourne and he arrived there when he was twenty.

WPA is now based out of Sydney, which may be compared to Toronto. The high population centres in Australia are far from each other and are mostly concentrated around the south-east coast, sort of like Canada.

All Sydney supplies is an audience. Most of the bands in Sydney don't come from Sydney. They come from Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, even Melbourne, and they go to Sydney; there are good au-

diences and a lot more pubs to play. It's better to be a band in Sydney than in Melbourne."

"Melbourne", says Thomas, creates artier, more "ancst Ridden" bands than Sydney because Melbourne is much rainier, colder and drab. It has spawned such bands as "The Birthday Party" and "Hunters and Collectors".

"Sydney people are really good at putting the shit on Melbourne... It's like Vancouver and Toronto: I haven't noticed that many poeople in Toronto criticize Vancouver, but everyone in Vancouver hates Toronto.

"Melbourne people don't really criticize Sydney; they try to ignore it because Sydney is so damned beautiful, the weather's so nice. Whereas Melbourne looks like a bloody bomb has been dropped there. It's a really badly planned city, it's on...a swamp, it has rotten weather. It's got really nothing going for it in that way. So Sydney people really find it easy to criticize Melbourne.

"In another sense, Vancouver is a bit similar to Perth because it's so far away, so it's days' and days' drive. Whereas Perth...is across the Nullabor Plain. To cross the Nullabor, even now that they've fixed up the road,...it's three days' drive through the desert.

"We've just started going to Perth on a regular basis; we've been there three times. It costs us more to go to Perth than it would to go to New Zealand or Asia... It's just crazy! It's just so far."

Another similarity is the traditional Celtic music from which WPA draws its influences, like Canadian band, RARE AIR.

"There seems to be a fair sort of cross-over. I was quite pleasantly surprised, last time we were here, (that) we could go into...an old second hand shop and there would be a bunch of old daggy stuff. There would be records of Acadian stuff and piano-accordion music and country music in there that were like family favourites.

"It's probably a bit stronger here, that tradition of music, than it is in Australia".

Thomas says that Canadians are more receptive to the music of WPA than Australians are because of the strong sense and knowledge of traditional music here.

During the five years that WPA has been around, this has posed a problem in being accepted. Not fitting into the "bush" scene nor the punk scene, finding a place to play was difficult.

"We were just stuffed. We couldn't do the rock circuit, we couldn't do the folk circuit for what either of them was worth, which was very little in my opinion, anyway".

"What we basically did was run our own show. We just found a pub that didn't have anything on and we used to run it every Thursday for about six months... We built up a following... We knew we sort of had a market for what we did. It was a matter of making the conservative-minded people in the business see (it)".

Where Canadian radio is required to play 30% Canadian music, Australian radio is required to play 20% Australian music. So the star system is similar to that of Canada's. The struggle is against conservative American commercial music.

"You've probably got the same problem in Canada: there's a stupid idea that everything comes from overseas, that all the good studios are overseas, that all the producers are overseas. But there's some really good people in Australia, and great studios... Australians have got this sort of thing, they say 'world class'. We've just built a world class studio'. Or so and so is a 'world class' producer

and that's just a stupid inferiority complex Australians have got. And Canada has probably got the same thing from living next door to a bombastic, sort of super power like America. (It's) worse than us because you're right on the border and you're being told all the time you're worthless".

Thomas says that about 80% of Australia's population lives in cities in a thin coastal band and that thinking of Australians living in the rural outback is like thinking of Canadians as lumberjacks.

He draws a parallel between poets Henry Lawson and Robert Service. Lawson hated the bush and Service hated the north, but they wrote about them anyway.

Although he's "not on a great cultural mission," Thomas finds himself an unwilling ambassador.

"It annoys me that people think it's hot all over Australia when I grew up in a very cold part of the world."

I wished that I had had more time to speak with Mick Thomas. I wish that the batteries hadn't run out in my tape recorder. I was fascinated to find that Canada has such a "close relation" a world away.

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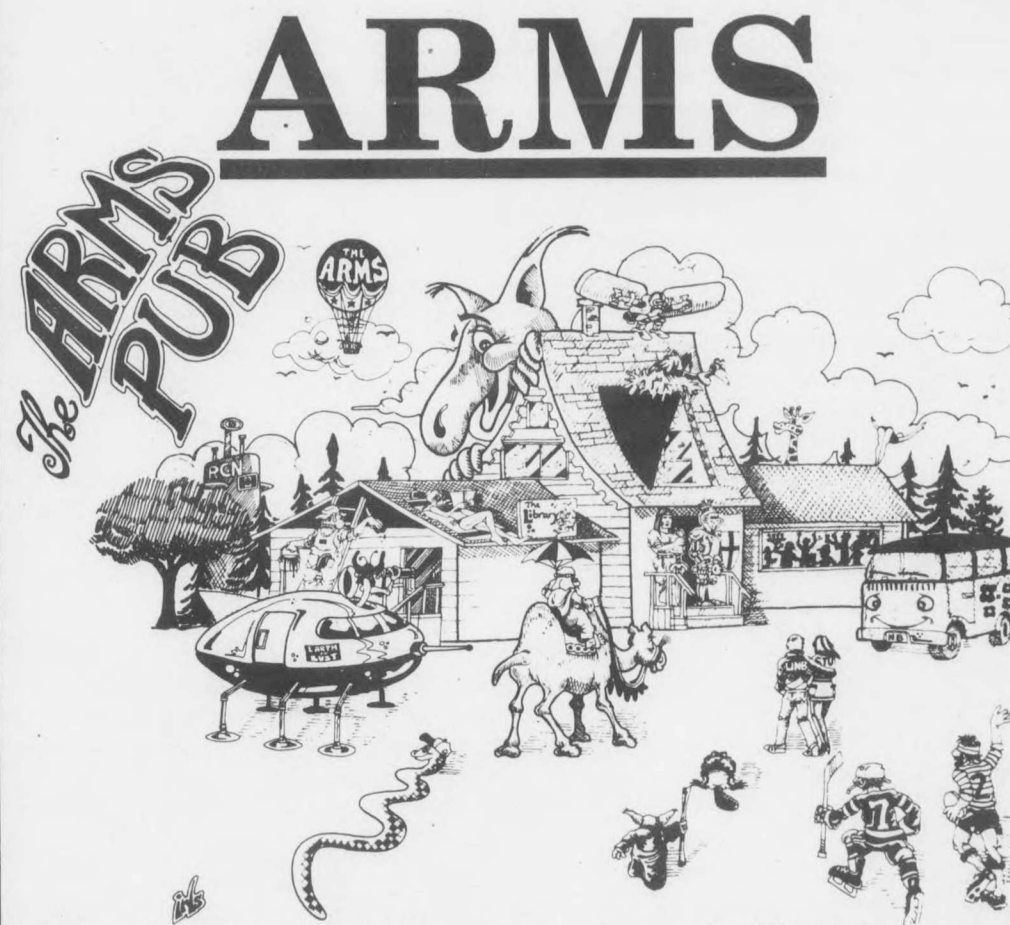
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