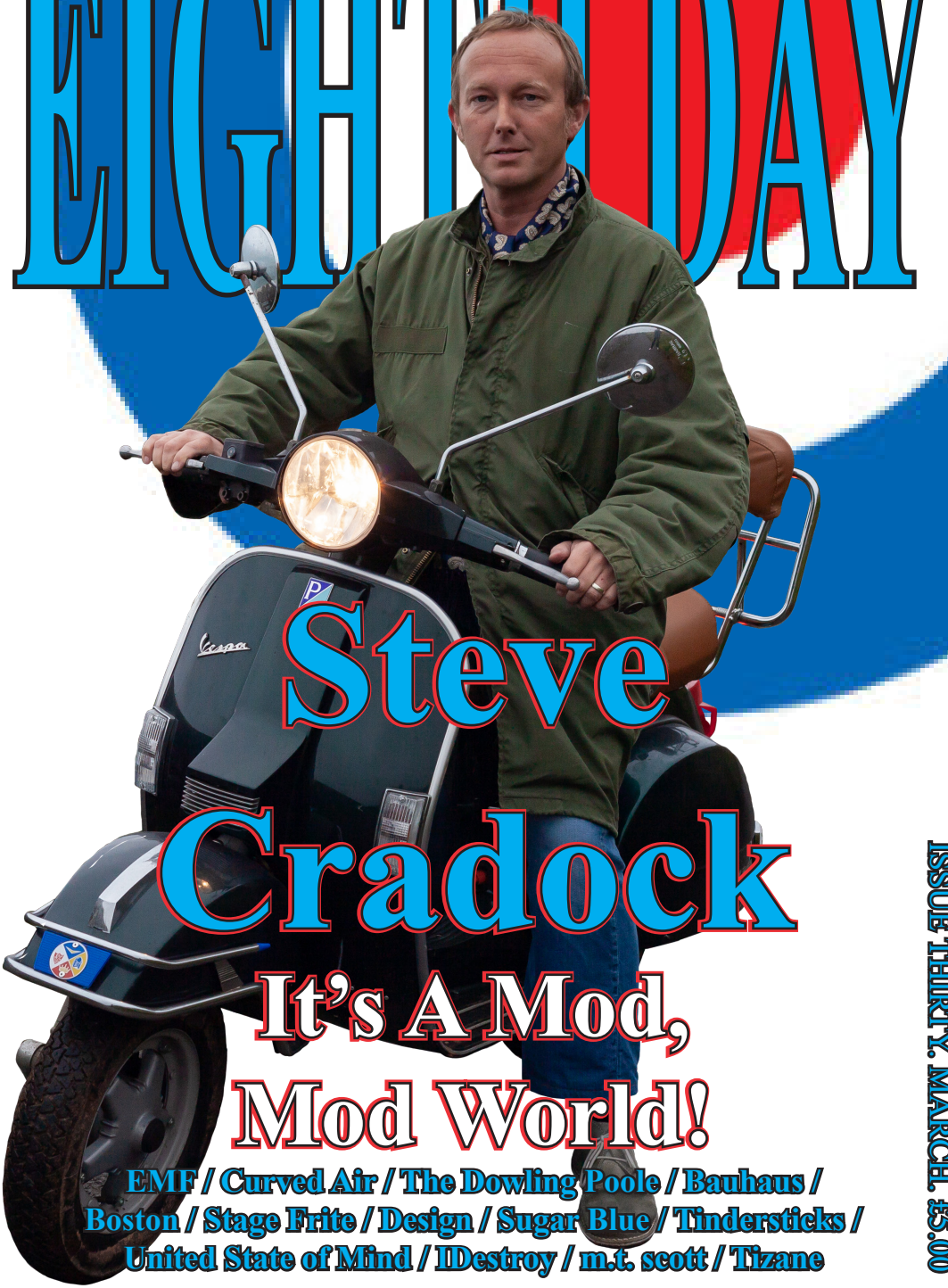
EIGHTH DAY



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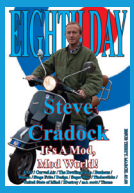
EIGHTH DAY



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James Atkin

on

‘Songs of Resistance’, EMF and Pop Stardom

Interview by Kevin Burke.

“... music, it’s not a sideline, it is everything.”

During these days of isolation, some artists have fired up their creativity. One such artist is EMF’s James Atkin. A man who never fails to hit the right notes at the right time, his latest album, ‘Songs of Resistance’, is a justification of that, mirroring faithfully our present condition, but echoing with a hopefulness and a light at the end of the tunnel. With songs such as ‘Hello People’, James reaches out to the masses, whilst pulling them back three decades with songs like ‘West Country Raver’ and ‘Three Stripes Adidas’. This makes the album an exceptional listening experience.

As much as we look forward to and immerse ourselves in new music, the roots of James’ career are still something to behold. Hitting the precipice of success in 1990 with EMF and the timeless single ‘Unbelievable’, the outfit followed with the hit album ‘Schubert Dip’ a year later. Two more albums followed, ‘Stigma’ (1992) and ‘Cha Cha Cha’ (1995). In between periods of hiatus, the tragic loss of bassist Zac Foley in 2002 and a string of reunion shows over the past two decades, the name EMF is still one which stirs a sense of pop nostalgia in so many.

Whilst lockdowns have proved a trying time for artists and the industry, between abandoned tours and rescheduled releases, music fans are craving new music and more importantly escapism. That is exactly what James Atkin presents. So, as February crawled along through monotony, I caught up with James from his home in the Yorkshire Dales to get nostalgic and also to investigate his latest work. I found an artist that emits a positivity in every syllable he speaks, and a man in full control of his career.

Congratulations James on the release of ‘Songs of Resistance’.

Aw thank you, that’s really kind of you.

What is the online reaction like to your new music?

Well, it’s been brilliant. It’s always a bit of a struggle being an artist on your own, doing it all of your own back - making the music, releasing it, going into production without any record label behind you - but the response has been brilliant. I mean it’s great, it’s gonna be ... hopefully the campaign goes on for a few months, and it’ll pick up and there are some good things in the pipeline. But yeah, the initial

response has been brilliant, fantastic.

Were you mindful when releasing it now, you may not have been able to promote the album in the normal way, but that music fans need new sounds?

Yeah. I mean I'm kind of lucky, I have a captive audience with the social media thing. It was always been massive, and the future, but now the way people do it. I mean, I would love to be doing that (touring), going out and doing gigs in the traditional sense. But you know, I think artists got creative and there's lots of digital content, which I guess people are getting used to, and adapting to aren't they?

So 'Songs of Resistance' is an album which you basically built and recorded from the ground up?

It is completely on my own. But quite a few of the tracks I wrote with Ian [Dench] who I used to be in EMF with. And quite often, over the years, I would get together with Ian and we would write songs and then they would get put on the shelf and nothing ever happened. We have always threatened to do a new EMF album from those tracks but with one thing or another that's kind of never come to fruition. So a few of these songs, initially they were my ideas but I helped develop them with Ian, because Ian's got such great songwriting knowledge and he kind of puts a magic into them. So yeah, mostly on my own, certainly all the recording and production on my own in my own little studio in Yorkshire Dales, with a little help from my old songwriting friend Ian.

The production on it is amazing, but in your writing, you are focusing on our / society's present state, but also reflecting over your career?

It varies. I mean, nostalgia, I can't help it. I'm in my third decade of making music, and it's kind of -what do you write about? I guess the title suggests that it should be a social commentary, but you know things do come up on

your political compass and you kind of have to say a few things. But there are so many people that do that so much better now, I don't really want to go into that. I don't want to go into that territory to be honest with you. So there's a little bit of that, a little bit of escapism...nostalgia, yeah, it's a real mixed bag actually.

It is less than a year since your last album 'Aries Pagan', are you somebody that can't sit still, and always has to be creative in some way?

I got 'Aries Pagan' out really quick, and that one wrote itself really quickly. But by the time the campaign is going, and it's getting released, I'm back to already collecting ideas. And then if you think in April, we went into lockdown, and we had that whole summer, I had so much time on my hands, and I just started gathering songs. I usually start of with a couple of ideas and how the angle of the record will go, and how I want the record to sound. It kind of just grows from that. It is amazing how prolific I've been in the last six months, and I've had a lot of time on my hands. I enjoy being in the studio, making sounds, making records, (laughs) not going out but staying in!

One of the songs on last year's 'Aries Pagan' that stood out is 'Mr. Soul', the cover of the Neil Young / Buffalo Springfield track ('Buffalo Springfield Again', 1967). How did that come about?

Well, it's just a tune I came across. I mean, I love Neil Young. I was searching around looking for a bit of Neil Young and that track popped up. I never really thought much about it, and I really liked the song. I realized I was in a dressing room in Tipperary [Ireland] when we were doing that Feile Festival, Derry [Brownston] put it on his phone, because we always have a bit of music pre-EMF gigs, and I was chatting to Derry about it saying 'That song is amazing'. I kind of took it away, and I think I might have recorded it by that point, but it was one of those

James in 1990

weird things where I didn't really know the song and then it popped into my life again, which is always a good sign. What a tune though, and it's such a different structure because it's just wavering along, it doesn't really do much but there's a couple of key little hooks in there that brilliant. So I was really pleased with that and I got my guitar out again, and it was great to play guitar too.

I follow Tim's Listening Party on social media (Tim Burgess), and he focused on the EMF album 'Stigma', but someone actually commented that you are a great guitarist?

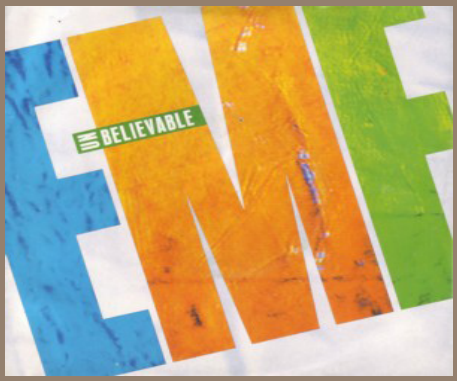
Haha, I always wanted to be a guitarist, that was my first love. The story goes that when EMF went into our first rehearsal room, I was on the guitar, Ian was on the guitar, Derry was on the guitar and I think Zac (Foley) was on the guitar, and we had to divvy up the parts a bit. Zac went onto bass, Derry on keyboards, Ian obviously stayed on guitar ... he's kind of leagues above everyone else as a musician.

Then I had to start singing and put the guitar down. They always say 'guitarists get really good when they play in bands'. I never really got to do that for the last thirty-years, playing guitar in a band. I feel like I almost lost out a bit. I still love playing guitar. I don't know if I'm that good to be honest ... I can get away with it.

The thing that's noticeable from 'Songs of Resistance', your voice has not changed. After three decades it's instantly recognizable. It's one part Bernard Sumner and one part Morrissey. Who influenced your vocal style?

Definitely Bernard, definitely Morrissey, a little bit Echo and the Bunnymen, Robert Smith. It's really funny my voice, I was a very reluctant singer. Like I said, with EMF, I didn't really think I was going to be the singer. I'm glad I took on the job, I think it was probably the best job in the band. For years and years I didn't really like my voice. I never had much confidence in it and I guess that's what


EMF in 1991



gave it its charm back then, you know; a bit unsure, a bit reluctant, it added to the character of it I guess. As years developed, I spent about fifteen years not singing, just learning and doing dance records. That's when I learnt how to produce records. I never really went back to singing until the solo album. It's a strange one, but I think my voice has gotten a little bit more confident. I don't think it's gotten any better. But I certainly wish I had the confidence now, back then when I was singing with EMF, I think I would have enjoyed it a bit more.

It is three decades since 'Schubert Dip', and of course it's three decades since 'Unbelievable' broke the American charts. What does that do to a young twenty-two year old guy, to have that level of success?

It's really hard to reflect what I was thinking at that time, I mean I guess we were on top of the world. But I was very young, it was a whirlwind, I mentioned before that I wasn't very confident as a singer or a frontman, so it was quite a challenge. I seem to remember by the time we got to America we were doing these six-week tours, the rest of the band were really enjoying it, really going for it and really partying, being proper rock stars, where I was going inwards. I'd love to say it was an amazing experience, but there was turmoil as well ... again, it's stupid, but if I had the chance again I'd probably do it completely differently and enjoy it a bit more. But I always wanted to be in a band, I always wanted to be a pop star, and the dream came true, which is incredible.

What is your view now of being a pop star, having that adulation, the magazine covers and everything that comes with it?

It was ... I mean, attention is brilliant, adulation is brilliant. I think you can lose yourself in it, I know it's certainly taken me quite a while to do a lot of work on myself, and come to a point where now I'm a much happier person. It's really strange, I'm glad I did other things in life rather than just that, at

that moment. Because I went of and got a career, I went to University, got a degree, started a family, got married, moved out of London. I did lots of stuff that kind of more defines me more that I'm in this place rather than that, and that achievement. It's a strange one, because I had to do a lot of work, because after fame, and going into the wilderness like that for ten or fifteen years or even twenty years I was on top of it, and I thought 'Well, what am I going to do now?' Life is a long time, isn't it?

You are so upbeat and positive. That comes through beautifully in 'Songs of Resistance' and you have a vibe, an outlook that is unique.

Yeah, I mean I am so lucky. I mean, I'm kind of ... the pressure is not on though, which is really good. I do worry, and I think it must be really hard for aspiring musicians. Also my peers, musicians of my age who are still trying to make a living from it, and the stress that must bring. I have got certain friends like Miles [Hunt] from The Wonder Stuff, who is brilliant. He has so many followers and people love him, but he is working so hard at it. I'm kind of in the position because I have a day job, and a lot of my friends in bands have day jobs as well, where the music, it's not a sideline, it is everything the music you make. But it's not precious, getting desperate about it. I think desperation shows through sometimes and I haven't really got that and I think I'm just relaxing into music a little bit. I really have enjoyed making this album. We've got a little home studio, nothing posh, we get to write songs ... I say 'we' because my wife comes in and we do it as a family. It's a nice thing to be doing, a nice thing to be doing at this point of my life as well.

So with the absence of pressure, it allows you to create and be fruitful with your work?

I don't know how I'd cope if I had a big record deal with a big record label and I had to do a three-week promotional tour. I don't think I'd be

able to do it to be honest with you. I'd rather, on a Friday night with my wife say 'I want to do a cover tonight; let's get the keyboard out, let's do a New Order cover or something', just to have some fun and not worry that I have to be cool either. One thing it's taught me, and I am a school teacher as well, you're not relevant to a seventeen / eighteen year-old, you kind of got to know where you are, your place and stuff and it's gotta come from within. Like you say, the pressure is off.

But even when EMF landed, did you guys have a demographic of fans, both fans of Electronica and Indie music?

Those first little trips to Ian's house in Gloucester, his mom's house, we had a piano, and a synthesizer, and we had a little bit of vision. I wanted it to be a Chicago House, Detroit Techno outfit. Ian of course is an amazing guitarist and his background is Indie music. I love Indie music as well. But I think it was the chemistry in the two of us working together, everything thrown into the rehearsal room, with sequencers and house piano, triads going off, we wanted to be Acid House, but we were kids that loved the Smiths and Cure and stuff like that. I think it was just a lucky time, it was the right time. You know, that whole Manchester thing was breaking but there's also the Balearic, Acid House thing, that mixed bag of stuff and it kind of worked for us. It's funny, I never think of it being anything different, but at the time when it came out, in particular 'Unbelievable' ... 'Unbelievable' is almost a Hip-Hop tempo, a Hip-Hop groove. The records were quite fresh sounding back then.

But they are still fresh-sounding three decades on and people still appreciate them. But it was an exciting time in music.

It was, and especially if you are a sixteen / seventeen year old boy, like I was, and you're really discovering music ... that kind of stays with you. I go back and rediscover a few of the albums that I loved at that time, and

those songs stood the test of time. It's all about everything that goes with the music I guess, that growing up. There's a few albums I go back and listen to.

James continued:

I was a bit of a Goth to start off with Kevin, I loved the Sisters of Mercy ... I go back and I listen to that Sisters of Mercy record, but it has a time, and it has a place. At that point in my life it was a pretty important record, some records stayed with me since and my wife always laughs at me because I don't listen to too much 'new' music. I say 'Why? After New Order released 'Technique' in '89, that's it', and she gets really frustrated saying 'Listen to this, listen to this?', but then she will catch me putting an old Cure record again.

But you guys, EMF, probably never thought that this far into the future and the songs you created would mean something to people?

Yeah it is incredible. Occasionally, and more recently in the last few months, I've been putting some EMF tunes together, like a video of us performing because we can't do live gigs, and we've posted some EMF songs and there is still people out there that absolutely love them, and they are still quite important to them. I am lucky! And I think the nice thing about EMF is we had a bit of commercial success, but the songs are remembered. It's not like some indie, distant band, the songs are still thought about. Especially 'Unbelievable', that one just won't go away [laughs]. Which is great, but I wish I had another five or six like that.

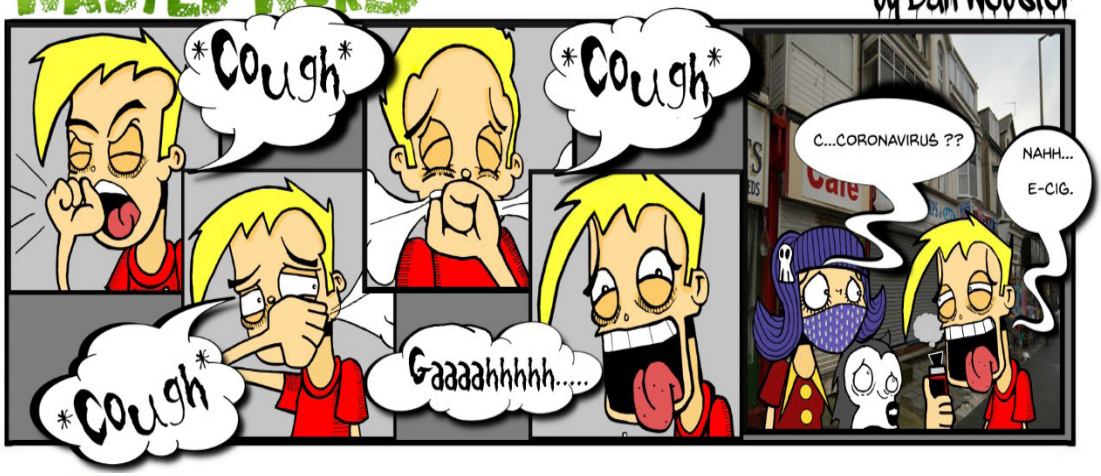
'Songs of Resistance' is available now on download, CD and vinyl through the James Atkin Bandcamp page.

jamesatkinmusic.com

www.facebook.com/ jamesatkinmusic

WASTED WORLD

by Dan Webster



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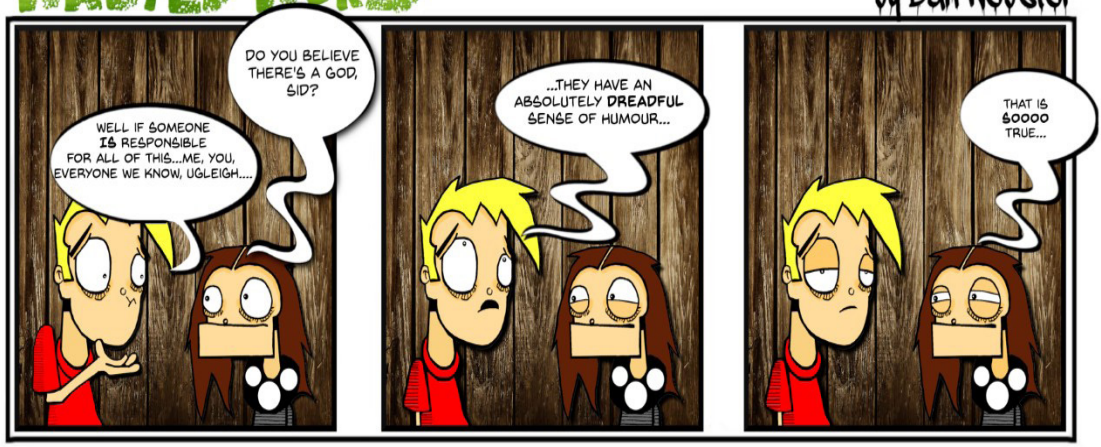

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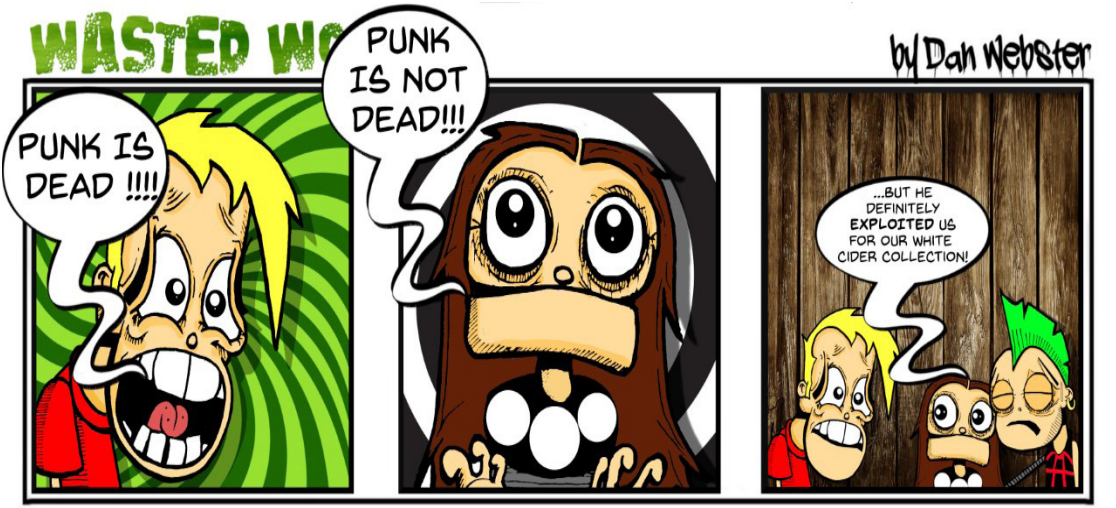


IDestroy

We Are Girls

Interview by Alice Jones-Rodgers
Photography by Dan Jevons.

It seems like far too long since we were able to attend a gig, to the point where jumping up and down in a hot, sweaty room, fighting for space in a crowded mosh-pit, getting drenched in flying beer and applauding a band for their onstage antics seems like a dim and distant memory. If the endless amounts of Facebook live streams just aren't cutting it for you, then there is an alternative and it comes in the form of 'We Are Girls', the storming debut album by that fine musical city of Bristol's newest export, IDestroy.

A perfectly-formed ten-track, short and (not so) sweet 28-minute encapsulation of the three-piece's riotously chaotic and often unpredictable live sets, which before the pandemic hit saw vocalist and guitarist Bec Jevons, bassist and backing vocalist Nicola Wilton-Baker and drummer Jenn Hills win acclaim from fans and critics not just all over the UK but also in Europe and places as far flung as South Korea, 'We Are Girls', released on 12th February via CD Baby, is the album that we all need at this present time.

With their forthright, outspoken recorded views, some may suggest strong influences of Punk, whilst others may note a healthy dose of Riot Grrrl, not least in the album's title (and title track), which offers a firmly tongue-in-cheek retort to the patronising attitudes that the trio have incurred as an all-female band from the outset, or recent single 'Petting Zoo', which highlights some of the most serious issues, having been written after Bec was groped twice in a matter of months. However, let's dispose of any genre classification because they are simply IDestroy, one of Britain's best and most relevent new bands and proud creators of one of the finest albums you will hear this year. What's more, we recently caught up with them for a chat.

Firstly, hello IDestroy and thank you for agreeing to our interview, it is lovely to speak to you. Could we start by asking where, when and how IDestroy came together and could you introduce us to your members?

Jenn: Bec and I met at uni and had been in another band previously. She then asked me at a party [in 2016] when we were quite drunk if I wanted to start a new band and of course I said 'yes'. Nicola joined us a couple of years later after depping for our old bass player. She already knew all of our songs, so it was the perfect fit.

For the uninitiated, how you would describe the sound you make and who would you cite as your influences?

Nic: Party punk! Basically a mixture of fun, upbeat but to the point songs - that's the best way I can describe it. We

all have tons of influences; mine are mostly upbeat, high energy acts. I took a lot of influence on the performance side of things from Frank Iero and My Chemical Romance particularly, playing influence from alternative bands like The Used, Green Day and also bass players such as Stuart Zender [Jamiroquai] and Flea [Red Hot Chili Peppers] made a big impact on me.

Bec: I was listening to a lot of Sløtface, Frank Carter, Childcare, The Cure and Dream Wife whilst writing the album, which I guess is a bit of a random mix! I just love music regardless of genre and take influence from a wide range of genres. When we first started IDestroy, I'd say our main vibe was riot grrrl. Bands like Bikini Kill, Sleater-Kinney, X-Ray Spex and The Gossip had a massive impact on me.

Your debut album, 'We Are Girls', was released on 12th February. Could you tell us a bit about the writing and recording process of the album and have you been pleased with the reaction to it so far?

Nic: We recorded in Jenn's studio in Bristol with her husband Jay engineering for us. It was amazing because there was no pressure of recording in a certain timeframe with studio fees piling up - we could take our time and I loved that more relaxed vibe. Having said that, once Bec had written the tracks and we had jammed them out in rehearsals, we had them all recorded in pretty much two to three weeks. The response has been amazing! Better than any of us actually anticipated. It makes it all worth it seeing how happy people have been receiving the album!

Bec: This whole experience for me has been so positive and the incredible response has completely kickstarted me into writing album number two.

'We Are Girls' was preceded by the single 'Petting Zoo', which highlights some quite serious issues you have incurred as an all-female band. Were there any particular incidents that inspired 'Petting Zoo' and what advice would you offer to other

women either already in the music industry or wanting to make or perform music in a professional capacity?

Jenn: In addition to Bec's experiences which fuelled the lyrics of 'Petting Zoo', things like this have happened to so many people and I think almost everyone will have a similar story. It's not taken seriously and will get shrugged off most of the time which is disgusting actually as everyone deserves to be able to live their life without being sexually assaulted. There really is no excuse. The song is not just specifically about our experiences being part of this band. I know lots of men who have also been touched without their consent or been in really uncomfortable situations which have then just been laughed off, however it is interesting that people assume this song is just about women! Advice to women in the industry or wanting to perform in a professional capacity would be that there will always be assholes that will view you as a sexualised object first and an instrumentalist second, so just be prepared for that and make sure you report any behaviours that are unacceptable. In my experience, people will also either have zero expectations and come out with phrases like, 'I didn't expect you to be so good' or have insanely high expectations as they feel like because you are a woman, you need to prove yourself and that you don't deserve to be on-stage so they will quiz and interrogate you so they can try put you down or undermine you. I haven't seen this happen with male bands we tour with.

Prior to this, you released two acclaimed EPs, 2016's 'Vanity Loves Me' and 2018's 'Pure Joy of Life'. Now that you have completed and released your debut album, looking back at your various releases, how do you feel the band's sound has evolved over the six years you have been together?

Bec: I'd say we have finally captured a sound that represents the energy of our live shows. The production on 'We Are Girls' is smashy and loud, just like an

IDestroy show! This is something perhaps previous releases were somewhat missing.

You have achieved so much as a band since your formation, including releasing the two EPs we just mentioned, various singles and now an album, playing over 300 gigs across the UK, Europe and Asia, including selling out shows in South Korea and undertaking multiple tours in Germany. What would you consider to be your proudest moment as a band so far?

Jenn: There have been a lot of moments that we have been proud of. It's hard to choose just one! However, we have recently been played on BBC Radio One which has been a goal of ours for a really long time. In terms of touring, a really proud moment for me is returning to any city that we have previously played and for people to remember us and bring their friends along. We have built up a really good community and I love returning to venues and see people just as enthusiastic the second time they see us!

Nic: Basically what Jenn said!

Bec: When we went to South Korea. In the days leading up to the show, we were literally handing out promotional flyers out all around Seoul. The gig was absolutely rammed and I remember thinking afterwards, 'Wow, we are literally on the other side of the planet, connecting with all these wonderful people through our music.' I made some memories in Seoul that I'll never forget.

With the pandemic, how has the last year been for IDestroy been without the ability to perform live, especially not being able to promote your album in that setting and how have you all been coping without being out on the road being part of your lives?

Jenn: It has been a mixture really, the lockdown meant that we could really focus on the album as we have a habit of getting carried away with touring all the time. But we did miss out on some really good gigs and tours last year and it was difficult getting my hopes up and then seeing everything either cancelled or postponed. Luckily, the response to our album has still been fantastic and we have had so much support from our fans online.

Nic: Before the pandemic hit, I remember we had a string of really

good packed out shows with such a great response from everyone - it felt so exciting and it was heartbreaking having to cancel the whole year we had lined-up. Without gigging, we still kept busy doing things for the album and recording a lockdown sessions record. Personally, I also channelled all of my pent-up stage energy into weightlifting, so it's been nice to find a new thing that I like doing ... and getting stronger! But I am soooo ready to get back out there and gig again!

When you can finally get back to gigging, for anybody who is still to witness IDestroy live, what can they expect from one of your shows?

Jenn: People can expect a really energetic live show with lots of audience interaction and dancing. We always put so much energy into our live shows, whether we are performing to 50 or 5,000 people. All three of us have had plenty of on-stage injuries due to us rocking out so hard so I think we can get carried away sometimes.

Nic: BRING EARPLUGS!

Bec: Honestly, when we get back playing live it's going to be nuts! Absolute chaos!

Finally, nobody is really sure when everything will revert back to some sort of normality, but have you made any plans for what you would like to do in the future?

Nic: I feel positive for the future, even with the uncertainty going on. We are going to gig again eventually and when we do, I will appreciate it more than ever! I think the plan for us is to just keep touring around like we always have, everywhere we possibly can, keep spreading the IDestroy joy and of course release album number two!

Bec: Lots more touring and release album number two!

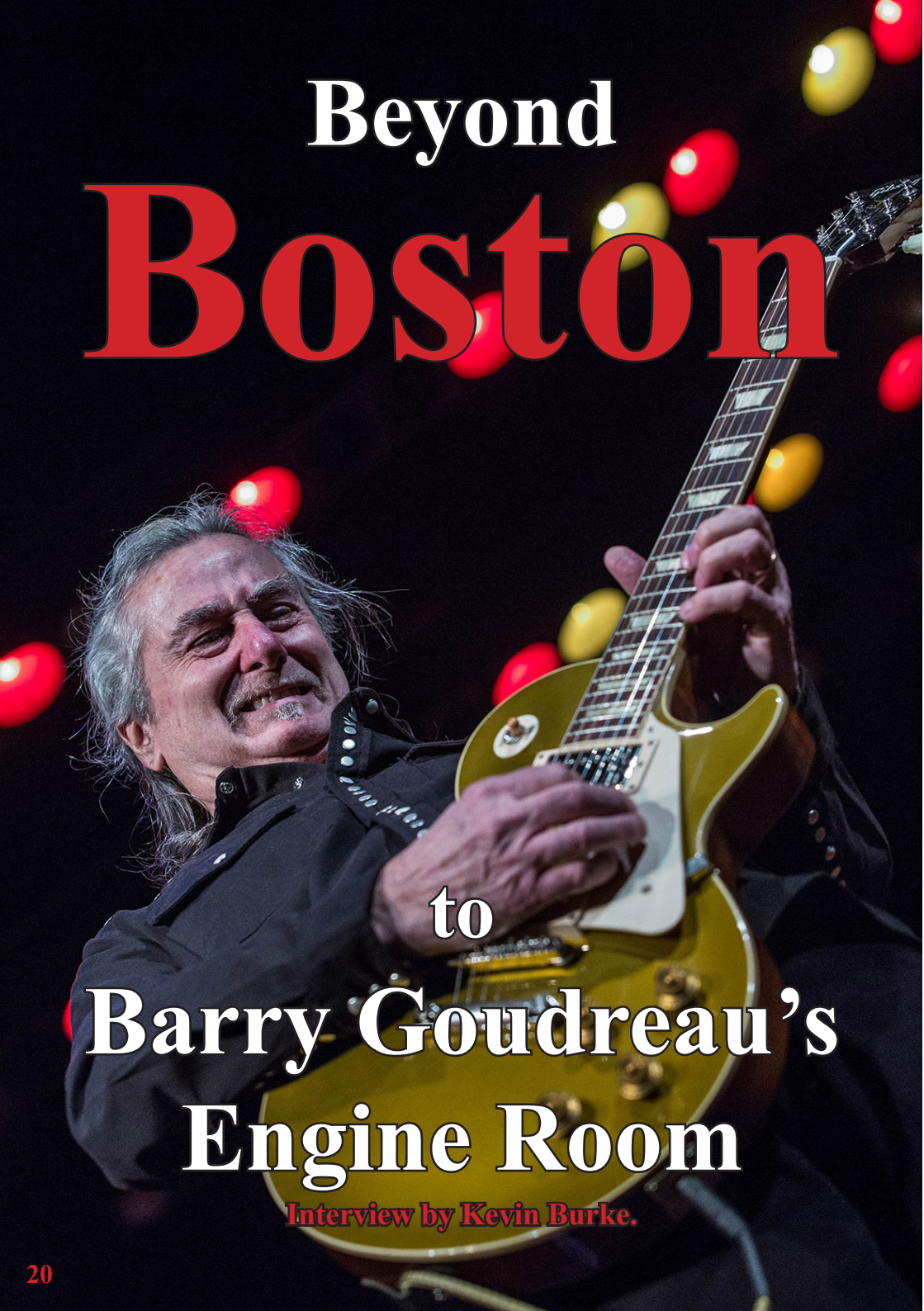
Thank you for a wonderful interview. We wish you all the best with 'We Are Girls' and for the future.

