

NICK CAVE

BAD SEED



By Nigel Bowen

NOWADAYS, Aussie punk rock legend **NICK CAVE** is a rich and respectable, drug-free, God-bothering, happily married father of four. But he spent decades kicking the Grim Reaper in the balls, daring Death to claim his troubled soul. By rights, he should have been locked up, murdered or died of an overdose years ago. So how come he's still here? ►

NICK CAVE

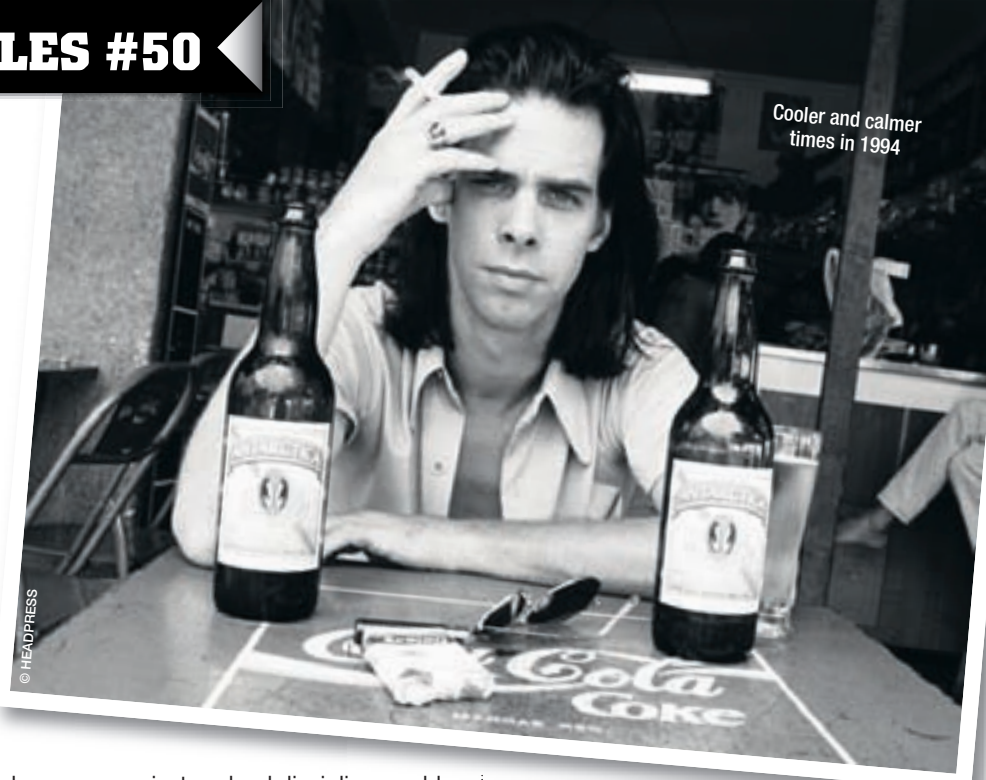
H E ENTERED the world as Nicholas Edward Cave on September 22, 1957 in the small town of Warracknabeal, Victoria. He was English teacher Colin Cave's third son and favourite pupil, exposed from birth to Cave Sr's love of literature and art.

Music was also a part of his upbringing. There was a piano in the house for young Nick to bang away at, and he was encouraged to sing in the choir of the Anglican church the family attended. But despite a deep religious faith, he was never destined to be your typical choirboy. Before even reaching his teens he was getting on the piss with his mates and arguing with his busy father, whose approval he craved, but whose attention he only seemed to get by causing the family embarrassment.

Nick became the town troublemaker and it wasn't long before he got expelled from school.

"Being an inquisitive 12-year-old boy, me and my friend attempted to pull down the knickers of a 16-year-old girl," he later explained to biographer Ian Johnstone in *Bad Seed: The Biography Of Nick Cave*. The girl's parents wanted him charged with attempted rape and what was to be a long history of run-ins with the law had begun.

The out-of-control teenager was sent to Melbourne's posh Caulfield Grammar, in the



Cooler and calmer times in 1994

hope some private school discipline would tame him. It didn't.

He spent his time punching on with the school bullies and building a reputation as an unpredictable weirdo. Once, after being called a faggot by a fellow student, he pantsed him and pretended he was going to sodomise his by-now-terrified tormentor.

