

Ben Connor – Full Bio



Soul-driven blues, folk, rock singer songwriter Ben Connor has been described as the musical love child of Leonard Cohen, Nick Cave and David Gray. With more than two decades of writing and performing behind him, Ben's warm, well-worn vocal cords ride soothing catchy melodies, sharing tales of love lost, love found, mythological journeys and harsh political realities.

Equally a slave to the beauty of words and melody as he is to the breadth of sounds his guitar can produce, Ben's many years of solitary song writing and soul searching has produced songs that are a homage to all three. And in them we hear Ben's distinct evolving style blended with the core influences of his early years - in his combination of words and melody there are hints of Tom Waits, Bob Dylan and Nick Cave, and in his guitar playing, ripples of Jimi Hendrix, Mark Knopfler and The Edge regularly rise and fall.

But time, a love of music that knows no bounds and a never-ending desire to explore, expand and improve has made Ben's music uniquely his own.

'I am always listening to music. And there is not a genre of music in which I haven't found something I like, something beautiful. There are a few artists, styles and genre's I always come back to though. Something that I think comes through in my songs is my love of music with a kind of sweet, deep, honey-like melancholy. And there are a few artists and bands that really capture this. Obviously, there's Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen and Nick Cave (who's masterful melancholic mass will always have a gravitational pull on me), but there's also, Thom York, Cat Power, Mark Lanegan, Portishead, J.J. Cale and Mazzy Star. Then there's artists like PJ Harvey, Gillian Welch, Beck, Lou Reed and David Gray who are great songwriters, with melancholy and more. And soul artists like Billy Withers, Otis Redding and Ray Charles who make life worth living. But I also like lots of feel-good stuff, and I like to think that comes through with a few of my songs. As for my more recent obsessions, Belgian artist Warhaus, the UK artists Michael Kiwanuka and Fink, and Australia's William Crighton I think are truly exceptional. But music serves different purposes and I often like to chill out to soundtracks and classical too. Ennio Morricone, for example, and atmospheric classical stuff like Erik Satie, Debussy and Beethoven. And jazz... I like some instrumental jazz numbers, particularly of the slower, more spacious kind - like most of the the tracks on Miles Davis's 'Kind Of Blue'. All this stuff I reckon has in some way influenced my style.'

Growing up in the inner-west of Sydney, Ben's love of music started with the discovery of Jimmi Hendrix at the age of 10. Lessons ensued, but it was only when a high school mate introduced him to blues improvisation and his, teacher, Jack Evans, that Ben's obsession with music really took hold.

'Those lessons in the back room of Jack's little house in Ashfield provided me with a palette for musical exploration that has given me a passion for music ever since. Starting me off with simple blues pentatonic scales, he'd loop a riff or chord progression, whack it on a tape and send me home with it to improvise. Hours would go by lost in the melodies and phrasing bubbling up from my unconscious. Then we moved on to improvising with all the modes of diatonic scale... and chord scales, and building complex chords... and learning and analysing great songs. I was smitten.'

Ben would play obsessively for hours a day and, with time, started to sing. Then, having struggled with dyslexia as a child and with a strong drive to overcome it, he developed a great love of literature. And this was coupled with the discovery of his second hero: the very literary Tom Waits.

'The bass player in my first band, for which I played guitar, gave me a mix tape of stuff he liked. There was Suicidal Tendencies, Mr. Bungle, the Chilli Peppers, that kind of thing, and there was Tom Waits' 'Heart Attack & Vine'. When I heard that track, I just had to hear more.'

Devouring every Tom Waits record he could get a hold of and reading voraciously, Ben started writing his own songs at 19 while studying a Bachelor of Arts degree (Music, English and more) at Sydney University.



But the music bug was too strong. Ben soon dropped out of Uni, formed a duo, 'Double Helix', with his cousin, multi-instrumentalist, Stuart Christie (drums, guitar, clarinet), and started writing intensively and performing regularly in the inner-west of Sydney while working at an inner-city cafe. The duo made an EP of 6 tracks at SBS studios then expanded into a four piece and recorded a live album at the Hotel Hollywood in Surry Hills.

At age 23, however, after two years of performing and working intensively on his music, Ben made one of those decisions you regret for the rest of your life: he concluded that if he hadn't made it yet, he'd never make it, and decided to pursue his plan B: his other dream... to be a writer. So, he signed up for a Communication Degree at the University Of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

Ben continued to write songs while finishing his degree, working, saving and travelling the world. He performed his music solo in Guatemala (where he recorded an EP), the US and Scotland, while working as a freelance arts/travel writer for Rough Guides, the Tiger Beer website and magazines in Scotland and Australia. Returning home, he continued to do the same (Ben's writing is available here: <https://benjaminconnor.com>).

