

best weekend 3

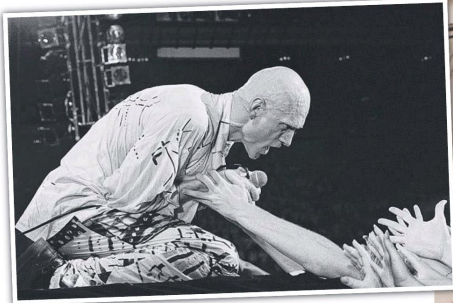
THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

Rock snapper Tony Mott moves on after decades in the mosh pit, writes Elizabeth Fortescue



Tony Mott at his home in inner-Sydney, and (left) his classic shot of Peter Garrett. Picture: Tim Hunter

photography
WHAT A LIFE!



As Australia's premier rock and roll photographer — so called by the State Library of NSW, which is honouring him with a retrospective exhibition — Tony Mott loves telling stories from 30 years on the road.

There was the time Mott was chatting pleasantly to Elton John when the Rocket Man suddenly threw a giant tantrum and sacked a member of his tour team.

Another time, Mott was hired by Bob Dylan's manager to photograph the legend's concert tour. On the first night, Dylan spotted Mott below the stage and told him

Tony Mott's photographs of Silverchair, Chrissy Amphlett, and Kylie Minogue and Nick Cave.

— in front of 12,000 people — to “f.k off”. Despite Dylan mumbling something to him about it three nights later, the photographer still has no idea how he caused offence.

Mott toured with the Rolling Stones three times, his resemblance to band member Ronnie Wood never failing to amuse Mick Jagger.

The stories tumble out. After all, Mott has photographed everyone from Madonna and Michael Jackson to Kylie, Nick Cave, Elvis Costello, David Bowie, U2, Powderfinger, Lou Reed, Michael Hutchence and “full tilt” punk rockers like Steve Lucas and his band X.

It's been a wild ride. But it's over. “The music industry's just gone from what it was,” Mott says in his bohemian inner-Sydney home.

No longer are pubs across Sydney pulsing and booming seven nights a week, as they did in the 1980s with the likes of the Divinyls, Hoodoo Gurus and Midnight Oil.

“The independent scene that happened in the late '80s, early '90s, which produced the Beasts of Bourbon, The Cruel Sea and all that — that's all gone,” Mott says.

“Music's not being

developed. And the record companies, there's only three majors, and they concentrate on TV.”

While Mott still does “bits and pieces” of music photography, he mostly takes stills on television and film productions.

But his rock career is going out with a bang — a comprehensive exhibition of his work at the State Library

of NSW titled What A Life! Rock Photography By Tony Mott. For the man himself, it will be a “bookend” — a kind of fond farewell to 30 years of strobe-lit basements and sweaty mosh pits.

Is it sad? “Yes, but it's inevitable,” Mott says. “And also the digital age made a big difference. Everybody became a photographer. Also all the magazines disappeared. I had 172 music magazines in the world on my books. (Now) 160 of them don't even exist.”

The exhibition will include classic shots like the one of Peter Garrett and Midnight Oil at the former Sydney Entertainment Centre in the '80s. Garrett is on his knees, ecstatic audience members reaching towards him.

“I always describe that one as the perfect example of ‘it's just a moment,’” Mott says. “A hundred-and-twentieth of a second later, it's gone. A hundred-and-twentieth of a second earlier, it's not there. I've got the print of the frame before, and it's nothing.” Digital cameras make it easier to catch the fleeting

moment, of course. But digital can't match the grainy quality of black and white film prints, Mott says.

A 1995 image shows Silverchair in Britain, teenagers on the cusp of superstardom. “Silverchair in their early days always pulled funny faces,” Mott recalls. “They used to do quite a lot of cross-eyes.”

The picture that started Mott's rock career is of Chrissy Amphlett belting it out at the Piccadilly Hotel in Kings Cross in the '80s. Mott worked as a chef nearby, and habitually dropped in after work to take pictures for his own amusement. Amphlett's manager paid \$20 to use one his photographs on a poster. For Mott, the next 30 years were a case of holding on to the rock juggernaut and never missing the chance to distil it for history.

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• **What A Life! Rock Photography By Tony Mott, State Library of NSW, Macquarie St, City, October 17 2015 - February 7 2016, free, sl.nsw.gov.au**

