

VASE NEWS

VICTORY AUDIOPHONIC SOUND EQUIPMENT

AUGUST 2009

Here's the latest in the series of newsletters we've sent to an ever growing list of VASE subscribers. It is gratifying to experience your enthusiasm and wishes of support for this re-emerging Australian brand. This month you'll be introduced, through his musubiographical profile, to Richard Faint: the final member of the new VASE steering team.

We're also following through on the information promised on Toowoomba's Owen Ray.

Noel Bourne brings us up to date on the Trendsetter Deluxe 60 and the involvement of Kevin Borich in the new VASE movement.

RICHARD FAINT'S VASE STORY

For as long as I can remember I have been interested in music and technology. It all started when my Grandmother gave me a little crystal radio for a Christmas present. I used to listen to the local AM radio stations late into the night. At an early age I learnt to play the piano but to a young person how can that compete with an electric guitar or a drum kit? In my early teens I bought an electric guitar and that is how I met Harry, who was at the time teaching guitar in the local music shop. I was still at high school and the only way I could afford an amplifier was picking potatoes during the school holidays. A hard way to end up owning a 50 Watt Playmaster Amplifier which sounded simply awful. It was more like a solid state hifi amplifier with vibrato added.

This was when my interest in electronics developed. I was involved in amateur radio and so I knew a bit about soldering and circuits and such. Anyway, in an attempt to make the Playmaster sound more like a guitar amp, I ended up building a variety of simple guitar effects like a fuzz box (as they were then called) a tremolo etc. At this point I was playing in a high school band and just having fun.

At about this time my Dad came home with a new record, "Switched On Bach" by Walter Carlos, showcasing the up until then unknown instrument, the Moog Synthesizer. This was a pivotal moment. The sonic quality enthralled me. We are talking late 60's. So I set about finding out what this instrument was and how the record was made. This was the first time I really became aware I guess of the capabilities of recording and multi-track tape machines and all the other stuff involved in electronic music. By now I was working for the local electricity authority as a design draughtsman and studying electrical engineering at night for 6 years at the QUT. I bought a Roland SH5 Synthesizer, which I still own as it happens and got thoroughly immersed in electronic music. It soon became evident that to make the music I wanted to would mean having some kind of recording studio. Information on all this was really quite difficult to find. There was no internet of course and very few magazines. I ended up sending letters to various overseas manufacturers of mixing consoles just to get an idea of what was involved. It became pretty obvious that I was not going to be able to afford a console.

So a high school friend and I, knowing no better, assured ourselves we could build a console and setup a small recording studio in my suburban home. This was long before home recording as we now know it was possible.

It took over 3 years to build that console - a 12 Input 8 Output monstrosity, initially feeding a Teac 4 track and later a Tascam 8 track tape machine. We did a lot of work recording local bands, pop, punk, country, jingles etc. This was an after hours affair, nights and weekends. In retrospect how my neighbours put up with me, or how I got away with it I will never know. It simply wouldn't be possible now days..

It was while building the console that I renewed my acquaintance with Harry. We bumped into each other in the street and caught up with what we had been doing. He was now making speaker boxes. Anyway, he came round home to see what I was doing and there in the middle of my living room was the 1/2 constructed console. That must have got him to thinking. A year or so later, having completed my engineering degree and having told the electricity people what I thought of their job, I joined Harry as the electronics person in the fledgling pro-audio company.

It was while recording that I became aware of the VASE guitar amps. The recollections I have of them is that they were quite a clean sounding amplifier and extremely loud. I saw quite a few of them pass through the studio door in the late 70's and early 80's. The studio was finally closed in the mid 80's. Digital was coming and I simply didn't want to spend the considerable amount required to update. Also, home recording had arrived so that segment of the market was drying up.

Since that time I have continued to work full time in the music industry designing and manufacturing pro-audio equipment. Along the way I became aware of the background behind those VASE guitar and bass amplifiers and the historical significance and importance of them in the days when seminal Australian rock and roll bands were just starting to make a name for themselves on a world stage. How different things might have been if Tony had been able to continue making them. In fact I continue to be surprised at just how many are still out there gigging on a regular basis.

So, when the talk about rebirthing the VASE name came up it all sounded like a rather interesting project to be involved with. Designing musical instrument amplification is still part art and part science. There is still a lot of room for design creativity and innovation because we are looking for tonality and impression as part of the end result. So much so that I have dusted off the Strat and started learning how to play it all over again. Interesting times ahead indeed.



Richard Faint at his Dreamtime Recording Studio in Ipswich circa 1982...



...and today at his office at AT Professional

Owen Ray: Collector and Passionate Muso

Owen Ray

The VASE Collection, a new home for Owen Ray's VASE acquisitions.



Tony Troughton's Steel Lap Guitar is at left

Here's the promised story on Toowoomba's Owen Ray. Owen has been active in the music industry for over 40 years as a performer (he can still be seen with his band The Countdowns), collector and designer of musical instruments as well as being involved in the production, retail and wholesale side of the business.

