

STEPHEN CUMMINGS

*From the day I was born, I've been searching
Searching for something I can't find
And here I go again ...*

- From The Day I Was Born

"My name is Stephen, and I'm a melancholic ..."

Stephen Cummings is an Australian folk/roots pop singer-songwriter. He has been making music for more than three decades. The quest for the perfect pop song continues with *Space Travel*, his new album, which comes 30 years after The Sports' first record, and 25 years after his debut solo single, *We All Make Mistakes*.

Excluding a couple of compilations and a live disc, *Space Travel* is Stephen's lucky 13th solo album.

Some guys have all the luck/ I don't have any

- I Remember

Space Travel was produced by Stephen's good friend Bill McDonald (Four Hours Sleep), recorded at Bill's home studio, Flippy-Flop. The album was mixed by long-time collaborator Shane O'Mara.

This is how Stephen explains the record:

"*Space Travel* is my 13th proper full-length album. We recorded it over a series of short sessions in Yarraville with Bill McDonald, Billy Miller, Peter and Dan Luscombe. Shane O'Mara mixed the album back in his Yikesville studio and spa. The songs were written mostly during the summer of '06. I don't want to go into too much detail about the songs, but I will point out that there are my usual themes of forgiveness and fucking up."

A magical, melancholic tour, it's an album of exclamation marks (*It's Not Me, It's You!*, *Hey Kitty, Kitty!*, *El Duderino!*) and the occasional question (*Who Wants To Buy A Broken Heart?*). It's filled with small, intimate detail (*She walked away, and Buck Owens was a playin'*). And, in the end, it's an album about love.

Life is love, life is love/ Love, love, love

- From The Day I Was Born

"I try to keep what I do to the area of love songs," Stephen says. "When I was young, I always wanted to have a girlfriend, but I could never get one. I've never wanted to be married, just having a girlfriend has been enough for me."

Stephen's girlfriend, Kathleen, is actually *Space Travel's* cover star. She also took the back cover photo of Stephen, when she was a RAM photographer. And Kathleen provided the album title – *Space Travel* was the working title for her AFI Award-winning movie, *Stranded*.

People don't like to remember things/ They cannot see the point

- From The Day I Was Born

Space Travel's opening line (*Little girl on a sofa, singing to herself*) will remind fans of Stephen's biggest hit, The Sports classic *Who Listens To The Radio* (*This girl in her bedroom, doing her homework*). Perhaps it's just a coincidence. But *Space Travel* encapsulates Stephen's incredible pop journey. "It covers all the things I've done," he explains. "This is me."

Haven't we had this conversation before?

- It's Not Me, It's You!

The journey started with the rockabilly-inspired The Pelaco Brothers, a supergroup of sorts, with Joe Camilleri, Melbourne public radio legend Johnny Topper and guitarist Peter Lillie. They released a posthumous EP in 1976.

Stephen's first real release came the following year, with The Sports' *Fair Game* EP. It was awarded "Record Of The Week" in NME: "Blimey, it is ace," the NME reviewer gushed. "If you got crooked by AC/DC, The Saints and Frank Ifield, don't think that all the bands Down Under are out of date. Steve Cummings out, Jagger Jagger ... I kid you not. The Sports are a gen-u-wine rock 'n' roll discovery. Move spheres to get this."

The Sports survived just five years, but released four albums. Stephen documents how it all went wrong in New York, in

the interview accompanying the new DVD, *In The Big Room*. "I had to room with Michael Gudinski after that," Stephen reveals. "I was so flipped out."

The Mushroom Records boss later admitted: "I gave up management for 10 years because of Stephen Cummings. He was traumatic to manage. But he's great now."

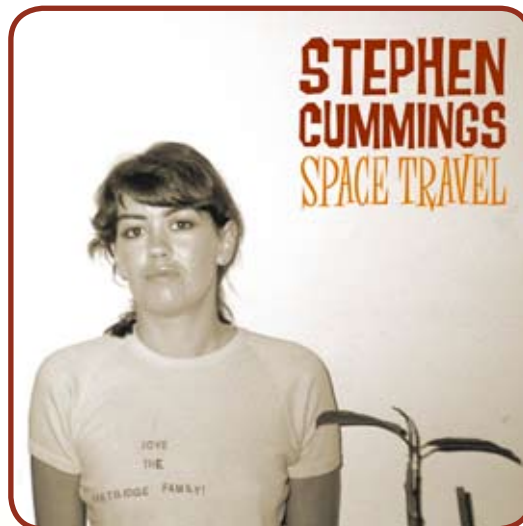
Hello, hello – where did those mad years go?