Though highly intelligent, Cave hated school, but made it bearable by collecting a gang of like-minded rebels around him and forming a band. It was called The Boys Next Door and was to become one of the most influential groups in the history of punk.

Oz's Sid Vicious

I T WAS August 1977 when the group played their first real gig at a parish hall. The local skinheads turned up and began heckling lead singer Nick, who responded by spitting on them.

Soon, half the band were brawling with the skins, while the rest played on. The skins turned up and arrested half the band. One officer told Cave if his fighter had been at the gig, he would've taken the group down to the station and personally beaten the shit out of them. Melbourne had given birth to its very own Sex Pistols.

After being kicked out of art college for submitting an X-rated painting of a circus musclemans upskirt perv on a ballerina, the musician became obsessed with four things: Anita Lane, a shy redhead who was to become his long-time girlfriend and inspiration for many songs, the Bible, his band and hard drugs.

Though he could barely drive, he took to stealing cars with fellow band member Tracy Pew. When really wasted, he climbed on the roof to car surf, or deliberately crashed into telegraph poles.

But it was another member of the family who was destined to become a road fatality. Just after turning 21, Cave was being held, not for the first time, at St Kilda police station on charges of vandalism and being drunk and disorderly.

His mother Dawn was yet again bailing him out when he learned his dad had been killed in a car accident.

Cave later reflected in his song book *The Complete Lyrics 1978-2001*, "A great gaping hole was blasted out of my world by the unexpected death of my father."

Mr Extraordinary

M ACHO pub rock and girly pop dominated the Aussie music biz in the late 70s and no-one – not the venue owners, not the music press, not the major record labels – were keen on the

CAVE HAD BEEN REDUCED TO WRITING LYRICS WITH USED SYRINGES FILLED WITH HIS BLOOD

THE MEN IN BLACK

NICK got the ultimate stamp of approval, as far as he was concerned, when his musical hero Johnny Cash covered Cave's signature song *The Mercy Seat* in 2000.

Shortly before his death, Cash even cut a duet with Cave on the Hank Williams classic *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*.

During a talk delivered at the NSW State Library in 2004, the long-time country music fan declared, "It doesn't matter what anyone says about me now. Johnny Cash recorded one of my songs, so you can all go and get fucked."

loud, nasty and completely unprofessional shitstorm that was The Boys Next Door. But inner-city audiences loved them...or at least loved to hate them.

With the gangly Cave as frontman, there was a feeling anything could happen and probably would. The drug-addled group lurched from one chaotic gig to another, their shrieking singer hurling himself round the stage like a demented praying mantis, singing songs like *Masturbation Generation* and *Sex Crimes* while casually kicking any punter who annoyed him in the face.

When questioned about his outrageous antics by music writer Simon Reynolds for

WHEN REALLY WASTED, HE'D DELIBERATELY CRASH HIS CAR INTO TELEGRAPH POLES

the book *Blissed Out*, Cave referred to the theme of one of his father's favourite novels, Dostoevsky's *Crime And Punishment*.

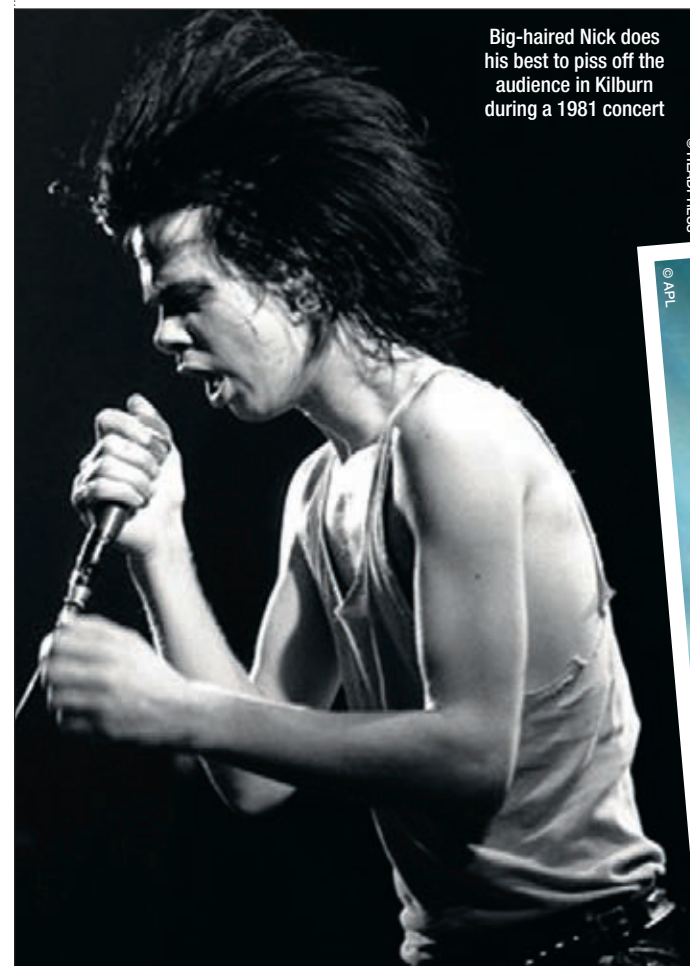
"The world is divided into the ordinary and the extraordinary... the extraordinary shouldn't have live by the dictates of the mediocre majority."

