**Peter Campbell – Full Bio**

June 2025

**Will the real Peter Campbell please stand up?**

Troubled childhood? Nope
Struggled with addiction? Nope
Cut my musical teeth in a garage rock band? Nope

I was born in Singleton in rural eastern Australia. I grew up an innocent in a loving family, attended a privileged private school and got a good education. Not much good for a raunchy music biography perhaps, but a valuable start for a life as a baby-boomer born right in the middle of the 20th century.

Music was serious pleasure for my family – music in the classical tradition, with strong Christian overtones, and it moved me; deeply. I played the violin and sang – choirs, school musicals, round the piano at home. All very wholesome.

I also had an uncle who was a renowned magician. His performances so captivated me that I jumped right in, taking to the stage at as a magician at 9. Soon after that it was TV as a violinist and then as a ventriloquist. Certainly exciting for a kid, but the taste of the stage and the power of communicating to an audience was intoxicating, even at that tender age.

I also know that the world outside mesmerized me – some of my most powerful childhood memories have a sense of awe in the face of nature; southerly busters, storms, the sea, the cold, the wind, the bush, the mountains and wild creatures. Though it often frightened a timid child, there was a sense of rightness being part of the natural world.

At 12 the folk boom was in full swing and it connected as classical music had never done. I commandeered my brother’s guitar and learned to play from the radio and vinyl recordings from Peter, Paul & Mary (PP&M), Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger and the rest.

Perhaps more importantly, these artists revealed a world from which my tender upbringing had shielded me; social injustice, racial conflict, violence between nations/individuals, environmental destruction, the beauty of the earth, and the pain and pleasures of love.

By 15 I was beginning to write and perform my own music at school. By 18 I was studying architecture at the University of Sydney – a cathartic time that set the general course of my life as it taught me new ways of looking at the world, art, music and people. My art tutors were Lloyd Rees, Guy Warren and Rodney Millgate and my design tutor was Graham (Auntie Jack) Bond – structural mechanics and surveying took a back seat to the aesthetic side of the course. I became deeply involved in the legendary student theatrical production *Architecture Review,* and was a serious player in the 1969 edition, *The Great Wall of Porridge*. All this led to the professional theatre when I was invited to join Graham and Rory O’Donoghue in the cast in the Philip Theatre production, *A Candy Striped Balloon*, and the ABC film, *A Man on a Green Bike*. It was all a crash course in real life and I documented what I discovered in song, challenging myself to become part of the social and environmental change that, even then, I could see must come.

I bought my first ‘real’ guitar with the cash from these productions (a Maton Southern Star 12 String) and began performing at concerts and the many folk clubs around Sydney.

I knew pretty early that I didn’t have the killer instinct to become a successful architect so in 1973, with a BSc (Arch), I decided to pack it in and concentrate on music.

My first album, *Of time and it's distance*, was recorded in Brisbane and released in 1975.

*'His lyrics are too compassionate to sound self-satisfied and the manner in which he musters images around an aphoristic catchphrase is too open-minded to sound smug. Rather, his songs deal with loneliness, freedom and love, and sensitive aspects of interpersonal relationships are dealt with in an appropriately susceptible manner'.*

*Christie Eliezer, Rolling Stone.*

This album introduced me to Noel Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul & Mary (PP&M) fame and in 1977 he invited me to open the shows for his solo Australian tour.

By then, with three small children in tow, and a more stable living to be found, I decided to utilise the architectural design skills I’d ignored by designing and building contemporary architectural art-glass. This business was an immediate success with many commissions undertaken in domestic, commercial and large ecclesiastical settings. I was hopeful that could keep this new enterprise growing, while keeping music alive and well in parallel.

It was in 1978 that Noel proposed he produce my second album at his Neworld studio in Blue Hill, Maine USA. The family of six (four children under six) toured the US and UK with me giving concerts, and then recording at Stookey’s *Hen House* studio in Maine.

The new album, *Across the Border* was released in May 1981.

