



Beres Jackson (Karoshi, Vacant Lake). Photo: Ben Adorjani

Under Their Skin

by Megan Spencer © 2014

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Recently [Megan Spencer](#) travelled to Berlin where she found an army of Australian musicians taking artistic risks. Heading back to Berlin was Karoshi's Beres Jackson, and coming home to tour Australia after five years was Sam Wareing - about to hit Canberra with her Berlin project, *Wasp Summer*.

Beres Jackson and I spend 15 minutes on the phone; he in Melbourne, me in Bendigo. I'm rasping through a cold so severe it eventually robs me of so much breath I hack into a coughing fit from which I may never recover.

I do, just long enough to call back and hear him say, "It's quite special".

He's referring to the city in which he's lived on and off since 2009 and the one I'm about to visit: Berlin. It's been Germany's capital twice over and Central Europe's **creative capital** since a steady stream of artistic adventurers began arriving on its cobble-stoned doorstep over a century ago.

And they keep coming as four decades' worth of Australian musicians can attest – with good reason says Jackson (also formerly based in **Canberra** with **Karoshi** and **Vacant Lake** in 2010.)

The city has gotten under his skin - so much so that the live performer/electronica musician will again return to Berlin come December.

We speak two days before I head there. Turns out I wouldn't truly understand his overtures until I felt Berlin humming beneath my *own* feet - its eclectic architecture, sense of place and open-tuned 'anything-goes-everything-is-possible' energy. Plus interviewing in situ many more Antipodean transplants who also affirm the city's 'specialness'. (Read the first part of this exploration of Australian musicians in Berlin on [Double J](#).)

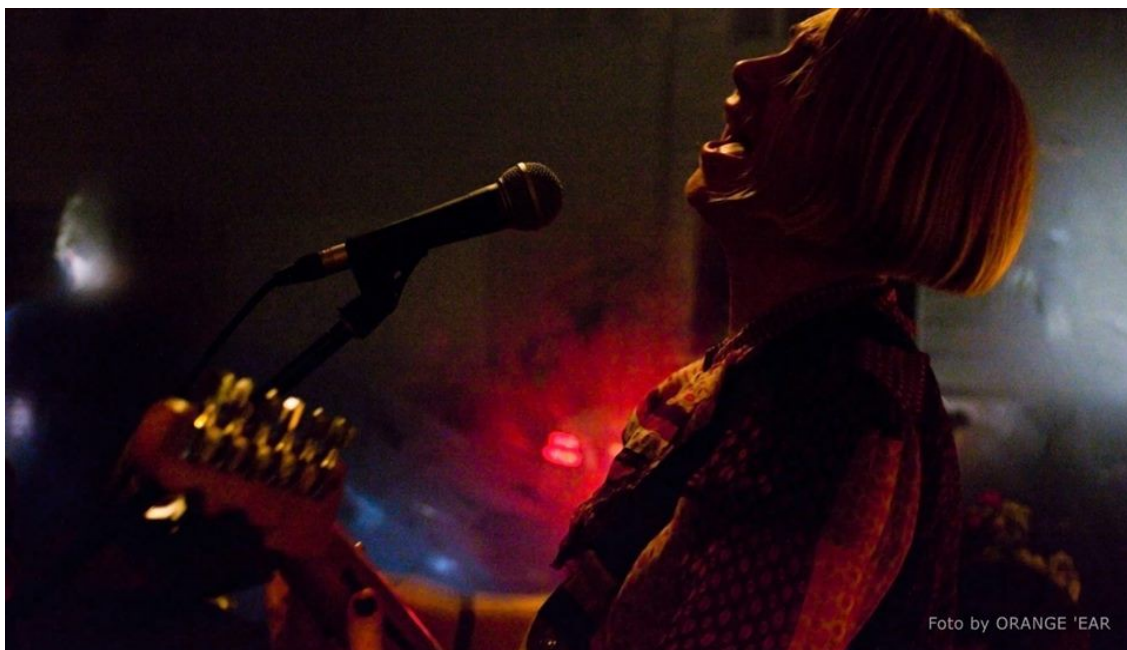
By the time Jackson returns to pick up where he left off, Germans will be revelling in the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the meantime he's worked a fulltime day job "in a government department to save a bunch of cash," so he can again immerse himself fulltime in music.

