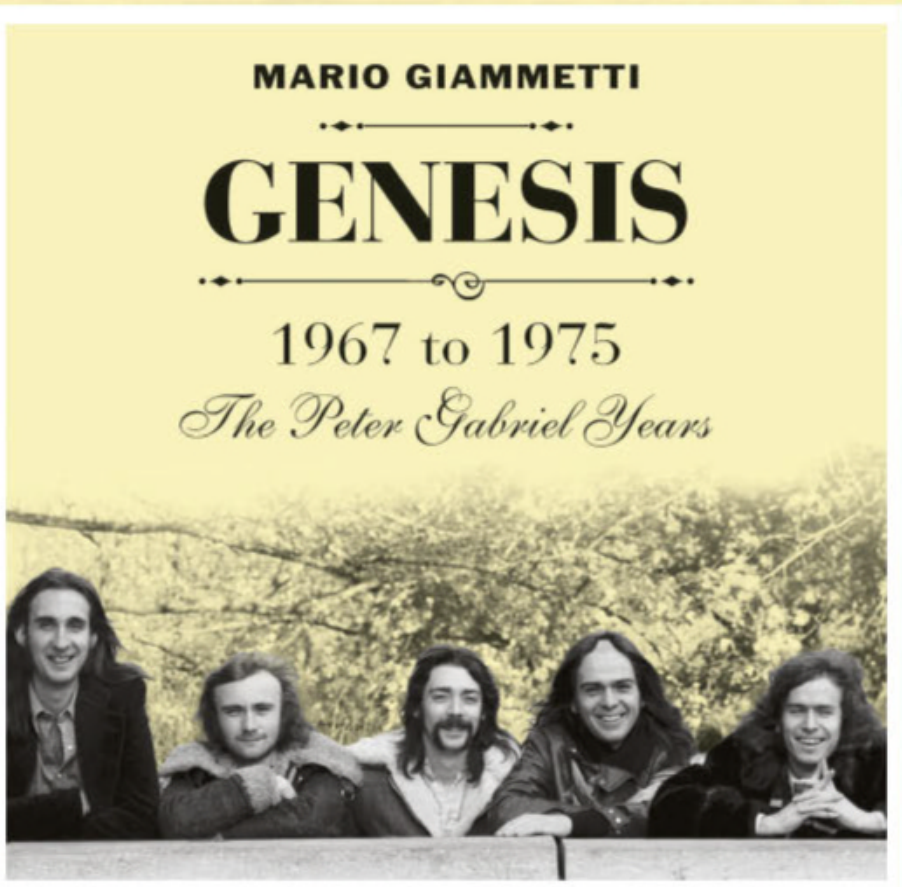
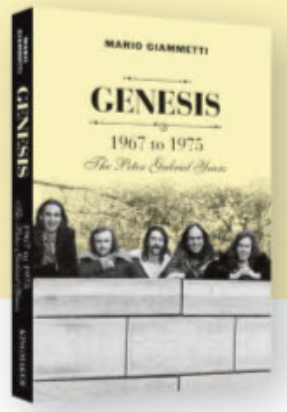


'A must for all fans who are interested in early Genesis. I thoroughly recommend it'.
Steve Hackett

'Having every key member offer candid but affectionate recollections of making each album is priceless, and the recreation of tour posters, publicity photos and the like makes the book essential for anyone with more than a passing interest in the band'.
Jordan Blum, Prog Magazine

The definitive biography of the early years of one of the world's greatest progressive rock groups written by one of the leading experts on the history of the band.

Featuring exclusive interviews with band members and with all of the important personalities who were part of the story of Genesis between 1967 and 1975.



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Carl Verheyen (Supertramp) and **Jonas Reingold** (The Flower Kings, Steve Hackett)
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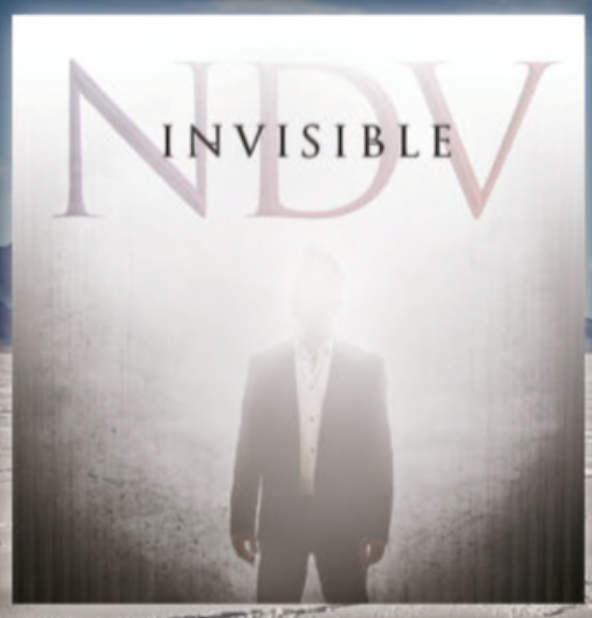

'Compositionally, lyrically, and in arrangement and performance, Nick D'Virgilio reaches a new level with Invisible. Combining his talents with a great selection of guests and a concept and lyrical themes that anyone can buy into, you have a very strong album'.
Geoff Bailie, PROG REPORT

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NEW INTERVIEW

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How *In Absentia* became modern prog's most influential album

STEVE HOWE

New solo album, an autobiography and the future of Yes

MAGENTA

"We're getting the Moog, the Taurus pedals and the Mellotrons out again"

SUPERTRAMP

How they made the 20-million-plus selling *Breakfast In America*

+
NICK D'VIRGILIO
SYD BARRETT
HENRY COW
DAVID SANCIOUS
COLIN BASS
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FUTURE
PROG 111

LONELY ROBOT

FEELINGS ARE GOOD

In Stores 17th July

John Mitchell (Arena, Frost*, Kino, It Bites) returns with his new studio album "Feelings Are Good", which begins a new chapter after completing the 'Astronaut-trilogy' on 2019's "Under Stars".

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KONKRET MUSIK

In Stores 24th July

The sixth album by Sweden's **Gösta Berlings Saga** "Konkret Musik" contains 12 explosive tracks filled with experimental instrumental rock.

Available as Digipak CD and as LP on 180g. vinyl with the entire album on CD as bonus & as Digital Album

ISSUE 111 17.07.20

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PRESS/LASSE HOILE

> **In a sense *In Absentia* was also the beginning of the end."**

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BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST

'BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST AND OTHER SHORT STORIES'
(2CD/1DVD REMASTERED & EXPANDED BOX)

- This expanded edition of "...Other Short Stories" comprises 40 tracks and features the original UK stereo mix re-mastered from the original master tapes and also includes a new stereo mix on a second CD and a high resolution 5.1 Surround Sound mix, new stereo mix and original stereo mix on an NTSTC / Region free DVD, all from the original Harvest masters. In addition there are three rare US album versions of 'Medicine Man', 'Harry's Song' and 'Someone There You Know', along with five BBC Radio session tracks from July 1971 and March 1972, along with two rare John Lees demo recordings from 1971 and three mono reduction mixes made at Abbey Road studios in July 1971.

RANDY CALIFORNIA & SPIRIT

'THE EURO-AMERICAN YEARS'
(6CD REMASTERED BOXSET)

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- Esoteric Recordings is pleased to announce the release of an expanded 6 CD clamshell boxed set that gathers together studio and live recordings made between 1979 and 1983 by the RANDY CALIFORNIA BAND and additional live recordings by SPIRIT. Due to demand from fans, Mick Skidmore has recovered from the archives an additional two CDs worth of previously unreleased material, plus it features a booklet with a new essay and photographs from the period.

ROY WOOD & WIZZARD

'MAIN STREET'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED CD EDITION)

** LIMITED EDITION POSTCARD AVAILABLE WITH PRE ORDERS WHILE STOCKS LAST**

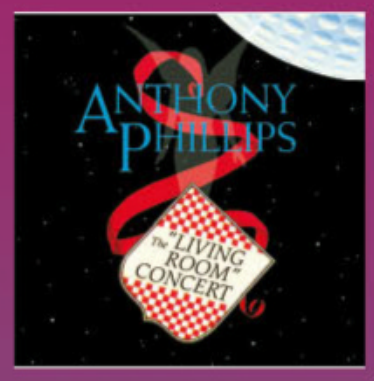
- After earning success as a performer and songwriter with THE MOVE, ELO and WIZZARD, Roy Wood recorded the material for what should have been his third solo album in the Spring of 1976. In 1999 the master tapes were re-discovered and MAIN STREET finally saw the light of day for the first time on CD. However, the title has remained unavailable for nearly two decades. This welcome reissued edition has been newly re-mastered and includes the bonus track 'Human Cannonball' which was recorded during the album sessions.

WIZZARD

'INTRODUCING EDDY AND THE FALCONS'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED CD EDITION)

** LIMITED EDITION POSTCARD AVAILABLE WITH PRE ORDERS WHILE STOCKS LAST**

- Roy Wood formed Wizzard in 1972. The band stacked up a series of classic hit singles and released the album WIZZARD BREW for EMI's Harvest label before departing for Warner Bros in 1974. Unavailable on CD for many years, this welcome reissue has been newly re-mastered and includes five bonus tracks drawn from singles all issued in 1974, including the top ten hit 'Are You Ready to Rock'. Also restores the original artwork and features a new essay and a replica poster included with the original 1974 LP release.



ANTHONY PHILLIPS

'THE LIVING ROOM CONCERT'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED DIGIPAK EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce a new edition of THE LIVING ROOM CONCERT by original Genesis guitarist and celebrated solo artist and composer ANTHONY PHILLIPS. Unavailable on CD for many years, THE LIVING ROOM CONCERT has been remastered and expanded to include three previously unreleased tracks recorded for the original broadcast, Jaunty Roads, Let Us Now Make Love and Lucy: An Illusion.

FRUUPP

'MAID IN IRELAND – THE BEST OF FRUUPP'
(REMASTERED CD BOXSET EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a new re-mastered collection that celebrates the best of the legendary Irish Progressive Rock band Fruupp. This new assortment has been compiled by Fruupp lyricist and manager Paul Charles, who has also written a new essay for the illustrated booklet and has been remastered from the original master tapes.

BE-BOP DELUXE

'AXE VICTIM'
(3CD / 1DVD LIMITED EDITION DELUXE BOXSET)

- Esoteric Recordings is proud to announce the release of a new re-mastered four-disc deluxe expanded boxed set limited edition (comprising 3 CDs & a DVD) of AXE VICTIM the legendary 1974 debut album by BE BOP DELUXE. Newly re-mastered from the original master tapes, it features an additional 41 bonus tracks drawn from stunning new 5.1 surround sound & stereo mixes by Stephen W Tayler, BBC Radio One & John Peel sessions, a previously unreleased audition session for Decca Records, out-takes and more, with a 68-page lavish book.

ALSO AVAILABLE
(2CD EXPANDED & REMASTERED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings is proud to announce the release of a new re-mastered 2 CD set of AXE VICTIM, the legendary 1974 debut album by BE BOP DELUXE. Features an additional 17 bonus tracks drawn from a stunning new stereo mix of the album from the original multi-track tapes by award winning engineer Stephen W. Tayler, along with both sides of the rare Smile Records single 'Teenage Archangel' b/w 'Jets at Dawn' released by the band in 1973 prior to being signed to EMI. Also included are previously unreleased out-takes from the original album sessions.

UNICORN

'SLOW DANCING – THE RECORDINGS 1974-1979'
(4CD REMASTERED & EXPANDED BOXSET)

** SIGNED POSTCARD AVAILABLE WITH PRE-ORDERS WHILE STOCKS LAST**

- Esoteric Recordings is pleased to announce the release of a new 4 CD clamshell boxed set that gathers together three albums and an additional disc of previously unreleased archive material by the legendary British band UNICORN, gathering together the albums BLUE PINE TREES, TOO MANY CROOKS & ONE MORE TOMORROW, all with additional bonus tracks plus an additional CD with 19 previously unreleased studio and live archive recordings, selected by Unicorn's Pat Martin.

ANDREW GOLD

'LONELY BOY – THE ASYLUM YEARS ANTHOLOGY'
(6CD/1DVD REMASTERED BOX SET)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of LONELY BOY – THE ASYLUM YEARS ANTHOLOGY, a newly re-mastered seven disc boxed set featuring all of the solo albums released by legendary singer – song-writer ANDREW GOLD on the Asylum label between 1975 and 1980. Features 73 tracks, including the albums ANDREW GOLD, WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE, ALL THIS AND HEAVEN TOO & WHIRLWIND; all newly re-mastered from the original Asylum Records master tapes, plus rarities, outtakes and a DVD of promo videos and BBC Old Grey Whistle Test appearances.

DAVE COUSINS (& THE BLUE ANGEL ORCHESTRA)

'THE BOY IN THE SAILOR SUIT'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED CD EDITION)

- Unavailable for some years, THE BOY IN THE SAILOR SUIT has been newly re-mastered and expanded to include three bonus tracks featuring live performances of songs from the album, recorded in the USA in 2008 and in the UK in 2009. This release features the original artwork and booklet liner notes by Dave Cousins.

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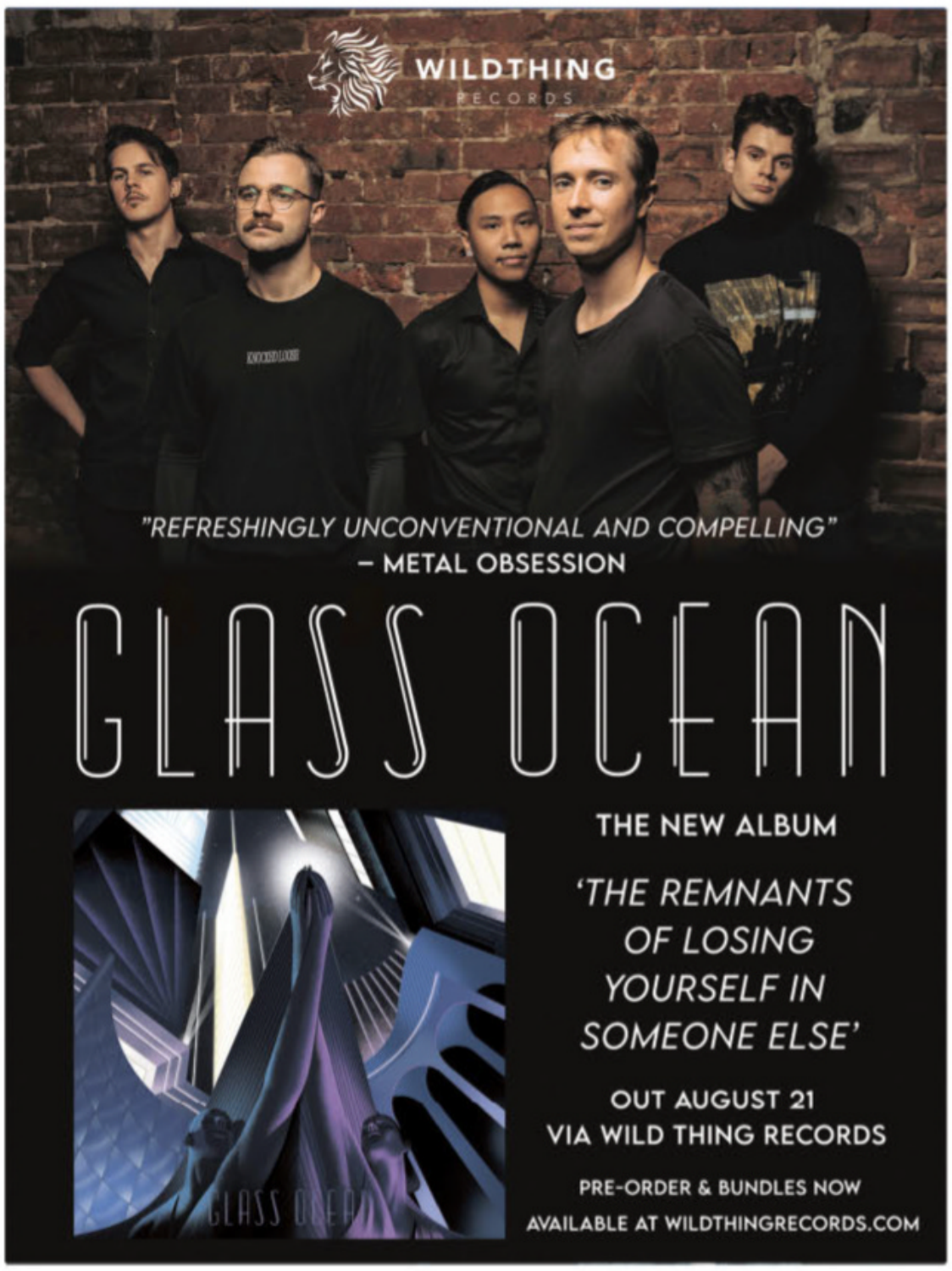

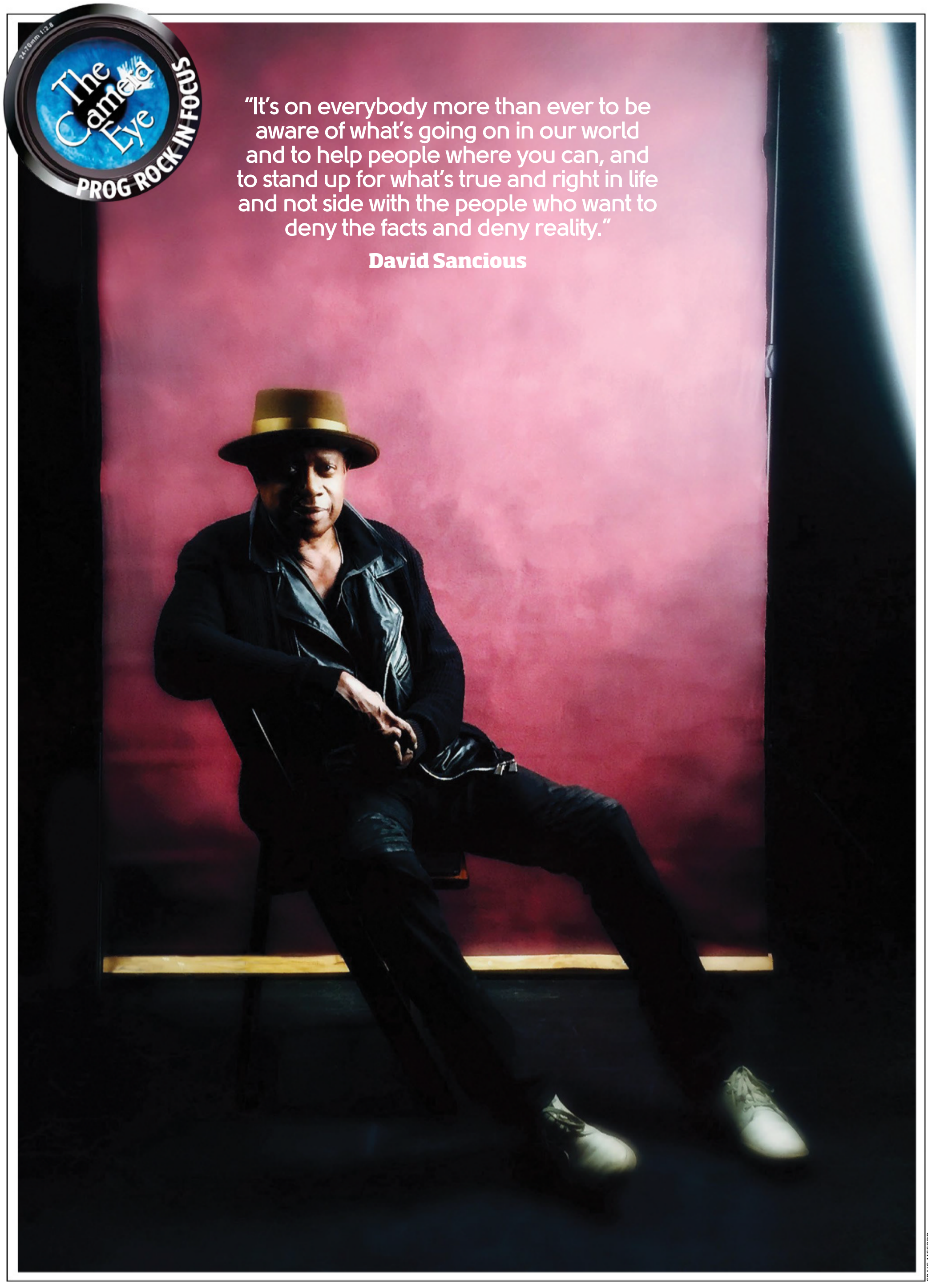

CRAIG MCCORD

Ed's Letter

Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog*. As I write this, we've just passed the halfway point of the year. To say it's been a strange one so far would be something of an understatement. Three months of anticipation slowly building for what 2020 had in store and then, wallop! The rug was well and truly whipped out from under our feet!

Sometimes it's difficult to take stock of what's going on with new developments flying at us thick and fast. On the other hand, lockdown has given us all plenty of time to ruminate. Sometimes too much time.

But music is a great leveller. And despite much of our everyday lives suffering severe disruption, we have the music of our past to keep us company, and music of the future to look forward to. Fortunately we've been able to keep *Prog* going throughout the upheaval (although it's been sad to see there have been some magazine casualties recently), and hopefully our reporting of the progressive scene has been of some comfort. As I mentioned last issue, I look at an increasingly busy prog schedule over the coming months and that really is quite exciting.

In this issue, cover star Steven Wilson discusses *In Absentia* as we look at how Porcupine Tree's 2002 album, their first for a major label, was one of modern progressive music's most influential records. We take a fascinating look at how prog really fared against punk back in 1977. And I'm delighted to point you in the direction of our Wild Thing Records sampler for you to download, highlighting some of the best modern prog that Australia has to offer. Details are on page 19.

So I hope you enjoy this issue of *Prog*. We're back on August 21. Until then, take care of yourselves and prog on...

Jerry Ewing - Editor

You can subscribe to *Prog* at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/PROG. See page 112 for further details.

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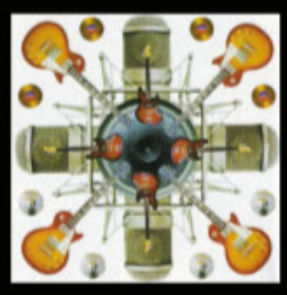

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ENCOURAGING SOUNDS

Thank you for producing *Prog* monthly. I grew up listening to (among others): Pink Floyd, Family, Captain Beefheart and The Grateful Dead (brilliant at Bickershaw) and, until reading *Prog*, did not realise that there were completely new bands developing this type of music.

Since reading your reviews my life has been enriched by listening to the wonderful Blackheart Orchestra, unfortunately missed in Guildford due to the lockdown. Also Mostly Autumn's excellent *Sight Of Day* and *White Rainbow* made me realise that progressive music is alive and well. Thanks so much for your role in encouraging this.

James Whitehouse, via email

THE SPICE OF LIFE

I enjoyed your recent article presenting your thoughts on those albums that advanced progressive music over the last 50 or so years [The Most Influential Albums In Prog, #110]. As for how we all define progressive rock I felt compelled to write in as I really don't think it's intended to be so broad as to include any new sound or cross-pollination within any music (eg rap and new age). Still it's challenging to constrain the definition too much. I think it needs to have some foundation in (what we call) rock music, and it probably needs to be more complex than a simple verse/chorus/verse song spat out by a three- or four-piece band of exclusively guitar, bass, drum and vocals. Like a good meal, it needs some spice, some colour and some presentation beyond just a slab of meat and a scrape of potatoes. But in order to be considered "progressive", does that spice, colour or presentation need to always be new? For me I don't think so. If, say, Porcupine Tree's sixth album is every bit as good (in our subjective way of judging prog) as their first, is it no longer prog because it's nothing new? Not in my book.

I absolutely enjoy the new boundaries and challenges, including, say, Big Big Train's incorporation of brass in new and different ways, but if Genesis were to produce a sequel to *Selling England By The Pound*, I'd still call it prog and I'd love it.

Jim Isaacson, via email

Blackheart Orchestra: enriching lives.

PRESS/SAM EDDISON

MUSIC TO MY EARS

As the latest issue plops onto the mat I just want to say a big thanks to all involved in getting the mag to us during these strange times.

It is a great spirit lifter to have some normality in an uncertain world.

Paul Thomas, via email

ON SAFARI

The healing power of music has never been more evident than in these difficult times. As we all struggle to come to terms with the new challenges facing us, it is more important than ever that we seek succour and release through the joy that great music brings.

While I anticipate the release of their next album, *Himlabacken Volume 2*, I am surrounding my ears with the incredible uplifting sounds of the back catalogue of Sweden's Moon Safari. Sadly, I suspect many *Prog* readers will still be unaware of this superb band despite them supporting Yes at the Royal Albert Hall in 2016.

Since I discovered Moon Safari they have taken me on many magical journeys. Often without me leaving the house but ultimately on trips round the world. Following them on cruise ships, seeing them supporting Fish in Stockholm. Meeting and making friends with other fans from around the world.

Moon Safari make music that reflects the type of people they are. Gracious, kind, positive, uplifting. That's what we need in these times. That's the power of music. That's the power of prog.

Andrew Hamer, via email

RECORD COLLECTOR

It is always interesting for me to read your feature, My Record Collection

TWEET TALK

Follow us on twitter.com/progmagazineUK

TOMMY ROGERS
@tommybtbam
If you truly enjoy live music, maybe take this virus seriously and wear a mask?? It's not hard... you just put it on your face. Bands will never be on a stage again if this doesn't get better.

DAVE KILMINSTER
@DaveKilminster
I was originally scheduled to fly to New York this weekend to start rehearsals for the Roger Waters This Is Not A Drill tour, but instead I'm in England with a lot of extra time to work on my album... possibly too much time!!

NICK D'VIRGILIO

NICK DVIRGILIO
@NDVMusic
Um... I think this whole stay at home thing has done a number on my hair. Or maybe that was my wife... yep, it was her. I'm glad I can still bring her some amusement during these crazy times.

LETTER

The Genesis article, Taking it All Too Hard [*Prog* 109], perhaps misses the main point about the disappointment many have felt about the upcoming reunion tour. It's wonderful that Genesis are back on the road, but I am one of the many who was simply unable to obtain tickets, and the band must bear some responsibility for this.

I was poised at the very moment tickets went on sale only to find, after waiting patiently in an online queue, that none were available. I tried several times, and indeed several different dates, only to find the same result. All of my Genesis-loving friends and family had the same dispiriting experience. Yet, within an hour, to my anger and dismay, tickets were appearing on fan resale sites at madly inflated prices.

How was this allowed to happen? Bands like Iron Maiden do not allow resale or transference of tickets, to prevent this kind of unacceptable abuse, and Genesis should have anticipated this would occur if they didn't employ a similar system. They should also have scheduled at least a few more dates, especially at London's O2 Arena.

It's hard not to feel resentment at the fact that my last chance of seeing this band I have loved and supported for most of my life seems to have vanished.

I will always love Genesis but I feel a sadness around this situation that was surely more avoidable than this if just a little bit more forethought, and a determination to play just a few more dates, had been applied.

Andy Thomas, East Sussex

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from The Merch Desk at www.themerchdesk.com.

as someone who still has a significant amount of vinyl going back to the 60s (my wife is a Beatles fan and we have some interesting and rare recordings). I spent the first 31 years of my life in America and I remember dancing to The Kinks, The Stones etc, as a teenager and I came to love prog so I can relate to Charles Snider's collection [*Prog* 109].

I lived in Philadelphia from 1970 to 1978 and I was privileged to see some great bands at the Electric Factory, the Tower Theatre, the Spectrum, the Main Point and Grendel's Lair. I also began to accumulate LPs of all types of music, especially prog, and there were quite a number of shops where one could find a wide variety of recordings. For a time there was a record shop on North Broad Street that simply sold 'cut-outs'. Needless to say I thought I had died and gone to music heaven. Occasionally I would purchase music at 3rd Street Jazz, a shop that also sold imports and copies of LPs that were sent to radio stations as demos. Talk about spoiled for choice!

Thank you for stimulating the memory of a 68-year-old music fanatic!

Cliff Chonka, via email

Charles Snider's record collection from issue 110.

My Record Collection

CHARLES SNIDER

THE 'P' IN PROGRESS

Regarding Phil Weller's Paperlate article [Is Prog Still Progressing? *Prog* 108], my opinion is that prog is more of an attitude and not an actual style of music. It is the way that it is arranged, played and presented that makes it appealing to someone who enjoys hearing new ideas.

Regarding bands that replicate those familiar sounds of the past, such as Ring Van Mobius, the way I look at it is that the original prog bands were mining a sea of ideas and suddenly the mines were closed in the mid 70s, [but the ideas] were still there waiting to be tapped into again. I love the insanity of the original prog scene, but I also love the retro-style bands who come up with amazing music that sounds like it was brought here in a time machine.

There are countless bands around the world who are creating new and exciting prog, surely even the most stubborn 'prog-luddite' should be hoping to find something new to listen to. Having an open mind to is all part of being a genuine prog head!

Buzz Elliott, via email

MARJANA (MARIANA) SEMKINA
@marjanasemkina
Someone told me in comments on Facebook to stop posting political bs 'cause I'm a musician. But what else is music, art, if not the response to the shit we see all around us in the world? Music comes from within but it's connected to all we see. And don't you dare try to shut us up.

JUDY DYBLE
@judydyble
My obelisk has fallen over. This is not a coded message

NEAL MORSE
@nealmorse
In this time of hatred, violence and extremism, Stevie Wonder reminds us of the *Visions* we all have in our hearts for peace and freedom. He inspired me this morning and I hope he inspires you as well. Remember: BE the change you want to see in the world!

PROG

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THE PINEAPPLE THIEF EXPLORE A POST-TRUTH WORLD

New studio album, *Versions Of The Truth,* is set to continue their recent ascent.

Thirteen might be unlucky for some, but it seems fortune is shining on The Pineapple Thief, who return with 13th studio album *Versions Of The Truth* on September 4.

Label Kscope confidently declare that its 10 tracks amount to the "finest album yet" from Bruce Soord and co — and, following their acclaimed prior releases, *Your Wilderness* and *Dissolution*, it seems the quartet are nearing the peak of their prowess.

No turning back: Bruce Soord [main], says The Pineapple Thief have entered their third epoch with the current line-up.

PRESS

"It seems to be quite a new thing, the fact that the truth doesn't really seem to matter anymore."

Prog news updated daily online! progmagazine.com

When asked if *Versions Of The Truth* is an evolution on his previous material, vocalist and guitarist Soord says the thought hadn't crossed his mind. "When I sit down and write a record I just sit down and write the best record that I possibly can," he reveals. "The few people who have heard it already have said it's a very different record."

The album is the band's third studio outing with dextrous King Crimson and Porcupine Tree drummer Gavin Harrison, and it appears this version of the line-up is here to stay. "I see The Pineapple Thief as having three big epochs," Soord says. "The third epoch we're in now is since Gavin joined.

"I see this as the third album of that reboot – and in those terms it certainly is an evolution. We've all got to know Gavin really well, and as a songwriting partner it's gelled really naturally."

Trailed by the astutely melancholic-yet-uplifting track *Demons*, which pivots on the lyrics *'Cos I've got demons/Yeah you should know/ You put them in me/And I will not let them go.'* The themes emanating from the record feel deep and personal.

"The title really doesn't need much explanation, especially in the Orwellian world that we live in," Soord comments. "It works at a very personal level for me: things are going on where truth is being distorted.

"The actual title is a quote from someone I know. He said, 'I don't know which versions of the truth you've been told.' I took that and I wrote a lot of songs about it. It applies to everything right up to the top – the top level of the world's society.

"It seems to be quite a new thing, this distortion of the truth, and the fact that the truth doesn't really seem to matter anymore."

The artwork, meanwhile, almost feels anti-prog. The etching on the cover is by the late German artist Michael Schoenholtz and comprises a series of abstract shapes. At first glance the illustration feels basic and rudimental, but take a longer look and it seems to reveal a different image each time.

"Michael passed away recently but we were able to use his work," Soord says. "I remember Gavin shared it with us all and we immediately said it was great. It fits the concept perfectly. Especially in the progressive rock scene: it's something just a bit different to what we normally do and what's normally done."

Soord hasn't set any goals for the record – "whatever comes, I will just enjoy" – but there are global tours in the schedule, with dates running all the way into 2022 as a result of coronavirus postponements. It's clear that the band (completed by bassist Jon Sykes and keyboardist Steve Kitch) are ready to soak it up all and keep on riding the wave.

"Over the last two to three years, things have gone a lot better than I guess what anyone really expected to," Soord admits. "The Pineapple Thief have been going for so long. All of sudden we hit this quite rapid upward trajectory, so we're just enjoying it."

Watch the video for *Demons* via www.pineapplethief.com. **CC**

BRUCE PORTRAIT: PRESS/JAMES CUMPSTY

This month, Intro was compiled by
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Malcolm Dome
Jerry Ewing
Martin Kielty
Rhodri Marsden
Alison Reijman
Natasha Scharf
Nick Shilton
Francesca Tyer
Rich Wilson
Phil Weller

GUNGFLY SET FOR LONELY AUTUMN

New album *Alone Together* revels in its sibling chemistry.

United and yet divided: Rikard Sjöblom's Gungfly.

Swedish multi-instrumentalist Rikard Sjöblom will return with a new Gungfly album, *Alone Together*, via InsideOut on September 4. The Big Big Train and ex-Beardfish man says it's "the prog rock record I always wanted to make". He explains: "It has all the little noodling and twiddly bits that I love, but it also has depth and purpose with its lyrics and feel."

The six-song follow-up to 2018's *Friendship* sees him stripping back his sound in favour of a power trio set up. "We didn't want a whole bunch of bells and whistles we didn't need," he says. "It was about making space for each other to really shine."

The line-up is completed by brothers Petter and Rasmus Diamant, who have been the backbone of Rikard Sjöblom's Gungfly's live band over the past two decades. And the band leader reports that they've blown friends away with their latest studio performance.

"I've never heard them play this well," Sjöblom says. "There are favourite moments of mine sprinkled all over the album. It's always a pleasure working with those guys and they really bring it on this record."

Lyrically, *Alone Together* reflects on how social media can impact people's perception of their own lives in the light of others, with digital platforms able to both unite and divide viewers with ease. "I wanted to write music that meant something to me, so I hope it means something to other people too," Sjöblom reports.

For more, visit www.rikardsjoblom.com. **POW**

FLYING COLORS TO LAUNCH LONDON CONCERT MOVIE

Third live album captured on last year's world tour.

Flying Colours – featuring Neal Morse, Mike Portnoy, Casey McPherson, Steve Morse and Dave LaRue – will release their third live album, *Third Stage: Live In London*, via Music Theories on September 18.

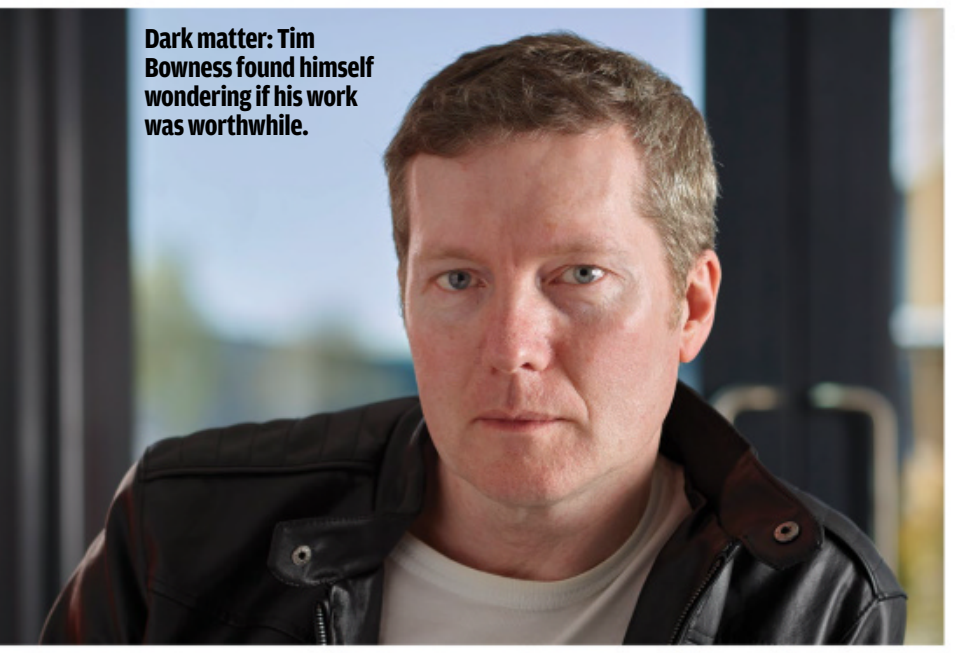
The band decided to record evidence of their brief 2019 tour after drummer Portnoy's joke that a Flying Colors show was rarer than a UFO sighting.

The album features material from all three studio releases, and vocalist McPherson credits Portnoy with the show's success. "Mike is a setlist master who knows how to take the fans on a journey. He makes our live shows magic." He adds, "It's epic to share the stage with those guys. They're really sensitive to the arrangement of music and they make it easy to let go and focus on the passion of performance."

Third Stage comes on five-disc Earbook, triple vinyl, two CD/DVD and Blu-ray. See www.flyingcolorsmusic.com. **POW**

Capturing their landing in London: Flying Colors.

PRESS/ JIM ARBOGAST



Dark matter: Tim Bowness found himself wondering if his work was worthwhile.

TIM BOWNESS TURNS THE UKULELE DARK

No-Man collaborator teams up with Barbieri, Edwin and Torabi on *Late Night Laments*.

Tim Bowness accepts that his upcoming solo album, *Late Night Laments*, could be seen as a premonition of the coronavirus pandemic – but he insists it's not. He's glad that he managed to complete the job just days before lockdown commenced. He'll release the eight-track recording on August 28 via InsideOut.

"A lot of the album came quite quickly. It was quite an intense burst of activity," he says. "In late 2018 I started with the closing track, *One Last Call*; it had a particular mood, and it all came from that. I did have a real sense of foreboding when I was writing. It's a darker album for darker times."

He adds, "There's an element of it being claustrophobic and intimate, but lyrically it's the most global and political album that I've done."

The timing was fortuitous as the singer-songwriter is convinced he couldn't have kept working as the lockdown began impacting everyone's lives, partly because the situation raised an important question: "Creating art in a time of crisis – is it useful? Suddenly everything felt tremendously irrelevant. So there's a lot of self-questioning."

He's also reached something of a conclusion, however. "Music, films, books, are more important to me; they offer an escape and even a greater sense of reality."

Late Night Laments was again mixed by Steven Wilson, Bowness' collaborator in No-Man, and mastered by Calum Malcolm of Blue Nile and Prefab Sprout fame. Guest contributions came from Richard Barbieri, Colin Edwin, Gong's Kavus Torabi and neo-folk artist Evan Carson.

"When I finished writing it I did feel emotionally exhausted," he recalls. "I'd written about 53 minutes and then edited it quite savagely, so what you've got is what I consider to be the perfect length for the music I make." Aficianados might be surprised to learn that a ukulele makes an appearance on the record, but worry not – "I've even managed to make the ukulele sound dark!" he promises.

With the future unclear, he intends to continue his *The Album Years* podcasts with Wilson, and hopes *Late Night Laments* will extend the purple patch he's been enjoying over the past few years. "Success is finding yourself somewhere new and being excited by that," he reflects. "And that definitely happened with this album." **MK**

"Creating art in a time of crisis - is it useful? Everything felt tremendously irrelevant."

Visit www.timbowness.co.uk for more.

INTRO extras

MATT BERRY TO FLY WITH *PHANTOM BIRDS*

Matt Berry will release his eighth album, *Phantom Birds*, on September 18 via Acid Jazz. The 13-track record features songs called *Something In My Eye*, *Man Of Doom*, *That Yellow Bird* and *Covered in Clowns*. The release follows the *Toast Of London* star's 2018 LP *Television Themes*, a collection of covers from TV shows of the 1960s to the 1980s.

Spreading his wings: Sons Of Apollo's Derek Sherinian.

DEREK SHERINIAN RISES WITH NEW ALBUM *THE PHOENIX*

Keyboardist's guest-laden return is his first solo release in nine years.

Acclaimed keyboard player Derek Sherinian will release a new solo album through InsideOut on September 18. Titled *The Phoenix*, it's his first since 2011's *Oceana*.

"Why such a long delay? It got to a point where I wondered if it was worth me doing another solo record," Sherinian admits. "Then I got inspired to start work on one, so I talked to Simon Phillips, my collaborator and mentor on these solo records for a long time. He was keen, so off we went. We co-wrote most of the material and co-produced the record. Simon has mixed it as well and he plays the drums."

The title was a suggestion that came in after Sherinian asked for ideas via Facebook. Top-line guests include bassists Tony Franklin, Jimmy Johnson and Billy Sheehan (Sherinian's bandmate in Sons Of Apollo); guitarists Joe Bonamassa, Steve Vai, Zakk Wylde, Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal (also Sons Of Apollo) and Kiko Loureiro (Megadeth).

Among the eight tracks are a cover that's connected to Sherinian's early days. "We've done Buddy Miles' *Them Changes* from 1970, which has Joe singing – it's the only song with vocals," the keyboardist says. "For me, that was special because I got my first professional break playing with Buddy."

For more, visit www.dereksherinian.com. **MD**

CONTORTIONIST'S LESSARD STARTS SOLO PROJECT

Vocalist Michael has a series of singles to serve up.