'We Are Girls'
is available now
via CD Baby.

idestroyband.co.uk

www.facebook.com/
Idestroyband

Beyond Boston



to Barry Goudreau's Engine Room

Interview by Kevin Burke.

"... we were just trying to get people to pay attention."

On 25th August 1976, Boston released one of the biggest selling debut albums of all time. Forty-five years on, both the self-titled album and rock radio staple hits such as 'More Than a Feeling' and 'Long Time' blast across the airwaves. Love or hate them, the sound of Boston is one which will not disappear into the ether like so many since. Indeed, they followed that stratospheric debut with the sophomore 'Don't Look Back' in 1978. Again, the album received acclaim, hitting the number one album spot in the US and Canadian charts, though it signalled a change, as principal songwriter / producer Tom Scholz felt aggrieved at the hastened release and so ensued a legal battle with the then record company Epic. It would be 1986, another eight years, before a follow-up Boston album, 'Third Stage', would surface.

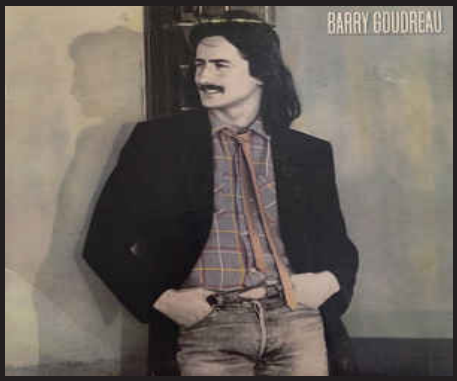
That Boston hiatus prompted a solo career for guitarist Barry Goudreau, and a variety of projects followed. Along with fellow Boston lead vocalist Brad Delp, Barry crafted a stunning eponymous debut album released in 1980. Whilst the call back to Boston was not forthcoming, the guitarist continued on projects throughout the eighties including the one-off 'Orion the Hunter' (1984) and towards the close of that decade, Barry alongside Brad formed Return to Zero. As the noughties dawned, the first collaboration proper by both musicians arrived in the album 'Delp and Goudreau' (2003). Following the tragic passing of Brad Delp in March 2007, Barry kept his mission statement alive. After the live dynamo of Ernie & The Automatic, the guitarist formed a new band, Barry Goudreau's Engine Room. With one release under the outfit's belt, 'Full Steam Ahead' (2017), the Engine Room are on the verge of releasing their follow-up album 'The Road'. On this album, Barry returns to his Classic Rock roots mixed with searing solos and chugging riffs. As January rumbled to a close, I caught up with Barry to discuss the new album, and a little about Boston.

After an initial conversation about the weather, the relaxed manner of Barry began to shine. He speaks in his distinguished, Boston accent, and we began to speak about the Engine Room and the combination of Blues and Classic Rock: **"The first Engine Room record was pretty much a straight Blues record, this new one is more towards Classic Rock than the first. The title cut is pretty bluesy though. There's the three girls singing**

backups and that kind of gives it that gospel kind of quality." Following this, he talked about how his influences have shone through, and the shift from 'Full Steam Ahead': **"The first record I was kind of looking back at my Blues roots and playing lead guitar. This time I'm looking back at my Classic Rock past, and what I was listening to before Boston took of in the early seventies. I think if you like seventies Classic Rock you will love this new record."**

Turning back the clock forty-five years, I asked the guitarist about his first foray into music with Boston, and his feelings on that debut album: **"Well, on one hand it seems like a very long time where on the other hand, it doesn't seem like it's that far of at all. The music is still pretty vital. I turn on my car radio and there are Boston songs there, and people contacting me over the internet and someone is discovering it for the first time. So it's got a little bit of both."** Barry reflected on his own family and their knowledge of his past accomplishments: **"I was just thinking only earlier I have children who are both adults now and they have their own children, and they never actually saw me play with Boston, they've seen me play with the other acts since. For them, Boston is something on the internet, or on TV. So yeah, it's kind of both ways, it's a long time ago, but it all still seems fresh somehow."**

Barry began with what would become Boston in 1969. Seven-years before the debut album would land, and through the genesis outfit, Mother's Milk, they slogged away to get both the record company and fan interest: **"... we were just trying to get people to pay attention. It was a struggle early on definitely, but I gotta hand it to Tom [Scholz], he really did some fantastic writing and the production on that [album]. The rest is history."** Though his own achievements as a songwriter came front and centre with the release of his own solo album in 1980. This release contained songs which he had originally approached Tom Sholz with:



"I mean, looking back with 20/20 hindsight, I'm not sure I would have handled it the same but I'm proud of what I've put out over the years. The 'Orion the Hunter' album was well received, and we had a couple of songs on the radio with RTZ with Brad. I thought that was a very good record, unfortunately the timing wasn't good with the Grunge Rock and Nirvana coming out kind of took the wind out of our sails so to speak. Looking back I think that's one of my best works."

'Orion the Hunter', both the project and sole album, is still regarded as a work of brilliance. Similar to his solo album, Brad Delp played a major part in it: **"He was there for part of the writing, he was in the background, we wanted to keep him out of the spotlight ... he was still with Boston on that one, and at that time we didn't want it to seem like we were competing."** Brad was the thread running through the career of Barry Goudreau. Not just a collaborator, but a friend: **"Brad and I go back to high school days, I met him when I was probably 15/16 years old and the first time I heard him sing I said 'That's somebody I want to work with.'"** The final track the duo released together was the 2006 radio hit 'Rockin' away': **"With 'Rockin' Away', at that time me and Tom were back in touch, and it was an effort to reach out to him to sort of ... smooth things over. But unfortunately, it didn't work out that way."**

Now with Engine Room, the question arose as to the expectations on the outfit to revisit Barry's earlier work: **"We play a handful of Boston songs, I don't want people to come out and see the show and go, 'Man, that would've been really great if they just played some Boston songs'. We do a handful of Boston songs, and songs from the 'Orion the Hunter' and the RTZ period as well. Obviously, we want to concentrate on the new material, but we don't want people to go away disappointed."** With that, I asked whether a following was developing for the Engine Room? **"Playing here, we have a good**

following and we play regularly. At this point, most of my band members all have families and kids and some of them are in regular jobs. We can't really jump on a bus for months, so what we do is regional at this point. But yeah, we've got a good following and people really like us, and like what we're doing."

As 2020 brought with it a pandemic, most artists are having to stretch to acquaint themselves with a new friend, technology: **"We had most of the recording done before the virus showed up, fortunately most of the recording was done, we didn't have any of the mixing and that sort of thing done. So the remainder of the recording we ended up doing remotely, you know. I have a small studio here in my house and I'd record some of my parts and email them out and some of the other players did the same. So we were able to finish it through the whole COVID thing. It's been a long time in the making but honestly, I'm happy that we took the time because I think it really made a difference. I'm really proud of this. I think people are really gonna like it."** Of course the subject of touring this release, and pushing forward with the Engine Room is inevitable: **"I'd like to, yeah. I mean at this point everything is so much up in the air. Some acts are booking shows for the Fall [Autumn], whether those will happen at this point is still up in the air. So we don't want to hold of putting the record out any longer, we're going to go ahead and do that. But as far as the live thing, I'm really not sure where it's going to go at this point."**

With a guitarist who has had such an astonishing career, stepping into the limelight and heaving stadiums from out of nowhere, there is an expectation of pressure now and with every release. On the other hand, Barry takes it in his stride: **"No, there was absolutely no pressure. That was the great thing about it, we took our time about it ... I wasn't looking to write hit songs, or hit a certain demographic, I was just doing the kind of stuff I love to do, and it all seemed to work out."** But the sound of 'The Road', and indeed the previous 'Full Steam Ahead' hark back to the late sixties and early seventies; perhaps a sound such as Cream: **"You kind of hit the nail on the head. When I was in high school, I had a friend who was really into the blues, and one of the first records I played along to was the Paul**

Butterfield Blues Band, I really loved that Chicago blues, and then when the English bands came over, like Cream and the other bands playing the Blues, and they kicked it up with big drums and big amps. I found it all really, really exciting. I saw Cream here in Boston. Eric Clapton was playing a red SG [Gibson] played through Marshall stacks. I loved that playing and I gotta have an SG and the stacks [laughs]. That's the reason why I play an SG to this day. I just loved that whole period - the late sixties and early seventies."

Continuing, Barry spoke about how he felt the Boston debut would be received, relaying his personal experiences of a classic: **"Well, we had hoped we would be able to sell a hundred-thousand records, because that was the point where the record company will allow us to do another record and we might actually have a musical career. So when it took off the way it did, we sold a million records in the first month, it took us totally by surprise. Of course we were scrambling trying to put together the live band to go out and promote it. Because at that point, we had only done a handful of shows. So we were so busy with all that we couldn't really focus on the success. So we would hear back [laughing], 'You sold a million copies this week'. It was like 'Oh my God, we sold a million records in the city of Los Angeles!' We had hoped we could sell a hundred-thousand and have a career and it took of like we could never have imagined."** Having a record comparable to the bands he idolized, I did wonder what the expectations were when Boston did tour? **"There was a tremendous amount of pressure to deliver on it. People listening to it thought 'There's no way they are going to go out and perform that record, they can't do it!' That on top of the fact we didn't really play it out that much, we didn't have any of the equipment, we didn't have any of the people in place to do the shows ... there was a tremendous amount of pressure. But, it all worked out pretty well [laughs]."** It certainly did.

For more information on Barry Goudreau's Engine Room and indeed news of that forthcoming album:

www.barrygoudreau.com

www.facebook.com/mjcica2017

Stage Frite

Nuts in Norfolk!

Interview by Alice Jones-Rodgers.

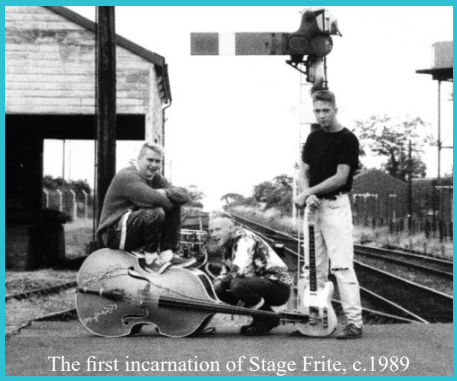
Back in 1988, drummer and backing vocalist Steve De'Ath, vocalist and double bassist Clive Perchard and guitarist Dave Rounce formed a short-lived Rockabilly-come-Psychobilly band called Stage Frite. They wouldn't last long (until 1991 in fact), but in that time, managed to sign to Link Records, get their music heard on the 1989 Link compilation album 'Kats Keep Rockin", play up and down the country in support of bands such as The Griswalds, Skitzo and The Frantic Flintstones and release a lost classic debut album in the form of 1989's 'Island of Lost Souls'.

The three-piece called it a day whilst in the midst of making their second album. Many years passed, with all the members going on to undertake other musical projects, until 2015 when De'Ath and Perchard decided to put the band back together. Rounce declined to re-join and new guitarist and backing vocalist Joe Mason was drafted in. Re-fired with enthusiasm to make new music and take their unique brand of what they term "swanabilly" (more about that later!) to an even wider audience, the band came to the attention of Alan Wilson, who signed them to his label, Western Star Records. They have gone on to release three brand new full length albums for Western Star, 2017's 'Scarier Than Swans', 2019's 'Swanabilly Kink' and the latest, 'Revenge of the Killer Coypu', which sprang out of the Norfolk swamps at the end of January.

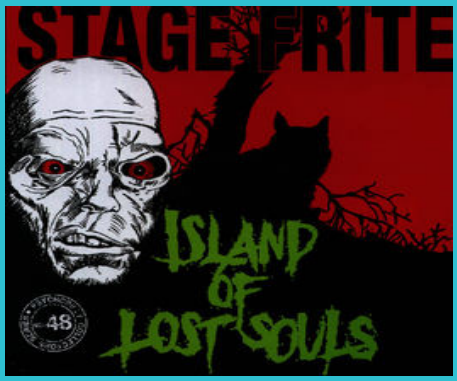
We recently caught up with De'Ath to conduct the following interview, in which we learnt more about what makes the band that Wilson affectionately calls "those Norfolk nutters" tick; their brand new and finest album to date and exactly why swans have played such an important role in the career so far.

Firstly, hello Steve and thank you for agreeing to our interview, it is lovely to speak to you. Could we start by asking where, when and how Stage Frite came together and could you introduce us to your members?

Hi Alice, thanks for giving us the opportunity to speak to you and your readers and hopefully give them an insight into what goes on with us out in the swamps of Norfolk! Stage Frite was put together in the late '80s with current members Clive on bass and vocals and myself, Steve on drums. The guitarist was Dave Rounce. Clive and me had been mates for a while and knew Dave from the Rockabilly / Psychobilly scene around Norwich. We had all been in various bands, which had never amounted to much, so decided to get together and see what happened. We had a good couple years playing various gigs around the country, leading to a record deal with Link Records, but called it a day not long after that. Me and Clive stayed



The first incarnation of Stage Frite, c.1989



good friends and, after both playing in different bands over the years, decided to get back together in 2015. Dave wasn't keen, so we needed a guitarist and who better to get in than 'Boy Joe' [Joe Mason], a Heavy Metal freak looking for something different.

So, having formed in 1988 as a Rockabilly band, you shortly afterwards pursued a more agressive Psychobilly sound and your debut album 'Island of Lost Souls' was released the following year. What are your memories of recording 'Island of Lost Souls' and how does the band that made that album compare to the band we know today?

The 'Island of Lost Souls' album came about as a result of playing a few gigs with Psychobilly legends The Frantic Flintstones, who's frontman Chuck Harvey was also a big part of the Rockabilly / Psychobilly side of Link Records. It was recorded over three very drunk and hazy days to be honest and how any of it was recordable is a mystery to me to this day. However, it seemed to go down well and in fact a copy of it was on eBay a while back for over £1,000 pounds! [laughs]. I don't think it sold! As musicians we were all very raw back then and I would hope we have improved somewhat, but the biggest difference would be in the sound and style of the music. Dave was very much a Rockabilly guitarist so still had that rockin' sound, whereas Joe's Metal background gives us a much more aggressive edge.

We just mentioned the Rockabilly and Psychobilly genres, but you term your music "Swanabilly". Would you care to enlighten us?

[Laughs] Yes, only Stage Frite are pure Swanabilly! As you've probably guessed, we don't take ourselves too seriously and living around the Norfolk Broads, we are surround by the bloody things [swans]. Clive lives on a boat which is regularly attacked by them and the title of our first release on Western Star, 'Scarier Than Swans' came as a result of an incident involving said birds, a canoeing Punk rocker and some


Steve De'Ath


Clive Perchard

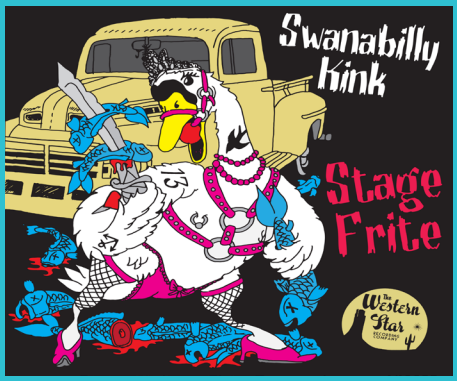
holiday makers! Because of the different influences in our music, it was hard to put us into one genre, so we thought we would invent our own. It started as a bit of fun and seems to have well and truly stuck.

You split in 1991, whilst in the process of making your second album. What exactly happened and when and how did you eventually come to reform?

At the time, I think we would all agree it had run its course. Our musical tastes had changed and just all wanted to go different ways, which we did. Dave carried on playing in Rockabilly bands, as did Clive, as well as Psychobilly and skiffle too. I played in a couple of Punk outfits, but as I said earlier, Clive and me always stayed good friends and decided to get back together in 2015 just to play some music and see what would happen. We asked Dave, who came to a practice but it wasn't for him anymore, so I asked Joe if he fancied it and after just one practice, he was hooked.

Since your reformation, you have released three albums on Alan Wilson's Western Star Records, your latest (following 2017's 'Scarier Than Swans' and 2019's 'Swanabilly Kink') being probably your finest to date, 'Revenge of the Killer Coypu'. Before we talk more about the new album, when and how did you come to start working and releasing with Alan and Western Star Records and how has the experience been so far?

We had made a demo tape in this recording studio in Norwich; it was an old nuclear bunker and was awesome. We sent it to a few people just to see if there was any interest. A good friend of ours, Neil Savory who sadly is no longer with us, R.I.P., sent it to Alan and it went from there. Clive had already recorded with him, playing in a couple of rockabilly bands, so that was a bit of an icebreaker and so in the spring of 2017, we headed off to make the long trip west and haven't looked back. We really can't speak highly enough about Alan, he is such a fantastic man to work with. His



knowledge of the industry is second to none. Over the years, I'd like to think we have become good friends and when we go down to record, it's a week of non-stop fun and laughter as well as getting an album out we are all proud of. Anyone who has worked with him, I'm sure would say the same and we feel very privileged to be part of the Western Star family.

Could you tell us a bit about the writing and recording process of 'Revenge of the Killer Coypu' and how did you come by the album's title?

The title is a bit of a play on words from a compilation album back on the late 80's. There were a series of these ,the first called 'Blood on the Cats' and the follow up was 'Revenge of the Killer Pussies'. The whole cover, title and artwork is a light hearted, tongue in cheek tribute to that. As for the writing of it, that didn't come without its complications due to the COVID crisis. Luckily, we had half of it pretty much sorted by the February and as we weren't recording until September, we were a long way ahead, for us. Then in the middle of March, the lockdown kicked in, so any chance of practicing or even getting together to sort things went out the window. The second half of the album was therefore a combination of various social media videos between us and around three or four practices before we actually recorded it. Once we are there with Alan, it always just seems to come together. We each do our bits and take on board any suggestions each of us might have and then leave it with him to work his magic, mixing, mastering and adding bits we've asked, like piano, lap steel and special effects.

How do you feel that 'Revenge of the Killer Coypu' compares to your previous albums?

I think all of us would agree that this is our best work yet. Each time we have recorded with Alan we seem to have grown in confidence and improved, not only individually but as a band, with different things we might try now as

opposed to perhaps a more safer option in the past. The songs on this album seem much fuller with more going on and have just improved, as I guess we have as musicians.

Talking of titles, how did the band come by its name? You don't particularly strike us as the sort of band who would be shy on stage ... or are you?

[Laughs] No, I don't think we could ever be accused of that! For Clive and Joe, it's any excuse to dress up, usually in something they have nicked off their respective other halves. I'm the more reserved grown-up one at the back, although its probably more to do with the fact I cant fit into my wife's clothes! [laughs]. I wish I had some really bizarre and fascinating story behind the name, but the truth is I really don't know, as I remember we had tossed around a few ideas but couldn't agree on anything, then Clive just suggested it and it was like 'Yeah, that will do for now'. Then we started to play a few gigs and as that's what people knew us as and it stuck!

How have you been coping as a band during the pandemic without the ability to get out on the road to promote your new music in a live setting and did you get chance to play any of tracks from 'Revenge of the Killer Coypu' on stage?

It has been hard, like it has for everyone I guess. It would obviously be great to be out playing the new album live to people, but we just feel so lucky to have got it recorded. We booked the slot with Alan around a year in advance and were so fortunate that when the time came we were allowed to do it; just a few weeks either side and it would not have happened. We know several bands who wern't so lucky and had to cancel and for one band on two occasions. We were lucky enough to play one of the very last gigs before the first lockdown, a Psychobilly festival called Bedlam [Breakout], which is held in Northampton and is absolutely brilliant. It starts Friday night and goes on until late Sunday and Psychobillies


Joe Mason

from all around the world descend on the place for a weekend of madness. It was a chance to play a few of the new songs and they seemed to go down really well. The early feedback from the album has been superb, so that's softened the blow of not playing gigs.

Finally, although we are guessing it might be a little difficult to say under present circumstances, what can we expect from you in the future?

Well, we certainly won't let the grass grow under our feet. Clive and me are no spring chickens, so we only have so much time before they put us in a home! [laughs]. We definitely have another project we will soon start working on and when we can eventually start playing gigs again, we will be back out there doing what we enjoy most. I'd just like to thank everyone who has come to see us, bought CDs and merchandise and supported us in any way. We love doing what we do and when we see others enjoying it, it makes it even more enjoyable.

'Revenge of the Killer Coypu'
is out now on
Western Star Records.

www.western-star.co.uk

www.facebook.com/
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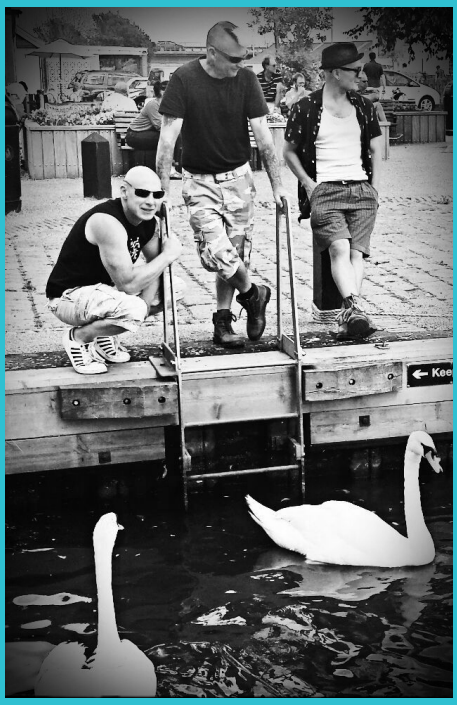
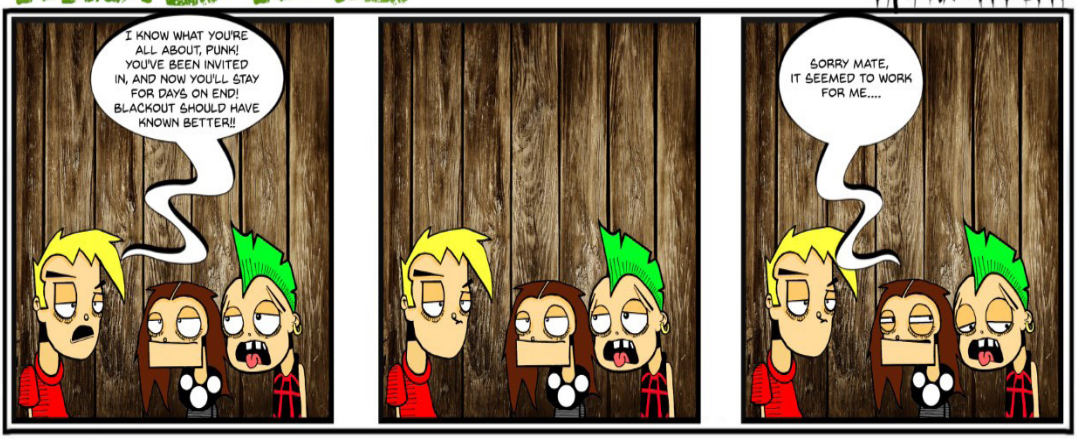


WASTED WORLD

by Dan Webster



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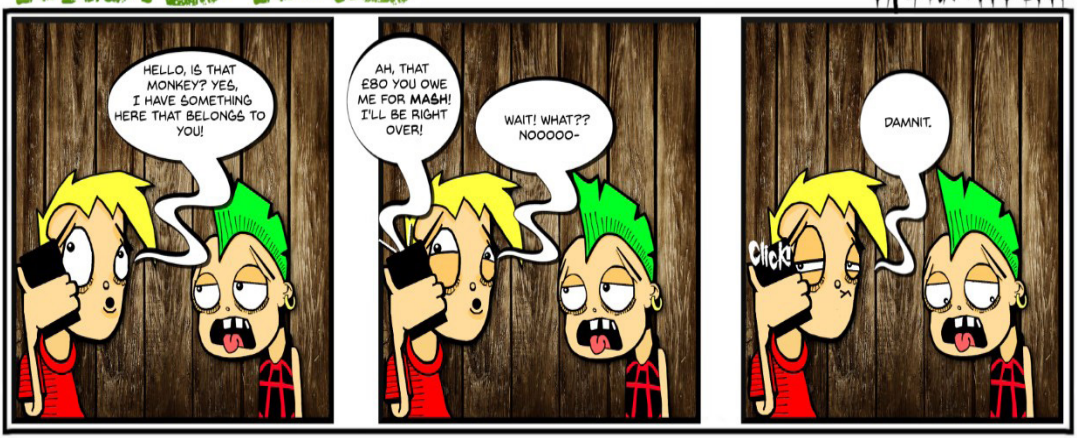

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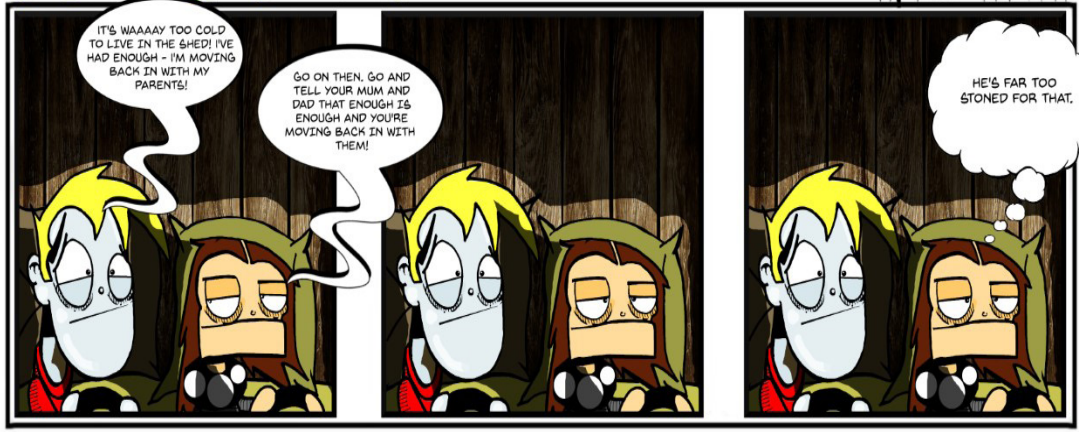
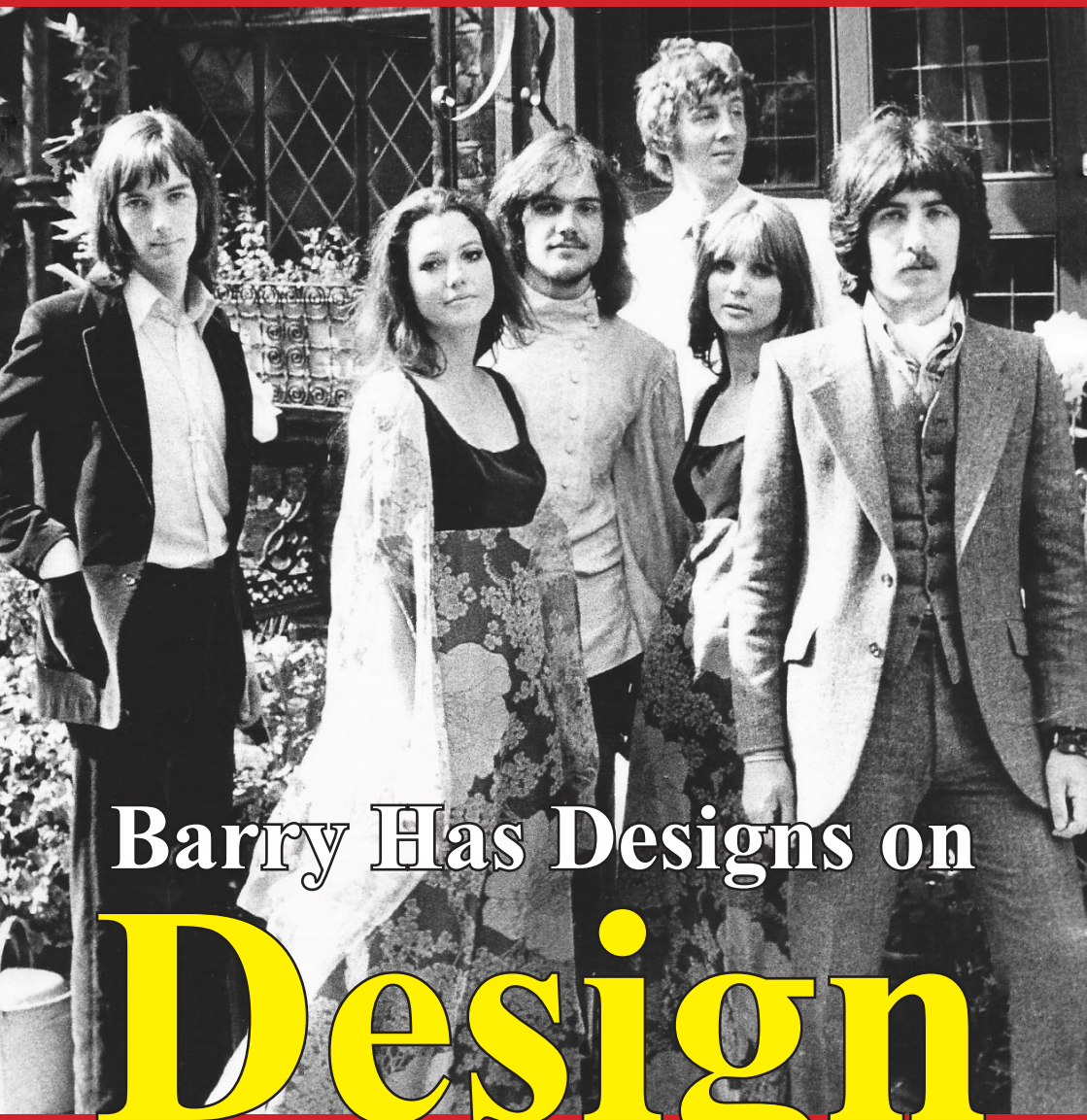




Barry Has Designs on Design

Interview by Martin Hutchinson.

Design is another of those bands that I missed first time around, although as a fan of 'Morecambe and Wise' and 'The Golden Shot', I would have seen them on TV.

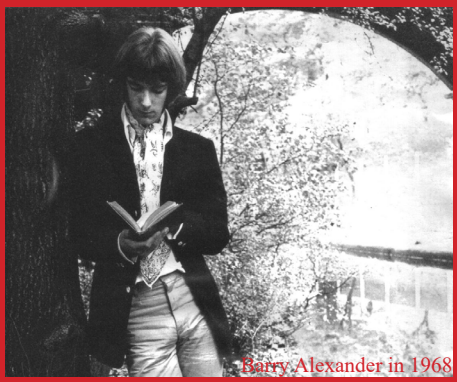
They were a six-piece vocal group that was formed in December 1968, and despite five albums, thirteen singles and numerous TV appearances, chart and commercial success eluded them and they split up in 1976. The group had an easy listening vibe with a hint of folk and psychedelia (imagine the cast of 'Hair' reduced to a sextet).

Started by songwriter Tony Smith, he set about recruiting like-minded musicians, one of them being an experienced songwriter who had worked at both Decca and Apple. Barry Johnston, whose father was the cricket commentator Brian Johnston, wrote using the name Barry Alexander, as when he joined Equity in 1970, there was already a Barry Johnston on their books; and it is he who is keeping the band's flame alive. He acquired the band's back catalogue and over the last ten years has released almost all the albums recorded by the band.

