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Meredith '09: "I Think I'm Going To Die"

A first-timer's account of the weekend's 19th annual Meredith Music Festival in rural Victoria by **A.H. CAYLEY**. Photos by **KRISTY MILLIKEN**.

Day One: Friday, December 11

The fun begins when we pick up the hire car in Melbourne. The forms are filled out and the keys are handed over.

"And that's your car over there."

It's the most hilariously uncool vehicle in the whole world: a bright green Ford

Falcon XR6; shiny silver mags, rear spoiler, only 1500 kilometres on it. Automatic everything. The hire people call it Kermit. It's the kind of car from which you would expect noxious doof to emanate at traffic lights, before speeding off in a fog of burnt rubber to spin doughnuts at a McDonald's carpark. It seems incomplete without a mini disco ball hanging from the rear view mirror, or a young man with a stud in his ear in the passenger seat, yelling vulgarities at passing women. It's the kind of car for which the Meredith "no dickheads" policy was written. They'll never let us through the gates in it. I can already see the coolsie sneers.

Alcohol is bought for the weekend. Friends buy outrageous amounts of canned beer, and I buy the cheapest vodka in the shop, before transferring it to a plastic container. It smells like acetone. Nasty. This is going to be an awesome weekend.

Meredith Music Festival is one of the most anticipated events on the discerning music fan's calendar. Now in its 19th year, it is heaped with tales of incredible performances, outrageous parties and a deeply festive atmosphere. Each year, thousands descend upon the Nolan family farm in Victoria's Meredith for three days of joy and excess, all sharing in the mythology and the history the event has earned. Its reputation as one of the best festivals in the country could not be bought, and I can't wait to finally see it for myself.

It's a long drive in the dickmobile, as the city moves quickly past us before eventually dissolving into the beauty of the rural countryside. Showers are predicted, though at the moment it's dusty and warm. We survive the glares of disdain our car provokes from skinny-jeaned hipsters, and set up our tents in the "Ringwood" section of the campsite, before heading down to the "Supernatural Ampitheatre" to catch **Regular John** play to the early crowd.

It's gorgeous here. Sprawling pine trees and gums shade an already lively crowd, lounging on sofas, lawn chairs, eskies, or dancing in front of the stage. The atmosphere here is absolutely tangible – people smile at each other, walking around in quirky outfits, facepaint and gumboots. They dance with absolute abandon, by now to **Oh Mercy**, and don't care who's looking. Many punters are already drunk (the gates opened at 8am), and the smell of weed occasionally wafts past. Even with such high levels of drinking and drug-taking, no violence or aggression can be seen, and this remains the case for the entire weekend.

Back at the campsite, bags are unpacked and drinks are prepared for the next few sets. I can't find my toothbrush. In an empty Lipton Ice Tea bottle, I mix my drink. Nasty vodka. Pineapple juice. Cranberry juice. A dash of soda water. It looks pretty awful through the green plastic of the bottle. I sip it on the way to **Witch Hats**, who take the emptied place of Crocodiles who have had to cancel their Australia tour due to a family bereavement. They play a strong set to a crowd expecting someone else (the timetable still says Crocodiles) but if anyone is disappointed, they don't let it show. A man standing by me asks if I'm "on my bean". I don't know what that means. His friend asks if I'd like to join them in the mud. I decline.



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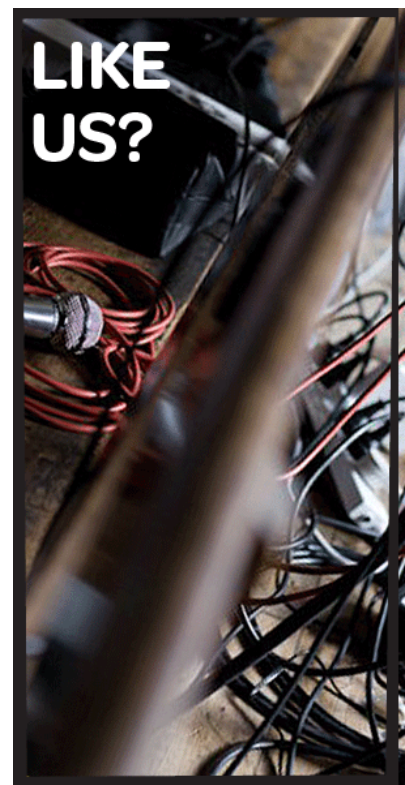
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"You know why? 'Cause you're on your fucking bean." I don't know what he's on, but I wouldn't mind some of it.

