

ENTERTAINMENT



The Waifs live at Newcastle Civic Theatre.

Picture: Marina Nei

Waifs return with mix of old and new

THE WAIFS
April 2
Civic Theatre

REVIEW JIM KELLAR

THEY were like old friends who came to visit on a rare trip through Newcastle. They had changed a little, but the ties that bind were as tight as ever.

Even for seasoned bands, there's always a risk when you come bearing gifts of new music not heard before, stories we don't know. But the mix of new and old was seamless. Although it felt like it took a couple of songs for us to link up on the musical merry-go-round, once the audience was on board everyone was certainly on the same journey of whimsical folk, grooving blues and heartfelt ballads.

Vikki Thorn, resplendent in mid-

thigh red lace dress and black jacket, kicked off the night with *Heart Of Me* and Donna Simpson followed soon with *Somebody*. But the house really got warmed up with *Bridal Train*, as Josh Cunningham's guitar magic, in this case acoustic, came to the fore and reminded everyone how important all three members are to the vibe of the band.

Josh took the spotlight for his own *Dark Highway* and the trio continued to mix and match new and old. The response to the classics grew louder at every turn – *Fisherman's Daughter*, *Lighthouse*, *Highway One*. Yet the new ones were to be savoured, a clear signal The Waifs have much more to offer.

The encore was worth packaging like a Christmas present, or more likely a wedding present, as the vibe was strong all night about love and partners. *Gillian*, *Love Serenade* and *Crazy Train* bound it all tightly together to finish a special night for Newcastle.

Waifs bring it home

Harvey Rae

December 15, 2014, 9:23 am



The Waifs. Picture: Courtney McAllister

I can't remember ever hearing the house music come on at the end of the night, only to be turned off so a band could return for a second encore but that's exactly what happened at the Waifs' Fremantle homecoming on Saturday night.

Originally formed in Albany in 1992, the Waifs' signature folk with a distinctly Australian twang has evolved to take in elements of Americana and Heartland rock, as evidenced by new material from an upcoming seventh album to be recorded in January.

The Donna Simpson-sung Rowena and Wallace followed a tradition of great storytelling about "two teenage runaways", evoking Bruce Springsteen. Another from now-bearded guitarist Josh Cunningham, Dark Highway, continued their well-loved theme of life on the road.

It had followed Vikki Thorn's How Many Miles and sister Donna's Highway One, the latter the night's first classic. Coming three tracks in, it was a promising start.

The big songs continued with London Still followed by Bridal Train. But mostly the air was filled with a sense of celebration, which Thorn played up to for Sundirtwater.

Love Serenade was Cunningham's most popular track but it was hard to go past Fisherman's Daughter.

It would have been nice to see Cunningham, one of Australia's better guitarists, letting loose on a few more solos but Thorn and Cunningham's encore of Gillian brought a rousing singalong, only to be outdone when Simpson rejoined them for Take It In.

It was a reminder of their original three-piece format and how far they've come from the days playing small WA pubs.

Earlier Danielle Caruana, aka Mama Kin, performed with her new outfit We Two Thieves. Also featuring Tinpan Orange's Emily Lubitz and guitarist Dave Mann, the three crowded around a microphone, bluegrass-style, and introduced themselves to the receptive audience.



BEAUTIFUL VOCALS: Aussie folk rock band The Waifs gives the Rockhampton audience a taste of some of their new work during their Pilbeam performance.

Allan Reinikka Rokawaifs

IT WAS the perfect mix of old and new.

Aussie folk rock band The Waifs lit up the Pilbeam Theatre with their performance last Wednesday, with some of their catchy classics getting a few enthusiastic fans on their feet and dancing in front of the stage.

The band's longevity in the music industry is amazing but clearly understandable when you hear the quality of their latest offerings and their past compilations.

The Simpson sisters, Donna and Vikki (now Thorn), and Josh Cunningham came together as The Waifs in 1992.

The touring band is completed by Ben Franz (bass) and David Ross Macdonald (drums).

The multiple ARIA-award winners were in Rockhampton as part of their national tour, which started in Alice Springs in November and wrapped up in Busselton, WA, on Sunday.

Their live performance was captivating, their music interspersed with personal anecdotes and explanations of what inspired some of the songs' lyrics and what motivates them as musicians today.

The announcement that they plan to record a new album in the New Year was met with thunderous applause from the audience.

Equally as welcome were renditions of some of their best-known tracks, including Bridal Train, London Still and Lighthouse, and new songs Rowena and Wallace, Dark Highway and Dirty Little Bird.

The encore performance of Spotlight was mesmerising.

Donna, Vikki and Josh all gave flawless vocal performances and Vikki's work on the harmonica was something to behold.

Melbourne singer-songwriter Liz Stringer opened for The Waifs last Wednesday and, in her first visit to Rockhampton, was sure to have won some new fans.

- P.M.

Music *The Waifs are on tour and recording again*

Bringing folk-rock back to the masses

AUSTIN KING

IT WAS successful 1970s and '80s music heavyweights such as Bob Dylan and Prince who had the most influence, musically, on Vikki Thorn.

Thorn and her "brother" Josh Cunningham and sister Donna Simpson were the faces of Australian folk-rock band The Waifs that had Aussies swinging in the 1990s.

After more than two years apart, The Waifs have finally reunited and returned to the stage in their bid to rekindle country boogie flames across Australia.

Thorn, a vocalist with a knack for serenading the crowd with her slick

slides on the harmonica, came together with Simpson (her biological sister) and Cunningham (a friend, who is more like a brother) in the early 1990s.

Thorn, Simpson and Cunningham (guitars, vocals, mandolin, ukulele, dobro) were the original members of the group.

Thorn, who lives in Utah in the US, told APN the band had been formed during an around-the-country trip with her sister in 1992.

The siblings were heavily into their folk and rock 'n' roll music, while Cunningham was more influenced by electrical guitar-type music.

The sisters were trekking the country in a campervan, playing music at various small pubs, when



THEY'RE BACK: The Waifs have reunited for a tour and upcoming album.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

they came across Cunningham at a watering hole in a regional Western Australian town.

Admittedly, Thorn said she liked to think of herself as the lead singer.

However, she and Simpson shared the lead role, with Cunningham adding background vocals here and there.

For the past three years, the three have been living in different countries.

For the first time "in a very long

time", the trio got together last month on the south coast of Western Australia to write and sing music.

The Waifs' current tour is the second in three years.

With much rejoicing from regional towns, The Waifs have decided not to include bigger cities in their tour.

"We love the smaller pubs and clubs because the atmosphere is more homely," Thorn said.

"We have such a great following in

Australia. They want to hear more music... our passion is playing music live."

Avid fans can expect some of their favourite tracks, including Take It In, Brain Damage and I Believe, at the upcoming concerts.

They can also expect a new album to be released in the next six months.

The Waifs play the Miami Marketta on Sunday and The Events Centre, Caloundra, on Tuesday.

They've still got it: the Waifs play Perth after three-year absence

December 15, 2014



The Waifs - and sisters Donna Simpson and Vikki Thorn - were back performing in Perth for the first time in three years.

The Waifs are back! Dusting off their guitars, the five-piece band has wrapped up their first national tour since 2011 – and pleased fans no end.

Fresh from performing at the Anzac Centenary commemorations in their hometown of Albany in November, sisters Donna Simpson and Vikki Thorn have rounded out the band's Australian tour in WA with fellow vocalist/guitarist Josh Cunningham, Ben Franz on bass and drummer David Ross Macdonald.

The Waifs were welcomed like prodigal children back to the Fremantle Arts Centre on Saturday night, performing in front of an eclectic audience of young and old rocking along to old favourites and fledgling new hits, amid the gusty port city winds.

But what was so reassuring was the smattering of new songs (and promises of a new album) interspersed with tried and true favourites that have held The Waifs in good stead during their 20-year career.

"We've never written a song together," Thorn told the heaving arts centre crowd. "We write separately."

So what was meant to be a sojourn to Dunsborough for some collaborative writing by Thorn, Simpson and Cunningham for a new album didn't actually eventuate.

Thorn told fans that after two days of catching up around the kitchen table, Simpson tottered off to a bedroom where she wrote *Come Away*, a reconciliation song of sorts. And it wasn't long before Thorn and Cunningham followed suit with some independent writing themselves.

As they say: "When you're on a good thing, stick to it".

As always, The Waifs write from the heart and personal experience. They are seasoned story-tellers. And newbies *Born to Love* and *Rowena & Wallace* appear no different.

While the rendition of *Love Serenade* was a little off the boil, The Waifs rolled out crowd-pleaser after crowd-pleaser – *London Still*, *Crazy Train*, *Lighthouse Man*, *Fisherman's Daughter* and *Bridal Train*, their heartfelt hit penned about their maternal grandparents who wed during World War II, winning hearty applause and cheers from the crowd.

The Waifs rounded out the gig with an encore, including the hit ode to Cunningham's mother, *Gillian*, *Take It In* and *When I Die*.

Taking The Waifs on the road again was never going to be easy, with both Thorn and Cunningham now living in the United States while Simpson resides in the port city of Fremantle. And add to that motherhood, with the sisters now juggling a few children between them.

But they're still the down-to-earth, folksy-rock set-up fans love.

What you see is what you get, just with a new lease on life. And that's the beauty of The Waifs. They don't change, they evolve.

The verdict: after a three-year break, The Waifs have still got it. It's four stars from me.

The Waifs played Old Broadwater Farm in Busselton on Sunday night, ending their Australian tour.

