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She-Riffs:

Gender and the Australian Experience of Alternative Rock and Riot Grrrl in the 1990s

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Abstract

This article uses analysis of media articles and archival materials to pursue two aims. First, we investigate the effect of Riot Grrrl and grunge's gender equality impetus in the Australian context. In pursuing this, we discuss the rise of female musicians in Australia around the time of grunge and into the late 1990s, particularly in women-only or mostly-women bands, and bands for whom gender was a key defining factor. Second, in keeping with the goals of feminist historians (although this is not a historical paper, as such) we aim to document the activities of some of the female musicians who were active in Australia during the 1990s. Given that this area has been otherwise neglected in academic accounts of Australian popular music and of Riot Grrrl/grunge, it will provide an important starting point for further studies to expand upon. We demonstrate here that the Australian intersections between feminism and rock music are unique, as are the dialogues, debates and solutions proffered, as they combined immediate, local grassroots activity with support from international acts who themselves, while notable in their celebrity, had similar ties to the type of direct action cultural communities exemplified by the Rock'n'Roll High School concept.

Keywords: Australian music; feminism; gender; grunge; popular music; Riot Grrrl

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Introduction

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw two significant and interrelated occurrences in popular music. The first was the grunge phenomenon that emerged out of the American North-West, spearheaded by the band Nirvana and the global success of their album *Nevermind* in 1991. The second was the emergence of the Riot Grrrl movement from the city of Olympia in the same region. Riot Grrrl was essentially a feminist version of punk that offered an intense critique of gender roles and the treatment of women in society, and more specifically their treatment in music scenes. Riot Grrrl encouraged girls and women to form their own bands and to use music as a way to have their voices heard. The movement also encouraged women's participation in music in other ways; for example through encouraging women to take over the area in front of the stage at a gig, a space more often inhabited by men (for discussions of Riot Grrrl, see Gottlieb and Wald 1994; Leonard 1997; Rosenberg and Garofalo 1998; Meltzer 2010; Marcus 2010). Riot Grrrl also encouraged women to find other ways to have their voices heard, for example through the creation of zines (many of which had a musical focus). The similar musical styles and shared geographic region of grunge and Riot Grrrl hint at their similarities in other ways; grunge and Riot Grrrl bands played together and shared members at times. Grunge—or at least some of its most well-known proponents such as Kurt Cobain and Eddie Vedder—also shared some of the philosophies of Riot Grrrl; for example, Vedder is openly pro-choice and Cobain was vocal about supporting equality for women. Grunge and the broader "alternative" scene surrounding it came to be associated with ideals of tolerance and acceptance, particularly in relation to gender (Shevory 1995; Strong 2011). In combination, these movements meant that the question of gender inequality in the music industry (and more widely) was discussed extensively in the early 1990s, and there was an upswing in the visibility of female musicians. This is certainly not only connected to Riot Grrrl and grunge; Clawson's (1999) work on female bass players, for example, documents how spaces had been opening up for female musicians in alternative scenes since the mid-1980s.

This article has two aims. First, it will investigate the effect of Riot Grrrl and grunge's gender equality impetus in the Australian context, specifically in relation to music (as opposed to non-music related zines, which to some extent have been examined already; see Harris 2003). In pursuing this aim, we will discuss the rise of female musicians in Australia around the time of grunge, particularly in women-only or mostly-women bands, and bands for whom gender was a key defining factor. Second, in keeping with the goals of feminist historians (although this is not a historical paper, as such), we aim to document the activities of some of the female musicians who were active in Australia during the 1990s, although we do not have the scope to

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give an exhaustive account of these women. We have used a thematic analysis of media and archival materials sourced from libraries, databases and focused internet searches. Given that this area has been otherwise neglected in academic accounts of Australian popular music and of Riot Grrrl/grunge, the information here will provide an important starting point for further studies to expand upon. We will demonstrate that the Australian intersections between feminism and rock music were unique, as were the dialogues, debates and solutions proffered, as they combined immediate, local grassroots activity with support from international acts who themselves, while notable in their celebrity, had similar ties to the type of direct action cultural communities exemplified by the Rock'n'Roll High School concept.