Then he realised his mistake.

As the years had passed, it had become apparent that all the songwriters he loved had worked harder and longer than any doctor, lawyer or other respected profession to achieve mastery of their craft and to write the songs that he loved. He read about the theory of mastery in 10,000 hours and realised he hadn't come close. To really progress as a songwriter, he realised he would need to give it significantly more time. Conversely, he realised that to truly excel as an arts/travel writer, he would have to give up his music. Music was and always will be Ben's primary passion and he just wasn't willing to do that. So, in 2012, he made the radical decision to give up his writing and has been working as a Tenant Advocate and clocking up his music hours since.



For Ben, 2012 to 2014 was an intensive period of song writing and jamming with other musicians. Songs started to evolve from a feedback loop of recorded improvisations of voice and guitar, listening to those recordings, identifying moments of rhythmic, melodic and lyrical inspiration then launching from those ideas into further recorded improvisations and so on. The lyrics that sprung, and continue to spring, from these improvisations, he says, are often colourful, occasionally poignant and regularly non-sensical, but are rigorously reworked and experimented with till he's satisfied.

'When I'm writing songs, I'm also often writing stream of consciousness musings into a note book for chunks of time a day, just to get the juices flowing. I've found that doing so makes the most impactful imagery and word combinations more readily available.'

In 2014, Ben and his new band (yet to be named) started performing in the inner-west of Sydney. But later that year, Ben's daughter was born with significant health issues and he was out of action for next three years.

From 2017, however, Ben has been writing songs and performing regularly, both solo and with his duo, Ben Connor & The Buttermen, at festivals and venues in his new home town of Katoomba and beyond.

From 2020 till 2022, using a professional studio and his home studio and engaging a session drummer and bass player, Ben recorded, then professionally mixed and mastered his album, *Stone Fields*.

Dark, with splashes of light, layered with instrumental palates and propelled by his special brand of husky baritone vocals, *Stone Fields*'s finely crafted songs journey through love, fatherhood, contemplations on mortality, majestic and mythical landscapes and more. And in them all Ben's formidable guitar playing features, giving texture and tone and lilting and roller-coaster melodies as it croons, coos, screeches and screams to the accompaniment of a flawless rhythm section.

Stone Fields was released on 2nd Feb 2023 and was launched two days later with a sold-out show the Baroque Room, Katoomba, on 4th Feb 2023.

Stone Fields received positive reviews from popular online music and culture magazine, *Happy Mag*, and the album's lead single, *Photograph*, along with its 'unique' animated music video, also featured on Melbourne independent music website, *Black of Hearts*. The album was played on community radio stations across the country via the Community Radio Network, featuring on the *Blues, Roots N Boots* show with John De Laurence, *Living Your Arts Off* with Nathan Kaye and *Country Wardrobe* with Nardia Drayton. Australian music industry legend Stuart Coupe also premiered the song *Sailor* from *Stone Fields* on his show *Dirt Music*.

Ben Connor & The Butterman (duo) – Full Bio

Soul-driven blues, folk, rock singer-songwriter, Ben Connor, has been described as the musical love child of Leonard Cohen, Nick Cave and David Gray. His cohort, multi-instrumentalist Stuart Christie ('The Butterman'), has entertained audiences around the nation and across the seas as a musician and physical theatre and circus performer with companies such as Circus Oz, Strut and Fret, Dislocate and Kage.

Together, Katoomba locals, Ben Connor & The Butterman combine the evocative lyrics, compelling melodies and warm well-worn vocal cords of a seasoned singer-songwriter with the style and theatrics of a professional circus performer.



As a solo artist, Ben has been writing songs for a little over two decades. Always the perfectionist, despite significant bouts of performing, large portions of that time have been spent behind closed doors. In early 2017, that changed as Ben started performing regularly, both solo and with The Buttermen, in the Blue Mountains and beyond. A dynamic performance with the Buttermen on the main stage of Katoomba's Winter Magic Festival in 2017, in particular, has been lauded, while multicam videos of the show have received an enthusiastic response on social media.

Ben Connor & The Buttermen is the reunification of the two founding members of Double Helix, a musical collaboration from the inner west of Sydney that came to an end in the early naughties when Stuart literally ran away to join the circus.

This time round its different, however.

True to his circus training, The Buttermen entertains both musically and physically, generating sounds that range from the subtle to immersive as he pats, taps, whacks and even wields a chain over his less than conventional drum kit, often while simultaneously picking, strumming, and occasionally even drumming, his guitars or making his clarinet sound like a cooing baby predator. And Ben has now honed his song writing craft, with one reviewer stating, 'Ben Connor has a mastery of song craft and a truly unique style and approach that could someday propel him to a place of prominence in the singer-songwriter pantheon'.