The sun having set, **Sia** takes to the stage. Disappointed by her set at last week's [Homebake](#), I have my fingers crossed she won't irritate me as much this time. She does. It's probably my fault, but I just can't stay to watch any longer. A friend later tells me she explained at one point that while she's aware the crowd wants to party, she just has a few more downbeat numbers to play. Way to read a crowd that paid to see you.

Standing by myself before [Tumbleweed](#), I innocuously ask a young woman for a cigarette. Within seconds I'm welcomed into her entire group, given far more cigarettes than asked, and receive cans straight from the esky, without having even been asked my name. I hear 10-minute condensed versions of life stories, and how all of these individual stories overlap. They say they love me "soooo much!"

Tumbleweed play a set even better than the one that had me walking on air after last week's Homebake, and the crowd here is even more appreciative. Grass is passed around, people crowd surf and dance real hard. This set will be talked about for the rest of the night, and remains the best of the day. Should have been Friday night headliners. Fuck YACHT.

2am. Trips back to the camp to refill my bottle and frequent, lengthy visits to the Pink Flamingo bar have me by now in the same state of mobility and mental strength as the average punter. That is to say, I'm fucked. Dinnertime. The salami panzarotti looks too good to resist. Even though dairy has been making me ill lately, I can't help but order it. Though tasty, it quickly takes effect.

Hunched over with stomach cramps, close to vomiting, incredibly drunk and shaking violently in the inhospitable cold, I head back to the campsite. My boyfriend makes up a bed while I sit against the corner of the tent, wobbling and shivering, eyelids low. I mumble and sigh my gratitude, complain about how I'm feeling and quickly descend into a terrifying nightmare. He returns in an hour to find me half awake, still dreaming and deep in the pits of paranoia.

"I'm dying," I tell him.

"I'm freezing. I need socks. Where can I buy socks tomorrow?"

He tells me there's nowhere onsite to buy socks.

"But I need socks. I'm so cold, darling. I think I'm going to die," I whimper.

"We all are."

He does his best to calm me down, but eventually gives up. I roll over to fight my struggle alone.



Day Two: Saturday, December 12

I wake comfortably in the morning in my warm tent, facing a big grin that says one mocking line, in a wussy little voice: "I'm dying." Fuck you. Time for coffee.

I can hear the **Ballarat Municipal Brass Band** ending their set to the sound of applause as I drag myself out of the tent. It's hot in there, and cold out here. Not dressed sensibly enough. Go back, get



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changed. See [Kid Sam](#).

Perhaps it's the time slot and the stiffness in everyone's joints, but it just doesn't hit the spot. Lead singer Kieran Ryan certainly has a captivating, dreamy voice that shines through the performance, but this morning the duo ultimately seems like a languid drone. I do believe they could very well be big, and there's definitely a great deal of talent here, but this morning, even radio favourite 'Down to the Cemetery' doesn't wake up the crowd. It's nice to lounge sleepily to, however, while downing a bowl of muesli (lots of yoghurt, hold the mango), but we eventually give up trying to be interested and head to the Pink Flamingo for some pre-midday "Bloody Merediths".

There are so many stories behind this festival, and so many traditions, all of which seem to have formed organically. There's "The Boot", a Golden Plains tradition that has seen a crossover to Meredith, whereby the crowd hold their footwear aloft for whomever they deem is the best set of the weekend. It only happens once, and is usually near-unanimous. There's the "Ranga Meeting", a meeting for redheads near a red-painted tree at a particular time. Though not official, the news spreads naturally and everyone soon knows what time to meet. Non-redheads are not welcome. There's the "Meredith Gift", a nude foot race that began 17 years ago as a means of filling in time before a delayed band. It now features in the programme, is emceed from the stage by TV personality Angus Sampson and marshalled by burlesque duo The Town Bikes. There's also the leopard print, wedding chapel style "Arch of Love" sitting at the top of the amphitheatre, just near the new entrance to the Pink Flamingo bar. It is said that any couple that walks through it together must kiss, and will remain together after the festival, and though it returns yearly, it has nothing to do with organisers, just some unknown punters who bring it every time.