"Yes, I was at Decca for seven months", Barry tells me from his home in Chichester. **"Then I was signed to Apple Publishing by their talent scout Mike Berry and I recorded demos in Baker Street, above the Apple shop."** He continues, **"After about six months, The Beatles realised it was a complete shambles. I turned up at the offices one day and everyone had left. By this time, I'd met Tony Smith and when he invited me to join Design, I agreed."**

The band's line-up was then Tony Smith and Barry on guitar and vocals, with the four other singers, Gabrielle Field, Kathy Manuell, John Mulcahy-Morgan and Geoff Ramseyer. Apparently, none of the songs demoed by Barry were released at the time, but one of them, 'The Minstrel's Theme', ended up on Design's 1971 self-titled debut album: **"Apple never paid me for the songs I'd done for them and they let me have them back."**

Barry then relates what the idea of Design was all about: **"The original concept behind Design was that we would be an acoustic vocal group with six voices and two guitars, Tony and me. Tony and I were songwriters with a folk music background: he was influenced by Paul Simon and John Martyn, I liked Donovan and Tim Hardin. Kathy and Gabrielle had classically trained soprano voices, and John and Geoff had played together in a semi-pro rock band called Free Expression. The idea was to combine all three musical backgrounds to create a new sounding British harmony group. We were inspired by American groups such as The Mamas and the Papas and The 5th Dimension, but also by the French vocal group The Swingle**



Barry Alexander in 1968

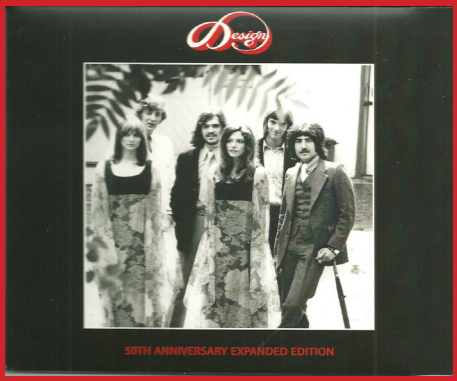
Design in 1970

Singers. So some of the songs on the first album are pop, some are folk, and others are like song cycles, with different parts and movements." For the first album, which has just been reissued in an expanded edition to celebrate its 50th anniversary, the band had a different way of recording, as Barry explains: **"We learned and arranged all the songs on the first album with just Tony on his 12-string guitar. He used to speed up and slow down at times, but we just followed him. When we came to record the songs with studio musicians, they didn't sound the same. Therefore, we recorded the whole of the album with Tony on his guitar and our vocals first, then added all the other musicians later. Not easy to do! After Tony left the group, we recorded in the normal way with the musicians first and it made things a lot simpler."**

And they had some of the best session musicians around playing on the songs. **"That's right"**, agrees Barry. **"We had the likes of Clem Cattini [The Tornados] on drums and Chris Spedding [best known for the 1975 single 'Motor Bikin', being a Womble and producing the Sex Pistols' first demos in May 1976] on guitar. We also used Vic Flick, who played the iconic guitar on the original James Bond theme, and on bass, the legendary Herbie Flowers of Blue Mink."**

Sadly though, the band's first album sank without trace and Barry thinks he might know the reason why: **"We started recording the album in April 1969, but it was not released in the UK until March 1971. By then, some of the tracks were nearly two years old and the music scene had changed. What had sounded current in 1969 was now out of date. If it had been released a year earlier, the album might have made more of an impact. Fifty years later, people simply hear the music for what it is, a unique style of vocal harmony. There was no other group like us."**

However, reviews were good, with the



album being hailed as "the Holy Grail of soft rock", featuring "intricate harmonies with a psychedelic twist". Epic Records, who had signed the band, released 'Willow Stream' as a single in both the UK and US and 'Coloured Mile' as a follow up in the US, but neither was a hit.

Despite the fact that sales of the albums and singles did not set the charts on fire, the band's 'family-friendly' image with four handsome men and a couple of gorgeous girls ensured that they were in demand for television appearances. Over the course of their career, they could regularly be seen performing on shows starring Tommy Cooper, Benny Hill, The Two Ronnies and Morecambe and Wise and they performed their 1970 single 'Willow Stream' on the ITV game show 'The Golden Shot'. However, all was not well with Tony Smith.

"Tony was feeling the pressure of being the main singer, songwriter, guitarist and arranger, and he was drinking too much", relates Barry.

"He passed out in the van on our way back to London after doing 'The Golden Shot' and he was admitted to hospital next day, where it was discovered that he had a stomach ulcer and a hernia. He was seriously ill for a while, and then we had a three-week tour of Germany and he went downhill after that. In the end, in November 1970, he had to leave the band."

With the first album due out, the band recruited guitarist Jeff Matthews to take Tony's place. **"Tony leaving was a massive blow to the group"**, admits Barry. **"Design was his group, he was in complete charge of everything, but he really wanted to be more of a backroom man. When we brought Jeff in, we rearranged the songs without Tony and they still sounded great. We had actually already started the second album, so we all stepped up to the plate. We divided everything that Tony had done between us and we were able to carry on."**

On Morecambe and Wise, 1971

Then there was the first of the 'Morecambe and Wise' shows. **"It was great"**, Barry smiles. **"After appearing on the show, the phone never stopped ringing."** And Barry has a special memory of Eric Morecambe: **"There was a great contrast between him and Ernie; Eric was exactly how you'd expect him, making people cheerful, but Ernie was a little more aloof. I remember just before we went on for our first appearance, Eric could see that I was nervous. He put his arm around me and said, 'It will be all right, sunshine' ... and it was!"**

Design appeared on the show another three times and did live shows with them too. This opened the door to more appearances and Barry has some great memories: **"We loved working with Val Doonican, he was so friendly and made us feel so welcome, and he was really interested in our music - he was an excellent musician. And I've never laughed so much as when we did 'The Tommy Cooper Show'. Tommy came up to me and said, 'My wife thinks you're really good [pause], she must be mad!' I could never tell if he was having me on or not."**

Design also opened for The Hollies and Gilbert O'Sullivan on tour: **"Yes, we opened for Gilbert on his first tour. He was high up in the charts and we opened the tour in Dublin. It was the only time on stage where we were screamed at. It was a fantastic tour."**

After the second album, entitled 'Tomorrow is So Far Away' in October 1971, Design signed to EMI, releasing the album 'Day of the Fox' on Regal Zonophone in 1973, and 'In Flight' and 'By Design' on EMI in 1974 and 1976, respectively. Although again well reviewed, none of them sold well. **"EMI wanted us to release 'poppy' singles, but we thought of ourselves as an album act"**, Barry Tells me. **"There was pressure on us from them to write and record more mainstream pop material, although we always included one or two more quirky songs on each album. But at**

Design reunion, 2011

heart we were still that experimental, adventurous vocal group. Our big rivals were The New Seekers and a lot of the songs that we were sent had already been rejected by them and we didn't want to be packaged like that. We had to put that image across when we were on TV, but our albums were different, although as time went on we did become more mainstream. After six years, Geoff and Gabrielle wanted to go back to our folk roots, and they left the group in 1974. The other four - John, Kathy, Jeff and myself - carried on for two more years, but it was never the same and we split up in 1976. Basically, we'd lost our credibility, and after we left, we never looked back."

Barry went into management and ironically, managed Design's great rivals The New Seekers for a while: **"Yes, our paths crossed a lot on the cabaret circuit and Marty Kristian of the band contacted me and asked me to manage them. Funnily enough, they were going to have another go at Eurovision, where they'd come second in 1972. This was in 1979 but sadly it didn't happen. The UK entry that year was Black Lace [with the song 'Mary Ann'], who came seventh."**

Barry lived in the States for a while and went into radio and then production and is now a book editor. Gabrielle moved to Australia (via New Zealand), recorded with her husband and now runs a craft shop; Kathy is now in Malta, where she still records and produces and John lives in America and is an administrator with the SYDA Foundation. Geoff sadly passed away in 1975. Jeff, who had been a qualified Quantity Surveyor, returned to that profession, and still plays music in his spare time. Tony moved to France, and after a life-saving operation in 1985, he became a consultant to the government and big businesses on inter-cultural affairs. He took up music again after his wife died in 2009, and says, **"The music has been pouring out of me ever since."**

Just over a decade ago, Barry found

that there was still interest in Design: **"I was coming up to my 60th birthday and, as you do, I went online to see if there was anything out there about us and there was loads of stuff. There were even companies in the US and Russia selling CD's of our first two albums. I managed to buy the rights to the songs and up to now I've released the first four albums on RPM Records. They also released 'One Sunny Day', a CD of singles and rarities and Market Square released a 'best of' entitled 'Children of the Mist' in 2019."**

This brings us to this new reissue of the first album on Vacancy Records (VRCD003), which comes complete with a 16-page booklet featuring interviews and rare photographs. **"It has the complete first album along with a few outtakes and demos, one of which is a cover of Paul Simon's 'America', and five newer tracks from all of us"**, Barry says. **"You can tell from our solo recordings after leaving Design how different we were. I was writing soft rock ballads, while Gabrielle went back to folk rock, Kathy was into ethno/ambient music, John wrote his inspirational songs, and Tony continued to create his own personal style of folk music. The one thing I wanted to do was to get the albums out again as they had been unavailable for 40 years and to leave a legacy of Design's music. I am proud of what we achieved. We made some great music and we weren't like any other group."**

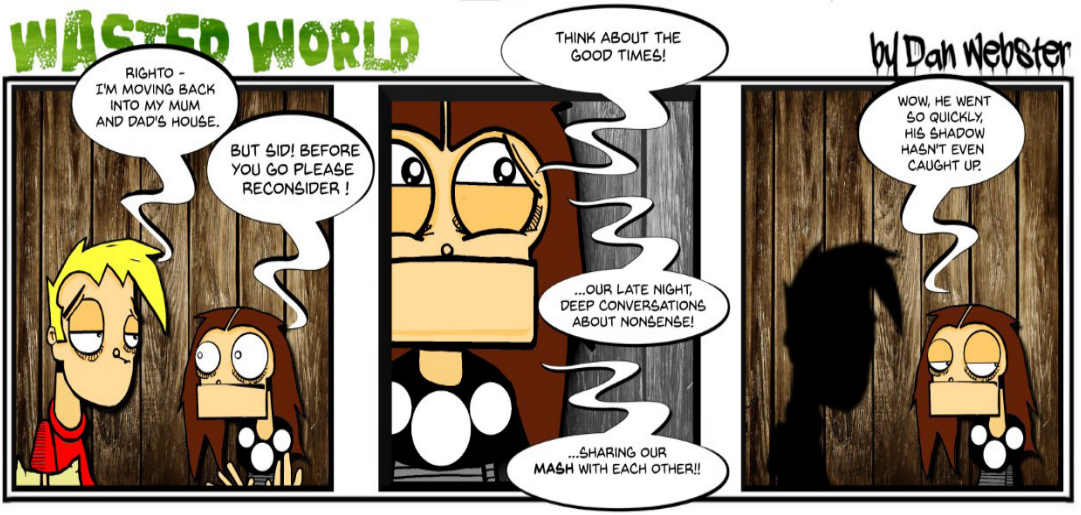
The 50th Anniversary Edition of Design's debut album is out now on Vacancy Records.

www.designvocalgroup.com

www.facebook.com/designvocalgroup

WASTED WORLD

by Dan Webster



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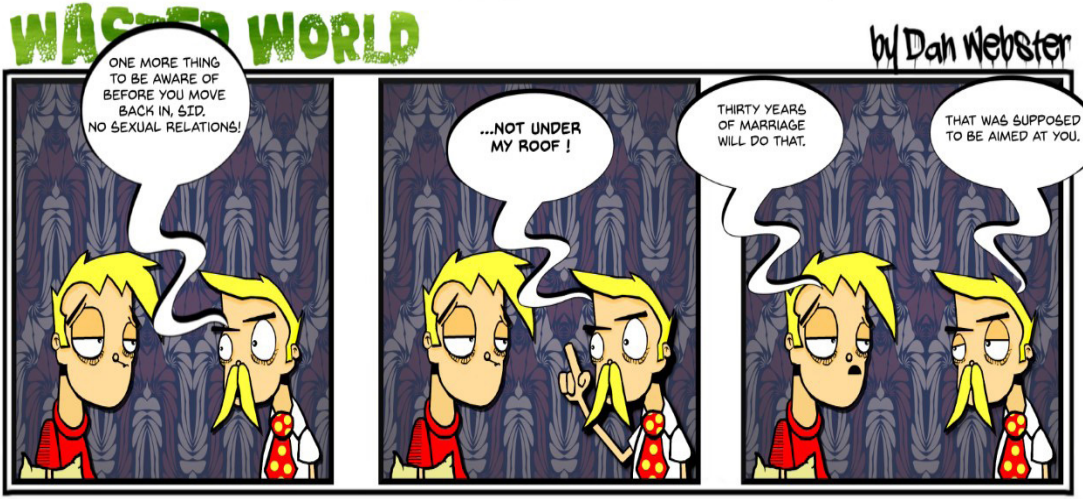

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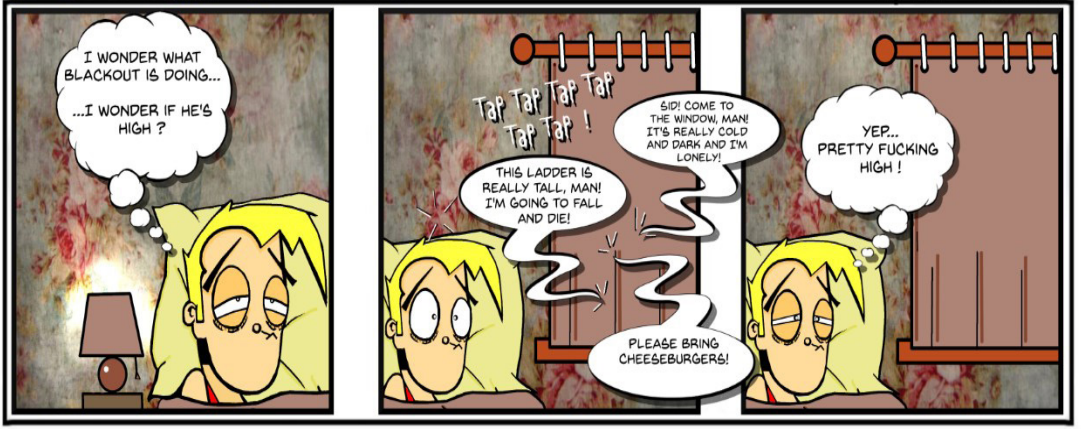


Hollerin' with Sugar Blue: The Harmonica Boogie Man!

Interview by Kevin Burke.

"If it weren't for the Blues, we'd still be waltzing!"

In 1978, Mick Jagger came upon a harmonica player on the streets of Paris. That busking Bluesman would go on to appear on the Rolling Stones album 'Some Girls', in particular the chart hit 'Miss You'. You knew his sound, before you knew his name. The harmonica player was Sugar Blue, who made such an impact with the Stones, enough to be brought back in for the follow-up 'Emotional Rescue' (1980) album, and also by way of that session 'Tattoo You' (1981). But that is not the beginning or the end of this extraordinary talent, it is only a side-story.

Born in Harlem, New York, James Joshua Whiting, aka Sugar Blue, began his career as a session musician with guitarist Johnny Shines. Though he also toured and recorded with Blues guitarist and singer Louisiana Red ('Red, Funk 'N Blue', 1978), his journey to Paris, or leap of faith that landed him on the creative path Stones came from the mouth of Blues legend Memphis Slim. As the man built his CV, he furthered his adventures in Paris with his debut album 'Crossroads', recorded and released in 1979. This album saw him collaborate and experiment further with the Jazz trombonist Mike Zwerin. After his 1982 release 'From Chicago to Paris', Sugar Blue joined a further legend, Willie Dixon and his Chicago Blues All Stars, going on to appear on the Grammy Winning 'Hidden Charms' album by Dixon.

Further adventures followed with more collaborations and indeed solo albums, including 'Blue Blazes' (1994) and 'In Your Eyes' (1995), right up to 2019's 'Colors'. On every release, his playing soars with a skill that can double the sound to appear like two soaring harps at once. Without doubt, he is a living legend, a one-of-a-kind, and a master of his craft. Sugar carries that raw blues scream into the 21st Century, inspiring on his journey. So, within the chaos of the first month of 2021, the ousted lunatic in charge of America, and a virus ripping into every aspect of our lives, I caught up with Sugar Blue to discuss his career. And he is everything I would expect, with an aura of eloquence which becomes addictive.

Starting with your views, is the Blues a way of life that symbolises the struggles and not just a statement of emotion?

'The Blues is truth.' - A quote from the

Sugar Blue with Mick Jagger

with Keith Richards, on tour with the Stones

Maestro and Poet Laureate of the Blues, Willie Dixon. The Blues is the musical heritage of Afro-American people, derived from African musical traditions combined with European language and instrumentation. The philosophical underpinnings of the Blues are torn from the deprivation, travails and fortitude of Black people in the face of the inhuman depredation and oppression of slavery. B.L.U.E.S. equals Black Life Under Egregious Suppression … which continues to this day in one form or another.

The Blues is and has always been a voice that speaks for those whom speech was denied or disdained. A palliative catharsis of spiritual and sensual power that gave succour through the expression of the indescribable suffering, hopes and desires of people under extreme cruelty and duress.

The Blues spoke, shouted and screamed in anger, defiance and, incredulously, joy ... Whips, chains, hatred, discrimination and trepidation cannot imprison the mind, spirit and will power of black people to survive and even thrive in the harshest of conditions.

Sugar continued:

From the Middle Passage to the plantations through to Jim Crow and the systemic racism of today that defiance, persistence and resistance gave birth to a creative musical energy that has brought to life what we know as modern music. This crucible of fire and pain that the people survive is also one of the reasons that The Blues has been so pervasive, because everyone of every ethnicity, old, young, rich and poor in the world has had to face the pain and strain of existence. Perhaps not as dire as Blues people but we all know and understand life's struggles emphatically, even babies get the Blues as Albert King described so eloquently! Jazz, spirituals, country, rock 'n' roll, Rap, R'n'B, Reggae, Soul, pop, Motown all owe their voice and their genesis to The Blues, even genres yet to be named! The Blues had a baby

and they called it a plethora of different names!

Your sound, and I guess influence is not strictly deep-rooted in the Blues. Did you soak up the sounds of Dylan, Hendrix and even the Beatles along your journey?

Allow me to quote my mentor, Willie Dixon once again: 'The Blues are the roots, the rest are the fruits.' Meaning that all of the modern music we listen to has it's roots in the Blues, which includes Dylan, Hendrix, the Beatles, Stones and on and on, add infinitum. That is to say that my roots are profoundly steeped in the Blues and always have been just as all of the artists that you mentioned previously. If it weren't for the Blues we'd still be waltzing!

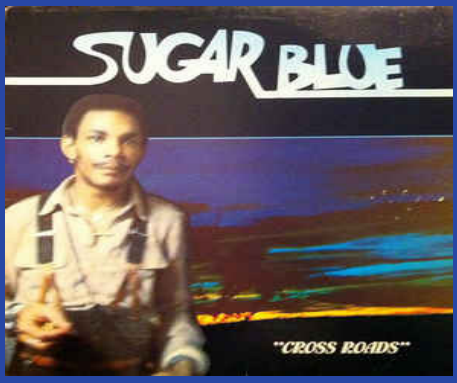
By all accounts it was Memphis Slim who advised you to travel to Paris in the late seventies. Did you find a vibe in Paris which revitalised and inspired your playing?

When Memphis Slim suggested I expatriate, it was some of the best advice I ever got and it opened doors, introducing me to some of the greatest musicians that ever lived - Dizzy Gillespie, Dexter Gordon, Papa Joe Jones, Frank Zappa, Stan Getz and so many wonderful artists! Indeed, it was an inspirational time and I will be forever grateful to Slim for taking the time to give a youngster some direction, he was exceedingly generous!

When you were brought in by the Stones to add that extra spark to the 'Some Girls' album, what direction did they give you if any in your contribution to the recording?

When I rolled into Pathé' Marconi studios I didn't get a lot of directives from the guys: most of the music was out of my head and on the spot, in the heat of the moment.

If the Stones had asked you to join the band's touring outfit at the time, would you have?



After I recorded with them I was given the opportunity to make an album of my own as a result of my participation with them and, as great an opportunity as it was to go out with them, I was never going to be a Stone or have the chance to create my own music with them. It was serendipitous and fortuitous for me to have been in the right place at the right time!

Were you a fan?

I had been a fan of their heavily Chicago Blues influenced music from when they first did Howlin' Wolf's version of 'Little Red Rooster' [1964]. I was really into the guitar part that gave it a smooth, subtle authenticity; it moved me.

Continuing with your stint in Paris, you recorded your first solo album 'Crossroads' (Blue Sound, 1979) there. Did working in the studio with Louisiana Red, The Stones, etc give you the knowledge of how to achieve such a solid debut?

In spite of the gigs I did with Red and the Stones, when I stepped into the studio I was a complete neophyte, on my own, with a song in my heart and a dream in my head There were a few musicians, notably Longineu Parsons, trumpet extraordinaire, Jimmy Gourley, guitar; Vic Pitts, drums and Cecile Savage on bass who helped me get it all together.

You push the boundaries of the harmonica, and you also stretch the sound into other areas. Did working with such talent as trombonist Mike Zwerin show your personal desire to explore other avenues outside of straight Blues?

I've been amused by what I've been accused! I've always been into jazz players like Jimmy Smith, Miles Davis and other great jazzmen. I have listened to the Blues harp masters from Sonny boy Williamson to Junior Wells and James Cotton, whom I named my little boy James after. I have loved Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Wonder ... Hanging out listening and

sitting in with players like Buddy Tate and Paul Quinichette influenced the way I approached the Blues and some of those cats' concepts seems to have rubbed of on me.

Continuing:

Mike Zwerin was a really nice cat who I knew initially as a music critic for the International Herald Tribune who wrote an article about me. I wasn't aware of his instrumental skills and bonafides until quite some time later. When I was looking for a trombonist for the session on the 'Crossroads' album I became hip to his musical history which was impressive to say the least and he came in with me on the project!

Something many may not know, but how did you come to appear in the Alan Parker movie 'Angel Heart' (1987)?

I had recorded with the great Bluesman Brownie McGhee on a beautiful tune entitled 'On a Rainy Day'. Brownie knew me from the many times I came to listen to him and Sonny Terry play, they eventually let me sit in with them. After Sonny Terry passed away I got the call to record with Brownie and it worked out well enough that some years later, when he was doing the film with Alan Parker, he brought me in on the project. Brownie was another Blues Master I was fortunate enough to be mentored by. He was a beautiful cat and a good friend to me.

You recorded, and toured with the legendary Willie Dixon, most notably appearing on his Grammy winning 'Hidden Charms' (1988) album. How inspiring was it to work with such an influential giant?

Working with Willie Dixon was perhaps the pre-eminent musical association of my life, thanks to Ms. Victoria Spivey and Memphis Slim. They made him aware of me at different times; Victoria back in the seventies and Slim in the early eighties. Willie taught me more about life, music, poetry, songwriting and how to play in an ensemble than I can explain

in less than a novel! He was the professor in the university of the Blues and I was most privileged to attend and study under him. Though I must admit I was an obstinate, intractable student at times, but he never gave up on me in spite of it, I am forever indebted to him.

On stage, when you are playing, or you get immersed in a solo, what goes through your mind? Are you in a kind of transcendent state?

When I'm soloing, I am in a zone where all that matters is the mood, the music and the magic that communicates beyond the power of language. A friend of mine once said that 'music and magic are very much akin', abracadabra! You don't have to be a musician to know the feeling: when the music is right, the communication is transcendental!

On your latest album, the exceptional 'Colors', you are still displaying that hunger to explore and adventure into other areas. Is the experimentation in sound as important as the songs themselves?

The songs demand from you what they require to sing and you must acquiesce to their needs no matter what it takes. If you don't, the music suffers and she doesn't care for those that don't abide by her needs.

Do you see the Blues continuing strongly into the 21st Century? And is there is a 'new breed' of younger musicians keeping the genre alive?

As long as people live, love, strive, win, lose, listen to and play music, the Blues will be an intrinsic part of life in its many expansive forms. There will always be artists expressing their creativity and exploring new ways to sing, play and invest themselves in this music that is as old, potent and imperishable as human emotion.

Thank you for your time, and continued health and happiness to you and your family.

You are most welcome! Thank you and all the very best of all things in this new year to you and those you love, family, friends and fans! Keep swinging!

www.sugar-blue.com

www.facebook.com/SugarBlueOfficial

United State of Mind

All in the Mind

Interview and Review by Martin Hutchinson.

United State of Mind is made up of three diverse UK music legends, who have combined to create a compelling eponymous album that is full of soul.

Maxi Priest is an iconic British Reggae vocalist, best known for helping to kickstart the 'Reggae fusion' sound. Combine Priest's considerable, Grammy-nominated talents with those of virtuoso rock guitarist Robin Trower, who found fame in Procol Harum and you have something special. But then add to that mix the producer and engineer Livingstone Browne, who also provides bass guitar and keyboards, and you enter another dimension. Browne has worked with both Trower and Priest previously, as well as ABC, Kylie Minogue, Ed Sheeran and Bryan Ferry amongst others.

All nine tracks were co-written by the three members, but the title track came from an idea by Trower, who says, **"As soon as he heard it, Maxi had the lyric idea and everything started to fall into place. Working on the album was a complete joy from beginning to end."**

The whole sound is commercial and smooth and at the end of last year, one of the tracks, 'Are We Just People' was included on the soundtrack of Art Jones' film about Muhammed Ali, 'Ali's Comeback: The Untold Story'. I guess you could say that this is an album that really packs a punch.

'United State of Mind'
is out now on
Manhaton Records.

www.trowerpriestbrown.com

L/R: Robin Trower, Maxi Priest and Livingstone Browne.

Tizane

First Fruit

Interview by Alice Jones-Rodgers.

To all intents and purposes, nineteen year old Kent-born singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Tizane is the girl who has everything. An endlessly talented performer, she started writing and producing her own music at an incredibly young age; has rightly been described by her enthusiastic PR man Paul Bedford at Kick Down the Doors as "Kate Bush meets Billie Eilish"; runs her very own record label, Jiggery Pokery Records; is represented by former PJ Harvey, Depeche Mode and Kylie Minogue associate George Kimpton and if this incredible run of luck continues, could be on the brink of worldwide pop stardom. However, the seventeen tracks that make up her debut album, 'Cherry' (aside from a fascinating ethereal rendering of Bob Dylan's 'All Along the Watchtower') were often an outlet by which she recovered from the mental health issues that simultaneously affected her teenage life and shaped her as a truly unique artist.

In this day and age of downloading and streaming, the decline of the physical product and many listeners not having the attention span to allow a fully-formed piece of recorded art designed to be enjoyed and pored over from beginning to end into their minds reconfigured by social media to think in 280 characters or less, 'Cherry' is probably the bravest record you will hear this year. Not only that but, even at this early stage in proceedings, it will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the best. In short, 'Cherry' is a conquest of such gargantuan proportions that not since Kate Bush's 1978 debut 'The Kick Inside' have we imagined an artist not yet in her twenties being capable of such an assured and imaginative opening gambit. With Tizane having been constantly evolving as an artist in the years leading up this release and always striving to push her creative skills into unexplored areas, what will follow 'Cherry' is anybody's guess, but for now, be pleased you were there to witness the first fruits of an artist who will very soon bloom into one of the world's very finest.

We recently got in touch with Tizane via Zoom, where, obviously readying herself for life after the pandemic, she greeted us (with a little help from one of those virtual backgrounds that I still haven't got a clue how to use at least) from a very appealing looking beach. In the following interview, she tells us all about what made her the person and artist she is today, gives us an insight into the making of 'Cherry' and perhaps most importantly, what we can expect from her in the future, which judging by that debut, will be nothing less than spectacular.

Firstly, hello Tizane and thank you for agreeing to our interview, it is

lovely to speak to you. Could we start by asking you to introduce yourself and how you came to start writing songs and making music?

I'm Tizane, as you know because you just said [laughs]. I'm nineteen, I'm from Kent, I'm from Dartford, a little town. I started singing from such a young age and I was brought up around music and I started writing when I was ... you know, as long as I can remember I used to write songs. I learnt guitar when I was really young, and piano and then when I was around fourteen, I started writing more serious songs. Actually, some of the songs that I wrote then are actually on the album. There was one that I wrote when I was really young that I kind of remastered as I got older. So, yeah, I've just been writing forever really!

Paul Bedford at your PR company Kick Down the Doors recently described your sound as "Kate Bush meets Billie Eilish". Would you say this was an accurate description and which other artists would you cite as your influences?

I mean, I get that quite a lot actually, which is a massive, massive compliment because they're both like incredible artists. I think growing up with my mum ... and my whole family ... my mum is a really good singer. She got me into Stevie Nicks ... Kate Bush, which is really cool because I've been described as reminding people of Kate Bush and that's like a huge compliment. So, yeah, I guess I do agree. It's a huge compliment for me, so I appreciate it.

What makes you tick as a songwriter and in your opinion, what makes a great song?

In my opinion, what makes a great song? Ooh, I think I'd say ... I've always said when talking to friends about writing music, other musicians ... well, basically all my friends are also musicians ... whenever we're writing music, I always, always say to people I think the biggest part when writing music is to keep your lyrics ... I like

my lyrics to follow the music structure-wise, like dynamics. When the song's building up, the lyrics build up and it gets more personal and stuff and I also think it's really, really important to keep your lyrics open to people to interpret the song however they want. So, quite metaphorical, but not too metaphorical so it does mean something to you, something specific to me. So, if someone's sad that their cat died, for example and I'm writing about me being sad because I fell over one day, you know ... I don't write about that, but something like that ... you know, they can interpret and think that is about that. I think that's pretty important in writing, yeah.

Your own website describes the recorded results of your early forays into making music as varying "in levels of quality and completion". How important do you feel experimentation is to the growth of an artist and how important has it been to you personally?

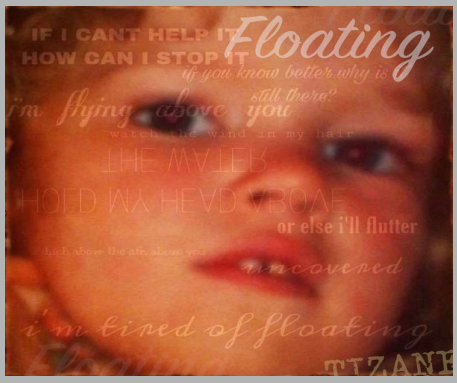
Experimentation is also one of the most important things to me. You know, for example, one of the bits of experimentation I went through during my kind of small growth was when I was sixteen and as I sing about in my songs, I really struggled with anxiety. I still do, but it was a lot worse when I was younger, so I had to kind of experiment with getting myself out there more and kind of trying to overcome my confidence issues, my struggles, so I used to go to open-mics, which is actually how I found my manager, George [Kimpton]. He's amazing, I love him so much, he's like family to me now. Yeah, so experimentation is really important. That's just an example. When I actually make my songs, you know, experimentation is incredibly important. I have songs that are completely different to other songs of mine that people have heard and it would actually shock people how different they are. But, you know, it's all about experimentation, for sure, and just trying new things and everything like that.

As you just mentioned, you are represented by former Rough Trade boss George Kimpton of Burning Girl Productions Ltd., who has worked with everybody from PJ Harvey to Depeche Mode to Kylie Minogue. How did this partnership come about and how has the experience of working with somebody with such a rich history in the music industry been?

I mean, we met at the open-mic, like I said earlier. He literally just went down to a pub to have a drink with his friend and he's never really been into watching open-mics. He's not really interested in finding like new artists to work with, like he works with me and he has worked with past people and stuff. But he just went down for a drink and he came up to me and spoke to me and I was just like 'Wow, this is really cool!' But at open-mics, I was doing open-mics for years and you kind of get people who come up to you and they're like 'Oh, you're really good' and 'I want to manage you' and stuff, but they're not really serious about it. So, sometimes they want you to pay money for them and stuff like that, it's just complicated, but yeah, I kind of listened to it, brushed it off my shoulders and kept it in mind, but then I bumped into him again and he was really telling me, really explaining it to me and I was like 'This actually sounds really good!' So, I decided I would give it a go and his past history of artists that he's worked with, it just makes him ... his connections are good and he's just so, so intelligent with how to go about things, how to work and he's so giving and our relationship, we are literally like best friends. He's like my grandad! He's amazing! He's an amazing man [laughs]; he's brilliant! Yeah, I love him!

Your debut album 'Cherry' was released on Jiggery Pokery Records on 26th February. Could you tell us a bit about the writing and recording process of the album and at this early stage, have you been pleased with the reaction to it?

So, 'Cherry'. I mean, the oldest song



on there is called 'Death of Me' and it's actually already out as a single and I started writing that when I was like fifteen or sixteen. I made a version of it and then I didn't do anything with it, because at the time I obviously I was just kind of making songs for fun. Sorry, I'm really cold; I'm kind of shivering whilst I talk, I apologise.

Is it getting cold on the beach?

Oh, it's so cold out here! I'm on the beach, it's nice! It's crazy, but the wind! [laughs].

In relation to our question regarding 'Cherry', Tizane continues:

But, yeah, so I had that song. That's like the oldest one that I'd written and we remastered it and then I kind of got into this routine of ... obviously I was struggling a lot when I was like eighteen or seventeen. That was mainly when I wrote these songs and I was struggling quite a lot with my mental health at the time. I'd dropped out of college and I was just on my own at home making songs and trying to get a job, but I was struggling with working, so it just became like a really, really good outlet for me just to write and produce and just make songs and it always has been, so I just spent all my time doing that and that's like how the album came about. It was originally going to be called 'Fragile', because that was like my idea to call it 'Fragile'. From when I was literally fourteen, I decided I wanted to make an EP or an album and I want to call it 'Fragile'. And then I had a dream. I think it was a dream of the album cover and of a song called 'Cherry', which I hadn't written yet, but I had a dream of it and then I had a dream of the album being called 'Cherry' and then I woke up the next day and I was like 'Oh my God, I've had this dream!' And then I went and made the song 'Cherry' and I thought of the album cover. But, no, it was awesome and people's reactions, to answer your other question, have been, so far, amazing! There was a review that got written and it came out yesterday and it was like the most incredible thing I've ever heard. It

just made me feel so happy about the album, because I'd been nervous about people's opinions, you know.

We were talking a bit about influences earlier and 'Cherry' features a rather ethereal cover of Bob Dylan's 'All Along the Watchtower' ('John Wesley Harding', 1967). What was it about this particular song that made you want to cover it and interpret it in your own style?