► COMMUNITY EVENTS

Life

The Waifs wait is finally over



IN CONCERT: The Waifs are bringing their tour to The Events Centre, Caloundra this December.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

AFTER a sold-out national tour earlier this year, fans of The Waifs have been taking to social media, begging for more.

Now their calls have been answered, with the announcement of a run of dates scheduled for November and December.

This tour is the first time since 2011 that the full band will be on the road together.

WHAT: The Waifs, with guest Liz Stringer

WHERE: The Events Centre, Caloundra

WHEN: Tuesday, December 9, at 7.30pm

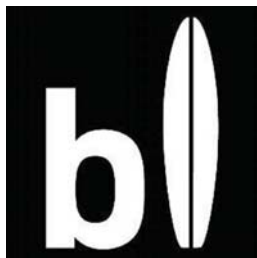
Vikki, Donna, Josh, Ben and Dave will reunite to perform old favourites, with the possibility of a few

tastes of what's to come.

Singer-songwriter and good friend, Liz Stringer will head up some special guest duties at the Sunshine Coast event on December 9 at The Events Centre, Caloundra.

All tickets are \$53.50.

For more details and to purchase tickets, visit www.theeventscentre.com.au or phone 5491 4240.



WELCOME TO THE WAIFS

Christie Ots sat down with Vikki Thorn from The Waifs to discuss music, friends and what she thought the first time she saw Missy Higgins.

For the second time this year The Waifs are travelling the country showcasing their special blend of folksy melody and honest song lyrics to rousing crowds. Back by popular demand from fans that have, as Thorn put it, loved the band for fifteen years and never seen them. For the first time since 2011 the full band is back together on tour, with Vikki Thorn, her sister Donna Simpson and Josh Cunningham joined by Ben Franz and Dave MacDonald; a recipe for success.

The band is just about to head south for a song writing retreat. Vikki says they've never done this before – all gone and written in one place together.

"We usually write separately, but I'm excited to go and write some Waifs songs and see if you can hear the collaboration," she said.

With life pulling band in different directions - Thorn herself lives in Utah in America - a lot of things have changed over the years since the band first formed in 1992.

"I used to think that music had to be written in a dark corner by yourself," Thorn says as she laughs, "But I've been playing with friends and the music that comes out of that collaborative atmosphere is so different, so it will be interesting to see what comes of this."

One thing we might not be hearing is more travel songs, such as *How Many Miles*, *Highway One* and the still in demand *London Still*. "I might just put a ban on any songs about being on the road or travelling," Thorn laughs, "I feel like maybe we've written about that a lot! Who knows though, we'll see where it leads."

The band is touring more regional locations this time around, like Alice Springs, Thirroul and of course Miami Marketta on the Gold Coast come 7 December, something that has been inspired by the overwhelming amount of social media the

band received pleading with them to tour again.

"We are so grateful for our fans' support, they are the reason we are still able to do what we love," says Thorn, "Our passion for music has only gotten stronger over the years and our fans are always so raucous and fun to play to." As for touring itself, she says it has gotten a lot healthier over the years, "It has become something that we want to do, instead of something you had to do."

In the 22 years since the band has formed they have played with, and toured with some amazing artists. In 2002 and 2003 the band was lucky enough to tour with Bob Dylan, first around Australia and then throughout the USA and Europe. "It was surreal," Thorn says, "He is one of those artists you grow up thinking the world of, and to open for him, it was like a dream." The Waifs' career has been full of those sort of pinnacle moments. Speaking of when she first heard Missy Higgins Thorn says, "She opened for us in a little place in Melbourne when she was 16. I looked out and I saw this one girl and her piano and I thought she was going to get eaten alive! We have pretty energetic fans, but I looked out two songs in and you genuinely could have heard a pin drop. She had captivated the entire audience. That was the beginning of the phenomenon that is Missy Higgins."

Having never played at any of the upcoming venues previously the band is excited to see new places and faces along the way. If you haven't seen The Waifs before find a venue near you and hit the road!

"We've had feedback that we're much better live," Thorn laughs.

The Waifs hit Miami Marketta Sunday 7 December and second release tickets are now available.

Live Reviews

“It was fitting, then, that The Waifs seemed completely at home on the WOMAD stage. As usual, the group perfectly combined all the elements of good folk rock - intricate work on guitars both acoustic and electric, the exquisite twang of their vocal harmonies, and Vikki’s spectacular harmonica stylings that burned with longing and sang with rambunctious desire and joy. The Sunday set (tragically short due to the time limitations at WOMAD) comprised several hits from *Up All Night*, including the rollicking ‘Lighthouse’ and the bluesy meditations of ‘Highway One’.

When it came to their breakout single ‘London Still’, whispers around Botanic Park told that during the Saturday night gig, Donna had forgotten the words, eventually being helped along by the legions of well-versed fans in the crowd. As she started into the number on Sunday, a group of diehards good-naturedly waved copies of the lyrics. Caught up in witty and utterly comfortable banter with her captive audience (asking if she could take a look at the words, and calling them ‘cheeky buggers’), she proceeded to once again lose her place in the song, turning to her bandmates and muttering ‘I’ve done it again, haven’t I?’ After a good laugh was shared by audience and musicians both, the group picked up flawlessly where they’d left off. It was a breathtaking moment that belied any accusations of fame having gone to the group’s heads, and demonstrated the honesty and good humour with which they approach their work - Donna smirked as she substituted the now-ubiquitous refrain for ‘I’m embarrassed still...’

The set also sported a healthy number of new songs. These were well received, in particular Vikki’s solo effort ‘One More Year’, a plaintive number about the corporate takeover of the salmon industry, dedicated to her father - a fisherman from Albany in Western Australia who first encouraged his daughters to pick up the guitar. It was a moving tribute, particularly as Sunday was his birthday. Donna was seen with her arm around him backstage while Vikki’s beautifully jagged voice sang out like a sharp knife: ‘The death of a way of life/Can mean the death of a man/Big fish feed on little fish/And big men feed on those who work with their hands.’ Like their classic ‘Bridal Train’ the song drew on personal history and experience to speak about real and difficult issues facing the people and places they have known. This deeply human approach served to drive the song’s political battle-cry into heads and hearts.

But it was the next number that proved an even more powerful example of music as a tool for political inspiration, and for me, the highlight of the festival. The Waifs recently featured on the tribute album for the music of Indigenous singer-songwriter Kev Carmody, *Cannot Buy My Soul*, performing his classic ‘From Little Things Big Things Grow’. Co-written with Paul Kelly, the gentle ballad tells the ‘eight year long story’ of Vincent Lingiari and the Gurundji land strike at Wave Hill which culminated in Whitlam’s historic soil-pouring ceremony, and the real beginning of the Indigenous land rights campaign in Australian law. Carmody happened to be at WOMAD for a

Saturday night concert (which I sadly had to miss), and joined The Waifs for an impromptu, unrehearsed rendition of the song.

Donna and Carmody sung/spoke their way through the narrative, blurring the line between song and storytelling - a distinction which Carmody's work, in the campfire-style folk tradition, regularly dissolves. Building on the intimate and humorous relationship with the audience that was obvious from the 'London Still' antics, we were encouraged to sing along with the song's simple, chant-like chorus. This, with the addition of Carmody's large, generous presence on stage, meant that what began as a jovial, carefree 'bonus extra' to the planned set soon deepened into a moving and uplifting moment of communal music-making - a kind of 'singing out' of shared stories and values.

For me, and I suspect for many around me, it became an outpouring of grief and regret for the shameful history of Indigenous reconciliation in this country - a particularly sharp pain after more than a decade of disgusting treatment by the Howard government, and the fact that the Kevin Rudd, the great white hope of the country, is yet to make his voice heard on the issue in an election year. Donna choked through the last verse - 'That was the story of Vincent Lingiari/But this is a story of something much more/How power and privilege cannot move a people/Who know where they stand and stand in the law'.

But the moment managed to transcend, perhaps even transform, the shame that still attends this issue. It became to an extent cathartic, or at the very least a focus for hope. The event was not just musical but ritualistic. As important as the words and sounds was the visual image of a big, grey-haired black man standing between two white 'waifs', sharing his music (to an extent his story, his pain) with them, and us. The sharing was both metaphorical and literal; we were singing along. Perhaps as a theatremaker I'm biased, but I felt the experience to be thoroughly theatrical, in the truest sense of the word - elements of storytelling, music, visual representation and audience engagement congressing in performance for a sharing of souls. Even an uplifting of those souls, for a fleeting moment, towards something higher.

Theatre or not (and ultimately such definitions are pretty irrelevant) Carmody provided the perfect epilogue. Pointing out across the sea of people thunderously applauding the performance, he said 'our spirit walks with you.' The gesture served to contextualise what had just happened, reaffirming the possibility of true reconciliation, punctuating the moment with the hopeful, forward-looking image of walking together. Given the anger that he and so many of his people must feel, it struck me as a gesture of great humility, and great strength.

Through my tears, and in the days to come, it gradually dawned on me that the song's mantra (which I had been gleefully singing along with my sea of new, nameless friends) articulated not just Vincent Lingiari's approach to his people's struggle for rights, but the nature of WOMAD and what it's

about. An event that has for years resisted the temptations of the mainstream cultural machine, WOMAD is awash with music, food and people from a variety of cultures, ages and walks of life. A place where South African sexagenarians, a Mexican, an Israeli and an Indigenous Australian woman can jam together on stage is a refreshing antidote to the monocultural, marketing-laden, drug-fucked drivel of so many 'music festivals' (you can tell I've worked at Summadayze - if I ever have to sell another bloody can of Smirnoff Ice, I'll...).

