

## FEATURES

# The story behind the Golden Plains Boot

by Sarah Smith

8 March 2011

 SHARE TWEET

+



Almost three years ago today on a typically golden afternoon in the Supernatural Amphitheatre, I was busy negotiating my footing on a styrofoam esky when I was struck in the back of the head by a mud-caked desert boot.

The blow knocked me forwards into a burly looking fella who was awkwardly shuffling around on one leg while trying to unlace a soggy, black Chuck Taylor. As I lurched about trying to steady myself **Sam Beams** (aka **Iron and Wine**) was on stage with a seven-piece band fleshing out his beautiful folk country tunes. He had just just been awarded the **Golden Plains Boot**.

According to **Aunty Meredith** - the elderly but never cantankerous matriarch of both Golden Plains and Meredith Music Festivals - The Boot is "...unscripted, and unanticipated. It happens when the whole of The Amphitheatre unites in appreciation of something that has wildly exceeded expectation. Someone or something that rises above and thrills. You can't plan The Boot. It can strike at any time of day or night. It's an example of the people that go to Golden Plains inventing something, and it catching on, and becoming a tradition."

And a tradition is something it certainly has become. Much like the raising of flags at Glastonbury the raising of The Boot has nestled itself inside the minds and souls of all Golden Plains punters

The only recorded time The Boot has been awarded twice at the one festival was last year, when punters held their footwear aloft for **Wooden Shjips'** psychedelic cover of Neil Young's Vampire Blues and later that day as **Nashville Pussy** stomped out a hicked-up version of Nutbush City Limits. [Editor's Note: In 2011 the boot would go on to be awarded a whopping five times.]

Throughout your typical Golden Plains weekend there will be several attempts to award The Boot to different bands, but if the greater crowd does not agree shoes are quickly (and shamefully) lowered. Only last year I was part of a breakaway group who tried in vain to award the boot to **Calexico** during their late evening set. We were, however, left shamed and soggy footed like a herd of drunken highland cattle when the rest of the audience deemed the moment unworthy.

For many years Golden Plains faithful have debated the origins of The Boot, and this year I was determined to find out where it all started. After some intense research (read: email to Aunty Meredith) I uncovered the story behind the first Boot Moment. And, as it turns out, there is even photographic evidence.

Somewhat fittingly the very first footwear lofter was **Cherry Bar** owner and regular rock 'n roll cowboy **James Young**, who along with music journalist and current CEO of Music Victoria **Patrick Donovan**, was blissing out to the mystical sounds of **Comets On Fire** at the inaugural Golden Plains in 2007, when a spirit from above pushed them to raise their boots.

**Tell us what was going through your mind when you first held your Boot aloft at the inaugurate Golden Plains?**

**James Young:** It was the first Golden Plains back in 2007. It was the afternoon of the second day and we were all pretty fried by then, but there was no way I was going to miss the psychedelic sounds of Ethan Miller and Comets on Fire out of Santa Cruz California for the first time. I made my way down to the very front of stage and got lost in the swirling guitars. I looked down to the ground and was transfixed by the dirty bare feet around me. Then I started staring at my white patent leather Rocco's boots and became obsessed with their beauty. A beauty I had to share. Share with the band, share with Golden Plains. So, I took off my boot and held it in the air. High and proud. Later I took off my other boot and remember enacting a Punch and Judy boot theatre performance. I was completely absorbed in the music and the moment. When my buddy Drew Head tapped me on the shoulder and encouraged me to turn around I was amazed

to see a thousand other people holding up their shoes in a united gesture of crazy love.

**Do you recall the song that inspired you to de-shoe?**

**James Young:** Would it impress you if I said Pussy Foot The Duke from the 2004 Sub Pop Comets On Fire LP Blue Cathedral? Yes? Of course that was it. The reality is, that it was an involuntary response to the incredible total music experience created by the band and the environment....

**What was it about Comets On Fire?**

**James Young:** I thought they were the best band that year. They understood the place, the people and the feeling. I'm pleased that the "raised-boot" has become synonymous with the people's vote for the best band at the Festival, because inadvertently that's exactly what my boot was at Golden Plains One for Comets On Fire.

**Patrick Donovan:** I had caught the cosmic maelstrom that is a Comets On Fire concert a couple of times and knew we were in for a wild ride. We prepared ourselves with a few celestial tracks on the drive down in James' recently acquired flame winged caddie, and sparks shot off the tail as the black beast bounced off the bitumen. The stage was set come sundown as we gathered in the dusty bowel of the Amphitheatre. Comets came on like sonic overload -all flailing limbs and mis-matched rhythms. It was like the members were playing different songs. It took a few tracks to take hold. But take hold it did and we soon found ourselves lifted into the sky on a technicoloured UFO in the shape of a sandman. It was cool up there, and as we rocked out we were served tequilla sunrises by long haired hippies and legendary bootmaker Rocco fitted us with brand new pairs of spanking Cuban heeled boots.

Then the UFO suddenly dropped us off to earth and I looked to my right to see that James was so enamoured with his new boot that he had raised it above his head to share it's glory with the earthlings. By the end of the show we turned around to discover that hundreds in the crowd had followed his lead, chanting "Rocco, take me to your leader".

Political dissidents have since taken up the trend, raising their shoes in protest and even throwing them at the occasional despot.

**Why do you think the tradition of the boot has stuck?**

**James Young:** Because it was unforced, accidental and somehow perfectly Golden Plains, it kind of belonged. It's one of many crazy little things that remind you, you're at a special Festival that is as much about the punters as it is about the bands.

**Did you think at the time this would become as special to the people of Golden Plains as The Gift is to the people of Meredith Music Festival?**

**James Young:** Think? At the time, I couldn't formulate a sentence. The boot was talking for me. I wasn't thinking. I was just responding to an experience. Giving back.

**What defines the ultimate Boot moment?**

**James Young:** For me a 'boot moment' is an unexpected moment of unbridled exuberance. When the performer, the place and the person feel a mystical bond so rare, so wonderful, so ethereal that the unrehearsed response is something so ridiculous, But so right. At that moment, at Golden Plains, a boot is raised.

**Patrick Donovan:** Each year the boot is raised at golden plains when the music reaches a level so pure and elementary that simply dancing is not an adequate way of expressing ones pleasure. One must raise the boot!

**Golden Plains 'Boot moments':**

2007: Comets On Fire

2008: Iron and Wine

2009: Old Crow Medicine Show

2010: Nashville Pussy and Wooden Shjips

2011: Justin Townes Earle, Besnard Lakes, Pulled Apart by Horses, Imelda May and Belle and Sebastian

2012:???

---