By 1980, with an alarming array of criminal convictions beginning to pile up and his group banned from many local venues, Nick decided it was time to flee the country. He was never to live permanently in Australia again.

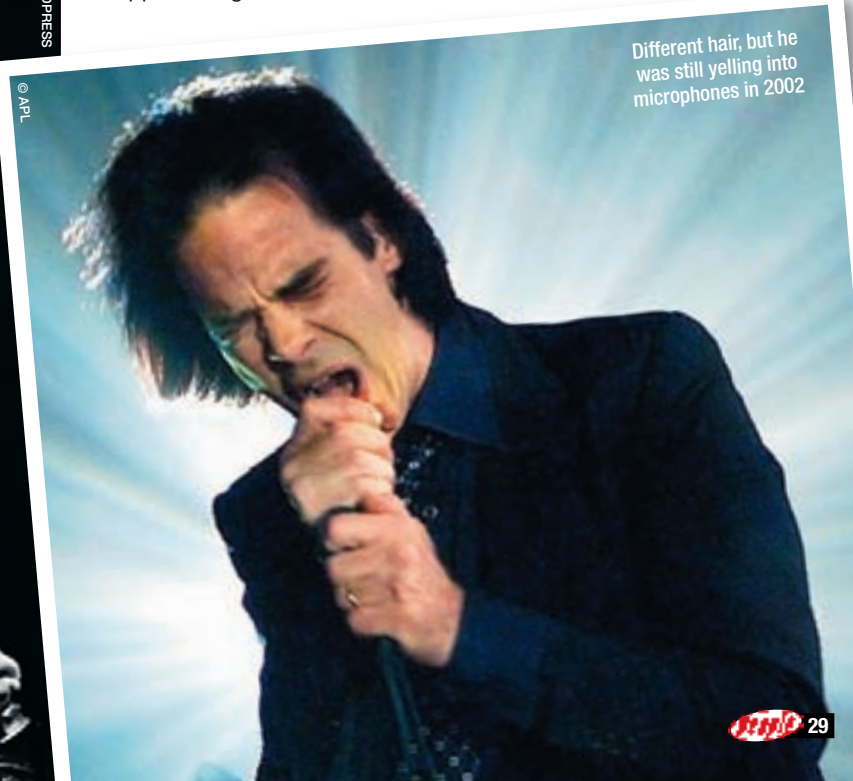
The band – renamed The Birthday Party – moved to London, where a penniless Cave was reduced to stealing chocolate bars for food and thieving bicycles to get money for drugs. Unflappable English



The Birthday Party get serious (above) and a fresh-faced Nick performing in 1977 (below)



Big-haired Nick does his best to piss off the audience in Kilburn during a 1981 concert



Different hair, but he was still yelling into microphones in 2002

NICK CAVE

From ass to angel

ALL his adult life, Nick had written and performed while loaded on booze, speed and smack. Once they were taken away from him, what would happen?

What happened, according to Cave, was he "went from being Old Testament Nick to New Testament Nick".

Long obsessed with a vengeful God killing wretched evildoers, Cave put his faith in Jesus, a figure willing to save an unworthy sinner such as himself.

Far from drying up, as he'd worried, his creativity blossomed.

He finally finished his first novel *And The Ass Saw The Angel* in 1990 and published it to rave reviews.

