

ART

Rolling rockers gather no Moss



MUSIC



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In tune

Moss band members Peter Cornthwaite (drums), Clive Pollard (keyboards), Graham Knowles (bass), Mark Simpkin (lead guitarist), and Susan Craig (lead singer).

Picture: SUPPLIED

It's Australia Day. About 5000 punters are hyping up. The energy swells. And you are on stage performing your best heartland rock.

"Amazing doesn't cut it," says Moss lead singer Susan Craig as she describes the band's performance at the South Adelaide Football Club this year. "Particularly when the audience enjoys it. It's not just the audience and performer; you become one thing."

It was the biggest gig Moss had ever done. The band, often likened to a modern-day Midnight Oil, was born only four years ago – first as a cover band, before turning to heartland rock about two years ago.

While the band may be in its infancy, its members are not. Lead guitarist Mark Simpkin, bass player Graham Knowles, drummer Peter Cornthwaite, Clive Pollard on the keyboard and Craig are all over 50.

Their age is reflected in the music, says Craig. The lyrics range from "Botox and fillers are personality killers" to stories about the drug ice, transgender issues, nuclear waste dumps and domestic violence. The band members are children of the 1970s, an era when "the stage

was the podium and the lyrics were the speeches".

"Music that is written about issues inspires hope," Craig continues. "We can't remember too many speeches from kings and presidents, other than from Martin Luther King, but we can remember so many songs about so many things."

Real issues are increasingly lacking in the lyrics of today's music, maybe thanks to the rise of social media. "Facebook may have something to do with that," Craig says. "A lot of people are communicating and uploading their concerns on Facebook. But those messages are short-lived."

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Music at a mature age has more than one advantage.

Studies show music lessons in childhood can provide benefits for the long run, providing a defence against memory loss, cognitive decline and a diminished ability to distinguish consonants and spoken words.

Musical training even impacts on the physics of the brain. Harvard neurologist Gottfried Schlaug found in a 2003 study that the brains of adult

professional musicians had a larger volume of grey matter than the brains of nonmusicians.

In 2011, a study of a group of adults, aged between 60 and 83, showed those who had studied an instrument for at least 10 years scored the highest in areas such as non-verbal and visuospatial memory, naming objects and taking in new information.

The best part is it's not too late to gain benefits from music. Jennifer Bugos, assistant professor of music education at the University of South Florida, Tampa, found people aged between 60 and 85 who had piano lessons over six months showed more robust gains in memory, verbal fluency, the speed at which they process information, planning ability and other cognitive functions, compared with those who had no lessons.

As for Moss, Craig says the band might feel its age the morning after a gig but nothing holds the members back on stage. "Maybe if somebody taps us on our shoulder and says, 'It's time for you guys to get off,' I'll be concerned about it," she says. "But, as long as people are enjoying our music, we keep on going."