

Fred Smith

It is about time Australia caught up with Fred Smith. This remarkable singer-songwriter - who at various times reveals influences that range from Paul Kelly via Lou Reed to Loudon Wainwright III to Leonard Cohen - keeps releasing amazingly accomplished albums. In tune with the times and prepared to reach beyond predictable folk formats, he is endlessly innovative and creative.

[Bruce Elder, Sydney Morning Herald]

Fred Smith has spent the last 15 years all over the joint: working on peace keeping missions in Afghanistan and the South Pacific, touring in America and travelling the Australian festival circuit. He has released about eight CDs, mostly solo but also collaborations with Liz Frencham and the Spooky Men's Chorale. Two of these CDs have won National Film and Sound Archives Awards.

Fred cut his teeth performing comic and satirical ballads in bars and festivals in the late 90's. His earlier performances were described as "Noel Coward meets Loudon Wainwright". His debut album Soapbox gained cult status in his home town selling over 3000 copies in Canberra and about 7 copies in the rest of the country.

After releasing Soapbox, he traveled to work with Peace Monitoring operations in Bougainville, an island province of Papua New Guinea that had recently emerged from ten years of bitter civil war. Fred became something of a celebrity on Bougainville hosting his own pidgin language radio show and collaborating with local musicians to record and release 20,000 copies of a cassette of peace songs.

Fred returned from Bougainville to record the award winning "*Bagarap Empires*" CD (pronounced 'Buggerup'). The CD won rave reviews and the National Film and Sound Archives award for Best New Release of 2002. It was described in Canada's Penguin Eggs magazine as "an amazing piece of work. Truly folk music at its best - chronicling a period in a peoples' history that few of us know anything about."

In May 2003, Fred returned to Bougainville. Film-maker Nick Agafonoff followed Fred and his Bulmakau band around during the final weeks of the Peace Monitoring Group's operations. The documentary "Bougainville Sky" was released in Nov. 2004.

Earlier that year Fred met Liz Frencham. He had written an album's worth of songs for a woman's voice and was looking for the right gal. He found her. They released their first joint album "Into My Room" to critical acclaim in the second half of 2003 and have since gone on to become a major force on the Australian festival circuit. In 2007 they released their second album "Lovethongs"- a collection of Fred's love songs. The album was rated one of Top Ten Albums of 2007 by Sue Barrett in Rhythms Magazine and won rave reviews in the Sydney Morning Herald and Melbourne Age.

Fred moved to Washington DC in November 2005 and spent three years touring throughout the United States, Canada, and Australia. He returned to Australia in 2008 to release "Texas". This CD captures the zeitgeist of an America divided in the second term of the Bush administration. It touches on subjects from Barak to Iraq with the insight, balance and irony that have made Smith one of Australia's most respected songwriters.

Then, on a Friday night at the 2008 National Folk Festival, Fred fell to drinking with Stephen Taberner in the session bar. This led to an impromptu performance a couple of nights later which saw the Fred Smith Band and the mighty Spooky Mens' Chorale combine to spray manly odors all around the Merry Muse tent. This in turn led to the **Urban Sea Shanties** CD (which won the 2009 National Film and Sound Archives Award). It's a collection of thinking man's drinking songs.

In July 2009, Fred was the first Australian diplomat to be posted to Uruzgan province, Afghanistan. His main job was to build relationships with tribal leaders in order to improve cooperation and understanding between the local community and the Coalition Forces, to act as a bridge between these two vastly different cultures. This put him in a unique position to understand both.

He served most of his 18 month tour of Uruzgan province on the Multinational Base in Tarin Kowt and at a Forward Operating Base in the Chora Valley. Smith played regular concerts in Tarin Kowt where his songs are on everybody's iPod. His comic ditty "Niet Swaffelen op de Dixi", entreating Dutch soldiers not to do unspeakable things in the portaloos around the base, became a hit with the Dutch military and he toured Holland in November 2010 on the strength of it.

Whilst in Afghanistan, Fred wrote a collection of powerful songs about his experiences and the realities of life for soldiers in this difficult war. These songs were released in 2011 on an album called "Dust of

Uruzgan". The album won featured reviews and front pages in The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald, and The Melbourne Age.

"the music of Fred Smith comes straight from the front line... raw, ribald, but also capable of moving grown men to tears."

John Huxley, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 July 2011

"In a world full of vacuous songs, Fred's is an incredibly strong body of work"

John Schumann

"an exceptional songwriter and certainly the equal of Bogle, Walker and Schumann"

Bruce Elder, Sydney Morning Herald 'Review of the Week' August 2011