*'Peter Campbell's songs are the bitter-sweet, even haunting, musings of a man who intuitively grasps something of the mysteries of faith and life, and of the confluence of the two, and who is able to capture those intuitions with permanent freshness in his lyrics. Peter has the thrilling knack of empathy that enables him to move inside people's states of mind so that he is not singing about them, but about himself as one of them - singing on behalf of them. It's a rare gift, and for that alone he deserves a wide and appreciative audience.'*

*Owen Salter, On Being*

PP&M's cover of my song *Wild Places* on their 1982 album *Such is Love* gave me hope that I might be a reasonably decent songwriter. In 1983 I supported them on their national Australian tour to launch the album.

In 1983 my songs *One Last Wild River* and *Hope is Rising* became anthems for those who successfully struggled to save the Franklin River in Tasmania's south-west from destruction by damming for hydro-electric power, and huge audiences that flocked to the peace rallies convened by People for Nuclear Disarmament.

In the mid-80s the first marriage reached its end. With four children to nurture, and a new relationship burgeoning, the instability of a musical career was all too clear, and the stresses of the breakup led to a repetitive injury that put an end to building leaded glass (though the design still continues in 2025). It was a disastrous time personally and professionally.

The first move towards recovery was the development of a specialist school’s show for pre- and primary school kids. Called *The Mugic Man*, it resurrected the fascinations of my youth, combining the rollicking good fun of the banjo with the classic mysteries and genuine entertainment value of the magician/ventriloquist.

The second move provided even more stable support; I took a deep breath, gathered every bit of design confidence I could muster and, in 1988 began a new venture focused on graphic design. This business went through three distinct corporate phases building expertise, an impressive body of work and a reputation for cutting-edge contemporary design. In 2014 it became Peter Campbell Design (PCD: petercampbell.com.au) specialising in high level branding, exhibition design, environmental signage, wayfinding, social documentary photography and publishing, constantly pushing the boundaries of creative thought.

The reality is that music took a back seat over these years, though I continued to write and perform as often as was possible.

In 1998 I got back to the stage with the release of a double album, *'Rear View Mirror’* – a serious effort to rekindle the audiences and begin the process of getting exposure for the new music. One disk presents a live concert recorded in 1983, the other highlights from the first two albums. Whilst obviously ‘old’ work, the music has its place, speaking a kind of ‘musical Esperanto’ that I believe still speaks of the truth.

In his liner notes for Rear View Mirror, Noel Stookey had this to say:

*Although often considered the 'poor relative' of all musical forms, folk music nonetheless ultimately embraces (and is embraced by) the most committed and perceptive of the world's poets and musicians. I can't help but feel that the attraction must be in large part due to the integrity of the medium and the fact that it lives and thrives in shared experiences often quite independent of popular media trends.*

*Peter Campbell learned a long time ago one of folk music’s basic tenents: ‘...if you sing me, you must LIVE me...’ . his heart and his concerns have taken him around the world. Whether contrasting insights of deep personal relationships against a backdrop of natural wonder, speaking directly to an environmental concern or expressing the simple joy of home and hearth-building, Peter's command of melody and lyric combine with hope and understanding to produce among us a listening community of mutual support and encouragement - no small task in these cynical times!*

*The fact that, aside from his talent as a singer-songwriter-guitarist, he is an accomplished visual artist, a design consultant and architectural glass artist only seems to underline the fact that those who speak to the best in us are those who see life from the broadest of experiences...*

*It's been a delight to have produced some of Peter's earliest material (contained on this retrospective) and I, like you, look forward to hearing his musical wit and wisdom for many years to come.*

*Noel Paul Stookey / May 11, 1998*

After 30 years embedded in Sydney’s notorious Newtown, my wife Jan and I moved to the little village of Moss Vale in 2015. The culture shock was as real as the relief of landing in Australia’s beautifully rural Southern Highlands and becoming part of the creative community it supports.