For one weekend a year something descends on Adelaide's Botanic Park that is all too rare in the individualistic insanity of our world - a sense of community, cultivated through the making and appreciation of an ancient form of human expression; music. The moment I shared with The Waifs and Carmody, as well as countless others (like a spontaneous conversation about South Melbourne with the Turkish man selling gyros) left me convinced that this slow, gentle cultivation, from the 'grass roots' of human community, holds many of the answers we so desperately seek. Convinced that from little things, big things can indeed grow.

As Carmody left the stage and The Waifs rocked into their final number, Vikki remarked 'what a beautiful thing, sharing music.' Exactly."

Spark Magazine - WOMADelaide, 26 March '07

"No such problem this time with support act The Waifs, unencumbered by rock peers' penchant to drown lyrics, also enjoying aural success. The Waifs, like the Dixie Chicks, enjoyed their ascension from the stately Palais to the tennis court. And they exuded a Chicks like maternal pride in their nesting between their last studio album **Up All Night** in 2003 and their new disc cut in Nashville earlier this year. 'Donna and I took a few years off to have babies', Vikki Simpson told the audience, 'three boy'. The Simpson sisters swapped banter, vocals and instruments as they ambled through highlights including *Lighthouse* and *Crazy Train*. Josh Cunningham, adept on guitar, mandolin and dobro, also sang obligatory Dylan song *Lonesome When You Go*. And, for light relief, Vikki announced his cameo on ukulele 'the tiniest instrument in the biggest venue'. Ben Franz also showcased their largest instrument - double bass - and Vikki Simpson alternated on acoustic guitar and harmonica. The semi acoustic outfit anchored by drummer David McDonald, proved a perfect foil for the headliner's hard driving country rock. Equally importantly they road tested new songs such as *How Many Miles* from their Nashville sessions and closed their set with their prophetic *No Such thing As Goodbye*."

Nu Country.com - Keith Urban support at Rod Laver Arena, Melbourne 18/05/07

"But while Keith Urban and his band were deciding which ragged t-shirt to wear during their last performance on Australian soil at Burswood Dome last night, The Waifs opened with a handful of songs which would have made any listener fall in love with them. Vikki Simpson's wailing on the harmonica heralded the old favourite *Crazy Train* and showed off all the things this West Australian band are good at. There's nothing like a hometown crowd

and while Donna Simpson jokingly thanked Keith for being kind enough for closing their show, I could have watched them play all night.”

West Australian - Keith Urban support at Burswood Dome, Perth 23 May '07

“West Australian representation was strong at this year’s festival, and **The Waifs** took to the stage on the second day to a very large crowd in the main arena. How times have changed for The Waifs from playing small room gigs, side stages at the Big Day Out to filling the Fremantle Esplanade at this year’s festival. The Waifs were joined on stage by the toddlers of the respective young Simpson mums as they played tracks ‘London Still’ and ‘Lighthouse’ from their ARIA award winning album *Up All Night*. It was a joy to watch the extended Waif family band drawing laughs and cheers from the crowd, and definitely a joy to see them back on stage after a lengthy break. The Waifs have become one of the most unsung heroes of WA music and it was gratifying to see them in front of such a large crowd enjoying the accolades they so richly deserve.”

Rip-In - West Coast Blues and Roots Festival, 1 April '07

“Australian folk icons The Waifs took to the stage next, in what was their first appearance in Victoria for some time. They showcased a lot of new material, much of which seemed to have a bluesier edge than their previous material, whilst still retaining a definite Waifs sound. During *Highway One*, Josh Cunningham’s blistering guitar solo was easily overshadowed by a next generation Waif baby wandering onstage and playing tambourine...it’s good to see the future of the band is secure! The Waifs closed with hit *London Still*, a crowd favourite.

Beat Magazine - Point Nepean Music Festival

“Josh Cunningham’s cascade of guitar in the opening to *London Still* sparked immediate swells of applause and a hushed sing along. As Vikki swaggered eerie harmonica from one side of the stage, Donna raised an imaginary beer to the air as she crooned the lyric “As you toast to your small town/When you drink the happy hour”.

Stay, a new song from the group’s forthcoming album, revealed a cockier, more potent side to The Waifs. To the flash of the strobes, Cunningham lathered meaty electric guitar. Vikki’s singing was unrestrained with a soaring range of vocals in the league of fellow West Australian Katy Steele. Cunningham wound out the latter part of the set with a cute song performed on ukulele. With operatic war-era vocals, Vikki cupped her hands around her mouth as if singing from a megaphone. And, with a sisterly peck on the cheek and arms wrapped around each other, Donna and Vikki left the stage beaming.”

Drum Media - The Metro, 3 April '07

“The Waifs at Tilley’s is such a natural combination. Their mellow and soulful folk sounds struck just the right chord as they captivate the capacity crowd during their recent mid-week visit. Despite having never seen a Waifs

gig, their incessant touring meant I'd read and heard plenty of positive reports about their on stage antics. I'll admit my knowledge of The Waifs back catalogue stems solely from triple j favourites, but I was soon promising myself I would look up their older material as their soulful guitar riffs and story telling lyrics hooked the crowd and got feet tapping. *London Still* was the first track that I recognised and it wasn't surprising to hear the bulk of the crowd merrily singing along. Vikki's powerful harmonica skills were impressive and sent shivers down my spine as she hit the high notes. The group maintained a relaxed vibe throughout the night as they discussed what tracks they should play, shared anecdotes of boozy Bondi nights and introduced their long-time friend who was celebrating her 30th birthday, but apparently she only gets onstage when there's a stripper pole! The pace gradually built as they brought the funk. In ho-down style they sang about riding their high horse and sailing to the edge of the world. Their unabashed story telling has an endearing ability to play on the Aussie spirit of humble beginnings and carefree appreciation for the simple things in life. *Gillian* got a spin to show their older style and *Lighthouse* followed to bring us back to their most recent album. We had further insights into the Waifs family as Donna told of Vikki's two young children and that this was "the same as Britney Spears!" After a barrage of tight guitar solos and seamless riffs I was impressed to hear that Josh had made all but one of his guitars. They truly are professionals in their field. After declaring Tilley's as their favourite venue and delivering an energetic delivery of *Fisherman's Daughter*, they left the stage to rousing shouts of encore and applause. Josh and Vikki then sauntered back on stage and with Josh on a ukulele they played a heart warming and comical little tune that I assume is called *Sentimental*. More applause ensues and the crowd called them back on stage another couple of times. They strummed and crooned, the sublime vocals of Vikki blew me away, Donna's confident but often tangential stories were charming and Josh's powerful mastery of his guitars was highly motivating. As they left the stage for the last time, the crowd begged for more, but as the house lights came on I felt relief as their energetic set had left my hand sore from clapping and my voice hoarse."

BMA Magazine - Tilley's, 6 April '07

"After a couple of babies, traipsing around the country in a campervan and a tour with Bob Dylan, **The Waifs** finally made a triumphant return to Canberra. The much loved trio of Josh Cunningham and Simpson sisters Donna and Vikki have enthralled folk-country lovers here in Canberra plenty of times in the past during their 15 year history, with their early days in the Nation's capital spent performing to a meager crowd 'we were pretty much on first name basis with by the end of the night', Donna laughed. Fast forward a little and next followed a sell-out Canberra Theatre gig following the success of their album *Up All Night*, a tour which famously revealed Donna's pregnancy live on stage to a raucous audience dancing in the aisles to *Bridal Train*. With a stellar gigging past, how did their latest performance measure up? Tilley's hosted a full house while the outrageously talented trio tipped the scales with possibly their best Canberra gig to date. In their typical laid back fashion, **The Waifs** performed a smorgasbord of tracks to an adoring audience including *Fisherman's Daughter*, *Lighthouse*, *Highway*

One and a number of tracks from their first album. In between songs, witty banter between the Simpson sisters kept the crowd entertained. “Boy she was cranky with me earlier today,” Donna jibed at Vikki. “She screamed at me ‘You woke up my baby!’” The crowd lapped it up in between shouting requests which were mostly obliged, resulting in last minute changes to the set list and making for a pleasantly spontaneous gig which felt like a killer jam session with mates. Donna played a special request for a birthday girl member of their entourage - a song she composed whilst rolling home drunk to her new Bondi apartment, meanwhile Vikki delighted long-time fans by announcing the band has made sound progress on their next album which is to be released later this year. Their live sound is to be envied, with minimal set trickery they had many feet tapping to the sounds the bass and harmonica. The band seemed entirely at home in the smaller setting, and the audience showed their appreciation by demanding two encores, which still wasn’t enough to exhaust the group’s repertoire of talents. The intimate and spontaneous gig was clearly more to the tastes of the band’s back-yard porch anthems and certainly made an impression on longtime and new fans.”