With the "corporate side" of the Sydney music business bearing down on him - and inspired by DJ/soul musician **Ray Mann** - the 32 year-old says the decision for the initial move from his then home was motivated by seeking clarity.

"It was make or break time for me. The Sydney scene would have destroyed me... I didn't know where to place myself - you have to 'know the right people' and 'do the right thing'."

"You're kind of anonymous [in Berlin]. So you go back to basics. It's humbling."

"I know it sounds corny but I am just about the music! So I started from scratch. And it's a cheap enough city to do that in."



Sam Wareing/Wasp Summer. Photo: Orange 'Ear

"It is expensive to live in Australia - *unreasonably* expensive - especially without a fulltime job," nods Sam Wareing with the fulcrum of understanding that comes with five years as an ex-pat 'Berliner'.

Born in England, raised on the Gold Coast and a stalwart of the Melbourne indie scene, Wareing is so at home here she practically glides over the cobblestones towards the café where we meet and spend the next hour embedded in conversation. She worked hard to get to here.

In 2008 Wareing landed in Berlin with a band (**The Mime Set**), a relationship (in the band), and a mission to write a bunch of songs. Only one survived.

“We broke up in Berlin!” she laughs, settling into her lavish ‘German Eiskaffee’. “We’d... got to the point where we’d kind of realised our dreams. Everyone scattered except for me.”

“So I stayed writing songs and watching the Olympics [on TV] and crying.”

Exploring the city and “getting lost at night on [her] rickety bike”, the 39 year-old exclaims “I ate it up!” then “fell in love with Berlin.”

She returned home to Melbourne but the “slow-moving” European wasps she’d befriended that summer called her back.

“They’re my ‘spirit animal’,” she says only half-jokingly of the insects after which she named her first Berlin music project and album, **Wasp Summer**.

“I realised that I couldn’t live in Australia any more – there was too much history. I worked for ten months... came back and found an apartment in the first week – where I still am!”

Marvelling at Berlin’s generous “pass the hat culture” that keeps so many musicians afloat, she says she’s learned to live “in the present moment”. Artistically she’s pushed herself into moody ‘alt.country’ and diversified her income stream by co-forming a ‘do it together’ [collective](#) of Berlin-based artists, to book “Australian independent touring bands”.

She also runs a regular program of small house concerts, [Sofa Salon](#), (most recently featuring Dave Graney, Clare Moore, Harry Howard and Edwina Preston), and teaches English.

“Everyone says ‘I’m only gonna be an artist’,” she laughs. “But everyone ends up doing something [else to get by].”

Unwittingly echoing Jackson again she says, “Berlin has become a process of stripping away..”



Sam Wareing/Wasp Summer. Photo: Megan Spencer

"I needed the challenge to know that without a band, without a boyfriend, a co-writer, a guitarist – without *all* of the props I'd had to define myself... that I could be *truly* independent and cope on the other side of the world, and deal with my own sorrows and create my own joys, and transform it *still* into functional art that would allow me to travel."

"So while it has not made me rich or well-known," she grins, "I've had a lot of adventures. And in the end that's more important – that I've had an interesting life."

The blazing sun under which we sit voids
the last of my cold and melts the remains
of Wareing's towering beverage.

As islets of cream slide into a river of watery
espresso, she reflects upon her relationship
with Australia – where she will soon return
for an East Coast [tour](#) - and what living in
Berlin has given her.

"I've realised from living here how much
more open... and challenged as a person I
am."

"Here, in this weird way, I really feel borders:
a sense of a land that has neighbouring
countries which it must cooperate with. You
have to be more perceptive and open to live
in a country that has nine different borders
with nine different countries!"



Photo: Sam Wareing/Wasp Summer by [Jan Bechberger](#)

"You develop a casual internationalism that you can't in Australia because we are so isolated."

"I feel very welcomed here. You have access to all these ideas and energy! There are a lot of ex-patriots in the Australian community working hard, diligently plugging away. It's a really wonderful space to work and connect with people."

"No-one knows you here. So you can either fake it or just be you, and it's fine either way."

"I made a decision to just be more myself."

Sam Wareing/Wasp Summer plays [Bloody Lips @ NewActon](#) in Canberra, Saturday 29. November. Beres Jackson/Vacant Lake plays [Loop Bar](#) in Melbourne on December 5 and [Oxford Art Factory Gallery Bar](#) in Sydney on December 11.