

## **WA:Kim Salmon: the muso who spawned a legion of imitators**

By Rebecca Le May

PERTH, AAP - It's fitting to take a backward glance when discussing a retrospective gig.

Kim Salmon, front man of 1980s Perth underground band The Scientists, can't resist reflecting on how the music scene has changed in his 30 or so years in the business, which has seen him play guitar in The Beasts of Bourbon and lead The Surrealists.

It's The Scientists that gets Generation X going, though. The band influenced grunge greats such as Mudhoney, Nirvana, Jon Spencer, and more recently The White Stripes.

But being a highly regarded musician didn't stop Salmon losing his day job in a music distribution warehouse.

It might have something to do with the shift towards music downloads and piracy whittling away at musician's royalties - a common complaint among musos.

Married with two children and speaking from the Melbourne base which he's called home for the past 18 years, Salmon says not only were vinyl albums and their accompanying artwork more exciting than downloading tunes off the internet, they also were more likely to provide a livelihood for artists.

"It's a funny thing, people's attitudes to music," he says.

"People are saying music should be free and there is a lot of 'right on-ism' about that, which kind of ignores the fact that it's somebody's livelihood.

"A photographer wouldn't have a bar of it.

"Technology has changed things for a lot of industries.

"What I am trying to get at is anarchy is a great thing but you can't just have it in small sectors, where 'property is theft' for musicians but not for everybody else.

"If I'm able to make a living out of something I've put so much effort into, all the better."

Salmon says his musical tastes have expanded with time, with keyboard, samples and harmonica now part of the blend.

"If you say you can play guitar, it's been devalued somewhat over the years: it's not thought of being a skill, although when you think about how most people play it, it isn't a skill," he laughs.

"It can be as sophisticated or as degraded as you want it to be.

"Musically, I've become a lot less set in my ways ... and expanded beyond guitar.

"I've been doing a lot of different things over the years.

"People have a perception about musicians once they reach a certain age and you have to get around that a little bit.

"I'm making as much music as I ever did."

He enthusiastically describes his musical collaboration with Died Pretty frontman Ron Peno, The Darling Downs, as "country-politan".

The duo recently released their second album, which sounds like quite a departure from the "swampy, primal, blues-infused sound" tag critics trot out to describe The Scientists.

"He's the singer and I play acoustic guitar and banjo.

"Rather than use the term alt-country (alternative country), I prefer to use the term country-politan, which is a term that was around in the 1960s.

"It was a genre that meant Nashville country and western, and people like Tom Jones and Dean Martin and various members of the Rat Pack turned their hands to country.

"Lee Hazelwood was also a cornerstone of the genre.

"I'd like to revive that term and have a term that people don't have to cringe when they use it."

At age 57, Salmon shows no sign of slowing down, but says he might get into teaching guitar or some other form of writing in the future.

"I'd like to think I was still useful," he laughs.

The Scientists return to their home town to perform a 'Don't Look Back' concert at the Becks Music Box as part of the Perth International Arts Festival on February 13, playing an extended version of their classic Blood Red River album.

Salmon hinted the band could play other tracks from its heyday "if we get asked for an encore".

Surrealists fans will also be delighted to know a reunion is planned in the next few months.

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