Fasterlouder.com - Tilley’s, 6 April ‘07

Album Showcase

“When a friend invited me along to see The Waifs many years ago, in the back room of a Balmain pub, it was a random discovery of a truly brilliant band from Western Australia. After the performance I eagerly forked out cash for both their earlier albums, *The Waifs* and *Shelter Me*, which have stood the test of time as great releases. Since then it had always surprised me that The Waifs are not a lot bigger until they released their *London Still* EP, then the full-length album *Up All Night*, which provided their huge break into the mainstream. Funnily enough, just as they were hitting the heights of fame The Waifs seemed to be veering towards a country vibe, which was a little off-putting for long-time fans. But on Wednesday night, during a showcase performance at the Factory Theatre, their music was exquisite, intense and infused with a blues-based tone that has marked out their next album *Sun Dirt Water* (due out in September), as a potential Australian classic. To see the Simpson sisters on stage - Donna urging on the music with tambourine in hand, Vikki pouring out her soul through her harmonica - was truly a gift. And that’s not to mention their singing, which appeared to avoid the usual over Aussie accents (a trait long emulated by Missy Higgins), instead focusing on a vocal mix that veered from soulful and playful (usually Vikki) to downright blues melancholy (mainly Donna). The sublime guitar of Josh Cunningham, standing in between his two long-time band mates, stood testament to the strong musical influences gained from a blues-based trip (and recording sessions) in North America. Cheerfully dubbed as a “Pete Murray look-alike” by Donna, Cunningham also sang a couple of songs which, again, seemed highly influenced by US blues and folk rock. This was a Waifs gig that was truly unforgettable - one of the best

shows I've seen in a long time - and proof that the trio is at a creative peak."

Sun Herald - The Factory Theatre, 12 July '07

"The Waifs did the right thing in playing their return show at an intimate venue like the Fly By Night Club. Intimate by their standards that is - even the band seemed surprised by how long it had been since they'd played such a small sell-out show in their adopted hometown of Fremantle. These days, Albany's favourite Fisherman's Daughters could sell out Belvoir a couple of times over if they weren't already too busy touring America with Mr Bob Dylan thank you very much, but with a new album on the way and some songs to road test it was just them and 500 of their most loyal party faithful that got to experience the first strains of the *Sun Dirt Water* album. With little ado The Waifs made their way onstage, and their usual great sense of humour left little doubt that they were feeling comfortable with the home crowd. They kicked off with some newies, Donna Simpson likening the latest record to 'a mixed bag of lollies'. 'I like to call it our cabaret record,' sister Vikki added. 'I like to call it a mixed bag of lollies,' Donna repeated cheekily - and so was the good-natured tone of the night, with the sisters regularly taking turns at friendly bickering. Meanwhile the man caught in the middle, Josh Cunningham, was certainly not overshadowed - one of Australia's finest and most underrated guitarists gave us some sensational solos to cheer at over the course of the evening. The set reached a highpoint four tracks in with the double of *Highway One* and the award winning *Bridal Train*, both causing sing-a-longs that, particularly in the case of the latter, were quite moving. A new song called *Vemillion* followed, showing promise, and it wasn't long before latest single *Sun Dirt Water* was aired an, as if to cement its place in The Waifs' catalogue of classics, they followed it up with *Lighthouse*. *Up All Night* was the source of most of the older tracks (closer *Crazy Train* being a notable exception), with *London Still* (err, *still* their best tune) and the signature *Fisherman's Daughter* featuring prominently. Alas no *Haircut* or *Take It In* for the hardcore fans, but that just everyone something to look forward to when the 'proper shows' are announced for the launch of *Sun Dirt Water* in September. What a treat it was for all involved."

Drum Media Perth - Fly By Night, 19 July '07

sun dirt water Album Tour

"Against the backdrop of four giant white curtains, The Waifs delivered a mix of old favorites and new tunes. The band obviously still enjoy what they do after 15 years together, and are making music that sounds better than ever. The easy banter between sisters Donna Simpson and Vikki Thorn, and laughing at each other for making mistakes. It's a testament to how comfortable they are on stage and with each other. Thorn coming in too early on 'Vermillion' was met with a glare and a laugh that can only be exchanged between siblings. But it's their charm and lack of pretence that makes The Waifs so endearing. A cover of Frank Ifield's 'I Remember You'

showcased the band's versatility and talent at harmonising. As guitarist Josh Cunningham sang along with the girls and a few times alone, he began to sound more and more like Paul Kelly, which is no bad thing. The crowd was in full foot-stomping and clapping force for oldies 'Highway One' and 'Fisherman's Daughter', with a few even feeling the need to woo when Simpson sang of being a West Australian Girl. Thorn's amazing vocals were given a chance to shine with the a capella 'Papa' and USA Songwriting Competition winning 'Bridal Train'. As the band left the stage, there was little doubt that their encore would include 'London Still', but first came 'Feeling Sentimental'. This has to be one of the sweetest love songs around, even as poor Cunningham took a few tries to get it right on his ukulele. The crowd sang along to every word of 'London Still', with some left so impressed they gave the band a standing ovation."

Drum Media Perth - Regal Theatre, Perth 29/09/07

"It was not just the primal passion but the tempestuousness and timing that caught the ear and eye. The Waifs were reaching the climax of their grand maternal eulogy 'Bridal Train' when a slender blonder thrust her tongue into the gaping mouth of her precocious female pal. It was way back in the bleachers, on the left aisle, and under the stony gaze of a mute male statue guarding the long vacated bar. And, of course, in clear view of bemused spectators in a near capacity crowd soaking up the merriment of a group celebrating 15 years of musical magic. The Waifs are not just masters and mistresses of cross genre fans but also same gender persuasion. Vikki Thorn's (nee Simpson) tale of her grandma eloping on a slow post World War II train from Perth to Sydney to sail to California to her American sailor husband may have been saved for song number 11. But it struck a chord with the vast audience who sang along and the passionate pair of land-locked lips for 4 minutes 21 seconds of aural or oral bliss. The Waifs are not your stereotypical country-folk-rock combo - they again proved as entertaining live as on CD and DVD. They opened with fifth album entrée song 'Pony' and galloped through a 21-song set to encore finale 'London Still' with timely tempo changes. Salient sequencing enabled the band to punctuate new album favourites such as Josh Cunningham's evocative 'Eternity' and his rollicking 'How Many Miles' with Thorn's title track 'Sundirtwater' and older songs - Donna Simpson's videogenic 'Highway One' and Josh's 'Lighthouse'. The sisters' patter, unlike some peers, never seems contrived - not even newly wed Donna's intro to a song for an ex-boyfriend - 'Love Let Me Down' or 'Take It'. The latter was preceded by a nod to violinist Jen Anderson to illustrate a return to the scene of the rhyme (Cable Beach, Broome) where The Waifs' journey began when the sisters met their co-founder Cunningham. Equally charming was their self-deprecatory comparison to The Seekers during skiffle driven revamp of English born yodelling ARIA Hall of Fame inductee Frank Ifield's 'I Remember You'. The trio dismissed the band and performed it in acoustic mode, replete with ukulele harmonica, in the vein of their recent touring companion Keith Urban and Dixie Chicks. By then it was nostalgia time from 'Bridal Train' singalong, 'Lighthouse' and new songs 'Lies', 'Stay' and 'Goodbye'. The sisters' autobiographical 'Fisherman's Daughter' enabled Thorn to do an a capella gospel tribute to

the sisters' grandfather, then another rollicking train song and slice of the Sierra Nevada with an acoustic rendition of Cunningham's new disc finale 'Feeling Sentimental'. Like most Waifs concerts they finished on a high with the uplifting 'London Still' - by then the 'Bridal Train' cameo combatants were out of breath."

Beat / Nu Country.com - The Forum, Melbourne 02/10/07

"The sisters' earthy humour has the ability to transport the audience at even the most hallowed theatre to the front bar of The Roebuck Hotel back in Broome. Donna Simpson even said that she might be allergic to Adelaide, that - just as she did at this year's Womadelaide - she would get through the show with the help of a generous dose of a popular decongestant. Particularly its stimulating qualities, it seemed, for in spite of her cold and the need to regularly sneak off-stage to blow her nose or clear her throat, she was quickly back each time to dance like a Woodstock child. Even when confined to playing the tambourine, she shook it with all the gusto of someone living out a rock and roll dream. Since chancing upon each other in a far-flung corner of the Western Australian desert fifteen years ago, the trio has extensively toured Australia, the US and the world's festival circuits; their unique brand of familial on-stage banter particularly appealing to the latter. Love and motherhood followed for Donna Simpson and Vikki Thorn (nee Simpson) and they relocated to Minnesota and Utah respectively. Josh Cunningham - the reluctant pragmatist, it seems - stayed on the road for a time as a member of Missy Higgins' band. The Waifs are undoubtedly enjoying the opportunity to be back on the road - it's what they know and do best - but their verve for playing the new material is clear, too. The first three songs of the set, the bluesy *Pony*, the soul balladry of *Sweetest Dream* and the country finger-picker *Eternity*, quickly established the diversity on **sundirtwater**. While a song like *Bridal Train* now evokes images of the trio's years endlessly traversing the western seaboard, it also holds up the songs they wrote while couped together in a van against the maturity of their current output: the slowly simmering jazz of the title track that seduces with teasing restraint; the country-rock riffs of *No Such Thing As Goodbye* that could easily be Keith Urban in full hair-flicking, boot-scooting flight; and the bouncy pop of *Stay* that sounds more like *99 Red Balloons* than their signature tune, *London Still*. Cunningham's country influences have been clear on previous recordings and Simpson and Thorn's familial grounding in Americana - largely attributable to their grandfather, a US Navy sailor once stationed in Australia - is well documented in print and on record. But where previous efforts have fused the trio's varied influences into a country-folk sound, **sundirtwater** bravely commits to the disparity, producing an album that reflects the worldliness that 2002's ARIA-winning *Up All Night* (and, perhaps ironically, motherhood) has brought them."