These aims are important to pursue because of the difficulty that women have had in breaking into the world of rock more generally. Women tend to be marginalized across the music industry, but there are places (for example pop or the realm of the singer-songwriter) where they have faced less adversity in building successful careers. This has been less the case in heavier, guitar-based genres. Numerous studies have documented the ways in which women are essentially discouraged from participating in making rock music, whether this be through the "gendering" of the sound of such music as masculine (Walser 1993), the exclusion of women from spaces associated with the creation of such music (for example, music shops and recording studios; see Cohen 1997), the belittling of women musicians at gigs (Leonard 2007), or through explicit intimidation tactics (enhanced with social media), and the general threat of sexual harassment and assault that women experience more generally at venues (Gooding 2015). These act in conjunction with a music industry that is still focused on women's appearances and sexuality as marketing tools (Hatton and Trautner 2011; Lieb 2013) and a music media that still often reduces female performers to their gender and little else (Coates 1997; Davies 2001) to circumscribe where and how women can participate, and to preserve rock and heavier music as masculine spaces. This is not to say that no progress has been made; women with guitars are undoubtedly more visible today than in the 1970s or 80s. Many of these problems persist, however; a recent survey by Music Victoria found that female musicians in the state still cite most of these issues as barriers to their success (Music Victoria 2015). If it is a feminist goal to seek to increase women's representation in the areas of popular music where they have been marginalized or excluded, then identifying and analysing points in history where women have made inroads in achieving this goal is an important way to increase understanding and develop strategies to go further. The 1990s in Australia is one such moment, and documenting this time and the ways in which intersections between the specificities of the Australian music scene and international trends in music

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made it possible increases our understanding of what enables increased visibility of marginalized groups in popular culture. In keeping with that goal, however, it also needs to be noted that the feminism being documented here is not obviously intersectional. Queer politics are represented in the Grot Grrrl zine discussed below, but almost all visual representations of band members in media and archival material show white participants. Further, no mention is made in any of the documents examined of Indigenous Australian women or issues relating to them. In this way, the Australian adaptation of Riot Grrrl appears to have reproduced some of the aspects of the original movement that have seen it criticized for focusing mainly on issues relating to white, middle-class girls (Piano 2003).

The discussion of women's marginalization in music at this time also needs to be understood as something that can be related to the "waves" of the women's movement. In much the same way as many social movements, the push for greater representation of women in the creation of music outside pop and carefully designated spaces for female singer-songwriters appears to go through cycles of activity that usually correspond with the emergence of musical movements. These are usually movements that push social boundaries in some way. As with the women's movement (see Grey and Sawer 2008, although more pronounced in terms of being seen as something "new"), when one of these periods of activity occurs, it is often framed as a unique and original moment, unprecedented in music history. In this way, the women who were active and political in, for example, the punk movement during the 1970s have more often than not been left out of historical accounts discussing that time (Reddington 2007). In fact, the way that women are written out of rock history more generally (including in academic studies) contributes to their marginalization (Strong 2011).

A Brief Pre-History of the "Alternative Rock" Moment in Australia

The contemporary Australian music sector is a small marketplace, heavily reliant on cultural imports. This is a plainly stated assumption in Australia, where it is often argued that "to look for the 'Australian' element is to look for an inflection, the distinctive modification of an already internationally established style" (Turner 1992: 13). To a large degree, this phenomenon is related to demographics. The population of Australia is small in comparison to other centres of Anglophone popular music; Australia's population size is less than half of that found in the United Kingdom and more than ten times smaller than that of the United States. Further to which, Australia has one of the lowest population densities in the world. The country's citizenry is spread

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across a land mass directly comparable to the US—7.6 million square kilometres—yet which encompasses only eight capital cities situated thousands of kilometres apart. This severely affects the traditional revenue bases of the music sector, as capital investment in Australian music is restricted by a small marketplace and expensive pathways to international, often-protected markets. At a local level, domestic tours are short and travel-intensive, and thus seldom profitable. For musicians and ancillary music workers, Australia can be a difficult place to succeed and to create ongoing careers. It remains an arts sector dominated by professional amateurs and hobbyists, who, Rogers (2013) argues, sit at the centre of the music culture as opposed to its periphery. Yet this aesthetic history of the amateur and professional-amateur has long, often unheralded, cultural reach.

