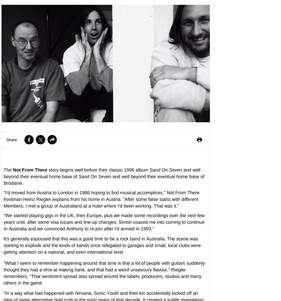
Not From There released a classic, won an ARIA and split up: what happened next?

By Dan Condon
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The **Not From There** story begins well before their classic 1996 album *Sand On Seven* and well beyond their eventual home base of Brisbane.

"I'd moved from Australia to London in 1986 hoping to find musical accomplices," Not From There frontman Henry Riegler explains from his home in Austria. "After some false starts with different members, I met a group of Australians at a hotel where I'd been working. That was it."

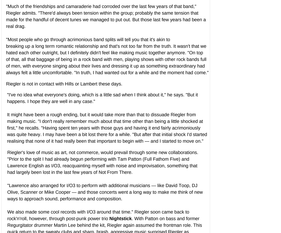
"We started playing gigs in the UK, then Europe, plus we made some recordings over the next few years until, after some visa issues and line-up changes, Simon coaxed me into coming to continue in Australia and we convinced Anthony to re-join after I'd arrived in 1993."

It's generally assumed that this was a natural home to be a rock band in Australia. The scene was starting to explode and the kinds of bands once relegated to garages and small, local clubs were getting attention on a national, and even international scale.

"What I seem to remember happening around that time is that a lot of people with guitars suddenly thought they had a shot at making bank, and that had a weird unsavoury flavour," Riegler remembers. "That sentiment spread also spread around the labels, producers, studios and many others in the game.

"In a way what had happened with Nirvana, Sonic Youth and their kin accidentally kicked off an idea of some alternative gold rush in the early years of that decade. It created a subtle magnetism, shifting a whole swath of musicians toward the centre."

Not From There's debut album *Sand On Seven* is a largely unsung classic in the mid-90s alt-rock canon. Led by two brilliant singers — Tash O'Brien' and Juanita's Cocktail Party' — the record felt vital, with Riegler's noisy guitar and the band's raw atmospheric energy capturing a moment of creative urgency that still resonates.



While we talk of an explosion of *underground* music, Riegler remembers it differently. "Rather than so-called underground music persuading bigger audiences to engage with it, I thought the opposite was happening as musicians and bands were adapting themselves to a perceived mainstream audience," he says. "You kind of felt it happening to yourself.

> I didn't totally comprehend it at the time, but there was this dull feeling that I might be fucked now.
> Henry Riegler

"While, at the time, I wasn't quite able to put my finger on what this uncomfortable feeling was — or perhaps because I was in denial — I'd say that a slow and subtle corruption was taking place, also within myself. "That feeling didn't abate. In fact, it was perhaps exacerbated as the band's popularity grew.

Not From There were nominated for three ARIA Awards in 1999. *Sand On Seven* won the Best Adult Alternative Album category. The band made an admirable stand on the podium and in the amusing press conference), but, looking back, there's not a lot of joy attached to the achievement for Riegler. "Other than the weirdness of being seated between Jimmy Barnes and Kate Ceberano — who kept elbowing me in the side every time my face popped up on the video-screen — other than that, I felt that winning that thing pretty much was the kiss of death.

"I didn't totally comprehend it at the time, but there was this dull feeling that I might be fucked now." There's always an upside, though. "My parents got a kick out of it, and they still view it as some symbol of achievement," he says. "I let them believe it. So that's useful." Not From There worked in some new influences on second album *Lahrain Lovers*, with aspects of disco and funk working their way into the band's noisy, atmospheric rock.

But it wasn't long after that album's release that the band imploded.

> There'd always been tension within the group, probably the same tension that Made for the handful of decent tunes we managed to put out.
> Henry Riegler

"Much of the friendships and camaraderie had corroded over the last few years of that band," Riegler admits. "There'd always been tension within the group; probably the same tension that made for the handful of decent tunes we managed to put out. But those last few years had been a real drag.

