

No Signal;

How the 70's Rock and Roll spirit survives in the age of Instagram



Figure 1- Party of the Undead 2018 - Two & Six Photography

This is the story of how a lost night in Sydney's concrete jungle led me to the last bastion of true Rock and Roll.

Hidden deep beneath the Sydney Skyline, stood in defiance between a TAB Bank branch and a website design firm, you can find the last living fossil of a bygone age. Frankie's, located in the CBD of Australia's artistic epicentre, now acts as a reminder of the good old days to a generation of people with 'Dark Side of the Moon' tattoos hidden below their pressed Armani suits. The seductive neon red and yellow sign outside disguises this orchestral oasis as a cheap Italian restaurant, keeping it preserved from the originality erasing hands of the Instagram age. In fact, I seriously doubt anyone within this time capsule even knows what Instagram is... Thank God.

On a warm Monday night, I walked down the cigarette burnt carpet stairs and pushed back the saloon doors. Meandering through a crowd of 'T-Rex' emblazoned T-shirts and boys back in town, I realise there is a noticeable lack of obtrusive handheld search lights. That's correct, there was not an Apple logo in sight. Instead, a cross-section of this diverse city spawned conversations over the oldest unifying force in existence: music. Taking in the cacophony of conversation, it becomes clear that this place acts as a shelter for Woodstock wayfarers and heavy metal heads alike, a nirvana for those born in the wrong era. Anchored at the bar, holding my place in line against the swirling currents of humanity,

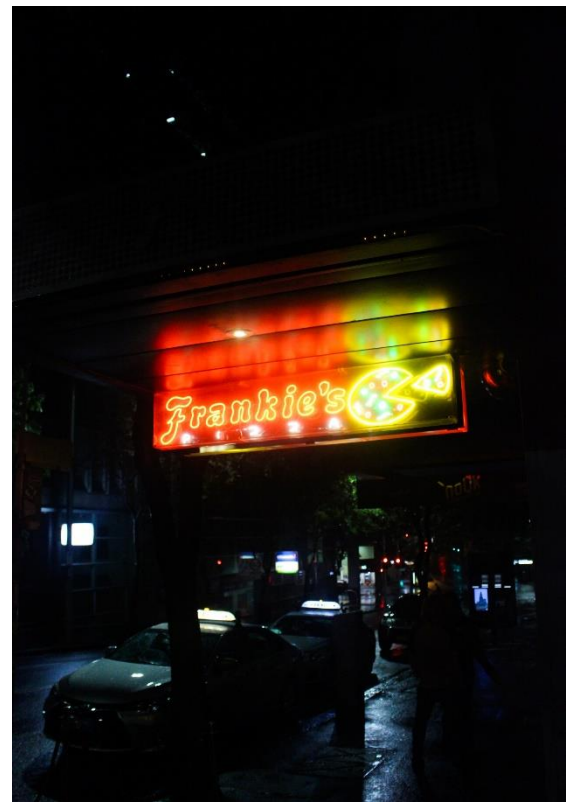


Figure 2- The Secret Entrance 2018- Two & Six Photography

I become elated at my sheer luck for stumbling across this diamond in the concrete. Yet, my excitement is quickly muted by the realisation that I could never have found this place if it had not been for luck. How can it be that the delicate existence of these archaic watering holes and the Rock and Roll spirit they encase, remains balanced on the fragility of Chinese whispers. A multitude of one-dollar beers began mixing with the questions formulating in my mind. Questions about how places like this still exist in a world slowly suffocating in laminated menus and iPad-wielding waitresses. Questions that would later have their answers, straight from the men keeping this spirit alive.

Figure 4- Woodstock and Wall street 2018- Two & Six Photography

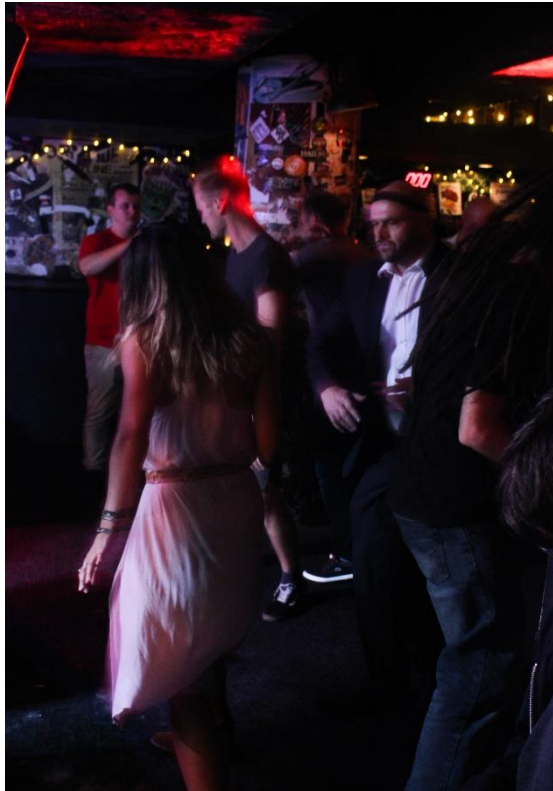
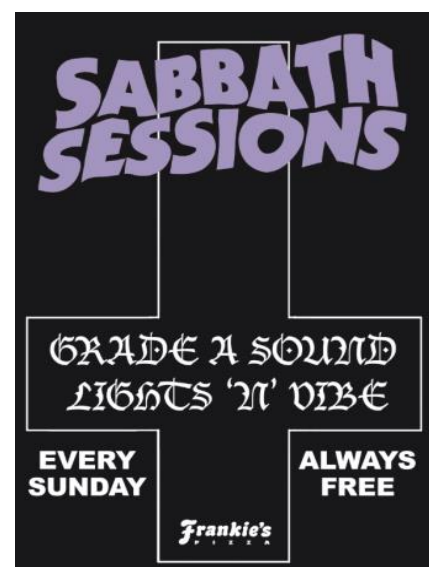