During the eighties, Australia's rock music scenes produced work that played a footnoted role in the development of American alternative rock and grunge music. Early in the decade, Melbourne's Bruce Milne produced the cassette-based *Fast Forward* fanzine (a mix of interviews and music), a cultural artefact that ended up in the hands of American Bruce Pavitt. Pavitt, of Seattle, was so enamoured by the concept of *Fast Forward* that he created his own tape zine titled *Subterranean Pop* (Schaefer 2011), something that found a measure of commercial success with its fifth issue selling a reported two thousand copies.[1] In 1986, Pavitt funded the similar *Sub Pop 100* compilation, mapping out key post-punk/pre-grunge and alternative rock acts (Scratch Acid, Sonic Youth, Wipers, U-Men) and inaugurating the key imprint driving the Seattle grunge contingent. When Sub Pop started releasing records by grunge precursor Mudhoney, Bruce Milne snared the domestic rights to their album *Superfuzz Bigmuff* (1988) for his Au-Go-Go label. Throughout this era, the two labels maintained a dialogue, and many of the upcoming Seattle grunge bands that came through Sub Pop—including Nirvana—cited an affinity with a range of Australian punk rock bands, in particular The Cosmic Psychos and The Scientists. The names of Australian rock bands continue to appear in interviews and journalistic reporting throughout the grunge moment. In one of Nirvana's key media appearances, in the April 1992 edition of *Rolling Stone* magazine (including the cover), music writer Michael Azerrad (1992) writes:

> For now, Kurt Cobain and his new wife Courtney Love, live in an apartment in Los Angeles's modest Fairfax district. The living room holds little besides a Fender Twin Reverb amplifier, a stringless guitar, a make-shift Buddhist

1. There is, as with much music history making, some conjecture as to Sub Pop zine's exact origins. Olympia's *K Records* and *Op Magazine* make similar claims to Milne and the journalistic accounts of his work with *Fast Forward.* Yet the specifics of *Fast Forward*'s media use—the cassette and paper fanzine product—more loosely resemble early issues of *Subterranean Pop*, and Milne's relationship to Pavitt is clearly in place during this era.

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> shrine and, on the mantel, the couple's collection of naked plastic dolls. Scores of CDs and tapes are strewn around the stereo—obscurities such as Calamity Jane, *Cosmic Psychos* and Billy Childish, as well as Cheap Trick and the Beatles. [emphasis added]

This redistribution of cultural capital during the brief commercial success of grunge and alternative rock is most famous for its extension into leftist politics, feminism and the American music underground. Yet, intertwined within this new discussion was Australian underground music, much of which was severely restricted in its retail distribution (Mathieson 2000: 16) and radio airplay at home. As such, the effect of grunge and alternative rock in the domestic marketplace proved potent, changing the tone and sound of Australian commercial music.