"Most people who go through acrimonious band splits will tell you that it's akin to breaking up a long term romantic relationship and that's not too far from the truth. It wasn't that we hated each other outright, but I definitely didn't feel like making music together anymore. "On top of that, all that baggage of being in a rock band with men, playing shows with other rock bands full of men, with everyone singing about their lives and dressing it up as something extraordinary had always felt a little uncomfortable. "In truth, I had wanted out for a while and the moment had come."

Riegler is not in contact with Hills or Lambert these days.

"I've no idea what everyone's doing, which is a little sad when I think about it," he says. "But it happens. I hope they are well in any case."

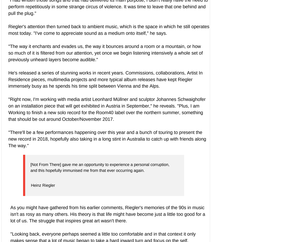
It might have been a rough ending, but it would take more than that to dissuade Riegler from making music. "I don't really remember much about that time other than being a little shocked at first," he recalls. "Having spent ten years with those guys and having it end fairly acrimoniously was quite heavy. I may have been a bit lost there for a while. "But after that initial shock I'd started realising that none of it had really been that important to begin with — and I started to move on."

Riegler's love of music as art, not commerce, would prevail through some new collaborations. "Prior to the split I had already begun performing with Tam Patton (Ed Kuepper and Laurence English as VCO3, reacquainting myself with noise and improvisation, something that had largely been lost in the last few years of Not From There.

"Lawrence also arranged for VCO to perform with additional musicians — like David Toop, DJ Olive, Scanner or Mike Cooper — and those concerts were a long way to make me think of new ways to approach sound, performance and composition.

We also made some cool records with VCO3 around that time." Riegler soon came back to rock'n'roll, however, through post-punk power trio **Nightstick**. With Patton on bass and former Regurgitator drummer Martin Lee behind the kit, Riegler again assumed the frontman role. This quick return to the sweaty clubs and sharp, brash, aggressive music surprised Riegler as much as anyone else.

"The last thing on my mind was being in another guitar band," Riegler says. "Other than working with VCO3, I had started writing songs for what I guess would have been some solo song-ish record, but I'd also been playing lots of ping pong with Martin Lee, and he began talking about making music together." Lee appealed to Riegler's competitive streak, teasing him about whether he could still deliver the intensity of a live rock performance.



"He kept taunting me with comments that suggested that I couldn't *do it anymore* — and soon enough we were in a practice room, with Tam joining shortly after. It was meant to be simple and fast, and the music was exactly that."

The band was short-lived, but made a powerful impact in their time together. They left us with an EP, a split single with fellow Brisbanites The Grates and a hefty sense of goodwill among revellers lucky enough to see the watertight trio live.

"We wrote a set worth of songs and started playing all over the country. It was a lot of fun while it lasted, playing and driving around Australia with my friends was fantastic on many levels. And Martin could rarely beat me at table tennis. That matters."

Nightstick ceased not long after it began, leaving Riegler free to pursue the solo material he had longed to one day make. The resulting output was stunning. Intimate, well-refined songs about Riegler's friends, about love, about living inside of our heads.

"I had something that needed to be extracted from within and it came out in the shape of those songs," he says. "I really had no choice but to write it down, it was like the cosmos forced me into it. Rather than the invisible hand of the market, it was the invisible hand of song punching me into that space.

"I thought it would remain private, but one thing lead to another and I gave an awkward solo debut in the store-room of my favourite Brisbane cafe. I forced my friend Tom Lyngcoln (The Nation Blue) to join me that night as he was also just beginning to trial his solo material and I needed someone who was just as raw to go through with it." He hadn't agreed, I might never have done it. It was pretty intense, despite just being a nylon string and voice."

