

33¹/₃ OCEANIA



DRIVE

by Henry Johnson

B L O O M S B U R Y

Bic Runga's
Drive

33 1/3 Global

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Bic Runga's *Drive*

Henry Johnson



Series Editors: Jon Stratton, UniSA Creative,
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1 Introduction

Introduction

'Into Overdrive: Bic Runga was the face and sound of 1997' (Alexander 1998). These complimentary words are from the caption to a photograph of multi-talented musician Bic Runga in 1997 in a weekend New Zealand newspaper, the *Sunday News*. The accolade summarizes the rapid impact that Runga had already made in the New Zealand music industry as a result of her highly acclaimed debut album, *Drive* (1997). The album was an instant national success, entering the New Zealand album charts at the No. 1 position and remaining in the Top 50 for an impressive sixty-four weeks (Scapolo 2007, n.p.).¹ It paved the way for her career as one of New Zealand's most celebrated pop music performers.

The caption that begins the chapter was a play on words of the title of her album, celebrating Runga's meteoric rise to fame in many facets of the music scene, which she certainly dominated for much of 1997. She was in fact a songwriter,

¹ Internationally, *Drive* peaked at No. 50 in the Australian charts in 1998. Some of Runga's other releases in the 1990s achieved moderate success overseas, including her 'Sway' single, which reached No. 10 in the Australian charts in 1998, and No. 83 in the UK Charts in 1998. See <https://australian-charts.com/showitem.asp?interpret=Bic+Runga&titel=Drive&cat=a>; <https://australian-charts.com/showitem.asp?interpret=Bic+Runga&titel=Sway&cat=s>; and <https://www.officialcharts.com/search/singles/sway/> (accessed 4 July 2022).

multi-instrumentalist (e.g. voice, drums, piano, guitar) and music producer, with each talent contributing to the success of *Drive* and her releases that followed. It is with such recognition that this book offers insight into Runga's route to the New Zealand Music Hall of Fame (Te Whare Taonga Pūoro o Aotearoa),² an accolade presented to her in 2016, and one that recognized her high-profile career for nearly two decades after her debut album, multiple music industry awards, and many achievements in New Zealand and overseas.³

Acknowledging Runga's significance in the field of New Zealand popular music, this book discusses her debut, self-produced album, *Drive* (Appendix 1). The study navigates the performer's rise to national stardom, musical style, accolades and performance achievements in New Zealand and overseas.

Bic Runga: A short biography

Born in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, in 1976, Bic Runga (Briquette Kah Bic Runga) grew up in the suburb of Hornby and attended Cashmere High School. Runga's early performance experiences were at home, with her musical mother and two older sisters, in high-school bands, and through the Christchurch School of Instrumental Music ('Drive Home' 2017).⁴ These three spheres of musical influence

²See <https://www.musichall.co.nz/portfolio/bic-runga/> (accessed 21 March 2022).

³See Bic Runga's website: <http://bicruna.com/> (accessed 1 March 2022).

⁴See <https://www.csm.org.nz/> (accessed 11 April 2022).

nurtured an environment of music making through familial sway, peer association, and community music education.

Actively involved in a high-school culture of music making, Runga participated in the national high-school popular music competition, Rockquest, on several occasions (Chapter 2). Subsequent to her appearance in Rockquest in 1993 as part of the popular music duo, Love Soup, which won the Christchurch regional final and achieved third place in the nationals, Runga moved to Auckland (New Zealand's largest city) in 1994 and focused on her solo career. After actively developing her performance profile, Runga was signed to Sony Music New Zealand in 1995. The same year, Sony released her five-track EP, 'Drive', and in 1996 released her single 'Bursting Through' in the lead-up to the New Zealand release of her album, *Drive*, the following year.