The timing of this cultural shift was fortuitous. By the early 1990s, the independent retail stores dotted around Australia were charting the rise in popularity of Sub Pop's roster, occasionally building their own store-affiliated labels in a manner similar to Bruce Milne's Au-Go-Go. INXS manager Chris Murphy had similar plans, establishing rooArt, a semi-independent label that found success with an eclectic mix of old and new; they signed and successfully promoted pub-rock band The Screaming Jets, but also found success with a very early wave of Australian alternative rock and pop acts such as Ratcat, The Hummingbirds and You Am I. At the time, *Rolling Stone* magazine—the Australian domestic edition was a hugely influential media outlet due to its availability in schools and public libraries—began to feature the odd alternative Australian act, and between 1991 and 1992 very quickly pivoted hard rock coverage from glam-metal to grunge-alternative. When Nirvana's *Nevermind* became a certified commercial success and cultural phenomenon, the Australian commercial music sector refocused its attention too. It briefly zeroed in on local rock scenes around the country, in the process employing new A&R staff more attentive and cognoscente with the underground documented by labels such as Au-Go-Go and rooArt (for an extended discussion of this period, see Mathieson 2000). During this process, one of the things that came to light was a growing core of all-women, or mostly-women bands, loosely affiliated by drawing influence from the Riot Grrrl movement, either directly or via the long arc of grunge's affiliation with feminist rock from the American Northwest.

Rock'n'Roll High School

While the media blackout declared by the original Washington-based Riot Grrrls in 1992 led to a decrease in coverage of the movement,[2] and created a

2. Riot Grrrls believed mainstream media coverage was misrepresenting their message (see Meltzer 2010: 33–35).

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perception that it was "dead", its dissemination had in many ways only just begun. The dramatic events surrounding the arrest of punk band/performance artists Pussy Riot in Russia in 2012 show how this is still an ongoing process (Dunn 2014). In Australia, while signs of Riot Grrrl influence began to appear early in the 1990s, its impact developed slowly, and was most obvious in the middle to later part of the decade. In attributing an increase in female participation in rock in Australia to Riot Grrrl, however, it must be noted that what can be observed is not only a direct engagement with Riot Grrrl, but also the wider grunge/alternative movement that contained a message of gender equality that can be partly, but not entirely, attributed to Riot Grrrl or individual women comprising the movement. Regardless, the 1990s saw the establishment of a significant number of all-woman (and almost all-women) rock bands for the first time in Australia.

One of the factors that brought this about was the establishment of the Rock'n'Roll High School (RnRHS) in Melbourne in 1990. Classically trained musician Stephanie Bourke set up the school initially for girls, and although later boys were also admitted, they never made up a large proportion of students. The school offered lessons to not only get girls and young women playing in rock bands, but to also give them a variety of other skills that would allow them to be self-reliant in the music industry. This included teaching technical, production and management skills. A student at the school, Sarah McKeown, summed it up in the following way:

> There's really nowhere else in Melbourne—let alone the world—where you get such a high level of support for being a female musician and where you can be surrounded by a group of really motivated, strong people who believe what they're doing is important to changing the future of rock. (van Horn 1998)

In its first year the school had 60 students, and was partly funded by grants from the Victorian Women's Trust, Victorian Ministry for the Arts and the federal government body AUSMUSIC ("What is AUSMUSIC?" 1991). Although it is not unusual for popular music related activities to be funded through government grants in Australia, particularly at this point in time when government intervention was seen as one way to address the decline in the music industry (see McLeay 2006), these grants are an indication of the school's alignment with the industry mainstream. Over time, as will be shown below, it moved towards positioning itself as more "DIY" and subcultural. Over the eleven years it ran, the school took in over 2,000 students.

RnRHS students formed many bands (van Horn (1998) reported that there were 30 in residence at the school at the time of writing her article), of which most were all-female and many were made up of unusually young musicians (as young as 10, a novelty factor that may have increased interest in some of

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the bands). Some of these became reasonably successful, including Tuff Muff, Gritty Kitty, and Sheraw. Stephanie Bourke's band Hecate (Litany in the US market) had a song, 'By Myself', that charted at number 95 on national youth broadcaster triple j's annual "Hottest 100" audience poll in 1995, a key metric of popularity in the Australian indie scene. The band went on to be "the first Australian all-female band to get picked up by an international label" (van Horn 1998) when they were signed to Tim Armstrong's Time Bomb Records, also appearing at the Lilith Festival in the US in 1998. However, the best known Rock'n'Roll High School student, and the one who has had the most successful ongoing music career, is guitarist and singer Brody Dalle. Dalle's band, Sourpuss, formed at RnRHS, had some success in Australia (most notably playing the Summersault festival in 1995 alongside bands such as Sonic Youth and Bikini Kill) before Dalle moved to the USA with Rancid's Tim Armstrong and started a new band, The Distillers (Aaron 2003).

