

# ROCK IT OUT WITH MAGIC

WORDS: NIGEL ADLAM. PHOTO: CHELLE CARR



*Rock star Adam Thompson was left with a swag of bitter-sweet memories, a deposit on a nice house and not much else when Chocolate Starfish split up acrimoniously.*

The ponytailed, furcoat-clad lead singer of what was considered one of Australia's best live bands had enjoyed his time at the top.

But he quickly learnt a cruel lesson about fame.

"Everybody wanted a piece of me when I was with the band. But I became less than relevant after the break-up – nobody wanted to know me.

"I didn't make a lot of money out of Chocolate Starfish. I knew nothing about business, nothing about planning for the future. I spent nearly all I earned.

"I didn't know how to conduct a meeting let alone work out a budget."

Adam spent a few frustrating years after the split in the late nineties trying to carry on working in the music industry. And then, as so often happens in life, a seemingly simple thing – an invitation to work with Aboriginal kids in Alice Springs – was to lead to a metamorphosis.

"It was a voyage of discovery," says Adam.

"Reality television had just taken off, especially talent programs. I didn't like them – I didn't like the way they were so judgmental, the way the bloopers at the end of the show mocked the kids.

"I wanted to build up people's self-esteem, make them realise they could do good things in their lives."

Adam was reborn as a motivational speaker.

But he didn't just speak: the rocker revolutionised team-building and self-pride workshops by getting the participants – whether they were Aboriginal kids from bush communities, school children in big cities or the executives of multibillion-dollar energy companies – to write a song.

And then sing it together.

"We write songs on a key message, whether it's building greater cooperation between work units at a big business or practising safe sex among young Aboriginal people.

"It's extraordinary how engaged everybody becomes in getting the words just right.

"By the end of the workshop, everybody sees things differently. They realise how they can improve themselves."



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Adam's Melbourne-based company, MusoMagic, has conducted several hundred motivational workshops since that cathartic day in 2001 when he went to "sing a few songs" to kids in the Alice.

The format is roughly the same for all groups, although the delivery is obviously more sophisticated for company executives.

Business clients always know Adam's history – and are delighted to write a song with a rock star.

Many of the bush people don't have a clue about his past – but love the pride-building sessions all the same.

MusoMagic has worked throughout Australia and has even branched out to India; the workshops last from half a day to a week, and the number of participants has ranged from a handful to 500.

The job has taught Adam something precious: humility.

"I was always pushing for fame and adulation. There was a lot of ego involved when Chocolate Starfish was at its peak. I didn't know much about myself – friends often knew more about me than I knew about me.

"It's humbling to realise people have wanted to make changes to their lives after hearing you speak.

"It can be working better in the office or an Aboriginal child getting rid of 'shame' and doing something they thought they couldn't.

"They realise that you get out of life what you put into it."

Adam loves the work, despite the extensive travelling involved.

"Could I make more money banging out old songs at RSL clubs? Possibly. Would I have such a smile on my face? No."

Adam hasn't given up his hard-rocking life. Chocolate Starfish, which was formed in 1992 and broke up in 1998 after releasing two highly-acclaimed albums, is back in business.

The band will close the Masters Games in Alice and will perform the whole *Bat Out of Hell* album in Melbourne on October 31.

"It's marvelous music," says Adam. "But, no, I'm not going to dress up in a fat suit and pretend to be Meat Loaf."

The reunion had been an emotional one, more pointedly in his reconciliation with guitarist and co-songwriter Zoran Romich.

They were estranged for over a decade after the breakup of Chocolate Starfish.

But Zoran joined the reformed band in 2010 and was ready to go on tour when he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

"He rang me daily," says Adam. "One day, he said, 'I'm ready to go now'. I said, 'No, we've got too many songs to write together.

"And he said, 'We'll have to write them in the next life. But don't worry – I'm not afraid to die.'"

Zoran died three days later.

As per Zoran's wish, the band carried on, with new guitarists filling the musical void. His indelible mark on the band remains, living on in the many songs he wrote and cemented in the hearts and minds of fans that continue to turn up and sing along.

Adam continues to write, collaborating with other musicians and finding inspiration as he inspires others.

"Much of what we do in life is around choices. Like our song *Mountain* suggests, you can either be a mountain that stays solid and unmovable, and eventually be worn down by the passing of time, or you can be a river and follow the stream no matter where it leads. Like the song says, 'I always knew, what I had to do.'" **TQ**