Owen is a man of passion and energy who knows what he wants and doesn't hesitate to go after it. His motives are commendable: he is devoted to keeping standards high, and to working in cooperation with others who share his passion (or with those for whom his passion becomes contagious.) He has a special commitment to Australian made guitars and products.

He is the owner of Toowoomba's iconic music store International Music which doubles as a museum, housing Owen's musical collections. Owen says he and his business are committed to quality Australian products which would explain how he managed to have in his collection a quantity of VASE amps, as well as hand written schematics, photos and memorabilia from the Tony Troughton family and probably most excitingly, Tony's steel lap guitar hand crafted by Mr. Troughton himself.

His dedication and perseverance in acquiring these items proved to be a treasure trove for the current team at VASE when Owen very graciously donated them to our VASE collection.

You can learn more about Owen's world by clicking on his web site: www.internationalmusic.com.au.

GETTING IT OUT THERE!

Update by Noel Bourne

Trendsetter 60 Deluxe

This week brings us one step closer to the assembly of the pre-production VASE Trendsetter 60 Deluxe. Gary Broadhurst, who assembled the original VASE Trendsetters, has been eagerly awaiting putting his skills back into practice with the re-release of this Australian iconic amplifier. Following assembly there will be intensive in house and on the road testing carried out. Look for some pictures and the assembly process under way in the next VASE Newsletter.

Kevin Borich Signature Amplifier?

Yes one of Australia's legendary guitarists Kevin Borich has trialed a number of VASE amplifiers from the VASE reference collection and likes the tonal response.

Following much discussion and meetings over a long period of time with Kevin we are now in the process of prototyping a new high powered VASE designed amplifier to meet Kevin's requirements and upon completion and Kevin's endorsement, this amplifier will proudly join the VASE product lineup.

Specific details will be in the next newsletter. To see what Kevin has been up to lately, why not visit Kevin's website www.kevinborich.com.au?



Rod Lowe of Tasmania has to be one of the youngest people to own a VASE, only 11 when his dad realized he was serious about his music and outfitted him with a "VASE BASSMAN 100 amp & a cab with both a 15" & a 12" speaker in it."

Here, in his own words, is his VASE story.

Here's MY VASE story:-

I started playing bass guitar when I was about 9 y.o.-approx 1973- as the bass literally 'spoke' to me from a very early age & as soon as I was able I was playing basslines on my Dad's guitar. Dad bought me a bass-a Gibson EB-0 copy- & I was plugging it into the valve stereo(or mono I think actually) he built in the early '60's. After a couple of years I was getting good enough to audition for any local bands with members young enough to have me found usually on my bass teacher's noticeboard.

After a couple of successful auditions, but unsuccessful bands, Dad realised I was serious about this bass thing & suggested to me that I needed my own amp. He told me I should get something that will last & recommended me NOT to go to the local music shop to buy the newest "practise amp" on sale, as he said- it would very quickly be NOT loud enough & also he recommended that I get a Valve amp as he wasn't impressed with the "new" solid state stuff he's heard for guitar etc...(HOW RIGHT WAS HE -IN ALL respects????!!!!)

We scoured the local adverts for something suitable & after a couple of months found a possible buy in a nearby suburb. We got there to find a guy selling a VASE BASSMAN 100 amp & a cab with both a 15" & a 12" speaker in it. I LOVED it at 1st sight, But Dad was right again in asking the seller to not only give it a test run for us, but also to take the rear off the amp to gawk in at the handmade workings & also to take the rear off the cab to check out the speakers-as the seller didn't know what they were, the impedance, or how much power they handled. So after a complete demo & inspection, Dad was settlewd & I was sold of the 1st note played on it.

That VASE BASSMAN 100 was now MY RIG!!! It served me Superbly well in the yerars to come- performing faultlessly at practises & gigs all over Tasmania, to gigs in Sydney & Melbourne later on.

