

Bluesfest, Australia's Premier Blues and Roots Music Festival took place this year outside Byron Bay in late April over six days attracting almost 100,000 visits.

The festival could be called Guitarfest with many bands indulging in guitar solos that were too long, but with notable exceptions being Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello and a lesser known Australian band - The Snowdroppers.

I managed to catch up with The Snowdroppers between shows. The band is Sydney based and mixes blues, soul, rock and punk. They performed twice at Bluesfest attracting capacity crowds both times. The majority of the audience was under thirty with more females than males which stood out from the average age of the general Bluesfest crowd. The audience mix was something banjo and harmonica playing vocalist Johnny Wishbone enjoyed, claiming it "a good statistic".

The Snowdroppers is a loud band with ribald lyrics that manages to get males and females singing along to a chorus which asks, "S%&k my c%\$k, li#k my balls" but this is no surprise to Wishbone who says, "The lyrics have universal appeal."

The band members are dressed like Australian bushrangers but when they step out there is no tea chest bass; what happens is hard driving blues rock. The band has a strong on stage presence lead by Wishbone who is controversial and animated. Wishbone says he is a thespian having appeared in the Macquarie University Comedy Revue and in two Shakespeare plays, one of these was Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare's bloodiest and most violent work where Wishbone played Chiron the son of Tamora – Queen of the Goths.

At the festival most of the guitarists play long solos, but Pauly K (guitar) was sparse with his solos and he says this is his decision not the bands, "I hate to play two songs in a row with a guitar break, here we go the same old guitar lick [imitates a guitar solo], do not mind a bit of a solo but it is not something I look forward to doing." Wishbone chimes in with "we think of the audience and I would not want to listen to long guitar solos. We are not trying to appeal to the men over 56 years old with Telecasters.... we do not interest those people at all."

The Snowdroppers have caught a few acts at Bluesfest and were impressed by Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi Band "they had two drummers with one big kit, we were watching from the pit, and they were watching each other the whole time, one doing a roll and one doing intuitive dynamics and slowing down, it was neo blues that plays with some soul."

Although Derek Trucks played long solo breaks he did appeal to Wishbone, "A lot of those players, and I am going to offend men over the age of 45 who play Fenders and Gibsons, bore me to tears, ...solos that go on forever. He [Derek] does play for a long time and he really held me, he has some thought, not just doodling ... doing that slide stuff and up picking with his fingers." Asked about other acts Wishbone asks: "Why do these old artists do covers and blues standards instead of the stuff they did in the 60's?"

The Snowdroppers were one of about fifty Australian bands to be asked to play at South by South West (SXSW) and while at SXSW The Snowdroppers caught up with Eli "Paperboy" Reed who also performed at Bluesfest: "Man if you close your eyes....the vocals are note perfect, all of the band have soul ..... have so much groove, makes you want to go and practise" Wishbone said.

When asked which artist they would like to feature from Bluesfest the Band would choose to do "I Saw the Light" with The Blind Boys of Alabama. The Blind Boys of Alabama performed two packed shows in the large Crossroads arena and featured Aaron Neville, who with Linda Ronstadt had two number one Grammy-winning hits "Don't Know Much" and "All My Life". Fans of the television series The Wire were also treated to the Blind Boys version of "Way Down in the Hole" which was used as the theme song in its first season.

The Snowdroppers are happy to be controversial and take risks— their second set took place on Anzac Day and in between songs they organised a two up game for the crowd with Wishbone as the spinner.