The Contortionist's vocalist Michael Lessard has prepared a series of solo single releases, which recently started with the launch of *Use The Rest*. He doesn't have any large-scale ambition with the songs and videos to come via Good Fight Music, but he hopes people will enjoy them as much as he's enjoying the change of creative environment.

"The Contortionist is very much a collaborative effort," says Lessard. "Being able to have something that is 100 per cent my vision, unswayed, is a welcome change."

He believes listeners will detect a different style of writing in his solo work. "My main focus is on making the instrumentation and production play a supporting role to strengthen the lyrics and vocals," he explains. "In The Contortionist, sometimes the vocals take a backseat to make room for someone else."

Lessard's material will appear over the coming months. Meanwhile, he confirms The Contortionist are "writing a record that will be released once touring becomes a thing again."

For more, visit www.goodfightmusic.com. **MK**

Straightening up: Michael Lessard.

PRESS/ CHRIS C COLLINS

THREE COLOURS DARK

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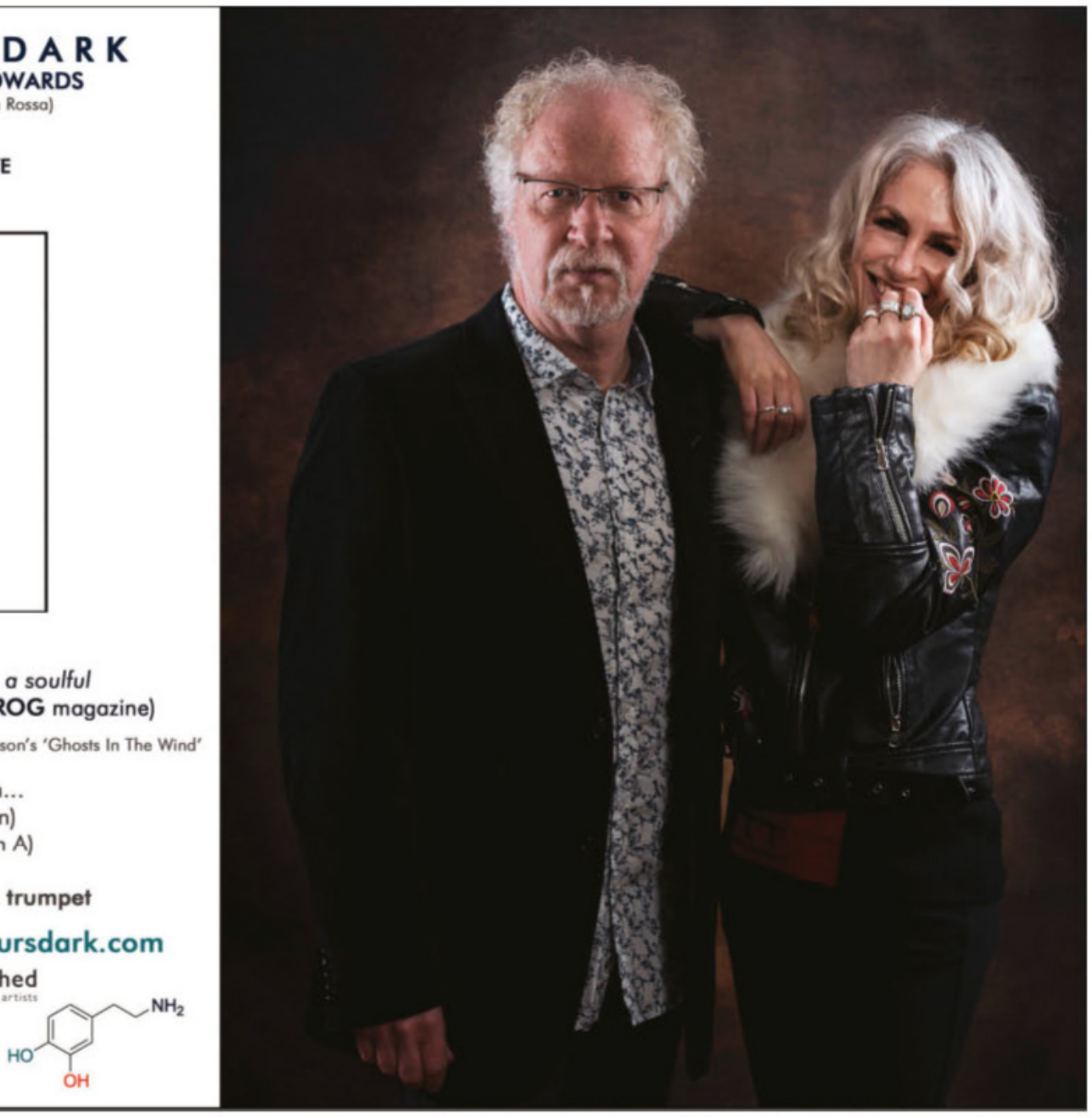

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AUTOMATIC FOR THE TANGENT

Auto Reconnaissance is the first time the same line-up have made a second record.

The more things change: Andy Tillison.

The Tangent launch their 11th studio album on August 21. Entitled *Auto Reconnaissance*, it's the first time the band have had the same line-up for two successive releases. "That's pretty good about 15 years in, isn't it?" laughs de facto leader, keyboardist/vocalist/producer Andy Tillison.

"The Tangent started out as a project — we weren't supposed to be a band," he continues. "However, slowly but surely, we gradually ended up with people who were becoming more regular." As such, guitarist and co-producer Luke Machin, bassist Jonas Reingold, saxophonist/flautist Theo Travis and drummer Steve Roberts complete the line-up, as they did for 2018's *Proxy*.

Tillison reports that he's enjoyed having a certain level of stability for the first time in the band's history, before adding a proviso: "There's always been a question in my mind — how do you develop when you don't have any changes in the line-up because you're not bringing any new blood in? But Rush had that very long lasting line-up and did develop well together. In The Tangent we started off with essentially 10 years of line-up chaos and then started to stabilise. Yes did the opposite!"

He believes *Auto Reconnaissance* finds the collective at their most diverse. "The album goes from essentially quite accessible and commercial almost pop music at times into some of the darkest stuff we've ever done," he reports. "It's got the flavour of some of our most poppy album, *Spark In The Aether*, but part of it goes as far into our darkest moment, *Le Sacre Du Travail*. These two flavours sit side by side."

Not far shy of two decades since their 2003 debut, *The Music That Died Alone*, The Tangent remain signed to InsideOut. "This band has never followed a career path," Tillison says. "We're not trying to career build. We're just trying to build a body of work and see what happens next.

"InsideOut have played a huge role in allowing us to do this without any kind of plan or goals. And we're very grateful to them for letting us do it.

"I hear a lot of people dissing their record labels, but InsideOut have signed me four times, for fuck's sake! It's probably not because they like my hairstyle. They must be mad!"

Auto Reconnaissance features sleeve art by Ed Untisky, who last worked with The Tangent on 2014's *A Spark In The Aether*. **NS**

"We're just trying to build a body of work and see what happens next."

For more, visit www.thetangent.org.

INTRO extras

PAIN OF SALVATION TO RELEASE *PANTHER*

Pain Of Salvation will follow 2017 album *In The Passing Light Of Day* with *Panther*, which arrives on August 28 via InsideOut. Reporting that work had taken two years, Daniel Gildenlöw says: "I have felt the need to push boundaries, musically and sonically, approaching the music from more diverse angles, without losing the identity of the band."

Bringing happiness: Ozrics' Ed Wynne.

OZRIC TENTACLES OFFER *SPACE FOR THE EARTH*

Latest album follows summer solstice tune.

Psychedelic proggers Ozric Tentacles release their 16th studio album, *Space For The Earth*, five years after previous outing *Technicians Of The Sacred*.

Band leader Ed Wynne made the most of the lockdown to develop the record, which was preceded by *Humboldt Currant*, a single launched on the summer solstice.

"The record company said to us, 'How about doing a single?'" Wynne reports. "I replied that I can't really do three-and-a-half-minute pop songs, but they understood that. We decided to bring it out because there was no actual gathering at Stonehenge this year. It was meant to give everyone a little lift for the midsummer and to help them along."

He says he's delighted with progress on the album: "It's going really well. This lockdown has given me so much time to get it exactly how I want it. My music is really a way to keep myself sane – when it comes out through the other side, it translates as happiness to people."

He continues: "Those who have heard it say it is very much a moving on from *Technicians*. There are seven tracks, all different, going from serene, new age meditation music to very silly rock. It'll be across the board as usual."

Along with the release of *Space For The Earth* in August, Kscope will launch a series of seven classic Tentacles albums, remastered by Wynne, later this year.

Visit www.facebook.com/OfficialOzricTentacles. **AR**

FLAMING LIPS GET EMOTIONAL ON *AMERICAN HEAD*

Wayne Coyne presents "pallet full of emotions and stories".

The Flaming Lips release their new album *American Head* on September 11 via Bella Union. It follows on from 2019's *King's Mouth*.

The launch was preceded by the song *Flowers Of Neptune 6*, which arrived with a video that was completed just hours before the USA went into lockdown in March.

Vocalist Wayne Coyne says *American Head* is based on the feelings encapsulated in the lead track. "It's rather like a pallet full of emotions and stories, and that's probably why it's so endearing," he reports. "The song has all these mellow, dramatic things going on with references to mothers, brothers and internal stuff. It's all hinting at some bigger emotions; when you hear it, you can apply it to your own life."

Living in the moment: Flaming Lips.

The album, he adds, includes the message: "Be cool and be in the moment. There are a lot of times where there is serendipity; things come together."

For more, visit www.flaminglips.com. **AR**

FAD GADGETS

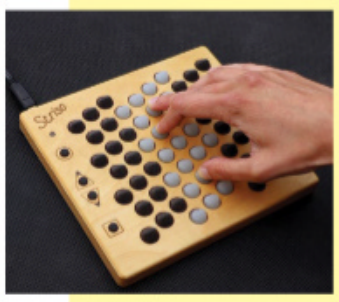
Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

OPEN AI JUKEBOX

Could a non-human entertainer enchant and enthral a human audience? The Microsoft-backed Open AI project is putting the theory to the test by training a neural network on a database of 1.2 million songs, giving it some lyrics (co-written by AI and some humans) and seeing what it comes up with across various genres from easy listening to hip-hop. The results, unsurprisingly, sound like an impersonation of music rather than music itself. You've got to pat AI on the head for having a go, but would you choose to listen to it? Nope.
www.openai.com

STRISO

Many people have had an idea for a new instrument and put it on Kickstarter to see if the idea flies. Most of the time these projects go unfunded, unmade and unloved. The Striso, however, has struck a chord. Dutch inventor Piers Titus van der Torren has been developing this thing for more than six years, trying to make something that's fun to play and easy to learn. Piers explains in the promo video that you can "play it anywhere," and illustrates his point by performing a tune while sitting on some swings. The fact that it looks like a game of solitaire is an added bonus.



www.striso.org

ASTELL & KERN SR25

Time for our regular chortle at high-resolution audio players, the kind of musical snake oil that's best avoided. This time last year we featured Astell & Kern's SP2000, which played audio files and cost the best part of £3,000. The SR25 is almost an admission that its predecessor might have been be a tad overpriced – it comes in at a more reasonable (but still eye-watering) £550. If anyone's able to discern between the audio quality of those two devices, I'd class it as a paranormal event.

www.astellnkern.com

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Benjamin Savariau believes the French scene has more to offer than people realise.

EKPHRASIS

Guitarist **Benjamin Savariau**'s French act champion the strength of their nation's scene, urging the rest of the world to take note.

With their recently released debut album, *Weird Interbreeding*, Ekphrasis have a fitfully descriptive title. By interweaving the glassy thump of djent guitars with swelling keyboards, soul music excursions and twisting jazz runs, the quartet expel a sound that thrives in its versatility. A kaleidoscope of moving parts and melding genres, emboldened by John Petrucci-inspired guitar flourishes and Yes-sized crescendos, the record provides further evidence of the blossoming French prog scene.

"We've got a lot of cool progressive bands in France," founding member and guitarist/vocalist Benjamin Savariau enthuses. "Bands like Mobius, Klone, Fractal Universe and Adagio prove that. We have a really reactive and loyal scene here too, so we can always put our trust in people turning up to our live shows. Now, with our album released, we want to grow within the international scene too."

The band hail from Avignon, which nestles in the country's south-east, a historic city cast under the shadow of the intimidating Palais des Papes – the largest Gothic building in the world. In its shadow they've crafted a sound that's just as imposing and impressive. Despite the panoramic scope of their sound, it still sounds razor sharp. The experience of their personnel (whose collective CV includes stints in a Sting tribute band and performances as backing bands on French TV) means they know how to keep their sound focused and uncluttered.

"The first album is an introduction to Ekphrasis' universe," Savariau says. "I love Dream Theater's *Images And Words*, and I've been heavily influenced by the djent scene too; the first Animals As Leaders is a masterpiece. But I really wanted to go further with those influences, so there is a lot of *Hot Rats*, *Close To The Edge* and *In The Court Of The Crimson King* influences in the music too. I didn't want to set any limitations to the composition process.

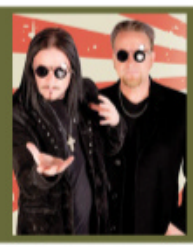
"Gojira have shown the world there is a need to focus on the French metal scene," he continues. "But they still feel like the exception. I encourage the world to take a look at our scene; so many bands are aching to be discovered." **POW**

"I encourage the world to take a look at our scene; it is so versatile."

Weird Interbreeding is available from www.ekphrasis.bandcamp.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

Yello will release *Point*, their first album in four years, on August 28. It's described as an "ultra-modern" take on their classic sound. Dieter Meier and Boris Blank previewed the LP in June with summer-sounding single *Waba Duba*. See point.yello.com.



Dukes Of The Orient (left), the John Payne project featuring Eric Norlander, release their second album, *Freakshow*, on August 8 via Frontiers. Says Payne, "We wanted to create an echo to the past." See www.facebook.com/dukes.of.the.orient.

Organisers of the **Summer's End Festival** have postponed the 2020 event in Chepstow until next year as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The event will now go ahead from September 30 until October 3, 2021 with the same line-up and venue.

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WILDTHING RECORDS **SAMPLER**

Where the wild things are...

Hello, and welcome to our Wild Thing Records sampler. *Prog* is delighted to have hooked up with the pioneering Melbourne-based independent record label and web store to bring you some of the most exciting sounds emanating from the southern hemisphere.

Launched in 2018 as the label arm of touring and management company Wild Thing Presents, the venture comes after years of championing the burgeoning Australian prog scene, including co-promoting Progfest and building the Australian careers of many internationally recognised bands. It prides itself in discovering cutting-edge artists, and includes exceptional releases from Caligula's Horse, The Ocean, Circles, Ebonivory, Glass Ocean, AlithiA, and many more to come. Enjoy!

Jerry Ewing, Editor

"Having worked very closely with international and Australian progressive rock and metal artists for almost 10 years in management and promoter capacities, I felt that the next step was to launch a record label – Wild Thing Records. I'm excited to be working with such innovative and inspirational artists, among such a rich musical scene that's open to everyone from all walks of life. Prog is a genre that's welcoming to all, and I'm proud to be part of this amazing international community. We look forward to many more releases to come!"

Eli Chamravi, Director
Wild Thing Records
www.wildthingrecords.com

Ebonivory

This Ballarat-based quintet were formed by singer and songwriter Charlie Powlett back in 2014. A series of early EPs and tours supporting Dead Letter Circus and Circles, and an appearance at 2019's Progfest helped to establish the band as one of Australia's brightest young prog hopes. They released *The Long Dream I* in June, part of an ambitious two-album conceptual affair that never fails to impress.

***Patting The Black Dog* and *Explosions After Dark* are taken from *The Long Dream I*.**

Circles

Melbourne-based alt-prog quartet Circles released their debut album, *Infinitas*, through UK label Basick in 2013 and *The Last One* through Season Of Mist and Wild Thing Records in 2018. The band have made a name for themselves touring with TesseracT, Caligula's Horse, Dillinger Escape Plan, Periphery, and more.

***Breaker* and *Tether* are taken from *The Last One*.**

AlithiA

No strangers to the pages of this magazine, Melbourne's AlithiA have been around since 2004. The band released their acclaimed second album, *The Moon Has Fallen*, in 2018 and have toured Europe with Leprous and Agent Fresco, as well as being regulars at Australian festivals such as Bigsound and Progfest.

***The Sun* and *Empress* are taken from *The Moon Has Fallen*.**

Glass Ocean

Sydney quintet Glass Ocean will release their anticipated debut album, *The Remnants Of Losing Yourself In Someone Else*, in August, which highlights their contemporary approach to progressive music, highlighted by singer Tobias Atkins' soaring melodies and sugar-coated hooks.

***Voyage* and *Beyond Us* are taken from *The Remnants Of Losing Yourself In Someone Else*.**

James Norbert Ivanyi

Sydney guitarist James Norbert Ivanyi took the solo plunge in 2013 and now has three acclaimed albums under his belt – including 2015's *The Matter Circumvention* – as well as 2017's *Denalavis* EP. UK fans may have caught him with Haken and he's also appeared at NAMM in the USA and the UK's own Tech-Fest.

***The Matter Circumvention* and *Malevolent* are taken from *The Matter Circumvention*.**

What's on your free Wild Thing Records digital album

Download the 10-track sampler from www.bit.ly/Wild_Thing

Ebonivory
1. *Patting The Black Dog*
2. *Explosions After Dark*
Taken from *The Long Dream I*

Circles
3. *Breaker*. **4.** *Tether*
Taken from *The Last One*

AlithiA
5. *The Sun*. **6.** *Empress*
Taken from *The Moon Has Fallen*

Glass Ocean
7. *Voyage*. **8.** Beyond Us
Taken from *The Remnants Of Losing Yourself In Someone Else*

James Norbert Ivanyi
9. *The Matter Circumvention*
10. *Malevolent*
Taken from *The Matter Circumvention*

JACK BRUCE
SONGS FOR A TAILOR
(ATCO, 1969)

Cream had barely waved the world a fractious farewell before Jack Bruce embarked on recording his solo debut, *Songs For A Tailor*, in early 1969. In collaboration with his word-weaving lyricist cum beat poet, Pete Brown, he fashioned an essential collection of songs for all seasons.

Having already dabbled in jazz-rock the previous year by recording *Things We Like* – which the pernickety bean counters at Polydor had stalled in releasing – Bruce was once again able to secure the services of Dick Heckstall-Smith (sax) and Jon Hiseman (drums), with the welcome addition of Chris Spedding (guitar) plus Harry Beckett and Henry Lowther (trumpets), among other notable musicians.

In his efforts to cross further musical boundaries without reservations, Bruce set exacting standards as a composer. The complexity of the songs required the technical ability of musicians of the highest calibre and he was never one to accept compromise.

Strains of the theme from *The Prisoner* may be discerned in the opening bars of *Never Tell Your Mother She's Out Of Tune*, which gives some indication of the unfamiliar surroundings into which the captive listener is repeatedly cast throughout the album. Be it *Theme For An Imaginary Western*, *Rope Ladder To The Moon* or *The Ministry Of Bag*, there's much here to stir the senses and quicken the blood.

This was Bruce at his best, with something to prove and driven to execute his art rock designs. His frequently grievous vocals may have owed as much to Graham Bond as his bass playing did to Charles Mingus, but he was, without a doubt, every inch a unique musical pattern maker.

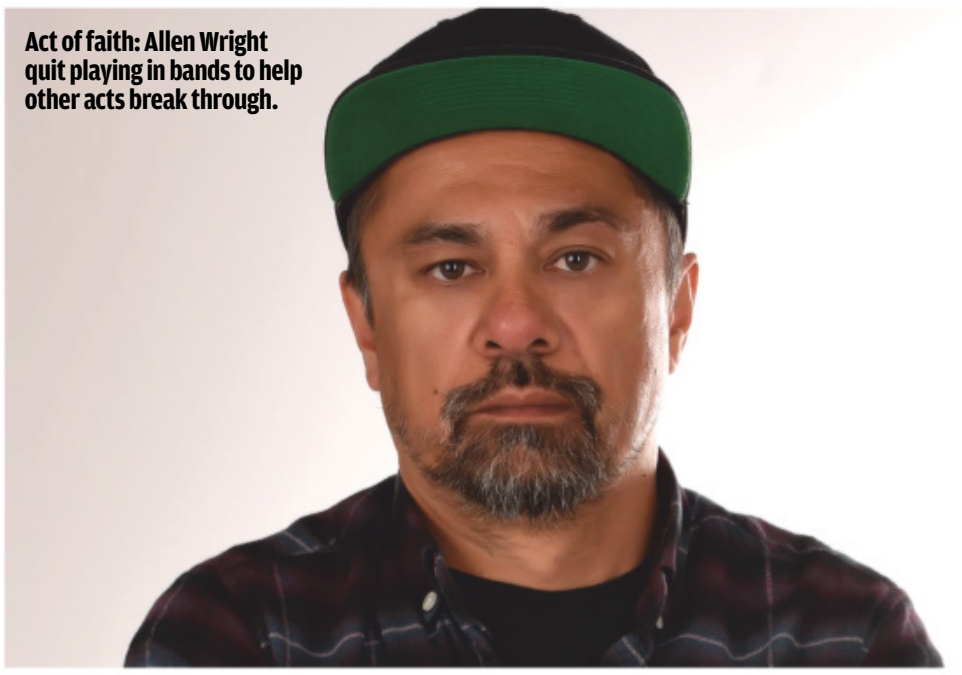
Admittedly Brown's wordsmithery wasn't everyone's cup of tea. Often accused of being more Lear than Longfellow, he drew on fathomless wells of inspiration from Shakespeare to Robert Louis Stevenson, Tolkien and Ginsberg; but where his lyrics may have sometimes sounded off-the-cuff, they were invariably handcrafted raiments cut from a cloth of the finest materials. He leads the listener purposefully into the citadels of the heart – if, on occasion, losing his head in the rainbows.

Songs For A Tailor captures the full force majeure of the Bruce/Brown partnership taken at the flood, long before the soap lost its lather or the seas dried up and Bruce succumbed to stranger brews.

Following in the boots of The Beatles and forbearing the shoes of the fisherman's wife, this album ain't no hand-me-down zoot suit. This is a finely-spun suite of magical music, beautifully made to measure. Why not step inside the changing room and try it on for size?

LIN BENSLEY

HAVE A CIGAR
Saluting the scene's supporting crew



Act of faith: Allen Wright quit playing in bands to help other acts break through.

GO DOWN BELIEVING MANAGEMENT

Allen Wright ditched singing and unexpectedly got involved with an influential European prog festival.

Attending school in the aptly named German town of Rammstein was probably an early portent of where Allen Wright's career was heading. The vocalist ping-ponged between his native California and Germany in the 90s, joining metal crossover bands Headcrash and then End Of April.

"I called it quits on playing after meeting many bands on the road who didn't have bookers or management," Wright says. "I started growing my network, taking on a couple of bands who ended up being connected to Roadrunner Records."

He settled in Cologne where, in 2005, he established Go Down Believing Management, booking and managing mainly metal bands. His current roster includes French avant-gardists Hypno5e, prog metallers Shokran and Ukranian groove metallers Jinjer. Since 2011, he's been a talent programmer for Euroblast Festival in Cologne, which has attracted Devin Townsend Project, Meshuggah and Animals As Leaders. Younger bands such as TesseracT, Monuments and The Algorithm made their European breakthroughs there. Although coronavirus has put business, including October's Euroblast, on pause he's pleased that tickets for the postponed event are still selling as it "shows how faithful the Euroblast fans are."

Wright was on tour with Jinjer when the pandemic struck, first in Tel Aviv, then in Australia, and finally Latin America. "They started shutting everything down after we played — I felt there was this tsunami chasing us from show to show," he recalls. "Touring forms around 70 to 80 per cent of all band income. Whether in the future we do live drive-in shows or in a limited capacity venue, crew and travel expenses will be the same — even though we're on a much more limited income." But he remains positive about the future.

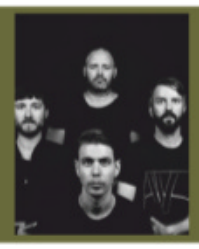
"There's an abundance of local talent in every nook and cranny of every country. It's difficult for them to get shows as big bands bring their own support," he says. "When you've got a capacity of 50 to 150, it's perfect for local bands." **AR**

Visit www.facebook.com/godownbelieving for more.

"I felt there was this tsunami chasing us from show to show."

PROG IN BRIEF

Swedish instrumentalists **Gösta Berlings Saga** (right) launch new album *Konkret Musik* on July 24. It's described as a mix of "progressive rock, synth minimalism and otherworldly melodies" that will "not leave anyone unaffected."



The Mighty Handful release new album *Touchy Subjects* on September 5. Singer/producer Matt Howes says the follow-up to *Still Sitting* explores some "dark and ugly" relationships via characters who "aren't very nice people." For more, see www.mightyhandful.com.

PRESS/THOMAS WILLIAMS

AA Williams: lounge music.

AA WILLIAMS

London singer-songwriter pierces the veil with melancholy post-rock hymns.

"I HAD TO Google it because I didn't know what that means!" says AA Williams in response to journalists and fans describing her haunting songs as 'death gospel'. "If somebody could give me a definition of it, I'd know if I was cool about it or not!"

The classically trained musician made her debut with a self-titled EP last year and has since found herself compared to the progressively minded Chelsea Wolfe, Emma Ruth Rundle and Louise Lemón — artists she admits she's never actually listened to. But with the release of her first full-length album, *Forever Blue*, she's ready to show the world what she's really made of.

"The balance of heavy and light has always been something I've been interested in, but I made the EP in my living room and there's only so much one can achieve when you don't have the right equipment," she explains with a faint south London accent. "Creating the album, there was a bit more time and more knowledge going into it. There are also two sung male vocals and one is heavy [Cult Of Luna's Johannes Persson guests on *Fearless*] so it's about providing a texture, providing a balance. It's nice to have something starkly different to the softer elements and I think that using it on just one small portion of one song is enough to just give a hint without it being overbearing."

Although she's been playing piano and cello since she was a child, Williams is self-taught when it comes to guitar and singing, which lends a raw, experimental edge to her music that caught the attention of MONO. Eagle-eyed fans might have spotted her performing as part of a string quartet with the Japanese post-rockers at last year's Roadburn Festival, and she also collaborated with them on last year's *Exit In Darkness* single.

"Taka [Takaakira Goto, guitars] and I had already been emailing [before Roadburn] because he'd listened to my EP but there wasn't a plan. It was a case of: let's see if it works, let's see if the writing styles complement each other," she reveals. "I enjoy the spaciousness of post-rock; the way there's room for everything to breathe. [When I'm writing] words come to me last and I use the voice as an instrument rather than just a way of presenting text."

As the world prepares to heal from the pandemic, Williams' live plans have gone on hold. She's previously supported Nordic Giants and Russian Circles, and is curious to see what the future holds. In the meantime, she's been working on a series of living room performances she calls 'Songs From Isolation'. Filmed by her husband Thomas, who also plays bass on her album, the single-song sets have seen her reworking Radiohead and Nick Cave classics in her melancholic style.

"It's been nice to reimagine songs that people are familiar with. It's also been a lot of fun to work with my husband and it's been an enjoyable project to have during this time," she says. "If I'm able to reach new audiences in the process then that's an extra bonus." **NRS**

"I use the voice as an instrument rather than just a way of presenting text."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

AA Williams *(vocals, guitar, piano)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Hypnotic dark folk drenched in atmospheres worthy of Sigur Rós

CURRENT RELEASE

Forever Blue is out now on Bella Union

WEBSITE

www.aawilliamsmusic.com

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

April 2020

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1	**RUSH**	Permanent Waves *(UMC/MERCURY)*
2	**PINK FLOYD**	The Later Years 1987-2019 *(RHINO)*
3	**TAME IMPALA**	The Slow Rush *(FICTION)*
4	**NIGHTWISH**	Human. :II: Nature. *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
5	**HAWKWIND**	Road Hawks *(ATOMHENGE/CHERRY RED)*
6	**TOOL**	Fear Inoculum *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
7	**KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD**	Chunky Shrapnel *(KGLW)*
8	**AIRBAG**	A Day At The Beach *(KARISMA)*
9	**PETER GABRIEL**	Flotsam And Jetsam *(REAL WORLD)*
10	**JEFF LYNNE'S ELO**	From Out Of Nowhere *(RCA)*
11	**DEVIN TOWNSEND**	Empath *(INSIDEOUT)*
12	**BRIAN ENO**	Apollo – Atmospheres And Soundtracks *(UMC)*
13	**HAWKLORDS**	Alive – In Concert *(HAWLORDS)*
14	**FROST***	Others *(INSIDEOUT)*
15	**WIRE**	10:20 *(PINK FLAG)*
16	**KING CRIMSON**	In The Court Of The Crimson King *(PANEGYRIC)*
17	**STEVE HACKETT**	Genesis Revisited Band & Orchestra – Live *(INSIDEOUT)*
18	**MARILLION**	Afraid Of Sunlight *(RHINO)*
19	**THE ORB**	Abolition Of The Royal Familia *(COOKING VINYL)*
20	**FRANK ZAPPA**	Hot Rats *(UMC)*
21	**PORCUPINE TREE**	In Absentia *(KSCOPE)*
22	**KATATONIA**	City Burials *(PEACEVILLE)*
23	**OPETH**	In Cauda Venenum *(MODERBLOGAT/NUCLEAR BLAST)*
24	**MARILLION**	Script For A Jester's Tear *(RHINO)*
25	**SIGUR RÓS**	Ágætis Byrjun – A New Beginning *(KRUNK)*
26	**GENESIS**	The Lost Radio Recordings *(GOLDFISH)*
27	**PENDRAGON**	Love Over Fear *(TOFF)*
28	**TANGERINE DREAM**	Recurring Dreams *(KSCOPE)*
29	**FISH ON FRIDAY**	Black Rain *(ESOTERIC)*
30	**FAIRPORT CONVENTION**	Shuffle And Go *(MATTY GROOVES)*

Find out more at **www.officialcharts.com**

WIN!

CLANNAD DELUXE BOX

This month's competition celebrates the creativity of one of Ireland's greatest musical exports: Clannad. The celtic folk proggers recently released the impressive *In A Lifetime Anthology* and we have a copy of the extremely limited deluxe edition to give away to one very lucky reader.

This amazing set contains more than 100 tracks spread across five CDs, a double and single vinyl LP, and a seven-inch single, plus there's an exclusive book and related ephemera. The whole package captures the award-winning family's finest work from a career that's spanned 50 years, and includes their two new recordings with Trevor Horn (*A Celtic Dream* and *Who Knows (Where The Time Goes)*), as well as rarities, live tracks, and their big hit, *Theme From Harry's Game*. This collection is a must-have for fans of celtic-infused prog.

To be in with a chance of winning this amazing prize, simply head over to www.bit.ly/clannad_box and answer the following question:

Which of these artists has Clannad's Moya Brennan *not* sung with?

a) Robert Plant

b) Joni Mitchell

c) U2's Bono

For more information on Clannad, visit www.clannad.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from July 17-August 21, 2020. By entering the competition you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing

MILES DAVIS
The Lost Septet
SLEEPY NIGHT RECORDS

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

LAUGHING STOCK
The Island
APOLLON RECORDS

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

AA WILLIAMS
Forever Blue
BELLA UNION

The Musician
Kenwyn House

MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA
Birds of Fire
COLUMBIA

The Writer
Rich Wilson

MARILLION
Fugazi
EMI

The Reader
David Lloyd

I AM MORON
The Lovely Eggs
EGG RECORDS

Just another brick in the wall for Dutch proggers Lesoir.

PRESS/ HARRY HEUTS

LESOIR

Riverside's Dutch buddies piece together their influences with help from Muse's producer.

IT'S BEEN A slow burn for Lesoir. Formed in Holland in 2009, the band have consistently recorded and released four compelling albums and there are indications that their latest release, *Mosaic*, could propel them firmly towards a career-defining breakthrough.

"When we started, we were just an alternative rock band," recalls guitarist Ingo Dassen. "After two albums, we got into prog and started listening to people like Steven Wilson and we kind of rolled into the prog scene. Over that time, we've supported a few bands, such as Riverside and also appeared at The Night Of The Prog in Loreley. We're not as well-known as some of the new prog bands, even though we have been around for quite a while."

Unquestionably, a substantial part of their appeal are their live performances, which manage to retain an emotional edge in tandem with consummate musicianship. That ability is something that has transcended onto their studio albums, with the band capturing their onstage energy and enthusiasm on tape. Indeed, unlike many musicians who are content recording their parts in independent isolation, Lesoir and their producer John Cornfield (Muse) prefer to record together while in residency at a studio.

"It's the only way if you want to work with John Cornfield," says singer Maartje Meessen with a laugh. "He doesn't want it any other way and all the albums that we have done so far were recorded live. It's important that we do this as it makes the record unique."

"If you listen very carefully you will hear a little coughing or clicking on the floor and we left those in," adds Dassen. "Of course, everyone could record things remotely and then you can edit it and make it super-smooth, but it also kills dynamics and emotion. We have always chosen to approach it by recording an album as live as possible. We're hoping to get the live energy we have onstage and catch that for the record. John wants to capture the vibe of the band and that's more important to him than the perfect take. If the emotion is right, then we will always settle for that take."

Certainly, that emotion is something that has been caught on their latest release *Mosaic*. Aside from the quality of the musicianship and soulful lyrics, the band are patently maturing as a unit.

"There comes a point where you're used to how you write together and what to expect from each other," says Dassen. "All of that means that this album is very natural and we really feel that this is the best album we could have made at this point."

"We're happy with the record and that people are very positive about it," interjects Meessen. "We have very loyal fans and it feels really good. That gives us a great deal of satisfaction. The sales are better than the previous albums and I guess that only time will tell if we can keep this up." **RW**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Ingo Dassen *(guitars)*, **Maartje Meessen** *(vocals, keyboards)*, **Eleen Bartholomeus** *(guitars, vocals)*, **Ruben Heijnsbroek** *(bass)*, **Bob van Heuman** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

A beguiling blend of Anathema, Porcupine Tree and The Gathering with an original twist

CURRENT RELEASE

Mosaic is out now on Glassville

WEBSITE

www.lesoirmusic.com

"We're always hoping to get the live energy we have on stage and catch that for the record."

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LOUISE PATRICIA CRANE

The Eden House's divine vocalist teams up with Jakko Jakszyk for solo debut.

SINGER AND SONGWRITER Louise Patricia Crane brings her listeners a unique blend of romantic escapism and alternative rock. Her sound encapsulates a variety of inspirations, from 70s music to the visual arts, and immerses the listener in a dreamlike space.

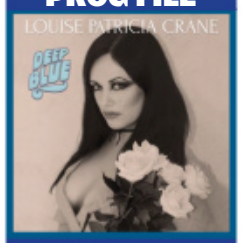
Speaking about her early interest in music, Crane mentions artists such as Kate Bush, Sweet and Queen. She suggests it was this music that directed her own sound but admits that her operatic training must have played some part. "I think my initial training made me mindful," Crane muses. "One thing my teacher really taught was the use of the diaphragm — how to look after the voice and really access that part of your body."

Although Crane has been involved with several underground bands, including dark prog rockers The Eden House, singing and writing her own music was her calling. She explains that it's always been a need for artistic expression that couldn't be brought to light among other musicians.

"Working with The Eden House was a privilege," she begins, "but I felt that I had so much that I wanted to say musically. Stephen Carey [The Eden House's co-founding guitarist] and I got on super-well and I saw this as an opportunity. I just started writing one night and I knew that this was going to lead me to being able to explore my own musical ideas."

As Crane had hoped, writing that first song was the beginning of a new creative journey. Working with Carey over the course of three years, her debut album *Deep Blue* was brought to life.

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Louise Patricia Crane *(vocals)*, **Stephen Carey** *(guitar, piano)*, **Jakko Jakszyk** *(backing vocals, guitar)*, **Simon Rippin** *(percussion)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Dreamy and progressive, combining the ethereal and romantic with alternative rock and intriguing suspense

CURRENT RELEASE

Deep Blue is out now via Peculiar Doll

WEBSITE

www.louisepatriciacrane.bandcamp.com

"It's been harrowing for me," Crane admits, "because there were a lot of things that went on in my life. Recording only began in earnest around early summer last year. You need to be in the right creative head space when there are two people working together and Stephen was open-minded to achieving my vision."

Despite challenges faced, the album's release brings Crane's musical journey to a head. Its eight songs capture her love of beauty, of the feminine, of language and of art. The music is personal and yet detached, blending romantic escapism with an undercurrent of realism.

"I want to transport the listener away from the ennui of daily life," she explains. "The Pre-Raphaelites are a big inspiration for me. They had a great way of marrying beauty and tragic characters, femininity and sensuality with death. I find it really alluring and beautiful."

Although future albums are in the running, Crane states that taking time to enjoy this record is the next step. Featuring appearances from some of her musical heroes — including Ian Anderson, King Crimson's Jakko Jakszyk and Pentangle's Danny Thompson — *Deep Blue* is, she confesses, her proudest musical achievement to date.

"Working with multiple heroes of mine has been brilliant," Crane acknowledges. "That is it. In a way I don't really know where I go from here. At any point I'm probably going to wake up and it's all been a dream." **FT**

"The Pre-Raphaelites are a big inspiration for me. They had a great way of marrying beauty and tragic characters."

Fresh blooms from Louise Patricia Crane.

PRESS/ESTER SEGARRA

CALEB LANDRY JONES

He's played a mutant, an eccentric zombie killer and a member of a Satanic cult, but the Hollywood actor-turned-musician's biggest role yet is on his debut album, *The Mother Stone*. *Prog* finds out what makes this Syd Barrett fan tick.

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Henry Diltz

He's found fame as an actor in productions such as *X-Men: First Class, Twin Peaks: The Return, Three Billboards In Ebbing, Missouri* and *Get Out*, but the Texan-born 30-year-old's lifelong passion has been music, which has led to a debut solo release of rare ambition and scope, *The Mother Stone*. Once referred to by *New York Magazine* as "Hollywood's go-to weirdo", his modern psychedelic style comes from a deep root of The Beatles, with lashings of *Madcap* Syd.

You grew up around music. Was it your first love?
Yeah. My grandfather was a drummer who made radio jingles and my mom was a singer-songwriter. We always had a piano, and my dad saw how important music was for my mom, so the two of them were in agreement: every child needs to play music.

Did that get you started with the piano?
I tried! [Laughs] But technique gave me trouble. Any instrument I tried to crack from drums to piano to guitar, being told you had to do it a certain way drove me nuts. I had to wait until there wasn't anybody in the house, then I could mess around and they wouldn't think the notes I was using were crazy.

"When I heard *The Madcap Laughs*, I felt Syd was giving me a big pat on the back to keep going in the direction I was headed."

Your first inspiration was The Beatles.
I heard *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* when I was about eight years old. We would drive to my grandmother's house and this would play in the car. Me and my brother had films in our heads listening to the music. *A Day In The Life* was so scary and John Lennon's voice occupied my head for years. I heard *The White Album* in my 20s. That definitely used all the crazy notes that you shouldn't.

How did you get into Syd Barrett?
I was in my 20s living in Los Angeles. My girlfriend played me *The Madcap Laughs* and that affected me greatly. When I heard Syd I felt he was giving me a big pat on the back to keep going in the direction I was headed. He's a really important role model to me.

How did you start acting?
I'd been training as an actor my whole life and didn't realise it until I found myself in a position to act. [Laughs] I'd use the odd thing from here [from real life], then when I did it, acting became about trying to figure out how far I could push its boundaries.

Your music seems to be kind of character-driven. Is that right?
It was probably always character-driven… I don't know if I ever realised that, but whenever I wrote it was always pretty dramatic, or melodramatic. It's always contained a clown or two that I can't seem to shake. It took most of my early 20s to kind of try and kill that clown off, or abandon it. [Laughs.]

According to our notes you have around 700 songs!
I've got like 24-25 hours of straight music, but I've been recording since I was 18. I used to play with [experimental folk band] Robert Jones but when Robert [Hudson, guitar] left it forced me to write on my own, so I was able to put forward these quirky ideas. Living is an inspiration. I'm inspired by every moment. There's no shortage of ideas, just a shortage of time. Sometimes I feel like an Orc in *The Lord Of The Rings*, chopping away relentlessly at trees, that's my toil.

Do you miss songwriting when you've got an acting job?
I do. Any time I can, I'll get something down. Sometimes I'll have been away for six months, so I get back to the barn [at his parents' place] and it'll all come vomiting out. I keep everything, I embrace the mistakes. One day you'll look over something and go, "That was the little runt that never gained legs, let's do something with it."

You met director Jim Jarmusch on the set of *The Dead Don't Die*. How did he help you?
I was shy, but I gave him some of my music. I was thinking, "This guy doesn't like a lot of things but he might get it." His work means a lot to me. He suggested the record label to me [Sacred Bones].

***The Mother Stone* is a big, complex affair. Did you get to take your time with it to let it evolve?**
Yeah, thanks to producer Nic [Jodoin] at Valentine [a Hollywood recording studio renowned for Bing Crosby, The Beach Boys and Black Lips]. He was into what I did and we squeezed it until we couldn't squeeze no more, like, "I think that's it for keyboards, let's get on to strings and horns!" [Laughs].

You've said the ideas for the album came to you in dreams.
I'm also talking about daydreams as well, or images that you play around with that occur in your waking hours. There was a time when I didn't dream hardly at all for a long time… and the ones I had I didn't remember because of marijuana intake.

