

My Career

The sweet sounds of charity

HOTSHOT

T J James, 33 Singer-songwriter

You are a Canberra musician and you have just released your third independent album, *Another World*. What does your job entail?

I'm a self-managed musician, writing songs, doing performances and busking. I just got a sponsorship grant from the ACf Government to help younger people with disabilities forge a career in creative arts. I work with cerebral palsy charities that help promote my music and in return receive a percentage of sales. My purpose is to help kids through my music.

It's not all drinking, drugs, rock'n'roll and late nights then?

Not really. Sometimes I come home late but I'm married so I try to keep a balanced life.

Do you play requests?

Yeah, yeah. A lot of the time I play my original music, but I can do covers too, I'm very versatile.

What sort of training do you need to be a singer-songwriter?

I had four years of keyboard lessons and six years of vocal training but I started writing lyrics and melody when I was in year 6. I have really been singing since I was about four.

So it is true that talent is something you're born with?

Not necessarily but in some sense I think God has got it all worked out. I was born with cerebral palsy so the right side of my brain, which is the creative side, overtook the left side, which is the motor skills side. I never really thought about another career path. This is what I've always wanted to do.

Who were some of your earlier influences? I saw EMs Presley on television when I was four. He had just died and they were running specials on him. I was mesmerised with this fellow. I remember my parents wanting me to go to bed and me thinking, "this is a good job". Before that I was obsessed with lawnmowers, I think because they made a lot of noise. A lot of my work comes from influences like Billy Joel, Bon Jovi, but also Kiss and the Beatles. It's classical pop-rock that can be easily played on a radio station.

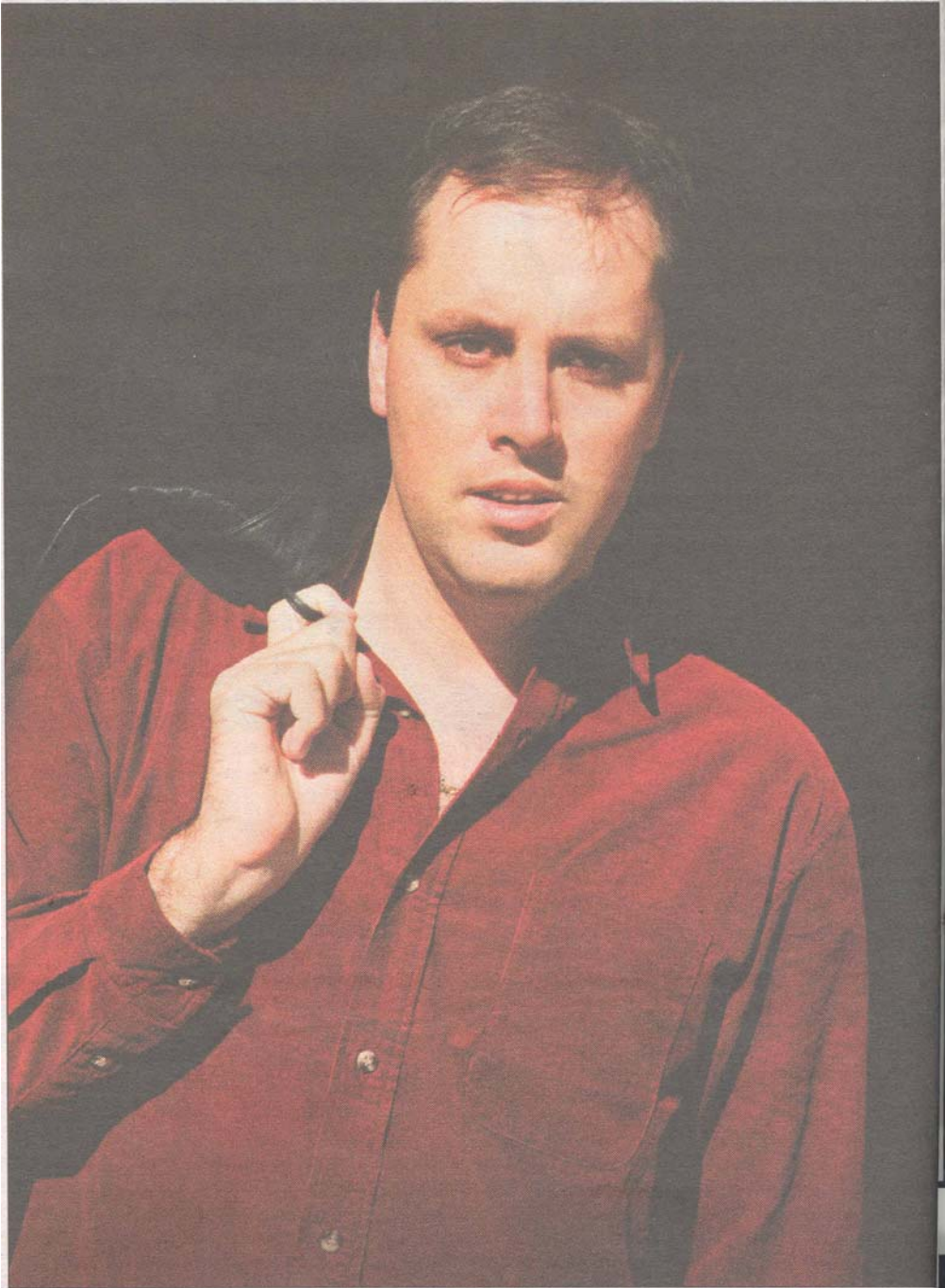
What are the best aspects of your job?

It's very satisfying to give people some hope. And the worst?

Busking on a cold winter's day. I have done a lot of that, 13 years actually; in Canberra and your fingers freeze. But things are starting to happen now and I'm going on tour next year during Cerebral Palsy Week. I'm also launching a CD overseas.

How much do singer-songwriters earn?

It depends how good you are and how much effort you put into it. You have to show some kind of flair but have to work on it. Just because you sell a lot of albums it doesn't mean you'll be



earning a lot of money. You can get \$10 to \$50 a night busking. In a club show expect about \$100 an hour, but as you draw the crowds in you can charge more. I earn a full-time living out of it. What artists or songwriters would you like to work with? Several. Desmond Child who has written songs for lots of people, from Kiss to Cher and Ricky Martin, or Jim Vallance | Alice Cooper, Brian Auger or Robert John "Mutt" Lange, the producer who worked for The Corrs and AC/DC. I have played with Wendy Matthews and Rick

Price. It's great to think your song could be sung by someone like John Farnham.

Would you like to expand beyond the disabled community and market your music to everyone?

Yes, but I'm really happy doing what I'm doing.

Every artist, be it the Rolling Stones, Madonna or I me,

needs die-hard fans who will always buy the_

music. There's enough within the disabled

community [around the world] to do that. If you

look after them, they will always be there for you'

Lia Timson