Other bands from the school received publicity through connections to US bands. In the mid-1990s, word of the school spread among touring musicians from overseas, and a number visited the school, including major draws from the newly minted alternative rock moment: Sonic Youth, Fugazi, Rancid, L7 and Dinosaur Jr. Some of these (and other) bands went on to offer RnRHS alumni support slots on their tours, along with offering other types of support to the school. Kim Gordon from Sonic Youth, for instance, donated a bass guitar to the school, where it was regarded reverentially due to her iconic status. Furthermore, Thurston Moore from Sonic Youth not only visited the school, but after receiving an answering machine message from Midget Stooges singer Miranda De'ath, included it as the opening to his solo *Psychic Hearts* (1995) album. Moore later released a split single by Midget Stooges and another RnRHS band Bindi on his Ecstatic Peace label. These connections also led to the inclusion of the school and a number of bands from it in a documentary on women in rock (mainly focused on US bands), *Not Bad for a Girl* (Apramian 1995).

Although the RnRHS was already generating media interest, the patronage of these key alternative American acts provided not only tangible assistance to the bands at the school, but also generated publicity that may have been hard to attain otherwise. This aspect of the RnRHS demonstrates how the impact of Riot Grrrl and the gender equality imperative of the alternative scene in the early 1990s plays out in a variety of ways. The feminist way of thinking that informed these movements—along with the idea that bands should support each other's careers more generally, as exemplified in practices like the more successful bands wearing the shirts of other less well-known bands—did not just play a part in the creation of RnRHS in the first place. It also made it more likely that these outside artists more closely tied

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to the roots of Riot Grrrl would find a school producing all-girl bands worth taking an interest in. The impact on Australian music then comes from (at least) two directions: immediate, local grassroots activity, and support from celebrity international acts who were connected to overseas communities undertaking similar action.

The impact of Riot Grrrl more directly could also be seen at the Rock'n'Roll High School, but emerged much more gradually and is likely to be a result of the school's interactions with non-Riot Grrrl musicians from the US with knowledge of the scene. Newsletters released by the school (Rock'n'Roll High School 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995) show the gradual development of an explicit feminist consciousness at the school, and an adoption of signifiers of Riot Grrrl influence in terms of aesthetic. Newsletters from the early years of the school are professional-looking and unpolitical, with little explicit discussion of gender or gender politics beyond the fact that they mostly focus on females. In the 1993 newsletter, in which the visit of Sonic Youth is the big news, feminism is being discussed. This issue contains an editorial by Anna Liebzeit and Stephanie Bourke that has an obviously feminist approach, but that reads as though the authors are still in the process of grappling with what this might mean for the school. As the writers ask a series of questions about the position of women in music, one gets the sense that these issues are being articulated clearly for the first time: "Why do people *still* think female participation [in music] is a novelty? ... Does it occur to us that most of our influences are male? ... When can women being active be old hat?" (p. 5). This notion that the members of the school are experiencing a feminist awakening over the years is confirmed in the summary of the earlier newsletters that is contained in the 1995 edition, where Edition 4 (probably 1992) is identified as the time at which "some band members began to develop a consciousness about being female in a band" (p. 1).