What about the imagery, you in a powdered wig?
My girlfriend Katya [Zvereva] is an artist. She wanted to take a photo of me and we needed to make a music video, so we ended up making a set at her warehouse. We bought a wig and started filming, which became all of our visuals. She'd been asking me to make sketches, and I tried, but eventually she said, "Don't worry about intellectualising anything, we just have to *do* it." We put together some wild stuff and that photo was part of it.

It looks experimental, and louche…
Yeah, it's King Louis XIV! And then I was reading some YouTube comments on the single [*Flag Day/The Mother Stone*] and they were like, "It's Amadeus!" and I was like, "Beautiful!" But it's all in the eye of the beholder, it leans on the person looking and listening to bring themselves into it.

The Mother Stone is out now via Sacred Bones.

When **Porcupine Tree** released *In Absentia* in 2002, it represented not only a dramatic shift in the band's sound but it also marked the start of a new era in modern progressive music and inspired a generation of heavy artists. Following on from Kscope's deluxe reissue, *Prog* takes a more detailed look at the album that **Steven Wilson** describes as "the beginning of the end".

Words: Dave Everley **Images:** Lasse Hoile

As Steven Wilson looks out over the floor of the Middle East Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts from the stage, he can't help feeling a little depressed. Thirty pairs of eyes stare back at him. This is the sum total of people who've turned up to see him and his band Porcupine Tree play this hip East Coast club...

It's Monday, July 22, 2002, and this is supposed to be a tipping point for Porcupine Tree. Over the last decade, these British oddballs have existed on the fringes, becoming a rallying point for anyone with an interest in shape-shifting, vaguely psychedelic sounds without ever quite extending beyond cultdom.

But recently, things have changed. In a fairly astonishing turn of events, Porcupine Tree have been signed by Lava Records, a subsidiary of music industry powerhouse Atlantic. They have suddenly found themselves on the same label as rap-metal superstar Kid Rock and platinum-dusted MOR-grungers Matchbox Twenty.

The dream Porcupine Tree have been sold is that their new album, *In Absentia*, will push them to the next level. If it succeeds, Wilson and his bandmates will be sipping cocktails around guitar-shaped swimming pools in newly purchased Beverley Hills homes. But all that looks to be a long way away on this Monday night at the Middle East Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

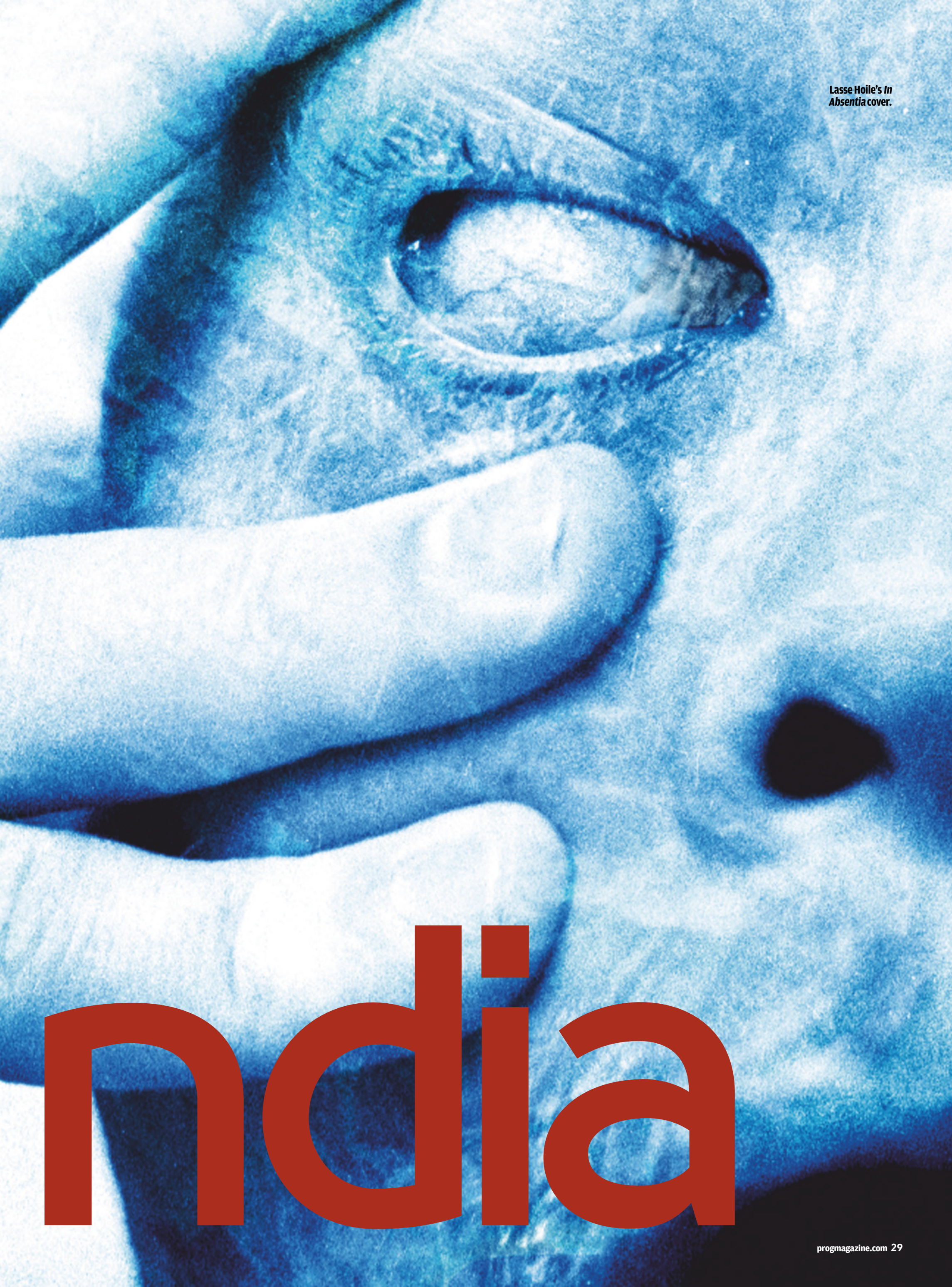
"You suddenly realise that you're facing an uphill battle trying to convince a lot of people who don't know you to start caring about you," says Wilson today. "That's not just the fans but it's partly the industry too."

In Absentia would be released two months later, the first of two albums Porcupine Tree made during their dalliance with the majors. In music industry terms it was a flop, even though it outsold all of the band's previous releases by a wide margin. It certainly never bagged them any guitar-shaped swimming pools. Yet at the same time it reshaped the band entirely, opening them up to a new audience, and by extension ushering in a brand new era for progressive music.

Almost 20 years on, *In Absentia* stands as a landmark. It was the first great progressive rock album of the 21st century, one whose marriage of musicianship, melody and heaviness shaped so much

"It opened up a whole new audience for them, and it helped open up a whole new audience for progressive rock. You suddenly heard a lot of bands who sounded like them."
Mikael Åkerfeldt

In Asce



Lasse Hoile's *In Absentia* cover.

that followed. But it would also set its creators on a path that would see their leader dissolving them less than a decade later. *In Absentia* was a game-changer for Porcupine Tree, but it would ultimately herald the beginning of the end for modern prog's greatest band.

Eighteen months before he began working with them, Gavin Harrison saw Porcupine Tree at Shepherd's Bush Empire in west London. Harrison had carved out a career as an in-demand session drummer, playing with everyone from Level 42 to Iggy Pop. In 1995, he had appeared on a solo album by former Japan and current Porcupine Tree keyboard player Richard Barbieri, and it was Barbieri who invited Harrison along to the Empire half a decade later to see his current band.

"I was impressed that they could get so many people in the room playing very uncommercial music," says Harrison, though he was less impressed with what he saw. "After about an hour, I thought, [non-committally] 'That's it, I've heard enough.' I sent Richard a message saying I wasn't feeling well."

Steven Wilson was experiencing a different set of emotions, chiefly frustration. Porcupine Tree were essentially a one-man bedroom project that had grown massively out of hand. By the mid-90s they had turned into a proper band; by the end of the decade Wilson had reined in his more amorphous tendencies in favour of a concise approach that veered towards the pop. The albums *Stupid Dream* and *Lightbulb Sun*, released in 1999 and 2000 respectively, were packed with hooks and choruses and conventional song structures. This was as radio-ready as Porcupine Tree had ever got.

"But nothing was happening," says Wilson. "Nothing doing. We just weren't getting played on radio."

Those two albums hadn't disgraced themselves. The line on Porcupine Tree's sales graph had been rising steadily for the past decade, to the point where they were selling 50 or 60,000 copies of each album. But Wilson still found himself bumping against a ceiling.

"Having made two albums that I thought had quite accessible material on, there was a sense of frustration," says Wilson. "You could argue that Porcupine Tree were always the quintessential cult band. But at this point, I'm thinking, 'We can be more than this.'"

They could, but it would take a convergence of business and artistic forces for it to have a chance of happening. Two of those forces were named Andy. The first was Andy Leff, an American music manager who had been involved with 90s pop princelings Hanson. Leff had heard Porcupine Tree and loved them. He saw them in the lineage of the great progressive acts of the 70s, the ones who could serve great musical epics on one hand while hitting the pop charts on the other.

Leff arranged a meeting with the band with the blessing of Porcupine Tree's current manager Richard Allen, owner of their original record label Delirium. The American talked a great game: Porcupine Tree deserved a major label record deal, and he was the man to get them one.

Wilson was intrigued despite himself. "We were, like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' But the more I talked to Andy, the more I started to take him seriously."

Amazingly, Leff wasn't bullshitting. He got an in with another guy named Andy — Andy Karp, an A&R executive at Lava Records in New York. Karp was a rare breed even in 2000: a genuine music fan with posters on his wall and a working knowledge of 1970s Genesis B-sides. His love of old-school prog was offset by the kind of business savviness that reasoned there was an audience for a band like Porcupine Tree even then.

"That was the notion," says Wilson. "That there was a gap in the market. There were a lot of people out there who love this kind of music, whatever you call it — progressive rock, or art rock, or whatever."

Wilson met Karp and was won over by his passion for music and the fact that Lava's parent company Atlantic

"You could argue that we were always the quintessential cult band. But at this point, I'm thinking, 'We can be more than this.'"
Steven Wilson

PRESS/KSCOPE/LASSE HOILE

Porcupine Tree, L-R: Richard Barbieri, Steven Wilson, Gavin Harrison, Colin Edwin.

had deep pockets. "I got very excited about the possibilities of making a record for a major American label, with all the attendant promotion and financial input that would imply."

He decided that signing with Lava was the right move. He wasn't unaware that the label were taking a chance on band who were way out of step with what else was going on. "When we signed that record deal, I was 33. Richard was 43. We were no spring chickens. For a major label, it was definitely a leap of faith."

Porcupine Tree had more going for them than just a prog-loving cheerleader at the label. Wilson had been amassing music for a new album before Lava entered the picture. "We had the songs that could give us that crossover in the way that some of the classic progressive rock bands from the 70s had managed to cross over with great songs."

But the songs Wilson had been writing weren't ersatz reruns of *Roundabout* or *Thick As A Brick*. In the two years since *Lightbulb Sun*, his listening tastes had shifted considerably. Porcupine Tree were still anchored somewhere between the deep waters of the esoteric and the shallows of pop, but another, altogether more unexpected noise had entered their leader's orbit: metal.

In another life, Steven Wilson could have been a member of Iron Maiden. As a young teenager, he had discovered the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal — the early 80s movement that galvanised a flagging metal scene. But he soon grew tired of cut-off denim jackets and Saxon back patches. "I'd fallen out of love with it and gotten interested in other things," he says.

Around turn of the millennium, Wilson was introduced by a journalist to the music of Opeth, a Swedish death metal band who were trying to throw off the shackles of the underground scene they'd emerged from. They sounded nothing like the heavy metal Wilson knew from 20 years earlier. A mutant strain of extreme metal had appeared, its DNA intertwined with that of everything from prog to jazz and the avant-garde. Bands such as Opeth and fellow Swedes Meshuggah were straining of the boundaries of the metal scene.

"For years I'd been bemoaning the fact that no one was experimenting in rock music any more," says Wilson. "And of course I was just looking at it through my little telescope at this very small sub-section of the rock scene. When I was introduced to bands like Opeth and Meshuggah, I went, 'Ah, *this* is where the innovation is happening, at the brutal end of metal.'"

He dived in headfirst, devouring this new noise. Ever the student of music, he picked out a thread and tugged on it. "I'm one those people that's always looking for what I can do next that's different," he says. "I immediately could see how elements of that could be brought into my own writing."

That interest was strengthened when Opeth mastermind Mikael Åkerfeldt approached Wilson to produce his band's next album. Like Wilson, Åkerfeldt was a fan of music's dustier corners. He was also a fan of Porcupine Tree.

"I'd been introduced to them by my friend Jonas [Renske, singer with Katatonia]," says Åkerfeldt. "I loved them straightaway. Steve became my idol. Even then I put him on a pedestal with Ritchie Blackmore and Joni Mitchell."

The pair connected and a firm friendship was forged, one based on musical respect and a desire to warp the rules in their respective fields. Wilson produced Opeth's *Blackwater Park* in 2001 and the blossoming musical bromance opened the Englishman's eyes even wider to the potential that lay in metal.

"In the back of my mind I did think, 'This is going to make the band seem a bit more vital and edgy. It might blow away some of these associations with old fashioned 70s rock,'" he says. "I thought that it certainly wouldn't do any harm in disabusing some people of those kind of notions."

Wilson had already started writing the songs that would appear on *In Absentia* before his reintroduction to metal. 'Old' Porcupine Tree are still audible in the album's first single, *Trains*, and deceptively gentle anti-record label diatribe *The Sound Of Muzak*. But the metallic vista that had opened up before him couldn't help but bleed into what he was doing.

"I started detuning the guitar [a tone] down and writing riffs," he says. "*Strip The Soul, Blackest Eyes, The Creator Has A Mastertape* — then again, I'm also writing *Heartattack In A Layby* and *Collapse The Light Into Earth*, which have barely any guitar on at all." They pointed towards the direction things were going in.

If Wilson's love of metal defined this phase of Porcupine Tree's career, it also reshaped Porcupine Tree themselves. The line-up that entered the 00s — Wilson, Richard Barbieri, bassist Colin Edwin and drummer Chris Maitland — had been working

ALL IMAGES ON THIS SPREAD: PRESS/KSCOPE/LASSE HOILE//IN ABSENTIA DELUXE BOX SET

together since 1993. But something was about to change.

A major label deal brought with it an unexpected set of pressures, not least in the commitment that would be required. As Wilson tells it, Chris Maitland was becoming increasingly anxious at giving up a lucrative regular job playing West End shows, and this anxiety turned into tension.

Matters reached a head in rehearsals a few weeks before the band were due to go to New York to begin recording. Things were said, resulting in Maitland grabbing Wilson and pushing him against a wall. Today, the latter won't be drawn on the specifics of what happened. "I don't want to talk about the particular incident, but Chris wasn't concentrating properly and wasn't playing as well as he should have done. I lost my temper and it resulted in a parting of the ways."

The broken friendship was repaired the following year when Maitland appeared on the debut album by Wilson's Blackfield project. But at the time it left Porcupine Tree in a hole. That was when Gavin Harrison heard from an old friend.

"Maybe nine months after I'd seen them at Shepherd's Bush, I get a call from Richard," says Harrison. "He said, 'Our drummer's just left, would you come to New York and play on this record?' I said, 'Yeah.'"

Wilson, Barbieri and Harrison hastily convened to share the material that had been written for the new Porcupine Tree album. "I thought, 'This could be quite interesting,'" says Harrison. "I'd never really played on anything so heavy."

He was in, albeit initially as a hired hand. Wilson says there was no Plan B. "Christ, no. We would have had to use a session player. Andy Karp suggested the guy [Will Calhoun] from [90s funk rock band] Living Colour."

Like Wilson, Harrison had been exploring some of metal's far reaches. The drummer had become fascinated with the ground-breaking rhythms of Meshuggah, a band that he and Wilson bonded over, and Harrison's hard-hitting but intricate drum work would partly define this new era of Porcupine Tree.

"It's one of those times when it all worked out fantastically well," says Wilson. "It could have been a disaster, but fate was smiling. Gavin came along, did the record, and then he

Porcupine Tree brought modern prog out of the shadows.

Living the dream on tour.

"I don't want to be the clichéd guy that says, 'I did everything right, the record company fucked it all up.' It wasn't entirely down to them. We didn't fit. Kid Rock was an easy sell. Matchbox Twenty, an easy sell. This bunch of eccentric Englishman playing this odd music, people didn't know where to put it."

Steven Wilson

eventually just sort of joined the band by stealth."

When Porcupine Tree arrived in New York in early 2002 with Gavin Harrison in tow, they found a city weighed down by emotion. It was just a few months after the epochal events of 9/11, and an air of eerie dislocation still permeated the air.

"It had a strange feeling to it," says Wilson. "It was in this healing period. I don't think it fed into the record, but that doesn't mean it's not there. It must have had an influence."

One song certainly bore the psychic imprint of this huge tragedy. On the day that the planes crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, Wilson was working on music in his home studio in the UK. When he surfaced for air and heard the news, he abandoned the track he had been working on. But the emotions that coursed through him manifested in another piece of music he began writing weeks later: the album's eventual closing track, the spectral piano ballad *Collapse The Light Into Earth*.

"It's a song about a break-up, but it's definitely informed by what happened," says Wilson. "I didn't want to write about 9/11. It would have felt like jumping on the grief bandwagon. But at the same time I felt the sense of sorrow and of shock that everyone else felt. I found myself sitting at the piano, writing this song that became *Collapse The Light Into Earth*. It was actually influenced by Jacques Brel's *If You Go Away*, but the

sense of sorrow is what everyone felt in the days after 9/11."

In New York, the band were sheltered from the psychic turmoil of the city by the $2,000-a-day [£1,600] sanctuary that was Avatar Studios. Formerly known as Power Station — it recently reverted back to this name — this venerated space had played host to the likes of David Bowie and Madonna. If nothing else, it brought home that fact that Lava were serious about their investment.

"We worked through it really quickly," says Harrison. "They booked 14 days for me to do the drums. I did it in five. It was efficient."

Efficient but expensive. The overall cost of making the album ran into six

The heavy music on *In Absentia* attracted a younger, more metal crowd for their US tour.

figures: a fortune now, but smallish change in an era where the music industry had yet to be kneecapped by illegal downloading. By the end of the campaign, Lava had lavished around $400,000 [£324,000] on Porcupine Tree. "If you include tour support, then yes," concedes Wilson.

That spend wasn't apparent when Porcupine Tree turned up at The Middle East club to kick off the *In Absentia* campaign. The album was two months away from being released, but, still, only 30 people? Gavin

Harrison, for one, was wondering what he'd let himself in for.

"I'd just been with Claudio Baglioni, who is Italy's [answer to] Elton John," says the drummer. "We were filling the Olympic Stadium, [almost] 80,000 people — I've got my own limo, my own five-star hotel room and business class flights. I'd gone from that to a clapped-out tour bus and very few people in tiny rooms."

Wilson insists that the opening show wasn't indicative of that US leg of the tour. "I don't want to give the impression that every night was like that," he says. "We'd go out and sell out the House Of Blues in LA and the Nokia Theatre in New York. If it had all been bad, it would have been extremely soul destroying and the band would have probably broken up. But we saw enough to make us optimistic for the future."

"It was miserable," counters Harrison. "Extremely miserable."

Slumming it around New England wasn't the worst of Porcupine Tree's experiences. That honour went to their stint with Yes on the prog giants' tour in support of 2001's *Magnification*. Despite his distaste at being pigeonholed, Wilson figured there was a generational overlap between the two bands, audience-wise.

It was a rare moment of naiveté on his part. Porcupine Tree were initially allocated a 45-minute slot, kicking off at 7.30pm. As the tour progressed their stage time got shorter and earlier, until they found themselves onstage, literally waiting for the arena doors to open so they could start playing.

"I remember looking at Steve and going, 'So when do we start? Do we need some people in here?'"

Wilson sighs at the memory. "I could not wait to get off that tour," he says.

In Absentia was released on September 24, 2002. Its cover featured a striking, eyeless self-portrait taken by Danish artist and designer Lasse Hoile. It perfectly reflected the album's themes of absence and madness, though it was utterly out of keeping with prevailing trends.

Sales started slowly and pretty much continued that way, at least in terms of a band signed to a major label. According to Wikipedia, the album stormed the German charts at No.58. In France it reached No.143. There's no record of it registering in the UK or US at all.

Lava shoulders some of the blame in Wilson's eyes. He points to the fact that the label sent out three different songs as singles at the same time to appease different radio formats, dispersing focus. But he also concedes that Porcupine Tree were fundamentally a hard sell.

Eye say, variations on a theme, eh? Lasse Hoile went above and beyond for the *In Absentia* cover by making himself the subject.

PRESS/KSCOPE/LASSE HOILE/*IN ABSENTIA* DELUXE BOX SET

PRESS/KSCOPE/LASSE HOILE/*IN ABSENTIA* DELUXE BOX SET

"I don't want to be the clichéd guy that says, 'I did everything right, the record company fucked it all up,'" he says. "It wasn't entirely down to them. We didn't fit. Kid Rock was an easy sell. Matchbox Twenty, an easy sell. This bunch of eccentric Englishman playing this odd music, people didn't know where to put it."

It's impossible to argue with that. But there's another reason why *In Absentia* was so pivotal. Porcupine Tree may have flown over the heads of fans of mainstream music and the disinterested masses who turned up to see Yes, but the album cracked open the door to another constituency entirely. Its heavier tracks — notably *Blackest Eyes* — were picked up by metal radio stations in the US. Combined with the sideways patronage of Mikael Åkerfeldt and Opeth, Porcupine Tree

found the make-up of their audiences changing. The small but devoted army of fans who had followed Porcupine Tree through the various protean phases of their career — psychedelia, progressive rock, something vaguely approximating pop — was suddenly swollen by a legion of metalheads pulled in by the jagged edges of *Blackest Eyes* and *Strip The Soul*.

"I discovered Porcupine Tree around 2006," says Jan Hoffmann of German post-rockers Long Distance Calling. "Particularly with *In Absentia*, I had never heard anything like it. It was a huge influence on us and the bands we knew."

There's an irony to all this that Steven Wilson brings up himself: if Porcupine Tree had stuck with the breezier, poppier sound of *Lightbulb Sun* and *Stupid Dream*, they might have had more chance of breaking the ceiling for prog-leaning bands in the early 00s.

But the comparatively lowly commercial success of *In Absentia* is in inverse proportion to its artistic impact. It didn't just change Porcupine Tree, it changed the course of progressive rock from that point onwards. They weren't the first band to combine forward-looking musicianship with the visceral energy of metal — a line could be drawn from Rush to PT's most notable precursors Dream Theater, taking in the likes of Queensrÿche, Watchtower and Voivod. But no one had so consciously thrown themselves into it like Steven Wilson.

"It clicked with a lot of people Porcupine Tree had never clicked with before," says Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt. "It opened up a whole new audience for them, and it helped open up a whole new audience for progressive rock. You suddenly heard a lot of bands who sounded like them."

Typically, Wilson has rather mixed feelings about the compliment. "The first thing that I feel about it is that it's very flattering to my ego," he begins. "I do hear the influence on a lot of other bands, and I do think the record sounds quite contemporary and quite current. In retrospect, I can see that we were doing something different and innovative.

"But the second thing, which is more negative, is that people think that's the kind of music I want to hear. Anyone who comes up to me and says, 'Please listen to my album, it's very influenced by what you did with *In Absentia* or [follow-up] *Deadwing*', I say, 'Well don't give it to me then, I'm not interested.' The last thing I want to hear is music that sounds like Porcupine Tree 18 years ago." He laughs self-deprecatingly. "The arrogance of it. But I don't."

It's this wilfulness that would prompt him to split Porcupine Tree and embark on a solo career just under a decade later. Having embraced metal with *In Absentia*, Wilson found himself increasingly trapped by the genus of music he'd been partly responsible for.

"Very quickly I discovered that it came with its own set of limitations. I still feel in a sense that the band broke up when it did is because I felt like we had painted ourselves into a corner as this prog metal group. And I was very tired of that. I wanted to do other things. So in a sense *In Absentia* was also the beginning of the end."

Wilson has fielded regular requests to reform Porcupine Tree down the years from fans and the music industry alike. His response has always been a straight 'no'. That's something that is unlikely to ever change.

"A one-off show, that is possible," says Wilson. "But what isn't possible is that Porcupine Tree or any band would ever become my primary creative outlet ever again. I don't think I'm made for being in a democratic collective environment."

That may be the case now, but it certainly wasn't then. As fine as the solo work he's subsequently put out, nothing has had the influence that PT had. And no album of his has been as influential as *In Absentia*.

The deluxe edition of In Absentia is out now via Kscope. For more, visit www.porcupinetree.com and www.stevenwilsonhq.com.

> **"We worked through it really quickly. They booked 14 days for me to do the drums. I did it in five. It was efficient."**
> **Gavin Harrison**

Future Perfect

Steven Wilson updates us on his Covid-19-delayed new album *The Future Bites*.

The campaign for Steven Wilson's sixth solo album, *The Future Bites*, was just getting into full swing when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Plans were changed: tour dates were postponed and the album was put back from June 2020 to January 2021.

"It was a pain, but I wanted to present it properly with all the high-concept stuff around it," he says. "But there's been a silver lining, which is that I've been able to put a lot more time into recording extra material for the bonus edition. There are now an extra six songs to go on there, alternate mixes and longer versions of tracks that are on the main album, because the album itself is very concise."

Steven Wilson: not appearing at a drive-in near you.

PRESS/ANDREW HOBBS

That's ironic, given the first song released from the album was the 10-minute *Personal Shopper*, a largely guitar-free satire on western consumerism. "This is probably the least guitar-orientated record I've ever made. There are a lot more electronics on this album, but it's not an electronic album as such. But where the last two or three records clearly had reference points in the past, this sounds like it could have only been made in 2019 or 2020.'"

> **"This sounds like it could have only been made in 2019 or 2020."**

Personal Shopper was notable for a spoken-word guest appearance from Elton John. Wilson hit on the idea of using the veteran singer after watching the *Rocketman* biopic. "There's a scene at the end where he's talking about how he managed to kick all his addictions except one: shopping. I thought, 'Who could be better to read this monologue of First World consumer items than him? He's the most famous consumer on the planet.'"

A mutual friend passed the track on to Elton, who loved it and called Wilson to say he'd do it. "The only thing he wouldn't read out was 'cocaine', for obvious reasons. And he wouldn't say 'mobile phone case'. He said, 'I don't have a fucking mobile phone.'"

Unlike other musicians, Wilson has laid low during lockdown, avoiding online sessions. "I'm not the sort of artist who is going to impress people with an acoustic guitar in my living room."

And will he be doing any drive-in concerts? "No," comes the firm reply. "Absolutely not." **DEV**

Nil Recurring

Porcupine Tree's biographer takes a step back in time to chart the British band's musical journey from **Steven Wilson**'s psychedelic bedroom tapes to the progressive act that finally found their sound on *In Absentia* via pop rock and krautrock.

Words: Rich Wilson **Images:** Claudine Schafer

18+

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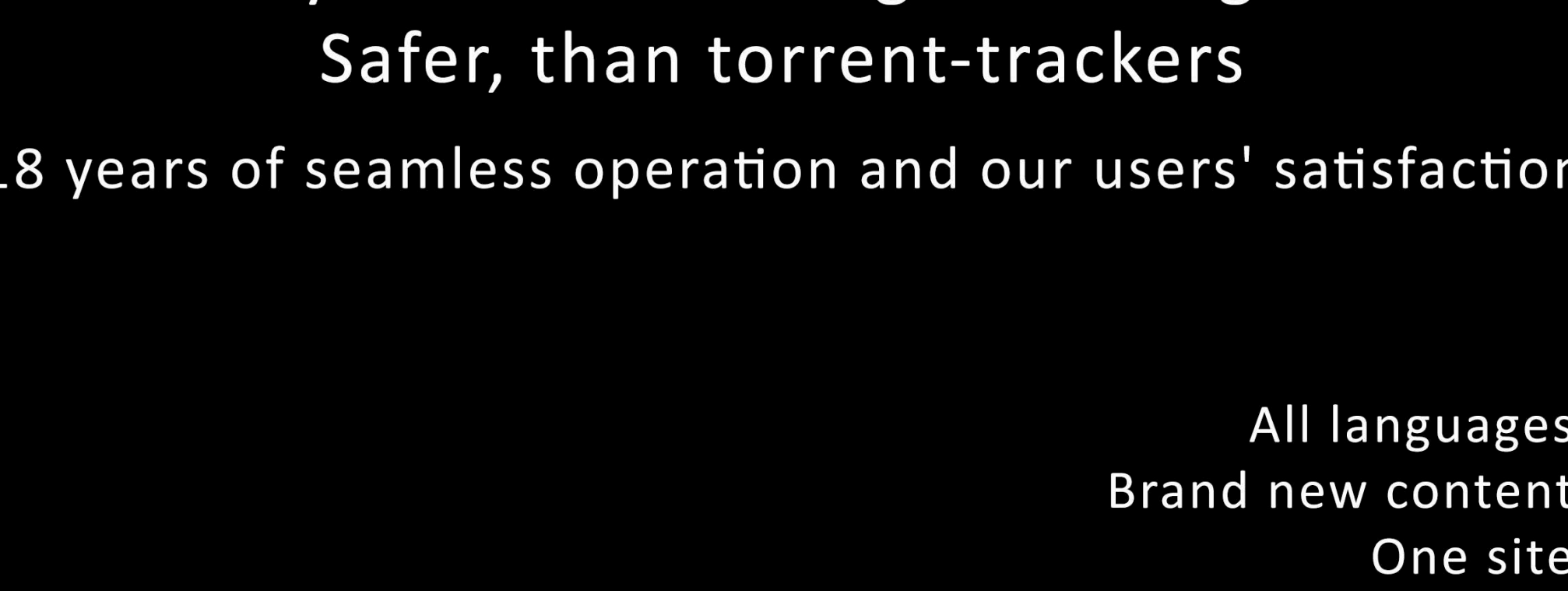

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There were those who failed to comprehend Porcupine Tree's musical transformation, from the elegantly crafted pop rock of 2000's *Lightbulb Sun* into a fiery, fearsome progressive metal act in the space of two years. Consequently, those detractors dismissed *In Absentia* as a cynical shift of musical genre to hop onto the then-burgeoning prog metal scene, led by the likes of Dream Theater and Opeth. Of course, such blinkered, keyboard punditry failed to appreciate the one aspect of Porcupine Tree that was at the core of their existence — their deliberate desire to avoid repetition, predictability and having their creativity curtailed by the confines of a debilitating genre box. It's an attitude that has continued to infuse Steven Wilson's solo works, and one that appears likely to continue.

For Porcupine Tree, it all began in Wilson's bedroom in Hemel Hempstead where he recorded two psychedelic-influenced cassettes, which would eventually be released as *On The Sunday Of Life....* Following the release of the trancey *Up The Downstair* in 1993, Wilson soon began to realise that there was a live market for his music. With Richard Barbieri, Colin Edwin and Chris Maitland recruited, Porcupine Tree made their live debut on December 4, 1993 at the Nag's Head in High Wycombe.

"The first time I heard the music, I thought, 'What the fuck is this?'"

> **"I thought some of it was pretty awful, but then you can apply yourself and begin to love it by being part of it."**
> **Chris Maitland**

Bright young things: Porcupine Tree.

admitted Chris Maitland when referencing Wilson's early material. "I thought some of it was pretty awful, but then you can apply yourself and begin to love it by being part of it. So suddenly you're like, 'Bloody hell, I really like that actually. I thought it was shit when I first heard it, but actually that's really nice'. You begin to love it through your involvement rather than anything else."

During the summer of 1993, Wilson started writing and recording for what would eventually become *The Sky Moves Sideways*. The album remains a fan favourite, even if the band themselves now view it as veering too closely towards the type of progressive rock that Pink Floyd had created during the 70s. Previously, they'd attracted a hippie audience on the back of comparisons to acts like Ozric Tentacles. With a move towards more traditional progressive rock, Porcupine Tree shows were gradually beginning to captivate older fans who were keen to discover what they viewed as the "new Pink Floyd". That was something Wilson became acutely aware of and although undoubtedly appreciating the attention, that association rapidly began to alarm him. The threat of the band merely recreating spacey, progressive rock that was infused with nostalgia wasn't a career path he wanted to take.

With Wilson being almost instantly dissatisfied with the direction that the band's music had taken, he was eager to move away from what he perceived as the "easy option" of continuing the progressive retrospection of that album. Crucially for the development of Porcupine Tree, that realisation coincided with his growing confidence in the abilities of the other members of the band.

In that sense 1996's *Signify* would be the first of the modern Porcupine Tree albums, with the band's four personalities all adding their own inspirations. Consequently, it would become a pivotal record with those musical influences colliding and forming a distinctive sound that saturated the album.

There was also an avowed determination that *Signify* would be a record that added a fresh dimension to their approach. Critically, it moved away from classic progressive rock and towards a sound more influenced by krautrock acts like Neu!. The transformation of the band towards

krautrock posed yet another problem for their label, Delerium, in terms of marketing them — it was, after all, the third distinct musical genre that the quartet had worked in as many years. Porcupine Tree had been initially touted as psych/space rock before reinventing themselves as a Floydian prog band, so Delerium didn't exactly relish the prospect of repositioning them in the public eye.

"Yes, that was another relaunch," recalls their then manager, Richard Allen, dryly. "With *Signify*, we ditched the whole psychedelic space rock thing and we went for krautrock. Krautrock was very hip at the time and there were all types of reissues of really obscure stuff appearing. Steven was into it, Neu! were hip, Julian Cope had just put out his *Krautrocksampler* book, so we sold Porcupine Tree as being influenced by krautrock."

Certainly, that strategy appeared to work, given that *Signify* was the band's first album to gain plentiful reviews in the mainstream music press, even if these were far from glowing. Yet in the main, the press were supportive, particularly those magazines where musical knowledge and appreciation was more important that the vagaries of musical fashion.

Wilson had started work on creating Porcupine Tree's next studio album as early as October 1996, initially recording a single cassette of demos that were written over the following three months. Those six songs included *Even Less*, *Piano Lessons* and *Slave Called Shiver,* all of which were in a roughly familiar form to the versions released several years later on their *Stupid Dream* album. Crucially, Wilson's musical direction began to take on a distinctive new bearing, which shifted their sound away from krautrock shaded music and towards something very different. Becoming obsessed with harmony vocals and creating the perfect compact song, Wilson had absorbed the musical leanings of such artists as The Beach Boys, Brian Wilson, and Crosby Stills Nash And Young.

Released in 1999, *Stupid Dream* was dismissed by many as an example of Porcupine Tree somehow "selling out". From an outsider's perspective, there was a certain logic to their claims. Here was a band that had previously delighted in writing sprawling, non-commercial tracks who were suddenly recording an album with three-minute songs, many of which contained a natural pop charm. There were of course viable explanations as to why the music had taken such a turn, not least Wilson's interest in making an album that was packed with songs, and an obsession with treating songwriting as a distinct art in itself.

Stranger by the minute: Steven Wilson wanted to avoid repeating himself with Porcupine Tree.

"I've known Steven since 1987 and he loved artists like Tears For Fears and Prince as much as he liked Stockhausen and Pink Floyd, so his music is entirely honest."
Tim Bowness

A follow-up appeared in 2000 with *Lightbulb Sun*. The music followed a similar path to its predecessor, and although Wilson now considers the album to be a "weaker relative of *Stupid Dream*" that "didn't really advance the band's sound at all", the songs retained an air of sophistication. It was, however, well balanced between the simpler, poppier approach and those songs that demonstrated more ambition. Whereas *Stupid Dream* had an unmistakable exterior gloss, *Lightbulb Sun* had an untreated rawness that was a natural match for the material.

Of course, the desire to expose one's music to a wider audience is fraught with complications. Wilson has stated that the reason he makes music is ultimately "to share it with as many people as possible" adding that entails him being "forced to embrace whatever means there are for that music to do that." As someone for whom money has never been a prime motivator, Wilson saw the release of singles as a necessary marketing evil that could help him achieve those goals. With many of the tracks on *Lightbulb Sun* being suited to radio play, this provided the perfect opportunity for the band to finally gain some greater exposure.

However there was the very practical issue that their record label weren't set up to deal with a single that charted highly. Part of Wilson's frustration during this period was also the fact that Radiohead, who at the time were producing music in a similar vein, were selling millions of albums worldwide. There was an irritation that Porcupine Tree's music, while on a parity in terms of quality, was being wilfully ignored by the mainstream.

In the 90s, with prog remaining terminally unfashionable and unable to acquire any media support, Radiohead were seen as a lifeline for the genre. More traditional prog bands were able to tailor their sound, namecheck Radiohead in interviews and yet distance themselves from what they saw as the millstone of the prog moniker. The problem was that Porcupine Tree didn't move in the same social circles as those influential acts who could provide them with tour support slots. As their booking agent Glenn Povey neatly summed it up, "They didn't go drinking backstage with Gaz from Supergrass at Glastonbury and they hadn't got a hope in hell of getting in with that lot. You have got to be part of their social scene to get on with those people."

One irony of *Lightbulb Sun* is that this was the first time that the band had failed to drastically recast their sound. From psychedelia, through overt prog and krautrock, to the more song-orientated album, they had always progressed. Yet on *Lightbulb Sun*, aside from the more organic feel, the overall approach and sound possessed certain similarities to *Stupid Dream*. The result was a vociferous criticism from a small proportion of the fans, who slated the band for what they perceived as merely treading water. It was an unusual paradox: most acts spend the bulk of their careers recording stylistically similarly albums and when they do try and change, they're met with abuse. The fact that Porcupine Tree were being harassed for daring to *not* transform provided an insight into the type of open-minded, ambitious listeners that they were now attracting. Indeed, it's to Wilson and his bandmates' credit that they had a fanbase with such a broad taste, the result was that they generally maintained support even when their music had drastically shifted.

From top: *Signify*, *Stupid Dream* and *Lightbulb Sun*.

Although Porcupine Tree effectively went on an indeterminate – and potentially permanent – hiatus a decade ago, Wilson has continued that approach of creating and performing music that's both creative and not necessarily commercially appealing. It's an asset that the musician's long-term No-Man collaborator, Tim Bowness recognises and applauds.

"Steven's music may be more mainstream in some respects, but I would make a very strong argument that he's doing it because he likes the types of music that he's investigating now," he argues. "It's similar in a way to the mid-80s' argument that Genesis were a sell-out. I've known Steven since 1987 and he loved artists like Tears For Fears and Prince as much as he liked Stockhausen and Pink Floyd, so his music is entirely honest. It will be interesting to hear the reactions to his new album [*Personal Shopper* which is due out next year], but I personally think that there's enough on the album that will appease hardcore fans. The other thing is that there's so much momentum with his career, even if it doesn't become his *So* or *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?*, I don't think that there will be any long-term repercussions. I think he'll continue to make music that he loves. I wouldn't be surprised if he released a New Wave Of British Heavy Metal album at some point, as that was another key influence for him."

As guitarist **Steve Howe** prepares to release his first solo album in nearly a decade, *Prog* chats to him about finding the right balance for *Love Is* and why he decided to step into the role of lead singer. Plus we get the lowdown on what's happening with **Yes**.

Words: Rich Wilson
Portrait: Adam Gasson/Future Owns

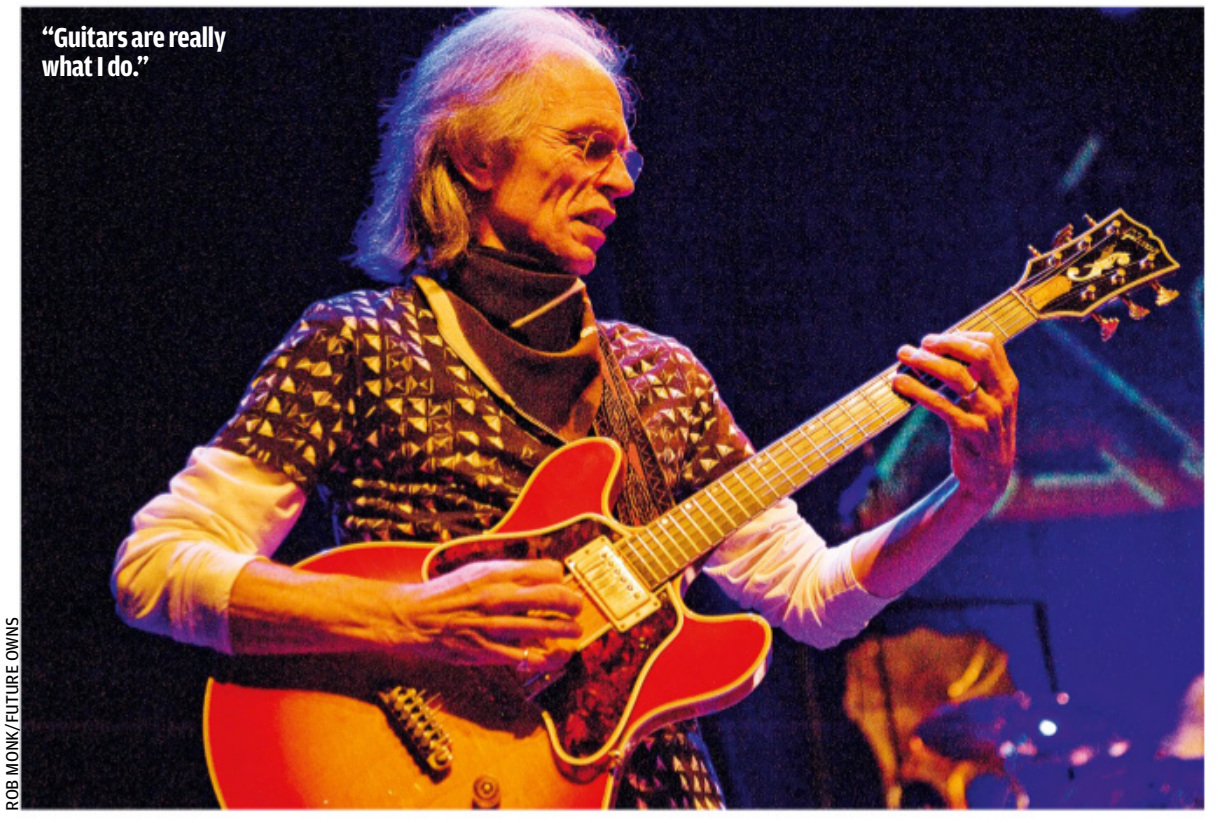
Love And A Wonderous Story

“Solo albums have to be fun from the word go. You’re doing your own album and you can do what the hell you like.”