Fasterlouder.com - The Thebarton Theatre, Adelaide 04/10/07

"The Enmore Theatre was packed with corporate dags dressed in their weekend mufti, some venturing so far as to wear shorts, despite the stormy weather. It was a crowd that was unlike the new-age hippies I had expected to find. Despite the contradiction between the stereotypical Waifs fan and

The Waifs Enmore audience, these middle aged squares put all the gig going kids to shame, creating more decibels than was probably legal. Sisters Donna Simpson and Vikki Thorn praised them several times claiming they were the best Sydney crowd they had ever played for, Donna joking “I feel like the bloody Seekers”. The Waifs have had a revival in mainstream popularity with their new album **Sun Dirt Water** selling like hot cakes and playing festivals like Splendour In The Grass. My assumption was that the majority of the crowd had jumped on bandwagon in some bizarre middle-aged fad. However, after seeing couples necking each other, singing along and even crying to the feel-good classics of The Waifs, it became that the trio have had a huge influence on their loyal fans. Every movement made onstage was met with riotous applause. It was well deserved as Vikki Thorn proved to be an outstanding vocalist and played the harmonica with such precision, she could have beaten Bob Dylan in a harmonica dual. Proficient and professional musicians in every way, their performance was in no way clinical. Their banter with the crowd was as personal as their interview with Andrew Denton on ‘Enough Rope’. The feeling of connection fans feel with sisters Vikki Thorn and Donna Simpson is possibly due to the manner in which they allow everyone in on their sisterly squabbles. Intelligently, they revealed titbits of an unresolved argument throughout the show. The squabble was over a new song (written by guitarist Josh Cunningham) that broke with The Waifs’ style, embracing a brooding blues/rockabilly sound. Donna getting her way, The Waifs played the never before performed song, Vikki sulking visibly as she performed. Like any good drama the sisters hugged and made up onstage. The Waifs have proved that they have staying power in the industry, and with performances as entertaining as this one that is unlikely to change.”

The Brag - Enmore Theatre, Sydney 11/10/07

“Headliners The Waifs have packed the house with generation-spanning punters. Baby boomers mix it up with X and Y, jostling for a spot for a view of both Simpson sisters. Josh Cunningham takes the middle spot on stage and this proves a suitable metaphor for his place in the set. Between the warm, joke-telling Donna and the high-wailing Vikki, Josh holds his own as do Ben Franz (double bass) and David McDonald (drums), albeit in supporting roles. The first three songs off the rank are the most swagger-spiced from the new album **Sun Dirt Water**. They are a satisfying warm-up, but it’s after pumping out the first oldie of the night, ‘One Highway’, that we really get into the kind of performance The Waifs are known for with ‘Vermillion’. One of the less noticeable songs on the new album, it comes alive with the symphony of Donna’s guitar with her husband Ben Weaver on banjo pursued by Vikki’s harmonica; the three triangulate and zone in on that soul-searing effect music has in its finest moments. The imagery in ‘Bridal Train’ of white dresses and red dirt providing a fitting juxtaposition of The Waifs’ new and classic material - now that the girls are Yankee-wed themselves (maybe it’s genetic?). Donna breaks up formalities with sincere inquiries - “Am I in this one?” - and generally interacts with the audience as though we’re all cousins at Christmas. Playing a ukulele that (like all his instruments) he’s made himself, Josh takes the lead in creating an old-time jazz feel as the band render Frank Ifield’s ‘I Remember You’ and a slow jazz

original 'Feeling Sentimental'. The latter could pass as a Billy Holiday tunes, especially when Vikki cups the mic, creating an old-school recording effect. It's to the rousing applause of this song that the band leave the stage for a brief reprieve before returning for the inevitable encore with 'London Still'. This ode to everyday homeland traditions is a crowd-pleaser, but not of the same calibre as the preceding two hours or so."

TimeOff - The Tivoli, Brisbane 17/10/07

"Following on were The Waifs, who kept the pace nice and smooth - even though there was a healthy group of mellow revelers dancing near the stage. For me though, these talented girls make me feel like I'm sitting in a tent burning joss sticks with Bob Dylan. They have a certain ethereal quality that makes you feel you are so relaxed that you could forget that the wet ground was starting to come through your blanket and that the weather felt like it was dropping to minus five."

Drum Media - Legs 11 - The Domain, Sydney 26/10/07

Sun Dirt Water - Single Reviews

"At its deepest heart, this song has got the blues. Each note and instrument quietly fleshes out the bluesy bass and Vikki Thorn's seductive vocals create a laid-back lounge groove which casually draws you in. It's one hell of a sexy song."

Daily Telegraph

"This change is unlikely to impact too much on weekly proceedings, but The Waifs have changed their sound significantly on this first taste of their next album. Don't worry, existing fans, they haven't incorporated a 'Break it down!' rap or put their shoes back on or anything crazy, but the WA roots trio do sound like they've done a Face Off with Peggy Lee of Fever fame. It's all very smoky, very breathy, and very late '50s femme fatale with her own theme song about everlasting love. The biggest difference is that in this context, with its smouldering guitar, its hotblooded drumming and preheated vocals The Waifs sound like they have a timeless class. That's not always necessarily a great thing, but compared to their usual warts-n-all Aussie-as demeanour, going upmarket is one of the most exaggerated changes they could make, and it makes their upcoming album of the same name all of a sudden very interesting."

Rave Magazine

"There's a definite jazz/gospel vibe about this first single off the forthcoming album of the same name. It's a subtly sophisticated leap forward from the folks/roots base from which The Waifs sprang a decade ago, but a natural progression all the same as the former were a natural evolution from the latter anyway. This is no quietly impassioned moment in the way *London Calling* was. *Sun Dirt Water* would sit more comfortably in the Peggy Lee songbook, just sassy enough to say that this is a woman who's singing now, no longer a lost little girl."

Drum Media

“The Simpson sisters have moved out of home and you can tell. After relocating to America the heart and soul of The Waifs are no longer shaped by the sprawling West Coast of Australia or writing songs about the Kimberley. Whether it be a result of their prevalence on the US folk circuit, or just a natural evolution, *sun dirt water* has significantly more soul, while the added piano sees the track oscillate between jazz and cabaret. The steamy vocals and their extended range makes this song seem like The Waifs’ interpretation of Peggy Lee’s *Fever*, a fine progression indeed.”

Drum Media Perth

“The Waifs are back with a haunting, emotive and sexy little number that showcases the instantly familiar and outstanding songwriting skills of Vikki Thorn. Beginning with the slow, sexy pluck of a double bass, the blues slowly slide in and, by the song’s end, builds into a smoking ode to what this particular woman wants out of her man. This may not have been what you would have expected from The Waifs’ return to the airwaves, but an incredibly welcome one nonetheless.”

TimeOff

“Our very own folk/roots favourites, The Waifs are back with their haunting and emotive new single *Sun Dirt Water*, the title track to their anticipated forthcoming release. Their previous release, *Up All Night* spawned Alternative favourites, *London Still* and *Highway One*, and gained them huge exposure on the independent scene. Since *Up All Night*, which is almost triple-Platinum and garnered four ARIA Awards, The Waifs recently returned for appearances at *Womadelaide* and the *East & West Coast Blues Festivals* to an overwhelming response. The track has a distinct lounge/ jazz vibe which will once again catch the attention of Alternative radio.”

The Music Network

“A fair attempt at country noir by The Waifs, who ache and shimmy through their slinky latin rhythms like they’re laying out a warning to all the old boy cow pokes in ye olde saloon: don’t expect to make it with the singer the way you’ve been making it with the whores. She’s a little more demanding. It’s a moody tune, if a little hollow.”

Beat Magazine

“Hmm - on the one hand, The Waifs are reliably talented, competent and tuneful. On the other hand, *Sun Dirt Water*, with all its tasteful guitar solos and let’s-go-to-the-Spiegeltent-for-a-sophisticated-night-out, -Marge arrangements, is really just (good) adult contemporary snooze jazz. So, er, choose your won conclusion, I guess. I’m going to have a chardonnay and some cheese chunks while I think about switching the Sorrento holiday house to green energy.”

Inpress

Stay - Single Reviews

“Folk frontrunners, The Waifs deliver the second single from their #2 ARIA Album, *Sun Dirt Water*. Their acclaimed album, *Up All Night* reached double-Platinum in Australia and won the band four ARIA Awards. The Waifs have enjoyed two top 50 singles in Australia. The band so impressed Bob Dylan when they supported him on his Australian tour that he asked them to join him on his 2003 North American tour. And with tunes like latest single *Stay*, it’s not hard to see why. An upbeat mix of the album version sees the band take it up a notch from previous single and title track, thanks to Chris Lord-Alge. We’re expecting a gradual crossover to commercial radio from Alternative.”

The Music Network

Sun Dirt Water - ALBUM REVIEWS

“Acclaimed West Australian indie folk outfit, The Waifs are set to release their forthcoming album, *sun dirt water*, under independent record label, Jarrah Records. The band, consisting of three members - Josh Cunningham and two sisters Vikki and Donna Simpson - have referred to the album as by far the most risky and interesting album to date. Their radio hit of 2002, *London Still* led the trio to touring with artists including Bob Dylan. “*Up All Night*” reached the Australian mainstream and Alternative charts, whilst receiving ARIA Awards including Best Independent and Best Blues & Roots Release and spawning the singles, *Highway One* and *Lighthouse*. *Sun Dirt Water* is set to be their finest record to date, with seductive grooves that stroll between styles. The first single and title track taken from the album has received support from national metro and Alternative radio. Check them out for yourself as The Waifs kick off a national tour late September and if you were lucky enough to catch their last minute addition at Splendour In The Grass. Marketing will include street press, print, online and instore advertising campaigns.”

