John Bywaters interview

Interviews and the personal perspective
Interviews are a useful method of gathering information about a specific topic. They are particularly valuable when you require a personal perspective about an historical event, issue or personality.

One of the problems with interviews is also a strength: the personal perspective. By giving you access to personal opinions an interview allows you to discover what impact events have on individuals. If you are interviewing someone involved in an historical event, they can give you an insight into their motivations or reactions.

The personal perspective is also biased. It may be reliable, but it does reflect a personal opinion, not a fact. You have to ask questions such as:

- How long after the event is the interview?
- Does the interviewee have anything to gain from the interview?
- Is their memory reliable?
- How can I check what I’m told?
- What makes the information I gain useful?

Preparing an interview
When developing an interview, it is important to make sure you know why you are conducting it, and what information you would like to obtain. It is important to prepare well so that you can ask questions that will give you useful information. You can choose to use open ended questions that require longer responses, such as 'what do you think about...?' You may choose to combine these with closed questions that require shorter, more direct responses. These could include 'did you ever...?'

Example: interview with John Bywaters of The Twilights
This is a response from John Bywaters, who was a member of Australian band The Twilights, who travelled to England in 1966 after winning the national Hoadley's Battle of the Sounds. He was asked in 2011 what he remembered about when The Twilights went to England in 1966.

'We when we arrived at Southampton we were met by a rep from EMI, which was a great help. His name was Roy Squires and he travelled to London in the train with us back to his office. It was a great help to have him meet us as we hadn't booked any accommodation because we'd left that to our Australian manager who at that time hadn't even arrived in the country. Walking the streets with our suitcases and equipment was no fun but that's a story in itself.

We were to contact the big booking agency called the Grade Organization about the gig we'd won as part of the prize and they said they'd never even heard of the Twilights or Hoadleys for
that matter. Luckily one of the partners in the company, Nat Berlin, liked our hard luck story and found us a couple of gigs which worked out pretty well for us.

The big problem was that we had no cash in a bank account to tide us over while we found work and we were constantly skint.

We were always well received wherever we played but there weren’t enough gigs or cash coming in to support us. After a few months we used our return tickets to come back to Australia. We even turned down a month’s work in Germany by returning home.

While we were in the UK we recorded 3 tracks at Abbey Road, *Young Girl*, *What’s Wrong With The Way I Live* and *9.50*. EMI put a bit of effort into promoting *9.50* as a single, but as we were leaving to come back to Australia their promotion stopped. I remember the guys from EMI were sorry to see us leave as they thought we had a bit of a chance with that single.

I seem to remember the fees for a band like ours were pretty awful and you had to get a bit well known before you could get any decent sort of money.

Source: © John Bywaters

As a participant in the event, John Bywaters is able to bring a personal perspective to an important historical period in Australian popular culture.

This source could be used to help you understand the difficulties Australian bands faced in travelling overseas in the 1960s. As a memory recorded 45 years after the event, you would have to check it against other sources.

**Discussion and preparing your own interview**

How does The Twilights experience compare with that of The Go-Betweens and The Jezabels who followed in their footsteps in the following decades?

Using the information here, develop a series of questions that you could use to interview someone about whether they think Australian music has made an impact overseas. Draw up a list of possible interview subjects that you think could give you an educated opinion on the topic. Your interview may not be with an expert, but it will give you information that you can use to help you develop a broader understanding of what Australian music has contributed to global popular culture.

You could record the interview as a podcast or vodcast.