"All my solo albums have given pleasure in particular ways because none of them have been a headache," asserts a jovial Steve Howe with a wry laugh. "Nobody got cross, everyone got paid, I walked away with a smile and the label were happy. You don't always get that with group albums. You get internal problems, disagreements, different directions and people walking out. They're quite hellish. Solo albums are not allowed to be like that. Solo albums have to be under my control but all fun from the word go. You're doing your own album and you can do what the hell you like."

Such sentiments do, of course, merely hint at some of the indoctrinated chaos that has blighted Yes over many decades. Indeed, there rarely seems to be any extended hiatus from the internal politics, splits, line-up alterations and public recriminations that have constantly distracted from their music. It's not tricky then to determine that the source of Howe's carefree demeanour is that we're discussing his new solo album, the uplifting *Love Is*, his first solo release in almost a decade. A delay that, for someone as musically prolific and creative as Howe, seems almost inconceivable.

"Well, I've basically been very busy," he explains. "In that time period, I've made at least one record with Yes, two with Asia, released a Steve Howe Trio album [2019's *New Frontier*], done four solo tours, toured with Yes and also with Asia. I have also not been in any hurry. Nobody is knocking on my door saying: 'Quick, give me a new solo album'. So that gave me a chance to mature a record and go off into different areas of writing. It also means I can get some finesse into it, put a stamp on it and make sure that I really, really like it. Quite often with an album, you can really think that you're finished and that you're really happy. You then leave the session and you go, 'Yeah, I've got this now' but when you play it, you can think 'Well, I don't know.' You can think that you're finished many times but if you have the space to come back to a record after a week or two, or even a couple of months, you hear it differently. I wanted to make sure that it had all the ingredients. If you have high expectations for your own project, then you really don't want to compromise. I was totally uncompromising on this record and wanted to get it finished, with a capital 'F'."



ROB MONK/FUTURE OWNS

Those ingredients referred to by Howe include a recording that's consistent in style both musically and lyrically, an asset that hasn't always been a mainstay of his solo career. However, the guitarist isn't alone in being attracted to producing stylistically varied recordings. Numerous artists have, when freed from occasionally stifling band environments — replete with committee writing and a requirement to show restraint in incorporating new genres or approaches — adopted a scattergun approach, recording in countless styles once freed from those band shackles. And although those albums may confirm the musician's prowess to genre hop, such diversity doesn't always result in a recording that works as a consistent listening experience. It's a point that Howe readily accepts has occasionally been the case over his solo career, which has now extended to 45 years and 13 recordings.

***Love Is*... making a solo album and doing what the hell you like?**

"I do think there are two types of albums that I have made," he muses. "*Beginnings* [1975], *The Steve Howe Album* [1979], *Elements* [2003] and maybe a few others, were a real hodgepodge of different styles. There might be an orchestra on one track and then I'll be playing a washboard on the next. From one extreme to another. But this album, *Spectrum* [2005] and *Turbulence* [1991] are much more about finding tracks that glue together and are really all about the continuity. Yes gave me great opportunities in the 70s, not only to show my writing, but also to write and record two solo albums. In fact, I think that I was the only member to do two solo albums in the 70s. When I got to writing *Turbulence*, I thought, 'Now hang on a second. I want this to be all instrumental and no orchestras and not a lot of acoustic either.' I wanted to write an album concentrating on the electric guitar. That album was probably the first time when I thought, 'That's what an album from Steve Howe should sound like.' It stays in a certain area."

Perhaps also recognising that the new album would benefit from a balance of songs and instrumentals, *Love Is* alternates between the two. It's a novel approach and one that aids the albums flow, as Howe relates.

"Yes, well I've never really done that before," he muses. "Some of my albums are instrumental, some are completely full of songs, so for this record it was good to get a balance. It has a symmetry to it that I felt was interesting and rather appealing. So that added to my development of an idea. I had other tracks as well, which I suddenly thought, 'That's not right, that doesn't fit.' It was a case of whittling it down and getting it beautifully finished off. I think that developing the running order on an album is one of the most important things. That's one of the things which really makes a good album. To be able to get continuity when you're not using the same sounds is quite a challenge and one that I enjoyed."

Known predominantly for his backing vocals with Yes and Asia, Howe decided to take on the role of lead singer on the songs collected on *Love Is*, with current Yes singer Jon Davison providing harmonies. Unlike many artists, Howe's voice hasn't shown any signs of decline or crippling deterioration despite the years of gigging. Indeed, if anything, it's developed a fuller sound, which, coupled with his understanding of how to use it to bolster a song, gives the material a refreshing honesty.

"I'd like to think that my voice has matured well and has never burned out," he ruminates. "Although I'm older, it has certainly improved with age. I've learnt more about my range and I've learned more about what I want to do as a singer, although I know that I'm only a singer to an extent. Guitars are really what I do and everything is predominantly a vehicle for writing for guitars really. Quite often, I have said to myself, 'Just stop writing songs', just get on with writing instrumentals, that's my world. That's where albums like *Spectrum* come out of the blue as I have dropped the idea of singing and just gone instrumental. Then suddenly, I'll go, 'Oh no, I've got an idea for a song' and that's because it takes longer and takes a lot of work. I don't believe in improvised lyrics that people sometimes throw out. A lyric has to be crafted, although you need to have a good idea to start with and have a few lines to set you on the way of making a song. It also doesn't have to be about one theme. It can draw in a few topics, so I feel free in songwriting terms. I do enjoy getting the ideas for lyrics and there's also an enjoyment in developing those things."

Lyrics, as the album titles hints at, are an appreciation of his love of "beauty, ecology, nature and wonderful people", yet these themes are frequently wrapped around indirect words that provoke thoughtful consideration from the listener. Disregarding the more throwaway, trite lyrical approaches adopted by some bands, Howe relates how there was a conscious attempt for the words to match the soul of the music.

"It's a craft and words are powerful in themselves," he explains. "There are things that I want to say that I don't want to say straightforwardly. It's classic, I met someone who said, 'I've written some songs, come to my house and listen to them.' I listened and they were like, *'Baby, I love you.'* I said to him that you just can't say that. If you want to express

Howe decided to take on lead vocals for *Love Is*. An excellent decision.

"If you have high expectations for you own project, then you really don't want to compromise. I was totally uncompromising on this record and wanted to get it finished, with a capital 'F'."

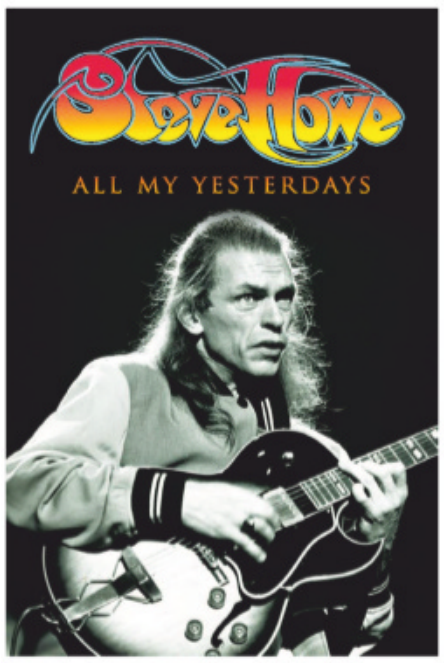
JOSEPH BRANSTON/FUTURE OWNS

that, you have to use some words. They don't have to be overly poetic, but they have to develop it so that it says something in a meaningful way. I enjoy that process but there has to be a sense of economy too as you don't want to waste time. You want to use it creatively and certainly chopping around a lyric is great fun and also having Jon Davison singing was great as he will develop ideas as well. He did exactly that with some of his lyrical harmonies but we kept it that I'm the lead singer. Although Jon is a far better lead singer than I am, his function on the record was to harmonise and he did some wonderful things. As he was singing, I asked Jon to play bass as well, as he's a tremendous bass player. So basically, he had that as a project and he did that for me a couple of years back. It's really exciting to have Jon on it and his bass work is great on the songs."

There's an understandable familiarity with Davison's high-pitched vocals working in tandem with Howe's distinctive guitar sound, not only due to the singer's current role within Yes, but because of the unmistakable similarity between Davison's voice and that of another Jon. Given that time is capable of repairing even the largest of interpersonal rifts, did Howe ever consider approaching Jon Anderson to contribute to the album, if only for sheer nostalgic, musical fun?

"All I can say in answer to that is that Jon and I have a nice friendly and quite loving and respectful relationship. That's my answer, thank you."

Such cloaked diplomacy leads us perfectly into Howe's recently released autobiography, *All My Yesterdays*, which traces the guitarist's professional career with scant references to his personal life. The book instead concentrates on his musical endeavours, although Howe admits that the process of selecting which material to omit was a delicate one.



Steve Howe's autobiography is out now. And jolly good it is, too.

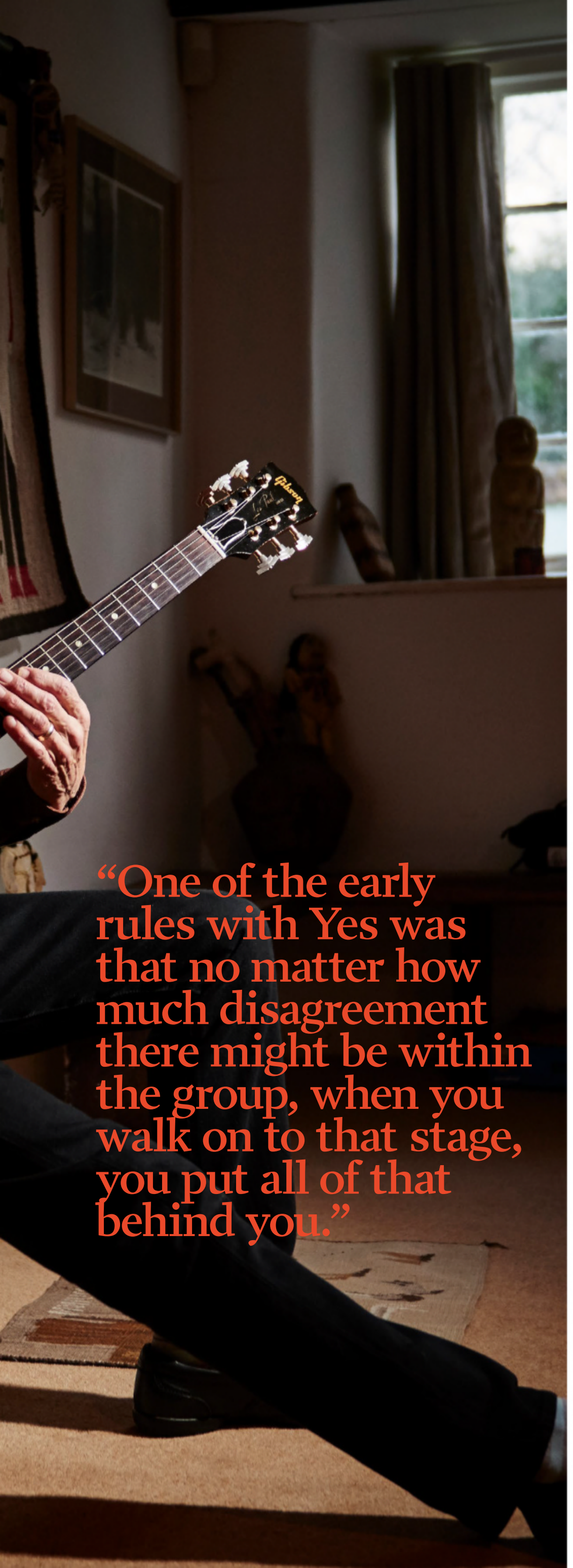
"I'd never intended to write a book about my private life, my family, or people I love as putting those thoughts into words would be very difficult," he explains. "I wasn't going to tackle the whole shebang and decided that the book had to have focus. People know me as a guitarist, which gave me the chance to talk about this from my professional point of view. It's harder than you might imagine in terms of where you draw the line. How far will you let the public know some of the craziness or badness? I didn't want to write a book that trawled through everything difficult about my life. Some autobiographies tend to be a sad story of abuse, drunkenness, Alcoholics Anonymous, broken marriages and disasters. I've had a few but I didn't want my book to be depressing and I think I found a more positive side with critique in it."

As one of the most dysfunctional bands, Yes and Howe's time with them is covered in detail, although he's generally restrained when discussing some of the issues which have affected that band's career. Indeed, when reading these memoirs, there's a renewed admiration that he possessed the energy and everlasting patience to handle the perplexing raft of crises that have dogged Yes over the last 50 years.

"Well, yes, it was a living nightmare but one of the early rules with Yes was that no matter how much disagreement there might be within the group, when you walk on to that stage, you put all of that behind you," he asserts vehemently. "You leave your baggage off the stage. Yes did that night after night. Sometimes there were *dramatic* problems before shows but as soon as that music started, it was, 'Right, get on that stage and play.' That was the marvellous thing about Yes – it was a bunch of troopers. We were all feeding off the live professionalism in Yes and if anybody scarred that, they wouldn't last long in the group. You can't risk Yes for your own indulgences or your own ego. It had to be this fascinating collective, which was a bit like a headless chicken. You had to get the balance, carry on and that was what was so important. I didn't want to sound like a schmuck in the book and didn't want to use malice to ram somebody down the drain hole. We may have our differences or different styles but if someone wasn't into the music anymore, then it was fine, they could go off and play something else. I didn't see those things as a way to put other people down, as that isn't respectful. It's not in my personality to really want to do that.

Howe deliberately avoided sounding "like a schmuck" in his autobiography.

JOSEPH BRANSTON/FUTURE OWNS



"One of the early rules with Yes was that no matter how much disagreement there might be within the group, when you walk on to that stage, you put all of that behind you."

Future Times

Howe gives us an update on what's happening in **Yes**.

As with countless other bands, Yes have been somewhat stymied by the coronavirus outbreak, which led to the understandable cancellation of their Cruise To The Edge Caribbean extravaganza, and their tour performing the *Relayer* album. Howe reveals that the shows have been rescheduled and that there's talk of live internet performances towards the end of the year.

"We are going to do *Relayer* next year and we're very excited as we are sort of set up to do all that. So, it has been put back a year and hopefully we can do something which is similar to what we had originally planned this year. To be honest, this year we can't really imagine doing anything live but we may be able to get some collaborations going later in the year. We might look at doing something across the internet. That's not on the cards right now, but it really ought to be. It ought to be something that we're working towards and we are, albeit very indirectly. Not being able to perform live is a great loss as it is so natural to me and I enjoy the challenge."

Due to the shutdown of their live shows, Yes do have an unexpectedly large gap in the calendar. With some musicians finding the lockdown a useful space to create new music, and with Yes' last studio album, *Heaven And Earth*, being released six years ago, there's a hope among the fanbase that the band may imminently record new material. Howe remains coy and noncommittal on the subject, but as their history is testament to, with Yes, anything is possible. **RW**

New album? Go on, guys...

PRESS/GOTTLIEB BROS

Although that doesn't mean to say that I'm not critical, but I err on the side of fairness if I can."

Howe's opening chapter references the band's 2017 Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction, which, given the involvement of eight of their alumni, wasn't devoid of drama or underlying animosity. Although the guitarist's account of that evening may be notably restrained, it's obvious that those frustrations have lingered in the intervening years.

"I explained in that chapter some of the controversial side of what Yes was at that point and fortunately it has changed considerably," he explains. "We have soldiered on through it all and risen above it but basically that wasn't a simple exercise to go along and play. It had a lot of ramifications and imbalances that we couldn't totally address, so there was a compromise. I started the book there as it did have a story to tell. It illustrated what you were going to read more about and how Yes managed to keep going. The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame directed who should be nominated and that was fairly controversial in itself. It really just became the [1991] *Union* line-up and we felt that they had missed a few tricks there, as they could have included other people. Originally, Trevor [Rabin] was going to play the bass on *Roundabout* and I was going to play bass on *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*. Then Geddy Lee came along and said, 'I want to play bass on *Roundabout*,' and of course we let him do that. So, we had to adjust things a little. *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* turned into a bit of a fiasco with members walking around the audience playing keyboard guitars and things like that, but that was their choice. I was there, I was on stage, Alan [White] and I saw it through and came out the other end. There was a fair amount of silliness afterwards in interviews and meet and greets, but basically, we did do what we were asked to do. We just got up there and played a couple of songs..."

Love Is is released on BMG on July 31. All My Yesterdays is out now via Omnibus. For more information, visit www.stevehowe.com

SHADOW

Out Of The

Big Big Train drummer **Nick D'Virgilio** teams up with luminaries from Supertramp, Dream Theater and The Flower Kings on his new solo album, *Invisible*. The results, he says, take just a pinch of inspiration from his time with Cirque Du Soleil.

Words: Dave Ling **Portraits:** Erick Anderson

"I always wanted to be a solo artist but those ambitions took a back seat to family commitments and being in bands," states Nick D'Virgilio. "I'm not complaining because I've done some amazing things in life, but now I feel I've found my voice and from this point forward there will be a lot more music from me. I won't take 20 or even 10 years between albums."

Much has changed for this quietly spoken Californian since the release of a debut solo record, *Karma*, at the millennium's turn. Having co-founded Spock's Beard, Neal Morse's departure in 2002 saw D'Virgilio quit the drum stool to become lead singer and, for the first time, a significant writer over a four-album spell. After moving on in 2011 D'Virgilio played with Tears For Fears and also auditioned to replace Phil Collins in Genesis, going on to perform on four tracks from *Calling All Stations*, and he is a long-serving part of Big Big Train.

But it was during a five-year spell as part of Totem, the Cirque Du Soleil's touring presentation of mankind's history, that D'Virgilio had the idea for *Invisible*. As assistant bandleader his role in the show involved playing drums and singing largely unseen by the audience. With up to 10 performances each week, as night after night became year after year, the sheer gruelling anonymity of it all began to eat away at him. The opening song and title track, which includes the lines: *'It was the best and worst decision I ever made/I should have thought it out'*, holds the key to what follows.

"I was definitely frustrated by Cirque Du Soleil for a little while, but while this album is a little bit autobiographical it's not all about my own experiences," he replies. "It's more fiction than non-fiction. I was writing about things that are universally felt. Lots of people reach points in their lives that they don't expect to be, it's just how things have gone for them."

When asked whether his discontent with the job was based upon repetition or maybe if it caused him to realise he was more of an attention seeker than he knew, D'Virgilio chooses the former.

"The repetition had its good and bad points; it certainly taught me some discipline," he responds. "I did know that I was very blessed to have that job, the pay cheque was very welcome during a time when my career was very slow. And I ended up using the concept of invisibility to tell *a* story, not necessarily *my own story*."

So percentage-wise, how much of the tale is made-up?

"Oh gosh, just a little bit of it came from me — 10 per cent at the most."

An unforeseen development in this new Covid-19-conscious world of ours is that *Invisible* could also take on fresh meaning; that of underappreciated frontline workers.

"You bet," he agrees heartily. "Some people assumed that the first single, *Where's The Passion*, was about that. It really wasn't my intention, but if that song provides energy and positive thought during all of this crap, that can only be a great thing."

Although *Invisible* is a lengthy, conceptually themed piece, D'Virgilio didn't set out to make a prog rock record and that isn't really what happened. Its creator prefers to call the album "storied". *Prog*'s recent album review may have singled out *Turn Your Life Around* as a nod back to Spock's Beard, but what we're dealing with is a painstakingly assembled and varied rock record.

"A lot of the influences I expressed came from when I was a kid, and not all of it is progressive rock, though a lot of it's kinda

"I just made the best record I could; I wasn't too concerned with genres. I just wanted to tell the story. It had been sitting in my brain for way too long."

***Invisible*: track it down now!**

“I’ve done some amazing things in life, but now I feel I’ve found my voice and from this point forward there will be a lot more music from me.”

technical,” he explains. “I listen to a lot of different stuff.”

He voices surprise when informed that somebody in the *Prog* office noted a similarity between *Snake Oil Salesman* and the pomp rock of Styx. “I wasn’t setting out for that,” he chuckles, “but… okay.”

Instead D’Virgilio declares his love for Muse. “I’m a huge, huge fan of theirs,” he points out. “I love the way they rock hard, and what that band does has really seeped into my bones.”

Given that he is best known for membership of Spock’s and now BBT, isn’t a full-on prog record what most people would have wanted from D’Virgilio right now, and does he care about potential dissenting voices?

“I just made the best record I could; I wasn’t too concerned with genres,” he replies simply. “I just wanted to tell the story. It had been sitting in my brain for way too long.”

Perhaps understandably D’Virgilio is reticent to spell out the true meaning of the songs, though he does agree with the assertion that *Invisible* takes the listener on an emotional roller coaster ride. *Turn Your Life Around* references ‘*sinking in quicksand*’ but *Where’s The Passion* stirs us to rediscover ourselves. Very soon we are back into negativity once more as *Mercy* relates ‘*a sorry tale of doubt and fear*’ and *Overcome* sees the story’s focal point wondering: ‘*Can I break free and overcome?*’

“That’s typical of life, though, isn’t it?” he responds. “Things are going along very well and then suddenly the rug is pulled out from beneath us. You must climb those peaks and valleys to reach the conclusion. During *Where’s The Passion* the guy is still telling himself he still has it — there must be a way to rediscover the things that make him want to live again, and that he can find the stuff that brings him joy. That’s a theme that runs throughout the album.”

The aforementioned *Snake Oil Salesman* is a pivotal moment. D’Virgilio relates that it sees the hero “leaving town and setting off to find himself — maybe in a subway station in the UK or somewhere — where he sees a magical busker with the power to take away the pain of this whole crowd of people”. Later on, *Wrong Place Wrong Time* gives the storyline a further twist. “That is where he realises he’s in the shit,” laughs Nick. “He’s alone in this train car and *something* goes down, I didn’t want to be specific.”

That is where *Not My Time To Say Goodbye* pops up. “Having pretty much saved the day, he goes through a near-death experience,” says D’Virgilio. “He finds himself in the middle of something really dark that he didn’t expect.”

Past and present: with Spock's Beard and Big Big Train.

PRESS/ SOPHOCLES ALEXIOU

An unexpected reworking of the 1959 Motown hit *Money (That's What I Want)* that *Prog*'s reviewer described as "decelerated and slightly sinister" throws another curveball. "That's the part where the guy realises he's not alone, and that others feel the same way," D'Virgilio explains.

With its reference to '*a new chance I'm given*', *I Know The Way* ends things on a spiritually charged, upbeat note. The grand finale is something that D'Virgilio's old friend Neal Morse could have written.

"Uh, maybe," he considers. "Again, I didn't want to be too overt. People can make up their minds over which divine source brings him to that point. He realises he still has a lot to offer and a huge meaning in life, It's a big deal as until then he believes he has nothing to offer."

As the words 'he', 'him' and 'the guy' are used for the umpteenth time, we realise that D'Virgilio resists the temptation to award a name to the album's subject.

"I wanted people to think that its hero could be anybody," he rationalises. "It's not just me or this one person; each of us is a cog in the wheel. The lives of everybody have purpose."

Although it goes without saying that decades of networking allowed D'Virgilio to amass a sizeable raft of musician contacts, his current job played a part in recruiting the army of special guests that appear on *Invisible*. Nick has worked at Sweetwater Sound, the biggest online equipment retailer in North America, since 2014. A sponsor of the *Prog* Awards the last few years, the Fort Wayne, Indiana-based company also presents songwriting workshops with some of the biggest names in music.

Certain guest spots, including Jem Godfrey from Frost* and The Flower Kings' bassist Jonas Reingold, were the product of those longstanding friendships, while others came as a consequence of meetings at Sweetwater. Tony Levin, and Paul Gilbert from Mr Big/ Racer X, Dream Theater keyboardist Jordan Rudess and Supertramp guitarist Carl Verheyen all fall into both categories. "With Tony, we had met a couple of times before, but he was also part of a recording masterclass at Sweetwater," D'Virgilio relates. "I'm so used to hearing him play Peter Gabriel's stuff on the stick, I thought it would be cool to have him play some regular bass on *Snake Oil Salesman*."

One slightly unexpected name to pop up is that of Rick Nielsen, the veteran Cheap Trick guitarist who laid down an incendiary solo on *In My Bones*. "Rick is such a funny guy; so sarcastic," the drummer laughs. "He gave me so much playful shit about that song being in 5/4 time."

Sponsorships arranged via Sweetwater set up an arrangement that facilitated the album's string parts being recorded at Abbey Road in London. D'Virgilio still recalls the goosebump moment when the studio's ensemble commenced their contribution to the title track. "Oh man," he says with obvious pride, "being in Studio Two, which hasn't changed since The Beatles, you still get that overpowering sense of the magic that has been created there. It was otherworldly."

Until being written off by the coronavirus pandemic, D'Virgilio was to have enjoyed a summer of touring with Big Big Train. Having spent the past 11 years with that most English of progressive rock bands, like the other members the drummer was relishing the thought of not only a US excursion but also a headline spot on the Prog In The Park stage of the UK's own Ramblin' Man Fair.

"We're totally, totally disappointed – it [the cancellation] really, really sucks," he sighs. "But on the plus side, BBT is one of the best bands I've ever been in and it's exciting that we are starting to get a little bit of success. All we can do is make the best of it. Our gig on the last tour, at the Hackney Empire, got filmed and that's going to come out with an incredible surround sound mix, and with touring off the table we are pushing forward the making of a new record. If travel restrictions are eased, the recording of that will begin that in November for release the following year. All BBT shows will hopefully be rebooked for 2021."

In the here and now, having turned 50 a couple of years ago Nick D'Virgilio is in a very good place. His daughter Sophia and son Anthony both appear as singers on *Invisible*, and he stresses that as and when a semblance of normality returns, so long as infrastructure to do so remains in place, some solo dates are a big priority.

"I'm already making plans for that. I don't know exactly how I'll do it as this is a very elaborate record, and if I commit to it then it will have to be a *show*," he says, emphasising the last word. "I think we could put on some fun concerts."

D'Virgilio appreciates the therapeutic value of getting *Invisible* out of his system.

"Oh, definitely," he affirms. "It was great to get across the finish line with it, and I hope that the record will take me onto the next steps of my career. It certainly gives the confidence to want to do more. I needed that.

"I feel like I'm in the prime of my life," he concludes. "I'm being much smarter about the things that I do and I believe I've really got my wits about me. I know what my strengths are and I hope to make the most of them in my remaining years. I've got great kids and a loving wife behind me, so I couldn't be happier."

Invisible is out now via English Electric Recordings. Visit www.nickdvirgilio.com for more.

“After *Legend* I was all for getting the Moog, the Taurus pedals and the Mellotrons out again.”

True Colours

After their previous album explored darker musical territory, Welsh proggers **Magenta** have returned to their signature sound. Robert Reed discusses marrying his pop background with prog, horror actors and the perils of social media.

Words: Nick Shilton
Portraits: Stuart Wood

Received wisdom defines Magenta pithily. "Neo-prog, female singer," Robert Reed laughs wryly. But over more than two decades, some of Magenta's seven previous albums have undermined said received wisdom significantly, most notably 2017's *We Are Legend*.

Complete with dystopian artwork, that album was arguably the most radical of Magenta's career. It was a considerably more dense – and to some, comparatively impenetrable – release. By contrast the band's new album, *Masters Of Illusion*, is a return to the sound for which Magenta are best known. It's also very possibly their strongest ever release and a deliberate stylistic shift from *We Are Legend*.

Reed has previously openly acknowledged that he struggled with both confidence and creative inspiration leading up to *... Legend*, feeling that he'd exhausted Magenta musically. As a result, that album took Magenta in a decidedly different direction.

"I get really bored if I do one style all the time and the same thing over and over again," Reed explains. "That's why I do other projects like Chimpan A, Kompendium and Sanctuary. With *We Are Legend*, I couldn't find a way in. Eventually I thought we'd do something we hadn't done before, which was embrace electronica sounds and loops and get a bit of a harder edge – stuff I'd avoided because I didn't think it was us."

Reed remains proud of *...Legend* and points out that some fans cite it as their favourite Magenta album. "I thought I would really push the envelope and do something that people wouldn't expect. We went to an extreme with the electronica, the longer songs and darker stuff. I really enjoyed doing it. To me, it was successful."

Magenta: in the pink.

However there’s no doubt that *…Legend* proved a cathartic experience, smoothing the way for *Masters Of Illusion*. “After *…Legend* I was all for getting the Moog, the Taurus pedals and the Mellotrons out again,” Reed enthuses. “Over the last couple of albums, I hadn’t really indulged in ‘retro prog’. I fancied going back to the beginning of Magenta and what the band was all about when we started.”

When Magenta first emerged at the turn of the millennium, prog was far from flavour of the month. “It was such a swear word. Nobody wanted to be a prog band. It was the worst thing you could be labelled as.” Defiantly, Reed proceeded to make “the most prog album he could”, namely Magenta’s 2001 debut, *Revolutions*.

That album and its considerably more polished successor, 2004’s *Seven*, firmly established the band, while simultaneously benefiting from a lack of audience expectations. “There was an innocence on *Revolutions* and *Seven*. We didn’t have any fans, so we didn’t have anybody to please.”

In pleasing themselves by making the music that they wanted to make, Magenta soon acquired a fanbase that has remained loyal to them subsequently. But success comes with a price. “When you’ve got fans, there’s pressure and a niggle in the back of your mind saying that you can’t do some things because you don’t want to upset the fans too much. People judge you more and that innocence goes a bit.”

Having taken some of the band’s audience outside their aural comfort zone with *…Legend*, Reed decided that with *Masters Of Illusion* he would make the album that he wanted to hear stylistically: “I was desperately trying to get back that writing innocence of doing it for me.”

Notwithstanding the near 17-minute title track, the hour-long new release zooms by. Yes, stylistically the album harks back to *Seven* in particular, but it’s a more accomplished and beautifully arranged record. It’s also highly accessible, the result of Reed’s pop background.

“Before Magenta I spent 10 years trying to be a pop star. That nearly killed me and Tina,” Reed says, referring to his time alongside Magenta vocalist Christina Booth in Trippa. “I’d had enough of being told what to do by A&R people. Magenta was a cleansing of my soul after being a slave to the pop industry for a decade, sticking two fingers up to everyone and saying I’ll do whatever I want now.”

While pop music may be anathema to some prog fans, it’s also one of the secrets of Magenta’s success. “In pop, the song is king,” Reed states. “With Magenta, the song comes first and then you put the window dressing around it. But it’s still a song at heart. That’s why Yes, Genesis and Pink Floyd are huge — they wrote great songs. Some other bands are technically amazing and musicians love them, but never sold any records because they never had any songs. Today, the bands that do well are the ones that write good songs.”

And purely and simply, *Masters Of Illusion* contains six very good songs. As Reed points out, they all follow the classic construction of a verse, a bridge and a memorable chorus. There’s then plenty of instrumental embellishment, such that even the album’s shortest track, *Snow*, exceeds six minutes.

“But you can get away with that, because on this album you’ve got the goodwill of the good songs. On *We Are Legend*, I was trying to write in a different way and break all the rules that I’d set myself. This new album is accessible because it’s going back to what Magenta were about on *Seven*.” It’s surely no coincidence that *Seven* remains Magenta’s best-selling album.

Magenta L-R:Dan Nelson, Robert Reed, Christina Booth, Chris Fry and Jiffy Griffiths,

More surprisingly, given how cohesive *Masters Of Illusion* is stylistically and sonically, some of the music on it dates back a decade, with only the title track and *A Gift From God* specifically written for the album. "With the song *Masters Of Illusion* I was on a mission to make the proggiest track I could," Reed confesses.

Two of the album's indubitable highlights — the catchy *Reach For The Moon* and the gentle, emotive *The Rose* — were recorded and demoed at the time of *...Legend*. "We had almost finished those songs but I thought they sounded too prog, not modern enough, and were going back too much to the past. They were completely alien to what we were trying to do. So because I wanted to shock people and do something completely different, I put them aside while we were finishing the last record. When we came to this album I played them and realised that they were really good songs."

Similarly, opening track *Bela* had sat on Reed's hard drive for a decade with the keyboardist failing to find a suitable home for it. Having previously demoed it with himself singing, he realised its full potential once Booth demoed vocals for it. *Snow* had been similarly homeless for around five years.

While *Masters...* is musically cohesive, like *Seven* it benefits additionally from a unifying theme, although that considerably postdated the writing of the music. "The music always comes first," Reed continues. "Lyrics are just not my thing, hence my love for Mike Oldfield and instrumental music. It's all about the melody and the chords for me — they are what float my boat. Lyrics are secondary. Shoot me down in flames for saying that, especially in prog!"

Demons in the mirror: Magenta's new album, *Masters Of Illusion*.

Reed has always relied on his brother Steve to supply lyrics. "I don't go near the lyrics. They're not my department and I just can't get my head around them. I do notice when I hear a corny or bad lyric, though!"

Instead, Robert Reed relishes having a concept to write music around. For *Masters Of Illusion*, the Reed brothers alighted on movie stars from the Universal horror films of the 1930s and 1940s and subsequent Hammer horror films of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

"Steve and I used to spend every Saturday night watching the Horror Double Bills on BBC2," Reed explains. "Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee are my acting heroes and I just loved the look of the films, especially the Hammer films which look like paintings. We were fanatical about them."

With the lyrics for *Bela* inspired by the life of Bela Lugosi and written a few years subsequent to the song's music, the brothers decided to make a horror actor the subject of each track on the album. "The real prog thing would be one song about Dracula and another about Frankenstein etc. But that was a horrendous idea and all the worst things about prog!"

Instead they chose to focus each song on the personal lives of six protagonists, with Lugosi, Cushing and Lee featured alongside Vincent Price, Lon Chaney Jr and Ingrid Pitt. As Reed points out, elements of the back stories of all six have a degree of universality. But there's also an overarching concept to the album and a similarity with the world of musicians.

"With actors, you see them up on the screen or out at premiers and think they're so confident. But in real life, most of them are frail. It's the same with musicians. To some extent, we're all masters of illusion. You get on stage and people see this cocky arrogance. But when you come off stage, you're as frail and as open to not liking criticism as anyone else."

The album's artwork features some important visual references too. "The cover shows this actor and various demons in the mirror. And the typewriter is meant as a nod and a wink at reviewers and journalists who can destroy people."

With the prevalence of social media, it's not just journalists who proffer opinions, welcome or otherwise, about creative endeavours. Reed has experienced this to his cost, principally from his Mike Oldfield-inspired *Sanctuary* albums, regarded by some Oldfield obsessives as sacrilegious.

"With social media everyone's got an opinion and there's no protection. Whereas before you'd have three or four critics and just had to weather that storm, now you've got millions: everyone's a critic. Musicians are not built to take criticism, but when you're putting music out, something so personal to you, you've got to be prepared for it."

Reed clearly remains shocked by some of the reaction to his *Sanctuary* albums. "The level of abuse I got personally was on another level. There were such violent and personal attacks. I hadn't killed anyone — I only made a record! But you've got to stand there like a boxer with his hands tied behind his back, because if you engage or try to fight back, that's even worse."

Happily, it's highly unlikely that the excellent *Masters Of Illusion* will result in a torrent of abuse raining down on Reed and his Magenta cohorts.

Masters Of Illusion is out now via Tigermoth. See www.magenta-web.com for more.

MAVERICK

THE WILD, THE WILLING AND THE NOT SO INNOCENT...

Nowhere Man?

Poet, pop star and clown prince of psychedelic rock, **Syd Barrett**'s painful decline into an apparent world of acid-induced mental anguish merely served to enhance the myth that surrounded him. This feature, originally published in the first issue of *Prog*, asks whether we knew the real story.

Words: Tommy Udo

Cambridge, mid-90s: to paraphrase the words of that bloody song by the Television Personalities, we knew where Syd Barrett lived. It wasn't really very hard to find his house – a few phone calls, a couple of letters and there we were. It'd been a quarter of a century since Syd's last disastrous stage appearance – with Stars, also featuring ex-Pretty Things and Pink Fairies drummer Twink – and since then all had been quiet. Too quiet...

His absence had been maddening. In our arrogance, we'd come to seek him out, to doorstep him as though he was some dodgy company director or politician. To get him – force him, even – to explain himself. How dare he revolutionise rock'n'roll and then give it all up and just walk away without a word! Not even having the good manners to die young!

Of course there were no illusions that we are the first hacks, fans or weird obsessives to go looking for Roger 'Syd' Barrett. And, as one grouchy neighbour made clear to us, we weren't even the first to turn up that day.

After half an hour of knocking on the door, we stuffed a note through the letterbox, sat in the car and waited. By midnight there was still no sign of anyone. If he was hiding in the house, he was sitting there with all the lights out. We gave up and left; if we're honest, we were relieved not to have found him. It was never that Syd was 'lost', he just really never wanted to be found.

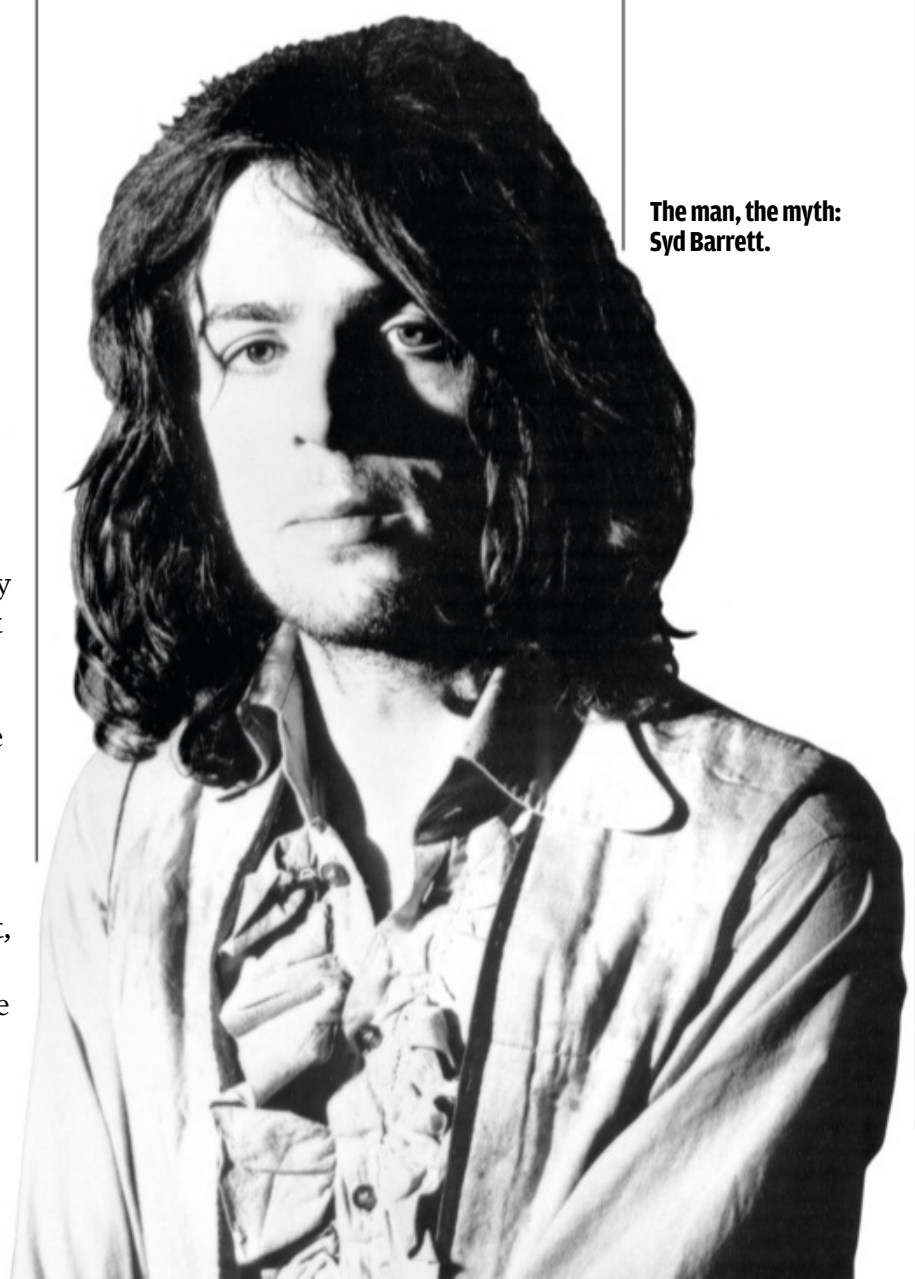
Like Robert Johnson, Syd Barrett's recorded legacy is slim. There are 40-odd songs, mostly written during a rich creative period from 1966 to 1967, ranging from the cosmic freak-out of *Interstellar Overdrive* to the childish whimsy of *The Gnome* to the cracked and melancholy *Jugband Blues*. Yet these songs drew up the blueprint that would shape Pink Floyd for three decades – they never really emerged from his shadow – as well as for the post-psychedelic progressive rock scene.