It hasn’t been without its pain. We all look back at 2020 with real horror with the drought, the bushfires, the floods… and then the globally disastrous pandemic, COVID-19, bringing its own traumas related to people sick and dying in staggering numbers, financial hardship, mental illness and the rise of domestic violence and abuse.

My musical response to this year in was a song. A difficult song about difficult things, but with an element of hope and redemption at the end. This song is called *Too Long*.

Serendipity kicked in and *Too Long* reached the ears of the convenor of the *United Nations International Summit on Domestic/Family Violence in the COVID-19 Era –* a three-day online conference out of New York in November 2020. Suffice to say that, after a slight rewrite to align the lyrics more directly with the focus of the Summit, it emerged as the anthem for the event with a new title, *Waited Too Long*. The event was opened with greetings from His Holiness the Pope, and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. 45 countries participated, it was translated into six languages, leading thinkers and practitioners presented, and the anthem was a moving hit, played 3-4 times a day.

This experience convinced me to return to the stage bringing with me a large cache of songs which had never been heard. In 2023 the inaugural Bundanoon Folk Festival became the platform from which I leapt back into the music that sustained me most of my life. The response was immediate and enthusiastic.

*Peter Campbell seems to have sprung fully formed from an alternate folk universe! Hard to believe I’m hearing him for the first time. Peter plays his 12-string guitar as classic backing for his smooth as honey voice and delivery, taking classic folk songs to a new place and then backs it all up with brilliant originals. I wish to see Peter grace many a future folk festival stage.*

*Rosie McDonald, Artistic Director, Bundanoon Folk Festival 2023*

I believe in the power of voices raised together – ‘communities in action’ that find harmony between the singer, the song and the audience. In 2024 we set about creating a suite of videos to capture the way in which the music has evolved. Shot mid-winter in the tiny Berrima Village Hall, with a willing audience drawn from across the generations, three new clips called the ‘Berrima Sessions’ distil universal human experiences in an ironic challenge to antiscience, the choice for peace and a celebration of community. The audience raises its voice in a rousing, thoughtful, hilarious and moving collective vote for human compassion, engagement and truth in a time of global trauma. Savanna Storm, a member of the audience, put it this way:

*Peter Campbell knows how to light up a room. From his knee slapping, rhythmic a cappella, to his heart felt words about pain and passion, politics and the environment, Peter’s songs spring from his heart – his mighty voice and magnetic energy are enriched by the mastery of his 6/12 guitars and banjo. His powerful messages about the state of the world, from his deeply personal take to the wider arena of disruption and uncertainty, still the audience. His songs speak to your soul – it’s been a long time since words and music brought tears to my eyes – Peter Campbell did that. You could have heard a pick drop.*

2025 sees the release of my fifth album *Burden of Hope p*roduced and engineered by Australisn music legend Brendan Gallagher. With the world in turmoil the task of remaining hopeful is urgent and seriously hard work. This collection speaks to the heart of our times without flinching. From the rollicking hilarity of the politically incisive *Same Science* (recorded live), to the wistful yearnings of *Half the World Away* and *I’m Not Saying*, the overtones of country in *Waiting on the Weather* and *Brindabella Blue*, the passionate *Coat of Many Colours* and the almost savage title track, *Burden of Hope*, these songs weave through the landscape of our shared humanity, keeping unerring focus on compassion, healing and love.

So, for over 60 years the trajectory of life has taken me into many areas of creative endeavor. With human rights, social justice, equal opportunity and environmental sustainability as personal imperatives, the broad experiences of a lifetime of artistic activity have translated into an ethical, responsible and varied creative practice across the artistic spectrum.

This music has explored the deep matters of the human heart in a challenging world, the profound effect of increasing social dislocation, and the impact of a warming planet on the finely balanced and globally intertwined natural environments that sustain all life.

Thanks for making it to the end. Go and get Burden of Hope and give it a listen – I hope you enjoy what you hear!

Peter Campbell

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