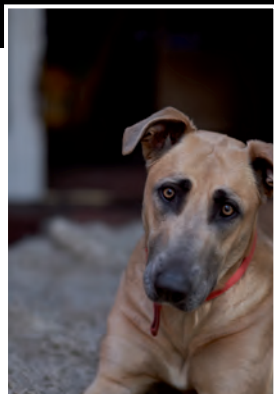




Things I love with Rick Steele

text > Emma Leask images > Rob Simeon

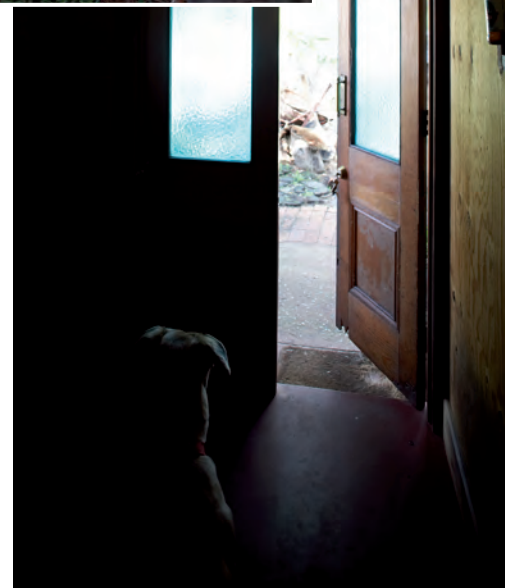


The son of a preacher, Kiwi-raised Rick Steele's musical baptism of fire was 20 years touring WA with The Hot Biscuit Band, playing gigs from Bridgetown to dusty Kalgoorlie mine sites. Today, at 58, with four albums and performances with Split Enz and Elvis Costello under his belt, he's proud to be a founding father of the Perth Blues Club and Lakes International Music Festival (October 27 and 28 in Gingin) – not to mention

passing his musical genes (and genius) to daughter Katy (lead singer of Perth band Little Birdy,) and sons Luke (Sleepy Jackson singer) and Jesse, also a musician. Rick talks family values with Scoop.

HIGHCHAIR When Rick returned to Perth in 1981 with an 18-month-old baby and a three-month-old in tow, he was “extremely broke” and “somewhat anxious” about the parenting challenges ahead. “We bought a

highchair for \$2 from Good Sammy's. It has been painted four colours, was used by our four kids, grandchildren and, I hope, great grandchildren. It's a humble but beautiful reminder of the magic of childhood.”



MY NEWSPAPER COLLECTION

“It's like a diary of my life,” explains Rick, who keeps articles and obituaries that interest him. “I have a copy of the last *Daily News* ever printed and the first *X-Press*. I can pull out 1986 and read a kaleidoscope of what was happening. It works as a measuring stick for where I'm at now.”

BOOTS AND HARMONICAS

In 1972, while playing Neil Diamond songs at the Perth Concert Hall Tavern, Rick met Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. “I was wearing flares and platform shoes,” he recalls. “After half an hour of hearing the real blues I gave up fashion and decided to buy a mouth organ. I met Nastazi from Midland who made me a pair of boots. I visit this skilled craftsman to this day and make my living playing harmonicas.”

MY DOGS “Rosie performs her duty as head of security with great dignity,” says Rick fondly, adding the old girl is now 11. “Circy, her daughter, is learning her role quietly and efficiently. They take their job as ‘man's best friend’ very seriously!”

THE MUSIC IN ME “At eight years old I felt music,” says Rick, who mowed lawns as a 12-year-old nipper to buy his first guitar. “I took it to boarding school and taught myself, with my brother's help, to play the Beatles, Stones and Kinks. For me, music is an essential stress reliever.”

MY WIFE Married to Liz for 30 years, Rick says: “Love is the undiminishing support of a faithful wife who loves her husband and children unconditionally. Blessed are the homemakers.”

THE RIVER Rick's uncle had a jetty and rowboat in Whangarei, New Zealand. “By eight years old I had read *Tom Sawyer* and I would row and dream. I've been running river cruises on the Swan since 1985. There's something special about cruising with a cleansing ale and rousing song.”

FAMILY “I do a Dylan song titled *Oh Sister*. I want to encourage people who have fallen out with their siblings or parents to repair the damage. I recently spent an evening just with my sister – the first time since she left home 46 years ago – and went fishing with my brother. I hope my children will be blessed in the future with the same experience of family love.” **S**