- Little Girl On A Sofa

Michael's Liberation label now releases Stephen's albums, including repackages of his back catalogue. Stephen's first two solo albums – *Senso* and *This Wonderful Life* – have been packaged together, with bonus tracks and extensive liner notes, as have *Lovetown* and *A New Kind Of Blue*.

When Stephen started his solo career, he talked about creating a new genre – Intelligent Adult Oriented Rock. "I want to get into the area of making music for those people who need something a little more," he said in 1982. Now, he adds: "With society, everything is geared around the infantile. I'm trying not to buy into that."

Liberation also produced the *In The Big Room* DVD with the *Rockwiz* team, filming Stephen, Bill McDonald and Billy Miller live at the



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Forum, directed by *Countdown's* Paul Drane (who also made AC/DC's famous Swanston Street clip for *It's A Long Way To The Top*). Stephen is an occasional member of the Rockwiz "Brains Trust", described in the Rockwiz book as "musician, writer, bon vivant. Nominated by critics as Melbourne's Number One Sook". (First single: Masters Apprentices – *Undecided*; First concert – The Loved Ones).

Stephen has also written two novels – 1996's *Wonderboy* and 1999's *Stay Away From Lightning Girl*.

Kellogs pursed his lips. "Yeah, I know, you're a popular singer who's not popular."
"Yeah," countered Robert, "but I get good reviews."
"Well, we all know what that's worth," Kellogs said, looking at Robert as though he were insane again. "Rock music died when it attracted critics and was placed in the arts pages along with other dead movements like dance and classical music and literature." Kellogs hung his head in silence, as though thinking this idea through. *"You're too fucking sensitive, that's always been your problem."*
"I know, it's my curse," said Robert.

- Stay Away From Lightning Girl by Stephen Cummings (Random House)

Whatever way you look at it, Stephen has had a remarkable career, writing and recording more than 250 songs. "Sometimes my life is so stable – I'm such a stable, well-balanced person – that I don't really have much to write songs about any

more," Stephen confesses. "So I have to look at other people's lives, and I do take inspiration from a lot of films."

"Let me explain something to you. Um, I am not 'Mr Lebowski'. You're Mr Lebowski. I'm the Dude. So that's what you call me. You know, that or, uh, His Dudeness, or, uh, Dude, or El Duderino, if you're not into the whole brevity thing"

- The Big Lebowski

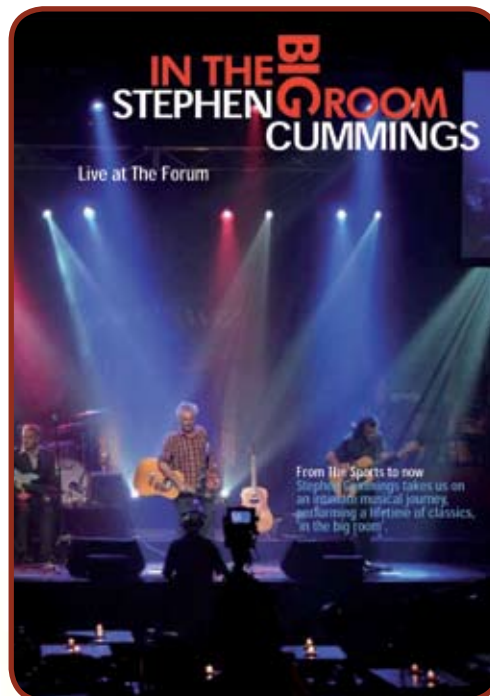
"I just like trying all these different things that I'm interested in. I just keep doing it, trying to get closer to achieving what I set out to do."

In any war – and show business was warfare – there were bound to be casualties. Robert saw this in himself and he saw it in Maclean – both had spent too much of their lives running on rock 'n' roll time, which was no kind of time at all. Buying the dream was easier than giving it up.

- Stay Away From Lightning Girl

"I just want to do as much as I can while I can," Stephen says. "I just want to keep doing stuff."

No stopping/ He who stops falls over
- No Stopping



Stephen Cummings In The Big Room DVD

Things to note:

- Stephen's new album 'Space Travel' is the finest of his career
- 'In The Big Room' is remarkably, his first ever DVD, and features all of his greatest hits recorded live at Melbourne's iconic Forum Theatre in an empty room, with a skeleton band
- The DVD also features a fascinating interview with Stephen in the back of a car with Brian Nankervis
- Stephen is on tour in all states between now and the end of the year
- The 'In The Big Room' DVD comes with a bonus audio CD of the performance - one for home, one for the car

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