Then of course, there's **Combo La Revelacion**, another festival mainstay. They have played Meredith 14 years in a row now, and usually manage to form a giant conga line in the amphitheatre. Though it doesn't seem to happen this year – I can't see it, at least – they certainly have the entire crowd moving; thousands of muddy, drunk white people doing their best latin dance imitations.

Walking back to the campsite to refill my bottle before **Paul Kelly**, I have to pass the same group of dickheads who have been sitting around their cars all morning – parked on either side of the road, so you have no option but to walk between them. They order people to drink from their beer bong (which they have been using since early this morning) and shout lewd comments at young women. Later in the evening, one will poke his head from the back of his car and ask a friend and I what our "tucking in" techniques are like. How hilarious that the kids have come so far to party so hard, but the end of the day, they still need a mother figure to tuck them in.

I will always have a soft spot for Paul Kelly. I was raised on his music, and have continually marvelled at his ability to so wonderfully describe the everyday and banal while imbuing it with a sweeping, poignant lyrical beauty. Today, he plays a powerful set of favourites (and earns The Boot of Approval from the crowd). Vika Bull helps out on backing vocals, and later handles the lead for 'Sweet Guy' and 'Everything's Turning to White', which I belt out in tune with the man standing next to me. We don't look at each other, and don't say a word. We don't have to. The song ends, he pats me on the shoulder, and soon leaves.

I stay exactly where I am. It could just be the booze or the lack of sleep, but at the death of the final note of his last song, 'How To Make Gravy', I bolt as quickly as I can away from my friends, sunglasses on, to watch the sun set over the ravine and let the tears stream down my face.

Just before midnight, having pulled myself together and got back in the spirit of things, I head up to the Pink Flamingo to wait for **Eddy Current Suppression Ring**. I'm blown away by how beautiful the amphitheatre looks from here: pink rice paper lamp shades, coloured lanterns and a disco ball that moves slowly in one of the trees. I can't even comprehend that the majestic pines that tower above everyone were planted as mere saplings 70 years ago. I almost fall over backwards trying to see the top of one, but a kind punter catches me, then offers me a dumpling.

Eddy Current Suppression Ring more than make up for their disappointing Homebake set last week. They have the crowd – already fluffed after Jarvis Cocker – going wild. Lead singer Brendan Suppression at one point mentions he'd like to walk to the sound desk, and asks if the crowd could make an aisle for him. With a parting of his hands, the crowd splits in two, and Moses walks along the amphitheatre and back again to the stage. No one rushes forwards. He isn't swamped by fans. It takes a true connection to inspire a crowd to participate like this, and it really is an amazing moment. It'd never happen at the Big Day Out.

To the Pink Flamingo for drinks and conversation, including convincing a wasted young man in a



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wizard's hat who joined our table that we all worked on the festival and that I am "Aunty Meredith".

Yacht Club DeeJays provide a soundtrack of '90s novelty tracks. Hours pass. It's time to go to bed. I don't think I'm going to die tonight. Still can't find my toothbrush.



Day Three: Sunday, December 13

I should get up right now for the **Master Song Tai Chi**. How cool will that be? The whole crowd doing the same tai chi moves at the same time, the only difference being outfits and levels of inebriety. It'd be a good wake up. I'll feel great for the rest of the day. Yep, definitely going. I'll just rest my eyes for a few minutes and then I'll go.

I wake up again more than an hour later, and get myself ready while **Kes Band** play to the early crowd. Still can't find my toothbrush. Swat numerous earwigs off my gumboots, which I painted red using the leftover paint from my dining chairs; check there's nothing living inside; put on the boots; and head down to the amphitheatre. With a bacon-and-egg sandwich bought from the "Mobile Brekkie Ute", I get up close for **Wagons**. What a brilliant wake up. They play to a large and keen crowd, who cheer loudly for 'Goodtown' and dance along to a country cover of the Christmas hymn 'We Three Kings of Orient Are', before frontman Henry Wagons switches to drums for a hip-hop tune led by Si the Philanthropist and Mark "Tuckerbag" Dawson.

Things soon calm down again with **The Middle East**. I thoroughly enjoyed them at Homebake, but was unmoved today. Perhaps it's just that they followed Wagons, who definitely should have been later on the bill. They were lacking in stage presence and seemed uncomfortable between songs. Time will change this, no doubt.

