



# SCHOOL OF POP

Fifty years ago this month, the first major newspaper for Australia's youth hit the stands, providing a platform for a generation of rising talent. BY PHILLIP FRAZER



JOHN FARNHAM AT 18, 1967



OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN AT 20, 1968

COURTESY, VERA WASS JAGER

THE GO-SET EDITORIAL TEAM IN 1969: (FROM LEFT) PHILLIP FRAZER, JEAN BEDFORD, JON HAWKES, DAVID ELFIK, IAN MELDRUM AND WENDY SADDINGTON



**C**HANGE WAS EVERYWHERE in the summer of 1965-66: the number of teenagers had doubled in the 20 years since World War II, and we had rock'n'roll, the pill, the Vietnam War – and parents from another era. We listened to top-40 radio and danced to the Beatles, the Stones, Billy Thorpe, the Seekers and the Easybeats. If you were cool you were playing Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and John Coltrane.

I was 19, a student at Monash University, and my only publishing experience was working on the student newspaper with my housemate, Tony Schauble, but that didn't stop us brainstorming ideas for a newspaper for teens and 20-somethings. I wrote up an editorial plan – music, fashion, lots of photos – and married “go-go” and “jet-set” to get “Go-Set”.

Among the Tiffany lamps and red velvet armchairs at Melbourne's Thumpin' Tum nightclub, we found Colin Beard, a Pom who had a Pentax camera and had shot some band photos; Terry Cleary, the son of an AFL footy legend who offered to use his sideways way with words to sell ads; and Honey Lea, who was 16 but said she was 18 and who became fashion editor.

Three sleep-deprived weeks later, on February 2, 1966, the first issue of *Go-Set* hit the newsstands – and it came out every week after that for the next eight years. When Colin slipped through security to meet the Stones at the Palais in St Kilda, Mick Jagger declared his photos “the best shots anyone's ever taken of us”.

*Go-Set* was where it was all happening, though it was all happening from the tiny house Tony and I rented, now also the *Go-Set* office and staff crashpad. One day, a girl named Lily drove up in a brand-new pink Valliant, and when she offered to write stories for nothing *and* lend the Valliant to Tony, Lily Brett became our lead interviewer. A month after that, I asked a mop-topped bloke who appeared in the kitchen why he was sweeping our floor. “I just wanted to help,” he said, holding out a hand. “I'm Ian ... um ... Meldrum.”

While it's true that Ian wrote and spoke in a stream of froth and thought-bubbles, he knew more about the pop scene than all of us, so he became our ace reporter. Watching Ian become mates with everyone, the DJ Stan Rofe reckoned he was a bit of a band moll, and so called him Molly.

All the gossip and funky photos of teenage and early 20-something stars such as John Farnham, Normie Rowe, Stevie Wright and Olivia Newton-John connected *Go-Set* to our readers, but so did our cheeky and defiant voice. Ours was the universal voice of adolescence, which at that time also had a new honesty and forthrightness – a break away from the “know-your-place” mindset of our parents' generation. Our attitude to gayness and most social differences was a cheerful whateverism: the *Go-Set* vibe was that your lifestyle is yours to choose.

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GO-SET PHOTOGRAPHER COLIN BEARD IN 1966



JIM KEAYS (STANDING, SECOND FROM LEFT) WITH THE MASTERS APPRENTICES, IN GO-SET IN 1966

## Where are they now?



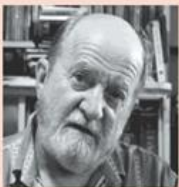
**PHILLIP FRAZER**, a *Go-Set* founder and editor; now writes from Coorabell in northern NSW after 35 years editing political and environmental magazines in New York.



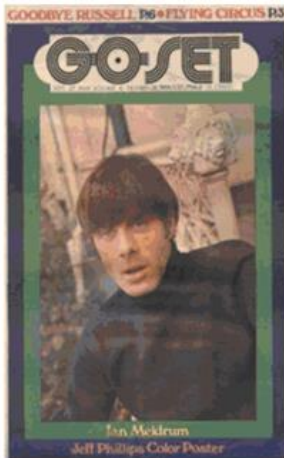
**LILY BRETT**, *Go-Set*'s feature writer; is now an acclaimed New York-based novelist whose books include *Lola Bensky* (2012), based on her *Go-Set* days.



**DAVID ELFICK**, *Go-Set*'s Sydney office manager; founded the surf magazine *Tracks* and has produced feature films including *Newsfront* and *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.



**COLIN BEARD**, *Go-Set*'s co-founder and photographer; after *Go-Set* he shot fashion for *Vogue* and taught photography. His work has reached a global audience.



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My generation didn't have its own filmmakers yet, or non-commercial DJs, let alone social media, so the music was our loudest voice, and *Go-Set* was its print medium. By 1970, a McNair survey reported weekly sales of more than 60,000 nationwide, and a readership of 480,000. The growth spurt came when David Elfick, a University of NSW drama student, took over our Sydney office. He pulled together a new staff of young self-starters and together they made *Go-Set* as hot in Blacktown as it was in Balwyn.

*Go-Set* was at its peak at a moment of dramatic cultural change: the Beatles went psychedelic, Dylan went electric, and our generation's music, film, literature, art, drugs and politics were now the global counter-culture. I headed to the US and Europe to get a blast of their energy. In San Francisco, *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner, who was 24 like me, made a deal for *Go-Set* to run his best rock stories. He invited me home for dinner where the other guest was the hottest writer of the day, Tom Wolfe. I found myself defending Australia against Wolfe's charge that we were all racists.

Until 1971, *Go-Set* had survived because the printers had allowed us to stay months behind on bills, but now they demanded their money. I met with Rupert Murdoch, who offered to buy *Go-Set* if I stayed on working for him. I declined. He replied, “Nice meeting you.”

In 1972, I left *Go-Set* to launch the Australian edition of *Rolling Stone*. Sadly, *Go-Set* folded in 1974. ■