His albums, once patchy, were now hailed as works of genius by the same critics who used to slag him off. He wrote and acted in a range of arthouse and mainstream films, as well as providing music for them.

Romantically, things were a fair bit more complicated. Cave fell in love with Brazilian fashion stylist Viviane Carneiro and had a son with her in 1991.

(Around the same time another son was born to an Australian girlfriend). By the mid-90s Cave had parted with Viviane.

After a brief, passionate affair with English singer PJ Harvey, he married Vivienne Westwood model Susie Bick in 1999. She gave birth to twins, Arthur and Earl, shortly after.

So respectable had the once smacked-out, car-stealing punk become he was



Nick and Susie at the *Miami Vice* premiere afterparty in London



© SCOPE

pointed visiting professor at an academy of poetry in Vienna. Delivering a lecture there, he spoke about the pup just like his dad.

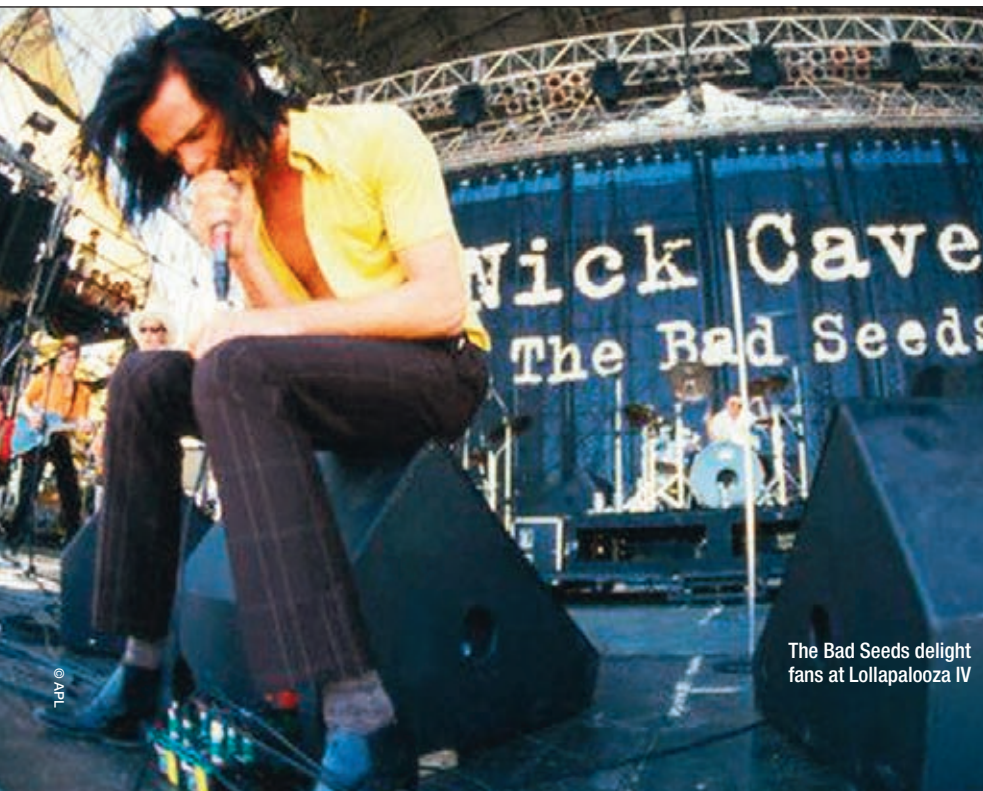
"At 41, I have become my father, and here I am, ladies and gentlemen, teaching." Colin Cave would've been proud.



Accepting his Best Music award for 2005 flick *The Proposition*

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'JOHNNY CASH RECORDED ONE OF MY SONGS, SO YOU CAN ALL GO AND GET FUCKED'



The Bad Seeds delight fans at Lollapalooza IV

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WHEN KYLIE MET NICK

LONG before it was trendy, Cave was a huge fan of Kylie Minogue. When his friend Michael Hutchence began dating her, Nick asked him to pass on the message he wanted to work with her. In one of the oddest musical pairings of all time, the punk and the pop princess collaborated on *Where The Wild Roses Grow* in 1996, a typical Cave tale of twisted love and brutal murder. They're still good mates — in 1998 Kylie gushed to *Billboard Magazine*, "He taught me never to veer too far from who I am, but to go further, try different things, and never lose sight of myself at the core."



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