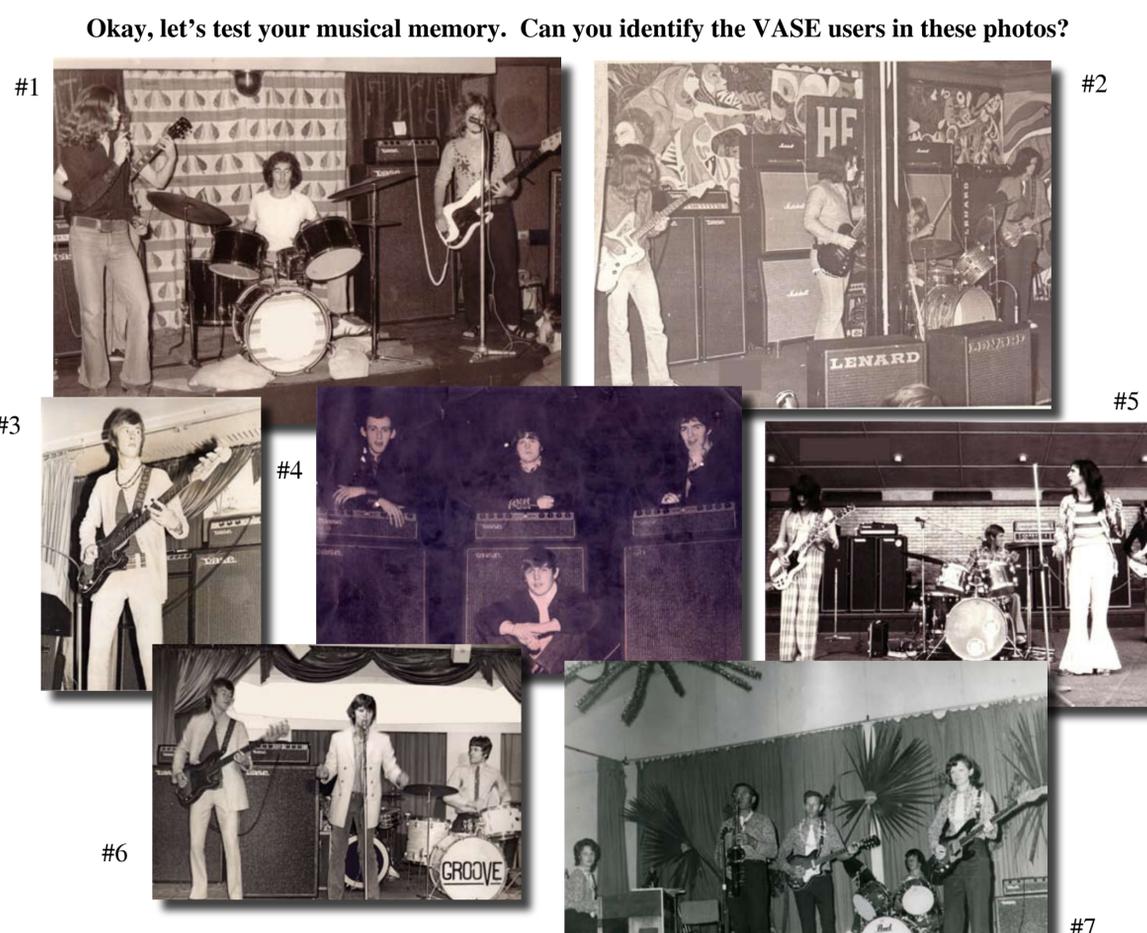
I can tell you also that they certainly DON'T make 'em like the VASE much anymore.... That Vase stood up to ALL the abuse a teenaged boy who didn't know much about the do's & don'ts of using a valve amp!!! That amp was turned on with NO LOAD, Plugged into incorrect impedances... you name it, I subjected it to it! AND- it kept working perfectly!!! It even went to Melbourne strapped to the roof racks on our bands Fiat Bambino!!!! And worked perfectly for years afterwards! It DID break down once... A sax player working with us in Melbourne in 1986, had placed her beer on top of the amp- something I'd learned by this stage, was a NO NO!!! - & then, of course, the beer spilled INTO the amp!!! It was like a DALEK on self destruct!!!! Blue light arc-ing, a burning smell & myself diving for the power supply to cut it!! In true VASE fashion though, the amp was back at a gig very soon after. I took it to a valve amp repairer & as it was a properly made piece of gear, it was easy for a repairer to work on & fix!!! Another aspect that modern digital amps & the like cannot compare in.

So the Vase was up & running again- thank Goodness. It was MY RIG, & even "Way back then" it was evident to me that most other amps that bassists were using didn't seem to compare to my amp! Even guys that told me of their new state of the art bass rig- their amps NEVER seemed to sound anywhere near as good as mine- & mine was my 1st AMP!!! Couldn't be THAT reason- that it was simply 'sentimental'. NO- it was because the VASE was ALL VALVE & was pumping the 100watts into a 15" & 12" speaker cab that was a sealed cab. A CLASSIC FORMULA- & one I still use to this day. Though SADLY not with the great old Vase amp! Sadly this amp was STOLEN from a flat I was living in Melbourne in 1988- along with my Precision bass- a 1978 model & the 15" & 12" cab! It was stolen. Nothing else was stolen- probably because we didn't HAVE much else then. BUT I was Mortified. Not only was my RIG gone, but it was SUCH a value to me, due to it being my 1st rig, bought by my Dad & was mine since I was 11 yrs old!

BUT- such was it's influence, with it's great sound, THAT today I use all valve amps & sealed Speaker cabinets- just like the VASE rig I 1st owned. It's a classic mix- an ALL VALVE amp into a sealed Speaker cab!!! That VASE amp was such a reliable piece of gear, & it sounded SO GOOD, that it's certainly shaped MY styles & tastes in music & bass playing for the rest of my life!

I certainly cannot wait to see any NEW VASE gear. I also wish bass amps were made today, with as much quality & care as the VASE amp I owned in my youth! GREAT AMP with a great sound & Superb reliability!!!
Regards, Rod Lowe

Okay, let's test your musical memory. Can you identify the VASE Users in these photos?



That's all for this month. If you have pictures or stories of your own VASE history we'd love to receive them. We'll be back in a month with the next newsletter, but the team is always here if you have questions or feedback in the meantime. Reach any of us at info@vase.com.au and remember to pass along your newsletters to anyone who might be interested in following the VASE resurrection.

Bye for now, CAROL