



# Bop away on the cruise that rocks

Travel editor **Brian Crisp** hits the high seas – not to mention the high C's

I HAVE a secret – I have two lives. Two jobs, really.

My main job, the only one that pays any money, is travel editor of this august publication – a job I love and treasure, and one my workmates envy.

My other job, the secret one, is that of a cruise ship entertainer. That's me second from the left, one of four 50-year-old men dressed in \$10 Hawaiian shirts purchased from Lowes, on board the MV *Athena* cruise ship off the coast of Western Australia last February.

Our band, The Deadliners (when it was formed we all worked in newspapers, so it made sense), was asked to play on a rock 'n' roll cruise from Fremantle to Albany, Esperance

and back.

We have been playing together for about three years at pubs and parties, having formed when a workmate needed a band for his 55th birthday.

From there we got a manager and fame and fortune has beckoned. Perhaps "beckoned" is too strong a word. And "fame and fortune" more a figment of my imagination.

By nature, we are more a classic Aussie rock band than the Elvis rock 'n' roll type, but after countless hours in rehearsal, our *Be-Bop-A-Lula* was ready for the high seas and not bad at all. And I don't mean maybe, baby.

The last time I had sung on a cruise ship was in 1979. I was trying to impress a girl named Louise from

Sydney. We were on a schoolies week cruise aboard the "funship" *Fairstar*. My relationship with Louise didn't last, but I am the best of mates with her brother, so all was not lost.

Anyway, armed with 90 songs, the plan for the *Athena* cruise was that we would play on the back deck – I think in nautical terms that's the stern – for about an hour each evening while the guests shook, rattled and rolled off their dinners.

The *Athena* is a throwback to the classic days of cruising. It has room for 550 passengers and while it may not have the bells and whistles of some of the newer ships, it offers fantastic value for money and a rare standard of intimacy.



Operated by Classic International Cruises, the *Athena* arrives in Perth for this season on December 18. It has 15 itineraries out of Fremantle and Adelaide this summer.

It is 160m long with eight passenger decks. Built in 1948 as a sturdy Swedish North Atlantic liner, it has sailed under five names – and was last refurbished in 2005 to emerge as Classic International Cruises' flagship.

We spent most of our time around the back deck. When we weren't playing we were relaxing in the sun, drink in hand.

The first five minutes of any gig is usually enough time for the band to know how things are going to go. Let me tell you it is very lonely on stage if things don't go well. But if everything goes fine, and the audience likes you, then that's great. Time flies and it is fun, fun, fun.

If it doesn't go well though, and trust me sometimes it doesn't, then

you only have a few hours of agony before you can pack up and go home. We once played a gig where the most popular request from a scantily clad thirty-something busty blonde was: "Please stop so we can plug in our iPods". Damn you Apple.

To add insult to injury, when we did stop, they played Kenny Rogers. We actually could have played that.

But when you are on a cruise ship in the middle of the Indian Ocean for five nights, there's no escape – whether the punters like you or not.

So imagine our delight then when magic fingers Mark Voisey strummed the opening D chord of The Stray Cats' *Rock This Town* and half the crowd jumped up and started to dance. We later found out that they all belonged to a rock 'n' roll club from Geraldton.

We played, they danced. And all had a great time. As I said earlier, we were supposed to play for an hour a

night. On the first night, we played for 90 minutes. On the second night, we played for three hours. By the third night, we were starting at 10pm and saying goodnight about 2.30am.

We had a ball. So much so that we are doing it again for two cruises in January.

We've lost one of the band members. Bass player Noel Mengel actually has found fame and fortune – not singing – but in the literary world. He is busy writing his second novel, the follow-up to *RPM*, and has been replaced by Bernie Bradford.

I guess the only disappointment for me was that no one threw their undies at the band. We slaved away, sweated and strained our voices each night for the Geraldton dancers and not one person felt inspired enough to toss a pair of knickers my way.

Perhaps this time we can remedy that situation.

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### The Deadliners

The Deadliners are on board the *Athena* (pictured) for a five-night cruise leaving Fremantle on January 2 next year (cabins are available from \$1095 a person, twin share) and a two-night cruise leaving Fremantle on January 7 next year (cabins from \$450 a person). Children under 18 cruise for free on the January 2 cruise, paying taxes of \$125. And the solo supplement on that cruise is only 30 per cent extra in selected cabins. Conditions apply. For details and bookings, see a travel agent or [classicintcruises.com](http://classicintcruises.com)





THE DEADLINERS: Mark Voisey, Brian Crisp, Noel Mengel and Greg Bawden between sets on the MV *Athena*