

More than music: The story behind one of Melbourne's most iconic music venues

In the heart of Melbourne city sits an institution of live music and counterculture known as the Cherry bar, and it is in this institution that you will find a man standing at the end of the bar, drink in hand and cast in a cherry red glow, this man is James Young.

If you didn't know any better, you'd be forgiven for thinking James was a part of the furniture at Cherry bar given his seeming ever presence at the venue over the past 20 years, in which time he has been the owner of what he believes to be the greatest bar in the world.

To hear James's talk about the Cherry bar is to hear a lifetime of passion for live music and for rock'n'roll and what that passion can bring to a venue, with James only being an owner in the first place as he "always wanted to get into his favourite bar".

And ever since he made this want a reality by purchasing a share in the Cherry bar 20 years ago, he has worked tirelessly to keep live music in Melbourne as healthy as it has ever been.

"You have to be there" James insists, "the punters want to see you". He believes this presence separates himself from other publicans and venue owners throughout Melbourne as there is barley a person who has been to Cherry bar and doesn't possess a story about meeting James.

A larger-than-life personality, James has turned himself into a personification of what it means to be Rock'n'roll, with his signature cowboy hat and Cherry bar branded jackets accompanying him everywhere he goes.

Self-described as "obsessed" with the venue, James admits that if he doesn't see live music at the Cherry bar three times a week, he "goes crazy".

It is this obsession however that has led Cherry Bar to being more than just any old bar in Melbourne, with patrons describing the venue as "an icon of Melbourne run by an icon of Melbourne."

James however is incredibly humble about the ePect and influence he and the Cherry bar have had on Melbourne's music scene, he instead credits it to the rock'n'roll, what he believes to be "the greatest art movement of all time."

And to hear James talk about rock'n'roll it is clear that his passion and love for it transcends the walls of the Cherry Bar and permeates into the world he sees around himself.

He describes it as “counter intuitive” coming from a man who has made his career in live music, but according to James “rock'n'roll is not a sound” but rather “an attitude” and it is this what makes him love it.

With James believing that is this distinction that separates rock'n'roll from other genres in music and art as a whole and provides his ultimate reason for his lifetime and dedication to the artform.

According to James it is this removal from the confines on any specific sound that enables rock'n'roll have “the power of social change” that makes him so endeared to the movement of rock'n'roll.

He says that what you can get from rock'n'roll “you don't from a book, parent or teacher” as the messages that it conveys are typically so raw and emotional for those mediums to sufficiently get the message across.

He cites Amy Taylor of the band Amyl and the snipers as an example of the alternative avenues to enlightenment that Rock'n'roll provides.

He believes that songs Amy has written has completely changed his world view in certain instances, with him saying that her song ‘Knifey’ completely opened his eyes to the implicit violence that exists in the world for women.

“I had never even considered how it would have felt to walk home alone in a dark park.” But upon hearing Amy's searing vocal delivery he instantly understood the fear and anger that is spurred by that experience that she and so many other women experience.

It is experiences like this that keep James invested in the world of rock'n'roll, and keep his passion raging on for live music and more specifically the cherry bar, it's these moments that for James ensures he will be involved in music for the rest of his life, and ensures that on the whole “rock'n'roll will never die.”