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AH, MUSIC – the sounds that soothe the savage beast within. Nowhere does that apply more than in a tattoo shop.

Many tattooers around the world come from the music scene in some capacity – either ex-musicians, clubland or rabid fans. Like many other contemporary tattoo artists, I came from the late '80s punk scene and have my background as both a fan and an ex-singer in a band. Granted, it was a crappy one – we only played a few gigs before losing half the band to various vices.

Punk music in those days was far different from today and so was the scene. Before MTV made punk mainstream, before glossy mags brought the fashion into everyone's homes, and before worldwide tattoo acceptance was a reality, the scene was dirty, violent, chaotic, highly charged and very legit. Without a doubt, the tattooing that came out of that environment was much the same. It's no wonder that so many tattooers have such passion for the music played while they work – myself included.

Nothing breeds drama and resentment in a tattoo workplace quicker and nastier than clashing musical tastes. I have witnessed it all over the world in nearly every shop I've worked in, including here in Australia. I've seen various schemes devised so that everyone gets their allotted time on the CD rotation, but it seldom works when the majority disapproves of what is playing. Usually, the music ends up getting bagged until it's begrudgingly changed. It really is mob rules when it comes to the stereo.

As a guest artist with somewhat extreme tastes, I have bore the brunt of this more than once. I worked at an all-rock 'n' roll tattoo shop in Holland some years back, where all they played was old rockabilly, Johnny Cash and '50s rock. That's just what everyone who worked there was into. For whatever reason, at that time I was only really listening to gangsta rap, so when I arrived at the shop everyone hated the music (and eventually me!) for having to sit through it day after day. In the end, I was allowed one CD per day. My revenge was getting those big 80 minute CDs and burning every last second with the most gangsta shit I had. It was definitely war! We all remained friends in the end, but during work hours, it was on.

The other consideration is that a lot of tattoos themselves are directly connected to the musical scenes, genres of music or bands themselves. Entire styles of tattooing can be associated with styles of music, and so it follows that the artists doing those styles usually also follow that

Inked Australia's resident tattoo advisor Kian Forreal on the importance of music



KIAN'S PHOTO BY MATTHEW LOWDEN



music. For example, a tattoo artist like Paul Booth (if you don't know who he is, look him up) tattoos very dark and evil motifs in an eerily realistic and morbid style, and in black and grey only. Metal is the music for him and his shop – no exceptions. He tattoos people from the metal scene; people who mainly wear black and are rather dark in nature. Slayer, for example, get tattooed by him, so the music is intrinsically linked to his style of tattooing and doesn't really go outside of that. The shop is decorated in this fashion as well and Paul – along with some of his other artists – travel on tour with metal bands, tattooing at massive festivals all over the world.

The same can be said for a lot of traditional American tattooing, with its links to rockabilly and rock 'n' roll. There's a certain dress sense associated with both of these scenes – haircuts, styles, shoes, pants and belts, all the way down to what hair grease to wear. I would venture an opinion that the 'old school' tattoo/music scene is probably the most visible and highly 'fashionised' tattoo scene out there. It is rather amazing to see it first hand over in the US, where it is taken very seriously.

Car culture is also strongly connected to tattooing and music, and I daresay those three things comprise the holy trinity of underground culture. Of course, not all tattoo scenes involve cars, and none nearly as much as the 'old school' scene previously mentioned – as well as the lowrider/Latino scene with its black and grey portraits, script lettering, clowns and angels. Still, these are probably more prevalent in America, where hotrods and lowriders are much more accessible. Even in Australia, though, there is a massive scene of tattooed revheads – and

they all have their own style of music that they are dedicated to.

You might wonder how Japanese tattooing in the west fits in musically. From my experience, Japanese tattooing isn't tied to one genre of music either by artist or collector. It's very hard to pigeon-hole. The music I listen to ranges from techno to classic rock, hip-hop, punk and drum 'n' bass. Most of the artists I know that do what I do have the same eclectic tastes and ranges. Although, a little known fact is that a lot of the accomplished Japanese-style tattooers in America come from and still support the hardcore punk scene over there.

Some of my clients love rap music when I play it to pump them up, while others love dark progressive house to hypnotise them for hours on end to help get them through the long sessions. In the end, I reckon it's whatever makes you feel good and able to let go. So all you tattooers out there with various musical tastes – let's all try and get along, hey?!

Also noteworthy, Rhys Gordon has moved on from Inner Vision Tattoo and will be working at Tatudharma. All of us at Inner Vision wish him luck and prosperity with his new beginning. He will be missed. ☹

Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 17 years international experience and who specialises in traditional Japanese tattoo work and script lettering. He has worked all over world and has studied under some the leading tattoo artists of today. He is based in Sydney at Inner Vision Tattoo in Surry Hills. His website is: www.kianforreal.com For information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal please visit www.fadeyourtattoo.com