His two solo albums and the handful of demos and outtakes that have surfaced in recent years collapsed into his own little world; Edward Lear-like nonsense poetry and jittery post-acid comedown folksiness. They sold poorly at the time, though a devoted cult of believers has tended to his flame all the way through the long decades of his silence.

One could argue that Syd looms large in the history of punk rock, the lo-fi indie scene and the new generation of psychedelic folkies like Devendra Banhardt. Everyone from The Jesus And Mary Chain to David Bowie has covered his songs and paid some homage to his inspiration. And the inspiration was not just his music. Everyone loves a 'mad genius', a star that explodes and leaves a vacuum in its wake. Better to burn out than to fade away.

His is a potent myth: a heartachingly beautiful man, the person that everyone wanted to be around, a powerhouse of musical and artistic talent. The drugs that helped to fuel and sustain this maverick creativity also helped to push him over the edge into the realm of mental illness. At the peak of their fame on an American tour, Syd started to behave oddly. He would go into catatonic trances. He would be unable even to mime let alone perform his songs. In the space of a year the man who had helped to revolutionise – no exaggeration – English rock'n'roll

"His is a potent myth: the beautiful friend and artistic power-house pushed over the edge by drugs."



The man, the myth: Syd Barrett.

GEMS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

ADAM RITCHIE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Seeing red: Syd Barrett and Rick Wright play at the Architectural Association student party, London on December 16, 1966.

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Pink Floyd in 1967, L-R: Roger Waters, Syd Barrett, Nick Mason and Richard Wright.

was a burnt-out case, ejected from the band he had formed and shaped.

The solo albums that followed were dark and disturbing with pitiful sales. After the second one, everyone — not least of all Syd himself — seemed to have given up on his music career. In an interview with journalist Giovanni Dadomo, around the recording of his second album, *Barrett*, in 1970, though published in *Terrapin,* the Syd Barrett fanzine, in 1974, he was asked if he was looking forward to performing again. "Yes, that would be nice," he replied. "I used to enjoy it, it was a gas. But so's doing nothing. It's art school laziness, really."

Syd, it seemed, both burned out like a supernova and then spent the decades until his death fading away. Yes, his absence was certainly maddening. In 2009, Iggy Pop was advertising car insurance and the New York Dolls and the MC5 were regularly touring and recording despite key members having died off decades ago, so there was something about Syd's retreat from his own legacy that really rankled. Poor mental health isn't a barrier to a comeback: look at Roky Erickson, Brian Wilson, Arthur Lee and even Sly Stone. Nobody is too 'unstable' to come back, do one of those fawning broadsheet retrospectives, play Glastonbury, duet with some twat like Pete Doherty or maybe make an ad for Apple computers.

It wasn't for lack of trying: people had tempted Syd for years. Jimmy Page and Brian Eno expressed an interest in producing him in the early 70s, and later on The Damned approached him to produce their second album, *Music For Pleasure* (they ended up settling for Floyd drummer Nick Mason instead).

But, goes the myth, Barrett was beyond it all, a recluse, holed up in his mother's Cambridge house, lost forever in an acid casualty wilderness. At various times it was reported that he was in a mental hospital, that he had died, even that he was recording in secret.

Most famously, he turned up in the studio when Pink Floyd were recording *Wish You Were Here* in 1975 (it's a matter of conjecture as to whether or not they were actually working on *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*, their soaring tribute to him). Overweight, hair and eyebrows shaved, it was the first time that any of the band had seen him in almost five years. Roger Waters was apparently reduced to tears. When asked what he thought of *Wish You Were Here*, Barrett said it sounded "a bit old". He later attended David Gilmour's wedding and slipped away from the party. That was the last time any of the band ever saw him.

"Syd pioneered new techniques; Floyd became underground superstars."

Some psychedelic stories are a long, strange trip but the story of Syd is more akin to being shot out of a cannon. Barrett arrived in London to join The Tea Set (aka The T Set, the Screaming Abdabs, The Abdabs and the Architectural Abdabs) in 1965. Syd wasn't yet 20. A self-taught guitarist inspired by Stax mainstay Steve Cropper and rock'n' roll icon Bo Diddley, he gave the band their new name when they found themselves on the same bill as another group called The Tea Set. The Pink Floyd Sound soon became part of the tiny London underground scene. Barrett pioneered new guitar techniques that involved feeding it through echo boxes, using a Zippo lighter as a slide. The band were booked at the UFO Club in late 1966 and soon became the first superstars of the British underground.

It's hard to convey how quickly the music scene changed. In 1966, most British musicians had few ambitions beyond playing R&B. A year later they wanted to surrender to the void and journey to the innermost centre of eternity.

LSD had been doing the rounds in underground circles for a few years. It was not actually made illegal in the UK until 1966. Many on the scene had used it and Barrett was seen to gobble it like Smarties. While there is no doubt that psychedelic chemicals opened the user's mind to new possibilities, Pink Floyd were bringing to rock music some of what progressive jazz musicians like John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk had been doing for some time (and were similarly chemically inspired).

The long, drawn-out songs like *Interstellar Overdrive* would be the template for post-Syd Pink Floyd and the psychedelic and progressive bands who followed. The fairy tale songs like *Bike* tapped into other traditions like music hall songs, children's songs and folklore. The debut album, *The Piper At the Gates Of Dawn*, was bloated with possibilities.

David Gilmour has gone on record as saying that he believed that Syd's drug use merely exacerbated a problem that was already there, that the breakdown would have happened anyway. The band were touring incessantly and Syd was under pressure to write another hit single to follow up *Arnold Layne* and *See Emily Play*. As time progressed, Roger Waters referred to "The Syd problem" as Barrett became increasingly isolated from the band and unable or unwilling to perform. One solution that was mooted was that Syd would record and write but not tour. Syd, on the other hand, suggested hiring two sax players and a girl singer. By early 1968, after a few shambollic gigs as a five-piece — Barrett's friend David Gilmour had been drafted in as a second guitarist and, it was vainly

hoped, as a stabilising influence on Syd — Barrett was out. The band's second album, *A Saucerful Of Secrets*, was recorded with little input from Syd. The closing track, *Jugband Blues*, is a bleak and evocative description of a breakdown, a sad farewell to the Floyd. His last contribution to the band was the song *Vegetable Man*. Then-manager Peter Jenner explained: "It's just a description of what he's wearing. It's very disturbing. Roger had to take it off the album because it was too dark."

The two solo albums that followed are a more low-key expression of that dark insanity. Recorded with David Gilmour — the musicians had to play around Syd, who seemed incapable of playing the same song the same way twice — they sound like psychedelia stripped of all the effects and studio wizardry, leaving only the actual musical and lyrical weirdness beneath.

Syd then joined Stars, a sort of three-piece supergroup with Twink. At one show Syd froze onstage and then walked off. Twink recalled meeting him in the street a few days later. Syd read him a bad review of the show and quit there and then.

And that was Syd's career in music. Afterwards, according to legend, he became a hermit. A virtual shutaway, lost forever in his own psychosis, unable to communicate.

Since his death, however, another picture of Barrett has emerged. According to his sister Rosemary, in an interview with *The Times*, Syd was neither mentally ill nor was he a recluse. He had spent a short time in a private "home for lost souls" and had seen a psychiatrist, though he was not on any medication nor in a therapy programme. He was shy and retiring, though loved the company of his nieces and nephews, was chatty to the staff in the DIY and gardening stores he frequented, and had lived alone and looked after himself since the death of his mother in 1991. He had turned his back on music and wanted nothing to do with it, but he was a keen gardener, had returned to his first love — painting — and had even written a book about the history of art.

Tripping the light fantastic: Syd Barrett performing with Pink Floyd at London's UFO Club.

ANDREW WHITTUCK/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"He avoided contact with journalists and fans. He simply couldn't understand the interest in something that had happened so long ago and he wasn't willing to interrupt his own musings for their sake," she said.

Syd would paint large canvasses, photograph them and then destroy them. He didn't like to be reminded of the past; he went round to his sister's to watch a BBC TV documentary about him and the Pink Floyd, but left, complaining that it was "too loud".

Driving away from Cambridge that night, we like to think that a neighbour was giving Syd the secret knock and whispering, "It's okay, they've buggered off back to London." Syd would then emerge from his refuge, make a cup of tea, pick up his guitar and then sing one of the many songs that he'd written but never recorded, songs that he alone would ever hear.

Syd Barrett cycling on his 60th birthday.

GEOFF ROBINSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

For more about Syd Barrett, visit www.sydbarrett.com.

Mother's Talk

Smashing the boundaries between rock and jazz, **Hedvig Mollestad** tells *Prog* about being inspired by mythological monsters, trusting her listeners to keep up, and why she's not closing the coffin lid with *Ekhidna*.

Words: David West
Images: Julia Naglestad

"It's not a concept album, no," says Norwegian guitarist Hedvig Mollestad about her new release, *Ekhidna*, "but I also think it's nice to have one thematic palette that I work within to find ways to attach this to something more concrete than just music."

It takes its name from the mythological Ekhidna, a half-human/half-snake being who was the mother of a host of monsters in Greek mythology, from the many-headed Hydra to Cerberus, who guarded the entrance to Hades. Mollestad is best known for the six riff-packed, heavy rock meets progressive jazz albums that she's cut with her trio featuring bassist Ellen Brekken and drummer Ivar Loe Bjørnstad. However, *Ekhidna* sees her working in a new sextet playing music that she composed as a commission for the 2019 Vossajazz Festival.

"My daughter was very into dragons at the time," says Mollestad, "so we were looking at what types of dragons there are in history. There are so many dragons and so many monsters, each representing something that keeps your world of ideas going. When we saw Ekhidna, I knew instantly that this was the monster I was looking for. Being the mother of all the other monsters, it was clear to me that was going to be the embodiment of the project."

The music explores themes around motherhood and humanity's inability to live in harmony with nature, and the line-up isn't just twice the size of the trio, it has a boldly different sound too. There's no bassist, instead Mollestad is joined by Marte Eberson and Erlend Slettevoll both on Fender Rhodes, with trumpeter Susana Santos Silva, Elephant9's Torstein Lofthus on drums, and percussionist Ole Mofjell. "If you're starting a new project, you have to take it away from your previous patterns," says Mollestad.

> "When we saw Ekhidna, I knew instantly that **this was the monster I was looking for**. Being the **mother of all the other monsters**, it was clear to me that was going to be the embodiment of the project."

"I wanted to try to make music that sounded different and one of the ways to do that is to choose different musicians to approach it."

Marte Eberson usually tours with pop group Highasakite, and she's also the daughter of Jon Eberson, Mollestad's old guitar teacher from music academy. "I know where she's coming from," says Mollestad. "She has this deep connection with jazz, and she has this presence, everything she plays is a small explosion."

Erlend Slettevoll provides a counterpoint to the eruptive Eberson, with Mollestad observing that Eberson approaches the Rhodes like a guitarist where Slettevoll has a pianist's mindset. "I wanted them to complete each other and to be able to pull different things out of them in the music," she says.

Among the maelstrom of the two Fender Rhodes, there's a rich rhythmic layer from Mofjell on percussion and Lofthus on drums. "He's very trustworthy rhythmically," says Mollestad about the latter, "but he still takes a lot of chances and challenges the other players. Also, he's a monster."

Mofjell's participation allows the band to move in unexpected directions. In the title track, Mofjell leads them into an Afro-Cuban groove. "He was playing it at some point, we thought, 'This is really cool,'" says the guitarist. "I wanted to turn up this percussion thing, so it's mixed quite loud to make it in touch with this idea that people are playing together live. It's not just a production ingredient, it's an instrument being played by someone who could play this thing until he's bleeding. It's hard work playing those drums that hard."

The presence of Susana Santos Silva on trumpet reflects the fact that Mollestad's

Doing the monster mash: *Ekhidna* is out now.

Hedvig Mollestad: constantly moving forward.

L-R: Erlend Slettevoll, Torstein Lofthus, Susana Santos Silva, Ole Mofjell, Marte Eberson, and Hedvig Mollestad (front).

father was a trumpeter and the combination of guitar and trumpet is one that's close to her heart. "I've been listening to Jim Hall/Art Farmer, and also the works Chet Baker did with guitarists, all the guitarists who worked with Miles Davis," she says. "I wanted to work with that, but I didn't want to have a shredding trumpeter. I wanted a sound-oriented trumpeter that could break up this riffy thing I was going to make. I've been listening to Susana and playing with her in Mats Gustafsson's Nu Ensemble, so I knew she had a classical background, which she had been playing a lot before she chose the path of improvised music. She's very strong, which you have to be to cut through all of this."

The music on *Ekhidna* first debuted live at Vossajazz before Mollestad took the project into the studio. When she records with her trio, the goal is always to capture as much of their live energy as possible. "It's been important to me not to touch it too much, just to leave a take as it is," she says, "but this time it was more important for me to shape it up a little, not like in a pop way in producing sounds, but being more focused on the structures."

There were a few tracks from the live set that didn't make it onto the record, so there may be more music from this project down the line, and when they play live there's certain to be plenty of improvisation and exploration. That's not to say there wasn't room for spontaneity in the studio. "Most tracks last for a long time, there is a lot of information," says Mollestad. "That is very demanding on the listener but at the same time I trust the listeners to be interested in what they hear, so you want to give them something that can't just go in and out of their ears. There are layers here that I'm positive are giving the listeners different experiences the second, third and fourth time they listen, but at the same time you have to be kind and not give them an hour of things that have to pay attention to. There's got to be a bit of relaxation as well. I do what I can but I try to keep the listener in mind, wanting them to have a cool experience and wanting them to know it'll be different if anybody should ever be able to listen to this live."

That leads to the challenge of launching a project during a global crisis. "There was a discussion whether we should release this project now or at some other point but it was important to release this now," says Mollestad, noting that Vossajazz was a year ago. "We recorded it in January, it's really important in these times for me not to postpone everything to next year and make 2021 a copy of what was supposed to happen this year. These projects move on no matter what pandemic is touching the world and to me it's also really important to try to keep my music moving forward."

Live shows are starting to return in Norway and, at the time of writing, Mollestad had two album launch gigs booked in Oslo and a Norwegian jazz festival at the end of June. "This is the year for *Ekhidna*," she says. "Next year there will be a new trio record coming out, so we really want to do live shows this year as far as possible."

For UK fans waiting for a long-overdue return visit, there was a trio gig at Café Oto in London on the books for August, but Mollestad is waiting to see whether it will be rescheduled. Against this backdrop of uncertainty, Mollestad wanted *Ekhidna* to end up on upbeat note with the track *One Leaf Left*. The title references ecological decline, but it's not about despair. "That song is the last one we play in the set," she says, "but the ending is supposed to be powerful and open. You're not supposed to feel like the coffin lid is closing, it's still open."

Ekhidna is out now on Rune Grammofon. For more see www.facebook.com/hedvigmollestadofficial.

"It's really important in these times for me not to postpone everything to next year and make 2021 a copy of what was supposed to happen this year."

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“It’s all really gone backward. Trump has to be removed from that office. The longer he’s there, the worse it will get. Whatever you thought this person was going to do for you, it’s wrong.”

The Sky's On The Ground

In an interview conducted before the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, renowned keyboardist **David Sancious** opens up about touring with Peter Gabriel, his new solo album and tells *Prog* why it's so important to stand up for the truth.

Words: Sid Smith **Images:** Craig McCord

They say if you want to understand the world from another person's perspective you should walk a mile in their shoes. For David Sancious, a simple walk in Los Angeles graphically demonstrated that despite the thousands of miles marched by the civil rights movement in the 1950s, 1960s and beyond, very little had changed in terms of the discrimination experienced by the average black American.

He recalls being stopped by two LAPD cops for being "black while walking", an incident that happened in the wake of the Rodney King beating by police officers. "I was on the original So tour with Peter Gabriel. We had a few hours to spare so we decided to take a walk on the Santa Monica pier and these two officers pulled me over and put me in the position. One minute I was out walking with my then-girlfriend and suddenly I'm up against a car with my hands up and my girlfriend is standing there looking at me, like, 'What the hell is going on?' What I haven't mentioned is that my girlfriend was white. She also happened to be a professional photographer. She backed up a little bit on the grass and like a war photographer on one knee, started filming, rapid-fire, the whole situation. I called out the badge number of the officer, I said, 'Write this – the officer's name and badge number – down.' They must've just been a couple of bored racist cops and, 'Oh, let's do one last thing on our way home before we knock off, let's just mess with this black guy and just embarrass him', or whatever."

That particular encounter, coupled with the grim incidences of police shooting unarmed black men and the rise of racist, discriminatory behaviour was channelled into *Urban Psalm #3* on *Eyes Wide Open*, his first solo studio album since 2005's *Cinema*.

David Sancious first came to prominence through his keyboard work in Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band's 1973 debut, *Greetings*

Right: David Sancious' new album, *Eyes Wide Open*.

From Asbury Park, NJ. A multi-instrumentalist equally at home supplying scorching lead guitar, as he did on Stanley Clarke's *Journey To Love*, or with his trademark fluid, dazzling keyboards. Sancious formed his own band, Tone, oscillating between jazz-fusion and a distinctly prog-centric rock on albums such as 1976's *Transformation (The Speed Of Love),* 1977's *Dance Of The Age Of Enlightenment* and 1978's *True Stories*. Peter Gabriel's admiration for Tone led him to send a telegram offering Sancious a job in his live band, a role and a friendship that has lasted decades.

Articulate and nuanced, his new record doesn't pull any punches when it comes to calling out the blight of racism and the unravelling of the civic and civil norms that have spawned a destabilising chaos and uncertainty. The songs and music for *Eyes Wide Open* have been a long time coming, he says, evolving after lengthy touring with Gabriel and his other live commitments with Sting. "I had a period where I was home and I had months without work but I had enough money to survive. Everything was fine. So I just delved into it and focused on it. Also, things that happened around that time politically, like the election in the US; that had an impact on me, of course. I started sort of getting ideas about that and watching the correlation of what happened in the UK with Brexit, how that was politically a very similar dynamic albeit in a different form, you know? Everything really came together quickly. So the personal, along with the social, along with the political, it all just became a theme. I definitely knew that I wanted to have at least one vocal piece on the album. But then as all these things developed, I said, 'These things belong together and I want to present the vocal themes in order.' You know, it's almost like two records in one. A whole side of vocals and the opposite with instrumentals."

With Sancious providing all the vocals, keyboards and guitars on the album, he's joined by an appropriately agile and shifting cast of world-class drummers including Italian jazzer Adriano Molinari, Living Colour's Will Calhoun, Prince alumni Michael Bland, long-time collaborator Joe Bonadio and session legend Vinnie Colaiuta. The album is peppered with samples of news recordings, often bookending the tracks with that spoken narrative adding conceptual heft, which establish the impression of not only this being akin to a documentary soundtrack but, as the instrumentalist describes it, a movie for the ears. "What you see in your mind's eye is up to you how you feel. It's very cinematic. The instrumental part of the album, I think, I'm really happy with that as well. This album is the gradual unfolding of what I wanted to say, the way I wanted to say it, and combining it with the other music. What's interesting to me if you listen to the thing in the order that the songs are presented, it's really an interesting journey. It's pretty, pretty broad. It's like an ocean of music, of experience and concept and feelings and stuff, not to mention the musical styles. There's a lot of musical ground that's covered there. The song *War in Heaven*, that's a whole other thing. Just me and Vinnie Colaiuta going at it." The track recalls some of the dextrous interplay that was a feature of his *Forest Of Feelings* album. "Yes, I agree, and another song that does that for me is *The Treehouse*. I think has kind of sonic connection to *Forest Of Feelings* and that era of performance without being harmonically identical to it."

On *In The Middle Of The Night* an exhausted, groggy voice can be heard complaining about being unable to sleep. It belongs to Sancious himself, captured audio vérité, sounding weighed down by the situation we currently find ourselves in. "I was so concerned about things that I just was up, I could not sleep," he says. The current 'America first' direction of US foreign policy fills Sancious with grave concerns, as does the domestic agenda being pursued by Trump's White House. "It's all gone backward. Trump has to be removed from that office. The longer he's there, the worse it'll get. Whatever you thought this person was going to do for you, it's wrong. The support for him was misguided and it's really damaging the country. It's a very worrying time. Gosh, I mean if things weren't frisky enough, we're having to deal with a worldwide pandemic."

Like other musicians, Sancious' paid live work has come to a halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At a time when he might be expected to be gigging in support of the new album, he finds himself quarantined at home. With numerous one-off dates gone, a whole year's worth of income has also been lost following the cancellation of a tour with Italian vocalist Zucchero. "We were due to start that in May but it's all gone. I was talking with Will Calhoun on the phone the other day, and we were wondering what's going to happen until live work comes back? It's not like we're going to get the all-clear and boom — we're all running out of our places and the concert halls are filling up again. So, with all of this employment gone away it's going to take a while to come back or resurface some kind of other way. I mean, it's going to be more important than ever to monetise the internet and find ways to keep producing music somehow and then find a way to give you enough income to help you survive. It's really challenging. To be honest, it's a day by day thing.

"It is truly a different industry from the one that when I got started in the 60s and 70s. You really have to reinvent yourself. I think there's a kind of continual… not so much reinvention, but an expansion when it comes to finding other ways to reach people."

Though taking care of business is a necessary adjunct of being a professional musician, what's interesting when you talk to Sancious is the deep relationship he has with music in its most natural unmediated state. When he speaks, Sancious possesses a stately calm, giving the impression of someone who's warm, quick to smile, and pretty grounded; he knows where he comes from, who he is and where he's going. Part of his composure and sense of focus comes from his long-standing practice of meditation and yoga. "I started meditating when I was a teenager," he reveals. "I think I was still in the E Street Band when I started, or managed transcendental meditation. So I had to be like 17 or 18. I also do yoga. Sting taught me the form of yoga that he does, which is really challenging and hard. I feel privileged to have this music come through me because I've seen the effect that it has on people. I can't explain to you how I feel when I hear the music and what effect it has on me internally, emotionally, and I know that I'm not special in that way. Other people will have their own way, in their own time, to their own degree, they will have that energetic experience of it. I feel myself to be an instrument for the music itself in the same way that, you know, these keyboards, that's the instrument that I then touch to get it into the third dimension and get it to people."

Onstage in 1987, L-R: Tony Levin, Peter Gabriel, Manu Katche, David Sancious and David Rhodes.

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

The title of the album, *Eyes Wide Open*, is for Sancious another way of saying that things have to change and change for the better, but the caveat is that you have to stand up and be counted. "It's on everybody more than ever to be aware of what's going on in our world and to help people where you can, and to stand up for what's true and right in life and not side with the people who want to deny the facts and deny reality. There is the lyric from the title track, *Eyes Wide Open* that goes: *'Up is down, the sky's on the ground, shoot you in the back is the name of a town somewhere, somewhere in America.'* That's messed up. There are lots and lots of people who will take that pay cheque from Fox News or Trump's administration who'll tell you that you're bright green and you're from Mars right to your face and just distort and deny reality. That has to be stood against and everyone could do that in their daily life. Everyone's got their own responsibilities. Like we're responsible for our own bodies; what we do and what we don't do; what we believe and don't believe; what we're going to take part in what we're going to stand against."

Eyes Wide Open is out now. See www.davidsancious.com for more.

“I can’t explain to you how I feel when I hear the music and what effect it has on me internally, emotionally.”

NEVER MIND THE SEX PISTOLS

HERE'S THE

PROG

GeRS

The history books will tell you that prog died the day the Pistols uttered the F-word on TV. That the careers of Yes and ELP were ruined by the spiky-haired revolution. The truth, however, is substantially different. Over the following pages, we see how the history books were wrong. We go behind the scenes on Pink Floyd's *Animals* – an album that was released in the same year that punk grabbed the UK's music scene by the throat and gobbed in its face. We also discover what happened when prog legends Rick Wakeman and Robert Fripp came face-to-face with The Stranglers' JJ Burnel and The Clash's Joe Strummer. Prepare to be shocked...

DID PUNK KILL PROG?

Words: Tommy Udo

In all the interminable books, memoirs, articles and TV documentaries contemplating punk, there's one thing they all seem to agree upon: punk rock killed progressive rock. "Almost overnight, after the Sex Pistols, prog rock came to a halt," declaimed one pundit in a BBC documentary. Very well phrased — but factually totally untrue.

The fact that Johnny Rotten once wore a Pink Floyd T-shirt with the words 'I hate' scrawled in felt-tip above the band's name is always held up as evidence that punk was some kind of reaction to prog. Yet Rotten (as John Lydon) was a huge fan of Hawkwind, Van der Graaf Generator, Can and various other bands whose progness was never in doubt. The idea that punk 'had to happen' because a whole generation was idly fuming away at the complexity of King Crimson or the overblown theatricality of Rick Wakeman's staging of *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table* on ice is just absurd.

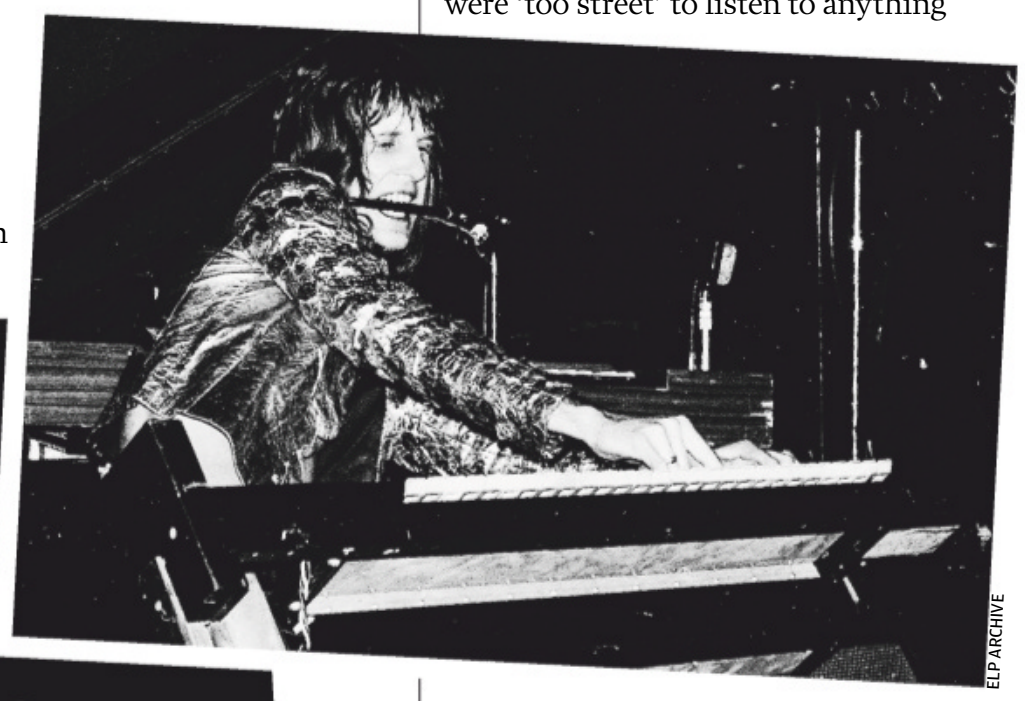
As a crop-haired angry young man myself, I can't recall ever wasting a minute of 1976, '77 or '78 thinking about how much I hated prog. Like most of my contemporaries I was having too much of a good time to really give a toss about prog, disco, rockabilly, pub rock or chart pop one way or another. There were too many other things in the world to hate. If there was anything musically that I couldn't stand it was the constant diet of crap novelty records and golden oldies and smug DJs that ruled Radio 1 and *Top Of The Pops* in those days.

In the pages of *NME, Melody Maker* and *Sounds* we were told that prog was the class enemy and encouraged to feel hatred. This was a revolution and, to paraphrase Lenin, what use is a revolution without firing squads? The thesis was that punk was a product of the salt-of-the-earth discontented proletariat, while prog was made exclusively by evil, right-wing toffs, and consumed only by Tory voters, fox hunters and those addled by false consciousness. The reality, of course, was that while prog certainly had its share of former public schoolboys, at least the prog rockers were honest about their origins while people like the privately educated Clash guitarist Joe Strummer felt that it was important to fake a prolier-than-thou past for themselves.

At my comprehensive school, as well as a smattering of punks, the popular artists of the day in 1976 were Frank Zappa, Mahavishnu Orchestra and — for some reason — The Incredible String Band. Conversely, the boys from the nearby fee-paying school insisted they were 'too street' to listen to anything more complicated than the Ramones, and that their spare time was spent sniffing glue, getting nicked by the pigs (*maaan*) and smashing the state.

The attitude of prog musicians to punk was sometimes condescending: Rick Wakeman allegedly sent a letter to the head of his label, A&M, asking to have the Sex Pistols dropped; Roger Waters made it clear that he hated punk; the lack of musicianship was decried. You could sense that they felt threatened, though obviously they needn't have. Outside of the fantasy world created by the music press, it was prog that really ruled.

In the official history, 1977 was the year of anarchy in the UK, The Clash, no future. But it was also the year of Rush's *A Farewell to Kings*, Pink Floyd's *Animals* and Yes' *Going For The One*: the latter two were Top 3 albums, and all were accompanied by massive tours, some the bands' biggest ever. In the same period that saw the Pistols shoot and burn, not only did prog not die, it actually enjoyed one of its golden ages. In the last years of the 70s, prog continued to outsell punk both on album and live. The decade culminated



ELP ARCHIVE

Punk versus prog: John Lydon and Keith Emerson.

HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

"In the same period that saw the Pistols shoot and burn, prog enjoyed one of its golden ages."

with one of the most massive prog albums ever: Pink Floyd's *The Wall*.

In the late 70s and early 80s, UK, IQ, Pendragon, Twelfth Night, Marillion and Pallas formed, while a realignment of prog's superpowers created Asia. It says much about the hubris of the media that, having failed to notice these bands, there was a sort of collective assumption that they didn't exist. But with practically no press, radio or TV coverage, these acts regularly sold out shows and between them shifted millions of albums. What's more, away from the stadium level bands, the thriving UK progressive underground continued to make challenging and innovative music: Soft Machine, Henry Cow (and successor band Art Bears), Van der Graaf Generator and Bill Nelson (formerly of Be Bop Deluxe and later Red Noise) made some of their best albums around this time.

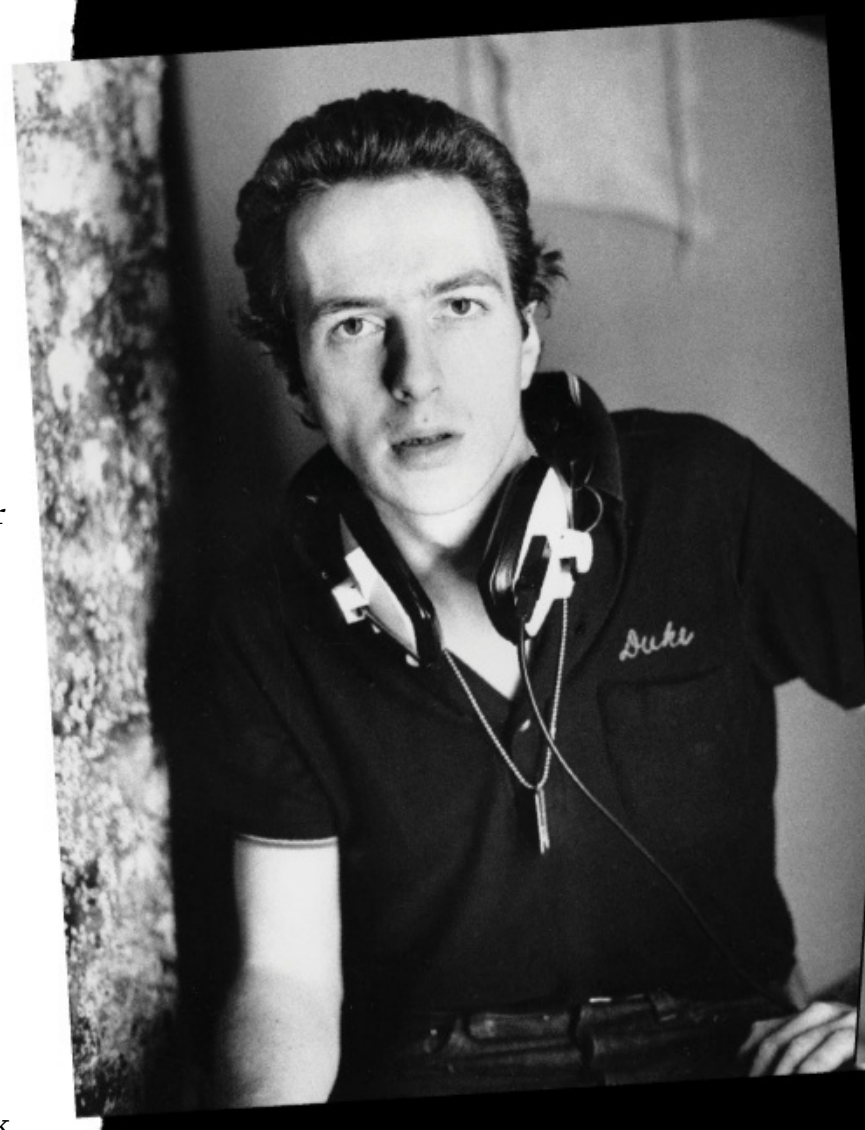
Perhaps even more interesting were the bands who emerged in the immediate aftermath of punk who tried to make music that did more than repeat the same three-chord formula. Cabaret Voltaire from Sheffield incorporated electronics, sampling and Hawkwind-like light shows; Glasgow's Simple Minds, particularly on their Steve Hillage-produced 1981 double album *Sons And Fascination/Sister Feelings Call*, incorporated many elements from classic Genesis along with krautrock, disco and avant-garde; Ultravox, on their third classic album, *Systems Of Romance*, made an album that seemed to continue the direction that Roxy Music abandoned after *For Your Pleasure*.

Indeed, the fact that many of the post-punk generation were making a new kind of prog wasn't lost on some more conservative commentators: "It's bloody Curved Air," sneered Nick Lowe when asked about Siouxsie & The Banshees, whose first three albums definitely pushed the boundaries of punk rock to their limits. And when Wire – arguably a synthesis of Ramones-style minimalist punk and high-prog complexity – recorded a 15-minute track called *Crazy About Love* for a John Peel Show session in 1979. Peel grumbled that it was a step backwards.

Today, prog is almost all-pervasive. There are so many bands – from Dream Theater, Opeth and Haken, to Anathema, Big Big Train and even left-field superstars Tool – who can all be termed prog. Pink Floyd's Live 8 reunion in 2005 not only stole the show but saw their album sales go through the roof afterwards, while the influence of King Crimson, Floyd and Yes is everywhere. Not bad for something that supposedly 'came to a halt' 40 years ago.

In 1981, the editor of US mag *Musician* brought the worlds of prog and punk together – and discovered that they actually got along very well. Meet the Crimson-loving **Joe Strummer** and The Clash-loving **Robert Fripp** as they go head to head.

Words: Vic Garbarini



JOE STRUMMER: DAVID CORIO/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES
ROBERT FRIPP: DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

WHEN STRUMMER MET FRIPP

The idea was simple: you get the two foremost proponents of the idea of music as a force for personal and social change, sit 'em down together for a few beers, and see what happens. The potential problems were obvious: on the surface, polite, articulate Robert Fripp and acerbic, street-wise Joe Strummer don't appear to be the most compatible duo in rock history. As musicians they seem to follow widely divergent paths, with the classically trained Fripp exploring the oceanic textures and laser-like solos of Frippertronics, or the fractured, geometric etudes of The League Of Gentlemen (his short-lived project with XTC's Barry Andrews, who would shortly afterwards form Shriekback), while Strummer the street poet and musical innocent bashes out three-chord symphonies, or heads further up the river into the dark, sensual heartland of reggae and dub. But this writer had a strong feeling that things were not what they seemed on the surface, and that these two had more in common than might be apparent at first glance.

What links them goes far deeper than style, personality, musical

taste, or social background. It's a question of sharing a sense of commitment, both to their music and society at large, and having the courage and integrity to back up their ideals with action. It involves a willingness to risk everything — including career, financial security, and public approval — to pursue their visions without compromise. In short, I believed that Robert Fripp and Joe Strummer were tapping the same wellspring and aiming for the same goal. We agreed to meet in London, where Robert was beginning rehearsals with a new band, Discipline, a dream aggregation consisting of ex-Crimson mate Bill Bruford on drums, former Bowie sideman Adrian Belew on guitar, and session bassist Tony Levin, that later became the new incarnation of King Crimson. Strummer was in rehearsals for an upcoming US tour, and was hesitant at first when I mentioned bringing Fripp along. I offered to just do a straight interview with him alone if he wasn't comfortable.

"No," said Joe, "I guess we can try it. After all, Fripp's probably closer to what we're trying to do than anybody I can think of."

Within a week, Fripp and I were standing in a garage-like London studio, watching The Clash work through some decidedly funky rhythms before Joe suggested we retire to the friendly neighbourhood pub for refreshments. Over the next few hours, Strummer revealed that he was a long-time Crimson fan, and Fripp commented that The Clash played "the best rock'n'roll show I've seen in six years". This is what happened when Strummer met Fripp.

One of the main things you two have in common is the belief that music can actually change society. How can this happen?

Joe Strummer: Because music goes directly to the head and heart of a human being. More directly and in more dimensions than the written word. And if that can't change anybody, then there's not a lot that will. Music can hit as hard as if I hit you with a baseball bat, you know? But it's not an overnight thing; you can't expect everything to change quickly. I figure it's an organic process. Insidious. Look how listening to all those hippie records has affected everybody in general: everybody feels looser about things now.

Robert Fripp: I did a radio show in New York with Bob Geldof of the Boomtown Rats recently, and he said he didn't believe rock'n'roll could change anything. And I said to him, "I disagree." So he said, "Well, if you build up hope in Joe Bloggs in some slum in Northern Ireland, he's just going to wind up disappointed". And I said, "Look, if there's Joe Bloggs in his appalling social conditions in Northern Ireland with no hope, and that becomes Joe Bloggs at No.8 in his appalling social conditions but with hope, you have two entirely different situations.

JS: That's right. Good point that.

RF: Then it's possible for the geezer at No.9 to get some hope, too. And then it spreads up the street, and you have a community. Then you're talking about something which isn't dramatic and exciting, but which contains the possibility of real change. It's easy to miss because it's essentially personal, and like Joe says, it takes time.

LEX VAN ROSSEN/MAI/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Joe Strummer: not bad for a guy who got kicked out of the choir.

> "Fripp's probably closer to what we're trying to do than anybody I can think of."
>
> **Joe Strummer**

Is it the music itself that can do this, or does it merely serve as a rallying point?

RF: Both, really. It serves as a rallying point, but it can work more directly too. I think sometimes at a really good gig when there's a certain quality in the music, a kind of liberation can take place, and you don't go home and take quite as much crap from the news as you did before, because you have actually tasted a different quality of experience, which changes how you think about things. So to a degree you've been liberated.

How did you both wind up choosing music as your means of expression?

JS: Well, I started playing music around '73. I'd tried everything else, and I couldn't find anything I wanted to do or anywhere to be. So I got into music because it seemed like the best thing around. You could say it was the thing that had the least laws and restrictions about it.

RF: I was trained as a guitarist. So I took lessons and I suppose I eventually could have become a classical guitarist. But it seemed that I was spending years and years working incredibly hard to have the opportunity to play other people's music. In terms of even serious music, the guitar repertoire is pretty second-rate. And it's anachronistic. Hearing Hendrix hit one chord said infinitely more to me than the entire classical guitar repertoire. And I realised rock was very malleable — that within it you can play classical music or jazz or blues or whatever you cared to, and it was still rock. If you went outside the form in jazz or classical you were selling out. But if you did it in rock music you were gifted!

What about you, Joe? If you had to point to your major source of inspiration, who would it be?

JS: Bo Diddley.

Anybody else?

JS: Bo Diddley.

Right. Incidentally, the stuff I heard you playing at rehearsal tonight sounded a lot closer to George Clinton than to *White Riot*.

JS: That's one of the most important things I've come to over the last few years — feeling more into funky music. At first I just couldn't take it at all. I thought it was a waste of time.

Do you find something in funk and reggae that rock'n'roll doesn't have?

JS: But rock'n'roll doesn't exist now!

What do you mean by that?

JS: That was heavy metal — that was something to do with other people and has nothing to do with me. I don't even understand what it's all about.

Alright, what do you call what you were doing on your first two albums?

JS: That was punk rock. Punk rock still exists, but I'm not interested in that either.

Why not? Because it's lost its creative impetus?

JS: Yeah, the fans killed it. They wanted it to stay the same, and that ended our interest in it. So they got what they deserved: a lot of rubbish, basically.

Since *London Calling* there's been a marked change in your musical approach: more emphasis on melody, increasingly sophisticated song structures, even a few ballads. Is this something you guys felt capable of all along?
JS: It's a bit like weight lifting, in a way. If we met every day and did some weight training, in a year we'd be the heroes of the beach. We were just flexing our muscles in a musical sense. Obviously, if you absorb yourself in music and practise every day, you become more capable.