So, at the time I decided to do this song, I was rehearsing because I was doing gigs at the time, because obviously before corona happened, you know, I was able to go and do live performances, which was really fun. So, I remember we were in rehearsal and George came up and he was like, 'Do you know Bob Dylan's version of 'All Along the Watchtower'?' And I was like, 'Yeah, it's really cool!' And he was like, 'Have you ever considered doing a cover of it?' And I was like, 'That's crazy, because it's like this crazy, big electric guitar kind of song! [the subsequent Jimi Hendrix cover ('Electric Ladyland', 1968) at least]. And I love playing electric guitar, I love all that kind of stuff, but it would be so different from my songs, but I spoke to him and we decided that it would be so cool to do my own version of it and completely change it up and we decided we would make it really atmospheric and ethereal. So, I worked with my engineer ... was it? ... This was so long ago now! I think it was my engineer, Rory [Muldoon] ... he's an amazing person as well, he's brilliant ... and I kind of spoke to him about it, we bounced back some ideas and I ended up producing 'All Along the Watchtower' and making it my own version of it. So, yeah, that's how it came about.

The pandemic has been really hard for everybody, but we imagine putting an album out without the means to promote it with live shows has been a bit of a nightmare. Were you tempted to push back the release of the album until some sort of normality has been resumed or was it

a case of having to get it out there to move on to another musical project and keep pushing forward with your career?

That's a very good question. Obviously, nobody could predict the pandemic, it has been very difficult for everyone, but we planned to release the album right at the very start of the pandemic, before we knew the pandemic was happening, but that was the plan. We pushed it back so many times that I don't remember all of the dates, but it was meant to be released a while back and then corona happened, so we decided to kind of have a feel for how the music industry is during corona. So, we released a few singles. They actually did very well. I know it's a massive shame that I can't go out and do my live performances because, I mean, I love performing, it's incredible, so we started doing like online livestreams and that kind of thing. So, yeah, it's like, it was hard but we pushed the album back and we said to ourselves, 'This is the last time we are pushing it back. Corona or no corona, this album's coming out!' You know, people are waiting for it, we're waiting for it. So, we decided on the 26th February, which is very soon and that is final! That's it, you know we've got the CDs made, we've got vinyls made, we've got everything organised. But, the good news of it is that, like, during corona, we wanted the album released but we had to push it back and I actually had time to squeeze in another song [laughs]. So, if it had come out earlier, I never would have had the opportunity.

So, something good came out of it anyway!

Yeah, definitely! [laughs].

Which neatly leads us on to the next question ... You have made the most of various lockdowns and continued corona-nonsense by setting up the YouTube channel Tizane TV. How has this experience been and though it probably isn't much of a substitute for getting out there in front of an audience, do you feel that the videos

you have made have taught you anything about presentation and how to market yourself as an artist?

That's also a really good question! [Laughs]. One hundred per cent! It's helped my presentation like a lot because I always used to have confidence issues. I met my best friend in the whole wide world, Bill Snowden, who is an amazing musician, absolutely incredible ... I met him when I was sixteen and then we didn't become friends until I was around seventeen and he really, really helped with my confidence issues, without even knowing it. He was just there and it really, really helped me and we started performing together. So, every time I perform with him, my confidence builds and I get more comfortable. But Tizane TV, the experience has been amazing. We have the best time because we bring in my make-up artist Shaz, who is amazing [laughs] and she's one of my good friends and then we've got George; we bring in Phil; the videographer James [Cross] from Cross Visuals, he's incredible as well and it's just like we're working, we're recording, but then it's just like we're a big group of friends, just hanging out. Of course, we took our precautions during lockdown, but sometimes we would order a huge McDonalds and all just sit down and chill out and so it was an incredible experience altogether. And then presentation-wise, one hundred per cent. After lockdown, the gigs are going to be so cool and so fun and so much more interactive and cool!

We have been watching Tizane TV and it's almost like I can see you growing as an artist on each new video, if that makes sense?

Yeah, I appreciate that! I'm glad to hear it, because I try. It's good fun. I see myself getting more comfortable.

Finally, we previously mentioned Kate Bush, who started making music at a similarly young age, before releasing her debut album 'The Kick Inside' in 1978, at the age of 20. You seem like the sort of artist who might just push their creativity

to the same extremes as she has done throughout her career. Where would you like to take your music on future releases?

Ooh, that's also a really good question! I'm going to say that after every question, but it is a really good question! Yeah, Kate Bush started very early in age and has grown a lot and personally, I want to ... I don't know, to be honest, I just kind of want to let things happen and, you know, if people like my songs, then they like them; if they don't, then they don't, you know. I'm in a really good place at the moment where I'm really content and happy, getting feedback, being able to do interviews like this and it's incredible and I love it. But, overall, I want to explore and experiment in the future. You know, when I've released more things, I want to really explore my abilities in what sort of music I can make. Obviously, not incredibly different ... I don't want to make a rock song or something ridiculously different, but I want to experiment. I want to learn, one hundred per cent I want to learn, which I already do. Every time I make a new song, I learn new songs. And I want to meet new people. Make more songs, meet new people and learn, that's the answer!

Thank you for a wonderful interview. We wish you all the best with 'Cherry' and for the future.

'Cherry' is out now on Jiggery Pokery Records.

tizane.net

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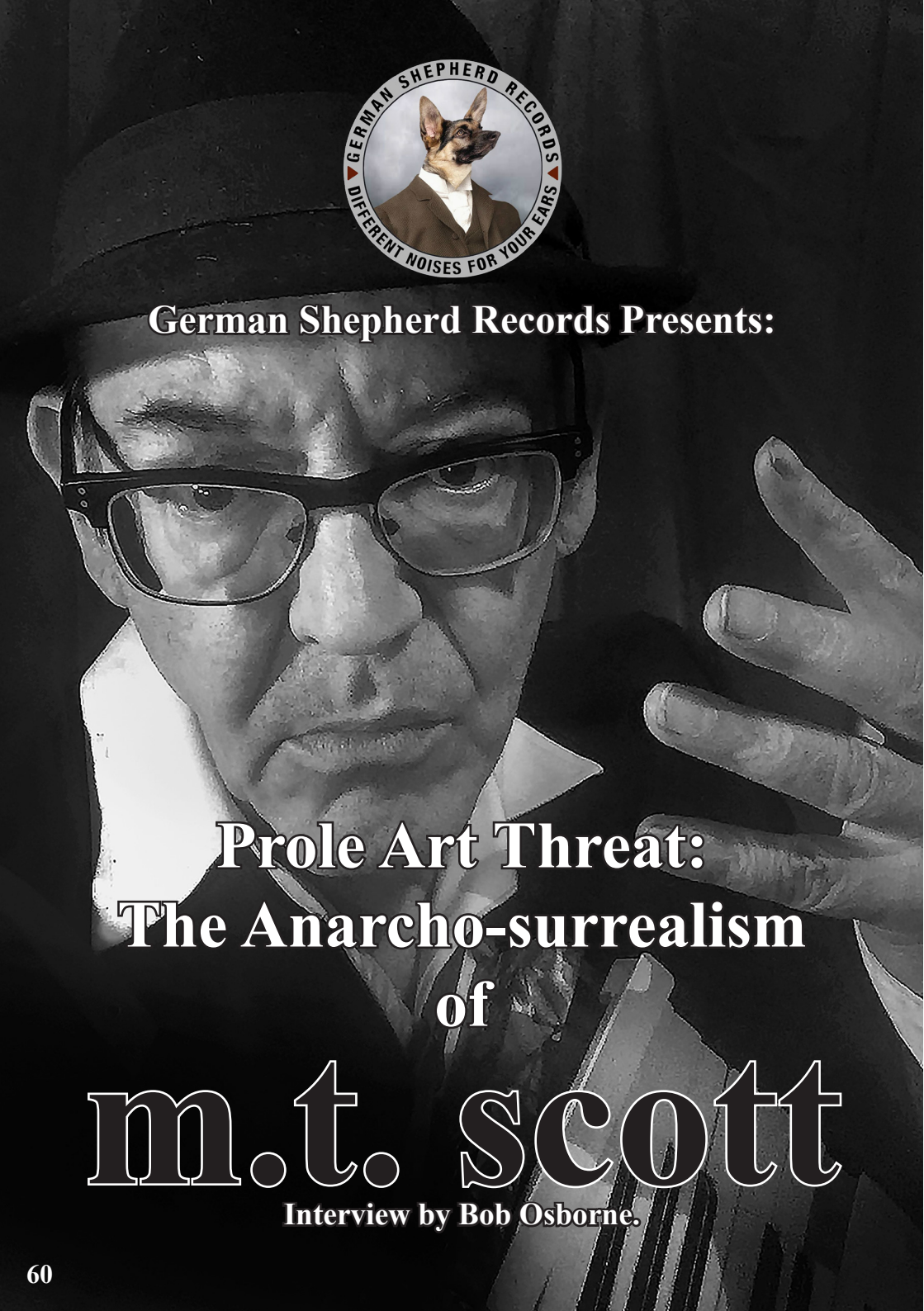


German Shepherd Records Presents:

Prole Art Threat: The Anarcho-surrealism of m.t. scott

Interview by Bob Osborne.

As I write this article, it is the anniversary of the sad and early demise of Mark E. Smith of The Fall. A stand-out track from the 1981 Fall release 'Slates' was 'Prole Art Threat', which lyrically defies easy interpretation, like a lot of Smith's work. However, the title has always struck me as a potent piece of symbolism about the role of art and class in the music business. The supposed ethos of the 1976 punk explosion was that neither the art or the music of that movement was learned in school or taught at college. It came from, supposedly, the proletariat who educated themselves rather than having conventional teaching influence their work. There's a degree of truth in that but it became so mythologised in the inky press as to lose a lot of its meaning and intent. However, out there in the dark corners of the music world there are artists who still manage to capture the spirit of and perpetuate that movement.

Some commentators have described the period between the punk explosion of 1976 to the end of the '80s as a golden age where the socio-political infrastructure and welfare system allowed for both the education and facilitation of comedians, artists and musicians, whereby the "entertainment" industry, previously a place only accessible to the privately educated or self-funded, was accessible to, and occupied by, the working class. Michael Scott is an example of that cadre of artists/musicians who benefited from that relaxation of the "rules".

The artist known as m.t. scott recently let loose his ninth release with German Shepherd Records. At the same time, we also launched the eighteenth release by STAGGS, of which Scott is also a key member, alongside Paul Ridley. Scott and Ridley first performed together as members of the Newcastle anarcho-punk band Reality Control.

In this article, I examine the work of both projects and explore Scott's musical history. It all started in the suburbs of Newcastle in late 1980.

REALITY CONTROL

Scott's first musical experience was Reality Control, an anarcho-punk band. They were formed in late 1980, with Michael Barlow vocals and rhythm guitar, Ken Fawcitt on bass and Paul Ridley on drums together with Scott who initially played guitar but also sang. They were very much influenced by the extant anarcho punk scene generated by bands like Crass. One of the band's early recordings 'The War Is Over' was included on Crass's 'Bullshit Detector 3' various artists compilation in 1984.

The lyrical content of the band's material was built around anti-war and anti-religion themes. After some

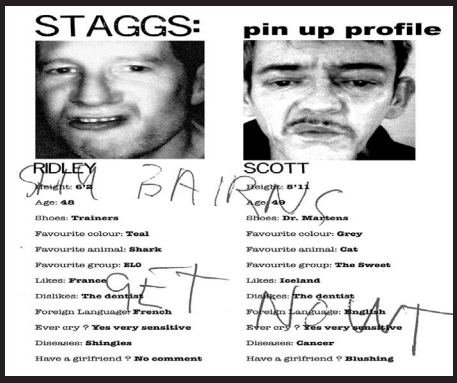
Reality Control

success with an early demo, they put together a few more releases and appeared on a number of compilations. In March of 1984, they released a split flexi-disc with friends Blood Robots. Both bands were part of the Gateshead Music collective. By the time the record had been released, Ridley left the band, sacked for "attitude problems" and two more drummers were employed before Reality Control played their final show in Nottingham in October 1985.

In 2012, Antisociety, in conjunction with Flat Earth Records, a hardcore punk label run by Sned from Blood Robots, released a remastered compilation of the bulk of the Reality Control recordings called 'Document', which led to Ridley contacting Scott about remixing one of the tracks. The album is unashamedly punk, fast, loud and angry. There is honesty about the music which is more valid than the "show-biz" ethic of the first wave of punk music of the mid '70s. The 21 track collection is an important reminder of what that genre of music could achieve without the pervasive influence of the mainstream of the music industry.

CUT, THE RHOMBUS OF DOOM AND ART SCHOOL

After Reality Control, Scott formed a short-lived experimental band called Cut. The band featured a brass section, a bass player, a reel to reel tape recorder and Scott on guitar and vocals. They played two gigs, one at the now legendary Mayfair Ballroom to an empty hall. After that project came what Scott describes as "a dalliance" with The Rhombus of Doom, a loose collective of musicians from various parts of the North East, who played mostly improvised and experimental music. Once described in print as 'probably the worst band in the world', Scott says, "After Reality Control split, I was invited to provide some vocals for them, which I did on several occasions ... my favourite episode being when the folk-hippy viola player asked to write an article about the band, instead produced a well-informed and



historically accurate piece about coracles". A thirteen track compilation of mostly live material called 'Scorched Black Void' (2006) and a second release, 'The Broken Circle' (2009) remains as evidence of the collective's existence which in hindsight does not reflect the negative press, but reveals a fascinating and somewhat anarchic mixture of motorik, space rock and free jazz which has elements of Neu, Can and Faust in its delivery.

After this, Scott moved south to study conceptual art, producing audio work and using film and video in large scale multi-media installations. Often using physical objects within the work, there was some controversy involving a dead hare. After an exhibition in Arnhem in The Netherlands, and a period of European travel, he found himself in London in search of gainful employment. He had this to say on the subject:

"Never having been a fan of being told what to do, my subsequent ventures in employment were largely antagonistic. On returning to academia to study graphic design, and working for several years in the field, whilst being slightly less horrific, did nothing to improve my opinion of formal employment".

STAGGS

2012 saw Scott and Ridley working together again on a new version of the track 'Nice' from the Reality Control compilation. They decided on the name STAGGS to reflect their endeavours.

STAGGS first came to my attention via Leeds band Flies On You, who shared their first release, 2013's 'Weird Kids'. The Salford DJ network soon picked up on what was a unique and fascinating musical project.

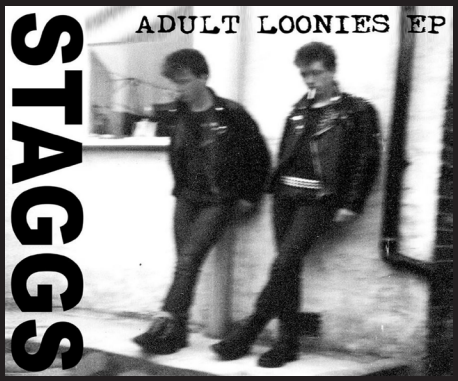
Scott and Ridley self-released five EPs over an eighteen month period, with one being a fascinating remix project featuring reinterpretations of four tracks by Mave Mills, Flies On You, Bedroom Legends and Scott himself

under the name DJ Capt. Mainwaring.

After I had written a couple of positive reviews about their work, Scott approached me about German Shepherd releasing material and in late 2014 they joined the label with a new single 'When Eartha Kitt Met Pete Tong', a fascinating mix of samples and structures topped off by Scott's trademark dry wit. Eleven further releases followed with dizzying levels of variety and genre hopping. 2015's EP 'Shy Bairns Get Nowt' stands out as a masterpiece of observational commentary on the state of the nation coupled with a wry commentary on Geordie footballing legends Jack and Bobby Charlton, it also included the aforementioned remake of 'Nice'. The duo's punk roots were also revisited for the 'Adult Loonies' EP in 2016. The title relates to their debut release, 'Weird Kids' EP, the assumption being that the band had matured, whilst simultaneously imitating their past.

STAGGS was always going to be a good companion for German Shepherd, they were the epitome of outsider music, completely and unapologetically unique. After our series of releases by STAGGS, we felt that a selection of the pre-German Shepherd recordings would make a fine addition to our catalogue, at least whilst STAGGS were chewing the cud over newer material. An omnibus of fifteen songs, perversely called '13 Golden Greats', was released in 2018. It reflects the finest of the first five releases collating and remastering the best examples of early STAGGS. As we said at the time, "They present music in an entirely different manner to accepted norms, subverting the anticipated, an aural antidote to the banal and benign. A slap in your face, albeit a sonic one, to jar you from complacent listening habits. They do not fit into any easy genre classification in that they gnaw at the fabric of those constructs and re-imagine them from a STAGGS perspective."

The pace for STAGGS then slowed down due to illness and three more releases came at one a year up until



2020 with the prophetically titled 'The Death of STAGGS'. Rumours of their demise were a little presumptuous as they returned this year with a new two track release 'Unfinished Cadence'. In early 2021, Scott and I had an Email discussion about the band:

Is the STAGGS methodology music-wise something that comes mainly from Ridley, or is it a more collaborative effort - How does it work practically?

STAGGS are a classic case of good cop / bad cop. I am the bad cop. Many bands have split up due to 'musical differences', whereas STAGGS embrace them.

There are some clear borrows and steals (i.e. samples) in STAGGS work from established / historical music sources, often many times in one song, almost a cut-up approach like Brion Gysin / William Burroughs? Thoughts?

The idea is to deconstruct established motifs and place them in a different musical context in order to place the listener in an uncomfortable or perplexing position. Like booking a comedian for a wake. The Burroughs cut-up technique is a fair point but I think the difference is that STAGGS use it to make certain points about modern music and culture, whereas the Beatniks did it at random to see where it led.

How does your art inform your music ... and vice versa?

The German concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (Total Artwork) is described as a work of art which makes use of all or many forms, or which strives to do so. I like that idea.

Would you consider yourself to be a Surrealist?

Having always enjoyed subverting and mocking established norms, I naively thought I was just being 'wrong on purpose', yet it wasn't until I began to study art history that I discovered it

was known as dada, or surrealism. In answer to the question, I'm tempted to make an absurd comment about fish, but I won't!

Your humour might be described as Dark / Sardonic. Do you agree?

Yes.

How much of your academic education plays into what you create? Is Art Rock a thing or something made up by journalists?

Only in that I am aware of art history and its influence on social culture. I don't think it plays a big part. Had I not been 'educated', I'm sure I would still be involved in creative pursuits of some kind. And yes, Art Rock is a lazy term invented by journalists to describe music which they do not understand or cannot easily categorise.

Your cover art is striking /unique. Where do you derive it from and how important is it in the context of the music?

Like the music itself, it's a kind of 'visual sampling' used to illustrate the work in hand. Sometimes it's good to judge a book by it's cover.

To quote Frank Zappa "Does Humour Belong In Music?"

Humour in music is often derided and dismissed as a 'novelty', like The Wurzels for example, which is why I try to keep it as dry as possible, using sarcasm and being deliberately obtuse. It can work well - the late great Ivor Cutler springs to mind. I saw him once in a doctor's waiting room, resplendent in a tam o' shanter and plus fours. He wasn't performing, just waiting to see the doctor.

And similarly, "Does Anger Belong In Music?"

Of course, music is the perfect medium for anger. Shouty, sweary, antagonistic punk rock has kept Simon Cowell's starry eyed, tragic pop idiots at bay, and presumably made them cry. Excellent!


m.t. scott

STAGGS often poke fun at the musical establishment. Do you see this as an important process?

Well, what else is the musical establishment for?

A lot of STAGGS work appears to have been inspired by life events, some of them quite harrowing. Is this an accurate interpretation?

Yes, it's slightly clichéd now, but the Scout Master in the track 'Ron Was Cool' ['13 Golden Greats'] was in fact a paedophile, there was always a flasher in the woods, the school was indeed burnt down and being beaten up by Aggro Boys was a real thing.

What is the thinking behind the new release?

A Cadence, in Western musical theory, is a melodic or harmonic configuration that creates a sense of resolution or finality. An unfinished or imperfect cadence is therefore one which has no 'end' and thus leaves the listener longing for the final chord, which never comes. Apparently it drove Mozart mad, whereas STAGGS quite like it. The two new tracks are slower and less manic than previous releases, the lyrical inferences clearly reflecting the current climate.

m.t. scott

With Ridley sidelined through illness, Scott embarked on solo work to compensate for the lack of new STAGGS material. It is in this collection of releases that Scott demonstrates perhaps more considered thinking and less overt humour in his work.

Material from 2007 was revisited for the first release 'The Broken EP' in 2016. The trademark world weary observations are placed in a broader aural context with each piece being a self-contained narrative but in the context of an overall theme. There is a cinematic feel to the music, which continues through the run of releases.

The prophetic 2017 release 'Live at the Edelweiss Lounge' by m.t. scott and the swing youth was a "concept album" loosely based on the The Edelweiss Pirates and Swing Kids youth groups of Nazi Germany, whose rebellion was, initially to drink, dance, sing and play "degenerate" jazz or swing music. However, fighting Nazis was also on the agenda. This album was "dedicated to them and all who stand against fascism to prevent the darkest times of the 20th Century seeping into the 21st". Given recent events in America a salutary warning.

When he approached us about his 2018 release 'When the Lamb Became Lame', he mentioned he was heading in a folk / country direction and we were equally bemused and concerned. Experience should have told us that whatever he does it is not going to within the realms of perceived genre norms. He drip-fed us the tracks on this album at each stage of their development. Each time there were subtle changes to the form and content with a marked improvement at each stage in the process. He wanted to call it 'Country Rock', but as usual with his work, it was much more than that. Starting with an obvious nod to The Fall (mining and melding several parts of their career) and then moving through phases of country and folk music with his usual anarchic abandon, he created a unique suite of songs. The addition of Josephine Dechamps' vocals towards the latter end of the production process was an inspired move and added that certain magical element that was necessary to fully conclude the project. The subject matter, as with all his work, is both biographical and autobiographical, inspired meta-fiction in musical form with tangential psycho-geography woven into the cover of the release and the backbone of the collection. There's the odd in-joke also for those of you steeped enough in the lore of the music of the last 35 odd years.

2018 also saw a single release, again with Josephine Deschamp, called 'Don't Mention The War'. At the time Scott described the release as "On

holiday against nature, Basil Fawlty meets Marlene Dietrich in a nazi death camp. They examine British heavy metal graffiti and take photographs. True story". The piece has a distinctive feel, a piano lost in a soundscape of menace with bittersweet melodies dancing across a blackened landscape. Scott and Dechamp interlock in a post-referendum slow dance echoing the work Christopher Isherwood, or Truman Capote or Dagmar Krause. A truly european sound in the time of Brexit.

2019's 'And This Is Why Clowns Are Sad' comprises four tracks, each a vignette soaked with pathos in the style of Brecht/Weill who have had a tussle in an abandoned arthouse cinema with John Barry and any number of post-rockers you care to mention. Trademark glitches pervade the piano led explorations leading to rich orchestral textures. The voice is always close to the microphone seeping into your unconscious. The subject matter appears fairly conventional but the usual Scott tropes are in play; a mix of the drama of the kitchen sink and some other deeper existential, possibly metaphorical messages, somewhere in the layers.

Impossible to pigeonhole, 2020's 'Secure Unit Radio Broadcast' finds Scott at his most experimental moving away from conventional song structures. The release contains a baker's dozen of vignettes composed of snippets of found sound, musical interludes, atmospheric layers, and abstruse intent. It is a compendium of eclectic aural imagery riven with emotional complexity, occasional hilarity, and hidden levels of meaning.

My conversation with Michael continued with a focus on the m.t. scott project ...

There is a detailed narrative that lies behind a lot of the m.t. scott work. Is there a literary component to what you do?

Indeed. Most of the narratives are true, some are embellished and some are

fiction. It would be counter productive to explain which are which, so I tend to give hints rather than tell the whole story, like a novel with the last chapter missing, or a joke with no punchline.

I said in 2016 of 'The Broken EP': "The usual Scott themes are in play, biting and caustic wit set amongst cinematic aural adventures providing a challenging and fulfilling listening experience". Any thoughts on that description? I'm particularly keen to draw out the filmic components of what you do. Much of what you do sometimes feels like short films which translate into an aural experience?

Hmmm ... I am often told that my work is 'filmic'. It's not deliberate but I see the point ... I suppose it depends on one's imagination and how one interprets the music ... you have also described some of my shorter pieces as "vignettes", which I feel is a more accurate description.

What music by others inspires / informs your work?

I try not to be directly 'influenced' by others music but will often adopt and copy certain styles and genres, perverting them as I see fit ...

Regarding current work?

My previous album 'Secure Unit Radio Broadcast' was recorded during the first lockdown of 2020. Each day for thirteen days ... unlucky for some ... collecting found sounds, snippets of music and speech, and arranging them by eye, I left them to fester for a while and then went back and mixed them by ear. The result was what you might expect from the description ... of course it's awkward and difficult to listen to, but that was the point. My current EP, 'The Voices', while in a similar style, may or not be more accessible. Based on a found, historical recording of a psychiatrist interviewing a schizophrenic patient in a secure hospital, in four parts, it is clearly quite harrowing ... you can't dance to it, but I feel it reflects the current climate.

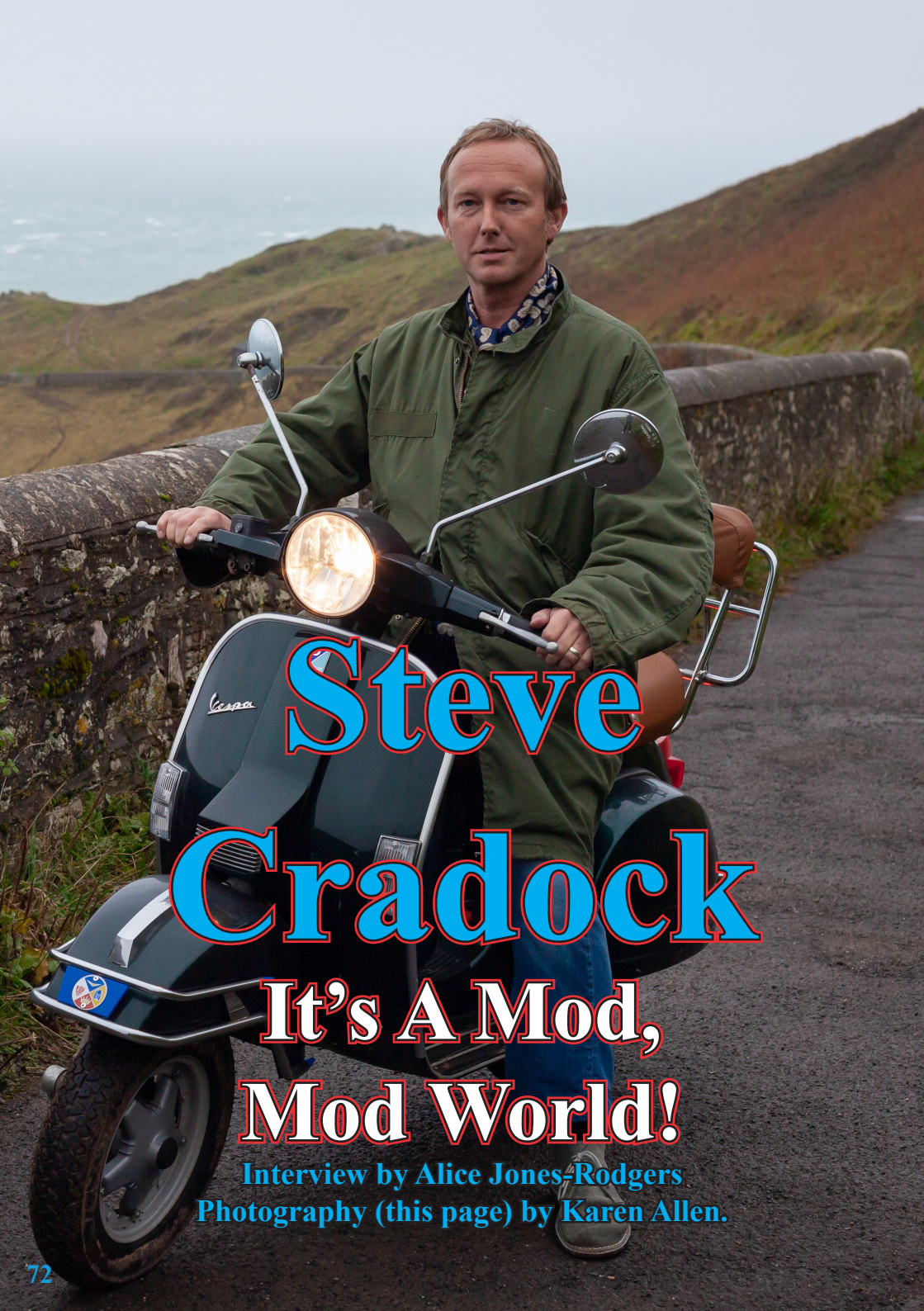
Never mind, my next hit single will doubtless be in the style of Stock, Aitken and Waterman.

A NEW PUNK PROLE THREAT?

In conclusion, I suppose I should ask if there is any chance of a Prole Art Threat emerging from a younger generation? Highly unlikely given the state of education funding and a more conservative feel to the arts and media in general. However, any aspiring musician / artist wanting some pointers on how to buck the establishment and perhaps create something challenging to the status quo would be well advised to listen to Michael Scott's work over the years. With music recording and production now easily achieved at home, perhaps it is the perfect time for a new "explosion".

germanshepherdrecords.com/artists/staggs

germanshepherdrecords.com/artists/m-t-scott



Steve Cradock

It's A Mod, Mod World!

Interview by Alice Jones-Rodgers
Photography (this page) by Karen Allen.

For Solihull, Birmingham-born guitarist and producer Steve Cradock, 2021 is a year of anniversaries. Twenty-five years ago, not only did he marry Sally Edwards, a then record plugger for his band Ocean Colour Scene, but that band also released their classic second album 'Moseley Shoals'.

Released at the height of Britpop on 8th April 1996, the production of 'Moseley Shoals', released on MCA Records, had been self-funded with the money from Cradock's first full tour with Paul Weller in support of the Modfather's 1995's equally classic 'Stanley Road', for which (as with every Weller solo album bar his 1992 self-titled debut) he had also been part of his studio band. Bolstered by support slots with Oasis on their 1995 tour and later, their legendary Knebworth concert on 8th August 1996 in front of 125,000 people and the success of its four top twenty singles (three of which reached the top ten), including the iconic 'The Riverboat Song' (number 15), which after its release on 5th February was borrowed by Chris Evans as the guest introduction music for Channel 4's 'TFI Friday' (aired for the first time at the end of the very same week), 'Moseley Shoals' sailed to number 2 on the UK album charts (three times in the space of a year, in fact), spent 92 weeks on the chart and sold two million copies worldwide.

However, this wasn't a band who had simply come out of nowhere to become the darlings of that Britpop scene and bring Mod back to the people. Probably unbeknownst to many music fans at the time, Cradock, along with vocalist and guitarist Simon Fowler; bassist Damon Minchella and drummer Oscar Harrison had previously been slogging around every venue in Britain since 1989 when they formed after the break-ups of Cradock's '80s Mod revivalist band The Boys and Fowler's Velvet Underground inspired band The Fanatics and had released their self-titled debut album in 1992 to little fanfare. The history of that particular album, although frought with disagreements with their then record label Fontana, more often than not over how it should sound in order to position the band within that strange early '90s musical landscape where the popularity of the UK's fag-end of Madchester / Shoegaze band dominated Indie scene was under threat from the US's Grunge movement, is just as fascinating as that of its follow-up. They even began to record it with famed Rolling Stones producer Jimmy Miller, but after that attempt was deemed unsuitable during Fontana's rigorous checking process (i.e. does it suitably evoke what being in chronically depressed post-Thatcher / 'grey man'-era Britain was like?), a second effort was made and suffered the

same fate, before Brendan Lynch (also responsible for the production of 'Moseley Shoals'; the 1997 number one album 'Marchin' Already' and 1999's 'One from the Modern', as well as every Weller solo album through to 2000's 'Heliocentric') was finally brought in to give the record company what they wanted (or at least what they thought they wanted).

Move forward to present day and Ocean Colour Scene, despite a few line-up changes (notably the departure of Minchella back in 2003), are still going strong and have thus far racked up an impressive ten studio albums, whilst Cradock continues to record and perform with Weller. He is also now, since 2014, a fully-fledged member of The Specials and this year sees the tenth anniversary of his third solo album, the rather wonderful 'Peace City West'. To mark this particular anniversary, Cradock has reworked and remastered the album and on 4th April, it will be reissued on his Sally's label Kundalini Music. This re-release of the album, which was originally recorded at Weller's Black Barn Recording Studio in Surrey and features contributions from 'The Inbetweeners' star James Buckley, Sally, Andy Crofts of The Moons and legendary soul singer P.P. Arnold (she of the 1967 Small Faces classic 'Tin Soldier' fame), who lent backing vocals to 'Travellers Tune' and lead vocals alongside Fowler on 'It's a Beautiful Thing' from 'Marchin' Already' and who's 2019 album 'The New Adventures of ...' was produced by Cradock, also sees it being issued on vinyl for the very first time.