ALBUM OF THE WEEK - The Music Network

“Fans of The Waifs over the years will agree that like a fine bottle of wine this band gets better and better and then even better. This album was recorded in Nashville, Tennessee and gee doesn’t it show, so many sonic layers with some great vibes and ridiculously crafted tunes. So much depth, so many colours from the palette, lyrically challenging, and super soothing to the ear. It is an album that grows with every listen. *sun dirt water* has got plenty of eclectic tracks from two sisters and a demon guitar player, this album is a classic and timeless effort that will, like The Waifs get better

with every listen. 5/5”

Mixdown

“Get a camp fire ready for September 1 when The Waifs’ long-awaited fifth studio album is released. The trio is back with its mix of blues, country and jazz. The Waifs hold their own with this album and maintain their momentum seen in their previous album with their storytelling and raw honest vocals. But the material should reach its peak when the band perform the songs live.”

The Echo

“Sales of The Waifs back catalogue - including the heart-achingly wonderful London Still- will be boosted by their recent inspiring appearance on Andrew Denton’s Enough Rope. The good news for fans is that there’s a new album, **sun dirt water**, while a single of the same name is already available. The title track is typical Waif wondrousness- a bluesy, rootsy number with their loquacious, licorice voices soaring over trundling, tumbling percussion and B.B King-style squealing guitar. It’s the purity of their voices and the honesty of the emotion they put into their recordings that sets them apart from the mass-produced “music” out there. 3/5”

The Sunday Mail

“Definitely one of my favorite Aussie bands, The Waifs have been in hiatus of late, but this week their new album is launched. Having made a name for themselves on the festival circuit here and abroad, their ARIA award-winning 2003 release “Up All Night” reached triple platinum status. The self titled CD and other early albums ‘Shelter Me’ and ‘Sink or Swim’ were expressions of youngsters on the road having fun and experiencing independent life for the first time, busking in the streets and playing gigs in remote corners. This offering is more serious, world-weary, definitely grown up stuff!

Leading off with ‘pony’ the Blues infusion is strong, Donna Simpson’s smoky voice lifts over Joshua Cunningham’s growling guitar licks and Vikki Thorn’s harmonica just howls with passion. Rhythm section of David Ross Macdonald and Ben Franz hold down the beat with perfection. Title song ‘sundirtwater’ is set to be a classic, its rolling pulse and singing guitar is finely crafted. Vikki’s lyrics and vocal are a tale of “sweet everlasting love”. Prolific songwriter Cunningham is definitely one of our best guitarists, and it is evident again on the moody ‘vermillion’.

Slide-guitar features in the Country-Rocker ‘how many miles’, but ‘without you’ is more like The Waifs of old with its mellow folksiness. More Blues on ‘sad sailor song’ though ‘get me some’ gets the Jazz treatment.

Lackadaisical ‘eternity’ is Cunningham’s chance to exercise the tonsils. One of several Nashville session-musos, guest organist Reese Wynans lays the bed for the bluest of blue ‘sweetest dream’. Rocking it up again in a Country vein is ‘goodbye’; while ‘stay’ is more up-tempo and quite sentimental 60s style pop. Second last track ‘love let me down’ is the saddest song I’ve ever heard, with Josh’s grunty guitar pouring pathos all over Donna’s voice of misery- great feel! And in the end ‘feeling sentimental’ has a cute ukulele

riff with a 40's nostalgia, short and sweet. In a quip to the crowd on the double live disc 'A Brief History', Donna says, "('Crazy Train')... was written when we were doing American accents." It seems the band is doing it the American way again - inevitable, I suppose, due to the amount of time spent in that much larger and more exciting scene. Hopefully Oz has not lost these wonderful songwriters and performers, like so many before them! They are our living treasures!!!"

Peter Dawson

"What is it about songwriters with a little country in their veins wanting to write songs about a pony? And so The Waifs open their long-awaited fifth studio album with a Josh Cunningham composition, a country blues classic, laden wit irresistible harmonies from Vikki Thorn and Donna Simpson. After a year away from each other, the trio, and bandmates bassist Ben Franz and drummer David McDonald, regrouped in Nashville to record an album which sounds effortless. The album's first three tracks herald this to be a confident and eclectic collection. The title track features Thorn delivering a slow-burn sexy vocal over a slinky jazz and lounge soundtrack. It is followed by *Vermillion*, a song which sounds like it has escaped from the Cold Chisel vaults. The Waifs pick up the pace with the joyous country romp *How Many Miles*, a song the Dixie Chicks would kill to cover, while *Get Me Some* dips into 70s west coast pop rock and *Stay* is completely unexpected with its jaunty organ and driving rhythm. This is sublime music, the perfect soundtrack to calm a busy soul. **4/5 Runner Up Album of the Week**"

Daily Telegraph

"After a four year hiatus, The Waifs are back with a new album- **SunDirtWater** - and a new attitude towards music. The band- Donna Simpson, Vikki Thorn and Josh Cunningham - say the songs display a new sound and a greater depth of emotion, "I think it's a really good reflection of our more mature songs," Simpson said. The title **SunDirtWater** relates to the three very different personalities within the band, but also the way they work together."

Coffs Coast Advocate

"After a year away from each other, The Waifs regrouped in Nashville to record their long-awaited fifth album. **SunDirtWater** sounds effortless and makes the listener feel decidedly relaxed. 'Vermillion' sounds as if it escaped the Cold Chisel vaults with Josh Cunningham busting Ian Moss guitar chops. 'Get Me Some' dips into 70's West Coast pop rock and 'Stay' is completely unexpected with its jaunty organ and driving rhythm. In fact, much of **SunDirtWater** sounds like the results of Fleetwood Mac and the Dixie Chicks spending a few hours jamming. **4/5**"

Herald Sun

"From the album title to the colours and textures of the album artwork, this Western Australian trio are saying they're earthy and real on their follow-up to 2003's *Up All Night*. Which is all well and good, but man cannot live on roughage alone. Sisters Vikki Thorn and Donna Simpson and their musical partner Josh Cunningham, are renowned for their "keep it real" folksiness,

so in lieu of a Lucinda Williams album, at least three of these new tracks ape her Spartan song structures and throaty howl, while 'Without You' and 'Get Me Some' have that lazy/dozy Jack Johnson feel about them. Better moments include 'Stay', which suggests the trio have a little pop in their palates, and the gritty blues of 'Pony'. **2/5"**

Who Magazine

"In the four years since Up All Night went multi-platinum The Waifs have virtually broken up, founded various families and put some balance in their lives. It shows, because **SunDirtWater** is their best album yet, with a sense of texture and songwriting ease that expands their folk roots. It engages with the sultry title track, takes in a sparse country lament (Vermillion) and dabbles with gospel (Sweetest Dream). It's a dark, invigoration disk. **8/10"**

Sun Herald

"Sales of The Waifs' back catalogue will be hugely boosted by their inspired appearance on Andrew Denton's Enough Rope two weeks ago. A new album, **SunDirtWater**, is out this week. The title track is typical Waifs' wondrousness: a bluesy number with their voices soaring over tumbling percussion and squealing guitar. **4/5"**

Sunday Telegraph

"*Sun, Dirt, Water* is a more precise and professional affair than previous efforts, but it's not all smooth sailing. Bluesy opener 'Pony' sets things up nicely, but the band doesn't sustain the mood, and just a touch too often their former earthiness is set aside in favour of a sound dangerously close to adult contemporary dirge. 'Without You' and the morning television friendly 'Get Me Some' are the worst offenders. Elsewhere, pop-rock influences and a more contemporary vibe make this album feel like a transition - a band that's changing and not quite there yet, although there are definitely some positive signs: Favouring electric guitar, Josh Cunningham produces a few beautiful moments - hints of Mark Knopfler in the solo of 'Vermillion' and haunting textures in 'Love Let Me Down'. But while songs like the solid-gold country 'How Many Miles' will further endear The Waifs to their growing American audience, *Sun, Dirt, Water* is a step away from the folk-pop that won hearts here. "

Rolling Stone

"With this fifth album recorded in Nashville, the down to earth Waifs were able to avail themselves of some of that city's notable session players. Combine this with the fact that American is now their second home and you can feel the shift of focus in The Waifs' music. You can tell how that has informed tracks like the rootsy blues of opener 'Pony', complete with parping harmonica, the rocking country of 'How Many Miles', with its own take on twang, the gritty guitar-Hammond organ interplay of 'Sad Sailor Song', the 60's soulfulness of 'Sweetest Dream', the 70's rock of 'No Such Thing As Goodbye', the lilting cabaret lullaby of 'Felling Sentimental' and especially in the jazz inflections on the title track. Fortunately, if that seems to present a picture of undue diversity, it all still sounds pretty grounded and unaffected in that typical Waifs kind of way. Carried along by

the inviting voices of sisters Donna and Vikki. And that really is the strength of this effort - no matter how far they appear to roam geographically and musically, the core of their self sufficient, road tested style is the down-home warmth that still comes through. **3.5/5"**

Rave Magazine

"Most of these new songs were written during sisters Donna Simpson and Vikki Thorn's two year long maternity leave when they lived in different corners of the world. As a result the songs are set in places such as South Dakota and the musical palette includes country, soul, blues and lullabies. There's a genre for just about every taste, which torch ballads such as 'Sweetest Dream,' up-tempo kickers such as 'Stay' rubbing shoulders with the dreamy 'Feeling Sentimental'. Their performances crackle with energy and the girls' vocals, Josh Cunningham's guitar and the rhythm section are the most polished of their career." **Seven Days magazine**