Figure 3- Joel McDonald 2018– Two & Six Photography



The stage at Frankies is more iconic than the Marilyn Manson signature on the bathroom stall. After talking to the bar manager, and by talking I mean fragmentedly shouting at each other over the sound of ‘Sabeth Bloody Sabeth’, I learn that Frankie’s has been hoasting live music every night since 1971. The thousands of photographs that plastered the walls of Frankie’s where not ‘vintage’ recreations but rather genuine glimpses into a half a century of unpublished musical history.

The recurring protagonist in a lot of the photos, was a man I discovered to be named James Ferry. James ferry is two things; Firstly, he is one of two co-founders of Frankies back in the 70’s. A homegrown hippie who fell in love with Sydney’s surfing and musical worlds in equal measures. Secondly, he was the father of the drummer currently tearing through Maidens ‘Fear of the Dark’, as I turn back to ask my new best friend, the bar manager, for another libation.



Frankie's has stood as a refuge for liberal thought and debauched expression through lamentations of The Vietnam war, The Bay of Pigs, and The Watergate scandal. It has been a platform for musicians and protestors to vent and create for decades, yet the question still remains, what role does Frankie's fulfill now that the worlds Rock and Roll spirit has ascended up to 'The Cloud'? And why are these places such a rarity?

I decided that the man most qualified to answer these questions was the drummer Dave Ferry and his friends from Frankie's World Famous House Band.

After some persuasive words and a promise of free photographic work of this night's event, the bar manager leads me through a 'Staff Only' branded door and into the band's dressing room. Propping my camera up on an empty 'Brew Dog' beer keg, I hit record and wait for the crowd's final applause to usher in the men who can shed some light on the miraculously exciting nature of Frankie's in the age of POP culture.

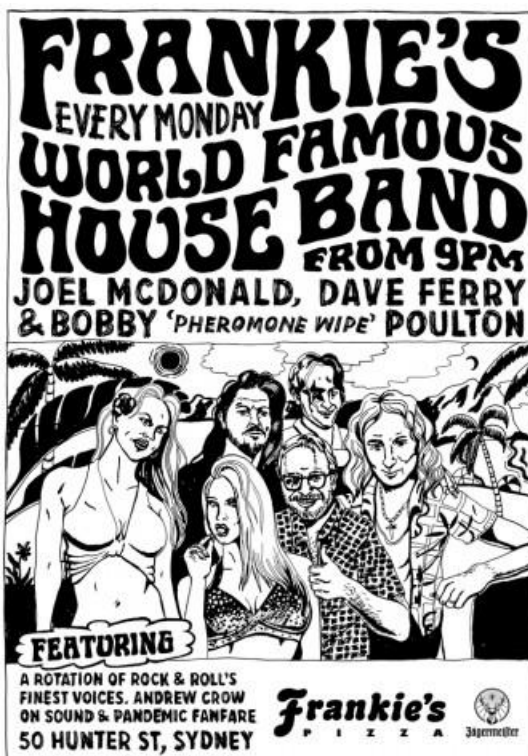


Figure 5- Frankie's world famous 2018- Two & Six Photography

“If these walls could talk they would never stop singing.”

ME: ‘Do you think that the Rock and Roll scene is still as alive now as it was back in the 70’s?’

JOEL MCDONALD (Lead Guitar): ‘Regardless of scenes and all that, this is a place you can come and get a cold beer and listen to loud music. We’re not reinventing the wheel, we do what we do here and we do it well.’

ME: ‘Is live Rock and Roll still appreciated or has social media and the uprooting of underground music drowned you out?’

DAVE FERRY: 'I think that it is appreciate now more than ever, you can see it when you play, the crowd is so engaged. I think they're looking for a release. When you step into Frankie's you go back in time and the annoyances of the 21st century leave you at the door.'

ME: 'Is it competitive to get a spot on this stage?'

BOBBY POULTER (Bass): 'New acts are always looking for a place to cut their teeth, now they're competing against acts who have been there and done that. There's nowhere else these bands can play.'

ME: 'So why do you think people crave feeling like there back in the 70's?'

DAVE FERRY: 'In simple terms? Because you're aloud to be yourself.'

Thanks to these true Rock and Roll preachers, I had my answers. With everything going on in the world at the minute there isn't much room left for authenticity. In a world where people live identical lives online, we begin to lose touch with true feelings. But when you walk through the doors of Frankie's and the bass drum resonates through you, you are reminded that we are all still capable of primal expression. In fact, in my opinion, not only are we capable of it, we need it.

Text and Photographs by Chris Kelly.