



Scared? You should be! The Mystrys with Bob Crawford (left), Michael Kopp (middle) and Buff Parry (right)

# Melbourne To Be Wild!

**Masked mavericks THE MYSTRYS burst onto the Australian pop scene in 1966 with a spaced-out single and some downright intergalactic hype, before vanishing almost as quickly. SAM WILSON lifts the hood on one of Antipodean music's weirder moments**

The history of popular music is strewn with long-forgotten one-hit wonders, many of them rightfully so. But look past the warbling soap starlets, grunting football players and disco ducks, and you'll come across the occasional gold-plated killer. 'Witch Girl' by Melbourne band The Mystrys is an especially mind-bending example. In fact, this is one one-hit wonder that makes you wonder what might have been.

The group's singer and bass-player, Charles Bayliss, has no doubt in his mind. "We would've been huge," he says. "Our potential was international." Lead guitarist Ziggy Zapata agrees. "We could've gone on to bigger, better things."

Flashback to Melbourne, early 1966: Young Charlie Bayliss is in a band called Isy & The Dynamics (notable for their female drummer – Australia's own Honeycombs, if you will), when he's approached after a gig by a middle-aged businessman who introduces himself as Michael Kopp. Kopp, who is accompanied by his sidekick Gerry Valek and financial backer Buff Parry, invites Bayliss and The Dynamics' lead guitarist, John Farrugia, to join a new band he's putting together – an Antipodean supergroup to rival the likes of The Beatles and Rolling Stones. Always open to fresh musical adventures, Bayliss is keen. Farrugia declines.

Bayliss subsequently recruits the other members, guys he's crossed paths with around the rock 'n' roll traps: the aforementioned Zapata (from a group called The Untouchables), rhythm guitarist Kevin Thomas and drummer Malcolm McPhee (later to be replaced by John Lake). And so The Mystrys were born.

The name was no accident. Kopp told the band they'd be wearing tight-fitting green velvet hoods whenever they appeared in public. "We had to sign declarations that we wouldn't divulge who we were; it had to remain a secret," Bayliss recalls. "I was very excited – I fell for it straight away." Zapata was less impressed. "It was a really stupid gimmick."

Stupid or not, this was one gimmick that kept on giving. Like some kind of showbiz I. Ron Hubbard, Kopp's ambitions for The Mystrys were intergalactic. He encouraged Bayliss, Zapata, McPhee and Thomas to pose as ancient aliens from a distant galaxy, and they adopted silly aliases accordingly: Ankharr, Kuff (read it backwards), Zoarg and GMX. Finnstar was the fifth, invisible member. Yep, he's the one you can't see in the photos.

In keeping with this sci-fi vibe, well-known local music identity Bob King Crawford had been enlisted to write a suite of suitably spacey and occult songs for the group. Of the 20-plus numbers Crawford penned, only 'Witch Girl' and its B-side 'Land Of The Green Sun' survive; sadly, other luridly named gems such as 'The Mummy Walked' and 'My Name is Dracula' are lost in the mists of time.

After rehearsing in secret for three months, The Mystrys were ready to record at South Melbourne's state-of-the-art Armstrong Studios. Sound engineer Roger Savage had cut

his teeth in London, recording The Rolling Stones at Olympic Studios: if anyone could make Kopp's far-out musical vision a reality, it was him. (Savage later went on to an illustrious career in movie sound production, but that's another story).

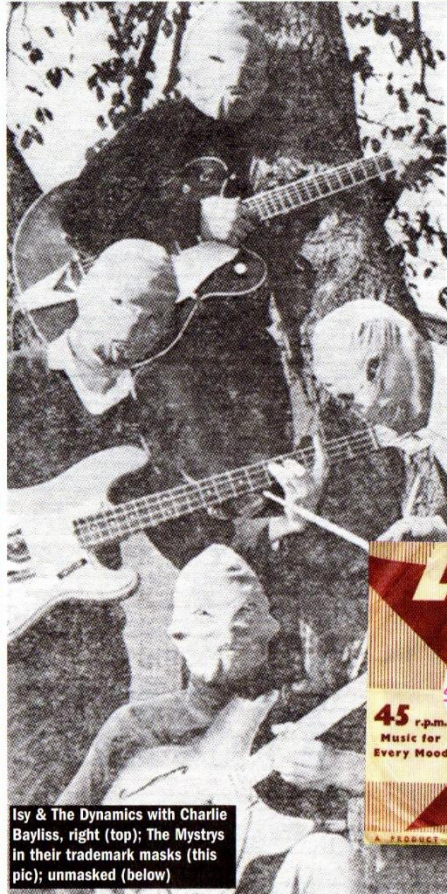
'Witch Girl' is unlike anything else on the Aussie charts at the time. Two manic minutes of supernaturally-themed garage madness, it bears plenty of novelty hallmarks — eerie female backing vocals, burbling cauldron effects, Hammer-Horror lyrics ("Which girl is the witch girl, look out when the moon is full/Cause you will see her shadow, and you will feel her pull") — without ever descending into kitsch. Blistering musicianship, an atmospheric production that Joe Meek would be proud of, and impassioned vocals make sure of that. Zapata likens the track to "the pounding surf sounds of The Atlantics" and certainly, it thunders along like a runaway bombora.

