

# Starry StARIA Night

What a night.

Pre-billed as being ‘the hottest gig of the year’, the inaugural ARIA Hall of Fame Event held at Melbourne’s Regent Theatre on Thursday 14 July 2005 proved to be not only that, but much, much more.

The auspicious event, held to induct six icons of the Australian music industry to the ARIA (Australian Record Industry Association) Hall of Fame, saw a piquant blend of celebrities and industry heavies grace the red carpet for an evening of nostalgia and unforgettable performance.

The dramatic opulence of the Regent provided the perfect ambience for the event, which after a brief welcome from ARIA Chairman, Mr Denis Handlin AM, began with the induction of the iconic Hunters and Collectors by the Member for Kingsford Smith and former lead singer of Midnight Oil, Mr Peter Garrett. Garrett’s powerful oratory of the legendary group’s history led into an all too brief, but impassioned, performance by the re-united Hunters that culminated with the classic *Throw Your Arms Around Me*.

Normie Rowe was next to be honoured, following an introduction by Ian ‘Molly’ Meldrum, who in a rare display of serious reflection, showed his playful persona cohabits amicably with a keen sense of social awareness. In accepting his award and acknowledging those people who’d been instrumental to his career, Rowe also expressed disappointment that the present lack of Australian-produced television shows is denying many of today’s young musicians the opportunities that contributed to his own success. In a seamless blend of old and new guard, Rowe – ably backed by Melbourne trio The Living End - then proceeded to bring the house down with a stirring rendition of his old hit *Que Sera Sera*.

Even Mushroom (Records) and Liberation Blue chief Michael Gudinski took a turn at the microphone, providing a musical history of the woman he dubbed ‘the greatest singer in Australia in my lifetime’; his former flatmate Renee Geyer, whom he affectionately referred to as ‘Frankie’. And the medley of *Stares and Whispers* and *Heading in the Right Direction* from former Geyer backing vocalist Ms Jade MacRae was nothing short of arresting, with the chanteuse proving her youth poses no hindrance to the sophistication of her performance.

Australian screen legend Jack Thompson had been selected to induct the 92-year-old Smoky Dawson who, in a moving address on the country music icon’s career, he referred to as ‘not a man of the past, but of the present.’ Smoky’s acceptance speech – filled with engaging anecdotes from his life, and ending with his reminding the audience that ‘it’s all about music, music, music!’ – was followed by a musical tribute by country maestros Lee Kernaghan, Anne Kirkpatrick, and Troy Cassar-Daly.

Next on the bill was Split Enz, who were inducted by fellow New Zealander and celebrated comedian and screenwriter John Clarke. Showing they'd lost none of their spirit with the passage of time, the Enz launched into a rousing delivery of *History Never Repeats* that brought the audience to its feet. And effectively, to its knees.

As a songwriting and producing partnership, Harry Vanda and George Young had been among the first inductees to the ARIA Hall of Fame; this year they were again honoured as members of The Easybeats, who enjoyed phenomenal success during the late 1960s. This is a rare accolade indeed - only Glen Shorrock has been similarly inducted both as an individual and as a member of Little River Band. The irrepressible Billy Thorpe took to the stage to induct The Easybeats, represented on this occasion by Vanda and Young and the courageous Stevie Wright who, despite well-documented health problems of the past, cut a fine dash in black leather and long hair. The tribute performance by You Am I, Tex Perkins and Jimmy Barnes that closed the show radiated all the fun and exuberance synonymous with the music of The Easybeats, and left the audience – and the walls - shaking.

And that was only the show. The after-party, too, was truly amazing – it's quite surreal to find oneself mingling socially with the people one's researched, interviewed and written about over a long period of time. When ordering a drink at the bar, I found myself standing between former Easybeat Harry Vanda and ex-Cold Chisel guitarist Ian Moss. Things don't get a lot better than that.