And you feel that you don't have to stick to that three-chord screaming punk intensity in order to keep your creative spark alive?
JS: Yeah, but will the audience accept it?

What do you think? How long will it take your audience to understand what you're doing?
RF: Two to five years, right? [General laughter.] Seriously! It takes about that long to disseminate. It's like throwing rocks in the middle of a lake and waiting for the ripples to get to shore. And in our industry, I've noticed it takes two to five years for an idea to be accepted.
JS: God, that's depressing. Our records will be deleted by then!

It seems that during the punk era there was a tremendous release of energy, and it doesn't matter how the music came out because everybody could feel the intensity...
JS: Correction. It used to not matter.

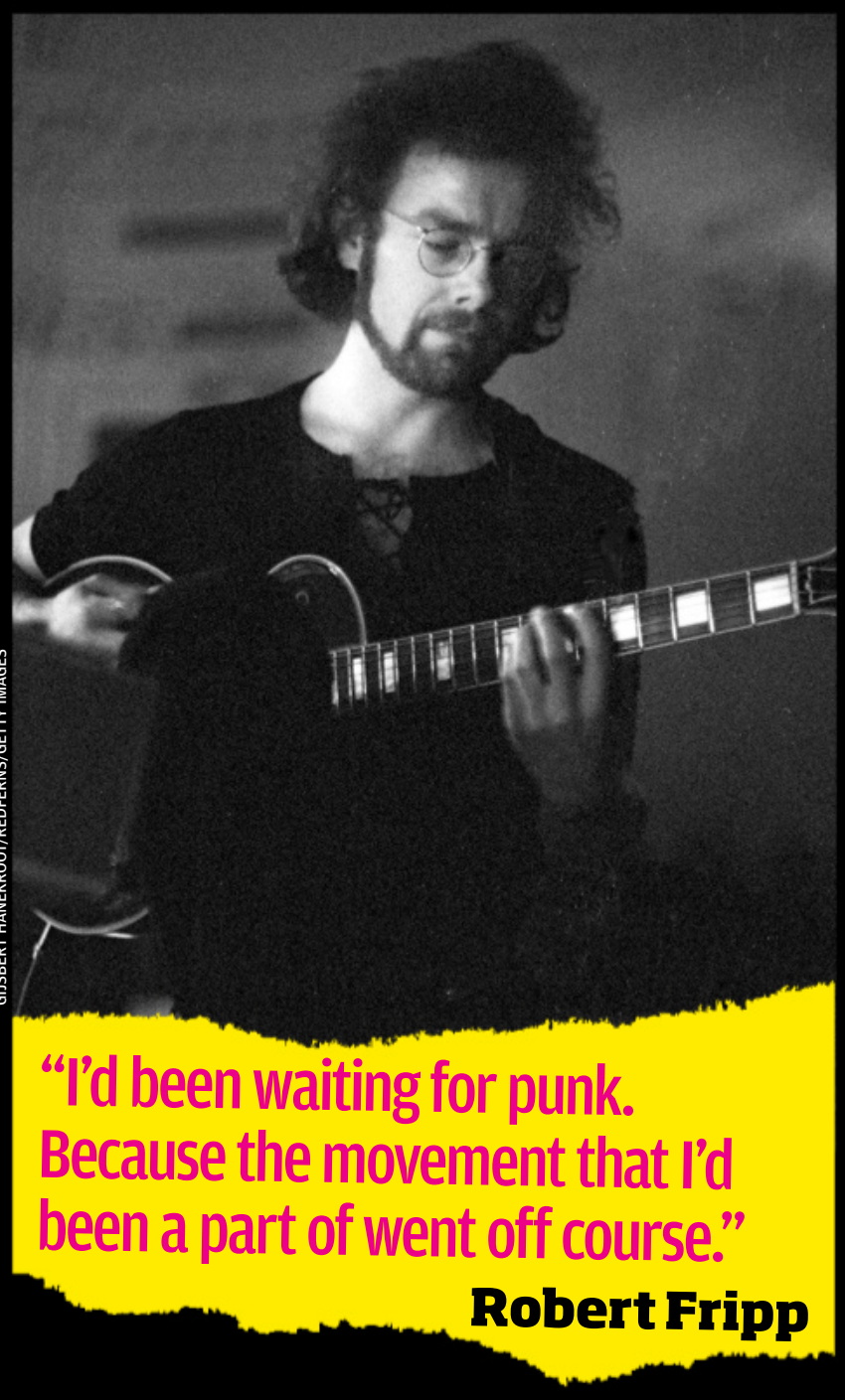
...And now you come to a point where you want to refine and develop your music, but you don't want to lose that energy. How do you do that? How do you avoid becoming like those 70s bands, just going through the motions?
JS: Well, that's where everybody winds up, isn't it?

Are you going to end up like that?
JS: Someone would give you odds on that.
RF: With the early Crimson, we were all desperate geezers.
JS: [To Fripp] Do you remember a tent in Plumpton?
RF: Yes! And do you know why we played there?
JS: I was in that tent, Robert.
RF: Really? What was it like?
JS: It was terrific... Really terrific.
RF: Can I tell you why we played there? The agency that booked it hadn't been completely straight with us, so we said, "You're no longer our agents." So instead of putting us on front stage – where we'd wipe out anything they had – they stuck us in the tent, so we wouldn't touch anyone. It was a deliberate move to fuck up our careers.
JS: And The Who were dead boring that night.
RF: I remember there was a girl still there an hour after we packed up. Suddenly she says, "Is it finished?" An hour after it was over.
JS: Yeah, it was like that in that tent.

Do you ever feel that an audience is just sucking you dry of energy, and not really joining in?
JS: Yeah, I feel that sometimes. And I get angry and I tell them about it when I do.

If you had to put into 25 words or fewer what it is you're trying to say when you get up on stage, what would it be?
JS: LOOK AT ME!

Robert Fripp: "An honourable way of working."



GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"I'd been waiting for punk. Because the movement that I'd been a part of went off course."
Robert Fripp

[Laughter] Yeah, but lots of bands do that and they don't get the same response that you do. What's the difference?
RF: Anything a performer does on a public platform is significant, even just scratching your ass. When I go on stage as 'Robert Fripp' it's more real, more alive. I can do stuff I can't do as 'Bob Fripp from Wimbourne, Dorset' and it has a significance quite apart from me... But when you do a gig, and maybe it's not even a good gig, but somehow there's a relationship between the audience and performers that's right, then no one's ripped off. And it feels good. It feels clean. It feels like an honourable way of working. I don't have to do this for a living, but because I decided to do it for another three years...
JS: What would you do for a living if not music?
RF: I'd probably still do it, [just not in public].
JS: You mean just for your mates?
RF: Yes. And some guitar teaching. Actually, I'd like to be able to go out and play 250-seaters with other musicians. At the moment, I can only afford to do it on my own. I don't want to play 3,000 seaters because I feel I can't make contact with the people I'm playing to. I told my management that today and they said, "You can't do it your way; you can't pay the bills that way."

Can you make money just from doing gigs?
JS: No. A big no! It's like throwing our money away. That's our ultimate aim, to be able to break even on tour. No matter how carefully you do it, you always come out in the red.
RF: King Crimson only made money after we broke up. After six years of hard work we had a deficit of $125,000 [£100,000]. When we disbanded, the records went on selling, and that's how we finally made some money. Nowadays, I spend more time working at approaches to business than I do to music. I reckon I spend one per cent of my professional life actually playing guitar. And that's not an exaggeration – that's literal!

Okay, Completely changing the subject, Joe, you wrote in *Clampdown* that anger can be power...
JS: Because you can either destroy things with anger, or it can motivate you to learn about your situation and follow things through. People just thought the whole punk movement was negative, but that was just a superficial reading.
RF: When I first heard about punk back in '77 I'd been waiting for six years to hear that kind of commitment: to hear some geezer hit a drum as if all he wanted to do in his life was hit a drum. And to mean it was all a great political statement. Because the movement that I'd been a part of went off course.

What went wrong?
RF: It went off because a bunch of working class guys tried to move up to a middle class level of income by aping middle class traditions. Supposedly

technique was important, but it became a facile technique — it wasn't real. People weren't in charge of all those endless displays of notes. They were becoming programmed, playing charts and licks, and it wasn't human.

And yet both of you get criticised by people who don't believe you can maintain commitment and still evolve into different musical styles.
JS: Maybe they're right, but how do they arrive at that conclusion?

Well, they can feel the energy from things like *21st Century Schizoid Man* and *White Riot*, but not necessarily from subtler mediums like dub or Frippertronics.
RF: Yes, but when you lose your virginity there's an innocence that you're never going to recapture. But that doesn't mean you're going to give up screwing! You learn to experience your innocence in a different kind of way.

PRESS/KING CRIMSON/DGM

Robert Fripp with Adrian Belew and Bill Bruford, backstage in Norwich in 1981.

Joe Strummer: [To Fripp] Do you remember a tent in Plumpton?
Robert Fripp: Yes! And do you know why we played there?
Joe Strummer: I was in that tent, Robert.
Robert Fripp: Really? What was it like?
Joe Strummer: It was terrific... Really terrific.

JS: Great point. Listen to what he's saying...
RF: When you lose your virginity it doesn't matter that you don't know what you're doing, because it has to do with innocence. So for me, art is the capacity to re-experience your innocence. How do you lose your virginity every time you make love? How do you do that musically every time you go on stage?

Okay, you asked the question. How do you?
RF: You have to know what you want, and you have to have the wish. One night at the Marquee in 1969, King Crimson went out on a tangent, maybe just for five minutes and you never knew where the hell it was, but I was telepathic. I knew everything that was going on, and what people were thinking. Because there was that energy in the room, and... I became a human being in such a way that — if that's what it means to be a human being, then I want to become a human being! Once you've had it, you have to find a way of living like that again. Otherwise there's no point in anything. And so you have go on 'til you find a way to do it. And if you want it enough you get nearer. There are a lot of techniques and disciplines that can help make you open to that quality of experience. I think that mastery of a technique or subject for a musician means being both a virgin and an accomplished lover at the same time.

What's the role of technique in all this?
RF: Technique is part of what you do in order to get there. But when you're there, you really don't give a shit about technique.
JS: Right. It's a combination of innocence and expertise.
RF: ...And the more technique you have, the more you throw away, and that gives you more authority. If you can only play one chord, and you play it with all you've got, that's pure. If you can play 10,000 chords, but you play one that's pure, it has an authority which the others don't.

JS: As Kierkegaard says, "Don't fall in the cup of wisdom that you drink from." What he's saying applies to music, too. All those flurries of notes and runs are like falling in, when all you have to do is drink.

[To Strummer] That reminds me of that line in *The Sound of Sinners* [from The Clash's fourth album, *Sandinista!*]: *'Looking for that great jazz note...'*
JS: ...Right, *'looking for that great jazz note that destroyed the walls of Jericho'*. You hit it. That's what we're after.

If you had to put into words what it is you'd like to give people through your music, what would it be?
JS: That they feel they could start to play, too. When I was a teenager I felt that musicians were a world apart — a secret society I could never join. So I didn't try until I was almost too old. I hope it doesn't seem so impossible like it did for me watching Clapton at Wembley and thinking, "I could never do that." It's not that hard, really. Now, I'm not a born musician like maybe Robert is...
RF: Not at all! I was tone deaf and had no sense of rhythm...
JS: I got kicked out of the choir...
RF: They wouldn't even let me join the choir!
JS: Well, that's quite an achievement, Robert. I really enjoy and appreciate what you've done.
RF: Sometimes — and this is only a theory — I think that music needs a musician to play it. That the music is alive, but you have to be out there to know it. And at that point it may be possible that the music is waiting to be played. So it needs a musician.
JS: I've been thinking about this recently. I find that when I write a really good song, it's a blur in my mind when I actually wrote it. I know the song exists, 'cos I can play it for my friends, but I just can't remember what happened between thinking of the idea of the song and finally playing it for my friend. Something happened that I can't remember.

One last question: what's the most important thing you've learned about playing music over the last five years?
JS: That unless you're prepared to give your heart and soul to it completely, forget it.

Well, that seems like a good place for us to stop.
RF: I'm up for some pinball. Do you play, Joe?
JS: Are you kidding? From Soho down to Brighton, I must have played them all...

Call of the Wild

Pink Floyd's *Animals* was a savage concept piece that tore strips off the social order of 1970s Britain – and hastened the band's demise. "Let it be said," notes Roger Waters, "that it's a very violent album…"

Words: Henry Yates

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

1977: the enormous inflatable pig floats above the stage during Floyd's Animals tour.

> "*Pigs* is a fairly compassionate scream of abuse. If you can scream abuse in a compassionate way."
>
> **Roger Waters**

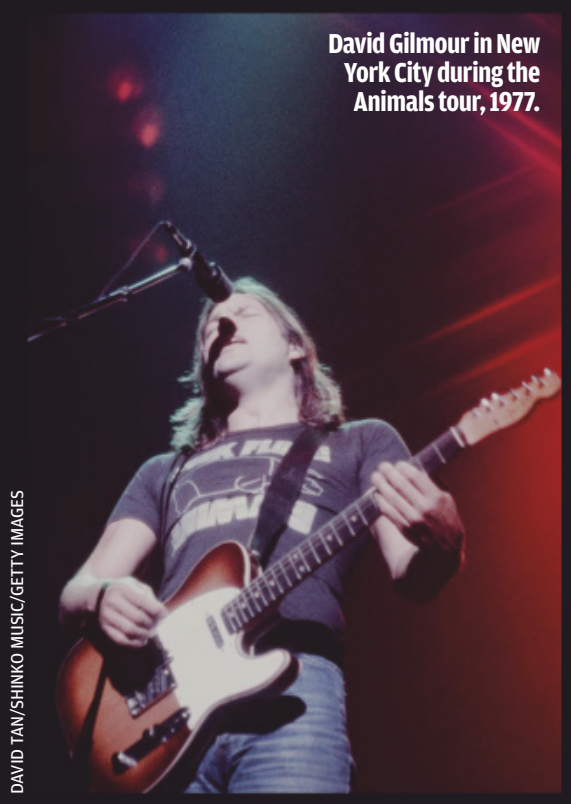
It was 1976 and Pink Floyd were a band on the brink of cultural obsolescence. In the wake of *Wish You Were Here*, the tills had kept ringing, but when John Lydon – recently rechristened Johnny Rotten – skulked across London that year in his mythologised 'I hate Pink Floyd' T-shirt, it caught the sentiment of British youth for whom the quartet were millionaire windbags, cosseted from life at the sharp end and representing all that punk had come to tear down.

Ironic, then, that even as the new guard bayed for their blood, Pink Floyd were busy recording an album of such anti-establishment malice that it would make the Sex Pistols' *God Save The Queen* sound like a squeak of dissent by comparison. "Let it be said," noted Roger Waters in one radio interview at the time, "that although the violence is tempered with sadness – and even a smidgeon of compassion here and there – *Animals* is a very violent album."

Animals was not directly inspired by punk, the band insisted. Waters has reflected since that he "didn't

Hell On Wheels

Revisiting the living nightmare of the Animals tour.



David Gilmour in New York City during the Animals tour, 1977.

DAVID TAN/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

Debuting in Dortmund, West Germany on January 23, 1977, Floyd's biggest tour yet unveiled staging and lighting unprecedented for a rock show, alongside a fleet of inflatables.

A reproduction of the pig from the *Animals* sleeve was detonated nightly as it sailed over the fans. To accompany *Dogs*, there was also the so-called 'nuclear family': grotesque blow-ups created by Mark Fisher and Jonathan Park. "I think the boys thought I'd gone the way of Syd [Barrett] when I said that we needed a giant inflatable family and a load of animals," reflected Roger Waters in 1987.

However, faced with the band playing to a click track in headphones, surrounded by airborne latex, *NME*'s Mick Farren wrote of a "depressingly hopeless journey through a menacingly sterile cosmos". In Frankfurt, a dry-ice hitch prompted fans to bottle the stage.

Things got worse when the tour (now dubbed In The Flesh) moved to North America. "The shows varied in quality," noted Nick Mason. "We were not spending enough time on key aspects like segueing from one number to the next. My memory is that some of the staging was as erratic as the music."

Now more interested in golf than socialising, Waters was travelling separately from his bandmates, and growing increasingly agitated at playing to drunken hordes calling out for *Money*. When a firework went off in New York during *Pigs On The Wing*, Waters chastised the perpetrator as "a stupid motherfucker". When the tour concluded at Montreal's Olympic Stadium, he snapped. "There was some kid trying to climb the chain-link fence. I finally got so angry with this kid – who was screaming all the way through one of the quieter songs – that I spat at him. And when I came offstage afterwards, I thought, 'What have I been reduced to here? And what has happened to the relationship between the band and the audience?'" So began Waters' concept for *The Wall*. But that's a whole different animal...

notice" the nascent punk scene as it raged around him, while David Gilmour "didn't feel like it was particularly relevant to us". But given the cultural sea change of the era, it's surely no coincidence that a similar white-hot anthropological rage boils through this 10th album, albeit shrouded in Waters' conceit of an Orwellian future-world where social classes are represented by pigs, dogs and sheep. "I've had the idea of *Animals* in the back of my mind for many years," the bassist told one interviewer. "It's an old chestnut, really, isn't it?"

These were indeed songs of a certain vintage. Of the five tracks that make up *Animals*, both *Sheep* and *Dogs* had appeared in concert two years prior (then known as *Raving And Drooling* and *You Gotta To Be Crazy*). "We used those two tracks, which went back to 1974," explains Gilmour, "and changed the names, doctored them around and stuck them on the album."

The great meltdown

In April 1976, when the band convened at their new north London recording facility on Britannia Row, Waters completed the tracklisting with *Pigs (Three Different Ones)* and the two-part *Pigs On The Wing*. A troubling pattern was emerging. While Gilmour was co-credited and contributes joint vocals for *Dogs* — and maintains that he "didn't feel remotely squeezed out on that album" — Nick Mason argues that Waters held the sessions in a creative stranglehold, "really keeping Dave down and frustrating him deliberately".

Richard Wright, for his part, saw *Animals* as the start of the great Pink Floyd meltdown. "It was difficult," the keys man told Floyd biographer Mark Blake. "That was when Roger really began to start believing that he was the sole writer of the band. With regards to that album, it was partly my fault, because I didn't have much to offer. Dave, who did have something to offer, only managed to get a couple of things on there. Compared to, say, *Wish You Were Here, Animals* was a slog."

Revisit the album and the venom isn't immediately apparent. On the contrary, never has a record started so deceptively as *Animals*, which opens with a cloud of strummed acoustic guitar, accompanied by the most heartfelt vocal of Waters' career, devoted to his new girlfriend Carolyne Anne Christie. "There was a certain amount of doubt as to whether that song was going to find its way onto the album," noted *Waters* of *Pigs On The Wing (Part One)*. "But otherwise the album would just have been a sort of scream of rage."

DAVID TAN/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

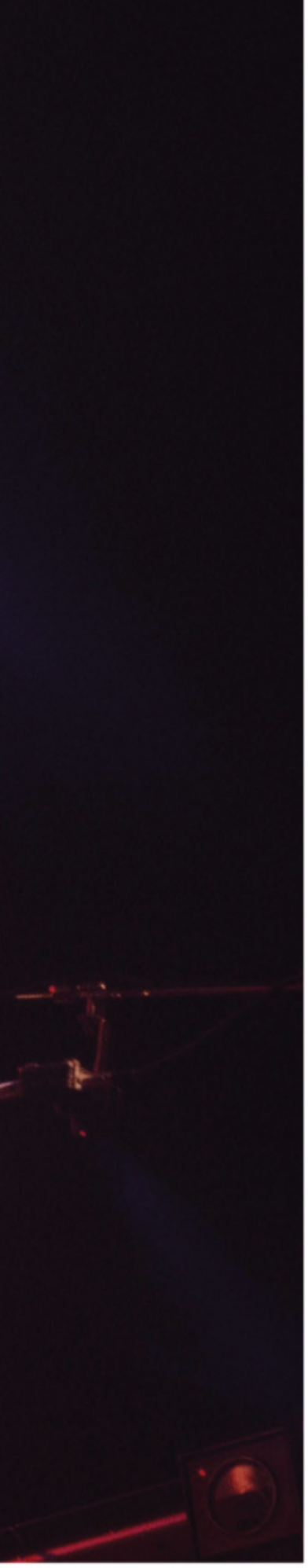
Roger Waters on Pink Floyd's Animals tour in NYC, July 1977.

Right: A Pink Floyd bootleg of their 1974 tour highlighting the live performances of *Raving And Drooling* and *Gotta Be Crazy*.

Release the dogs

True enough, anyone lulled by that lovestruck opening gambit was quickly jolted headlong into dystopia by *Dogs*. A 17-minute polemic whose genre-slipping music gave a bed for lyrics of abject alienation and savagery, it portrayed a Machiavellian businessman whose club tie and handshake mean he's *'trusted by the people that you lie to, so that when they turn their backs on you, you'll get the chance to put the knife in'*. Nonetheless, in a chilling couplet delivered by Gilmour, the washed-up protagonist ends the song with his just desserts, as *'just another sad old man, all alone and dying of cancer'*.

Decorated by porcine grunts and blues-rock guitar evocative of 1975's *Have A Cigar, Pigs (Three Different Ones)* was shorter — at 11 minutes — but even more vicious, taking pot-shots at the pampered blue-bloods



with their snouts in the trough: "*Pigs* is a fairly compassionate scream of abuse," explained Waters, "if you can scream abuse in a compassionate way."

While most of his targets are painted in vague terms, the final section saw Waters single out the morality campaigner Mary Whitehouse, who was famous for her Clean Up TV campaign of the 1960s. The bassist had deliberated over the verse and repeatedly thrown it out, but says he never managed to write anything better. "I was incensed by [her]," he told *MOJO*, "as I am by all book-burners and Bible-pushers; people who foster sexual guilt and shame, who try and deny people any opportunity to fulfil their sexual destiny."

After *Pigs* had burnt out with Gilmour's blistering outro solo, a lowing of livestock bled into the bass-driven space rock of *Sheep*, which offered a redemptive vision of the oppressed masses rising up against the dog class (*'Bleating and babbling, we fell on his neck with a scream/Wave upon wave of demented avengers/ March cheerfully out of obscurity into the dream'*).

"The lyrics are not a direct expression of my feelings as on *Wish You Were Here*," stressed Waters, who also played rhythm guitar on the song (while Gilmour handled bass). "More of them are put into a third person, about more distant events. Especially something like *Sheep*, which is nothing to do with me at all, really. It's a kind of weird tract, a kind of weird, slightly jumbled tract. It's kind of admonishing and a warning, but it's not really, because it's so confused."

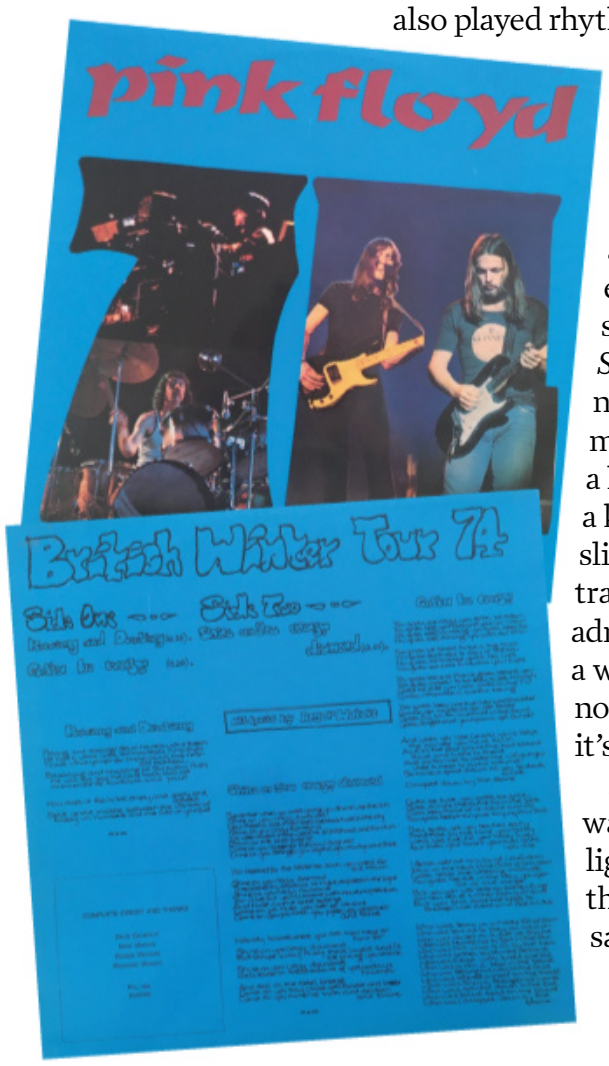
And finally, by way of much-needed light relief after the bombast and savagery, there was *Pigs On The Wing (Part Two)*. But even the opening love song's reprise reportedly caused further friction in the line-up, as it would garner Waters a second slice of the album's royalties. Nor, by all accounts, did it help band relations that session man Terrence 'Snowy' White was invited into the studio to contribute a guitar solo linking the finale back to *Part One* (only heard on the album's eight-track format).

So it was finished. Despite the decidedly radio-unfriendly material — and the supposed dominance of punk rendering everything else as irrelevant — *Animals* proved another commercial success, reaching No.2 in the UK upon its release on January 23, 1977 (albeit never matching the sales figures of the Floyd's other big-hitter releases from that decade). Curious, then, that its status has palpably receded over the years, to the point that in modern times, it's often dismissed as the gear shift between the better-loved *Wish You Were Here* and the masterpiece that took Waters' acerbic worldview to its logical conclusion, 1979's *The Wall*.

> "Although the violence is tempered with sadness and even a smidgeon of compassion here and there, *Animals* is very violent album."
> **Roger Waters**

As for the bandmembers themselves, they never did much to fight *Animals'* corner. "I didn't really like a lot of the music on the album," sniffed Wright in a BBC *Omnibus* special, while Gilmour was decidedly ambivalent while passing comment in 1992: "It's exciting and noisy and fun, and it's got really good bits of effects and stuff on it, but it's not one of our creative high points, really."

Doomy and nihilistic, *Animals* is not an easy album to fall in love with, and perhaps there are other releases from Pink Floyd around the period that you'd take off the shelf more readily. And yet, at a stroke, it proved that the band were still angry, eloquent, relevant and attuned to the thoughts of the man in the dole queue. No wonder it won them the grudging respect of the punk scene. "I'm always amazed," mused Gilmour in *NME*, "when I meet young English musicians who were big in the punk era, and they say they loved everything we did — and that includes one of the Sex Pistols. No, I'm not going to tell you which one..."



Pigs Might Fly

The story behind the iconic *Animals* sleeve art.

If the *Animals* sessions were a "slog", the sleeve art didn't come easily either. In December 1976, with the music completed, Pink Floyd invited their go-to design group Hipgnosis to present cover concepts, and were appalled at the pitch of a boy interrupting his parents mid-coitus.

In search of an alternative, Waters cycled around south London with a camera, stopping by the imposing Battersea Power Station, its four steaming chimneys evoking a fitting sense of dystopia. Yet the bassist had a twist in mind. "The band had just had an inflatable pig built for a tour," recalls Aubrey Powell of Hipgnosis in *Time Out*. "Roger and I looked up at the power station and said, 'Let's fly the pig between the chimneys.' Just like that."

If only it were that simple. Having commissioned the 40-foot high porker – now christened Algie – from German airship manufacturer Ballonfabrik, Floyd's creative team arrived at Battersea en masse. "There was a crew of riggers, inflaters and everything else," Nick Mason told *In The Studio*. "And also a highly paid marksman whose job was to deflate the pig with a well-placed shot in the event of it escaping."

Despite the eye-catching skies over Battersea, that first day of shooting proved an abject failure, the pig failing to fully inflate with helium and remaining thoroughly earth-bound. "We didn't get the shot," remembers Mason, "so the next morning everybody reported for work to try again – with the exception of the marksman."

This time, Algie inflated, only to break its moorings and take flight across London. "All flights from Heathrow were cancelled," recalls Powell, "and I was arrested. We put out a radio announcement telling people to look out for a 40-foot long, pink, inflatable pig."

"There were stories that airliners did spot the pig," picks up Mason, "although I think that's unlikely. A police helicopter did give chase for a while, but the pig was climbing like an F-14 at the time. Some time later, the safety valves opened and it began a gentle descent and landed in a field in Kent."

Powell ended up in the surreal position of being berated by a farmer. Roadies were dispatched to retrieve the pig, and a third day of photography (with two marksmen) passed without incident. "The day when we finally shot it," says Powell, "the sky wasn't as impressive as it had been, so I added the pig to the photo from the first day. It's actually a completely faked photograph."

One is a prog rock titan who saw the writing on the wall in 1977. The other is a punk hard man who spent the year brawling with other bands. So when **Rick Wakeman** and The Stranglers' **Jean-Jacques 'JJ' Burnel** got together in 2012, you'd expect bickering, bloodshed and epic keyboard solos, right? Wrong.

Words: Jerry Ewing

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE PUNK WARS, DAD?

"Let me ask you a question: What's all this about?" Stranglers' bassist Jean-Jacques Burnel, looking about as fit and healthy as a 60-something can, is leaning forward in his chair and enquiring with some intent as to why he's sitting next to the rather less buff former Yes keyboard player and all-round prog overlord Rick Wakeman.

We decided to bring together two men from opposite ends of the musical spectrum to find out what things were really like on the frontline all those years ago. In 1977 Wakeman had spent six months in Queen's Mountain Studios in Montreux working on Yes' *Going For The One* album. In stark contrast, The Stranglers were preparing to release not one but two albums, six months apart: *Rattus Norvegicus* and *No More Heroes*. For Yes it marked the end of their imperial phase. For The Stranglers it was the beginning of theirs.

> "I do remember Jon Anderson from Yes. Is he still into elves?"
> **JJ Burnel**

Surprisingly, given the fences that divided them back then, when the two men meet they greet each like old friends. It turns out that this is because they *are* old friends, their paths having crossed several times over the years.

"1977, then," booms Wakeman, settling back into his chair. "I'm not certain either of us will remember that far back..."

For JJ, 1977 would have been the start of an adventure, whereas Rick had, to put it bluntly, been round the block a few times.

Rick Wakeman: [Laughing] Thank you.

Jean-Jacques Burnel: Well, for me it was the start. It was the first time we'd released an album. We felt something was going on. A bit of a revolution. And with every revolution you chuck the baby out with the bath water. It was a Year Zero for many people, so anything

KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE OWNS

JJ Burnel and Rick Wakeman: old chums.

that had gone before was automatically excluded. It was only years later that people actually started admitting to having liked anything before Year Zero.

How long did that take?
JJ: A long time. I do remember [The Damned's] Captain Sensible at the time, without any irony, admitting he liked Abba; and when I saw the Sex Pistols they were playing old Monkees covers. There was a dichotomy between what people were doing and what they were claiming in the press. A lot of the bands claimed punk had nothing to do with drugs. I was like "What?!" We used to get called hippies because we smoked dope. Because everyone was broke and tight, speed was the drug of choice because it was cheap.

What was 1977 like for you, Rick?
RW: In 1977 I'd just rejoined Yes and we were recording *Going For The One* in Switzerland, which took six months…
JJ: Six months! We recorded our first two albums in 10 days!
RW: A lot of that time was spent with Alan [White, drummer] going skiing, Steve [Howe, guitarist] tuning his guitars, and trying to wake Chris [Squire, bassist] up! But [label boss] Ahmet Ertegun came to us and said: "I don't know how much longer I can keep funding records like this." We realised that this was the last bastion of prog rock as we knew it. We were aware of punk. I'd seen it coming a few years earlier when I saw The Tubes and took them to A&M, who signed them.
JJ: Really? We used to love The Tubes.
RW: We were aware that something was going on. And what happens when something new comes along is that it kills off what went before it, at least for a bit. When prog came along, it did away with the old beat and psychedelic groups, the way the beat groups had done away with the crooners before them.
JJ: When something new comes along, everyone wants to be a part of that peer group, to the extent that they'll deny their history. It's only when they've gained some confidence that they can start to admit where that history actually came from. Up until that point it's almost politically incorrect to admit your influences. But you can tell by just listening to the music. On our first album, the nearest thing we had to a prog rock song was this four-part piece called *Down In The Sewer*. That was about 11 minutes long and it was a suite. Prog rock, essentially, even if it was prog à la Beefheart and The Doors.

How did get you away with that?
JJ: A few people accused us of being hippies. But there was a lot of hypocrisy involved at the time. Like people claiming to be working class when they weren't. I remember Joe Strummer crying on my shoulder when we were the first band to support Patti Smith and the Ramones. He was in a rhythm and blues band called The 101'ers, and was going: "Oh I wish I had a band like yours." He used to live in the Notting Hill squats at the time. No one knew his dad was a diplomat.

Was there a rivalry between the punk bands at the time?
JJ: Not at first. Not until success kicked in. I remember meeting Steve Jones and Paul Cook from the Sex Pistols when we supported Patti Smith in 1976, and all Steve said to me was: "We're going to be famous in six months' time. I like your haircut!" Then a year later I remember having a punch-up with Steve and Paul and Paul Simonon from The Clash at the old Dingwalls. That's when the rivalry seemed to start — when we started outselling everyone.

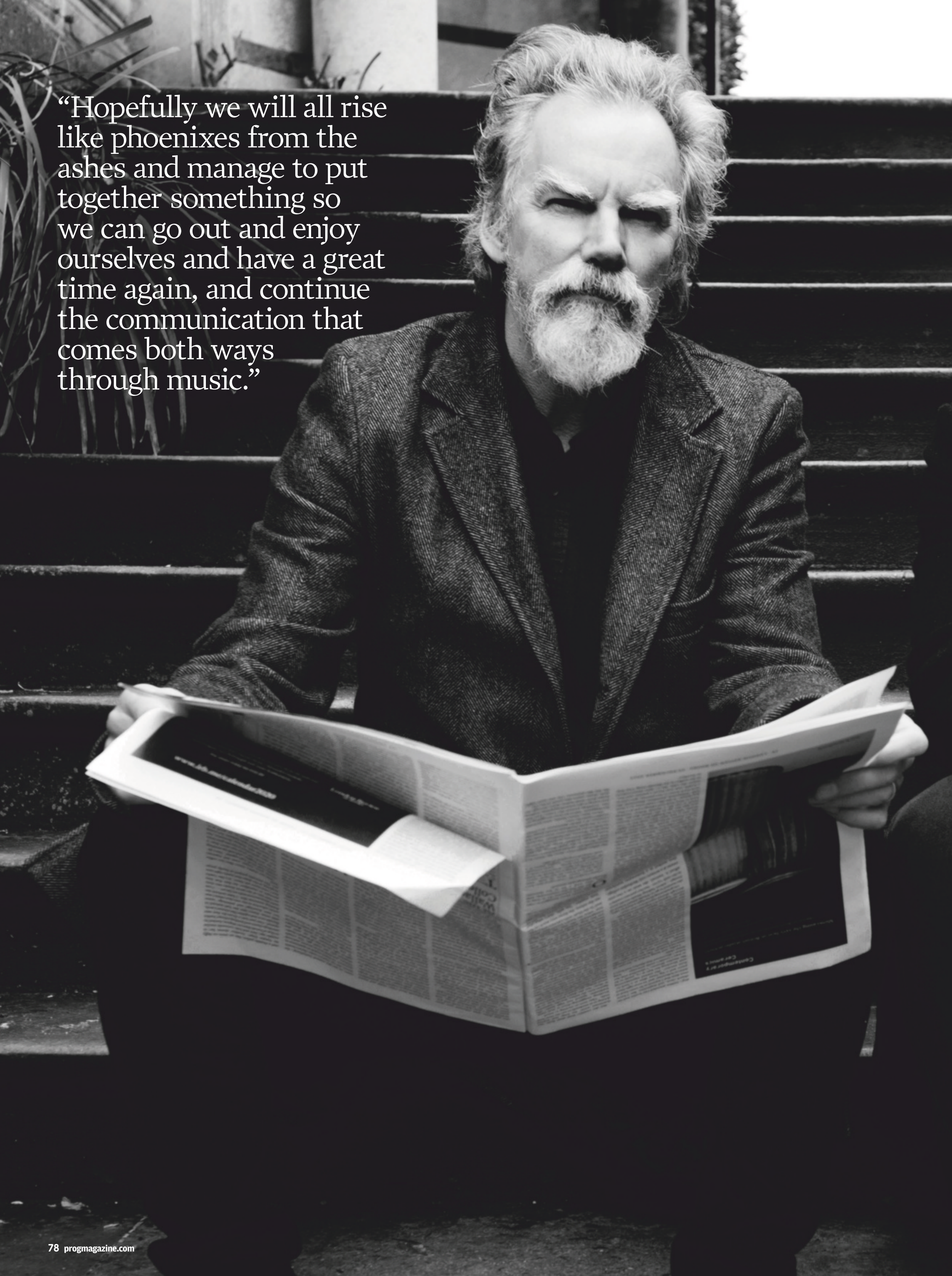
> "1977 was the last bastion of prog as we knew it. We'd seen punk coming."
>
> **Rick Wakeman**

Did that kind of rivalry exist in prog, Rick? Did you have any dust-ups with ELP or Genesis?
RW: No. The press tried to stir things up, between myself and Keith Emerson especially. But we were great friends and we used to laugh about it all. We let it go on because it fuelled press.

But that rivalry did exist between punk bands and prog bands?
JJ: We used to laugh at things like Pink Floyd taking years to make an album. But we've just taken two years to make our latest album [*Giants*]. The creative process can take time, because you're not on an assembly line. And you have a life outside of the band as well. The two worlds did occasionally meet: Freddie Mercury bumping into Sid Vicious in the studio, members of Led Zeppelin turning up to punk gigs…
JJ: I don't really recall fraternising with any bands from the previous generation apart from Dr Feelgood. When I was a kid I'd go and see bands like Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac and Black Cat Bones, who became Free, and I felt that kind of vibe in Dr Feelgood. Our keyboard player, Dave Greenfield, was a prog rocker, though. When I first met him he had platform boots on, his jacket had frills, and he had long hair and what we called a semi-pro moustache. He introduced me to *In The Land Of Grey And Pink* by Caravan. I did like that. I do remember the Yes singer [Jon Anderson], though. Is he still into elves?
RW: Jon has his own little world. When he doesn't like what's happening in the real one he retreats into his own one. He's a big fan of yours, though, JJ. We were touring together recently, driving around in the same car, listening to all sorts of music. We played some Stranglers, and he said to me: "You know, there's a few of their songs that Yes could have done." He was right. Certainly something like *Golden Brown*.
JJ: I will tell you something about *Golden Brown* that I've never told anyone before. It actually developed out of a prog rock suite. We were recording the *La Folie* album, and Hugh [Cornwell] and I were pissed off because we seemed to be writing all the songs. So we said to Jet [Black, drummer] and Dave, "Right, you two are going to write a song. We're off to the pub. Have it written when we get back." We fucked off to the pub all afternoon. Now, with Dave being a prog rocker and Jet being a jazzer, when we got back they presented us with this six-part piece of music. And we were like, "Fucking hell, we can't record this." We went, "Don't like that bit… don't like that… oh, wait a minute, we could something with that." And the part we did like formed the basis for *Golden Brown*.

1977 has retrospectively been cast as The Year Of Punk, but the biggest-selling albums of the year were *Bat Out Of Hell* and *Rumours*. Has there been a bit of rewriting of history?
RW: Well, up until 1942 the Germans were winning the second World War!
JJ: Have you seen these re-runs of *Top Of The Pops* from 1977 on telly? What a load of shite! It's like karaoke central.

So, 1977: was it fun?
JJ: It certainly was. I knew a year later that things were changing, though. I had a bank account, and I went in and the teller was a young girl with streaks of green in her hair. The great British assimilation had begun.
RW: It becomes mainstream.
JJ: Yes. It had become the norm. And nobody turns a blind eye.



"Hopefully we will all rise like phoenixes from the ashes and manage to put together something so we can go out and enjoy ourselves and have a great time again, and continue the communication that comes both ways through music."

In times of darkness we all need light, and that's just what **Camel** bassist **Colin Bass** is hoping to bring with his meditative new album, *Still*. He tells *Prog* about harnessing memories of simpler times with ambient musician Daniel Biro, and what the future holds for Andrew Latimer's crew.

Words: Dom Lawson **Images:** Judith Burrows

Wistful Thinking

When everything around you is going horribly wrong, it's always best to keep busy. Many professional musicians have made valiant attempts to keep the creative ball rolling during lockdown, with often highly questionable results. Camel bassist Colin Bass, on the other hand, has been helping to run the health food store that he and his wife, a nutritionist, bought four years ago, "basically on a whim".

"It's turned into quite a business!" says Bass. "We're the only shop like this for 25 miles or something, and somehow we've made a success of it. It's been an incredible learning curve for me, but it's been incredibly enjoyable. My wife is the boss and she's the brains of the outfit, and that's fine by me."

Of course, Bass is not just here for shop talk: there's a new record to talk about, too. *Still*, a collaboration with prolific London-based producer and composer Daniel Biro, is a collection of beautiful, atmospheric songs, pieced together over the last few years and featuring Bass as lead vocalist throughout. Entirely drum-free, it's also a pointedly soothing and tranquil record, which may be exactly what *Prog* needs amid the current chaos. That and some expert dietary knowledge, of course.

"The thing is, much to our surprise, my wife and I have discovered ourselves to be key workers," he notes, "because we're providing food. I've been driving around delivering to some of our elderly customers... I say *elderly* but some of them are the same age as me! [Laughs] I never think of myself like that, because I'm pretty fit. I'll proselytise about nutrition and the advantages of food for

L-R Colin Bass and Daniel Biro, and the new album, below.

your general state of health at some length, but I guess this interview is supposed to be about music. Maybe I'll save it until *Nutrition Magazine* phones me up!"