Runga's rise to Kiwi stardom is acknowledged in her number of awards and nominations in the Aotearoa Music Awards (New Zealand Music Awards).⁵ First appearing at the awards in 1996, when she was nominated for 'Most Promising Female' and 'Rising Star Award', she won the former category. Towards the end of the year, she was awarded the prestigious APRA Silver Scroll (Australasian Performing Right Association), an industry recognition of her songwriting for 'Drive'. A year later, Runga received three nominations in the Aotearoa Music Awards, winning the 'Female' award, and in 1998, reflecting the success of her album, *Drive*, she was nominated for and won

⁵In 1996 and 1997, the awards were known as the Clear Music and Entertainment Awards, and in 1999 as the New Zealand Music Awards. See <https://aotearoamusicawards.nz/award-history/> (accessed 1 March 2022).

four awards: 'Album of the Year', 'Female', 'Single of the Year', and 'Songwriter'. Several other personnel on the album also received awards: Wayne Conway for the *Drive* album cover, and Simon Sheridan as the engineer. With this considerable foundation, and releasing further acclaimed albums (Appendix 2), Runga went on to win numerous other awards in the years that followed (the most of any individual New Zealand musician), which culminated in a Legacy Award in 2016 and her induction into the New Zealand Music Hall of Fame (Roach 2015).

After the release of *Drive*, the popularity of Runga's albums over the next decade is shown in Table 1.1, where the impact of her studio and live albums is clearly recognized. Her second studio album, *Beautiful Collision* (2002), released five years later, consolidated her acclaim by achieving a record 101 weeks in the charts and receiving recognition at the 2003 Aotearoa Music Awards ('Female', 'Highest Selling New Zealand Album', 'Producer', 'Solo Artist') (Aotearoa Music Awards 2020). But it

Table 1.1 *Bic Runga in the Top 50 New Zealand Album Charts*

Album	Year	Peak	Weeks in the Charts
<i>Drive</i>	1997	1	64
<i>Together in Concert: Live (Tim Finn, Bic Runga, Dave Dobbyn)</i>	2000	2	26
<i>Beautiful Collision</i>	2002	1	101
<i>Birds</i>	2005	1	30

Source: Scapolo (2007, n.p.).

is with her debut album that Runga's career was propelled into the mainstream New Zealand music industry and she soon became a 'household name in New Zealand' (Moses 2017). Since its release, the album has achieved seven times platinum.⁶ Some of its songs have been released as singles, featured in movies and become iconic sounds in the New Zealand music scene. As a debut album, such recognition is particularly relevant when considering Runga's key achievements en route to the New Zealand Music Hall of Fame (Table 1.2). From winning a regional high-school music competition to being honoured with the New Zealand Order of Merit, Bic Runga has attained an esteemed place within contemporary popular music. It is for such reasons that this book focuses on the album *Drive*.

In New Zealand, several single releases are connected with *Drive*, and in various ways. Two years before the album's release in New Zealand in July 1997, an EP version of the song 'Drive' was released, which is a slightly different version to the track of the same name on the album. Also on the EP is a version of Runga's song, 'Swim', which is noticeably different to the version of 'Swim' on the album (changing from a funky sound on the EP to a futuristic rock style on the album). Other New Zealand singles released from (or with versions on) *Drive* were 'Bursting Through' (September 1996),⁷ 'Sway' (May 1997), 'Suddenly Strange' (September 1997) and 'Roll Into One'

⁶In New Zealand, platinum certification is awarded with sales of 15,000 units. See Recorded Music New Zealand: <https://nztop40.co.nz/about> (accessed 21 March 2022).

⁷Month and years indicate when the singles entered the New Zealand Top 50 charts.

Table 1.2 *Key Achievements: From School to Stardom*

Year	Achievement
1993	Winner of Canterbury regional final of Rockquest
1993	Third place in national final of Rockquest
1994	Moved to Auckland (worked in record shop)
1995	TV presenter on <i>Music Nation</i>
1995	Signed to Sony Music
1995	'Drive' (Love Soup) EP released
1996	Most Promising Female Vocalist award for the song 'Bursting Through'
1996	APRA Silver Scroll award for the song 'Drive'
1997	Featured on the front cover of <i>New Zealand Musician</i>
1997	Featured on the front cover of <i>Rip It Up</i>
1997	Release of debut solo album, <i>Drive</i>
1997	Female Vocalist award (for 1996)
1998	Album of the Year award (for 1997)
1999	International Achievement award (for 1998)
1999	'Sway' features in the movie, <i>American Pie</i>
2000	International Achievement award (for 1999)
2006	New Zealand Order of Merit
2012	'Sway' features in the movie, <i>American Reunion</i>
2016	New Zealand Herald Legacy Award
2016	Inducted into the New Zealand Music Hall of Fame
2017	<i>Drive</i> re-released (20th-Anniversary Edition)