These shows were as raw as they were rare. But the material was as well. Riegler played nylon string guitar, Seja Vogel (solo artist and Regurgitator keyboardist), Sufiwe Patton (Tam Patton and Hiroshima, Sullivan) and Meredith McHugh (Zeitjeins, The National Academy) accompanied on vocals, hand percussion and melodica.

"Having them perform with me made it a lot easier. I loved playing with them, I loved rehearsing with them, they made all those songs sound like them. I loved rehearsing with them, they made all those Songs better, both by their talent and their presence."

The end of this project was also unpleasant, Riegler recalls. "Then, at a show in Sydney, some asshole threw ice cubes at us during a performance and I snapped, pushed off the stage and engaged in a ridiculous act of physical violence, leaving me get kicked out of my own gig.

"Albeit funny now on reflection, I was shocked at discovering this facet of myself and it made me think about how the whole thing may have become a little all-too-precious.

"I had written those songs and that had delivered its main purpose, I didn't really have the need to perform repetitiously in some strange circus of violence. It was time to leave that one behind and pull the plug."

Riegler's attention then turned back to ambient music, which is the space in which he still operates most today. "I've come to appreciate sound as a medium onto itself," he says.

"The way it enchants and evades us, the way it bounces around a room or a mountain, or how so much of it is filtered from our attention, are once we begin listening intensively a whole set of previously unheard layers become audible."

He's released a series of stunning works in recent years. *Commissions*, collaborations, Artist In Residence pieces, multimedia projects and more typical album releases have kept Riegler immensely busy as he spends his time split between Vienna and the Alps.

"Right now, I'm working with media artist Leonhard Müllner and sculptor Johannes Schwaighofer on an installation piece that will get exhibited in Austria in September," he reveals. "Plus, I am Working to finish a new solo record for the Room40 label over the northern summer, something that should be out around October/November 2017.

"There'll be a few performances happening over this year and a bunch of touring to present the new record in 2018, hopefully also taking in a long stint in Australia to catch up with friends along The way."

> [Not From There] gave me an opportunity to experience a personal corruption, and this hopefully immunised me from that ever occurring again.
> Henry Riegler

As you might have gathered from his earlier comments, Riegler's memories of the 90s in music isn't as rosy as many others. His theory is that life might have become just a little too good for a lot of us. The struggle that inspires great art wasn't there.

"Looking back, everyone perhaps seemed a little too comfortable and in that context it only makes sense that a lot of music began to take a hard inward turn and focus on the self.

"Songs about personal angst or songs about about camping, or the Simpsons, or reflections on one's romantic dilemmas. Combined with an excess pre-Napster cash kicking about during that decade, it was shallow terrain.

"Of course, there were wonderful exceptions. But I doubt that future music historians will really find much to write about the bulk of the 90s."

It's highly unlikely Riegler will play in a band like Not From There again.

"Personally, I've managed rid myself of most distractions associated with being in a rock band I and have tried hard to unlearn much of what attached itself to me in the 90s. Whereas back then I felt part of some market-force-hybrid unity, now I don't. I try to make the work, I present it via recordings and performances, and then I start again. I pay little or no attention to it once it is finished. That feels healthy.

"Removing toxic writing from my practice also had the useful effect of allowing me to stand much further outside the work, the self being much less relevant. That's useful. It also allows me to have a much wider net when I make decisions on new projects. Much less restrictions overall. Also, I travel much lighter and no roadcrew is required."

But he's willing to concede that his time in a successful rock band taught him some valuable Lessons, taught him some valuable lessons.

"I'll remember that band mostly for the thrill of performing and touring with those guys and trying to enjoy most of the drama that ensued along the way," he says. "It also gave me an opportunity To experience a personal corruption and this hopefully immunised me from allowing that from ever occurring again.

"Being in that band was a useful step along the way and it definitely changed some of my outlook and provided some useful pointers as to what not to do."

You can hear Helios's latest music over at his Bandcamp page.

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