

Three of a Kind

DYSON, STRINGER, CLOHER
(FROM RIGHT)

PHOTO BY GIULIA MCGAURAN

A trio of talent from the Australian music scene have formed their own supergroup.

MIA DYSON, LIZ Stringer and Jen Cloher are three of Australia's most prolific musicians. They've released music independently for the better part of 20 years, and been friends for almost as long. Together, they form the supergroup Dyson Stringer Cloher, and despite a long history together, they're only now releasing their debut album.

Cloher, on the phone while on a solo tour in New Zealand, details how in the six years since their first release, a modest three-track EP, things have changed.

"I think in 2013 I was still feeling a bit ambitious; I needed to prove myself," she admits. "In the past six years I've mellowed a bit. I know Liz has as well. Just realising that life is so much more than music. And to have a great life you have to cultivate other areas of your life, so it's not fraught with music needing to work out."

Despite living in different countries – Dyson in the US, Stringer in Canada and Cloher in Australia – many songs on *Dyson Stringer Cloher* are written collaboratively. One of these is 'Can't Take Back', a bittersweet, Joan Armatrading-esque ballad with delicate harmonies. It's one of Cloher's favourites: "There's just something magical about it for me."

The album also bears tracks that were already written, and intended for release in their respective solo projects. This was the case with Stringer's 'Believer'. "It's a classic rock anthem," says Cloher, whose teenage next-door neighbour – aspiring AFLW player Lulu Beatty – features in the song's moving video clip.

Another song that made the cut from the 20-odd the trio had to choose from is Cloher's 'Falling Clouds', the album's first single. It's a punchy song with the refrain: "Nothing against Paul or Nick/ But if you want to be remembered then you better have a dick." The line doesn't skirt around the edges. It demands to know where the female and gender non-conforming (GNC) artists are in

the celebration of our nation's greatest singer-songwriters.

Cloher is determined to see female and GNC artists embraced in the same way as their male counterparts, though she says "there's still a level of discomfort for me around that lyric".

"I had to go through a process of working out whether owning the line would harm trans and GNC artists, or open up a bigger conversation around gender, and how we define it. When I was writing that song I hadn't really explored gender yet, and my own journey with gender has changed so much in the last few years. But I wanted to own that ignorance so that other people could feel like it's okay that we don't always get everything right," she says.

Cloher talks at length about artists who consistently stand up on issues in bold and unapologetic ways. Yet she doesn't claim to be one of these artists. Rather, Cloher defers to the

career. We will remember them for the sacrifices they took to make things better for everyone else. And the level of abuse they have to cop? You see the reality of what it is to have a voice and a profile," Cloher says.

Admiration also strikes close to home, and Dyson Stringer Cloher routinely describe their collective as a sisterhood, abounding with support and love.

"As an artist it's really important not to be isolated," Cloher adds. "You need people you can whinge to and cry with. Liz and Mia have been those really precious women in my life, who keep me going when the going gets tough."

After so many years together as friends and music makers, it makes sense that Dyson Stringer Cloher sound mature and reflective. The 10 songs are satiating, for artist and listener alike, and the fight is still well and truly alive. *Dyson Stringer Cloher* succeeds in buoying exploration, for

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likes of Suzie Higgin of The Falling Joys, and Jodi Phillis and Trish Young of The Clouds – female artists of the 1980s and 90s who paved the way for bands like Dyson Stringer Cloher. These are the artists name-checked in 'Falling Clouds', and the song's title is a homage by portmanteau to the influence such bands had. Cloher adds Camp Cope, Evelyn Ida Morris and Simona Casticum to the list of artists driving positive change in Australia's music industry, but notes that it comes at a cost.

"The truth is, it's a massive sacrifice to your own career to stand up and start talking about this stuff in a real way. When artists step up and have a voice, it's often to the detriment of their own

the artists themselves and all that come after them. The song 'Young Girls', for example, is a direct conversation with a younger self – a little regret, a lot of clarity and a heap of wisdom that only age can bring.

So what would Cloher say to her younger self, one whose life was perpetually marked by the dilemma of not conforming?

"I think I would just say, 'Good on you mate, you survived'... Imagine if there had been a space where I could have explored sexuality and gender and just been myself?"

by **Izzy Tolhurst** (@IzzyTolhurst)
» *Dyson Stringer Cloher is out now. They tour Australia 1-16 November.*