By the time Edition 8 of the newsletter is released in July 1995,[3] this consciousness is clearly much more developed, and a significant stylistic change has taken place. The newsletter is no longer neatly typed and carefully laid out. Instead, it has numerous sections that have clearly been cut and pasted, stuck haphazardly across pages, along with hand-written headings, comments and decorations. The contrast with the earlier neatly laid-out newsletters is marked. Edition 8 resembles much more the DIY style of a zine than a school newsletter. In addition to this, this edition explicitly discusses not only feminism, but Riot Grrrl more specifically. The term "grrrl" is used a number of times, both in pieces written for the newsletter and in articles reproduced

3. Issue 7, from 1994, is unfortunately missing from the archive from which the newsletters were sourced.

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from elsewhere (such as gig reviews), to describe female band members. The newsletter also demonstrates a certain amount of feminist activism, with the reproduction of an exchange from the pages of street press magazine *InPress*, where Stephanie Bourke responds to criticism of "femrock" bands with a letter outlining the issues facing women in the music industry. The adoption of this "zine" aesthetic, the language being used in the newsletter, and the obvious political stance that is being taken, can be seen as a signifier of a sense of connection to and allegiance with the Riot Grrrl movement (and of course feminism more broadly). This suggests the adoption of the Riot Grrrl "template" to give form to and make sense of the feminist identity that the school was already developing independently.

"Grot Grrrl"

The Rock'n'Roll High School was, however, not the only place women-only bands were emerging from at this time. In Sydney, and to a lesser extent in other capital cities, young women forming bands together were finding a foothold in the touring circuits and music industry. Some notable examples include Nitocris (formed in 1992, Sydney), Skulker (formed in 1994, Sydney), Fur (formed 1993, Gold Coast), SPDFGH (formed 1990, Sydney) and Clag (formed 1991, Brisbane). The period of maximum exposure for these bands was in the mid-1990s. Although they covered a range of genres (for example, Nitocris were generally considered to be a heavy metal band, whereas Clag were punk), these bands were guitar based with styles on the heavier end of the rock spectrum. The band members, as with those from RnRHS, tended to be quite young—the biographies and press of all the bands named above note that they were formed as a result of the members meeting at high school. After a period of visibility and moderate commercial success in the mid-1990s, most of these bands had broken up by the end of the decade. Recent nostalgia relating to the 1990s has nonetheless seen some reformations and come-back tours in the mid-2010s.

In a number of media articles (for example, "Rock Goddesses", Kenny 1994), these bands are grouped together under the label "Grot Grrrl" in a clear reference to Riot Grrrl. The term Grot Grrrl was adopted from a Melbourne zine of the same name produced by Sam Difference throughout the early 1990s, which (in keeping with Riot Grrrl style) contained a substantial amount of content relating to music (Bail 1996). As "sites where girls and women construct identities, communities and exploratory narratives from the materials that comprise their cultural moment" (Piepmeier 2009: 2), zines played a central role in the circulation of Riot Grrrl ideas. In the same vein, the *Grot Grrrl* zine presented frank discussions with Australian female musicians about the experience of playing music, and promoted local and overseas women's music. It covered a wide range of female artists, although focusing

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more on the rock end of the musical spectrum, as well as covering other feminist issues. Although there were connections between *Grot Grrrl* and RnRHS (the RnRHS newsletter and the zine mention each other at certain points), these were not particularly well-defined or close.

However, the label Grot Grrrl appears to have later been adopted by outsiders as a way of naming a trend, rather than by the groups called Grot Grrrl bands themselves as a way of acknowledging a unifying philosophy or shared plans, or by the magazine as a way of identifying certain types of bands. That is, the influence of Riot Grrrl did not result in a cohesive "movement" in Australia that called itself Grot Grrrl. The use of the Grot Grrrl label (while useful in a number of ways) therefore needs to be treated with some caution. As Strong (2011) notes, the dangers that emerge from developing labels for a version of hard rock dominated by women means that such terms can be applied to all women playing a similar style of music, separating the women out and defining them by their gender. This has been the case with Riot Grrrl and grunge, where bands such as L7 and Hole that were not part of the Riot Grrrl movement have nonetheless been labelled as such over time, meaning that grunge and its mainstream success can be redefined as masculine. This trend can be observed in this entry on Nitocris from the *Encyclopaedia of Australian Rock and Pop* in 1999:

> The mid-1990s saw the rise of a number of all-girl, agit-rock bands like Fur, Mace, Bittersweet, Sulk, Dolljuice, Gravelrash, SPDFGH and Nitocris. Loosely combined under the collective banner of 'grot grrrls' (similar to the American 'riot grrrl' movement that encompassed Hole, Bikini Kill, Babes in Toyland, L7, etc.), it gave a focus for the musicians to address topics that affected them deeply. (McFarland 1999: 401)

Bikini Kill is the only band named here that is unquestionably a Riot Grrrl band, demonstrating the way Riot Grrrl is often used to just mean "punk rock band with women". It appears that Grot Grrrl is serving a similar function, demonstrating how the problematic aspects of women's representations within alternative/hard rock scenes was reproduced in the Australian context. However, despite this, and regardless of the extent to which bands labelled in this way can be considered a collective of some sort, the existence of Grot Grrrl and these bands further demonstrates the rise of women-centred bands at this time.

The Rise of Female Bands in the Australian Context

Throughout this fast transitional moment, a series of Australian rock bands with female members were popularized, as underground rock bands that included women became more commercially successful and more widely dis-

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tributed. As Au-Go-Go Records began to move serious volumes of records for the likes of American acts Sonic Youth, Mudhoney and Dinosaur Jr., their biggest Australian signings were the noisy stoner-rock band Magic Dirt fronted by Adalita Srsen, and the wildly idiosyncratic alt-rock trio Spiderbait with bassist and occasional lead vocalist Janet English. Both these acts would soon find their way onto major recording labels, and throughout the nineties checked off most, if not all, of the benchmarks of Australian music success: festival touring, high rotation radio airplay and skerricks of international attention. Completely epitomizing this changing tide within the domestic industry was Steve "Pav" Pavlovic of Sydney, who, at the age of 25, found unexpected success with Nirvana's only Australian tour, parlaying this win into influential (if not profitable) label Fellaheen. The Fellaheen imprint released and promoted the likes of Noise Addict (including a young Romy Hoffman and Ben Lee) and the all-female Brisbane band Fur alongside domestic reissues of UK feminist punks Huggy Bear and the alt rock group Luscious Jackson (all women). Pav's attempt at festival curation—Summersault—also proved notable. Summersault ultimately failed commercially, touring only once in 1995, but it brought Bikini Kill to Australian audiences and the band played alongside Sonic Youth, and Kim Deals's post-Breeders band The Amps. Many of the shows on the Summersault tour included a local contingent of bracing all-girl rock bands emerging from the RnRHS and elsewhere. As shown, gender was noticeably foregrounded within Australian rock during this brief era, as both the popularity and availability of alternative music provided a national and international platform for feminist interpretations and interrogations of rock practice.

As such, the impact of Riot Grrrl was not fully felt in Australia until after the peak period of the movement in the US, and indeed during the time when most commentators have suggested the commercialization and co-optation of "girl power" was well underway. Research suggests that a similar story can be told about the impact of Riot Grrrl in other places, such as the UK. In her analysis of media coverage of grunge and Riot Grrrl, Strong (2011) has found that, although it was almost certainly in circulation at a more grassroots level previously, the term Riot Grrrl only started to appear in UK music publications in 1993. The fact that the influence of Riot Grrrl became apparent later in Australia meant that the surrounding politics and media reception were different from the initial movement in the US. By the mid-1990s, Australia was in the midst of what has been described as a "generation war" among feminists (Maddison 2004), partly in response to the types of tactics adopted by younger feminists such as Riot Grrrls, which approached media and popular culture in very different ways to earlier feminists (Strong and Maddison 2014). It also meant that these bands were at their most successful at the time of the emergence of "girl power" (as opposed to Grrrl power)

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as a marketing tool in the music industry. Schilt (2003) notes the emergence of "angry woman rock" in the mid-1990s (for example, Alanis Morissette and Fiona Apple), alongside more upbeat alternatives such as the Spice Girls, and argues that these acts represented a depoliticized, commercialized version of Riot Grrrl. This tension was felt in the local scene—Western Australian all-female band Lash were regarded with suspicion because of their association with pop-producer Andrew Klippel and were forced to publically defend their musicianship after negative comments by Stephanie Bourke were reported in the press (Johnson 2001: 50).