He may be considering trying to sell us some vitamins, but Bass is more than happy to move on to the subject of *Still*. An album full of beautiful melodies, immersive ambience, misty-eyed nostalgia and lyrical elegance, it speaks of great chemistry, inspired by a friendship that stretches back to the late 70s.

"Daniel and I first met way back in 1978, when I was between [Steve] Hillage and Camel, and I was playing with this guy called Jim Cuomo, a real eccentric and a brilliant sax player," the veteran bassist recalls. "I was playing in a band called The Casual Band, which was put together because Jim wrote music for a musical [*Woe Babylon*] that we did at the Edinburgh Festival in '78. Every year Jim used to go to a summer camp in Les Arcs, which is a ski resort near Mont Blanc, and young people would pay to attend classical concerts, classes and workshops, and then Jim did the jazz department. One summer we all went and spent five weeks up in the Alps. We did impromptu concerts and things like that, it was a wonderful summer camp vibe, and Daniel was one of the young students."

As luck would have it, teacher and student kept in touch and Biro would eventually move to the UK in the mid-80s, initially hoping to launch his own band but eventually settling into a widely respected career as a composer. Although Bass admits that contact between the two has been intermittent over the decades, he was more than thrilled when his friend got back in touch and sent over some new music that he had been working on.

"I said, 'I really love these songs! I wish I could sing them, because *you* can't!' [Laughs] So we started to exchange ideas and pieces, and after a couple of years we had this little chest of songs and just thought, 'Okay, let's put an album together.' It's been done in the modern way, *remotely*."

With both men contributing their own songs and embellishing each other's, *Still* is a true collaboration and an extremely honest one, too. With songs like Daniel Biro's darkly wistful *Old Europe*, a sombre tribute to the life and times of our continent, and Bass' *Once Was A Time*, a gentle but emotionally weighty hymn to childhood, it's a record that oozes melancholy and quiet wishes for better times.

"*Old Europe* is one of the first songs Daniel sent and it predates the EU referendum or anything like that, so it's not any kind of political thing," Bass explains. "It's a paean to the turbulent but wonderful history of Europe, as a place and a conglomeration of peoples, for better or worse. Daniel grew up in Italy and France, and his family roots are in Eastern Europe, part of the Jewish diaspora. There's this sense of gravity to that European history."

It does seem especially poignant in these (sort of) post-Brexit times, though, whether it's meant to be or not.

"Well, yeah. Because now we're all having to look at this new situation with our neighbours, when we should be thinking about how things are connected, instead of the opposite."

Meanwhile, the new album's most touching moment by far, *Once Was A Time*, takes Bass back to his earliest years. He was born in London but grew up in the small 'new town' of Bracknell in Berkshire in the 1950s, and remembers those years as "pretty idyllic, really."

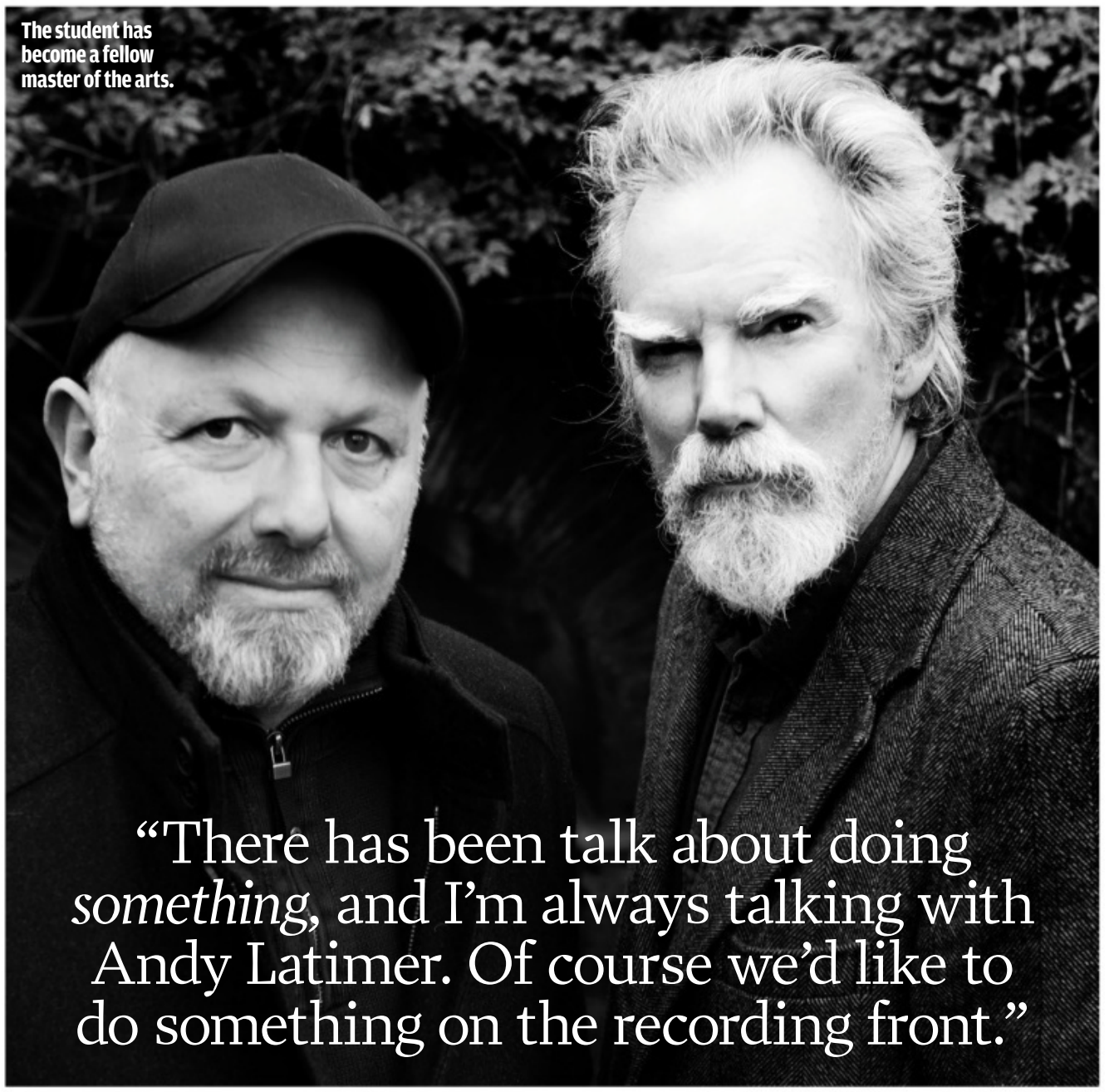
"I really loved that place," Bass recalls with a sigh. "But when I was eight years old, my father died and that changed *everything*, because my mother took me and my brother and moved back to her parents in London, basically not knowing what to do. My father was never spoken much about after that, and I resented that for a long time. I eventually went through a process with my mother about restoring the memory of my father. I don't expect anyone else to get it, but for me it's *all* encapsulated in that song. I'm just saying 'This is what those days were like…"

Given the madness of 2020, there's never been a better time to lose oneself in nostalgia for simpler, happier times. *Once Was A Time* is particularly meaningful for Colin Bass because it covers the period in his life when music suddenly became the most important and inspiring thing of all.

"These are vivid memories, of teenage cousins who were older than me. They had the bouffant hair and the pointy shoes and the tight summer dresses, and that was an erotic epiphany for me! [Laughs] I was five or six years old. I'd just put my head into the Dansette record player and listen to *Gamblin' Man* by Lonnie Donegan. *That* was my all-time favourite. I played it over and over again because it was so wild. It opened the door to another world. And I *distinctly* remember my teenage cousins jiving."

With *Still* released into the wild and, at the time of writing, no tangible end to the current lockdown situation, Colin Bass will be focusing on his key worker duties for the foreseeable future. He states that there will almost definitely be further collaborations with Daniel Biro, and that even though there are no firm plans for his more high-profile day job alongside Andrew Latimer, Camel fans may rest assured that communications are ongoing and new music is still a possibility.

"Of course, I would *never* report on anything officially from the Camel world," he chuckles. "It's not my place. It's Andy's job! [Laughs]


The student has become a fellow master of the arts.

"There has been talk about doing *something*, and I'm always talking with Andy Latimer. Of course we'd like to do something on the recording front."

Of course, there has been talk about doing *something*, and I'm always talking with Andy. Of course we'd like to do something on the recording front, but we'll see! There has been talk about the possibility of playing live again, but this is all completely up in the air at the moment."

It really has been quite the year, hasn't it?

"Yes, it's bloody madness! It's an unknown future for musicians and crew and everybody, and it's quite concerning," Bass concludes. "But hopefully we will all rise like phoenixes from the ashes and manage to put together something so we can go out and enjoy ourselves and have a great time again, and continue the communication that comes both ways through music. *That's* what I like."

Still is available now from www.colinbass.com

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Supertramp
Breakfast In America

New wave and disco reigned supreme, but somehow the sixth album from British prog pop group **Supertramp** caught the public imagination and mastered the globe. In an article that originally appeared in *Prog* issue 12, we look back on a band who were falling apart...

Words: Paul Lester

With anywhere between 18 and 20 million copies sold worldwide, *Breakfast In America* is arguably the biggest-selling prog album of all time after *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. Not that it was all-out prog – the sleeve featured a waitress pretending to be the Statue Of Liberty against a backdrop of crockery pretending to be the New York skyline; it was released well after prog's original golden age; and it wasn't what might be regarded as a quintessentially prog package: it only comprised a single disc and contained 10 tracks – lengthy tripartite song suites were notable by their absence. The total running time was a meagre 46 minutes, two of the songs coming in at under three minutes long, the rest being around the three, four and five-minute mark, with only one clocking in at over seven minutes. Four of the tracks were lifted for single release, which wasn't something you could say about, for example, *Brain Salad Surgery*, while the remaining numbers became daytime radio staples throughout 1979 and beyond, in Britain, across Europe, America and Canada, Australia, Scandinavia – most of the known world. In fact, it is rumoured that by the end of that year even those in the furthest-flung corner of the end of the world were able to hum the refrain to *The Logical Song* and knew every word to the title track.

That the album did so well was particularly impressive considering that it was Supertramp's sixth long player, and its release came at the height of new wave and disco. Its domination of the single and album charts, and the airwaves, was quite unexpected by all concerned – by all, that is, except the band's label boss, Jerry Moss.

"Jerry came down to the studio and said something about Peter Frampton – who was also on A&M – and us being likely to repeat his success," recalls Peter Henderson, credited as co-producer alongside the band. "Basically, he said, 'I think you guys are going to be next.'"

Breakfast In America.

"We were more likely to go out for an Italian meal than have groupies draped over us or drugged parties in hotels."
John Helliwell

Supertramp had already been around for a decade by the release of their most popular record, having formed in 1969 around core members and songwriters Rick Davies and Roger Hodgson. After two albums – 1970's self-titled debut and 1971's *Indelibly Stamped* – and several line-up changes, the group solidified around vocalists/keyboardists Davies and Hodgson, saxophonist John Helliwell, bassist Dougie Thomson and drummer Bob Siebenberg. This, the 'classic' version of the band, established themselves as a cult attraction.

The first album by the five-piece, 1974's *Crime Of The Century*, was hailed as a minor masterpiece of acerbic songcraft and dexterous musicianship, and it featured many of Supertramp's finest songs, including *School* and *Bloody Well Right* as well as *Dreamer*, their first UK Top 20 hit. And although the follow-up, 1975's *Crisis? What Crisis?*, wasn't quite so well received, it did posit Supertramp as premier purveyors of polished, prog-ish studio pop-rock with thoughtful lyrics, joining the select pantheon that also included 10cc and Queen. By the release of *Even In The Quietest Moments...* (1977), many of the bleak visions and dark portents about society expressed on the previous two records had come to pass in the form of punk, but Supertramp were able to weather the storm, and one of the songs, *Give A Little Bit*, became another huge and enduring hit.

But *Breakfast In America* eclipsed anything they had done before and skyrocketed the band into the commercial stratosphere. Supertramp were never a typical chart proposition or obvious stadium behemoths, with little of Gabriel-era Genesis' live charisma, and none of the virtuoso pyrotechnics of Yes/ELP. If they resembled anyone it was Pink Floyd, in that they were anonymous musicians whose focus was the song, but they didn't have the Floyd's mythic allure. Instead, they were a motley crew – the bluff, working class Davies (from Swindon) and the public school-educated Hodgson (from Portsmouth), plus a Scot (Thomson), a Yorkshireman (Helliwell) and a Californian (Siebenberg) – who had been assembled for solely pragmatic reasons. They weren't a gang of mates who had known each other since their school days, and there was none of that sense of shared history.

And yet, by *Breakfast In America*, they had built up a certain rapport, having spent much of 1973-4 living together in the wilds of Somerset, in a cottage called Southcombe where they were joined by family, friends, crew and pets, as well as unofficial sixth member Russel Pope, whom John Helliwell considers to be

CAMERA PRESS

Supertramp in the mid-70s. Clockwise from bottom left: Dougie Thomson, Rick Davies, Bob Siebenberg , Roger Hodgson, with John Helliwell (centre).

"underappreciated nowadays — he helped Roger and Rick with lyrics, and he was good in the studio, too". In his sleevenotes to 2010's deluxe reissue of *Breakfast In America* — a two-disc affair containing the remastered album and a CD of live performances from 1979, available for the first time — *MOJO*'s Phil Alexander describes it as a "creative and supportive atmosphere". Indeed, they had such fond memories of this period of enforced cohabitation that they tried to replicate the circumstances in America in 1978.

Supertramp's music, the adroit performances and immaculate surfaces — what Helliwell has termed their "sophisto-rock" — was embraced even more readily by American audiences than British ones, and the band found themselves spending more and more time in the States, to the extent that *Crisis? What Crisis?* and *Even In The Quietest Moments...* were recorded there, in Los Angeles and Colorado respectively. When they came to record *Breakfast...*, all five members had relocated full-time to the West Coast and bought apartments or houses there, but it was decided that the Colorado studio had been too sterile and so a new headquarters was found for Supertramp and co in Burbank, a home-from-home that was promptly given the name Southcombe. There, throughout 1978, they rehearsed the material and prepared the demos that would eventually be recorded at the Village Recorder studio in LA.

All very cosy, except that, according to some sources, they weren't quite the unified, cohesive unit they had been back in Blighty four years before. Principal songwriters Hodgson and Davies had begun to pull in different directions, the former's increasingly spiritual bent causing raised eyebrows in some quarters. In fact, the song *Babaji* from *Even In The Quietest Moments...* had alluded to Hodgson's latest penchant, and there was no stopping him now.

"Rick was pretty down to earth whereas Roger was a bit more mentally... not a higher plane, but spacey — he had spiritual yearnings," says Helliwell, whose swirling sax provided *Breakfast...* with one of its signature sounds, along with those staccato Wurlitzer electric piano chords and Hodgson's inimitable falsetto. It was in the build-up to *Breakfast...* that Hodgson fell in with a religious group who ran a commune in northern California. "It was an organisation of spiritually minded people run by this guy called Swami Kriyananda," recalls Helliwell, "although his real name was Donald Walters. They were all very sycophantic towards him. It was weird. Eventually Roger bought a place nearby and Swami found him a wife and they got married."

Some reports have it that there was tension between Hodgson and Davies over a variety of creative issues, including the naming of the album (Davies apparently wanted to call it *Working Title* or *Hello Stranger*, the latter after a track that he had written) and the title song itself, which he allegedly didn't want on the album.

Helliwell, however, maintains that, despite these rumours, the band were too intent on coming up with their greatest collection of material to allow personal or musical differences to get in the way. They even indulged in extracurricular activities together, such as playing football matches with

PRESS

Released: March 29, 1979
Label: A&M
Producer: Supertramp and Peter Henderson
Highest Chart Position: No.3 (UK), No.1 (US)
Personnel: Rick Davies (keyboards, vocals), Roger Hodgson (guitars, keyboards, vocals), John Helliwell (saxophone, woodwind, vocals), Dougie Thomson (bass), Bob Siebenberg (drums)
Recorded at: The Village Recorder/Studio B, Los Angeles
Mixed at: Crystal Sound/ Studio B, Los Angeles
Influenced by: Beatles, Procul Harum, Elton John, Pink Floyd
Influence on: Dire Straits, Scissor Sisters, Empire Of The Sun, Supergrass
Other info: The cover of second album, *Indelibly Stamped*, featured a woman's naked, tattooed body whose nipples A&M had to censor in the US with two gold stars.

"Jerry Moss came down to the studio, saying he felt we were next in line for success."

Peter Henderson, co-producer

When microphones just aren't enough: John Helliwell on the *Breakfast...* stadium tour in 1980.

RICHARD E AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

local superstar and new best mate Rod Stewart, during which Helliwell acted as referee.

"There had started to be something slight, not a rift, but it was becoming apparent that Rick and Roger were quite different," he admits, "but we managed to work well together. I don't remember any animosity at all. We were just getting on with it, finding tunes that fitted together."

They knew they were onto something special as soon as rehearsals began. "Even before we started recording we knew it was very strong musically," says Helliwell of the early *Breakfast In America* sessions. Beatles engineer Geoff Emerick and his young assistant Peter Henderson had worked on *Even In The Quietest Moments...*, but it was with the latter that the band had hit it off best, so he was invited back, this time to co-produce (see side panel). Supertramp had always had a reputation for meticulousness, and this was no exception. "The sessions were even longer and more tedious than usual," laughs Helliwell. "We spent hours and hours in the studio; it would take a week getting the right drum sounds." He was particularly peeved at the presence of Hodgson's device for producing the optimum air quality. "Roger had this ionizer that he thought helped the air. I was convinced the fucking thing was giving me headaches so I kept turning it off, and he'd turn it back on. There were a few funny things like that." But there were never, he insists, any punch-ups.

Breakfast in America, brunch in Travelodge Borehamwood.

"There have never been fisticuffs in this band," Helliwell asserts. "Just tense silences..."

They may have been a quietly combustible mix, but the chemistry worked, with spectacular results. Virtually every song on *Breakfast...* was a melodic treat, at least half the tracks — *Gone Hollywood, The Logical Song, Goodbye Stranger, Breakfast In America* and *Take The Long Way Home* — being either singles or TV and/or movie soundtrack staples, while the remaining five ranged from the mellow concision of *Casual Conversations* to the more prog-ish and expansive *Child Of Vision*. The beauty of *Breakfast...* was that it gelled as a whole, while it was to Hodgson and Davies' eternal credit that they managed to make songs as quietly critical (of the US, and each other) as these so infectious and easy on the ear. Supertramp's triumph, meanwhile, was the utter musicality and economical elegance of it all.

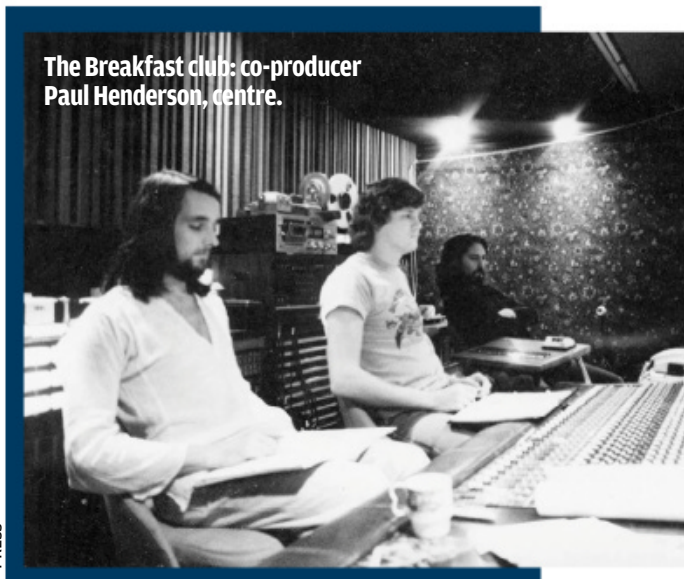
"We definitely didn't want to go overboard, because we were conscious of some groups going on and on with long, long solos and complicated arrangements," explains Helliwell. "We wanted everything to be tuneful and succinct. It was only when we finished it that we realised, 'Wow, we've got something pretty strong here.'"

Breakfast... was an immediate success, reaching No.1 in the US, Canada, Australia and Norway, while touring saw pandemonium down the front. Not backstage, though. "We still played darts before shows," says Helliwell, who reveals that, at 34, he was simply too old to indulge in rock'n'roll excess. "We were quite sober about it all, to be honest. We were more likely to go out for an Italian meal than have groupies draped over us or drugged parties in hotels." Like a sort of British Steely Dan, Supertramp used the medium of "sophisto-rock" to comment on the culture with a detached, resigned air.

"That's a good observation — we were looking from the outside," says Helliwell, who could confirm the appeal of these songs 30 years on, since Supertramp (minus Hodgson) were at that time playing them in stadia around the world on a comeback tour. "I guess our songs are enigmatic and can be taken in many ways," he concludes, "but they're original and musical and have good tunes that don't fit any particular category. People like them."

Twenty million, to be precise.

Supertramp's archived website can be found at www.supertramp.com. Meanwhile, Roger Hodgson will tour Breakfast In America in 2021. For the full list of rescheduled shows, visit www.rogerhodgson.com.


The Breakfast club: co-producer Paul Henderson, centre.

PRESS

"John was in the toilet..."

Co-producer Peter Henderson looks back on the *Breakfast In America* sessions.

"The sessions that produced the demos began on April 2, 1978, and the recording proper started on June 1. There's a myth that we spent three weeks getting the right drum sound but it wasn't like that. We spent a week bringing in instruments to make sure everything sounded good, then we set everybody up – drums, bass, Wurlitzer – in the studio, except for John [Helliwell] who had to record his sax parts in the toilet because there weren't enough booths!

"If the album sounds slick, that's less because of the musicianship and production and more because everything had been so carefully worked out. But it wasn't sterile – we wanted to capture a feel, a spark. We didn't want to labour anything. I was always looking to get a live-sounding performance, to make sure it jumped out of the speakers.

"Everyone pulled together. They'd all settled in LA, and for the first time they bought houses there, and they all got on well as far as I remember. There was one issue between Rick and Roger – Rick had written *Gone Hollywood* and Roger had persuaded him to change the lyrics because he considered them a bit downbeat. He was unhappy about that because he hadn't been too keen on Roger's *Babaji* and felt it was unfair, but eventually he went along with it.

"Apart from that, they were very respectful of each other and had a good bond. It's too simplistic to see one as Lennon and the other as McCartney. But there was always magic whenever they were in the room, and whatever their personal differences they respected each others' input and advice.

"Nobody expected the album to do so well. It was very pleasurable to work on and I never tire of hearing it, even though I spent nine months listening to those songs. I grew up listening to Yes, ELP and Crimson but to me *Breakfast...* wasn't prog – 10cc are closer to that. They were pop songs, pure and simple." **PL**

...And Then There Were 3

When two of **Airbag**'s original line-up left the band after the recording of 2016's *Disconnected* album, the remaining members of the epically inclined Norwegian group faced something of an existential crisis. There was no question of the band splitting, but whether they liked it or not, it was the end of an era. *Prog* finds out about their unexpected reinvention.

Words: Johnny Sharp **Images:** Anne-Marie Forker

Airbag know as well as anyone how challenging it can be to keep a progressive band going.

As many a progger can tell you – even the higher-profile ones you read about in these pages, who you might mistakenly imagine make a comfortable living from their art – the logistical difficulties of supporting a group of musicians financially, practically, emotionally, domestically as well as creatively, constitutes a continual headache. And of course, for many, the current lockdown has caused further stress, with gigging ruled out and face-to-face collaboration, let alone rehearsing and developing songs as a band, a complete no-no. And have you ever tried jamming together over a video call? The infuriating split-second delay when trying to play in time will surely add mental health meltdowns to your list of problems.

Airbag were lucky enough to avoid that particular crisis due to fortuitous timing – their new album, *A Day At The Beach*, was finished shortly before the pandemic went truly global. But way before that, they did have to bid a reluctant farewell to two long-time members and friends due to more mundane issues: people have jobs, families, partners... and not enough money to justify devoting so much time to music.

Airbag keyboard player Jørgen Hagen left in May 2016, with the band explaining that "a demanding life situation has forced some hard decisions". Six months later, bassist Anders Hovdan also left due to "a demanding personal life". Although drummer Henrik Fossum remained in the fold, he, along with the creative driving forces of guitarist Bjørn Riis and frontman Asle Tostrup, thought that this setback might just be an opportunity. A chance to reinvent Airbag's sound, or at least give it a distinct makeover.

Life's a beach, L-R: Bjørn Riis, Asle Tostrup and Henrik Fossum.

"There was nothing particularly dramatic about it," the generously bearded Riis tells *Prog* over a Skype call from his Oslo home. "You grow up and have other priorities. They left and the three of us ended up spending quite some time discussing how we wanted to take the band forward. Ideas for the new album began there."

So began the journey towards an audible break with Airbag's past, as it soon became clear that the band's fifth studio album would move away from the guitar-based compositions of their previous records. From the start, electronic sounds moved into the foreground, something evident from the slow-burning, cinematic contemplation that introduces *Machines And Men*, smouldering with a widescreen wistfulness before gradually working itself up into a wailing maelstrom of despair.

"The electronic stuff has always been there," Riis explains. "We have had several songs that ended up that way in the past, but this time we wanted to bring it in early on in the process, as a basis to the songwriting, not just as a production tool. The original demos were mainly guitars and drums, but then we started adding electronic elements and completely rearranging stuff from that point. But I think we managed to create the right balance between classic rock, prog and electronica."

Prog would agree with that assessment, and the early release of *Machines And Men* on streaming platforms certainly got a positive response from the band's fanbase. As an album, *A Day At The Beach* continues to benefit from a distinctly soundtrack-like feel to it. Which is no accident, it turns out.

"We've always had what we feel is a cinematic approach or feel to the music — both the lyrics and the music have to tell a story without it necessarily being a traditional concept album. I've always been into film music and movie scores, and also 80s electronic bands [such as] New Order and Tears For Fears. Asle is probably the most electronic-focused of all of us. He's very much into Massive Attack, for instance. But we were also influenced with what was around as we were coming up with the ideas for the album, it was right about the time of the *Stranger Things* series on Netflix. We're big fans of the music from it — it's by a band called SURVIVE. They use a lot of old electronic instruments and synthesisers, going back to old school analogue stuff. We listened a lot to that and…" he pauses with a slight grin, "we might have stolen a few bits as well…"

Nonetheless, at regular points when the emotional climate is right, Riis' beautifully emotive guitar fireworks still explode across the soundscape. Airbag's moody, soft-sung style has repeatedly been compared to Pink Floyd, and Riis' guitar to David Gilmour's distinctive soloing patterns. And even with a more digitally derived sound, the echoes are still pretty pronounced. So how does Riis feel about the endless comparisons?

"Look, if you compare me to one of the greatest guitarists of all time, of course I take that as a compliment! But he's only one of many. I was always a big fan of Tony Iommi, Billy Gibbons, Van Halen, Joe Satriani…"

Whatever his influences, it's the emotional resonance of his playing — and Airbag's songs in general — that is most striking. That's the result, he says, of maintaining an element of not trying too hard.

"I think we managed to create the right balance between classic rock, prog and electronica."

"I think you can overdo things, often end up doing multiple takes of a guitar part," he says, " but I invariably find the best version is the first or second take — I try again and again to recapture it but the first or second take tends to have the emotional connection."

As Riis mentions earlier, Airbag's approach is a holistic one, where a picture is painted in the listener's head through musical textures, and also striking lyrics.

However, it's a picture that can be viewed from different angles, as he explains of the title track, which is split into two parts on this album.

"I had quite an innocent image in my head, of a 50s-era family having a picnic on the beach, but then if you look at it another way you see another picture: beaches representing the refugee crisis, fleeing across the Mediterranean and washing up dead on the beaches."

That also taps into another abiding theme, running through the story, of war alienating humanity from itself in *Machines And Men*, and *Into The Unknown*'s scenario of a refugee leaving his family promising, perhaps more out of hope than expectation, that '*I'll try to hold on/I'll try not to fall into the deep blue ocean*'.

"We've always been fascinated by the individual rather than the politics of everything," says Riis. "We're not U2 or some big preaching band, so we always look at the destructive things in our society from the individual standpoint. I think the whole concept of the album is a case of us and them, and that song in particular describes how we're living in a time where you can choose to care or not to care. Both those songs are telling stories of war and conflict going on in front of you. And if you choose not to care you can always scroll down to the next cake recipe or switch the channel."

Meanwhile, there are thematic threads we can pick up from previous albums. '*There's a finger pointing... from a hole between the clouds,*' sings Tostrup on *Sunsets*. '*I'm being told just how to think and feel, what to say and what to do.*'

The notion of forces in society from government to religion to social norms constraining our freedom, brainwashing us even, is one we've heard before from Airbag.

"We're not U2 or some big preaching band, so we always look at the destructive things in our society from the individual standpoint."

"On [2013's] *The Greatest Show On Earth* we also had a song called *Redemption* [key line: '*You can only know right from wrong when we've got you by your soul*'] and it has always been something we like to write about," says Riis. "*Sunsets* deals with several sides of society and religion is one of them of course. If there's a theme to the album it's looking at all the things that numb us in order to stop us being able, or even wanting, to care."

But while the distinctly bleak and more personal outlook of the last album, *Disconnected*, was driven partly by Riis' disillusion with a "really shitty job" he had found himself in during the time of its creation, which plunged him into something of a depression, he has since found a more satisfying regular employment in a faintly unlikely role: kindergarten music teacher.

While the possibility of turning kids aged between three and five years old onto prog is perhaps an unrealistic goal, he finds that just being in a musical environment keeps his mind in creative mode.

"I've had ideas for several songs when I've just been strumming the guitar in front of the kids, and something strikes me. I make a short note to myself to remember it, and when I get home I write down some chords or some lyrics. Ha ha ha!"

But while his own personal circumstances have changed for the better since *Disconnected* came out in 2016, he probably wouldn't say the same about the global situation, given the rise of populism around the world. That may be why this album is less personal and more concerned with the wider world. It's a development also reflected in the final track, *Megalomaniac*, wherein a man '*with your suit and tie, and your firm handshake*' convinces the narrator, '*we're the best of friends/You'll make us great, take away our fears and keep us under control.*' *Prog* can't imagine who they might have in mind.

"Yeah," says Riis, "I think if we ever do that one live we have to have a big picture of Trump on the wall behind us!"

The logistical difficulties all too familiar to prog bands the world over continue to pose formidable challenges to Airbag — all four of the current band (Wobbler's Kristian Hultgren is now a semi-official member on bass) hold down day jobs, and Asle Tostrup, who recently became a father, likes to take long periods out to travel. But while the restrictions put in place by the Covid-induced lockdown have put paid to touring plans until 2021 at least, they have afforded Riis and his fellow bandmembers valuable time to come up with ideas for the next album in their respective home studio set-ups.

"Having had more spare time has at least allowed me to write some new songs," says Riis. "Between us we have enough material for something. Whether mine will be right for my solo stuff [he's released three solo LPs and an EP since 2014, generally in a heavier vein than his alma mater] or a new Airbag album I'm not sure, but the process has started, so I'm hoping it won't be another four years before the next release."

Let's hope there might be the odd event that's happened in the world to serve as lyrical inspiration. Actually, come to think of it...

A Day At The Beach is out now via Karisma. See www.airbagsound.com for more.

Airbag: men who climb mountains.

THE PROG INTERVIEW

JOHN GREAVES

Every month, we get inside some of the biggest names in prog. This issue, it's **John Greaves**. The bassist joined Henry Cow in the autumn of 1969 and remained a constant in the band until his departure in '76. He also played with National Health and Soft Heap, and teamed up with Slapp Happy's Peter Blegvad for 1977's conceptual *Kew. Rhone.*. He's enjoyed a modest solo career, which includes his current album *Life Size*, and, in 2014, he reunited with his Henry Cow bandmates at London's Barbican to celebrate bassoonist Lindsay Cooper's life. Here, he looks back over a varied career that's taken in performances with Mike Oldfield, Jakko Jakszyk and Robert Wyatt.

Words: Mike Barnes

John Greaves grew up in Prestatyn in north Wales and his musical path might have taken a different direction had it not been for the death of a bass player in his father's dance band, The Ray Irving Orchestra. At that point the 13-year-old Greaves had taken piano lessons and was able to read music, so his father bought him a bass guitar, telling him, "Bass is dead easy, you can learn this in a month."

After this early musical education, Greaves declined his father's offer of a permanent place in the band and instead went to Cambridge University in 1968, where he met the members of Henry Cow and promptly joined the group. He also had stints with the Ottawa Music Company, a rock composer's orchestra whose members included Steve Hillage, Mont Campbell and Dave Stewart of Egg.

Henry Cow signed to the nascent Virgin Records in 1973 and quickly established themselves as one of the most inventive, challenging and politically motivated groups of 70s progressive rock. They recorded *Desperate Straights* in 1974 with Slapp Happy, a trio of Dagmar Krause, Anthony Moore and Peter Blegvad. After recording *In Praise Of Learning*, Greaves left Henry Cow in 1976 and teamed up with Blegvad to record the acclaimed *Kew. Rhone.* in 1977. He enjoyed spells in National Health and, throughout the 80s, in Soft Heap.

Greaves' later groups include The Lodge with Jakko Jakszyk and Anton Fier, and he still plays in the Peter Blegvad Trio. In recent years he's played on Robert Wyatt's 1974 album, *Rock Bottom*, with the North Sea Radio Orchestra and vocalist Annie Barbazza, both in concert and on the 2019 release *Folly Bololey*.

He moved to Paris in 1984 and established himself as a songwriter of rare invention on the albums *Songs* (1994), *Chansons* (2004) and most recently *Life Size* (2018). At the moment he has a number of releases in the pipeline.

Latest album Life Size, featuring Jakko Jakszyk and Magma's Himiko Paganotti.

How important was it for you playing in your father's dance band?

It was absolutely important. It was the post-war generation meeting the beat music scene and not really knowing how to deal with it. We'd do dances where we'd begin and people were dancing around in their frilly frocks and their dress suits, and then Freddie And The Dreamers would come on.

By the time I was 15 or 16 I was doing arrangements of James Brown tunes and Otis Redding with the St Bernard Waltz, and the military two-step. It helped me have an open mind towards music and my father was very influential. He'd take us to the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall and I saw Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Woody Herman, and at the same time The Scaffold were playing in The Philharmonic, a pub across the road. It was a great time.

Pre-Cambridge days. It could've all gone so differently...

COURTESY JOHN GREAVES

> "We met Mike Oldfield on our first day, when he engineered the first track Henry Cow recorded, *Nirvana For Mice*, because Tom Newman had been celebrating the end of *Tubular Bells* and was brainless drunk under the console."

You joined Henry Cow as a teenager at Cambridge University in 1969. How did that come about?

I was a young innocent from north Wales suddenly in this wild and wacky world of Cambridge, which was like a Disneyland of academia. That was quite a shock. In the second year [guitarist] Fred [Frith] walked into my room and asked me to join this band, Henry Cow. That was another pivotal moment — there are times when you see something or hear something and don't understand what the fuck is going on but you know that you would like to be part of it.

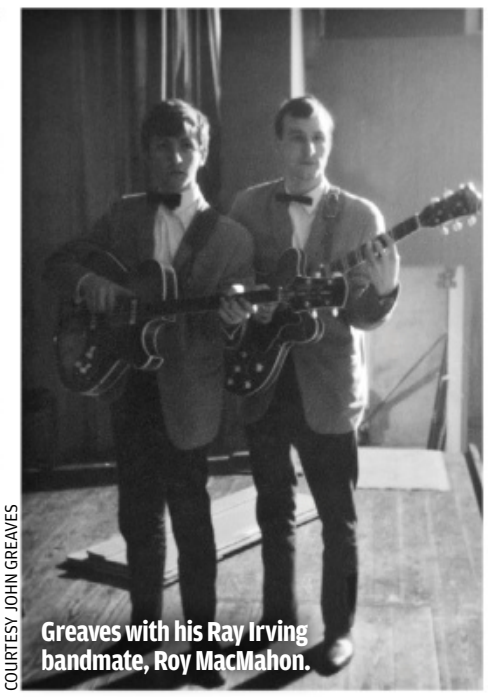
COURTESY JOHN GREAVES

John Greaves: a man who never regrets saying yes.

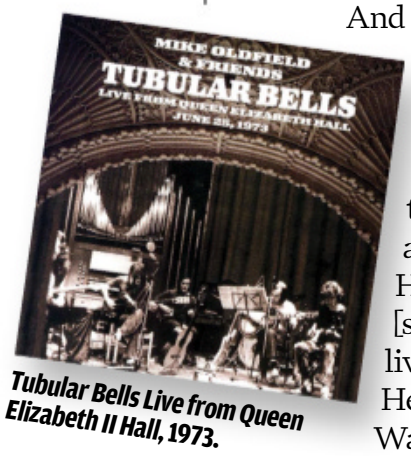
At the time I was a fan of Cream and Steve Winwood and I'd never heard anything like these odd sounds and time signatures that [sax and keyboard player] Tim Hodgkinson and Fred were making. I had to relearn how to play the bass guitar, how to play these impossible harmonic shifts and melodies. I began to play melodic bass because, at the time, there were only three of us, there were no drums, so it was a little chamber orchestra, really.

How did you present your compositions to the group?
During my time in the band Fred and Tim were the main composers by a long chalk. Tim's compositions were more hermetic, he'd written everything out. We spent a long time trying to get them right. Fred's compositions were deliberately more open to interpretation or more flexible.

I was learning to compose and daring to compose. I'd say, "I've got this riff here, Fred. What do you think?" Fred was always very generous in a pedagogical way. We'd incorporate these bits and pieces into a composition. On the first album, *The Henry*


COURTESY JOHN GREAVES
Greaves with his Ray Irving bandmate, Roy MacMahon.

in *Nirvana For Mice*, which I think is still more or less in 21/8! But the fluidity that occurred on a good night between Chris and me would have been the result of a lot of hard work. We had been at it for six years by the time I left and developed something that, without any false modesty, was



Tubular Bells Live from Queen Elizabeth II Hall, 1973.

on the *Tubular Bells* concert at Queen Elizabeth Hall and the famous BBC 2 2nd House programme in 1973. Was there a camaraderie among you?
There was camaraderie, definitely. We were very friendly with Mike and Maggie Thomas, his girlfriend. It was centred around The Manor, Virgin's studio, which was run independently by the wonderful Tom Newman.

Mike was living there and we met him on our first day, when he engineered the first track Henry Cow recorded, *Nirvana For Mice*, because Tom had been celebrating the end of *Tubular Bells* and was brainless drunk under the console.

And so when the *Tubular Bells* thing came up, Mike needed a band, so he got us all roped in to do that. We rehearsed at The Manor. Steve Hillage was and is [still] a friend. He lived with us in the Henry Cow house in Walmer Road in Ladbroke Grove. I lived above Steve's bloody echo chamber for a long time! Mick Taylor we didn't know, but he was brought in because Richard Branson wanted a star to sell his new product and he was great. We were also great friends with Hatfield And The North and we toured with Kevin Coyne.

DALLE/RETNA/PHOTOSHOT/AVALON
John Greaves, third from left, with Henry Cow in 1975.

Henry Cow have been cited as a Marxist band but Chris Cutler has said that in his opinion you weren't actually Marxists.
Chris would have preferred 'dialectical materialist', I suppose. We were — or I was — figuring things out. There was no specific

COURTESY JOHN GREAVES

political alignment. Geoff was the most militant; Tim's lyrics read like a manifesto for a revolutionary faction. I think

Cow Legend, Teenbeat is credited to both of us.

A recording that presents Henry Cow at their best is the 25-minute John Peel session from September 1975, which also appeared on *Concerts*. It's played as a continuous performance that incorporates songs, composed instrumental sections and group improvisations where the 'one' seems to have disappeared and the playing feels almost telepathic.
If I remember the piece correctly, it's the long improvised section

unique. No one else was doing that… and probably for very good reasons. (Laughs.) We worked on a radically different approach to written music to the point that by the end of our best gigs nobody knew the difference between when we were improvising and when it was written.

When Virgin Records formed it seemed like a haven for more adventurous progressive rock artists. You and a number of other Virgin artists, including members of Henry Cow, played

COURTESY JOHN GREAVES
The *Kew. Rhone.* line-up: Greaves with Lisa Sherman and Peter Blegvad in 1976.

> "There was no specific political alignment in Henry Cow. Geoff was the most militant; Tim's lyrics read like a manifesto for a revolutionary faction. I think these days we would just be part of the general anti-capitalist movement."

these days we'd just be part of the general anti-capitalist movement.

After leaving Henry Cow you recorded the song cycle *Kew. Rhone.* in 1977 with Peter Blegvad, who had been in Slapp Happy. It sounded quite remarkably different from what else going on at the time.

I had the experience from Henry Cow but at the same time I wanted it to be something different. It was time to move on. I don't think there's anything else quite like it and, again, maybe there is a good reason for that.

Kew. Rhone.: it's a bit different.

It's so complicated lyrically that at times it feels like a kind of crossword puzzle.

Talking about Peter's lyrics, he has been criticised for being pretentious all his life. And he probably is, but he still carries on doing the most extraordinary creations. I think your description of it as a puzzle is good; it's a game, it's fun. The song *Kew. Rhone.* is an epistemological study in 7/4 with a rhumba beat. All the elements are there and you can figure it out any way you like.

