

# Burning embers

Have you got what it takes to be in a band? DAREN POPE discovers that rock bands are alive and well

If the National Campus Band Competition was a first year university student it would be drinks all 'round. Aged 18, the big gig that's launched a busload of music careers has finally come of age and we're all invited to the party.

There are set to be scores of parties in venues on and off campus right across the state to mark the occasion as the Band Competition 2007 heats roll out. Victoria alone boasts over 20 participating campuses and that figure is easily duplicated in states across the country.

Far too often left out of the cultural slipstream, the island state of Tasmania last year turned out the winning band.

The Embers are a six-piece outfit with an expanding bottom draw full of original folksy tunes. In industry talk they're sound is described as "roots fusion, incorporating elements of Latin, folk, rock and groove." It's an eclectic mix that paved the way to industry kudos.

The Embers first prize kitty included a wad of cash (about \$8000), a heap of equipment and prepaid studio time with all the bells and whistles in St Kilda's renowned Woodstock recording studios.

Embers founding member and lead vocalist, Michael Attard says winning the competition was a shot in arm.

"Not only does it look so good on your bio when you apply to do festivals but also having a really top quality recording has been fantastic," he says.

The Embers have just finished putting the finishing touches to their debut EP (due for release in August) and since taking out the title have been beating off performance invitations. They join a prestigious list of past recipients, the more notable of which include Jebediah (95), Eskimo Joe (97), Ungkas (01) and the Preytells (05).

But The Embers success story is one of trial and error. It took two stabs at the title to finally break through. Just three weeks after they formed they entered the 2005 competition making it right through to the Tasmanian state finals. That was encouragement enough. The following year leading up to the



*Campus competition was a career kick-start for last year's winner, The Embers*

2006 competition they played at an astounding 36 gigs, all the while tightening their sound and song selection. Attard says that year of intense gigging was a critical period of development.

"We learnt heaps – we learnt how to listen to each other and how to get as much impact out of the song as you can," he says. "You get more discerning about your songs, especially in the writing."

The hard slog paid off. Attard describes the 2006 grand final held at Sydney University as the "best musical experience" of his life.

"Coming from a small town like Launceston and having a six piece band with lots of friends, we didn't know what to expect," he says. "That was the first time we'd ever played outside Tasmania and it was really encouraging and exciting to get up there and

to play and be so well received."

It's a thrill echoed in heats across the country.

Run by the Australasian Association of Campus Activities the competition is the largest of its kind in the southern hemisphere. Coordinator, Vanessa Brady says the competition provides an invaluable experience, particularly for bands that are just starting out. Many she says will be playing for the first time in front of an audience and it's not unusual for music industry professionals to turn up at heats either to help out as judges or purely out of curiosity. And it's not all about winning. Established bands like George, 78 Saab, Augie March and The Vines have all been through the band competition heats.

The competition Brady says, has a fine tradition of fostering new

band talent and while the past few years of voluntary student unionism may have dampened the spirit of many campus activities, the tradition of rallying your mates together to form a band flourishes.

"Student life in general has become a lot more serious," Brady says.

"Once upon a time education was free and students had this attitude that this was their chance to explore other activities along with study. I think it's a great loss because there's more to education than just hitting the books. Socially and culturally there are these things that we should be doing as well, and playing in a band is one of those things."

The 2007 National Campus Band Competition grand final will be held in Melbourne in October. The winning prize includes \$5000 cash,

CD pressing courtesy of Outbreak Marketing, musical equipment, recording time and more.

Judging is across select criteria that encompass originality of material, musicianship, stage presentation, recording viability and audience response.

Brady says the NCBC provides a unique opportunity.

"A lot of band competitions ask for demos but we purely go on live performance," she says. "You find the bands bring along their family and friends as their supporters so there's a lot of spirit in each heat."

Registration for the 2007 competition is now open on line. Go for it – you might just be the breakthrough talent the music industry is crying out for. [Q](#)

Details: [www.aaca.net.au](http://www.aaca.net.au)  
[www.myspace/theembers](http://www.myspace/theembers)

## National Campus Band Competition

### Victorian Heats

Melbourne University  
– Evelyn Hotel (Fitzroy)  
July 25, Aug 1 & 8

RMIT – Evelyn Hotel Aug 22

La Trobe (Bundoora) – Eagle Bar Aug 13, 15 & 22

La Trobe (Bendigo) – Golden Vine Aug 8 & 15

Monash (Caulfield/Peninsula) – The Laundry Aug 2, 17 & 29

Monash (Clayton) – Bar and Airport Lounge Aug 15 & 16

Swinburne – Glenferrie Hotel Aug 27, 29

Ballarat Uni – Karova Lounge Aug 15, 16 & 30

Deakin (Warrnambool) – The Sub Aug 8

Deakin (Geelong) – The Barwon Club Aug 23

Holmesglen – Evelyn Hotel Aug 15 & 29

NMIT (Fairfield) – Campus Aug 21

### State Finals

The Corner Hotel (Richmond), September 13

### National Final

Northcote Social Club (Northcote), October 25