

UNCLE BILL Not So Short Bio

In 1996 Gerry Hale finally formed his own band; **Uncle Bill**.

Hale had moved to Melbourne from England in 1988, and enjoyed a variety of work that included Musical Director for numerous commercial theatrical productions. He composed for and often performed in those shows, as well as performing in several bands: The Colin Hay Band, Zydeco Jump, Broderick Smith Guild, and guesting with many others. He had started The Esplanade Acoustic Club in St Kilda, and was well-known for his acoustic inclinations, as a fine player of many stringed instruments.

Some actor friends bought a hotel (The Terminus, in Abbotsford), and asked Gerry to provide some entertainment – thus Gerry Hale's Uncle Bill was formed with a gig already waiting.

Gerry grew up in Suffolk, with strong American country and bluegrass influence from the U.S. Airbases dotted around rural England. As a teenager he played in bands with visiting US players, met and shared a stage with Bill Monroe (thus the reference), the "Father of Bluegrass" music. Gerry's love of acoustic music and his eclectic taste combined in the guise of Uncle Bill to provide an outlet for what we have dubbed 'Popular Bluegrass'. Music played with the Bluegrass instrumental line-up of: fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, double bass, and strong vocal harmonies -- but not just the fast-pickin' hillbilly stuff.

Uncle Bill quickly re-introduced Australians to music they were already familiar with, as well as old-style traditional tunes, with instruments many had not seen played live in pubs before. Hale chose songs he had enjoyed playing with well-known local writers: Colin Hay, Paul Kelly, Broderick Smith, Paul Norton, Steve Boyd...and the songs came up a treat. Paul Kelly and Renee Geyer saw the band play at a small hotel, and both used Uncle Bill as their backing band in 1997 on the fine country compilation CD from W. Minc, **Where Joy Kills Sorrow**. Soon the band were being offered songs for their own CD, and in August 1998, **Special Treatment** was independently released. The album was made up of songs by local Australian writers, and although still selling well, the supporter's demands for a CD with their favourite 'other songs' proved too much to withstand. Two months later Uncle Bill went back to the studio and produced **One Day In Adelpia** – a CD of 17 songs recorded live in the studio in one day, no overdubs, no nonsense.

Early in 1999, Paul Kelly collaborated with the band to work on a CD of his songs entitled **SMOKE**, some old gems, and some new ones – all given the special treatment of Uncle Bill's Bluegrass instrumentation and harmonies. Kelly and the band enjoyed playing to a huge assortment of audiences around the country, as they played an east-coast tour late 1999. January 2000 saw Paul Kelly & Uncle Bill in Tamworth, then finishing their national tour with WA, an outback Queensland mining town and a big night at Port Fairy Folk Festival. Kelly and Uncle Bill were happy to accept three awards from the Victorian Country Music Association for their work on **SMOKE**: Best Group (open), Best Group (Victorian), and Album OfThe Year.

Gerry Hale's Uncle Bill have been a festival favourite for several years, at East Coast Blues and Roots Music Festival (Byron Bay), Port Fairy Folk Festival, Apollo Bay Music Festival, Queenscliff Music Festival... They have successfully introduced their own

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brand of acoustic music to folk, country, and blues audiences alike.

Gerry's dynamic performance and the band's strong musicianship and enormous repertoire ensured that the audience would have favourite tunes to request at their next show. The band covered songs from sources as diverse as The Kinks, Bill Monroe, Paul Kelly, Dan Hicks, The Who, Del McCoury, Bob Dylan, Steve Earle, Colin Hay, The Beatles, Guy Clarke, Broderick Smith... all with the same professional style, wit and skill.

The band disbanded in 2001, but an itch within Gerry caused him to reform it in late 2009, but with an entirely new line-up, a surprise to many on both counts. *"I am really excited by the new line-up, the chemistry of the band is exhilarating. There have been several versions of UB, but my new band is most definitely the best combination so far. I wouldn't have done it again any other way,"* quoted by Gerry Hale.

~~A new album is now underway, tentatively called "When I Was a Cowboy" due in October.~~ Correction – The new album took a little longer than expected. It is called **Blue Mule** and was completed a couple of weeks ago. We are very excited!

CURRENT LINEUP includes Gerry Hale, Kim Wheeler, John Gray, Kat Mear & Pepita Emmerichs.