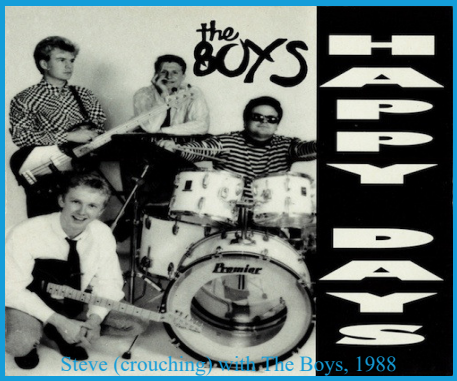
We recently rang Cradock at home in Devon, where he has been spending the lockdown time with his Sally and his two teenage children and not only preparing for the re-release of 'Peace City West', but also recording an instrumental album and working on the debut album by Weller's daughter, Leah, both of which are likely to see the light of day later this year.

Firstly, hello Steve and thank you for agreeing to our interview, it is lovely to speak to you. Could we start by asking how you first became interested in music as a listener and how you came to start playing guitar?

Aaw, bless you, thank you! Erm, well, when I was around ten or eleven, there would have been groups around like UB40 releasing their first album 'Signing Off' [1980] and also The Jam were ... I guess they were the pop group of that time, weren't they? Which is a bit weird really, when you think about it. I thought there was a lot of great pop music really, that you'd see on either Saturday morning shows or 'Top of the Pops' and that kind of got me into it. Playing guitar, probably boredom! It gives you something to focus on and it gives you a joy to achieve something, doesn't it? I remember when I first got my bass guitar, that was out a catalogue back in the days, right? I would spend hours and hours and hours playing the guitar, probably, like I say, because of boredom and it gave me a real ... in a way, it kind of isolates you, but in a great way and it puts you in this bubble of music. I mean, I don't think you particularly have to be a musician to get that. As long as you loved your music when you were younger, that's the bubble I'm on about, you know.

During your time in first band The Boys, you met Paul Weller, who's records you went on to perform on from 1993's 'Wild Wood' up to present day. What are your memories of meeting Paul for the first time and is it true that you would spend time at his Marble Arch studio attempting to pass on The Boys' music, only to often be turned away by technician Kenny Wheeler?

Yeah, I managed to play him the demos. [On getting turned away:] and quite rightfully, they were shitty, but they were the first kind of demos and he just said 'They sound like The Jam!' [laughs] and I guess this was at the time ... when would this be, about 1986, '87? ... when he was quite into the



Steve (crouching) with The Boys, 1988


Future bandmate Simon Fowler (second from right) with The Fanatics, 1988

electronic side of The Style Council by then. But hey, I just remember him being really cool and really dashingly dressed, you know, dressed immaculately and he was very friendly, you know. He wasn't aloof at all, he was really generous with his time, as he still is. I think he's a really special person, Paul.

During that time, The Boys supported Steve Marriott at the Irish Centre in Digbeth. How was this experience, did you get to spend much time with him and what were your impressions of him at this stage in his career?

[Laughs] I did! I managed to get an autograph, which I still have to this day! And I was in awe of him, I thought he was brilliant. I thought his vocals were brilliant. I think it was The DTs he was playing with at the time. He had a few groups, didn't he? Like The DTs, Packet of Three ... all hilarious names, aren't they? It was a great honour. I didn't really know the [Small Faces'] Immediate albums ['Small Faces', 1967 and 'Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake', 1968], I was more into the Decca stuff when he met him then. In fact, I think that was the only records I had at the time. So, yeah, it was cool! And he was complimenting everyone on how smart they all dressed and, yeah, it was amazing! I think that was the last gig I did with them [The Boys]; I formed Ocean Colour Scene like days after.

That is a good way to go out!

Yeah, it was, yeah! He gave me this as well, which was really cool, it was the first time I'd had a toke on a spliff. Looking back, only in hindsight, you know what I mean, but I think that's quite cool to have your first spliff given to you by Steve Marriott!

That is pretty impressive!

Yeah! [Laughs].

I was going to say not long afterwards, but literally DAYS afterwards, of course, you formed

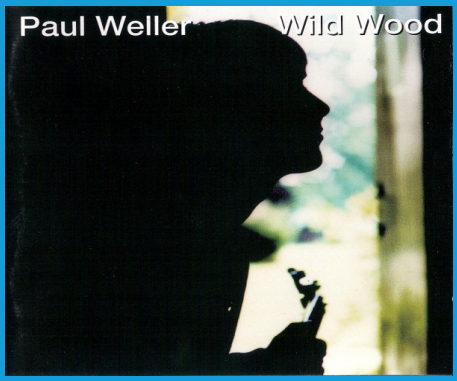
Ocean Colour Scene, 1992.
L/R: Steve, Simon Fowler,
Oscar Harrison and Damon Minchella

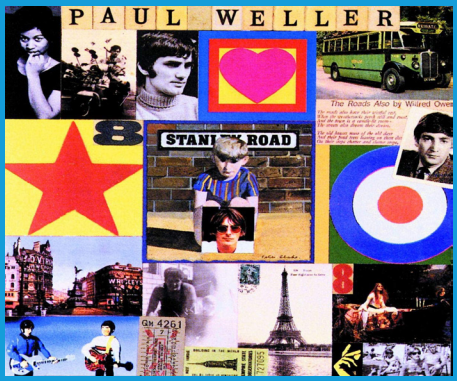
Ocean Colour Scene with Simon Fowler, Damon Minchella and Oscar Harrison. How did Ocean Colour Scene come together, can you remember your first meetings with the three musicians you would go on to achieve so much success with over the next few decades and what are your memories of those early years of the band?

It was more about meeting with Simon. Because I was friends with Simon, because he used to be a journalist at the local paper [The Birmingham Post], so I knew Simon and I would go out drinking with Simon. He was in a band called The Fanatics and they were kind of very sixties, indie. I really liked The Fanatics, I thought they were great. But it was more about ... we'd just seen The Stone Roses at The Irish Centre in Birmingham, which is like a thousand capacity; it was the same place we supported Steve Marriott actually. And it kind of brought it all together about being contemporary, about there being something happening that was our generation's stamp and sign on things, you know. So, we wanted, yeah, as opposed to trying to be like The Velvet Underground, I think we ... I think it was a really important time, that was, when the Roses came out and there was The La's also. I used to go and see The La's all over the country, you know. It was the first time I'd seen anybody of our generation who was doing something that really blew me away.

Following the singles 'One of Those Days' (1990); 'Sway' (1990) and 'Yesterday Today' (1991), as well as a re-release of 'Sway' (1992), Ocean Colour Scene released the self-titled debut album in 1992. At this point, the band were suffering from a number of problems with your record label, Fontana, and over the years, you and the rest of the band have been quite critical of that debut album. How much did these issues with Fontana effect what became that album and do you view it any more positively all these years later?

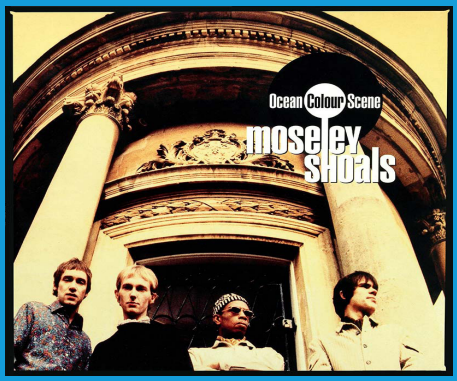
Well, the truth is that we weren't that good. We were just trying to find our





feet. We were still being quite plagiaristic; I think and the songs weren't as good. We hadn't found our sound yet and it took us to go through that and lose that deal. It would be easy to blame the label really, but I think we would have to look at ourselves first, you know. I think it's alright, but it's not ... And then we went back into a bit of wilderness existence. We all signed back on the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which was what groups did in those days. That's where Moseley [Shoals Studios] came from. It was a great common thing where people could, you know, not sit around and be fucking lazy, but work on your craft. And it was the summer after that album came out that I started playing with Paul and we'd got a little studio in King's Heath, next to Moseley, so we just, me and Simon, more so than the four of us really, we would go to this studio every day and just demo songs and just get stoned together and work at what we were doing, you know. And then it was the year after that that we started to define our sound and also, the music you had around ... Oasis had come out by then and through The Stone Roses and The La's and other groups, you know, Inspiral Carpets and then the [Happy] Mondays, there was all this thing happening that maybe 'Moseley Shoals' fitted into ... or, not fitted into, because it was of its own, I think, 'Moseley Shoals'. It was a new generation thing happening, wasn't it? You know when people say 'it's the right time' or 'it isn't the right time'? I think it was a lot to do with that also. And also, around that time, we had a great label. MCA were really happy that they'd signed us, as opposed to Fontana, who didn't know what to do with us and I don't really think liked us that much. So, that had changed and when you get a label behind you, they're promoting you with real passion, so everything just kicked off, you know.

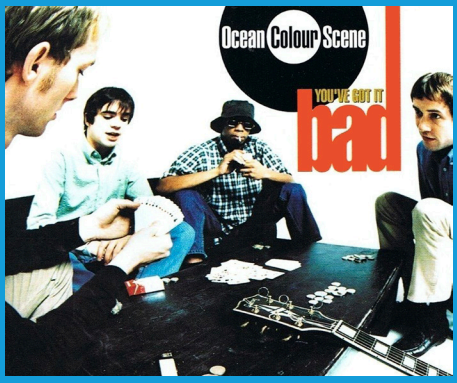
Is it true that you actually began to make what would become your debut album with famed Rolling Stones producer Jimmy Miller and what exactly happened there?



We did! We had Jimmy Miller and it [the studio] was in this church in Birmingham. It was fantastic, right? And we had Steve Osbourne, I don't know if you know that engineer? But, in the rave scene, he did a lot of [Happy] Mondays' stuff. So, we had Steve Osbourne engineering and Jimmy Miller producing. I thought it was fantastic! That was the first version of the album we did, but the record label didn't like it because at the time, I think Grunge was making it big and the American thing and then, you see, being led by a label, which is dangerous anyway, they then took us through another two different producers to do the album, because they wanted a certain sound to fit in with the times, which is a stupid thing to do. But we weren't sure of ourselves enough, or I don't think we also had the songs, you know, to disagree with them either. It was great fun working with Jimmy Miller though! He was really inspirational; although he was drinking a lot at the time, Jimmy was. He was kind of smashed a lot of the time. But so were we, you know? That's what was happening at the time.

There was what can only be described as a seismic shift in sound, vision and ambition between that album and what would become the classic 1996 album 'Moseley Shoals', which this year is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. The album was released 8th April 1996, peaking at number two on the UK album chart and going on to sell over 1.2million copies worldwide. It was preceded by the singles 'The Riverboat Song' (15) and 'You've Got It Bad' (7), whilst 'The Day We Caught the Train' (4) and 'The Circle' (6) followed. Could you tell us a bit about the writing and recording process of what would become 'Moseley Shoals' and were you were surprised at the album's success and the fame that came with it after the relative disappointment you encountered with your debut?

Well, we had our own studio [Moseley Shoals Studio] near five ways by then, in Birmingham. It was where Dexys



[Midnight Runners] recorded their first album ['Searching for the Young Soul Rebels', 1980] actually. It was only a small room with a little kitchen and a little control room, but it was kind of more of a professional set-up. A guy called Andy Macdonald, who ran Go! Discs, Paul's record label, he gave me a present one Christmas. 'Do you want a guitar?', he asked me. I said, 'Thank you very much, but Paul had just bought me a guitar', so I was like, I didn't particularly need one. So, he said, 'We'll play The Water Rats one night', in Kings Cross. He said, 'Call by my house in Chiswick and you can pick up some recording equipment, if that's going to be any help?' So, we did that; loaded a desk and like a reel-to-reel into the van, took it back to Birmingham and we started recording the tunes ourselves kind of the next day really, because we were so excited to get all this recording stuff. And so, we would have had most of the tunes and we would have started recorded them on our own. We definitely had like ten or twelve tracks down in demo format before Brendan [Lynch, producer] and Max [Martyn Heyes, engineer] came in and listened to them. So, we would just be there between ten in the morning until three o'clock the next morning every day, seven days a week. It was just really exciting. We had our own studio, we had each other and it was a great family vibe. You know, we just all hung out together, you know, we all dug each other and it was a great time that was. And no one knew it would be a success. This is what I was saying about the record label, about MCA, all of a sudden, they were going 'You're going to do this TV show'. We did the pilot for 'TFI Friday'; it's the thing before it gets accepted as an actual TV programme and we played 'You've Got It Bad' on that and Chris Evans, me and Simon really bonded, you know. Yeah, he was great and also loved the tunes and then next week he would be putting it on record of the week on Radio 1 and stuff. I mean, talk about lucky. I think you've got to have the stuff there for you to be lucky, do you know what I mean, don't you? But we had it all there and we were just very kind of lucky and blessed that we had this

label behind us pushing it. And to be honest, all we did was make the record and everything else just sort of happens in front of your eyes, you know.

So, it was obviously a bit of a relief after the band's early few years?

Yeah. Well, it's amazing, isn't it? That's why you try and form a group to do something like that. I guess, as they say, it's all history now, isn't it, but the next week, you'd be doing 'Top of the Pops' and it was just like living the dream. That album kept giving and giving. And I think it went to number two in the charts and it went to number two three times over that year, I think.

I tell Steve that I remember it so well and that 'Moseley Shoals' is quite a special album for me as 'The Riverboat Song' was released on the day that I had my interview for what became my first job at HMV (05/02/96) and then 'TFI Friday' started at the end of the same week [09/02/96]. I also tell him that I met Oscar in HMV before they played at Blackpool Winter Gardens on the same night, one of the many times I saw them live in that era.

[Excitedly] Oh wow! Right, so yeah, you were there! Brilliant, that's nice to hear!

This was of course the height of the Britpop era and you were often associated with Oasis, having been invited to support them on their 1995 tour, going on to support them at Knebworth on 10th August 1996, playing to 125,000 people and your second album, 'Marchin' Already', released on 15th September 1997, knocking 'Be Here Now' off the top of the UK album chart. How comfortable were you with that Britpop tag and how important was the endorsement of and association with Oasis to Ocean Colour Scene's success during the period that 'Moseley Shoals' and 'Marchin' Already' were released?

I don't know, it would have meant us playing to more people. They were so


Recording a cover of The Jam's 'Carnation' with Liam Gallagher for the tribute compilation 'Fire and Skill', 1999. The single reached number 6

huge, Oasis, but do you know what, we just got on from the first time we supported them, maybe Blackburn. I remember having a great evening with Liam [Gallagher] talking about shoes; these shoes and those shoes! So, we just bonded really well with them. They were interesting and they were a great band. But, I mean, when we played Knebworth, I think 'The Day We Caught the Train' was at number four on the singles chart, so I think it was part of that magical era and only Oasis could have played to that many people, but it was a joy to be asked by them, to be honest with you. But, as soon as it gets like that, there's going to be a backlash, isn't there? From there, it's got to come down, hasn't it really? But it doesn't matter, does it? Getting a number one album was an incredible thing as well, but what can you say? The scenario would have been that it would have got to number one, but you would have spent seven days of that week being more busy than you've ever been in your life, so you don't have time to enjoy it. For instance, when you said that to me then, I was thinking 'Oh, that sounds fucking amazing!', but at the time we probably didn't even have time to think.

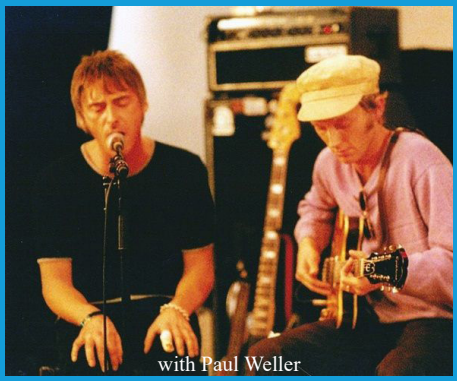
Quite a few people we interview tend to say that when you have success on that scale, you don't actually get time to enjoy it.

Yeah, which is probably a good thing! I think it would be a bit creepy sitting there and enjoying the success at the time. Don't you think that's weird?

Yeah, sort of sat there rubbing your hands together?

Yeah, 'Aren't we good? Aren't we successful?' That's fucking weird! So, in a way, I think it's good that you're just kind of busy [laughs].

The lead single from 'Moseley Shoals', 'The Riverboat Song', released on 5th February 1996, was of course used as the guest introduction music for TFI Friday, which started on the very same week. Chris Evans also played the song

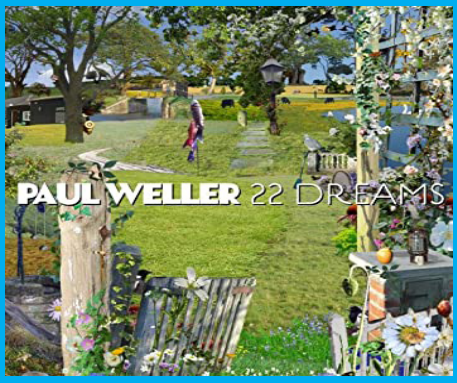

with Paul Weller

regularly on his Radio 1 show. Meanwhile, just over a year after its release on 16th June 1997, the lead single from 'Marchin' Already', 'Hundred Mile High City' was used as the theme for 'Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels' (released on 28th August 1998), by which time we are guessing that preparations were already being made for the fourth album, 1999's 'One from the Modern'. Similarly, how important was such endorsement from television programmes and films associated with the Britpop movement to the success that Ocean Colour Scene had at that time?

Well, I've got my own opinion about it, but when you hear people speak about it, they see 'TFI' as being the 'Riverboat' riff, and at times I've heard people say 'If I ever hear that fucking riff again ...!' So, I think it works on a positive and a negative. I can see both sides. If you didn't particularly like it anyway and every time a guest comes on the TV show, you heard that, I could see how it could piss you off. But I thought it was a huge honour. And I thought the way that it ['Hundred Mile High City'] was used in 'Lock, Stock' was really clever. It was like the opening scene. It's great that Guy [Ritchie] thought that track would work well. But that's all I know about it anyway; I think it's an honour.

At the same time, of course, you were working in the studio and touring with Paul Weller on a regular basis. It has always amazed me how you managed to juggle work commitments between Ocean Colour Scene and being in Paul's band. How difficult has that been over the years?

It's all been fine. There might have been maybe one or two things [where things crossed over], but we'd work together; we'd see when Paul was going out on tour and then we'd go out on tour another time and it meant that I was just playing a lot, you know, for quite a few years. To be honest with you, even 2017, 2018, I was playing Ocean Colour Scene, The Specials and

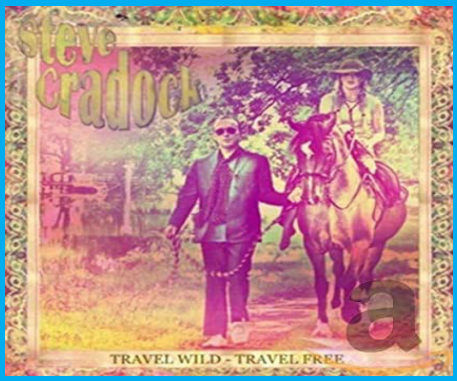


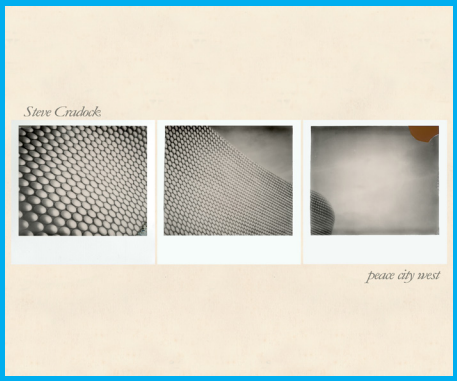
Paul and that was really busy, you know. But I managed to fit it all in and it was great!

As we previously mentioned, you have appeared on every one of Paul's solo albums from 1993's 'Wild Wood' onwards, as well as undertaking live promotion duties, but is there one particular album that you enjoyed working on the most and why?

'22 Dreams' [2008] was really amazing. I think that's when Damon [Minchella] and Steve White stopped playing with Paul and Paul was not happy with the direction of the 'As Is Now' [2005] album. He didn't want to carry on that sort of guitar thing and didn't know what he wanted to do. I think Paul was even thinking ... he probably didn't mean it, but he was like 'Oh, I was thinking about knocking it on the head'. So yeah, he said he was going to have some time out, but about a month into that time out he phoned me up and he said, 'I've got an idea for a tune. Can you come down?' And it was 'Have You Made Up Your Mind?' and he played a guitar part, then he put a bass down, I put the drums and then another electric guitar down and about three o'clock in the morning, that track was finished and he was saying 'This is a direction that I think's good'. I kind of stayed down there at his studio [Black Barn Recording Studio, Surrey] for a long time after that until it was kind of done. So, I think he spent a year doing '22 Dreams' and I don't know if you know that album well [I reply that I do], but there's all sorts of strange spoken word bits, there's mad instrumentals, so that was a real joy to be part of. But I've got great memories of all of his albums really.

On 2nd April, you will be re-releasing your 2011 solo album 'Peace City West', which includes it being issued on vinyl for the first time. We believe the album has seen a bit of rejigging for the re-release, so could you give us an insight into the writing and recording of 'Peace City West' and what changes have you made to it for the re-release?





Well, what I did, because it's been ten years and I realised we hadn't released it on vinyl, we were going to do that and I went back to the studio and it needed remixing. The sound of the original wasn't good enough. And I cut it all down a bit. There were a lot of interlude bits that I thought weren't needed, so just the songs are on there, which works better as an album I think and it's been remixed and remastered and I got Stephen Duyer, who did the original artwork, he did some new artwork for it. So, it just seems fresh and maybe how the album should have been originally. I'm just happy to be putting it out on vinyl.

As well as sitting between your debut solo album The Kundalini Target' (2009) and third solo album 'Travel Wild - Travel Free' (2013), 'Peace City West' of course fell between the two Ocean Colour Scene album releases 'Saturday' (2010) and 'Painting' (2013) and the Weller albums 'Wake Up the Nation' (2010) and 'Sonik Kicks' (2012). With this in mind, how different have you found the experience of working as a solo artist in comparison to being a part of Ocean Colour Scene or part of Paul's band and now, since 2014, also being part of The Specials and how creatively liberating has it been to record on your own, completely on your own terms?

Well, I spent last year doing an instrumental album, to answer the question, but it was quite therapeutic. I'd just be out in the garden, in lockdown, with an acoustic guitar and something would come out of that and then I'd just open the garage and record it. And it was just easy and the music flowed on this instrumental thing, so it was good. But, going back and that seems like a really busy time, the way you mention all those albums. Basically, me and Sal, we took the kids down to this farm at Start Point in Devon and we had a month there and we lived in a cottage, a friend's cottage, which overlooks the sea. It was really beautiful, even though it was winter and the weather was quite extreme. But it was just us all hanging out

together and we cocooned ourselves into the studio, that's what I remember of 'Peace City West', and we didn't come out until it was finished. It was fun. We had James Buckley [actor best known for playing Jay Cartwright in E4's comedy series 'The Inbetweeneers', who provides backing vocals and guitar on the album] down there and his girlfriend at the time, Clair [Meek, now wife]. They came down and spent a couple weeks with us. So, it was fun, you know. It was kind of family orientated and it was a lot of fun.

Finally, how have you been using these strange times of not being able to get out on the road and have you made any plans for once the pandemic is over with any of your musical projects?

Well, I've done that instrumental album, which I'll mix and I'll hopefully get it out at the end of the year. So, I did that, like I said, but also, I've been working with Leah Weller, Paul's daughter, which I've really enjoyed. Yeah, that's been great. And she's only got maybe three tunes to finish an album, so she's not far off finishing her debut album. That's been keeping me busy and it's been a joy to do. I've really enjoyed doing it, producing and playing on it. Yeah, that's been great.

So, still busy then!

Yeah, I try to keep busy, yeah. It sounds like I've been busier when you roll off all the statistics; I'm like, 'Fucking hell, okay'. But I always feel that I'm being lazy, I don't know why. But speaking to you, it sounds like I'm busy, so that's good! [Laughs]. I just go round my normal day thinking I'm not doing much. It's only when someone like yourself relates what I've been up to and I think, 'oh, that's okay actually!' So, thanks! [Laughs].

Thank you for a wonderful interview. We wish you the best of luck with 'Peace City West' and for the future.

It's been nice to speak to you! It's been nice to hear from you, so, alright, listen, bless you and thank you for your support over the years as well. Nice one, have a nice day!

'Peace City West'
is released through
Kundalini Records
on 2nd April.

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Paul Weller

Big News From Black Barn

By Alice Jones-Rodgers.

Evidently still sworn to secrecy when we conducted our recent interview, Steve Cradock continues his work with Paul Weller on the Modfather's forthcoming sixteenth solo album, 'Fat Pop (Volume 1)', released on 14th May via Polydor.

Weller had teased about a 2021 album release since the end of last year and more recently, Noel Gallagher let slip that his friend had been working on the follow up to last year's 'On Sunset' at home during the pandemic. 'Fat Pop (Volume 1)' was officially accounced on 25th February.

After Weller had laid down vocals, piano and guitar for the album, the material was then sent to Cradock, bassist Andy Crofts and drummer Ben Gordelier (the core band line-up that has appeared on every album since 2012's 'Sonk Kicks'), who added their parts to the twelve tracks. When COVID-19 restrictions were briefly relaxed, Weller reconvened with his bandmates at his Black Barn Recording Studio in Surrey to complete the album.

Astoundingly, considering the conditions under which 'Fat Pop (Volume 1)' was made, the album features a large number of guest appearances, including former Amen Corner vocalist and guitarist and one-time collaborator with The Who ('Who Are You', 1978), Andy Fairweather Low, who adds vocals to 'Testify'; Lia Metcalfe, vocalist of Liverpudlian band The Mysterines, who receives a co-writing credit on 'True'; producer and composer Hannah Peel, whom Weller has worked with since 2018's 'True Meanings' and adds strings to 'Cobweb / Connection' and 'Still Glides the Stream' (a song co-written by Cradock and first heard as a live performance from Black Barn last November, alongside 'Testify'; 'Moving Canvas' and 'Failed') and Weller's daughter Leah, who appears on the track 'Shades of Blue', which she also co-wrote.

To mark the announcement of 'Fat Pop (Volume 1)', Weller shared the strobe-heavy video for its opening track, 'Cosmic Fringes', which finds him marrying an uncharacteristically deadpan vocal to synth-pop beats and an invigoratingly rocky and upbeat performance from Cradock, Crofts and Gordelier. Meanwhile, the song's lyrics seem to give an indication of what else Weller has been up to during lockdown and, judging by lines such as "Stumble to the fridge, then come back again", it has been reassuringly similar to everybody else.

Curved Air

Stories of the Acid Folk: A Conversation with Sonja Kristina

Interview by Kevin Burke.

The rich sound of seventies progressive rock is still something that remains unique and effervescent as ever - a time when artists forged folk, rock and psychedelic music, creating an art form that is a compass for the greatest music that flows from the grooves of a vinyl record. At the forefront of that mix, is singer, songwriter and actress Sonja Kristina. Coming to the fore courtesy of the groundbreaking musical 'Hair' as Crissy, her move into music, and fronting a band came in the form of the legendary Curved Air. With a voice that haunts and raptures the listener within a kaleidoscope of vocal acrobatics, the fact remains, Sonja is a part of a legacy, standing under the same creative sky as Sandy Denny, Julie Felix, and indeed Buffy Sainte-Marie.

To start our conversation, I asked about Sonja's style, as both a vocalist and a songwriter: **"I think for me, the important thing is that whatever we end up with ... words and tunes and things, that it works on an emotional level. When I think of the artists that I like, and people like Peter Gabriel or Tom Waits, some of those people have more melodic pieces. All good tunes, they need to kind of hit home, with a story that has some truth to it."**

Following this, the lady reflected on her past, her beginnings in the sixties, and the artists that influenced her: **"It was the time when there were a lot of Folk artists coming over from America, and they were playing in the cafés in New York and such. People like Joan Baez, and Buffy Sainte-Marie who was my first really big influence from that scene. Because her songs worked very well emotionally, songs about romances of exuberance, songs about ghosts, and there weren't very many people writing their own songs, particularly the women. So, Tom Paxton songs, I learnt a few of those, and later in my travels when I was meeting people, I actually got Tom Paxton to write down the chords for a song that he'd written called 'Now That I've Taken My Life' ['Morning Again', 1968]. He's good at telling stories. They're not the most moving, but he's written some good songs that hold the listener's attention. They are like little news articles ... he tells a good story."**

Expanding with some of the more psychedelic folk acts Sonja discovered and a genre of dislike: **"When The Incredible String Band came along, they enlarged my perception of what was possible. I think because their music sounded like it came from another planet, they're beautifully curly and Celtic, but they don't sound derivative, and I like that, they sound like themselves and they don't necessarily fit into a genre. Country music is something I've never been drawn to. It always sounds like it's**

got the same backing track, but my mother used to love country stuff because I think she liked the kind of 'kitchen sink' stories they told."

The importance of Sonja's first break into musical theatre, as the character Chrissy in 'Hair', cannot be overlooked, nor could the question of her familiarity with the counterculture of the mid-sixties. **"No, it was just a musical that they were advertising for hippies and I morphed from identifying as a Beatnik ... my own version of a Beatnik ... into a Hippy, or my own thirteen-year-old version of one which was denim and sneakers. Then as Hippy things came in, that really appealed to me, with the various things I saw on TV, you know? These wonderful things that people created after they had taken LSD, and I couldn't wait to get my hands on some of that when I came up to London. But that was one of the first things I did when I went down the Middle Earth Club, and it didn't disappoint. But that was part of the times, the Psychedelic times, people experimented with drugs and there were a lot of casualties, but it was the time people partied with drugs ... I suppose they still do, but in those times it was part of the course."** Although, at one point, Sonja at a young age, ran London's Troubadour Club: **"Just on a Wednesday night, this was when I was eighteen while I was up at Drama College. I came up to London, and I was doing a lot of things rather than necessarily handing all my assignments in on time. But I was going down to the Troubadour on a Wednesday night, and Redd Sullivan and Martin Windsor were running it that night and then they were going away. And so I said, 'Could I take over the evening whilst you're away?' So, much to my surprise thinking back on it, they let me do that."** However, it was not long before Sonja put her own stamp on the club: **"It went from a straight, hip, folk club, to having poets, and a light show, people playing bongos, and I used to sing a couple of songs every week. It did quite well, people used to come back,**


Sonja in 1971

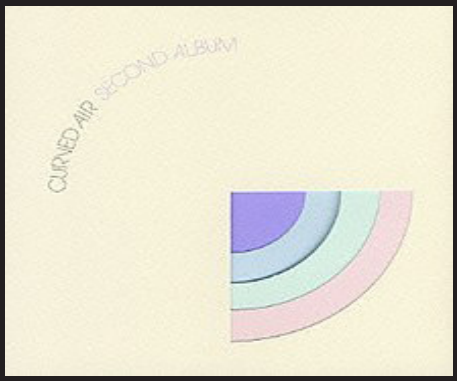

Curved Air in 1971

so for my first business, and I haven't done anything like that since. Since it was the sixties, there was synchronicity everywhere. You see someone on the underground, and I'd say 'You don't happen to know anyone that does lights and if they would come down and do lights at our club night?'"

She continues: **"So my little team grew, a team of artists like Al Stewart, who is a really good friend of mine and he had the same manager as me. But he came down and sang; Dave Cousins [Strawbs] came down and sang."** With a voice which carried depth and range, the lure of straight Pop Music never entered Sonja's mind. Staying true to her roots, and expanding upon them, even though her musical tastes were more varied: **"It was what was happening at the time, and I learnt the guitar and to accompany myself and people enjoyed what I did, so I kept doing it. But I remember I liked The Rolling Stones very much and Dusty Springfield, so this sort of R&B kind bluesy thing. I was aware of that being of great interest to my generation as well. So I used to search the Marquee up in London, when I was 15/16 and I saw some more R&B type music, and The Who and Mandred Mann and things."**

With Curved Air, the music created has stood the challenges of both advances and time. Recently boxed and remastered (Cherry Red Records), the first four albums by this sonic outfit still sound fresh; a fully fledged adventure through the looking glass. From the first and highly influential release 'Air Conditioning' (1970), to the neoclassical 'Second Album' (1971) which spawned the top-four hit 'Back Street Luv'. The third, and at one stage painfully rare, 'Phantasmagoria' (1972) is the icing on the cake of the fruitful journey, living up to the promise which was waiting to break free. This was followed by the wider reach of the Rock-laced fourth 'Air Cut' (1973).