With people already leaving for the drive home, **The Fauves** take to the stage before the declining crowd. They're alright, and play a set of old favourites with a strong presence and witty banter, but I still can't help but feel Wagons has blown everyone out of the water. I decide upon a massage at the Massage Tent – just another brilliant addition to the atmosphere – and can't help but grin at the absurdity of having a stranger carefully tending to my fucked up shoulders while a few metres away, a DJ plays Sam Sham and the Pharoahs to a muddy and weary crowd.

We pack up our tents and get the gear in the car. I find my toothbrush. Garbage is collected, earwigs are stomped on or run away from shrieking, and we make our way back down for the Meredith Gift. Standing behind the crowd, I see very little jiggling, though do catch a glimpse of a man completely shaven with his genitals painted pink. There's a male race, then a female race, then an impromptu race of men with their cocks stuffed between their legs: "The He-male Race". It's hilarious, and a great way to wind down the festival, as MC Angus Sampson reads from *Where Did I Come From?* onstage.

Finally, **The Dacios** take to the stage for the final set of the festival. Jesus Christ, they're good. They have the entire (though small) crowd moving in appreciation, and I can't help but wish more were here to see this. I look forward to seeing them further up the bill next year. Truly fantastic – hard, dirty, sexy

Meredith '09: "I Think I'm Going To Die"



A first-timer's account of the weekend's 19th annual Meredith Music Fe...

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garage rock. The rumour circulates that at the BeatBox Kitchen in the food area, the freezer has broken and Eddy Current Cool Ice Cream Sandwiches are selling for \$2. I run to buy one, and lay down before the stage for the rest of The Dacios' set. The mind wants to dance, but the body just can't anymore. There are plenty of others to do that for me.

The Dacios end, and as a BMX rider makes his way down the hill and off a ramp (crashing spectacularly) flanked by a laughing crowd, a man onstage has the last word: "Thank you for coming, but please now get the fuck out of here. If you're still here in an hour, the cops will take you home." An acid casualty to my left asks a friend "Do we really have to go? I want to stay." I couldn't agree more.

+

- Published on Tuesday, December 15 2009 by **A.H. Cayley**.

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Your Comments



Ash-showoff said about 2 years ago:

I bolt as quickly as I can away from my friends, sunglasses on, to watch the sun set over the ravine and let the tears stream down my face.

So cute.

My girlfriend did the same. Good times.



hyperfuzz said about 2 years ago:

this is no reflection on you, anne, but this site is stupid. i know it's an australian music site, but it seems silly to leave out such a huge chunk of your experience at an australian festival because it involved international bands. can you add in the other bits and send it to me, cos i'd like to read it.



josejones said about 2 years ago:

once we start mentioning international bands, it's a really slippery slope. next thing you know we'll be advertising maccas and putting patrick wolf records "on rotation".



Modi said about 2 years ago:

If one person reviewed every band on the bill, the article would have gone up some time next year I reckon.



Kristy said about 2 years ago:

Great story Anne, i laughed audibly throughout.



hyperfuzz said about 2 years ago:

once we start mentioning international bands, it's a really slippery slope. next thing you know we'll be advertising maccas and putting patrick wolf records "on rotation".

oh, c'mon. i know that's partially in jest, but you did a story on [spiral stairs MOVING TO MELBOURNE](#), ffs. i understand, but there's a bit of a gap between paul kelly and eddy current, timewise and it just feels a bit weeeird. i think "putting patrick wolf on rotation" could be an apt euphemism for not covering at least some of it due to an occasionally lax non-internationals policy.



Block said about 2 years ago:

He wants your job, jones!



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

no one has much luck getting cool cars around meredith do they?

btw..everytime I read something on this meredith it talks about 'acid or pills or acid casualty's. it's getting a bit boring..and I don't really believe it anyway.



Modi said about 2 years ago:

Yeah, but you're a dickhead.



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

nah bud, you are. nah I don't believe it. And why should I? and even if I did, it still stinks of lame.



JunkiePhil said about 2 years ago:

It's true Kelly.

It got to the point were you were like

"Stop offering me that shit, I've had a gut full already"



eastside said about 2 years ago:

so Walsh's panzarotti almost killed you? or were you just having a sook?



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

fair nuff. amaizng. so some OWSley character runnign around starting up a new acid test?

bizzare. it still sounds and looks a bit lame. acid out of context seems dumb and what context was there for acid? to jump around like a dickhead.

boring. (no offence to chats I know of course)



Modi said about 2 years ago:

Why shouldn't you?

Why believe any of it? Why read it at all? Why is the sky blue? Why am I bothering? Jerk.



