



And the beat goes on

Venero Armanno's new book was unexpected, he tells
ANNA EDWARDS

Like a bolt from the blue, Venero Armanno says the title of his latest book *The Dirty Beat*, came to him in the middle of an old friend's funeral.

In the '70s Armanno played in a rock band in Brisbane, with three other young guys.

One of them was drummer Cyril Campbell.

The Dirty Beat is a book about another drummer called Max and, starting at Max's funeral, it goes back over his life and examines his past loves, relationships, joys, sorrows and his music.

While Armanno insists the book isn't autobiographical he has to credit his old mate for

something, he says.

It was during Cyril's funeral service that Armanno was struck with inspiration.

"I was just sitting there looking at his coffin and I thought 'Oh Cyril, you were one of the best drummers that I've ever seen, you created a

really great beat, a great dirty beat'," Armanno says.

"And at that moment *The Dirty Beat* was decided."

The Dirty Beat was a book that Armanno never knew he needed to write, but it was a book he couldn't stop writing.

"For some reason, maybe because of Cyril, it just poured out," Armanno said.

"Whatever unconscious thing it plugged into, it was written in such a concentrated period I didn't have time to ask about it.

"It's almost like I don't even remember writing the book, almost like a fugue state."

Thirty minutes after Cyril's funeral Armanno said he was

back in his office, old-style exercise book and ballpoint pen in hand.

That day he scrawled 30 pages by hand, and the entire first draft was completed in 18 days – a stark contrast to the 10 years it has taken him to write past books which include *Volcano*, *Romeo of the Underworld* and *Firehead*.

"The thing is, none of it is autobiographical in any way, shape or form. In fact, immediately as soon as I thought of *The Dirty Beat*, I thought, well one thing I can't do is appropriate Cyril's life."

"What I did was I specifically created Max as a foil for Cyril, so if this happened to Cyril, then the opposite happened to Max, the only thing similar is that Max died of a heart attack while doing the sound for a young band, because that's what happened to Cyril."

Full of characters you either love, hate or try your hardest to work out, *The Dirty Beat*

contains elements of everyone and no one at all, says Armanno.

"It's like Mark Twain said about Tom Sawyer . . . Tom Sawyer was no boy he'd ever met but almost every boy he'd ever met," Armanno says.

"No one I know is like Max."

Other characters in the story, like Max's stepfather, the mysterious Concetto San Filippo, just appeared.

"He just popped up out of nowhere, and I think those are the best characters to draw because you kind of go, 'where did you come from?'"

Like his other recently released novel, *Candle Life*, Armanno says *The Dirty Beat* is one of his standout favourites.

"They're both like the children you didn't plan."

■ ***The Dirty Beat* (University of Queensland Press, RRP \$32.95) is out now.**



RAPID FIRE

What you're reading now:

The Good Doctor by Damon Galgut, *Notes From An Exhibition* by Patrick Gale, *Michael Tolliver Lives* by Armistead Maupin and *The Higher Realm* by James Friel.

Favourite place to read:

My bed.

Favourite place to write:

My study.

Favourite authors:

Haruki Murakami, Oscar

Hijuelos, Charles Bukowski.

Last book that made you cry:

Probably *Notes from Bunker Hill* by John Fante.

Book you couldn't finish:

American Gods by Neil Gaiman.

Favourite characters:

Tsar Castile and Cesar Castillo from *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* by Oscar Hijuelos.

What you'd like to write about next:

Eternal life.