Sonja remembers fondly the genesis of Curved Air and how they came to be:



"They had somebody that was just starting to manage them, he thought their music was great but they needed a front-person, preferably a girl. He [their manager] had seen me perform in 'Hair', and also the rest of the band they were working with the person who wrote the music for 'Hair' [Galt MacDermot] on another musical he had written. So there was a connection there, and their manager rang my manager on the first of January 1970, and asked 'Would Sonja be interested in joining a band?', and I was still in 'Hair' for two or three months. I went along, I heard them play, they were really nice guys, the music was just so beautiful ... beautifully played. Not quite classical but it had those beautiful melodies, and the songs were pretty much there but they needed lyrics. I loved words, making things, and having a piece of music and a tune to fit the perfect words was new to me, but it gave a structure in a way; you know, the words to fit the tune and that made the song develop in a different kind of way. When you're thinking it all up yourself, and thinking of the song and chords and everything as well." She went on to highlight the importance of chemistry within Curved Air, which is something Sonja carried with her from previous experiences: **"I had been working really closely with all the people in 'Hair', you know, the guys and the women. I wanted to keep that sense of community. We didn't pair off with one another, we moved into a flat together. I just wanted everything to be really relaxed ... in a way, that was the way I was used to things being. Going round the country doing Folk clubs, and parties by myself, and getting to know people. So I hadn't really been dating that much, you could name people I knew who were people that I met through the music scene ... other artists and things. So we bonded and it worked out really well."**

At this point, I asked Sonja about the build up and perhaps preparation that went into the recording of the Curved Air debut: **"It was the perfect time.**

We were a new band, so there was that excitement of going out on the road together. Once we rehearsed all the set out in the country where the bass players' family [Rob Martin] had space out in Gloucestershire, so when we got our set together we went out and played a lot. We played all the little clubs and universities, and colleges in England, and we also bought a bus, a forty-two seater I think it was?, a coach really. We travelled round Holland, Germany and Switzerland, we went with this bus playing little clubs and staying wherever they would put us up. Wherever we were playing, we stayed in commune type places, people shared spaces, all very idealistic and peace and love and all that. Wherever we played, the music went down so well, and we had this guy who became our sound engineer, so we had the same person mixing the sound every night, so that was really good."

Continuing, and reflecting on the already strong fanbase that was building: **"That was before we had the picture disc ['Air Conditioning'], but the sound was really good because we had keyboards and violin. It's important to get the right balance ... the right excitement. Basically we did a lot of shows, so by the time we got the deal with Warners,we had played the Roundhouse [London] several times over the year to bigger and bigger crowds. So we were really ready to record, we knew the songs inside out, and we could. So we got through all the songs that weren't good enough and got to the best ones. So that is why it turned out, to me, one of the best albums we did."**

In 1971, Curved Air appeared on Top of the Pops promoting the 'Back Street Luv' single, a new experience for the band: **"There was a lot of alternative music then, like Jethro Tull and more eccentric stuff was in the charts. It hadn't just been pop like it was in the mid-sixties, but it wasn't anything like I thought it was. I got picked up by a car, but then when I had done**

some TV when I was fifteen-sixteen, and my mother had gotten me some TV things. I was also picked up from home by a chauffeur and driven to the studios. So we got picked up, and I remember the dressing rooms. I remember the actual place where we played not being that huge, the audience were there, and the music wasn't as loud as we had been used to playing it. Pan's People, this dance troupe were there, and you could hear their feet stamping on the ground ... there was just a lot of this extra noise." Elaborating on the audience's perception, Sonja continues, **"When you see something on TV and it's all seamless and you just hear the music coming out and it's really loud but when it's actually being filmed or televised, there's all this other stuff going on. It was a very new experience. We did some TV in Germany and that was very different because that didn't really have an audience at all. We had a good space to work in and we really did play properly, whereas on Top of the Pops everybody didn't play."**

Following Curved Air and the hiatus of 1976 post-'Airborne', Sonja did not sit still for long, returning to her roots in the 'Hair' musical, and persuing a dynamic solo career, galvanising Sonja as one the greatest singers that Britain has produced. Her solo releases, from the self-titled first album in 1980 to the dynamic 1991 album 'Songs from the Acid Folk' with TY-LOR through to 1995's 'Harmonics of Love', not to mention her collaborations with Marvin Ayres as MASK, 2005's 'Heavy Petal' and 2010's 'Technopia', are drenched in her one of a kind flair. The music of Sonja Kristina and Curved Air refuses to become a footnote in history, or even disappear into the ether. Reunion shows have taken shape since 2008, and with further album releases including 'North Star' (2014) and the exceptional live set 'Live at Under the Bridge' (2019).

Going solo and breaking away from Curved Air, Sonja kept moving forward, but explains why the band drifted in 1976: **"In the eighties, I got another band together called Sonja Kristina's Escape, with a whole new**

bunch of songs and I auditioned a band. I found the musicians who had the strongest voice, and I put them in a room to improvise together, and I wanted the ones that were the most powerful players. So I had a really, really good band and we toured around and it went really well. I did some plays, and I did a revue of French songs but not sung in French, but really good translations. We toured around, a theatrical tour around theatres and we ended up in the Piccadilly Theatre. Then I did the musical Marsha Hunt wrote called 'Man To Woman'. So all these things were going on while Stewart [Copeland, former husband] was away with The Police and building that up. I was busy with my own projects, which was great." Looking back to her departure from Curved Air, Sonja stated: **"As it got to 1976, my heart wasn't in it in the same way, as the music wasn't that grand. Even Darryl [Way], when he put together a song, it didn't have the same kind of power as the early stuff did to me. But everybody put in songs and it was going in different directions."**

One of the many highlights of the early seventies Curved Air output was the experimental 'Phantasmagoria' [1972] album: **"Yes that was the Air Cut band; that was my band. I loved what we did on that as we did some of my songs and the people that we had chosen again were very powerful performers and writers too, they were very strong on every level. That band only held together for a year. But Kirby [Gregory] from the Air Cut band is with us now as we are still touring and we are just about to make a new Curved Air album. We did one seven years ago called 'North Star' [2014] and we are working on a new one now, and the band is just getting going with that. We are going to set up a Patreon page so the fans can contribute and help support us whilst we're recording this new album."** When Curved Air reconvened in 2008, they released a set of re-recorded versions of older songs entitled 'Reborn': **"That was really because we were getting ready for**

the road again, and Darryl wanted to ... being a producer, he wanted to give them his own touch. So, he wanted those songs to sound the way he wanted them to sound, and we recorded the parts from our home studios and sent them of to Darryl and he put it all together. We had a look at the songs, Florian [Pilkington-Miksa], Darryl and I ... we had a new look at the old material and got them ready for when we went out on tour. Then Darryl put layers of violins, and did sort of modern twists on things, he basically had fun with it and made it his own really. For us it was just a preparation again for starting after so many years."

Going back out on tour with Curved Air was not a nerve-filled experience for Sonja: **"I'd been working again and performing my Acid Folk thing at the Troubadour again. So I was all over the place with that, and that was great fun, totally acoustically or we played in bars and art centres with full-on psychedelic effects and magic. The Acid Folk line-up was very powerful and beautiful guys with long hair down to their waist. So I had been doing that, and one show at the Isle of Man I got offered to do. When I was younger, I used to play on my own all the time because that was what I was used to, but going to do a concert on the Isle of Man, I found it really hard, and I missed having everyone else's musical vibes running through the music - the instrumentals and the camaraderie on stage, the camaraderie when you come of and before you go on. I felt very alone, so I chose not to do any more support slots on my own ... I have chosen not to any since for that reason, because the whole burden was just on me, even though that's the way I started."** Apart from the recent Cherry Red box, the expectation of new material, there is also a further Curved Air project on the horizon: **"We are also working on finishing of a mix of a concert we did in Japan in February last year. I've heard the album as it is now, and it is a really, really good performance. So that will**

be out before we release the new material, and that will show how Curved Air is still alive and kicking and breathing. Through the new generation of players that we have."

The future is very bright indeed for Curved Air, a future which is the source of excitement for Sonja: **"The old Curved Air stuff, when it is interpreted by really talented musicians who can improvise and really play together, rather than playing like they are producing a record, they play off each other, it is not always the same, and the audiences love it. Our violinist now, he's called Grzegorz Gadziomski [Greg], he's from Poland. The last violinist we had Paul Stax had to leave because of an injury, so Greg is playing with us now."** Continuing, Sonja introduced the line-up of the twenty-first century Curved Air: **"Robert Norton, our keyboard player, he played with me in my Astro Folk which came after my Acid Folk, his joy is improvising, making new sounds and atmospheres like Francis did. Kirby Gregory who was with Air Cut, and he's a fiery guitarist, and Andy Tween, he was my drummer back then in the nineties. He had just come out of college after taking a degree in percussion. Since then he has had a very busy career playing all sorts of things and composing things, and he's now quite the master musician. He's a really interesting and exciting drummer, and I get really excited about this band. Our bass player [Chris Harris] has been with us since 2008, because he had been playing with Darryl in some of Darryl's other projects and he learnt the Curved Air set beginning again in 2008. He's heaven-in-a bass player too, with time and expression, and he plays all the nuances, the different styles of each of the composers. It's surprising how much is in a bass part."**

Even though 2020 did not bring the joy to perform like what was hoped, Sonja looks forward optimistically: **"Yes, we had a lot of stuff for last year we couldn't do, because after Japan we**

went to Brazil. We were meant to do the Prog Cruise, 'Cruise To The Edge', the Yes cruise with all the prog bands and things. Now that's put off until 2022; hopefully we won't have a pandemic then. It just seems with Zoom and everything, you can get a lot done without leaving the house- the day begins and ends and it feels like you've done so much but you haven't left the house … We [the band] are going to be working remotely, hopefully we will be able to play them together in a room before we record, because that's when you can actually find how they feel." Finishing, Sonja gave me her thoughts on our present condition and what fires her own positivity: **"Yeah, I feel that what we are going through, there are a lot of changes going on, but the world needed this space in order to make some much needed changes, it just sort of happened organically in a way."**

Sonja Kristina is the real deal, and a woman who has lived an authentic, extraordinary life. Although the line-up may have changed with the passing of time, Sonja keeps the motivations, mission statement and indeed spirit of Curved Air very much alive in this new era.

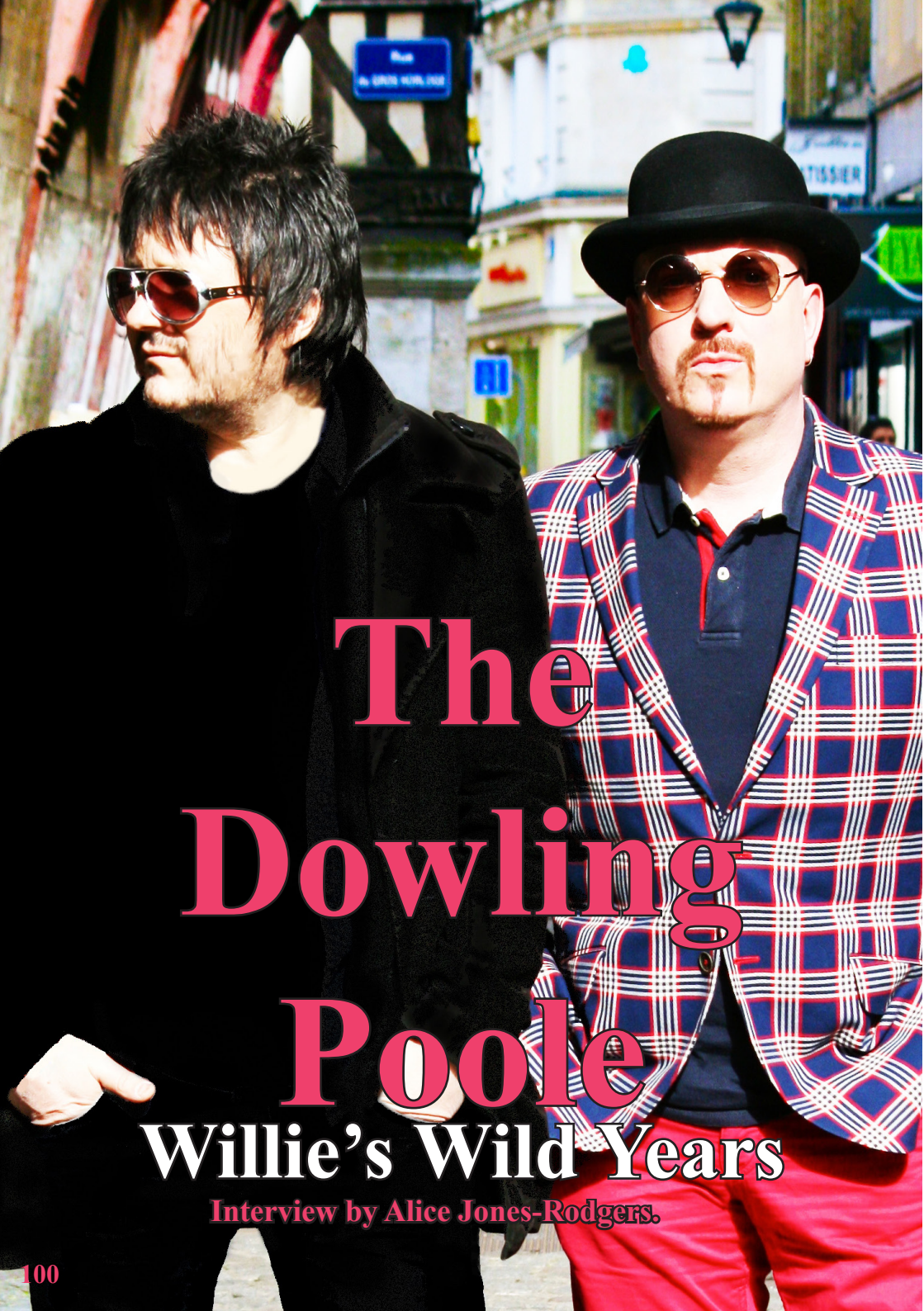
'Curved Air: The Albums 1970-1973' is out now on Cherry Red Records.

www.curvedair.com

www.facebook.com/CurvedAir

Exactly twenty-five years to the day since they put out their debut single 'Tuner/Lower' on their own label, Rock Action, Glasgow's Mogwai released their tenth album, 'As the Love Continues'. In between these two events, the band, led by Stuart Braithwaite, have quietly been pushing the Post-Rock envelope with their epic, largely instrumental soundscapes to the point that by now, their sound is one that is familiar to most. Mention Mogwai and most clued-up Rock fans will recount their uncanny ability to juxtapose unsettling quietness with monolithic loudness and more often than not, they will be thinking of guitar-heavy, overdrive utilising tracks such as 'Like Herod' from their 1997 debut album, 'Young Team'. However, as proven as early as that album's follow-up, 1999's 'Come On Die Young', the sound of Mogwai is so much more than that formula.

For 'As the Love Continues', which as much to the band's surprise as anybody else's, has just shot to the top of the UK album charts, Mogwai have reconvened with the producer of 'Come On Die Young', it's follow-up, 2001's 'Rock Action' and last studio album, 2017's 'Every Country's Sun', Dave Fridmann (albeit via Zoom). On this album, the work that they have undertaken on seven soundtracks, ranging from 2006's 'Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait' to last year's 'ZeroZeroZero' seems to have influenced the result more than ever before. Take for example, the opening 'To the Bin My Friend, Tonight We Vacate Earth', a keyboard and synth-led piece which harnesses the same sort of epic quality found on Sigur Rós' most euphoric work and in five minutes manages to evoke a space mission to seek out life on other planets: surely the perfect antidote to being stuck at home in this seemingly neverending cycle of lockdowns. Elsewhere, the guitars are back with full force for the pulverising 'Drive the Nail', the deliriously giddy Smashing Pumpkins-esque 'Ceiling Granny' and the chaotic 'Pat Stains', which features an atmosphere-adding guest appearance from trumpeter Colin Stetson, whilst Braithwaite provides a world-weary '90s Slacker-Rock channeling vocal on 'Richie Sacremento', a desperately sad tribute to friends the band have lost during their ascent to becoming number one album artists, such as the Silver Jews' David Berman and Frightened Rabbit's Scott Hutchinson. They look down with pride at this much deserved achievement, whilst Mogwai are probably still a bit bemused.



The Dowling Poole

Willie's Wild Years

Interview by Alice Jones-Rodgers.

"Okay Alice, this is a sound test! Are you receiving me? ... Are my 'P's popping too much? ... I sit on the 'PEEES' somewhat! ... Is it working?", jokes Willie Dowling in a manner befitting a gentleman who for the last quarter of a century has provided the musical scores and underscores for a massively diverse range of television programmes and films, from 'Armstrong and Miller' (Channel 4, 1999-2003) to 'Fireman Sam' ('Heroes of the Storm', HiT Entertainment, 2014) through to the newly revived 'Spitting Image' (BritBox, 2020), as he answers the phone from his remote home-come-studio somewhere in the French countryside.

It is from this residence that Dowling operates as one half of the explosively socio-politically aware rock duo The Dowling Poole (the other half being former Cardiacs guitarist and Wildhearts bassist and current Lifesigns bassist and vocalist Jon Poole). Having released three full length albums since their formation in 2013, 'Bleak Strategies' (2014); 'One Hyde Park' (2016) and 'See Me, See You' (2020)) as well as a host of singles and EPs, their latest releases, last year's 'Deep Breath' and 'We Are the Noise' singles and this year's 'The Trump Chronicles' EP find the band ramping up the political ante still further, adding a much needed voice to proceedings as the world goes seemingly off its rocker.

Whilst The Dowling Poole are an exciting enough subject for an interview in themselves, I set out to trace Dowling's career back to its very roots, when aged 18, he moved from his home city of Newcastle upon Tyne to London and after a series of bands in the '80s, including the hard rocking glam outfit The Grip, he joined The Wildhearts. After touring with them as keyboardist and contributing his diverse range of musical talents to their 1993 debut album 'Earth vs The Wildhearts', the initially fanclub only release, 1994's 'Fishing for Luckies' and second album, 1995's 'P.H.U.Q.', he chose to follow his own musical path and with the recently sacked fellow Wildheart CJ formed the band where I first became aware of him, Honeycrack.

Honeycrack, despite only releasing one album, 1996's 'Prozaic' and a string of Top 40 singles, if slightly overlooked in the grand scheme of things, were certainly one of the most interesting bands of the time, not really nodding towards the Britpop or Britrock movements of the time, but rather sitting somewhere in between. Sure, they could birth a tune every bit as Pop-orientated as Blur's mid-'90s output, but they also had enough of a raucous Rock edge to be invited to play at the Donington Monsters of Rock Festival alongside Ozzy Osbourne and KISS. Since that band fizzled out somewhat prematurely at some point towards

The Dowling Poole

the end of the '90s and leading up to the formation of The Dowling Poole, alongside his career working on music for the small and big screens, he has formed bands such as SugarPlumFairies and Jackdaw 4, in 2012 was reunited with Wildhearts frontman Ginger to produce his triple solo album '555%' and has recently lent his ear for a damn fine tune to the production of a brand new album by Dr. Hook.

During the lengthy conversation prior to the following equally lengthy interview, I ask him how he has been coping during these strange times, to which he replies: "I feel a little guilty for saying this Alice, because I'm painfully aware of how terrible it is outside these doors, but I'm in France and we sort of opted for self-isolation when we moved here, fifteen years ago now, when England, and it was England, chose to go to war with Iraq, which at the time, seemed to be the worst bit that had happened in my lifetime. Terrible things have happened since then that are at least of equal value to it, but ... Yes, it's very, very remote where we are. The nearest town is sort of twenty-five minutes away and other than that, our closest neighbour is a field full of cows. Anyway, this is a long-winded way of saying that I'm not nearly feeling the pain in the way that I recognise from reading the newspapers and watching the British news that most people are. There's a certain amount of guilt that goes with that because I find myself in conversations with friends sort of glibly saying, 'Oh, it's a beautiful day. I was outside planting sweet potatoes'. You know, some completely nonsensical thing that from their point of view must seem deeply insensitive."

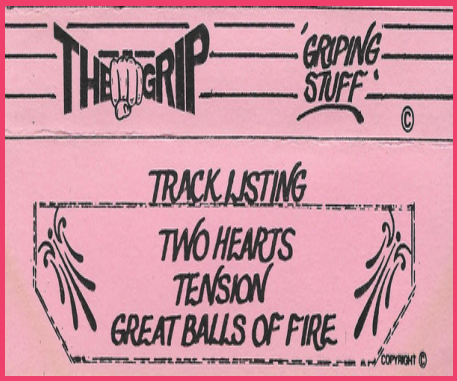
Firstly, hello Willie and thank you for agreeing to our interview, it is lovely to speak to you. Could we start by going right back to the beginning and ask how you first became interested in music as a listener and how you came to start making music yourself?

As a listener? That's a tricky one! I have one anecdote that might tell you something ... Well, actually, I have two [laughs]. I was seven years old and I had seen Slade on Top of the Pops and there was something about Slade that really appealed to me in a way that I still struggle to understand. Maybe it was the bright colours, the joyful nature of the song, they were a very 'up' band, and I really wanted the Slade record for Christmas; the first record I'd wanted. My aunt and uncle lived in London ... I lived in Newcastle upon Tyne at the time ... and my aunt and uncle, who were very, very hip, I was certain would get the message that I wanted this Slade record. And they did come up for Christmas and I did notice what could only be the Slade album. You know, records are fairly instantly obvious and this was in the days when records were all on vinyl, so it was obviously an album. Come Christmas day, I opened it up and to my horror, it wasn't Noddy beaming at me, but '21 Reggae Greats'! Not even a word that I knew what it meant [reggae], so I don't think I was even astute enough to hide my disappointment, but I do know that I didn't even play the record for a good few years. I must have been nine or ten when I finally went, 'Ooh, there's that thing!' and I put it on and wow, it got me straight away! I just loved it! I mean, to this day, there are songs that stand out on that record. There was a lot of Toots and the Maytals on it; 'Stir It Up', the original version, Bob Marley [and the Wailers, 1967]. It was just really interesting ... because at that point, of course, I am more aware of music and I'm more aware of, you know, the pool of bands that my other peer group aged ten would be into and it would have been, I suppose Sweet and those sort of mid-'70s bands, which I didn't completely get, but I'd got into The Beatles and had started getting their albums and then found this diversion, this type of music that I'd not heard of and I'd got a record of about three years ago or whatever it was, and I think it was part and parcel of broadening ... because to this day, I say I don't really know bands that well. Jon Poole will back me up on this, he's always astonished at how ignorant I

am; he just is astonished that I don't know this band or ... but what I do know is odd songs; songs have stuck out. I very early on got into The Carpenters, I liked Free, I liked ABBA songs, I liked The Beatles and when New Wave came around, it just seemed uniformly really good to me that stuff. I loved Squeeze and Elvis Costello and The Police meant a great deal to me, but to this day, I don't think I could name you one of any of their albums, I could honestly just tell you a handful of their songs. And it's really continued that way. I don't buy music a great deal. If I hear something, that will generally be ... because I don't really listen to the radio that much, apart from Radio 4 ... If I hear something, perhaps it will be one of the other band members playing something in a van, or something like that, then maybe that will pique my interest and I'll look for a way of getting hold of that record. But the last band I discovered, as opposed to songs, was about fifty years too late [laughs], or thirty years too late anyway, and it was XTC. Again, Jon Poole said to me ... because he'd read our reviews over the years, this was Jackdaw 4 and stuff like that, and XTC would always come up; 'oh, they're a bit XTC, they're a bit 10cc'. Anything with 'CC' in it, apparently I sounded like! [Laughs]. But I honestly didn't know anything by XTC other than 'Making Plans for Nigel' ['Drums and Wires', 1979] and the singles and Jon persisted a bit and he said, 'I think you'd really like them'. So, on his recommendation, because I trust him more than anyone else, I went and got a load of their records. But I confess, on first listen, didn't get it. I didn't get it and I think it's that stupid mistake that one makes of trying to listen to too much, too soon, listening to thirty songs. I remember doing it in the car on the way from England to France and it must have been thirty or forty songs that I listened to, back to back, and it's too much for the brain to make sense of and I remember saying to Jon, 'I'm not so sure' and then I gave it another go, I think must have been the truth, because suddenly I was aware that I was acutely listening to a song called 'Easter Theatre' ['Apple Venus Volume 1',

Photograph by Trudi Knight

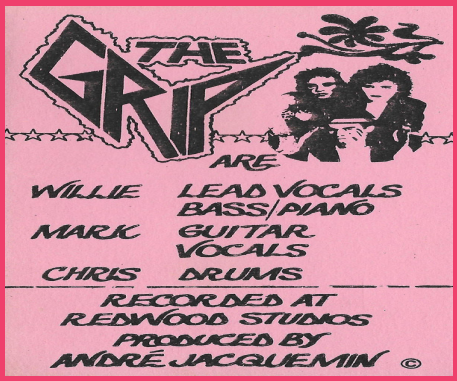
1999] by XTC and that was the key in for me. I just listened to that song on repeat, over and over again. It struck me as having all the ingredients of the people I knew a lot about, like The Beatles and The Beach Boys and stuff like that and brought something new to the table and it was so good. And then I saw what people were talking about and Id been drawing, I think, from a similar well to XTC for years without knowing it really. It was the same approach to songwriting where, I don't know, for want of a better description, it's kind of onion-like; there's always another layer to the onion underneath. I think there's a similar approach to my songwriting. But anyway, my point being, that's how I got into XTC and even those songs that I listened to on that day, where I listened to thirty or forty back-to-back, I went back and discovered that 'oh, I really like those now, I really do'. And how I came to start making music myself, once again, I'm not too clear on the history, but I had a band when I was about twelve, thirteen years old with a couple of friends from school, where it must have been for an assembly or something. Do you remember assembly? Do they still have them? I don't know! I don't know whether we were asked or whether we just did it, but we did a version of 'Let It Be [The Beatles 'Let It Be', 1970]', I think it was, just me and another kid on guitar with some girls singing and then when high school started and again, I was still in Newcastle upon Tyne then, I got rather more serious about it and formed a band who would meet and now it was a proper band, you know, two guitars, bass and everybody sang and drums. Again, it was all covers. I don't recall writing much until I was thirteen, fourteen ... as opposed to my partner in crime, Jon Poole, who will tell you the exact date on November the 9th, when he was five years old, he wrote this lyric and quote it back to you perfectly! He has the most staggering memory of anybody I have ever come across! He can recall the date, the albums, who produced it, what flavour gravy ... he knows everything, he really does! Mine are a little more vague, but it started somewhere around then. I had

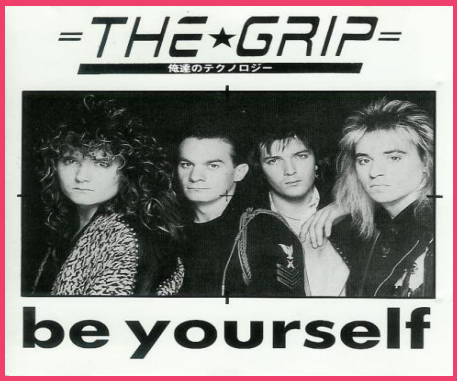


a few piano lessons, but I was very scared of my piano teacher, so I'm mostly self-taught! But, yes, so there were early bands and then, on the last day of my A-levels, I decided that as long as I had a ticket to get into university, I wasn't going to go but I would always be able to because I'd got my A-levels. And I moved down to London, just about four or five days after my eighteenth birthday and never went back at all. I stayed in London and formed various band, some of which you'll have heard of and most people will thankfully never hear of! [Laughs].

One of the things I wanted to ask you about was one of your first bands, The Grip. Weren't you somehow involved with Julian Lennon?

Oh gosh, now, that is going back! That was one of the bands that I was hoping you weren't going to mention! Laughs]. Only because it ages me so terribly, but I have already told you that I was seven when I heard '21 Reggae Greatest Hits', so I don't suppose it matters! I don't think I would be fooling anybody to say I was under forty! [Laughs]. I think The Grip was the second or third band that I was in when I moved down to London. I can't have been more than twenty when we formed and it was formed in a very peculiar way. There was a guy that was managing Julian Lennon at the time and Julian Lennon was in the papers all the time at the time and he needed a bass player, this guy that was managing him. And he ran a clothes shop, but a very swanky one in the centre of London. I think he would be one of the earliest what you might call yuppies. Very well to do and he was managing Julian Lennon and they were in Stringfellows every night and getting into The Mirror and The Sun paper and I don't recall how I got the phone call, but I was asked to be his bass player. I agreed, met him once and then he disappeared [laughs] because he'd moved over to New York and ran away from this manager guy and the manager said to me, 'You've obviously got something going for you. You write songs, don't you?' So, I played him a few and he said, 'Right!'



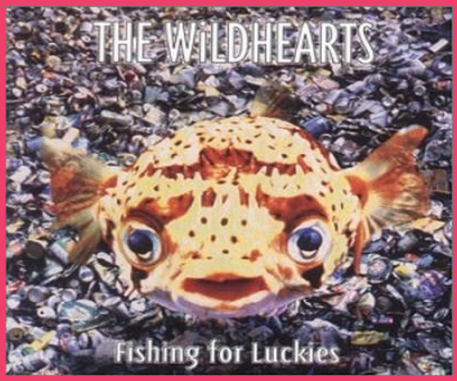


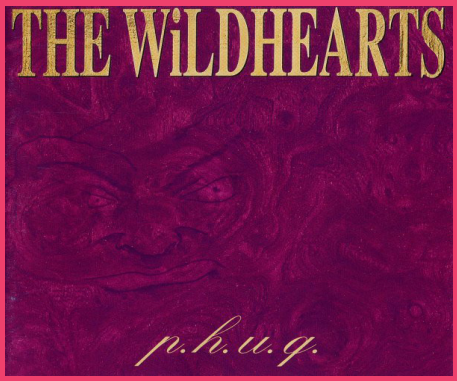
And he called me up two days later and he'd booked the Marquee Club on Wardour Street for in about a month's time, which he obviously paid very heavily for, which again, I was too naive to realise ... I just thought 'wahey, somebody thinks were great and they've given us a gig at the Marquee!' I mean, looking back on it now, it's ridiculous! But it was a very funny incident because I put a band together, just a three-piece with a couple of chaps that I knew from other bands around the Putney area in London and wrote fourteen, fifteen songs, I think it must have been in a week, two weeks ... I don't think I'm exaggerating because I do remember three weeks from the date of the phone call was the date of the show. So, we turned up, he wined us and dined us, he took us to a specialised leather manufacturers, he took us to an exclusive hairdressers, we got all done up for this show and we walked out on stage and to my astonishment, girls just started screaming and I thought 'this must just be how it is'. I hadn't realised he'd hired the Italia Conti Stage School [laughs] to come in, told them they were filming for a video and these girls' job to scream the second anything moved on stage. I became aware of it about half an hour into the show and these girls started looking backwards over their shoulders, as I found out afterwards [laughs], looking for their parents to come and pick them up! And the whole audience disappeared and by the last song, there was a handful of fourteen, fifteen year old kids all still waiting for their mums and dads, all clearly screamed out, not that interested in what was going on on stage, and that was the first ever gig of The Grip! [Laughs] Really funny! My career has followed a similar path ever since then. It's looked very promising from time to time, but by the end has just failed to deliver! [Laughs].

Following several years as a member of The Grip, you joined The Wildhearts as touring keyboardist and contributed to the band's 1993 debut album 'Earth vs The Wildhearts', the 1994 fan club only mini-album 'Fishing for Luckies' and

mini-album 'Fishing for Luckies' and the second album, 1995's 'P.H.U.Q'. How did you come to join The Wildhearts and could you tell us a bit about your experience of being part of the band?

Well, The Grip all ended somewhere around 1990, I think and there began a series of groups. I sort of dotted around playing sessions, I toured with Andy Taylor from Duran Duran for a while; Midge Ure for a while, from Ultravox; I had a sort of Aerosmith type band that I fronted for a couple of years called Cat People; I played with Hot Chocolate off and on for a few years and then The Wildhearts offered me a job. That was because I knew Ginger [Wildheart] from a band called The Quireboys, who were sort of part and parcel of that London scene in the late '80s and I was very close with Spike, the singer from The Quireboys [I tell Willie that we met Spike when we interviewed The Quireboys way back in January 2019 for Issue Four]. Yeah, well, I still love Spike. I haven't spoken to him for a long, long while but he's just a charmer. He was a lovely fella. But, as I recall, Ginger got sacked from The Quireboys and immediately called and asked me if I would help him out with some demos for this new band ... Oh, I think he asked me to form a band with him but I wasn't keen on doing that, so we did some demos together, which became the basis of what became The Wildhearts about six months to a year later, I suppose, I don't remember the exact date, and they started climbing the Rock ladder reasonably quickly, and this is during the period where I'm just sort of jumping from band to band, really as a session musician, and Ginger asked whether I'd come out on tour with them. I think he just needed a friend, because they didn't need a keyboard player, but it was the beginnings of the fraught period where there were lots of internal things going on with The Wildhearts. I think he just needed a mate more than anything and his management at the time were very keen that I might be the one to calm him down a bit! [Laughs]. But that was never going to happen! I sessioned for





them for about six months and the second I felt the stroppiness starting ... never full out, not the way that I've seen him attack other band members, but he did start dropping hints, you know [adopts Newcastle accent], 'Some people are going to have to decide if they want to be in this band or not', then I thought 'okay, well, I'm not going to stick around long enough for the full-on venom to come my way.

As The Wildhearts always struck us as quite a chaotic band to be a part of, what are your favourite memories of touring and being in the studio with them?

