



Libraries are fun!

Nicole Skeltys, musician

My earliest feelings of wonderment, beauty and mystery come from the books I used to read in my local municipal libraries when I was a little kid, growing up in Brisbane in the 1970s.

The local libraries were my imaginative gateway to the outside world. Dusty book stacks, old library catalogue cards, the smell of wooden shelving and Xerox machines, all these sense impressions were numinous with the teaming possibilities of life and ideas. The library made me feel how big the universe was, and how much knowledge there was, and how so many many people wanted to reach out and share with one another what they had discovered about life by writing so many books.

I remember hanging out in the reading pits; the space was warm and colourful, safe and exciting at the same time. I remember in particular my first love, Orlando the Marmalade Cat. Orlando was a very handsome ginger tom, who went on adventures to far off lands. I was enthralled by Orlando, and I think he really helped form my sense that life should be an adventure, that the mind should never be held back from wandering and exploring.

Libraries helped expand my horizons. As a working class kid growing up in the outer suburbs of Brisbane, libraries were an oasis of cultural capital. They provided the only evidence around that there was more to life than hanging out at the mall at the Chermiside shopping centre or getting it off down the creek behind the local pub with boys who feared condoms.

Later in life, when I was an intense and geeky adolescent, I contrived ways to be sent to the library rather than have to play sport. All sport seemed to me was choreographed violence, chicks whacking each other on the ankles with hockey sticks, or shoving elbows in faces to get balls into nets. The library then became for me a refuge of intelligence and calm.

As far as artistic sensibility goes, libraries have permeated my sensibility, both consciously and unconsciously. Last year, a friend

of mine in Sydney reported that some visitors to his place had seen me on TV and remarked with mixture of puzzlement and admiration that I looked like 'someone who had never left a library'. The phrase 'Libraries are fun' had already popped into my head for my next album, and I took this observation to be a synchronistic affirmation that I was destined to identify my music with the archetype of shaggy haired girls with no sense of social propriety who had access to a lot of knowledge.

For all these reasons and more, I decided to call my latest album *Libraries are fun*. I'd actually advise kids to hang out in local libraries than go to most of the expensive, commercialised clubs and raves today which have lost sight of any genuine commitment to a counter-culture and are really just money making ventures. Libraries are free and progressive cultural experiences, open to all tribes.

While web-based catalogues and internet access points are extremely useful and greatly valued by young people, particularly those on low incomes with no access to computers at home, and backpackers, as a musician, I don't deal with utility at all, but emotional states and psychic realities. In this realm, I think for young people libraries situate themselves as places where you can be yourself, you don't have to dress in a particular way, you don't have to behave in a particular way, you can just shuffle up as your ordinary daggy self and go on extraordinary emotional and psychic adventures though what you read. In this way, I imagine my album as the kind of book I might have found in the 'esoteric' section when I was a kid, that no-one had borrowed for years and years, but I would have 'dug it', even though none of my mates would have.

Nicole's story is one of the first submitted to the Libraries change lives pages on ALIANet [http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy/stories/]. Nicole will launch her new album Libraries are fun at the Fitzroy Library on 7 March. The film clip for 'Any ladies', a single from the album, was shot in Kurilpa Library in Brisbane. Copies of the album are available from some major record stores or check your local independent music shop.