ALBUM OF THE WEEK

"It's been four years since The Waifs last album Up All Night, so the talented WA trio had plenty of material for this new offering. Donna Simpson, Vikki Thorn and Josh Cunningham mix it up with an intriguing blend of blues, roots, soul and folk sounds, not to mention a distinct country twang that comes from being recorded in Nashville. As with their best work, their strength is their loose, relaxed style - it never feels like they're trying too hard and it always sounds like they're enjoying themselves. The result is more challenging than previous albums, but well worth the effort. ******"**

NW Magazine

"With a swag of graceful country blues, The Waifs' fifth studio album is an exercise in professional sauntering. Opener, 'Pony', sets the album of on a swagger, with a blues hook and harmonica. This is what The Waifs are known for; polished, soulful country for people who don't like country and it's here in spades. The title track fuses a jazz piano line with Vikki Thorn's earthy melody and blues guitar, the influences growing together in a seamless culmination of musical elegance. For its remainder, the album levels out with a set of beautifully crafted tunes. As it meanders hither and thither from melancholy, Nashville-inflected country to rock-inflected soul to jazz and blues and back again, it does so with all the confidence of a band who've mastered all of these forms. The Simpson sisters' harmonies are a sweet caress on the ears and if there's less of the folk touch that made up Up All Night so popular, **SunDirtWater** has a classic, timeless quality. **4/5"**

Xpress Magazine/ Timeoff

"**SunDirtWater** is The Waifs' fifth studio album and the follow up to their triple platinum, multi-ARIA award winning Up All Night - and, therefore, faces the daunting prospect of living up to the inevitable comparisons with its predecessor in the public eye. It is equally as difficult to avoid making comparisons to that particular award-winning album when trying to review **SunDirtWater** in its own right. That said, **SunDirtWater** has all the elements becoming another prize winner, it's explorative, experimental and brazen,

but perhaps a little too overwhelming for a comfortable listen. With a far more lo-fi approach to country and folk than their usual sound, this Western Australian trio have still cooked up a tasty brew of blues, country, folk and jazz, distilled into just thirteen songs. Each track is unequivocally delightful and bold in its own right, yet as an album it becomes dizzying for the listener and slightly unpredictable. The title track is a sexy, sultry jazz ballad that makes you wonder why you ever questioned the band's new direction; however, it quickly changes to the intense country twang of 'Goodbye', driving home the erratic nature of the album. Recorded in Nashville, it is easy to pinpoint why the album undertook such a distinctive country style, but maybe we Australians are a little too undeveloped to appreciate the country/folk that the Waifs deliver so very well." **Drum Media**

"**SunDirtWater** is The Waifs' fifth studio album and the follow up to their highly successful record *Up All Night*. This is The Waifs 15th year and, judging by the sounds of their new CD, it's going to be one of their best. From smoky blues to slinky jazz - and everything in between - **SunDirtWater** has it all. The songs on this album range from the 'poppy' to the almost country. Perhaps it was the Nashville influence that inspired them to write 'Pony', the opening track. This song truly encapsulates what The Waifs are all about - with its smooth bass line and typical Waif harmonies. The title track verges on catchy and with lyrics like 'give me the sun, give me the dirt, give me the water... give me sweet everlasting love,' it's hard to not sing along. 'Eternity', which is sung almost entirely by guitarist Josh Cunningham, brought back extremely fond memories of WOMAD in March this year. This track brings an almost joyous feeling and the rest of the album does a similar thing. **SunDirtWater** is a brilliant fifth effort. There is a feeling of satisfaction and happiness that you can hear in the way sisters Vikki and Donna Simpson and Josh sing together - almost as if this is what they'd been wanting to achieve since they started out. On first listen I was unsure but like all great things, **SunDirtWater** grew on me. All of the tracks are standouts and fans will walk away knowing **SunDirtWater** was definitely worth the long wait. This album gives me 13 more reasons to love The Waifs. Top effort, indeed."

Rip It Up

"WA's favourite country roots band return with an eclectic mix of tracks on their fifth studio album, **SunDirtWater**. From the stomping opening track 'Pony', with its rhythmic twanging bass line and suggestive lyrics "Gonna get on my pony and ride" sung with raunchy relish, the band share their infectious delight in making music. Standout title track channels' Nina Simone's *Feelin Good*, beginning subtly with an eerie vocal and bass, but building to the impassioned, hypnotic incantation "Gimme sun, gimme dirt, gimme water, give me sweet everlasting love". Josh Cunningham takes to the mike for the bluesy and spiritual 'Eternity', the restrained guitar and harmonica counter pointing rather than challenging his lyrics. 'Stay' is a throbbing Blondie-style frenzy, a dizzying but brief carousel ride. The heated 'Sad Sailor Song' is a drunkenly lurching piratical narrative fueled by Reese Wynans' Hammond organ. The album was recorded in Nashville,

where The Waifs enlisted various local session players to enhance their sound. Swinging together in rollicking country style on 'How Many Miles' and 'Goodbye'. Finally, we go back to the 1920's with 'Feeling Sentimental', a restrained, sweet and innocent lullaby accompanied by a ukulele. The band take it down a level with the understated 'Vermillion', but the extended heartbreak and eerie harmonies of 'Love Let Me Down' convey deserted isolation and introspection in a truly uncanny way. 'Without You' and 'Sweetest Dream' are gentle, Norah Jones-y tracks, with soft wire brushed drums, less emotional in their impact than the other tracks. However, along with the Commodores-style 'Get Me Some', these songs are more accessible to the mainstream - meaning that your Mum will appreciate this album too."

Drum Media Perth

"Romantic reality is a fertile font for songwriters - even the positive passion of the title track of The Waifs' fifth studio album. It would appear the Vikki Thorn, nee Simpson wrote the passion primed paean about her husband with whom she spent a year in Utah after touring to support *Up All Night*. Predominance of positive love songs is a salient signpost to an inner calm in a belated resurrection in a group whose massive road trauma is graphically depicted in guitarist Josh Cunningham's *How Many Miles*. Cunningham's clever use of a road metaphor for a relationship is a focal point of an inspired disc, kick started by harmonica driven entrée *Pony*. He develops his dexterity in writing assertive love tunes, sung by his female partners in rhyme, in *Without You* and *Get Me Some*. Students of the country genre might detect a subliminal steal from Tony Keith's song of the same name in the latter but not Donna Simpson's death driven narrative *Vermillion* - a lachrymose lament about a South Dakota cemetery. The imagery is superb with the parental passing followed by the son riding off with the *Hells Angels* and the daughter decamping in her mama's coat. Equally memorable is Simpson's *Sad Sailor Song* where the drunken skipper charts a course to death. Sequencing is superb with Cunningham's unconditional love songs *Eternity*, with its spiritual feel, and *Sweetest Dream* leading into a joyous rock rooted 'there's no such thing as goodbye' *Goodbye* and organic driven *Stay*. Simpson masters a melancholic mood swing in the dark recesses of bleak dirge driven *love Let Me Down* that segues into Cunningham's fecund finale *Feeling Sentimental*, replete with his ukulele. Extensive touring of the US and the sisters' post tour sojourn into the musical mecca has enriched the disc with Nashville session supreme Dan Dugmore on pedal and lap steel and Reese Wynans on organ and piano. Co-producer Garry West accentuated their country roots at the *Compass Studio* and record label he runs with banjo-playing spouse Alison Brown - a Harvard educated MBA. This dynamic disc is the perfect passport to maximum exposure on the Americana and college radio circuit."

Beat Magazine

"A long, dusty road winds its way through outback Australia. An old red pickup grumbles along, throwing up clouds of dust as it makes its way across a sun burnt desert. The soundtrack, played through a crackly tape deck is **SunDirtWater**. This, The Waifs' first studio album in four years, takes its time in winding around, nestling itself between your ears. The flawless,

unmistakable voices of sisters Donna Simpson and Vikki Thorn resonate throughout the record, and over the sparse instrumentation show why The Waifs are so highly regarded in the Australian music industry. With guitarist Josh Cunningham on lead guitar (and the occasional vocal), this is a trip full of quiet confidence, passion and a whole bunch of talent. Forming in the nether regions of Western Australia 15 years ago, it wasn't until the success of 2002's ARIA winner *Up All Night* and it's single 'London Still' that the three piece exploded into the eyes and the ears of the world's consciousness. Since the album's success, massive tours have ensued, as has motherhood - also part of a reason for the extended break between drinks. Now, they return with **SunDirtWater**, a much more countrified collection of songs than their previous folk influenced releases. Recorded in Nashville, it's clear that there was lack of pressure to record when listening to laid-back songs like 'Get Me Some', and with over 20 tracks laid down by the band, the selected 13 songs might not get the party started but they can certainly provide the background music to the morning after. It's smooth, it's immaculately produced, and there is no doubt that, come the summer months, this one's gonna get some play time on those long, warm evenings outback."