I don't really have any to be honest. I was in a peculiar state of mind myself at the time , thinking 'why am I sessioning? I should be doing my own band'. I mean, there must have been some happy moments because I wouldn't have stuck it out for six months if there weren't. I mean, I would say this: I always thought that Ginger could turn a good tune, but I don't think he was his best judge of material because he had the tendency to just churn it all out and there wasn't a selection process. But that was a pretty prolific period for him and there were lots of ... Oh yeah, so I do have a good memory! I remember doing a song that really appealed to me. It was during the 'P.H.U.Q.' sessions. We were down in Surrey in a rather nice studio owned by the guy what wrote songs for Buck's Fizz [Andy Hill] as I recall. Comforts Place, it was called and Ginger, in a bedroom one night, after we had finished recording, picked up an acoustic guitar and played me this song called 'In Lilly's Garden' and I remember thinking, 'aah, alright, I knew you had something!' That was a special song. I'm much more keen on that side of stuff. Again, it will make me deeply unpopular with your readers, but there is the heavy macho aggressive stuff that they do that I've just got no interest in whatsoever and leaves me completely cold, but, you know, '29x the Pain' [UK vinyl edition of the 1996 'Fishing for Luckies' reissue]; 'In Lilly's Garden'; 'Geordie in Wonderland' ['Fishing for Luckies'


Honeycrack in 1996. L/R: Hugo Degenhardt; Mark McCrae, Willie, CJ and Pete Clarke

original 1995 version], when he does his pop stuff, I like that and I was present on a few of those sessions and I must have enjoyed them. I did a few string arrangements for them for that album ['P.H.U.Q.'] as well and I always enjoy doing string arrangements. There's nothing like having real players in the studio and that sounded quite nice. I mean, I guess I'm just brushing over it slightly. There must have been good memories, but certainly not amongst my happiest days [laughs], put it that way!

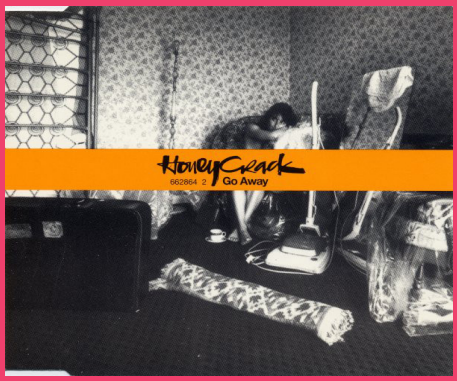
After refusing an offer to become a full-time member of The Wildhearts, opting to follow your own path, and guitarist and vocalist CJ's sacking following clashes with Ginger in 1994, the two of you joined forces to form Honeycrack and signed to Epic Records. You took on vocal, guitar and songwriting duties and the line-up was completed by adding guitarist and vocalist Mark McRae, bassist and vocalist Pete Clarke and drummer and vocalist Hugo Degenhardt. What are your memories of putting Honeycrack together, signing to Epic Records?

Around that time, he [Ginger] sacked CJ, who is back in the band now and I don't suppose any of them will thank me for remembering this period! ... But he sacked CJ. We were in the middle of making an album that I think is called 'P.H.U.Q.' [1995] and around this time, I'd already decided that okay, I'm out of this, it's too chaotic and you know, you're supposed to be mates in a band, at least as much as you can ... it was just all unnecessary as far as I could see. I'm a gentle soul! [Laughs]. But anyway, so, he'd sacked CJ. Now, I didn't know CJ that well, Ginger was my mate in the band and Danny [McCormack] I hung out with quite a bit and Ritch [Battersby], but CJ, out of the four of them I knew least well. But I did recognise that he was very popular and this is where I guess ... oh, I used the situation, is the truth of it. He'd sacked CJ, I knew CJ was popular. I'd been touting a few songs around, post-The Grip and meeting utter rejection all the time, but I sort

Willie With Honeycrack on TFI Friday, 1996

of saw an opportunity with CJ because I knew he was popular. So, I went to him and he was very distraught at the time because, you know, he'd just been sacked from this band that were really just starting to go places and he'd been kicked out right on the cusp of it. So, he was at a delicate stage himself and he'd got no money, he'd only got a guitar because I think that was all they gave him and so I said, 'Look, why don't you and I do something? Here's the story CJ, we'll contact record labels and say that once we were out on the road with The Wildhearts, we got on really well, we started writing some songs together and now we've got this idea for a band'. I think, just because he was a bit desperate, we went, 'Yeah, alright!' So that's what we did and I sent out the same songs, although we did re-demo a few of them ... but I sent out the same songs to labels and to my astonishment, we got a bidding war on our hands! Suddenly, I was sitting with the same A&R guys who turned down this stuff a year before and suddenly having to put up with them saying, 'Wow, this is the best stuff we've heard in years!' My temptation at the time was to say 'You fuckers ...!' But of course, you can't. You realise that if you do that then you're dead in the water and [laughs] nobody's going to talk to you after that! But that's how we blagged our way into a record deal and we had a bit of a bidding war, which got a bit complicated because suddenly, EastWest [Records], which was The Wildhearts' label at the time put a price on CJ's head to get him out of contract. Yeah, before we recorded a note, when we signed up to Epic, we already owed £100,000 just to buy CJ out of a contract! So, Honeycrack was off to a doomed start! [Laughs] Do you see the pattern in this now? Career-wise, it looks very good at the beginning, but soon goes downhill! [Laughs]. That's how it was with Honeycrack.

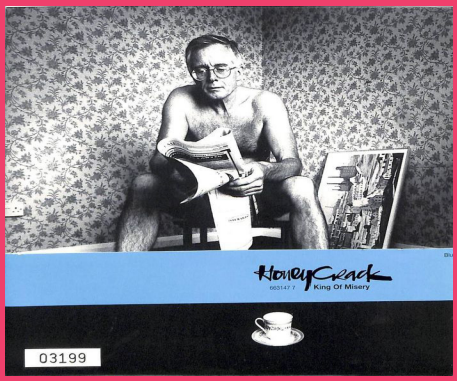
I tell Willie that I was a big fan of Honeycrack and that point in time, the height of the Britpop / Britrock (Terrorvision, Skunk Anansie, 3 Colours Red, Reef, Therapy? et al ... and of course, The Wildhearts) era,



I was working at HMV, where I bought the band's debut and only album, 1996's 'Prozaic' along with the singles taken from it, 'Sitting at Home', 'Go Away' and 'King of Misery'. I relay to him that I recall one of the singles, the resissue of 'Sitting at Home' (released 8th July 1996), being brought out as a 2CD set with a cardboard slipcase to house both in. I ask him: Because for me, Honeycrack sort of sat somewhere between Britpop and Britrock, how did you feel about those movements at the time and where did you feel you fitted in?

Oh wow, how interesting! [On the subject of the cardboard slipcase] That's one of the things that used to annoy me a great deal! It was just what record companies did. In order to get you into the charts, they used to print out multiple versions of the same thing and I just thought that was such a con. And of course, we were passively approving of it by letting it be done, but it's not like we had any choice, that was how they ran the business, you know.

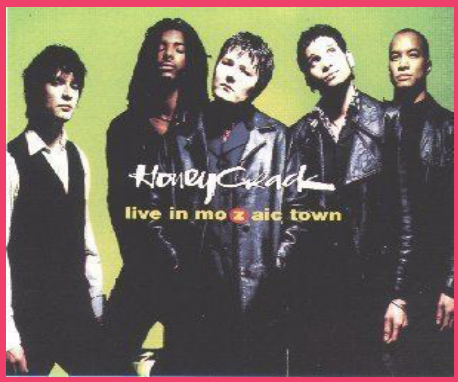
[On the subject of Britpop / Britrock] I have a lot time for that stuff. In the same way that Slade made sense to me, a lot of that '90s music made a lot of sense to me, I really did enjoy it. You know, guitar-based, clever lyrics ... I mean, even some of the less palatable or less popular stuff, or some of the stuff that seems to go in and out of popularity. I even liked some of the Oasis stuff, that was good. I was always more of a Blur fan than Oasis, but there was a whole load of them! Suede were great, I really liked them and Elastica were fantastic, I loved them. There was some good music around then. You know, now you say that, it reminds me that I think under any other circumstances, we would have fitted into that Britpop thing, but I think there was some hesitancy on the part of some journalists and so on because we came from ... our roots were The Wildhearts and The Wildhearts were considered to be very much a Rock band and of course, we couldn't sniff at that because we were offered things like Donington [Monsters of Rock Festival, 1996] and other rock



festivals, but you wouldn't have got Suede on at Donnington. Do you see what I mean? We had a lot more in common with the Britpop side of things than we did with the heavy rock side. We sat quite well with bands like Terrorvision and Menswe@r and Ocean Colour Scene. We had similar sort of rock sensibilities, rather than pseudo-Metal Heavy Rock, I think. [On the subject of fitting between Britrock and Britpop] I think that's a good way of putting it. There were a lot of Pop sensibilities in the singles stuff, like 'Go Away', 'King of Misery','Sitting at Home' and 'Anyway' [stand-alone single, 1996] and then you had the slightly Rockier end of things with things like 'Powerless', which had a little nod towards Punk Rock, I suppose. But you know, in a wider sense, that's always been my approach to songwriting. I find it intensely boring to have an album that delivers one dynamic level and one type of song all the time. And I know I go against the grain there because that is what most people expect of a band, but for me, the really interesting work is when a band recognises that human life is about much more than just one notion and you know, play around and express that musically and lyrically. Anyway, that is my approach and it doesn't make me a successful man, Alice, so I wouldn't take anything of it as bible!

What are your memories of writing, recording and promoting 'Prozaic'?

Writing was done very, very quickly. I'd done most of it before we'd got the deal, because as I said, we spent a long time in limbo with labels after us, but with EastWest suddenly putting a price on CJ's head, which meant that month after month another label would drop off if the price went too high and in the end there was only Sony and Epic left in the bidding war. During that time, I wrote most of the songs for the album. By the way, I say 'I wrote' and I don't think CJ would mind my saying that I wrote most of it, but it would be unfair of me to say I wrote all of it. CJ came up with the riff and the sing title for both 'Sitting at Home' and 'Go Away' and I think I wrote the verses around



both of those songs. I struggle to remember but certainly he contributed bits and I recognise that there was a nice little bubble gum pop thing that he did, so I would go, 'Okay, I can do something with that' and I'd take the bit away and I'd turn it into a song, but he came up with a few bits and pieces. And I think Mark McRae wrote one very late in the day and again, I think it was the same thing. I think there was a song called 'Paperman' on there that he wrote a verse for that I really liked and I think I added a chorus for that. Again, please forgive me Mark or CJ if you're reading this because my memory's straying and I'm doing you a disservice. I don't think so, I think I've got that right. Recording that was a happy experience. It was done quite quickly initially. We recorded with, to this day, my favourite engineer that I've ever worked with, a guy called Adrian Bushby, who I was not to see again but I ended up moving to France and, you know, life takes you off in different directions. He's since, I've heard, gone on to great things. He's won Grammys for Foo Fighters ['Echoes, Silence, Patience & Grace', 2007] and Muse ['The Resistance', 2011] and all sorts. And we recorded the album quite quickly in Trident Studios over a period of about three weeks and the label said, 'Oh, terrific, all good, now let's get mixers in to deliver the record'. Now, here's the bit I remember. Because I was in charge of producing and recording that, the whole three weeks we were recording the whole album, it cost £30,000 and then they said, 'Okay, let's get in some top mixers to remix the tracks' and I thought, 'no, that's a very good idea', because when you've written it and played it and produced it, it's hard to be objective to mixing and maybe somebody else would hear something that I'm not hearing. And there is where it became very, very lengthy. So, almost a YEAR later, they released that album and now it had gone from costing us £30,000 to £135,000! And bear in mind we're massively in debt, MASSIVELY in debt, and the biggest irony is that most of the record they released were my versions, or mine and Adrian Bushby's. They were a few

that the other mixers that came in did, that did the singles. Let's see, who was that? Al Clay mixed a couple of them that made it on to the record and Tim Palmer, who produced David Bowie [Tin Machine's self-titled debut, 1989 and 'Tin Machine II', 1991], another guy I liked a lot; he's very good. But a bulk of the album they released was the original one, which cost £30,000, but by the time they'd finished fiddling with it, it was £135,000! Again, as I said earlier on, when you're 22, 23, you just think 'oh, the magic money thing' and they'll send limousines for you and fly you first class, whereas I, by that time, was painfully aware of the record industry and they would send ... I lived, at the time, not far from Heathrow Airport, and they would send, I kid you not, a mirrored limousine to pick me up to take me the five miles from my house down to Heathrow Airport and I would say, 'Hold on a second! That must be costing a fortune! I'll get a mini-cab or my missus will drop me off down at the airport' and they'd go, 'Oh no, no! ... Well, it's different budgets'. So, you've got your press budget, you've got your touring budget, you've got your record budget, you've got your marketing budget and each department needed to spend its money, they had to meet certain targets and consequently, you had this ludicrous situation where, say, the touring money was running out and they'd say, 'Do you need to change your [guitar] strings every few days? Do you need to have three guys on the road with you?' And I'd go, 'Well, yeah, we do, but don't send the mirrored limousine!' [Laughs].

Material was demoed for a would-be second Honeycrack album (later known as 'PS The Unreleased Demos') before the band parted with Epic Records and split in the late '90s. A number of the tracks from what would have been the second Honeycrack album were reworked for your debut album with following project, SugarPlumFairies, 'Fruit Karma', released in 1999. How did Honeycrack come to an end and how did the songs earmarked for the second record fit into this final chapter of the band's story?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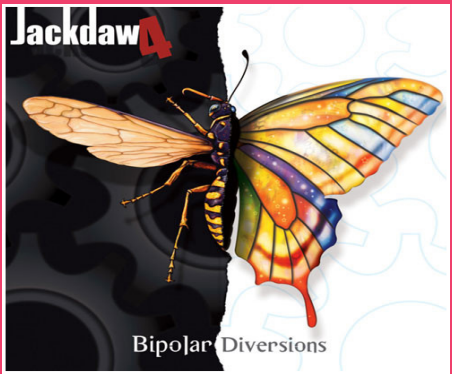
Yeah, that ['PS. The Unreleased Demos'] was crap! That was a terrible record! Oh, I really regret releasing that, but what happened was that everybody else in the band left and were untraceable and we had outstanding bills with van hire companies, with the mangement, who had put some money in ... because for a period of about three months when we left Epic ... and we did leave, we didn't get dropped. They failed to pick us up in time. They had a certain amount of time to pick up our option. Now, as I say, we were already pretty disillusioned with Epic, not least because they had sacked our A&R guy and got a new guy in who really didn't like us. So, our management at the time went out to our lawyer and said, 'Look, they haven't exercised the contract. Can we get out of this?' and the lawyer said, 'Yeah, you can try it on and if they really want to cling on to you, they will probably fight for you'. But I think they were a bit cheesed off at the time as well, so they did argue for a while and said 'No, you really shouldn't leave' and they presented us with a plan of what they would do for the next record, but we were so disillusioned with Epic at the time that we thought 'no, let's go'. I think the management were very confident that they would get us another deal. Well, there were deals offered, but they were very small time and at that time, everybody in the band, with the exception of myself, had already started wandering off doing other side projects and so, in consequence, being the only sort of grown up in the band at that time, i.e. I had a house and I was traceable and a mortgage and all this, whereas everybody else was literally still moving from floor to floor, they came after me for the money, and the management said, 'Well, look, you've got those demos, that would be a quick way to bring in some money and pay off some of the debt'. And it was for that reason and for that reason only, Alice, that I allowed myself to be persuaded to put what were really poor quality demos out as a second record. If I had my time again, I wouldn't have rather that never saw the light of day, because if I say so myself, 'Prozaic'



was a pretty rounded, solid record and to follow it up with such a crappy bunch of demos was a poor way to say goodbye, I think.

Willie continues:

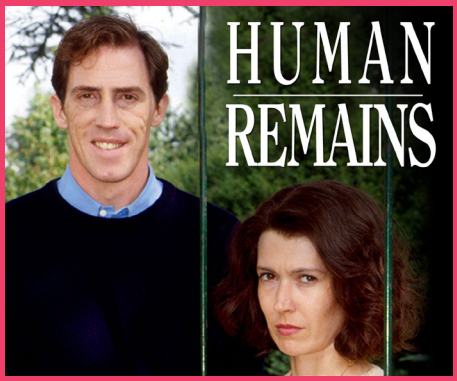
[Honeycrack] was a very similar story. I mean, we did very well for a few years, then the inevitable started happening. We didn't have roots like most bands. There was me and CJ, who, as I said ... I mean, I would call CJ a friend to this day, but it wasn't formed on that sort of school boy connection or, you know, that early formation. With the rest of the band, they were all initially hired hands that came from session places, with the exception of Mark McRae. I think it was an A&R guy who said, 'He's just left a band called Rub Ultra and he's very good'. We had a few minor hits, I think we got into the top 40 four or five times, but as so often happens and you hear this story a lot, there was a change of personnel at the label, our A&R guy went, the guy that came in really didn't like Honeycrack and I was already quite long in the tooth. I have a theory about this: If you sign a major deal when you're 22, 23, the combination of naiveity, innocence and who gives a fuck can work for you; you just get going. Well, I was already into my early thirties by the time we did this, so a bit long in the tooth, very jaded and knew the record industry by reputation well enough to know 'hold on a second, this isn't right'. Well, first of all, I imagine the record industry saw that in me as well and thought 'oh God, this guy could be a pain in the arse!' and equally, I knew when it was over, I just had this sinking feeling that this ain't going right and I don't regret not doing it anymore. So, I think the band folded, I think it was in 1997 and around then I started doing TV work, which I've kept doing. In fact, I think I mentioned earlier, I've just finished doing a series, 'Spitting Image' [BritBox, 2020]. I did it initially just to subsidise whatever band would come next and I'm struggling to remember what that was ... Oh, SugarPlumFairies I think came after Honeycrack and I did an album with them, one record called 'Fruit

Karma', that I don't think anybody's heard! [I reply that I have] Oh, have you really? You're a rare creature, Alice!

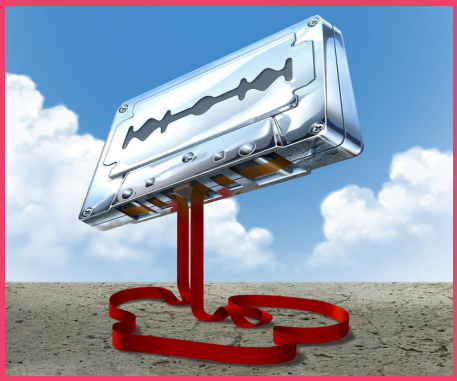
The final Honeycrack single, 1996's 'Anyway', originally released on EG Records, was later re-recorded and used as the theme tune to the Channel 4 show 'Armstrong and Miller' (Channel 4, 1997-2001), whilst other work underscoring and writing theme tunes for television and film has included everything from the Steve Coogan starring 'Dr. Terrible's House of Horrible' (BBC, 2001) to 'Fireman Sam' ('Heroes of the Storm', HiT Entertainment, 2014) and most recently the revived 'Spitting Image' (BritBox, 2020). The full list of the work you have created for television and film is of course on your website, but could you give our readers a bit of an insight into the incredible body of work you have created for film and television over the years, and do have any particular favourite achievements in this field?

I can tell you my least favourite straight away, 'Meg and Mog' [CITV, 2003-2004]! Fifty episodes of 'Meg and Mog', it nearly killed me! [Laughs]. There are only so many hours that you can hit a marimba and retain a degree of happiness! Oh God, what?! But, yes, typical me, I've started with the most miserable stuff! It started back in The Grip days. The Grip album ['Be Yourself', 1988] was produced by a guy called André Jacquemin, who made all of the Monty Python [album] recordings. He still does to this day. The Pythons do something, Terry Gilliam does something and then André is involved somewhere. So, André produced the first ... well, only Grip album and somewhere along the way, saw that there was something in me and that he wanted to help out, which was very kind of him. So he would give me session work from time to time and so I did little bits of session work for various Python projects over the years and I did little TV bits for him. So, I'd done some TV and I think when we did a TV show with Honeycrack and we were hanging out with comedians ...

which is my other great love, comedy, although less so now because I made the mistake of doing what I loved for a living for a few years and I think that's the key to unpicking some of the joy in it. You know, it's a bit like seeing how the magician's trick works; it's not so fascinating. And I did find that with comedy. Going into the nuts and bolts of it and doing it professionally for so long meant it had a degree less fascination for me because I can see the mechanics of it. I think it was one of the last TV shows Honeycrack did. It was a comedy show and bands were on. I think it was called 'Saturday Live' [ITV, 1996] and it was a comedy show and lots of names that we are now very familiar with were on that show doing little sketches or bits of stand-up, like Harry Hill, Simon Munnery, Jessica Stevenson was on there, a lot of the girls from 'Smack the Pony' [Channel 4, 1999-2003] were on there, countless others and, you know, a sketch would come to an end and a band would come on. So, Sleeper were on, Super Furry Animals, Belinda Carlisle ... We did two of these shows and by the time we did the second show, it was very clear to me that Honeycrack was coming to an end and I thought 'Okay, well, my other love is comedy. Maybe I could approach some of these comedians and see if I can't get some work out of it', because in my mind I always got it that all great comedy groups had their side guy, their music man, like Monty Python had Neil Innes and I thought 'wow, I wouldn't mind being one of them!' We got on well the first time with a few of them and if I'd have had my choice, I would have gone for Simon Munnery, but he really didn't need music, he was self-contained. He did a character called Alan Parker [Urban Warrior] and he didn't need me. But some of the other acts were good and one of them was Armstrong and Miller and they did a very funny sketch called Streaker, which was Norway's third most popular Heavy Metal band and I thought 'I could maybe have a go at them' and I'd heard rumours that they were doing a series for Paramount, a non-terrestrial TV station. To cut a long story short, I got the Armstrong and Miller one and ended up working



with them and did four series with them for Channel 4 and of course, once you're on that treadmill, I then got offered to do Steve Coogan's 'Dr. Terrible's House of Horrible' and I fell in with the director, a guy called Matt Lipsey, who took a shine to me. So, for a number of years, whatever Matt was doing, if it needed music, he'd get me to do it. So, I did Coogan with him, 'Lenny Henry in Pieces' I did [BBC, 2000-2003] and I did Vic [Reeves] and Bob [Mortimer] ... my favourite one to do of all of these, I think, was Vic and Bob's 'Catterick' [BBC, 2004]. That was so much fun! Jeff Beck came down and played a bit of guitar on it for a day, that was a lot of fun! I really enjoyed that, but one of the reasons I loved it was once I'd got Jim [Moir, aka Vic Reeves] and Bob's trust, they were happy. All they said was 'Can you play a banjo?' Well, I couldn't at the time, but I just said, 'Yeah, yeah, I can play banjo' [laughs], so I went off and learnt banjo and that was it, they just let me get on with it. It was really a lot of fun! Jim came down and did some playing on it and he said, 'Can I bring my Tibetan horn down to the studio?' So I said 'Yeah, alright' and I imagined him turning up with something he's picked up when he's been travelling, but no, it was a fucking old tuba, like a trombone bellhead and a piece of washing machine cable that he'd attached to a mouthpiece and he just blew down this thing! And it sounded fucking terrible and he turned to me and he went, 'Well, that doesn't sound very good, does it?' So I thought, 'what am I going to do here?' and I threw a load of reverb and delay at it [laughs] and this look of sort of karmic ecstasy came over him! So, I thought I could sample a bit of that and get that into the underscore. I did stuff for 'Big Train' [Channel 4, 1998-2002] and I did stuff for 'Human Remains', which was Rob Bryon and Julia Davis [BBC, 2000] and I did a couple of bits for 'Green Wing' [Channel 4, 2004-2007], but that was only incidental music, three series of 'Life of Riley' [BBC, 2009-2011], Caroline Quentin, I think that was and 'The Cup' [BBC, 2008], which was to my mind very underrated I thought and I thought that



should have been a lot bigger ... It was about a possessive football mum and dads trying to egg their kids on to live out their dreams. 'Bognor or Bust' [ITV, 2004], which was a game show that I did that pre-dated 'Mock the Week' [BBC, 2005 - present] and '8 Out of Ten Cats' [Channel 4, 2005 - present] but was very much along that sort of thing. I did 'Japanorama' [BBC Three, 2002 -2007] for Jonathan Ross; 'Boys and Girls' [Channel 4, 2005], which was a series that Chris Evans did for a little while; I did some stuff for Rowan Atkinson and Lenny Henry for Comic Relief [BBC, 2003], where Lenny did a Michael Jackson sort of thing and then recently, as I say, 'Spitting Image' [BritBox, 2020]. But the one that I'm most proud of was 'Catterick', that was so much fun to do.

You have worked with Ginger several times since your tenure in The Wildhearts, notably on the 2012 triple-album project '555%' as producer and co-songwriter. How did the experience of working with Ginger on '555%' all those years later compare to being a member of The Wildhearts in the early '90s? Also, we believe this is how you first met Jon Poole, formerly of Cardiacs, who you would go on to form The Dowling Poole with in 2013, so how did this come about?

It was the same and I regretted it immediately. Because there had been a number of offers prior to that. He had asked me to do this, that and the other, and you know, I think I helped him out on one of his birthday gigs, somewhere around 2005, which Jon Poole tells me is the first time I worked with him as well, because he did it as well. I don't remember meeting Jon Poole at all [laughs], but apparently, he played bass on stage with me for that whole night. It sounds terrible, but it is demonstrative and I hope not my complete self-centred ignorance; more that I just have a sieve-like memory! I don't recall that at all! So, I'd done that with him [Ginger] and well, that was probably about it and that's a twelve year gap between 1993, which is when I did The Wildhearts and I did

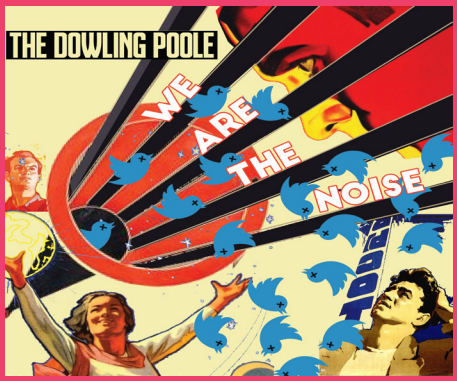
this one thing in 2005 and then, of course, one would hear through the grapevine that there had been various meltdowns, so every other invitation, I rejected, and then I got a call from his manager at the time, Gav, who said that ... again, I can't remember exactly if this is right, but I imagine that Gav would have said that, 'Look, Ginger wants you to produce his '555%' album', although I don't think it would have been called that at that particular time and I made all the usual noises, going 'Look, I'm eternally grateful that none of Ginger's anger had come my way', because I'm not that distant from him myself in terms of having an evil temper and being a manic depressive, so we're not a good fit, only his comes out in a very different way. If Ginger's suffering, the world has to know about it, whereas mine tends to be internalised. It's only my poor wife that suffers when I get grim. Although, I dare say, if I was out on the road as much as Ginger, then I'd be making everybody's else's life hell as well, I don't know. But I certainly didn't want to get back into that situation. There were numerous reassurances that things had changed and I think Gav or Ginger called me and said, 'Tell you what, I'll show you how things are different now and how I'm a different person, come out on tour and support us on an acoustic tour'. So, I did that and this would have been with Jackdaw 4 and the two of us went out and played on an acoustic tour that was very grim and grimy as I recall. You know, it was the back rooms of pubs and so on, but it was generally a happy experience. Ginger seemed to be much more in control of his emotions than he had been twenty years before, so in the course of that, when he was sort of hustling me to do the album, I kept saying 'No', but I let the feed in at that point and I thought 'maybe'. I mean, it would be terrible if none of us had the ability to change and what sort of evil bastard would I be if I didn't allow that possibility? So, to cut a long story short, I did it and there were a few incidents and again, I hasten to say it, very little came my way, it went other peoples' way and I found myself playing peace-maker in a couple of

situations and it angered me because I felt like I'd been duped. I thought, 'no, this is not as it had been sold to me on the package' and I find it hard enough to stay on top of my problems and to have to deal with Ginger's, who wears them very, very boldly on his chest and makes sure that everyone knows about them was just too much for me. Although, I wouldn't say I don't like Ginger; quite the reverse, I find him very good company when he is on form and he is not so self-concerned and is considerate to other people. But, so long as there's a risk that those old demons come out, the risk of what that does to me, and I don't want it to seem like I'm condemning him exclusively, I think we've done all we need to do and say together. There were some good moments doing '555%'. I mean, God, that's really how I got to know Jon Poole and if you think about it, there's a pattern in this because I pretty much nicked Jon Poole from him as well [laughs], just like I did with CJ. But under very different circumstances and I don't think either of them would approve of the word 'nicked'! Jon had been thinking along the same lines as me and I think at the time, he had just joined a band called Lifesigns, who he still does stuff with and I very tentatively approached him, or maybe it was the other way round, and said, 'Look, I really enjoyed working with you in the studio on '555%', what do you reckon?' And apparently, we'd both been thinking along the same lines. As I recall, there were a couple of trips over to France and we wrote some stuff very, very quickly and recorded it very quickly and we've been doing it ever since really. Although, now, far less frequently. In fact, last year, nothing at all because of COVID and in the interim couple of years, we'd have little bursts, but the Dr. Hook [with whom, prior to the pandemic, The Dowling Poole had been touring with] schedule got very busy for a while, so, you know we were spending so much time in each other's company and so much time away from home that I don't think either of us had the energy to get back together and him to come over to France, where I've got a recording studio, to record. He's got

a wife and child at home, so he appreciates the time he can get at home as well as I do. I don't mind saying this stuff about Ginger because all I have to do is say, 'Is this honest? Am I being honest about this, rather than bitter' and I can honestly say I am. Now, I dare say he wouldn't share my recollection and think I might be being a little unfair and unjust to him, but that's my recollection of the story. And I have always steered away from talking about it. There was a book being done a while ago ... well, I think there has been a couple ... and on a couple of occasions, people have asked me to make contributions towards it and I genuinely thought, 'I don't think I've got anything of value to offer in this situation because I'm not going to be telling you the same story as everybody else. My experience is very different and as long as I can be honest with Ginger about it and myself about it, then I just have to live with the consequences; I know it will upset a lot of people.

The Dowling Poole have made full use of internet resources such as Pledgemusic, which funded the 2014 debut album 'Bleak Strategies', as well as Bandcamp, on which you offered your latest single 'We Are the Noise' (October 2020) for free, and various social media platforms over the time you have been together. What are your views on the way in which the internet has changed the way in which music has been delivered to fans and promoted in comparison to how it was earlier in your career?

I have very mixed feelings about it, Alice, and I think one of the reasons would be is that I'm pretty badly informed about it, having lived through both means, you know, the pre-internet days where I had a good solid fifteen years of working, if not longer, before the internet kicked in. I do remember being very excited when it kicked off, thinking 'great, this removes the stranglehold from the record labels' and I was working very hard and the late '90s, early 2000s to do what I thought would be a game changer and that was



to give away an album, completely, you know, just launch it on the internet and give it away. And the infrastructure didn't really exist to do it then, but I figured it would be a gamble worth taking and right when I was ready to do it, Radiohead did it with 'In Rainbows' [2007] and in an instant, it killed off the interest in somebody you've never heard of giving away an album. Up until that point, the biggest band in the world give away an album, now that's something to crow about, then the kudos of a band you've never heard of doing it that might have been enough to persuade you to go 'Oh, if it's free, I'll have it' is suddenly completely negated, it pulled the rug from under ... and so it has remained really. I mean, my level of ignorance with things like Spotify ... I know the basics on that. I know that streaming pays so little and what it does pay filters up to the guys that already don't need it, you know. If you've got millions of plays, then that's worth something but the millions of plays go to the established players. If you are new band, it's as hard as ever to get anyone to notice you. In fact, I would argue ... and again, I'm on thin ice here because I don't know enough about it ... but I would argue, from my experience anyway, it's been even harder to get noticed. On the one hand, there's a very good argument for why I was excited about it in the first place, it democratises music. It means that as long as you can record stuff and get it out there without this huge encumbrance and burden of debt on you, a record label, you get it out there whichever way you want it to be to the people you want it to. The downside, that I didn't anticipate coming, but now is obvious to everyone is that it is so ubiquitous and the ability to record is so comparatively cheap ... you know, bear in mind it cost a fortune to go into a recording studio before we had iMacs and phones that could do broadcast versions of these things ... but what it's meant is music, by virtue of the enormous quantity that is available and released on a daily basis, an hourly basis, it's become this vast, muddy playing field wherein it's fantastic that we can all do it, in one sense it's tremendously invigorating and

liberating that everyone can do it, but what it's meant is that it is almost impossible, on this muddy field, to see a little green shoot of something that's really high quality sticking up; It's disguised by the mud and so it defeats me a wee bit.

We take it from last June's 'Deep Breath' and last October's 'We Are the Noise' singles and this year's five track 'The Trump Chronicles' EP that the pandemic has not sullied your creativity. How important has staying creative been to you and Jon during all this and what can we expect from yourself with all your many projects and The Dowling Poole next?

