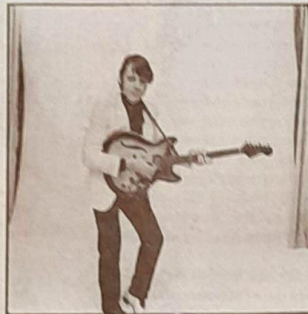




Clockwise from top left: The Tikiwis at the Logan Park Motor Hotel, 1967. The Paul Lestre Group performing at Cafe de Budapest, Remuera Rd., 1967. Johnny Bradfield and his band at El Matador, 1969. Ray Columbus and the Invaders at the Oriental Ballroom, Symonds St., 1964. Russ le Roq (Russell Crowe), 1981. Howard Morrison at the Station Hotel, 1971.



PHOTOS: JOHN RYKENBERG AND AUCKLAND LIBRARIES HERITAGE COLLECTION © 2014 PHOTOGRAPHY



Nostalgic nightlife in the frame

Marking NZ Music Month and the Auckland Festival of Photography, Joanna Mathers talks to Keith Giles about the legacy of John Rykenberg

Lips snarled, hand raised in sensuous blessing, Howard Morrison is lost in musical rapture. Part of a photographic series taken by the late John Rykenberg, the image (taken at Station Hotel in 1971) encapsulates mid-to-late 20th century Auckland: a city bathed in music.

Rykenberg, Dutch by birth, captured the nightlife of Auckland city over a period of 50 years, from the late 1950s to the early 2000s. The collection was gifted to Auckland Libraries Heritage Collection by his ex-wife in 2014 — more than 900 boxes of film, an estimated 1.6 million frames. And it's the most extensive collection of live music photography of the era.

Keith Giles, from the Auckland Libraries Heritage Collection, explains that Rykenberg started out by taking photos of patrons of the restaurants and clubs around the city himself, before opening a studio called Rykenberg Photography in Albert St.

He had a team of photographers working in the city's venues, many owned by the Dutch

expats that Rykenberg was friendly with.

In the early 1980s, a young man with rock star ambitions turned up at Rykenberg's studio for publicity shots. Gormless rockabilly, with a short-strapped guitar, this early version of Russell Crowe is (cringingly) delightful.

"This is when he called himself Russ le Roq and was sure he was going to be a rock star," says Giles.

The images of Howard Morrison and Russell Crowe are two hero shots of an exhibition being held as part of the Auckland Festival of Photography. On display at Silo 6 in Wynyard Quarter, the exhibition will feature many of the best photographs from the collection.

Live photography of Auckland performers from this era are rare. There are bits and pieces in the archives of high-profile promoters (such as Phil Warren) but nothing of this substance. It represents a missing piece of a puzzle, a visual relic of our cultural past.

"Up until relatively recently [bands] would come into the studios to have their pictures

taken for publicity purposes," explains Giles. "Live performances were not really photographed at all."

"Rykenberg was actually [at the clubs and restaurants] to take photos of the patrons; they'd be sent to them in frames with the clubs name, as mementos of their night. But in the quiet times, he would also take photos of the performers."

Also featured in the exhibition are Māori showband Tikiwis performing at Logan Park Morel in 1967 (they would go on to entertain troops in the Vietnam War in 1968); plus Ray Columbus and the Invaders at the Oriental Ballroom on Upper Symonds St in 1964.

The trove of visual goodness also straddles the transition from black-and-white to colour photography. "So you have that nostalgic appeal of the black and white, alongside the distinctive [and equally evocative] tones of the early colour photographs," says Giles. ●

● The Auckland Festival of Photography will take place from June 2-12.