Inpress Magazine

"Romantic reality is a fertile font for songwriters - even the positive passion of the title track of The Waifs' fifth studio album. It would appear that Vikki Thorn, nee Simpson, wrote the passion-primed paeon about her husband with whom she spent a year in Utah after touring to support *Up All Night*. Predominance of positive love songs is a salient signpost to an inner calm in a belated resurrection of a group whose massive road trauma is graphically depicted in 'How Many Miles'. Cunningham's clever use of a road metaphor for a relationship is a focal point of an inspired disc, kick started by harmonica driven entrée 'Pony'. He develops his dexterity in writing assertive love tunes, sung by his female partners in rhyme, in 'Without You' and 'Get Me Some'. Students of the country genre might detect a subliminal steal from Toby Keith's song of the same name in latter but not Donna Simpson's death driven narrative 'Vermillion' - a lachrymose lament about a South Dakota cemetery. The imagery is superb with the parental passing followed by the son riding off with the Hells Angels and the daughter decamping in her mama's coat. Equally memorable is Simpson's 'Sad Sailor Song' where the drunken skipper charts a death course. Sequencing is superb with Cunningham's unconditional love song 'Eternity', with its spiritual feel, and 'Sweetest Dream' leading into a joyous rock rooted "there's no such thing as" 'Goodbye' and organ driven 'Stay'. Simpson masters a melancholic mood swing in the dark recesses of bleak dirge driven 'Love Let Me Down' that segues into Cunningham's fecund finale 'Feeling Sentimental', replete with his ukulele. Extensive touring of the US and the sisters' post tour sojourn in the musical mecca has enriched the disk with Nashville session supreme Dan Dugmore on pedal and lap steel and Reese Wynans on organ and piano. Co-producer Gary West accentuated their country roots at the Compass Studio and record label her runs with banjo playing spouse Alison Brown - a Harvard educated MBA. The dynamic disc is

the perfect passport to maximum exposure on the American and college radio circuit.”

Beat Magazine

“This fifth studio album sees The Waifs having a lot of fun with their musical accomplishments. From the swampy blues of the title track to the vaudevillian ‘Feeling Sentimental’ this album oozes charm and confidence. Drenched in harmonies and punchy guitars, this is a kick arse album that will take them to a new level of acceptance.”

EDGE Magazine

“My response to The Waifs’ albums in the past as the same I have to brown rice, Patrick White novels and toilet paper made from recycled products. I could respect the effort and philosophy, I knew it was loved by some and was good for me, the world and our children’s children etc - but I just couldn’t find the passion to commit. Things weren’t helped by the fact that while their shows were great fun, their songwriting was rarely more than workmanlike and their earnestness could irritate after a while.

Sundirtwater is a different kettle of (organically farmed) fish. For a start, there’s a meatier, richer sound, their love for American roots music is matched by solid writing (the title track’s torch-song shimmy, the country soul of *How Many Miles* and *Sweetest Dream*, the menace of *Sad Sailor Song*) and there is an interesting dark streak throughout the album in Donna Simpson’s songs. What’s more, there’s very little of that nasal Strine twang. It is in the end a good country-blues-tiny bit of folk album. Maybe I should give White’s *Tree of Man* another go.”

Sydney Morning Herald - Spectrum

“It’s been more than four years since The Waifs’ last studio album, and a lot has changed. The singing sisters became mums and homed themselves in America, and guitarist Josh Cunningham amused himself by playing on stage with Missy Higgins. They made this new album in Nashville and it’s a sweet slice of Americana - combining blues, jazz, soul, country and pop. Think Lucinda Williams and Bonnie Raitt. The title is apt, because this is an earthy record. Most of it is pretty laid back, with only a few up-tempo tracks (including the standouts *Goodbye* and *How Many Miles*). Sweet stuff. **3.5/5**”

Music Australia Guide

“After the surprise success of their 2003 album *Up All Night*, The Waifs nearly cracked under all the attention. Instead, the trio took a year-long break from each other before reuniting to record a new album. It’s a strategy that worked because **sundirtwater** is the best album of their career. **4/5**”

Sydney Morning Herald - The List

“Well Vikki, Donna and Josh are back after the girls took some time off from the band to raise families. Has the time off and having kids been a good thing? In a word- no! The fire, the hunger just doesn’t feel or sound like its there anymore in the 13 songs found on The Waifs’ new album. It’s all fairly tame and what we’ve come to expect from this outfit to be honest.

Unfortunately, the problem with **sundirtwater** is that the tracks never really take hold of the listener. It's simply a case of play, listen, next. I'm not trying to dismiss this three piece because I love them as much as the next person, but a band can only be judged on what they put up in new material and this is all very predictable and mundane. 'Sad Sailor' and 'Stay' are about the only songs that seem worth mentioning with their cool, organ-flavored upbeat vibe but when the other tunes fall flat, then there seems little point. It's safe, never pushes boundaries and while there's nothing wrong with that, there's also not a lot right with it either. **2/5"**

Buzz Magazine

"The Waifs' most ambitious release yet? Some may say, because yes this is The Waifs like we've never really heard before. But it's not all new ground that the ex-WA trio are touching on with their fifth release **Sun Dirt Water**. The band don't shy away from delivering their trademark homely folk and roots, accentuated by the recognizable harmonies from sisters Donna and Vikki. But what they do introduce to us here, is a stronger splash of country (possibly influenced from recording in Nashville) deep blues and even jazz and soul. The result is two years worth of material melded into a 13 track album that rarely faults, a polished release that delivers some of the best Waifs material yet. And Thorn's vocals in particular have never sounded so sassy, smooth and at times even sexy. Standouts are playful opening number 'Pony', Vikki's sublime tone in 'Sun Dirt Water' and the gorgeous 'Vermillion'. Rounding out the album is a lullaby like ukulele track 'Feeling Sentimental', which ends the album off on an utterly sweet note. Old fans will dig the new sounds The Waifs are finding within themselves, and for new fans this is a fine introduction to one of Australia's best roots acts. Can we still call them roots?"

Rip In Magazine

"It's a little bit roots, a little bit rock...and more than a little country. Sister duo of Donna and Vikki Simpson now reside in the US and *Sun Dirt Water* was recorded in Nashville - and it shows. While those sweet wholesome sisterly harmonies will always be the band's backbone, the smooth studio production and playing from the likes of Dan Dugmore (James Taylor, Linda Ronstadt) on steel guitar and Reese Wynans (Stevie Ray Vaughan) on Hammond organ gives this a decidedly American flavour. While 'I'm Free' dips a little too heavily into West Coast rock for a group hailing from Western Australia, it's when they head into Lucinda Williams territory on the likes of the soulful 'My Sweetest Dream' or the country rock of 'Goodbye' that they shine, with the slick players taking a back seat to the sisters Simpson. This is an album that will please many, and may well break The Waifs in the States; and if you can feel a "but" coming on, it's just that fear that The Waifs are in danger of being seduced by the US market, and losing that honesty and immediacy that so many treasure. **3.5/5"**

Sydney City Hub

"It seems that the time The Waifs have spent hanging out with Bob Dylan in support of his Australian and US tours a couple of years back has paid off handsomely. No more is Aussie folk twang a call to hippies to unite, in **Sun**

Dirt Water there's jazz groove, alt country, blues and trad folk with a lush Nashville production to bring it all together. Despite the title, this is easily the least colloquial Waifs album yet. The sound resonates more in the American mid-west than Western Australia, perhaps indicating that The Waifs are finally aiming to grasp onto American audiences and hang on tight as the bull bucks. Thematically, the album is still very much about a wandering life, filled with tales of lament, memory and longing. Having three songwriters in the band in Donna Simpson, Vikki Thorn and Josh Cunningham has aided in improving some complexity to an album of simple songs. **Sun Dirt Water** starts with three songs as different as they are signs of deeper understanding of musical storytelling. The odd track reeks of homage to decades past, and hardly the masterpieces from that era, and most of these fall a little flat. But there are memorable moments. It is the opening trio of 'Pony', 'Sun Dirt Water' and 'Vermillion' (the latter featuring Dan Dugmore on pedal and lap steel) that will make the greatest hits album, along with the sublime second to last track 'Love Let Me Down' - a haunting reminder of what The Waifs are capable of after the lacklustre middle of the album. ***1/2"

The Brag

"West Australian-bred trio The Waifs have always been able to effortlessly weave a pop sensibility into their award-winning blend of acoustic-based folk, blues and country. Recorded in Nashville, their fifth studio album expands the band's established musical themes and could prove to be their most successful to date. With songwriting and vocals duties again shared between sisters Donna Simpson, Vikki Thorn and guitarist Josh Cunningham, the group's trademark sound - close Everly-style harmonies from the women, backed by Cunningham's lyrical guitar work - remains intact. Backed by the solid but unobtrusive support of bassist Ben Franz and drummer David MacDonald, the eclectic mood ranges from the smoky title track and Thorn's hard-blow harmonica 'Pony' solo, to the country-rock of 'Goodbye' and Simpson's vaudevillian ukulele on 'Feeling Sentimental'. Like their independent label partner John Butler, The Waifs continue to demonstrate that achieving success with talent and dedication - rather than music industry hype - is not only possibly, but highly desirable."

Country Update

"Successful bands don't always absorb the sounds of the cities where they record but The Waifs' decision to work in Nashville is written all over *Sun, Dirt, Water*. A good portion of the tracks are country blues songs, some fattened with squalls of organ and a shuffling backbeat. If you are still in love with the band that made *London Still*, that fragile ode to homesickness, it's quite a jolt. There's nothing wrong with a jolt, of course, and the trio's Tennessee dreaming is entirely convincing. From the gospel blues of *Sweetest Dream* to the jazzy groove of the title track and the jaunty bar room rocker *How Many Miles*, the fatter sound, dirtier guitars and shuffling backbeats fit Josh Cunningham and sisters Vikki and Donna Simpson like a well-cut suit."

The (Sydney) Magazine