

## Graham Bidstrup reflects on iconic Australian music legacy

August 24, 2025

— Categories: *Breaking News*



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Graham “Buzz” Bidstrup, one of the most recognizable drummers in Australian rock history, has released a memoir that chronicles his decades-long career shaping the nation’s music scene. The book, titled *No Secrets*, after the hit song he co-wrote with The Angels, details his time as a performer, songwriter, producer, and mentor to emerging talent.

Bidstrup, now also a music producer and community leader, has been a central figure in bands including The Angels, The Party Boys, and GANGgajang, which this year marks the 40th anniversary of its self-titled debut album. He also spent more than a decade managing and producing Indigenous music legend Jimmy Little, remaining CEO of the charity Uncle Jimmy Thumbs Up, which provides art-based health and education programs in schools across Australia.

One of Bidstrup's most enduring contributions was safeguarding the now-famous lyric, "This is Australia," in the GANGgajang anthem Sounds of Then (This is Australia).

Frontman Mark Callaghan, who originally penned the song as a poem inspired by his childhood in Bundaberg, considered cutting the line for being too overt. Bidstrup intervened.

"I said, 'If you take that out, you're going to kill the song,'" he recalled. "That's the thing that's going to make that song worth something."

History proved him right. The phrase became so closely linked to the song that it was included in the official title, and decades later, it remains the lyric most listeners recall when identifying the track.

In the memoir, Bidstrup emphasizes how his position as a drummer gave him insights other musicians might miss. Sitting at the back of the stage, he said he could observe crowd reactions more clearly than a lead singer.

"I could tell what songs went down well because I could see people either bopping or not bopping, jumping up and down or not jumping up and down," he explained. "So I knew about tempo. I knew about what songs went off, and I could also see what parts of the band weren't working."

This vantage point, combined with his work as a producer, sharpened his instincts about what connected with audiences.

Bidstrup's career coincided with the golden age of Australian pub rock, spanning the mid-1970s through the late 1980s. He played alongside household names such as Jimmy Barnes, Mondo Rock, and Australian Crawl, while also carving a reputation for his technical skill and distinctive style.

Part of what made him stand out was his unconventional drumming technique. As a left-handed drummer who plays open-handed on a right-handed kit, Bidstrup said it gave him a rhythmic groove others struggled to match.

“I’ve just got my hands open,” he explained. “I’m hitting the hi-hat with my left hand, the snare with my right hand. Other people couldn’t get the groove that I get.”

Beyond his on-stage presence, Bidstrup brought engineering and production expertise, often running recording sessions himself. “When a studio is \$1,000 a day, you have to get to the end of the day with something completed,” he said. “You had to actually have it right.”

With *No Secrets*, Bidstrup offers a behind-the-scenes view of a formative era in Australian music and the creative decisions that helped shape some of its most iconic songs.