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Ostensibly a song about The Mystrys' home planet, the less frenetic 'Land Of The Green Sun' paints a technicolour picture of an outer-space utopia where jealousy doesn't exist and "tangerines mix with the coloured folks". Guitar that sounds like a NASA transmission and intermittent cymbal flourishes heighten the effect. Radio stations gave it a wide berth. "They thought it was a protest song," Bayliss recalls. "It was very peaceful, talking about an ideal world — which it wasn't in those days. We had The Vietnam War; we had conscientious objectors; we had marches."

Though the band hadn't yet played a gig, 'Witch Girl' climbed the charts when it was released in June '66, surrounded by outrageous hype that amused some members of the media and irritated others: the members had never seen each other unmasked; they didn't have shadows; they were The Beatles on holiday... "Once I heard Michael Kopp on the phone telling someone I could play guitar standing on my head!" laughs Zapata.

Bob King Crawford oversaw the publicity. A fixture on the Melbourne scene since the '50s, Crawford was not only an established



Isy & The Dynamics with Charlie Bayliss, right (top); The Mystrys in their trademark masks (this pic); unmasked (below)



composer but a record label maven, PR consultant and all-round creative powerhouse. His media connections and ability to spin a wild yarn served The Mystrys well. "We have the gimmick to end all gimmicks," he boasted at the time.

Appearances on high-profile teen TV programs *The Go Show!* and *Kommotion* followed. Soon after, The Mystrys made their live debut at the popular Mentone Mod night. It took off," says Bayliss. "Everyone wanted to know who we were; girls were going crazy trying to find out." He adds that performing in the hoods "was horrendous. You basically only had eyes and a mouth. And of course, you'd look down at your instrument and you couldn't see it properly." They were also "hot as Hades" says Zapata, and ruined any chances of attracting young teenyboppers (though he concedes "the only good-looking one was Charlie, but the girls couldn't see him!").


After a few shows in Melbourne, The Mystrys set off on an extensive regional tour, supported by all-girl group The Kontakts, another one of Kopp's projects. (The Kontakts' gimmick? A male singer called Tony Satan!) Playing in far-flung towns and mining outposts around Victoria and South Australia, they were surprisingly well received for a bunch of near-unknowns wearing bizarre green velvet hoods.



Or was it the hoods that won over their country audiences? While many Aussie acts touring rural towns in the '60s had violent run-ins with locals offended by their shaggy hair and flamboyant clothes, The Mystrys, in their masks and smart tailored suits, may have seemed somehow more palatable.

Not to underestimate the power of their music, of course. Says Zapata: "All the guys in the band were very accomplished musicians. We used to blow our audiences away with classy playing like they'd seldom seen from rock bands."

But all the talent in the world couldn't save The Mystrys from their disappointing fate. Back in Melbourne for a brief break before resuming the tour, Bayliss ran into Crawford, who updated him on recent developments: Kopp (just one of several names he went by, as it happens) had skipped town with Valek when his habit of using dodgy cheques to pay for band expenses finally caught up with him. Along with several furious creditors, the Federal Police were closing in: it seems he was a prolific conman wanted for offences around Australia! He was never caught.

Broke and disillusioned, The Mystrys saw no alternative than to call it quits. As Zapata remarks, "There did not seem to be much of a future for a band that was a complete mystery to its targeted fan base." Almost 50 years later, he says, "It was a lot of fun until the unexpected end of the tour, but I don't regret any of it." Bayliss treasures his memories too. "It was an incredible part of my life and as much as I lost, I wouldn't change it." 

**extra added attraction!!**  
**FIRST LIVE APPEARANCE EVER!!**  
 controversial group —  
**THE MYSTRYS**  
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 'GO' and 'KOMMOTION'