Conclusion

The Australian intersections between feminism and rock music were unique, as were the dialogues, debates and solutions proffered. The materials available relating to a number of these bands are fragmented, or in some cases almost non-existent, so determining the exact extent to which the women in the bands discussed above were directly responding to the Riot Grrrl movement is difficult (and will benefit from further research). The difficulty in finding information on these bands, and in particular the complete absence of some of them from online search engines, speaks to the tendency for women's history to disappear and the fragility of the online archive. Even in a very well-researched and documented area of women's musical history—Riot Grrrl—the Australian response to it has been neglected. This includes recent materials focusing on either women in Australian music or Australian takes on Riot Grrrl. Indeed, Janine Barrand's otherwise excellent 2010 exhibition *Rock Chicks* makes only passing mention of Grot Grrrl and Nitocris in particular, and a triple j "J File" on Riot Grrrl quotes Adalita Srsen briefly (Barrand 2010). Although the issues around the creation and maintenance of an online presence will affect many pre-internet bands, it has been suggested that one reason women do disappear more often from history is because men are more likely to self-promote and undertake archival work that preserves their legacy (Lang and Lang 1990). However, the upswing in these types of bands at this point in time and the perception that they are connected in some way suggests that thinking about them as an Australian response to Riot Grrrl and the gender equality imperative of early 90s alt music—although a less than straightforward one—may help advance knowledge on how such movements disseminate and the forms they take in different contexts.

What is undeniable is that between 1990 and 1999 all-female and mostly-female bands were more prevalent, and more visible, in Australia than they had been at any point in the past, or since. While there were female-only rock bands before the 1990s (for example, Girl Monstar, Stiletto, Flying Tackle (Barrand 2010) and doubtless many more, particularly during the punk era,

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whose histories are yet to be rediscovered) and since (including Stonefield, The Spazzys, Mangelwurzel), it was during the 1990s that the image of women playing heavier styles of rock music, as musicians rather than only vocalists, gained wider circulation. These bands existed at the intersection of grassroots, DIY activity and more formalized, commercialized processes, and benefited from the visibility and success of grunge and Riot Grrrl, even as that success was being framed as damaging for the original US bands involved. The specifics of the Australian setting, its isolated cities and often less stridently oppositional music scenes inform and shape the response women made to the ideals of Riot Grrrl. This is most obviously borne out by notable and visible support from federal governance: a great number of the bands described here benefited greatly from the national push of state-funded public radio station triple j, and the RnRHS was the recipient of the exact sort of arts funding needed to correct market failures caused by the specifics of Australian culture. The still dominant influence of rock culture and its already established ties with grunge and Seattle also proved fortuitous, building cultural capital and forecasting the careers of supporters such as Pav and Milne—further paving the way for a moment where rock could willingly become more compliant with the tenets of grassroots feminism.

While questions were already being asked in Australia about gender equality in the music industry—as the formation of RnRHS demonstrates—and inroads were being made in terms of greater inclusion of women in rock bands—as the examples from independent labels from the early 90s show—the influence of Riot Grrrl, grunge and alternative bands from the US helped shape what was happening politically and created the conditions for women in bands to be normalized. In short, this is the story of how the Riot Grrrl ideal is eminently mobile, drawing very different constituents into practice from a very different locale. In Australia, Riot Grrrl brought together obscured histories, international flows and unusual allegiances with a view to vastly new solutions (like a ramshackle high school for rock music, an idiosyncratic clutch of rock bands) and yet still culminated in a remarkably similar epoch, a moment where women exploring and transmitting feminism via rock music felt particularly resonant, rich and assured, all before subsiding into the longer, less-than-satisfactory arc of music history.

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