Modi said about 2 years ago:

But you're right, what sort of context is a music festival in the bush for dropping acid?

Totally unprecedented and lame.



JunkiePhil said about 2 years ago:

Dude, people have been taking acid for as long as I've been alive.

Just cause you're old and haven't been out for a while, doesn't mean everything you used to do has stopped.

You just sound like a jellous old git to be honest.



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

cos I'm getting to the point modi. I don't believe it had any point. YOu jerk. jumping around in 80s ray bans or wearing a fucking animal costume BORIng

the only good bit is reading Junkie taking the piss out of them all from the stage with a bubble gun. THAT is funny. nice job JP.

everything else

lame



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

hey maybe I am old. but eww acid with idiots? sounds like freakathon to me



JunkiePhil said about 2 years ago:

God, you're so far off the mark.



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

well then fine. I don't get ya vibe then JP. I just don't get it. if it's all this nod nod wink woink shit you lame too. really I thought you guys were serious and about something.

bye

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josejones said about 2 years ago:

mostly photos of hipsters in their 'stupid get ups and sunnys'. I assure you this is by no means a representation of what the festival was like on the whole.

what festival were you at then?



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

yeah I sponse...at least I got part of the vibe.



theneworphan said about 2 years ago:

Walsh's panzerotti's are fantastic, so are his pastas.



lalorl said about 2 years ago:

i wouldnt drop an eccy, if ya fuckin paid me man. coz ive got the guts for LCD and the only jungle i know is Nam.



charly said about 2 years ago:

analysing the meredith culture from outside, it just looks like an extension of the facebook social networking culture..great socially, but musically berefit of anything at all really.

this is the most ridiculous thing i've ever heard. the music is the best part and the four merediths i've been to have introduced me and my friends to so many bands that i now love. there's nothing like dancing on the hill with your best mates to the great music that aunty meredith constantly provides.



kellyclarksonisgold said about 2 years ago:

aunty is the ABC?



kuroneko said about 2 years ago:

Matt - stop ruining threads.

Nice wrap up, AHC.



redlips said about 2 years ago:

so the group consensus is that the Walsh's panzerottis are all good?

I don't approve of the deep frying as opposed to the pressing of previous years. I got a rude shock on Saturday morning... I was expecting bacon and eggs and awesome and all I got was deep fried pastry overload. I didn't approve. Now to say that others weren't more impressed.



CaptainFez said about 2 years ago:

coz ive got the guts for LCD

Swallowing one of those 42-inchers must be hard going. I hope the buzz is worth it.



autumnleaves said about 2 years ago:

Sigh.. what really sucks is that in the last couple of years, the kind of people who used to give me shit for listening to a lot of the sort of music they book for meredith have started going. i'm not a snob, i like to get fucked up as much as the next person, and i like it when people go out of their comfort zones, but i always felt like meredith was the place where at least if the music doesn't come first, it's at least a solid tie between watching amazing bands and being wasted. what bothers me is that when people go who don't care about the music, is when the dickhead factor starts increasing.

i don't even mind the hipsters, at least they know their music and don't cause trouble.



golden-shower said about 2 years ago:

thats the problem with meredith...

i come for the music...

end up getting so smashed/high i don't even remember the bands playing or even whoes play.... or by the end; most of the festival in general.

but always come away feeling i just had the best time ever



Wolfgang said about 2 years ago:

"Yacht Club DeeJays provide a soundtrack of '90s novelty tracks"

I would rather suck the puss out of an abscess than be subjected to these talentless twats ever again.

Wise up melbourne.
They're a joke.

Over and out.



tigers said about 2 years ago:

great article, retarded comments afterwards.
nice one.



filterfeed said about 2 years ago:

poor internet.



HennessyKate said about 2 years ago:

really great festival story, well-told - loved it!



psymon said about 2 years ago:

haha - no room for cutsie bullshit at meredith - crying into the sunset? some supposed mental connection with the bloke next to you? jeezus! go back to falls



FrankieTeardrop said about 2 years ago:

Says someone with the username 'psymon'. Ha!



Ben said about 2 years ago:

[photos](#)



theparisend said about 2 years ago:

kuroneko said 2 days ago:

Matt - stop ruining threads.

and no more posts...



HEB said about 1 year ago:

Look - [AHC won best gig review](#)
Congrats!

NB: HEB has nowt to do with the Melbas

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