I'm working on some tracks at the moment. It invariably reaches the stage where and I'm sure most singer-songwriters will tell you a similar story, but you get very excited when you first write the thing and it's all marvellous when you're achieving it and then there's this middle stretch where you're doing the arrangements and as things start to get bogged down and slower, you start to question the value of the song and then it gets all exciting again when you start to mix it and then you release it and never want to hear the thing again! I mean, I quite often find that ten years goes by ... I'm astonished to say that, but it's true ... ten years go by and I realise, 'Oh, I haven't heard that track for ten years' and it will be one from Honeycrack or a Jackdaw 4 song or even a Dowling Poole song. I can't remember for what reason, but I had to listen to 'The Sun is Mine', which is on our 'Bleak Strategies' record, and I hadn't listened to that song since we put it out in 2014 and the process never ends. I find I'm listening to it with different ears and going 'Why the hell did I do that in the mix there? Why the hell did I this ...', so I don't think one is necessarily the best judge of one's own work. I find that's the nature of the process, because you know what's in your head when you put it down, you know what that string of words means to you and you don't actually read it the way that someone who has nothing to do with the construct of the sentence reads it for the first time and you realise that perhaps it doesn't quite come over the way you intended or you could have done something clearer. I think it's the same with songwriting too, you the know, the poetic nature of trying to hit a rhyme every so often makes you think that you've expressed a thought in one way and then when you look at it as objectively as you can, then quite often you think 'oh, that's not going to translate so well in somebody else's mind'. I don't know if you know this Alice, but Jon and I have been touring with Dr. Hook. We've done that for a few years now. In fact, I produced an album for Dr. Hook, which is due to come out. We've just done a couple of ... It must be a couple years ago now, but for various reasons, Dennis Locorriere, the singer from Dr. Hook,

he had a little health scare and then the pandemic hit, so all dates went out the window, like for every band, and everything changed and I would talk to my bandmates on this new thing ... well, I guess everyone uses it now ... Zoom every so often and realise 'oh god, they're all sort of in England and in major connervations' and saw how much they were suffering just not being able to play their instruments and again, I had pause for thought because during that period, I got to do 'Spitting Image' and write all the music for the 'Spitting Image' that was just on air and just having to get up every day, despite the fact that I moan endlessly about it because making music's tedious, very frustrating and you're doing it for yourself [laughs], but having something to do had stopped me from going potty in the way that I could see my poor band members all were, you know, having lost all that work and were suddenly starting to all go out of their minds. I've built up a whole bunch of things that need some parts from Jon to go on them that I'd be very keen to get out if we can. We also have an album of outtakes. I think we've done digital versions of some of these songs. Our demographic seems to be much more interested in physical [formats], so we were thinking about putting together the digital tracks that we've released, I've remixed most of them, as a cheap CD that you can now have physically. We might do that in a few months, but I'm far more keen to move on to new stuff and start releasing stuff like 'We Are the Noise', that is more about new material that we've got on the go at the moment. We'll have to see, Alice. The truth is, I don't know. There's the wish and then there's the practicalities of the wish.

Thank you for a wonderful interview and we wish you all the best for the future.

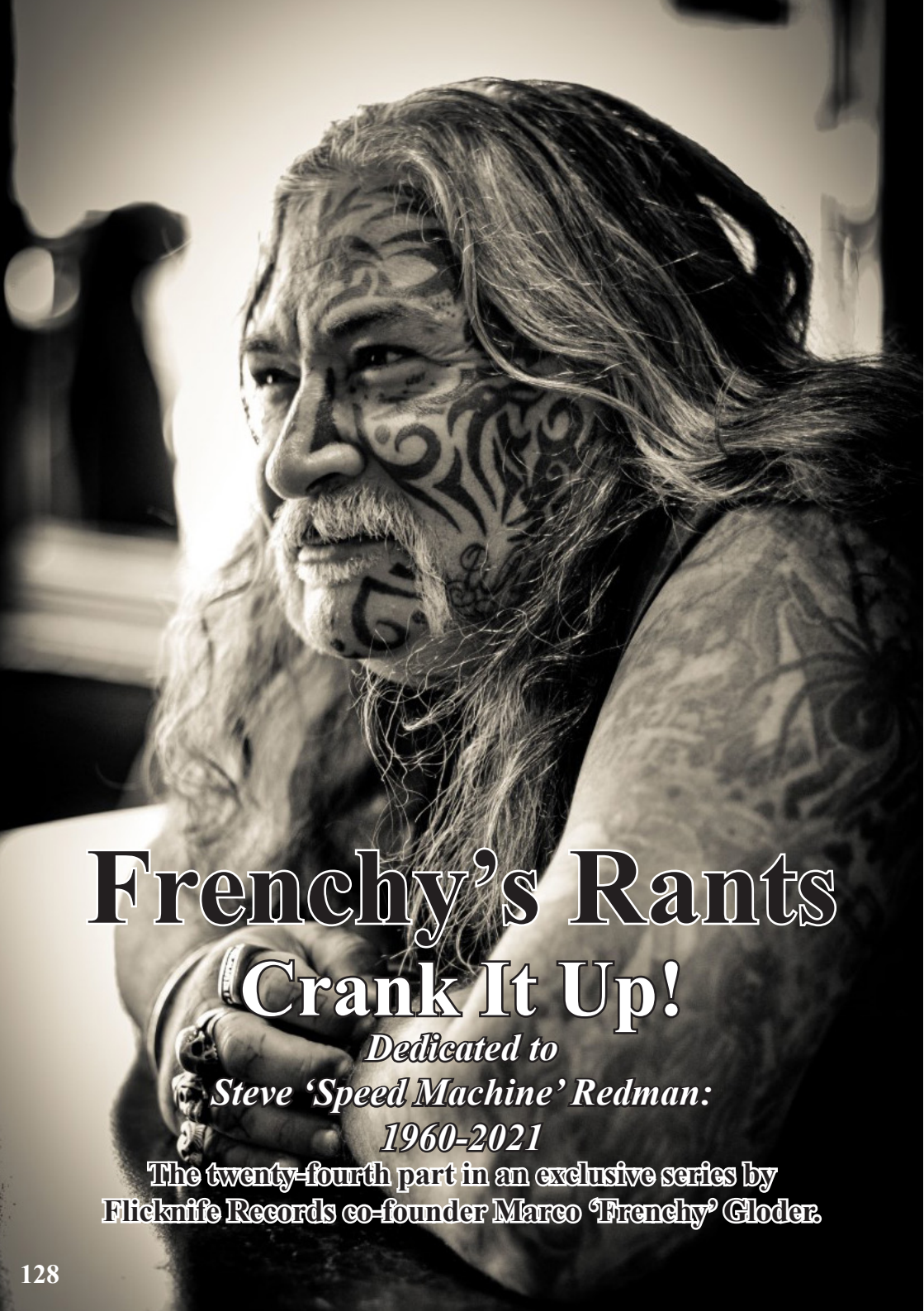
Oh, not at all. I just hope I haven't made your life too difficult, because I've just looked at the clock and we have been talking for two hours! [Laughs] Now you've got to sift through that bullshit and try to get some copy out of it!

www.williedowling.co.uk

thedowlingpoole.com

369music.bandcamp.com

www.facebook.com/ TheDowlingPoole



Frenchy's Rants

Crank It Up!

Dedicated to
Steve 'Speed Machine' Redman:
1960-2021

The twenty-fourth part in an exclusive series by Flicknife Records co-founder Marco 'Frenchy' Gloder.

I can't believe it but the sun is shining, the sky is blue and it's freezing outside: my favourite kind of day! It's not all bad and nature can sometimes send us a bit of hope: I like these days because they remind me of where I grew up, in Grenoble in the French Alps, although I am Italian Romani. The road stopped in Grenoble, so that's where my family settled: the law took the wheels off our caravans so we could go no further. But destiny came to our rescue because we had the beauty of the Alps despite the nastiness of the people … and most of all, we had music.

Have you ever heard a song called 'In The Year 2525' by Zager and Evans? Of course you have, almost everybody has: it was number one in almost every country in the world, including the UK. It had eight choruses, one bridge then two more choruses: weird song structure but it worked. No? Doesn't ring a bell (unlike 'Johnny B-Goode')? Well, Zager and Evans were one hit wonders, massive one hit wonders and they wrote the saddest and most depressing songs you've ever heard, although '... 2525' was set on a backdrop of jangly, happy guitars à la Mamas and Papas. Anyway, the song starts with the lines "In the year 2525, If man is still alive, If woman can survive …" Cheery, don't you think? And that was in the sixties (1969 I believe, just before the moon 'landing'), but even then, they weren't happy with life and the way industries were using the Earth resources and the same stuff we are unhappy with now. Believe it or not, but the year 2525 isn't that far away: OK, you and I will be long gone, but in terms of time, it's nothing but the blink of an eye. Like 1969 to now has been like a nanosecond: 52 years and we haven't moved an inch forward. Yeah, technology is better, cars are faster and safer, medicine is nearly as good as God himself, houses are better built, we can communicate wherever we are ... OK, so we have moved on half an inch in everything touched by technology. But what about us as a race, the human race, masters of everything we survey, warriors at the edge of time? We haven't changed at all in the past 1,000 years, let alone in the past 50. Of course, we think we are more open-minded, more on the button, fighting racism, sexism and all the 'isms', believing that we are so right-on. We aren't. We're just a tiny bit better than Neanderthal man. Jo Public is as much of a moron than he was back during the Crusades: the only difference is that now, he has been given a voice to express his idiocy, thanks to democracy and the freedom of expression. It's called having the right to express an opinion. The only thing that truly makes a difference in our life that has advanced regardless, that can be our salvation, is music: music can do great things.

Music, all genres of music, can express

Music, all genres of music, can express ideas like 'In The Year 2525' (the idea there is that we're all fucked whatever we do), advance a political view, shout about football, tell her he loves her, tell her he doesn't love her, cars, sex, drugs … everything has been sung about. What it does best though, in my opinion, is to drag you back in time, like a one-way time-machine. I hear 'Back in the USSR' and I'm back in 1969 watching the moon landing: I was 14 and the song had been released a year previously as the opening track of 'The Beatles' (aka 'The White Album'), but in the summer camp of 1969, it was played relentlessly. And that was a good summer, the summer I first got really naughty with a girl, twice, and the summer I also got naughty with her mate! On the other hand, if I hear 'Love Is the Drug' by Roxy Music ('Siren', 1975), I'm in hell, heartbroken, drug-fucked (don't do it!) and in both cases, I really feel like I'm there. It's freaky. What else has the power to make you travel in time? What else can make you feel happy, glad to be alive, sad, morose, regretful and sometimes all of those at once? What else can get you to split with 150 sovs for a first pressing of your favourite album? What else can make you cry with joy or laugh with madness? I can't think of anything else that has the power to reach deep into my soul and flip the switch to happiness or sadness, spark thoughts or mad dancing. From Chuck Berry to The Beatles, from The Rolling Stones to Guns N' Roses, from The Stone Roses to Redhead, music has always had that power, always had the knack to hold you in its hand and squeeze you tight sometimes nicely, sometimes nastily but never leaving you cold. And despite all the faults of the human race, all the wrongs that can't be righted despite the best efforts of the PC brigade, all the nasty things that only man can inflict upon man, all the injustices that make your blood boil, despite all that, our collective soul is saved by the beauty of music that man has produced over centuries. And that makes me happy and glad that we still can progress despite our best efforts to regress.

"And now, the end is near and so I face the final curtain" … there is always a line from a song for every occasion! If you can't find happiness in this most beautiful form of expression, when even the birds join in, my friend, I cry for you. In all the ways that our leaders have let us down and betrayed us, none have been nasty enough to silence music. Take refuge in it when you need a break; when life is so hopeless that you only see the dark; when the love of your life turns you into just another passing fancy ... Put it on and don't forget ... CRANK IT UP!

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I Care a Lot

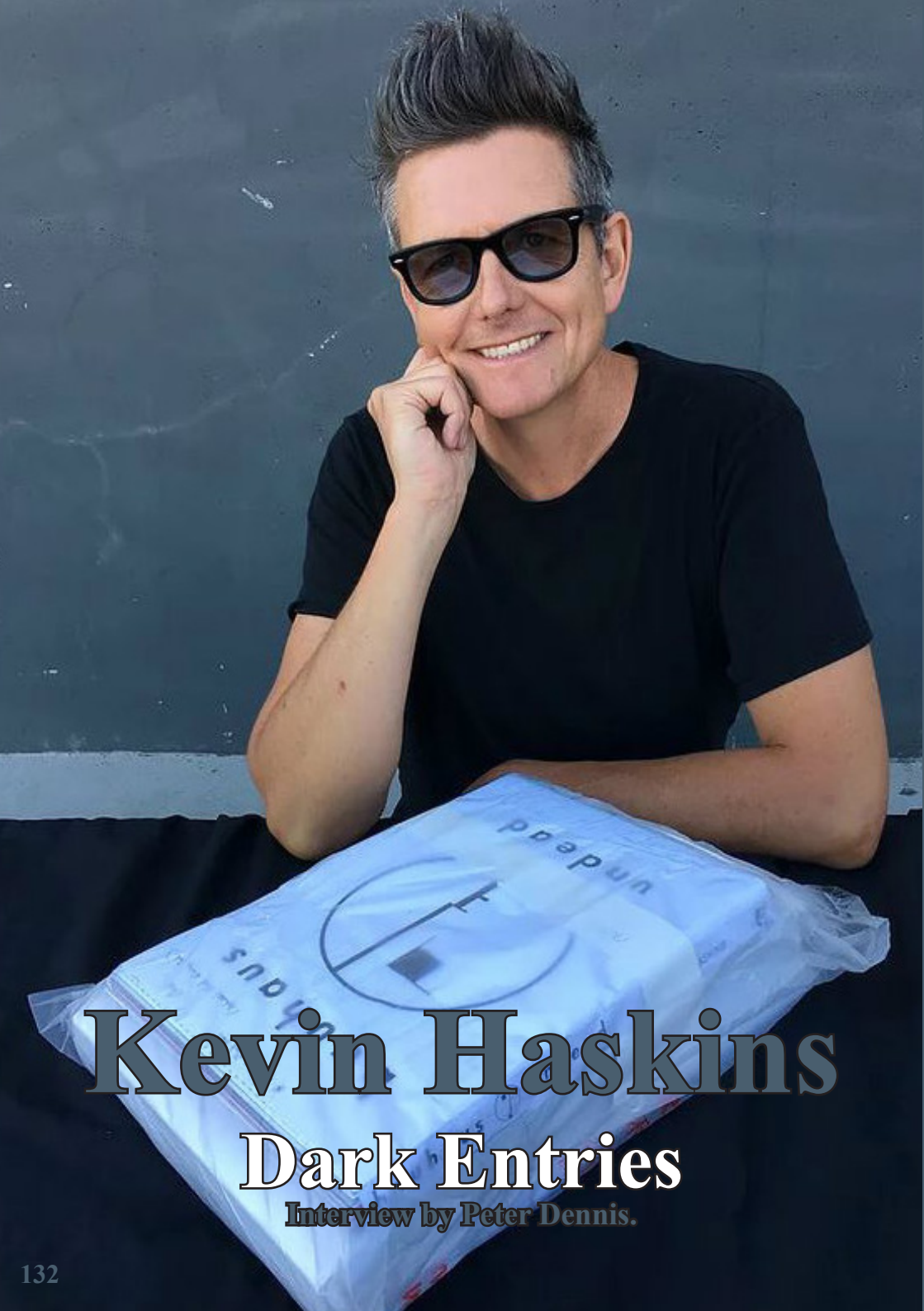
Critical Care

Review by Alice Jones-Rodgers.

In one of the most talked about among Netflix's current crop of film releases, 'The Disappearance of Alice Creed' (2009) writer and director J Blakeson's ironically titled 'I Care a Lot', the ever-wonderful Rosamund Pike plays Marla Grayson, an unscrupulous Massachussetts-based con artist who's executive lifestyle is funded by preying upon the elderly and infirm. After convincing the courts of her victim's inability to care for themselves and being appointed their legal guardian, she then moves them into a retirement facility, sells their homes and lays claim to their weatlh. In this criminal enterprise, Grayson is joined by people from right across the care system, including a doctor and those running the retirement facilities, thus creating a chain of corruption built upon unspeakable cruelty and pure greed.

Everything is going swimmingly for the heartless, calculating, icy and downright malicious Grayson (along with her partner and lover Fran, played by Eiza González) in her world coloured with over-saturated bubblegum hues (just look at the cherry red of her dress), highlighting its artificiality, where she can only smile in that gloriously unnerving shark-like manner as her ill-gotten gains roll in. That is until she bites off more than she can chew with new client, the sly and cunning Jennifer Peterson (Dianne Weist). It soon transpires that Peterson, far from being a helpless little old lady, is in fact "the worst mistake you'll ever a make"; a woman with connections to people who could make life "very uncomfortable" for Grayson. Warning unheeded and enter Roman Lunyov (Peter Dinklage), a hardened criminal with links to the Russian mafia, whom she soon discovers is not only her nemesis, but also her mirror image.

Despite the stunning performances of all of her co-stars, 'I Care a Lot' is carried along by Pike, the deserved recent winner of a Golden Globe award for the role, in a film which highlights the ugliness that can exist in systems designed to protect us. However, this is not a film about moral dilemmas, it is one about very nasty people doing very nasty things to each other served up as a deliciously slick tragicomedy crime thriller with one of the most unexpected endings we have seen in recent times. In short, we care for this film a lot.



Kevin Haskins

Dark Entries

Interview by Peter Dennis.

Having just released an updated and expanded edition of the weighty coffee table tome 'Bauhaus Undead', Kevin Haskins recently joined me for a chat to shine a light in the dark recess of Bauhaus' history.

Can you tell me about your earliest musical memories?

My earliest musical memory was The Beatles. At primary school a few friends and I pretended to be them and 'performed' in the sand pit in the playground, because it was a rectangle which resembled a stage. There were many artists and many genres of music that sparked my interest, but the pivotal moment was on 6th July 1972, seeing David Bowie performing 'Starman' ['The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars'] on Top of the Pops.

You started playing live at a young age with the band Jam. What was it like being a young land in a boozy, masculine world?

Playing Working Men's Clubs at such a tender age made me grow up fast! I was exposed to all manner of the earthy sides of life especially sharing dressing rooms with all types of 'arteests'. One memorable occasion was playing a Working Men's Club in Corby, which was renowned for violence. We were only in to the second song when we started to get bombarded by empty beer bottles and glasses!

After your first band your next act came at that point between pub and punk rock.

After Jam, came a short lived band called Grab A Shadow. The influences came from seeing bands such as Dr Feelgood and Eddie and the Hot Rods on the London Pub Rock circuit. I'm not sure which label we fell under as the musical styles were quite eclectic.

You attended the famous Punk Festival in '76. How did that shape your future?

On Monday 20th September 1976, my brother and I attended the Punk Rock Festival at The 100 Club in London. The line up was Siouxsie and the Banshees, Subway Sect, The Clash and the Sex Pistols. As we descended in to the club, I saw all these strange creatures adorned with safety pins and bondage. I felt like an imposter with my long hair and denim flares! The bands had a primordial raw energy and raw talent that sounded amazing and really exciting! It's a cliché but I thought to myself, 'I can do this!' As soon as The Clash launched in to a storming performance of 'White Riot' ['The Clash', 1977], I couldn't wait to get home and start a punk rock band!

It also seemed Northampton Art School was pivotal in shaping the local punk scene?

Although there were rules, there was a

huge sense of freedom at art school compared to the narrow minded shackles of high school. On our first day, we were set a task to create an environment out of paper and paint that spoke about ourselves. There's no doubt that this creative space went some way in my approach to shaping original drum parts.

It seemed things moved pretty fast in those days and you formed several bands before Bauhaus.

Yes, things did develop pretty fast with the advent of The Craze and Jack Plug And The Sockets and a couple of other band names in-between. It did help that each band retained the same members. New Wave / Power Pop was the general theme of all these bands. I can't recall much about this period other than I was convinced that Jack Plug and the Sockets was the band that would finally break through. I was very disappointed when we broke up.

Another band prior to Bauhaus was SR. How did that come about? Original Northampton punks The Shoplifters and SR came to an end in December '78. Was their a feeling punk had run its course?

SR was the first name given to the fledgling line up of Bauhaus. It was Daniel Ash's idea taken from the toothpaste brand! The rest of us were not very keen on it. When my brother David joined in place of Chris Barber, I think that he came up with the name Bauhaus. I do recall thinking that Punk had come to an end and was excited about how it was evolving in to what is known as Post-Punk.

Do you recall the first Bauhaus rehearsal? I understand you wrote 'In the Flat Field' ('In the Flat Field', 1980) at that rehearsal? Was there an immediate chemistry?

The first Bauhaus rehearsal was in a porta-cabin on the grounds of the Teachers' Training College. I was excited to meet Peter who I thought was very charismatic and when he started to sing I was blown away! The chemistry was right there from the get go and I instinctively knew that this band was going to be 'the one'.

Do you recall the first Bauhaus gig?

Our first show was in the back room at The Cromwell Pub in Wellingborough on New Years Eve. We played two sets and started and ended each set with 'Raw Power' [The Stooges 'Raw Power', 1973]. So we played it four times! Aside from Peter [Murphy], we had been gigging for years, but Peter took to it like a duck to water.

Six weeks later, you entered Beck Studio in Wellingborough and recorded your debut single 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' (1979) in one take?

The chemistry and creativity was firing

on all fours when we recorded 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'. Considering it was the first time that Peter had sung in a studio, he nailed it! I think it was down in the first take and we all knew that we had recorded a timeless classic. It was very exciting.

While Coventry, Liverpool and Manchester honour their musical sons does it bother you that Bauhaus aren't commemorated in Northampton?

No, it doesn't bother me at all. I feel extremely blessed to have been a founding member and we have enjoyed so many accolades, that I don't need any more.

You have recently released an expanded version of the lavish and lovely Bauhaus book. What was the reasoning behind that?

The reason for releasing the expanded edition of my Bauhaus coffee table book was to satisfy the demand. We found that many people missed out on the first pressing. However, the publisher was not prepared to invest in the original edition as they feared it would not sell enough, so they insisted on an expanded edition to make it more sellable.

How did you decide what to leave in and what to exclude? Did you draw upon your art schooling when assembling the book?

It wasn't a case of deciding what to leave out, it was more a matter of searching high and low for more strong content, which I think was satisfied. As with the original edition I had the help of Andrew Brooksbank and Vincent Forrest who both have deep collections. I also managed to find material of my own that I overlooked the first time, mainly never seen before photographs. I also had a lot of help from our lighting designer/road manager, Graham Bentley who shared some golden nuggets with me. I worked alongside my publishers in house art designer, Fendi Nugroho to layout the new material in keeping with the original layout.

It really is a fantastic book. Are there any plans for a paperback edition?

Thank you! I don't have plans to release a paperback, although I understand that some big publishing houses do this. It being a coffee table book, I'm not sure if it would work to reduce the size of the book.

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Bauhaus. L/R: David J, Peter Murphy, Kevin Haskins and Daniel Ash. Photograph by Fin Costello / Redferns

Tindersticks

Man Alone: Stuart A. Staples Discusses 'Distractions'

Interview and Review by Alice Jones-Rodgers
Photography by Julien Bourgeois.

Melancholic, dark, brooding and sombre are just four adjectives often used to describe Nottingham's hopelessly romantic and always unlucky in love Tindersticks. However, allow yourself to be immersed in the gloom exhibited on each of Tindersticks' previous albums, from their 1993 self-titled debut through to 2019's 'No Treasure But Hope', and there has always been an immense level of joy to be found in the manner in which even the darkest of subject matter is expressed. Take for example, the lavish and startlingly adventurous orchestration of classic albums such as the aforementioned debut or their second (also self-titled, aka 'Second Album') from 1995 or the more soulful rendering of what was by then their signature sound on 1999's 'Simple Pleasure' and 2001's 'Can Our Love...' Then, there is the aspect arguably most synonymous with the band's sound, frontman Stuart A. Staples' cavernously deep and perpetually wounded vocal.

For their thirteenth album, 'Distractions', whilst all of those above elements that have made Tindersticks so unique are in some way or another present and correct, presumably due to the socially distanced manner in which it came to fruition, miserabilism goes minimal, resulting in one of their most intriguing releases to date. Whilst you would be hard pushed to suggest that 'Distractions' was unaffected by the pandemic, Staples states that it should not be considered to be a 'lockdown album': **"I think the confinement provided an opportunity for something that was already happening. It is definitely a part of the album, but not a reaction to it."**

With Staples suggesting that the direction taken on 'Distractions' was something already in progress when the band were forced to cancel their remaining live dates in support of 'No Treasure But Hope' in January 2020, before throwing themselves into making its follow-up, I recalled that the idea of 'No Treasure But Hope' was to divert the focus from his studio sound in order to offer his bandmates the opportunity to experiment with new ways of approaching the band's songs. With this in mind, I wondered whether 'Distractions', by design or by virtue of the fact that it was recorded under lockdown conditions, was perhaps a reaction to its predecessor? **"It was the opposite of 'No Treasure but Hope' in the sense that everybody in the band used their musicality in a different way"**, replies Staples, **"and we ended up in a different kind of shape."**

Tindersticks have never been afraid to put their own spin on a classic, more often than not taking it in a previously unimaginable direction. Take for example, their cover of Otis Redding's 'I've Been Loving You Too Long' ('Otis Blue', 1965) from the B-side of

their 1995 single 'Travelling Light' ('Second Album') with its brushed drum and bass tuned to Staples' deadpan baritone vocal giving way to an orchestral crescendo or their sublime and emotionally raw take on Odyssey's 'If You're Lookin' For a Way Out' ('Hang Together', 1980) from 'Simple Pleasure'. Three of the seven tracks on 'Distractions' are covers and, unusually but not ineffectively, all are placed back-to-back in its middle section, where we find Staples and co. soulfully reinterpreting Neil Young's 'A Man Needs a Maid' ('Harvest', 1972); stripping Dory Previn's 'Lady With the Braid' ('Mythical Kings and Unicorns', 1971) down to its bare bones and detaching its storytelling lyrics from the original's country-by-numbers backing to expose the kitchen sink drama that lays within, thus creating something akin to their own 'Rented Rooms' ('Curtains', 1997) and turning Television Personalities' 'You'll Have to Scream Louder' ('The Painted Word', 1984) into a haunting lo-fi disco-funk number that is certain to fill the floor of any bedsit.

However, the most talked about track on 'Distractions' will doubtlessly be its immense opener, 'Man Alone (Can't Stop the Fadin')', which at eleven minutes is not only the longest Tindersticks track to date, but with its deceptively simple backing largely consisting of Staples' multi-layered mantric vocals, hypnotic pulsating bassline, a drum machine and various other liberally used electronics, is also certainly one of their most adventurous. **"This song was always a journey"**, says Staples, **"but I wasn't expecting it to be such a long one. We made a six-minute version, but it felt like it pulled off and stopped half way to its destination. This was the beginning of a long journey in itself to find the route needed to complete it; probably the biggest challenge a song or piece of music has given us. It was delicate and slippery right up to the final mix, which lasted a week!"**

Staples went on tell us how 'Man Alone (Can't Stop the Fadin')', despite pushing Tindersticks' sound into previously uncharted territory, also offers an insight into the roots of the band: **"For me, the song has a strange connection to the drum machine, bass guitar and voice combination of Indignant Desert Birds, mine and [guitarist] Neil [Fraser]'s first band when I was 17."** He went on to discuss the lack of narrative structure in the song's lyrics, another factor which immediately differentiates it from previous work: **"It was important to me that the words of the song were not a coherent narrative, but passing thoughts along the way."**

Released as the lead single from 'Distractions' in mid-January, 'Man Alone (Can't Stop the Fadin')' was accompanied by a video shot by Staples from the back seat of a London taxi. **"In the back of a London cab driving**

through the city at night is a very special space for me", says Staples. **"It has a particular kind of aloneness. This fascination grew over hundreds of nights leaving the studio exhausted at 1am ... Ladbroke Grove or St. Johns Wood, through the city and over the river to South East London in an almost dream state. Retracing that journey, this film became a way of touching the city and the feeling of being both a part of and apart from it."**

Elsewhere on 'Distractions', we find the penchant for the spoken word approach to lyrical narrative that has littered Tindersticks' work since their early days being put to used on 'I Imagine You'. However, whereas on 'My Sister' ('Second Album') or 'Chocolate' ('The Something Rain', 2012) that narrative was something more in keeping with the traditional short story, 'I Imagine You', on top of a simple piano refrain and ghostly noises which one suspects may be a theremin, disposes of the beginning, middle and end and continues the fragmented lyrical approach of 'Man Alone (Can't Stop the Fadin')' in order to express an emotion felt in a particular moment.

'Tue-Moi', an unadorned piano piece which sounds funereal even by Tindersticks' standards, also harks back to the band's earlier career, this time to their dalliances with the French language (take for example, their soundtrack for the 1996 Claire Denis film 'Nénette et Boni' and 'Plus de Liaisons', their Gallic reinterpretation of 'No More Affairs' from their 'Second Album', which was given away as a free 7" single with that release). On 'Tue-Moi', the title of which in true cheery Tindersticks fashion translates as "Kill Me", Staples offers up his best Serge Gainsbourg style vocal performance for a highly emotive song written in the aftermath of the Paris and Manchester attacks in 2015 and 2017. According to Staples, 'Tue-Moi' was a song **"always needing to be sung in French and perhaps this delayed its progress ... I had to find the courage of my convictions!"**

As if there hadn't been enough surprises on 'Distractions, it is concluded by 'The Bough Bends', which in one final unanticipated move takes the Tindersticks sound out of the claustrophobia of the city and places it wholescale into the wide open countryside, complete with bookending snippets of birdsong. Perhaps the lockdown conditions under which the album were created might have left Staples longing for the great outdoors and future albums will find him ruminating about failed romances amongst the country set. Judging by 'Distractions' and Tindersticks' ability to still constantly reinvent themselves, anything is possible.

'Distractions' is out now on City Slang.

tindersticks.co.uk

Review by Kevin Burke.

Netflix has hit upon something here, but I'm not exactly sure what it is. Their latest six episode binge-watch 'Behind Her Eyes' is bland and dull, but eager to entertain. Truthfully, not much happens, nothing is overly complex and there is very little depth. All that said, you cannot stop watching it, and the viewer is hooked to discover the finale plot twist. To give a broader perspective, the novel that this series is based upon by sci-fi writer Sarah Pinborough was publicized with the social media hashtag #WTFthatending. There is a twist or two and they are completely messed up, preposterous even, but still slightly unique, if not wholly expected.

The series follows a single-mother Louise Bardsley (Simona Brown) as she splits her life between her young son, her ex-husband, one sole friend and her job as a secretary. Things change though due to a chance meeting with a stranger in a bar, leading her to become immersed in an affair. In the first, and not plainly obvious twist, the stranger from the bar turns out to be her new boss, the doctor of the psychiatric office where she works. The suave, Scottish Dr. David (Tom Bateman) is an off-kilter character, who basically appears troubled, or perhaps in pain, throughout the series, and really, looks aside, he is a bit wooden. Louise and the doctor begin an on-off affair and with both characters being rather one dimensional, there is little excitement or flare and 'Behind Her Eyes' becomes a paint-by-numbers drama. That is until the much needed arrival of the good doctor's wife into the scenario and things start to become skewed.

The spark of darkness in the story is that character, the assumed long suffering, or perhaps lonely, wife of Doctor Tom is Adele, played by an unnerving Eve Hewson, daughter of Bono, who is the exact opposite of her father, being blessed with talent and her mother's looks. But it's the dead eyes that become terrifying, not just her skills with a carving knife and chopping vegetables without looking. Throughout 'Behind Her Eyes', she acts completely steel-like, barely blinking in scenes and with a malicious quality which pulls the viewer into the story. As Adele, lonely as she is, by chance (it appears) befriends her husband's mistress, this leads to the run-of-the-mill guilt from secretary Louise, who confides in Adele secrets, such as her night terrors (plot point), and of course other insights into her life. Although the focus of 'Behind Her

Eyes' would appear to be the lovestruck and endangered Louise, who is stuck in the middle on the sharp edge of a dangerous triangle, this shifts slowly, and instead rests on Adele.

From flashbacks, another important character enters the narrative. As we find a young Adele, hospitalized at what we can assume is a mental institution, we are introduced to Rob (Robert Aramayo). In some ways Rob is a character loosely based on Mark Renton from 'Trainspotting' (1996) and at times, the story of the junkie outsider begins to replicate that infamous movie. However, we find that a bond exists between Adele and Rob and the flashbacks become more frequent. While Rob worships Adele, and in some ways wants to become her, have her life, his desires are purely for other males. When the young Adele introduces him to Tom, Rob turns his obsession to him and so quite cleverly another love triangle enters the premise, as do dreams.

Understanding 'Behind Her Eyes' would seem straightforward, until the aforementioned dreams come into it. They form an important narrative, taking the centre stage and we see the young Adele sharing her experiences of dreams and how to control them with Rob, and later Louise. What this has to do with an imploding marriage, a woman caught up naively in an affair and this past character of Rob, all spectacularly collides in the last two episodes. The questions come up - is Rob dead? If so, did Adele kill him? What do dreams and supposed out of body experiences have to do with the drama unfolding? Truthfully, things get a little further unhinged, skirting round 'The Twilight Zone' or 'Tales of the Unexpected', whilst, personally, I got a slice of an amateurish M. Night Shyamalan breaking through and similarly to his outings ('The Sixth Sense' , 1999), you may feel compelled to watch it over for clues.

Those sitting down to watch a straightforward drama, forget it, this is not that. Yes, the character of Adele, played by Eve Hewson as a younger and older version, is perhaps the sole reason to watch 'Behind Her Eyes'. Other characters seem unsure and lifeless, and when victims start to emerge you feel little empathy for them, even when they despair. Ultimately there is no love in this series, certainly not emotional, and it is replaced by obsession. The erotic scenes are simply that, a view of a connection between two people, thriving between the doctor and his mistress, miserable between the husband and wife. But how it ends compared to how it begins is a million miles apart, as you find that everyone is a victim except for one. Figuring out who is actually who, and discovering not everyone is what they appear is a bit of fun. At only six episodes, it is not a huge commitment to your time ... but wtf, that ending!

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