

COVER
STORY



Pic by Cybele Malinowski. Pictured (L-R): Malina Hamilton-Smith (Super Massive), Nick Rudenno (Burn The Drama), Alison Cunningham (Anjeliina), Cass Eager, Nootjie (King Farook)

AS THEIR NAME WAS ANNOUNCED AS ONE OF THE NOMINEES FOR BEST URBAN RELEASE IN THIS YEAR'S ARIA AWARDS, NOT A FEW INDUSTRY PEOPLE IN THE ACER ARENA IN SYDNEY'S HOMEBUSH BAY WOULD HAVE REMEMBERED BLISS N ESO AS BEST URBAN ARTIST WINNERS IN THE 2003 AND 2004 **MUSICOZ AWARDS**.

MICHAEL SMITH CHATS TO SOME OF THIS YEAR'S MUSICOZ AWARDS – AND FUTURE ARIA? – NOMINEES.

AND THE NOMINATIONS ARE...

"I'd heard about it over the years," explains Nootjie from King Farook, nominated in the Urban category, "and the band that I'm with were in Musicoz two or three years ago when they were called The SHIT. I also did a show at the Marquee with one of the gentlemen who is a big part of it who was telling us a lot about it and it's obviously a good thing to get involved in. So we're gonna be supporting every artist that's up there on the night."

"I've actually got some friends that work for APRA (Australasian Performing Rights Association) who came to me – I hadn't told them yet – saying, 'Are you guys nominated in Musicoz? Wow dude, this is a really big deal now – good luck!' We're in the midst of releasing a single – the album's called *Land Of The Horny* – so the timing couldn't be more perfect for us."

For those of you unfamiliar with it, Musicoz, now in its seventh year, is a national non-profit initiative dedicated to exposing, supporting and developing quality Australian original music from the grass roots level by seeking out, recognising and encouraging the unsigned, independent artists and providing them with much needed support and career opportunities through what's become known as "The Unsigned ARIAs". It's a glittering annual awards night where the best acts across 17 genres, selected from more than 5000 entries from all over Australia, are not only presented with an award for their achievements but get to share in a prize pool worth more than \$100,000, including recording packages from Studios 301, Velvet Sound and Trackdown among others, airplay

on Nova, professional photo shoots, all manner of equipment and a \$25,000 national advertising package from Street Press Australia.

Hosting the awards night this year are Channel [V] VJs Jane Gazzo and James Kerley, while there will be exclusive performances from Musicoz's biggest success story to date, former Wollongong band Porcelain, who scored the Listener's Choice Award in 2001 and are signed directly to Universal Music in the US, as well as Butterfingers among others.

"I'd actually entered it I don't know how long ago with a high school band I was in," admits Rock category nominee Burn The Drama's Nick Rudenno, "but we were pretty bad and we didn't get anywhere. One of the guys from the band was researching the web – we usually put out our feelers for the different competitions going around – and we'd recently recorded our new single, *Carrying*, so when we came across it we thought we'd chuck it in and see how we went. It's got us into the top five so we'll see what comes of that but it's just nice to have a good response to the new single, which is a different sound for us from our last EP. Our drummer had a conversation with the organiser Pat Maloney – in fact when he rang, *Carrying* was playing in the background – and Pat said he was quite excited about the track and that it had had a good response in the office. But it's great. We only submitted the one song so to get through on the one song is really exciting."

"I'd wanted to apply last year and didn't," Cass Eager admits, nominated in the Blues/Roots category and who recently launched her debut

album, *Beautiful Day*, and as such will see her in WA on tour the night of the awards. "Then it all happened and I was bummed I hadn't applied so I just made sure I got in this year – even though it was by the skin of teeth, an hour before deadline or something! It seems to be getting bigger and better each year and it's great to have something like this for the artists that aren't ARIA level."

"I actually forgot to send out the little link 'vote for me' that they give you, so I was getting all these emails telling me it wasn't working and then I got the email saying I was in the top five and I was shocked until I realised it was down the music industry judges rather than friends voting, and that's means so much more. It's not all about CD sales either; it's a peer award about the music. And it's not about the winning. It's about being a part of it and being acknowledged by being nominated for what you do for a living."

"Before I joined the band [as vocalist]," Alison Cunningham from Anjeliina, nominee in the Metal/Hardcore category, explains, "I'd entered Musicoz twice previously with some solo electronica tracks, but because I don't play an instrument I was kind of a little bit all over the place. Then I saw the ad for these guys in *Drum* – they were looking for a singer – and it's strange 'cause I'd grown up listening to metal but drifted away from it because there are hardly any female fronted metal bands that I actually like so I couldn't see how it could work, but everything just fell into place."

"As a band we haven't entered many competitions but because I know it's judged by industry peers – A&R people and people from various parts of

SO WHO ENTERED?

The Musicoz awards have grown over the years and are now at the point where it's a truly national event. The man behind Musicoz, **Pat Maloney**, elaborates.

"The 5000-odd entries came from right around the country," Maloney explains. "It's certainly not NSW-centric, so people are really seeing Musicoz as a *national* event. I must say this job never ceases to amaze me. Every year these new people coming out of the woodwork and it's like, 'Wow, where did they come from?' In terms of quality, it's gone up and down over the years but this year I've had 15 of our 60 judges come to me saying this is the year. The entries have been outstanding, the quality really bloody good, so there's something in the water at the moment! It's just fantastic."

Of the 170 artists that made the top ten nominations in the 17 judged categories, 38 are from Victoria, 22 from Queensland, 19 from South Australia, 14 from Western Australia, five from the ACT, one from New Zealand and, in the International category, four from the US. The rest are entrants from across NSW.

the industry – It means a lot more when you get chosen. So you know that even if you don't get into the top ten, you know those people have heard your song and heard your name."

"It's because Musicoz has an incredible amount of integrity and credibility that we wanted to be a part of it," Alternative category nominee Super Massive's Malina Hamilton-Smith, looking like a contemporary rock version of Diana Rigg in '60s TV cult series, *The Avengers*, admits. "I think Musicoz is just an incredible scheme because they see it as providing all the development stuff that a band who has no money and who's unsigned would need. There's so much to do when you're a new band and if you don't have a lot of money behind you, it can be almost impossible to get ahead, because every step of the way someone wants money – you've got to pay for equipment, rehearsals, photo shoots, video clips, PR, recording, distribution, pressing – all that stuff you need is an enormous outlay."

"So it's a thrill for us to have been nominated as one of the finalists because the credibility that gives us means people are more likely to listen to our music and give us a go, even if it doesn't go any further. If it does go further, there are so many amazing people supporting this project who you get to work with."

WHAT Musicoz Awards 2007

WHEN & WHERE Thursday 22 November, Enmore Theatre, Enmore