You joined National Health in 1978. Were you keen to play in a group again?

I'd just gone to New York to do *Kew. Rhone.*. Neil Murray had left to join Whitesnake and Dave Stewart called me then and asked me if I'd like to join. I came back a year later and the job was still going. [Drummer] Pip Pyle was my best friend and he doesn't take no for an answer. Dave's music was challenging. I listened to the first National Health album with Neil on bass and thought, "Shit, I'm not sure I can play this." But hopefully I brought something different to it and we had a good time for a couple of years.

Henry Cow and National Health were both revered, but were hardly mainstream. Was it difficult making any money from music in those days?

It still is! Henry Cow were very thrifty. We would do these long tours where Chris and Maggie Thomas [who mixed the live sound] would be in charge of the food. Maggie had a book called *Food For Free* [by Richard Mabey]. She would take that quite literally. We'd roar down the autostrada to Naples and she'd spot some plant in a field and then she'd be cooking it on the bus, which would become filled with noxious fumes. We had survival techniques.

With National Health it wasn't much better. We sold a few records and were getting paid for gigs and Dave Stewart was

very good at handling money, but it was always hard. But if you do that sort of music, you are inevitably going to be worrying about paying the rent at the end of the month.

How much did the musical landscape change in the 80s? Did you find that commercial considerations gradually became more important?

I left England in the 80s and I've been plodding on skirting the mainstream and occasionally getting little entries into the business, retreating again, but still managing to survive in a world that you necessarily have to create for yourself. Nobody else is going to help you. You make your own rules.

What was it like in Soft Heap playing music that was all improvised?

At the beginning it wasn't totally improvised. I joined when Alan Gowen was still alive and I replaced Hugh Hopper. Then Alan died. And then with Elton Dean, Mark Hewins and Pip Pyle it was clearly stated that there was no point trying to do any written stuff, just get up there and play. That was improvising in a kind of jazz context but it wasn't jazz. We'd go places where I'd never really been before and I loved that.

> "I'm managing to survive in a world that you necessarily have to create for yourself. Nobody else is going to help you. You make your own rules."

In a review of Soft Heap in *The Guardian*, John Fordham wrote, "It's like an improvised equivalent of an early Who concert."
I thought, "Hey, I'll go with that."

Your 1994 album *Songs* features a number of guest artists. How did you allocate who should sing which song?

I had done solo albums like *Accident* [1982] and *The Little Bottle Of Laundry* [1991], which are my compositions, but I was shy about singing. I've known so many great singers, including Dagmar and Lisa [Herman who sings on *Kew.Rhone.*], and then I found myself in the studio in front of the microphone. I lacked self-confidence, but I bashed on and I'm pleased I did because I listen to them now with some admiration for the gall of the guy singing.

When we got to *Songs*, I met the wonderful singer, S'Ange – Susan Belling – who sung *The Price We Pay* and *Swelling Valley*, both of which had appeared on another album I made, *Parrot Fashions* [1984], but in a kind of classically trained soprano way, and I think they're both beautiful.

So I found myself in a very nice studio in Paris with a Steinway and I realised that I was beginning to make an album of my songs – and redoing some songs – but using different voices and of course Robert sprang to mind. I knew I could nail him because *Kew. Rhone.* was his favourite record and I'd get him to sing *Kew.Rhone.* because he couldn't really refuse – which he didn't.

I sang a couple of songs on the album including the Dylan Thomas song *The Green Fuse*. I wanted to conclude it with a French voice and wrote a couple of songs for a quite well-known French singer and actress called Caroline Loeb.

You've done a number of albums based on poems by Paul Verlaine, beginning with *Verlaine* in 2008. In what way has he been an influence?

I'd been in France for quite a long time and I thought that it was about time that I did an album in French, but it would take me years to write a song in French, so I thought that maybe I should a look at all those French poets that I was supposed to study at university all those years ago. I came back to Verlaine and all the poems sang directly off the page. I set them to music and found that relatively easy to do. So it wasn't so much an influence, I was researching the possibility of writing lyrics in French. I don't want to diminish him as poet but he's also a pretty good lyricist when it comes to it.

FRANZ SOPRANI/ COURTESY JOHN GREAVES

COURTESY JOHN GREAVES

Improvise, or what's the point?

Inset: with Peter Blagved.

COURTESY JOHN GREAVES

An offer he can't refuse: with Robert Wyatt in 2019.

The guest-filled *Songs* album.

This writer saw you play and sing Robert Wyatt's *Rock Bottom* at London's Café Oto with the North Sea Radio Orchestra last year and thought it was a brilliant reimagining of the original album.
The arrangements are all Craig's and I think he did a fantastic job of not pussyfooting around but reinterpreting those songs and finding a way to orchestrate lines that were originally virtually wholly improvised. Robert had got his old pals [trumpeter] Mongezi Feza and [saxophonist] Gary Windo to play and then edited with [the album's producer] Nick Mason to make it into a coherent shape, which he did beautifully.

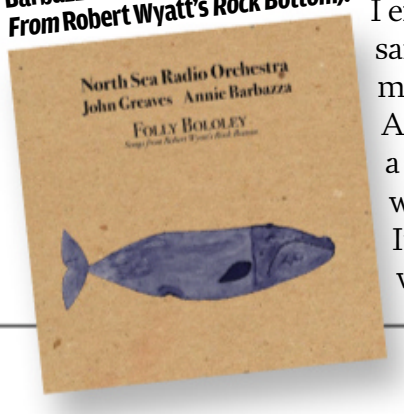
What Craig managed to do was to re-pitch the compositional side of *Rock Bottom* and to allow a limited amount of improvisation to go on, which let it breathe the way that *Rock Bottom* breathed and he really made it work.

The band is great and I was able to introduce Annie Barbazza, who, I think you will agree, sings it beautifully.

I'm so thrilled to sit there and play some of those Hugh Hopper bass parts like *A Last Straw* and *Alifib* and I know that Robert likes it. I couldn't resist playing a *Tubular Bells* bass riff under Oldfield's guitar lick at the end of *Little Red Robin Hood...*, which was admirably interpreted by Craig Fortnam.

Your singing on your most recent solo album, *Life Size*, seems to exude confidence and gravity. Robert Wyatt has said that your voice is "unique and saturated with gravelly charm".
Thank you, Robert. You can quote him on that by all means. I think I've become a singer despite myself. I get asked to sing things as an invited singer. I sing Fauré with some pretty heavyweight singers on a lovely record [*Ici-Bas — Les Melodies De Gabriel Fauré*] and I got invited to do a special Moondog event where I sang a couple of songs. I'm gung-ho now: anywhere, any time.

You've regularly played and recorded with Annie Barbazza. Your voices are so contrasting but there seems a distinct chemistry there.
Well yeah, that really is a thrill. I did quite a lot of solo gigs, which are just piano and voice, which I enjoy, but at the same time it's so much more fun with Annie. She's such a lovely person and we get on great. So I'm hoping that we will do a lot more.



Greaves teamed up with North Sea Radio Orchestra and Annie Barbazza for Folly Bololey (Songs From Robert Wyatt's Rock Bottom).

How did *Life Size* get released on Manticore?
Max Marchini started the label Dark Companion and he produced Greg Lake's *Live In Piacenza*, recorded on his last solo tour in 2012, on Manticore. They became great friends and Greg said, "If you like I'll give you the Manticore label, in name. I would like you to take on the legacy of the label." So Max co-runs Manticore with Greg's wife Regina as a sort of sleeping partner in the background.

He asked me what I thought of putting *Life Size* on Manticore and I thought, why not? I was never a great fan of Emerson, Lake & Palmer but that's neither here nor there. And of course it's got Jakko [Jakszyk] on the record and Himiko Paganotti from Magma — come on, it's got to be prog! So I'm pleased that's on Manticore.

On Alain Blesing's 2009 album *Songs From The Beginning* there's a version of King Crimson's *Fracture* with your spoken-word interludes from Dylan Thomas's *Under Milkwood*, *'Starless and bible-black'* and all. How did you get involved in that?
When I say that I get asked to do things, that was one of the first times. I've often regretted saying no, but I've never regretted saying yes. It's not my favourite album, but it's got interesting things on it. I am doing more spoken-word now and on *Life Size* I felt freer to do that — there aren't any rules. I can sing, I can imitate Richard Burton in a Dylan Thomas piece, or whatever.

On the track on *Life Size*, *Kew Rhône Is Real*, *Kew. Rhone.* seems to have re-emerged as some sort of entity, as if it has a life of its own.
For his [2011] *Kew. Rhone.* book, Peter Blegvad asked a lot of people what *Kew. Rhone.* is. Lisa wrote this wonderful poem. I had to find a context for it so I built up a computer-based piece and I just then spieled on top of it. She wrote: '*Kew. Rhone.* will threaten, will make you cry/God's just an apocryphal bearded guy'. *Kew. Rhone.*, is bigger than God is what she is saying. And who could disagree with that?

Life Size is out now via Manticore. Dark Companion are due to release a series of live albums this year. For more, see www.johngreaves.org.uk.

Edited by Dave Everley
prog.reviews@futurenet.com

New spins...

STEVE HOWE

The evergreen Yes guitarist uncouples from the mothership to drift through ever-shifting landscapes, both internal and external, on his first solo album in nine years.

Words: Chris Roberts **Illustration:** Charlie Roy

Love Is A River, the keynote track on Steve Howe's first solo album since 2011's *Time*, never quite does what you expect it to from one moment to the next. There are lovely hooks and melodies and refrains in there, but the structure of this six-minute song resists, at all points, doing what any songwriting craftsman's textbook would. Let that charming guitar line settle in? No, move on. Repeat that kind of chorus section? Don't be daft; maybe later. Do four of these motifs? Nah, how about three, or one?

It's this restless refusal to do the obvious, or even the sensible, which has always distinguished Yes from the run of the mill. And more often than not, their mercurial musical decisions have involved their longtime guitarist. On occasion, sure, they've tripped over their ambition. But when it's worked, they've struck rare, lofty magic.

Outside the band, Howe is no less peripatetic. The likeable *Love Is* may have a gentle, warm feel overall, but within most pieces there's an abundance of ideas. Don't expect progginess of the labyrinthine stature of, say, *The Revealing Science Of God (Dance Of The Dawn)* here — at six minutes, *Love Is A River* is the longest. But picture a later Yes album, like *Fly From Here*, if it was homegrown and barefoot, relaxing in the sun with a welcoming smile on its face.

The 10 tracks on here do make one concession to structure: they alternate between instrumental and vocal pieces, five of each. The instrumentals are moods for a day, states of mind which Howe's guitar took him into and which he explores tenderly, without tensing up. The sweet, shuffling *Fulcrum*, keyboard-decorated *Pause For Thought* and the at-first flamenco flavoured *Beyond The Call* (which gets busy and fuzzy midway like Mike Oldfield oomphing up *Ommadawn*) are delicately poised daydreams. *Sound Picture* allows some of his jazz-influenced inflections in through the window. It's jerky and jumpy

Love Is

BMG

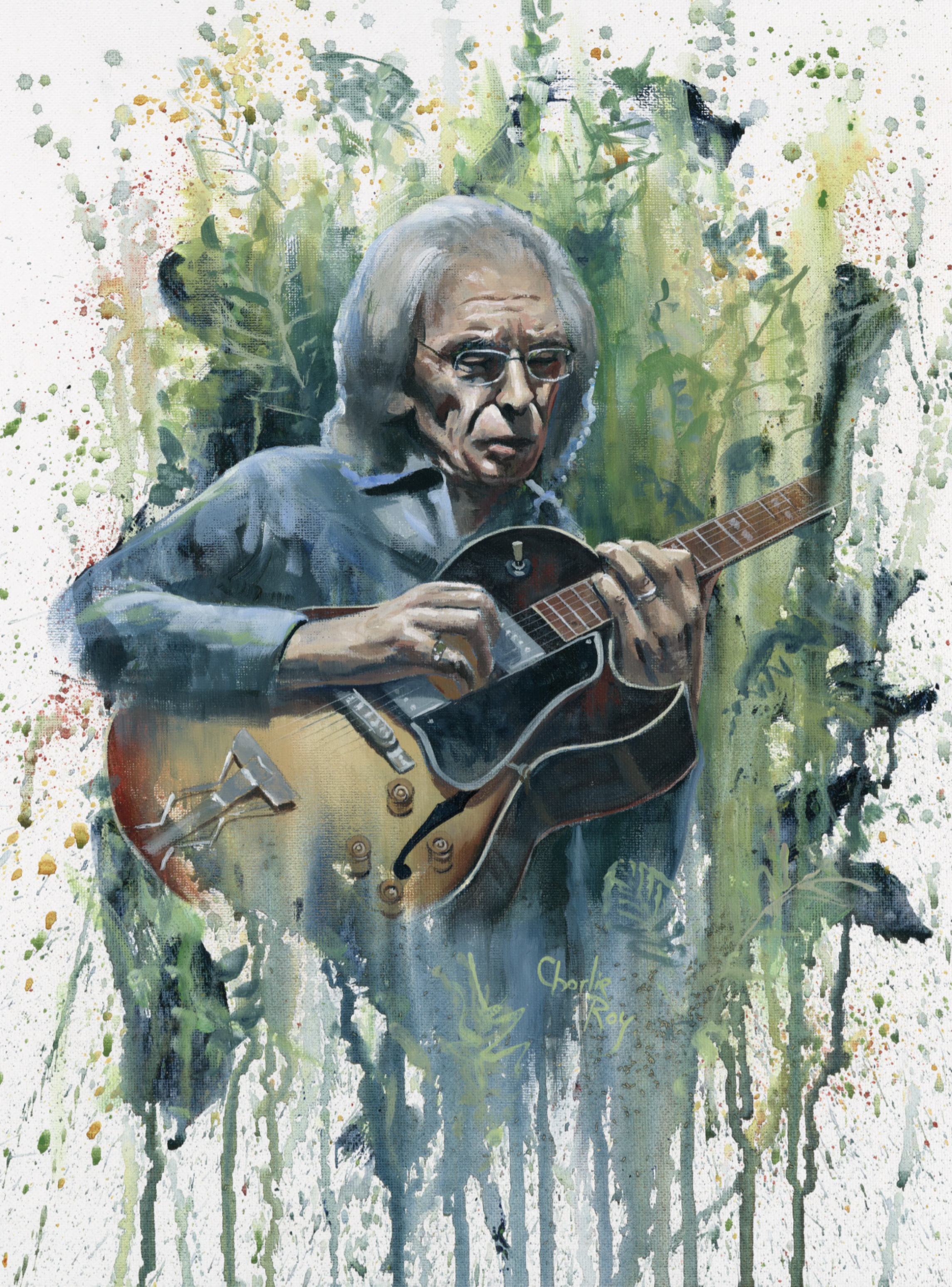
> ***Fly From Here*** **homegrown and barefoot.**

— a bumpy ride — then it isn't, then it is again. *The Headlands*, coming towards the end, gets somewhat more rocky, chugging away as Howe's lead spirals tastefully across its surface. It also, no doubt unconsciously, carries a faint melodic resemblance to Bob Seger's *Still The Same*, which, to be clear, is a massive red herring. This album is not like Bob Seger. It really, really isn't. But one has to call those unwitting faint similarities when one hears them.

Howe's playing everything on here, except for when his son Dylan delivers drumming. On the vocal tracks, however, Jon Davison joins in with high harmonies and interjections as well as playing bass. As the now long-standing holder of the title of Yes' Current Actual Official Vocalist, it's no secret he can sing, but his bass playing will perhaps, to many, come as a pleasant surprise. And his voice is a huge boon here. With all the will in the world, Howe is a solid rather than outstanding singer, and Davison's clever shading in, as the perfect foil, boosts the songs' personality levels. He's always respectful, knows it's not his spotlight, but brings some zing to the tunes.

The theme of the album is, Howe has said, the importance of love, particularly as in love of nature and love of the universe. Ecology. The world he'd like to see his granddaughter grow up into. These common ideals trickle down throughout. *See Me Through* buzzes along with an amped up energy which wouldn't have been out of place in one of Howe's early 60s bands such as Tomorrow or Bodast. It's a blast: Dylan's drumming kicks. Mentions of *'forests, streams and hills'* and *'I could smell the daffodils'* sees our host taking us on a Wordsworthian trip, with a Proustian rush of *Close To The Edge*, at least lyrically (though not — don't get over-excited — sonically).

The aforementioned *Love Is A River* flows happily despite its fidgeting, and an uplifting spirit runs through it, while *It Ain't Easy* is an inoffensive mid-tempo plodder, kept afloat by the never less than guileful guitar tones. *Imagination* sweeps in with a flurry of Yes-like lead lines but then reclines back into something more akin to Asia's AOR. Probably the best of the rest is the finale, *On The Balcony*, a paean to appreciating the roses and *'just letting things be'*. He's *'in a space, and the air is free'*. He'd be great in a stay-at-home lockdown, if you could imagine such a thing. It's a honeyed eulogy to mindful chilling out, but the trio make the very most of its ebbs and flows, and of course Howe scatters all manner of contrasting and complementary guitar lines, which tingle and thrill, over it. *'All civilisation's there'*, he sings, and while *Love Is* is enjoyable rather than essential, one could equally apply that statement to his evergreen, inspired playing.


Charlie Roy

FROST*

Others INSIDE OUT

Contemporary prog masters' outtakes EP.

Way back in 2015 or so, Frost* mainman Jem Godfrey teased that the band's next release would be a double album. Little was mentioned about this when *Falling Satellites* arrived the following year as a generous yet undeniably single album. It was easy to let this slide at the time, since there was plenty to get our teeth into, but there was that niggle for many fans of the "what happened to that extra material, then?" variety. Nearly half

> **A coda to Frost*'s last album and an aperitif for what's next.**

a decade on, this six-track EP acts both as an answer to that question, and as an appetiser for even more new Frost*-y goodness later this year.

While Godfrey's explanation for why these tracks weren't included on *Falling Satellites* makes perfect sense — he wanted to retain a focus and direction that he felt this material would dilute — *Others* opener *Fathers* wouldn't have been out of place on that album. It's a powerful, inexorable slice of raw Frost*, grabbing the listener by the scruff of the neck and dragging them into the expansive musical world of Godfrey, the ubiquitous John Mitchell and bassist Nathan King.

Despite the technical bent of much of this material and the criticism that's sometimes levelled at Godfrey and co that they're "over-produced" (whatever that means), the musician who wrote pop hits for the likes of Atomic Kitten is never too far away. *Fathom*'s strident majesty and aching beauty is a prime example, as is *Clouda* with its sequenced synths, heavily processed drums and dark brooding interludes, but which, at its heart, boasts vocal melodies that any self-respecting boy band could build most of an album upon. Meanwhile, *Eat* acts as part voice sampling experiment, part provocative rumination, and *Exhibit A*, a warning about the perils of fame, is a multi-layered, mini-masterpiece with so much going on it would benefit from a musical route map and assembly instructions.

Few bands have the talent, imagination, wherewithal and, let's be honest, unadulterated gall to chuck quite as much in the musical blender as Frost*, and *Others* is continued proof of that. It's not always an easy listen and demands a certain time investment to fully appreciate what's going on in places, so *Others* is perhaps not the most obvious place to start one's Frost* exploration. However, for the inquisitive progger familiar with some of the band's past work and the thousands of fanatically dedicated Frosties around the world, this EP is a little over half an hour of intelligent, involved, glorious sounding and often strangely moving music which acts as a belated coda to *Falling Satellites* and an aperitif for what's to come on their next studio album.

GARY MACKENZIE

ALIZARIN

The Last Semblance ALIZARIN.BANDCAMP.COM

Big music telling vibrant stories, now with added vocals.

Fittingly for a band who hail from Tinsel Town, Los Angeles' Alizarin style their output as "cinematic prog", and the band's second album develops this concept beyond their exclusively instrumental debut, *Cast Zenith*, as guitarist Josh Kay doubles up and provide vocals throughout.

There are still sweeping, ambitious statements that shift musical moods and juxtapose atmospherics and space with chunky prog metal riffing like opener *Elegy Simulacra* and mini epic *Attenuation*. Kay's voice, while perhaps not the strongest, adds another dimension to their songwriting – although it's written mainly in 5/4, the fantastic *Heirloom* feels like it's been shaped by the need to accommodate vocal melodies, and recent single, the slightly peculiar ballad *Velvet Margin* was written specifically around the de facto frontman's voice.

It isn't just about Kay though. Keyboard player Avelino Ramirez utilises some interesting and unexpected sounds throughout, including some rather sexy electric piano. Fans of the lighter end of Opeth's output and of Porcupine Tree's penchant for off-kilter storytelling will find much to love here. **GM**

BARON CRÂNE

Commotions NADGERS

French three-piece set the intensity dials to maximum.

Unfettered abandon and micro-dynamic vision charge the psychedelic jazz-liberated onslaughts unleashed on this second album from Paris-based Baron Crâne, whose mission is to push the power trio format to maximum limits.

Guitarist-leader Léo Pinon is joined by bassist Olivier Pain and drummer Léo Goize, plus guest vocalists, on five lengthy tracks that combine rare dexterity and refreshing lack of restraint. It evokes a range of early 70s outfits such as Tony Williams' Lifetime, Grand Funk and even Magma.

After *Firmin*'s darkly dramatic, light-and-shade instrumental churn sets the energy levels to stun, *Acid Rains* uncorks colossal block chord carnage after its eerie pulsing opening build-up topped with Arthur Brossard's desolate, alternative rock vocal. *Closing Doors* invokes rapid John McLaughlin-style time signature scrabbling, offset by calmer stretches. The bristling jazz-funk intensity of *On Rase Les Murs*' is upped by INCH railing in French over blazing riffage, while the controlled avalanche of *Fifth Stone* becomes a dynamic master-class of calm and violent storm. Like the whole album, it's given extra power through the sense of barely-containable chaos. **KN**

BLURRED VISION

Redemption OPEN EYES

Second album from well-connected prog upstart.

Blurred Vision mainman Sepp Osley escaped war-ravaged Iran as a child, ending up in Canada and, eventually, London. Along the way, he's crossed paths with Steve Hogarth and Peter Gabriel (who made guest appearances live and in a video respectively), as well as Rush producer Terry Brown, who Osley enlisted to produce this second BV album.

Said album comprises songs that pulled Osley out of "a period of depression". That state of mind is sometimes apparent, notably when Osley sings '*My mind is like exposed flesh/TV is the salt' on Inside Out/ Collision Course*. But largely this is an uptempo selection of songs, mixing electronic sensibilities with a Floydian sense of scale and emotion.

One Day feel dips its toes into 80s synth pop waters before expanding into more contemporary progressive rock territory with choppy guitars and a soaring chorus. Elsewhere *Clever Dawn* incorporates some of the biting intent of *Wall*-era Floyd, while rockier highlight *Magdalena* boasts the hookiest chorus on the record. Osley's melodies don't always measure up to his instrumental nous. Still, it makes for an enveloping, textured experience that deepens with successive listens. **PG**

TIM BOWNESS & PETER CHILVERS

Modern Ruins BURNING SHED

Art rock heavyweights' first collaboration in 18 years.

Tim Bowness and Peter Chilvers' 2002 collaboration, *California Norfolk*, was centred around a metaphorical village perched on a crumbling coastline. Eighteen years later, this belated follow-up delves further into psychological landscapes no longer seem important. Mixed by Peter Hammill, *Modern Ruins* bears both men's characteristics. Chilvers has worked with Brian Eno and Underworld's Karl Hyde, and on *The Boy From Yesterday* he builds up layers of electric piano, electronic percussion, synths and FX, while Bowness brings a lyrical melancholy that verges on bleakness. He's mischievously likened his approach to that of Samuel Beckett, but *Modern Ruins* is more reminiscent in its moods of Nick Drake's *Bryter Later* or The Blue Nile's *A Walk Across The Rooftops*. Basically, he cares and he's just trying to make sense of things. **MB**

Opening track *Your Sleeping Face* is a poignant song about ageing. Chilvers' spartan piano evokes the dimensions of a cold bedroom with an ageing man looking at his wife and trying to regain his feelings for her. The protagonist of *Blog Remember Me* is trying to get perspective on his life by reading his accounts of the past, only to find they

CRYPTEX

Once Upon A Time STEAMHAMMER/SPV

Articulate prog-pop from chameleonic Germans.

German trio Cryptex aren't an easy band to categorise. Their sound draws from the same wellspring as Nightwish, yet they also nod towards the heritage of Supertramp and ELO, offering intelligent pop bliss played with the acuity of prog masters come to replicating the quirkiness of Supertramp during the *Crisis? What Crisis?* era, while *Reptiles* brings to mind Uriah Heep circa *Demons And Wizards*, featuring dramatic guitar playing from André Jean Henri Mertens.

Once Upon A Time, their third album, is laced with lustrous melodies without ever blossoming into over-indulgence. *Because The Reason Is You* and *Body Language* provide keyboard player Simon Moskon ample opportunity to display his orchestral ambitions and give his smooth vocals a chance to shine. *Haunted* is the closest Cryptex

I Don't Know Why is more off the wall, nuzzling jazz intonations against a simple, eccentric chorus. *I See It In Your Eyes'* languid tempo builds around an echoing piano and lone voice, before concluding with an atmospheric whistle. Finale *Leaving* is different again, with a monologue detailing mental anguish as its centrepiece. It all shows an admirable breadth. **MD**

DIM GRAY

Flown GRIM DAY

Elegiac and beautifully dense post-prog from Norway.

It's not hard to imagine the three members of Dim Gray standing on a cliff overlooking a fjord somewhere on the Scandinavian coast, staring into the middle distance as choppy grey waves roil below them, a solitary tear starting to freeze as it makes the lonely descent to their chins. Those are the kind of images that spring to mind listening to this Norwegian trio's beautifully realised debut. Earth. All very spectral and mellifluous, but the real joy to be found in *Flown* is that Dim Gray rarely lose sight of the song.

Flown is aptly titled. Referencing Sigur Rós, Radiohead and, on the aching *Black Sun*, fellow Norwegians Kings Of Convenience, it feels like music to lose yourself in as you drift off above the

It's easy to get swept up in the beautiful dynamics of *The Wave We Thought We'd Ride Forever*, but the basic principle of the song endures; it takes you on a journey, but not without conclusion. Similarly, the underplayed *Song for E*, which sits at the opposite end of the band's musical spectrum, holds the listener's attention to its last lingering note. This is music caught between the dreaming and waking, losing yourself somewhere in the sky. **PW**

LAZERTÜTH

Leon/Galaxies HOUSE OF WATTS

Two albums, two sides of.

Firmly rooted in the DIY ethos of the weird music underground, Lazertüth's handful of releases to date have all been immersive, gleefully psychedelic and defiantly tough to pin down. Steeped in the wheezing Mellotrons and angular riffs of early Crimson, but with a penchant for freewheeling, acid-fuelled jams, the Massachusetts mavericks are just the otherworldly, brain-melting sonic cosmonauts we need in these times of

> **Theses are just the brain-melting cosmonauts we need.**

indigestible reality. In hindsight, 2019's fuzzy and febrile *Serpentor* full-length was only a tantalising hors-d'oeuvre in advance of this twin album splurge of wild creativity.

Leon is the new Lazertüth album proper and it's apparent that creative mastermind Ethan Weiss has recognised his band's chemistry and made it the focus of this new material. Opening epic *White Hot Chariot* is a riot of subverted prog tropes, clattering ensemble momentum and wonky melodies: both knowingly nostalgic and oddly timeless, it's a turbocharged version of the band heard on *Serpentor*.

There's a crispness to the production here that Lazertüth have only previously hinted at, and it's that subtle blending of modern sounds and old school musicality that makes each of these four elaborate melody-mazes so engaging. The lysergic whoosh of space rock that typified earlier releases is still intermittently present, but Weiss' tight-knit crew are too precise and plugged in to waste time noodling. Instead, every moment of sprawling closer *The Rider* sounds lovingly crafted, while the gargantuan excess of the two-part, four-section *Of The Same Design* is managed with great finesse. *Leon* is still a mind-bending trip, of course, but it's also a supremely focused and absorbing piece of work: peak psychedelic prog, *just* before the drugs kick in.

Meanwhile, *Galaxies* is a generous 40-minute helping of improvised cosmic rock, with Lazertüth bumped up to a six-piece for some unashamedly red-eyed rambling. At its best, on the 11-minute *Andromeda*, *Galaxies* sounds as vital and whacked-out as Grobschnitt's *Solar Music* or Steve Hillage's *L*. There's no mistaking the sound of musicians that know instinctively what works and when to stop waffling, but while you definitely don't *need* to be stoned to appreciate the meandering likes of *Cosmos Redshift 7*, it probably would help.

It's also hard to deny that *Galaxies* does pale somewhat in comparison with *Leon*. The former is an entertaining indulgence with several thrilling moments; the latter is simply one of the best progressive rock albums of the year so far. Both records can be found at Lazertüth's Bandcamp page, with *Leon* due for imminent vinyl release, too.

DOM LAWSON

LONELY ROBOT

Feelings Are Good INSIDEOUT

John Mitchell comes back down to earth, and feels the gravity...

Through all his prog outings, John Mitchell's always had a big, distinctive sound. His 'Astronaut Trilogy' — his previous three Lonely Robot records *Please Come Home*, *The Big Dream* and *Under Stars* — were dense, hefty works that revelled in their interstellar aesthetic. But beneath the cinematic production patina — the *Blade Runner* bleeps, the *Alien* echoes — Mitchell's anthemic palette, trademark rock riffs and melodic hooks always remained the engine. And amid the abstract, sci-fi lyrics he dealt with human concerns, like love, memory and identity.

> **Feelings Are Good is a pretty tough listen, but never a dirge.**

The fourth Lonely Robot album, *Feelings Are Good* dispenses with the space theme. As Mitchell puts it: "We're back on planet Earth, and I have a very personal lyrical axe to grind!" He says it was a cathartic record to write, and while it's risky to second-guess such personal and often oblique lyrics as those here, that disturbing cover speaks volumes. Mitchell's unafraid to dig deep into his own psychology, and comes across angry, bitter, frustrated, sad and heartbroken, sometimes within the turn of a phrase.

Yet that musical engine purrs. Vocoders and burbling keys colour the jaunty, jaundiced paean to the past *Into The Lo-Fi* (*'I didn't like the future and the present's out/I'm seeing things in sepia much clearer now'*). Discordant and disquieting, *Spiders* shows Mitchell's brilliance at sneaking in odd rhythmic shifts and modal harmony while never losing sight of the hooks and the story: *'With hundreds of eyes you watched everything rise, then shot venom straight to the heart.'* Aptly reflecting on life's ups and downs (mood swings, maybe?), catchy single *Life Is A Sine Wave* is a chugging retro rocker tempered with soft piano passages, a crunchy synth, and a soaring, lyrical guitar solo. Mitchell remains a monster player but keeps a lid on the widdle admirably this time out.

His guitars are urgent in *Suburbia* — a scathing diatribe against small-mindedness — and often play a more textural role, as in the electro-heavy *Keeping People As Pets*, an unflinching fulmination on abuse and manipulation in relationships. *Crystalline* oozes genuine, lovelorn sorrow, while the throbbing *Army Of One* morphs from defiant, barracks yard metal into a more introspective exploration of the war waged within.

Feelings Are Good is a pretty tough listen, but never a dirge. Indeed, two of its finest moments are its gentlest: *The Silent Life* is a beautiful, baleful double portrait, and with just his voice and acoustic guitar, Mitchell offers the plaintive and direct *Grief Is The Price Of Love* — the most bittersweet one and a half minutes you'll spend this blighted year.

GRANT MOON

FATAL FUSION

Dissonant Minds KARISMA

A mélange of musical ideas from maverick Norseman.

Just when you think you've got a handle on what Fatal Fusion do, the Norwegian five-piece take a left-field turn and leave you perplexed. But that's what makes the band's fourth album such a delight.

There are only four tracks, but each one is a concerto in its own right. *Coming Forth By Day* is a 14-minute ride that twists from the verve of prog metal to beatific pastoral passages, and then into a more pop oriented avenue before finally fading away on a majestic organ swathe from Erlend Engebretsen.

Quo Vadimus is half the length of its predecessor, yet provides equal variety, as Knut Erik Grøntvedt's earthy voice dovetails with Engebretsen and guitarist Stig Selnes. *Beneath The Skydome*, the shortest composition, seems to be sedately meandering, until the mellow feel gives way to a claustrophobic staccato passage.

The album's masterpiece unquestionably is *Broken Man Part 2*. The follow up to *Broken Man* from 2010's *Land Of The Sun*, delves into Traffic-inspired jazz, corrals Caravan-style delicacies and even nods towards Deep Purple Mk 1's vaunting progressive inclinations. A towering climax to a stunning record. **MD**

THE FIERCE & THE DEAD

Show Me Devon: Live At Kozfest 2019 SELF-RELEASED

Brit mavericks live without any touch ups.

Recorded at Kozfest in Devon last year, this official bootleg finds TFATD keeping their performance exactly as it was on the day. Resisting the temptation of using technology to fix mistakes has resulted in a flawed album. But that's to be celebrated.

Led by guitarist Matt Stevens, they storm through the set with a sense of power and intricacy that reels you in and holds the attention throughout. Their instrumental approach to progressive metal is entrancing with tracks such as *Truck*, *Flint* and *Magnet In Your Face* showing how the band neatly balance both sides of their personality. The musicianship is disciplined, yet bristles with a brusque fury. The best example is *666...6*, a journey that becomes an audio tidal wave enveloping the listener.

The band have also left in the daft between song banter that's so much part of their live presentation. This includes 46-second opener *Where's The Drummer*, appropriately titled, as everyone's waiting for absent sticksman Stuart Marshall to appear onstage. It all adds to the overwhelming sense of *Show Me Devon...* being a genuine representation of the full on The Fierce & The Dead live experience. **MD**

KRISTOFFER GILDENLÖW

Homebound NEW JOKE MUSIC

Rustic odes from former Pain Of Salvation bassist.

Kristoffer Gildenlöw has spent the best part of the last decade proving himself an evocative songwriter, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist. *Homebound*, the ex-Pain Of Salvation bassist's fourth album under his own name, squashes any lingering doubts about those abilities.

Eternal introduces the record with a mix of sounds from nature and evocative strings, ushering in the acoustic arpeggios and smoky verses of *Holy Ground*. It's an atmosphere that Gildenlöw maintains until the end, with occasional backing harmonies fleshing out *Like Father, Like Son* and *You Need Not Stay (Away)*. His take on Leonard Cohen's stark ode to failed romance *Chelsea Hotel #2* is right at home in this company.

But that minimalism sometimes counts against *Homebound*. *Infected* and *Snow* are too stagnant to be as impactful, while the album as a whole would benefit from a little more variety.

For all that, it's nearly impossible not to reflect on things like personal growth, shaky relationships, and unfulfilled ambitions as it plays. There's no denying Gildenlöw and company's mastery of moods and melodies to draw listeners in the whole way through. **JMB**

GÖSTA BERLINGS SAGA

Konkret Musik INSIDEOUT

Highly focused sixth album from instrumental Swedes.

Gösta Berlings Saga have been going for two decades already, but 2018's *ET EX* saw a spike in popularity, with the Swedish band's dense, widescreen dramas inviting comparisons to Goblin and King Crimson.

Konkret Musik has a different emphasis. Its dozen tracks are more concise and less reliant on guitars. Under the guidance of producer/vintage synth collector Daniel Fagerström, the quintet explore the further reaches of electronica without quite sacrificing their default position.

It's a balance they achieve well. At the core of *Vinsta Guldklocka* sits a fat keyboard riff, surrounded by melodic babble and humming guitar, while the aptly-timed *Basement Traps* is a more minimal salute to Kraftwerk, in particular the late Florian Schneider. *Closing Borders* may or may not allude to political climes, but its semi-orchestral flourish fails to dispel the sense of impending dread. Similarly, for its all kineticism, the title track unpacks the kind of doomy post-rock chords that are designed to unsettle. Guitarist Rasmus Booberg finally shifts centre stage for the Zep-ish *Förbifart Stockholm*, though it's less impressive than what's gone before. **RH**

JON HASSELL

Seeing Through Sound (Pentimento Volume Two) NDEYA

Influential innovator and still fiercely original.

Now 83, Jon Hassell continues to explore nuance and novelty in sound like an artist a quarter of his age. The trumpet player and conceptualist has been a demi-god of the avant-garde since studying under Stockhausen, and his legacy is less a career than a series of perpetual motion maps. Some will have come to Hassell's "Fourth World" primitive/futurist blendings through the gateways of Terry Riley or La Monte Young; others through his work with Eno, David Sylvian or Peter Gabriel.

A loose sequel to 2018's *Listening To Pictures*, his latest reverie is both minimalist and loquacious, skewed electronica and subtle acoustica. Two eight-minute tracks bookend the brooding: opener *Fearless* clicks like Can but murmurs and shakes like a spin-off from one of his 80s ambient ambles with David Sylvian, glitches and drones dropping in along the path. *Timeless*, the album's exit strategy, masters the illusion of making complex aesthetic decisions seem inevitable. Between these, sketches like *Moons Of Titan* and *Reykjavik* somehow summon up a sense of reassurance and comfort among their spooky, scratchy secrets. As always, he's in his own time zone. **CR**

ALLAN HOLDSWORTH

Frankfurt '86 MANIFESTO

Late guitar visionary's live set sparkles with fretboard brilliance.

Allan Holdsworth's death in 2017 robbed music of a true innovator. Stints with Ian Carr, Tempest, Soft Machine, Tony Williams, Bruford, and UK showcased a fiery and unconventional approach that acted as a musical accelerant wherever it was applied.

This live set with bassist Jimmy Johnson, keyboardist Kei Akagi and Gary Husband on drums explores his extensive 80s catalogue. Spacious and loose-limbed, the tunes and themes perfectly suit Holdsworth's legato technique and elastic tone. Bending scales and harmonies into impossible shapes his output as a composer is formidable. The dense intensity of his writing and work isn't always easy to digest but it's worth the effort, rewarding with scintillating layers of passion and complexity.

Those often jaw-dropping imaginative leaps in his chordal work coupled with the frantic speed of his famously mobile guitar soloing produce a thrilling convergence of style and substance. Yet the colouring he provides as a sensitive accompanist is breathtaking in its range and quick gear-shifts, intensely attuned to his fellow players. A vibrant reminder of Holdsworth's unique, uncompromising vision. **SS**

MAGENTA

Masters Of Illusion TIGERMOTH

Welsh proggers' heartfelt tribute to horror icons.

Usually, as soon as ones hears that any band have made a concept album, the expectation is for something esoteric. However, what Magenta have done is a little different from the norm.

Masters Of Illusion highlights six actors who helped to shape the way we view the history of horror movies. These are Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney Jr, Vincent Price, Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing and Ingrid Pitt — people who triggered a passion for the genre in keyboard player Robert Reed and his brother/lyricist Steve. But the album isn't about the characters which made them famous, it explores what they were like behind the masks.

> **A beautiful piece of work that gets better with each listen.**

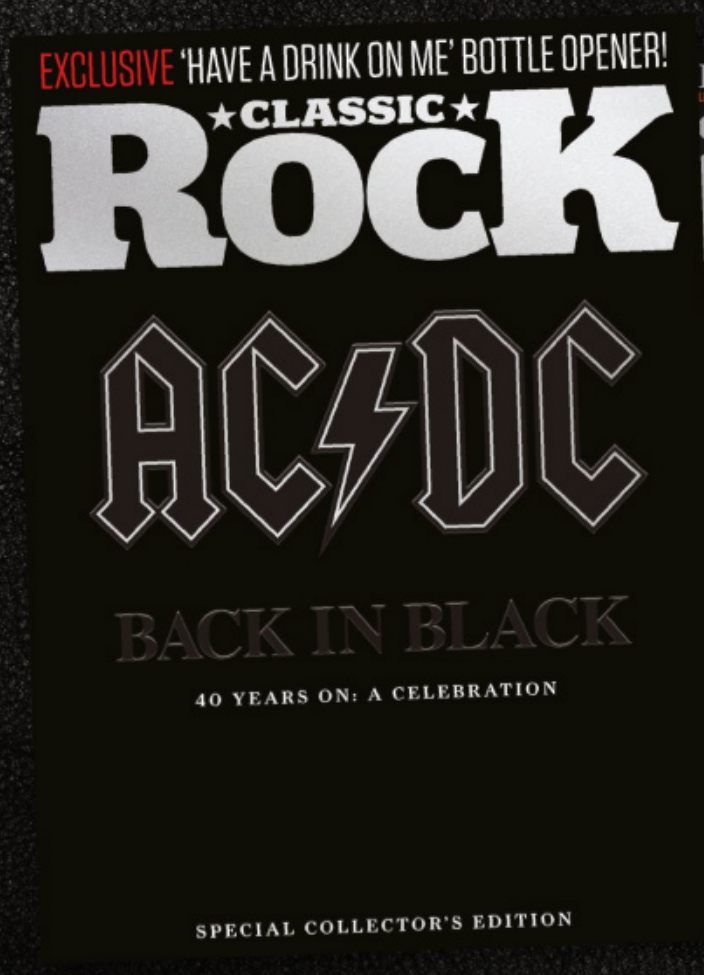
It's certainly a challenge to capture the essence of six strong personalities. The bon viveur Price, the aristocratic Lee, the cultured Cushing, Lugosi's drug addiction, Pitt's haughty sexuality and Chaney Jr's alcoholism. But the Reed brothers have the devotion towards their subject and the knowledge to make it work musically and lyrically. The rest of the band rise to the occasion.

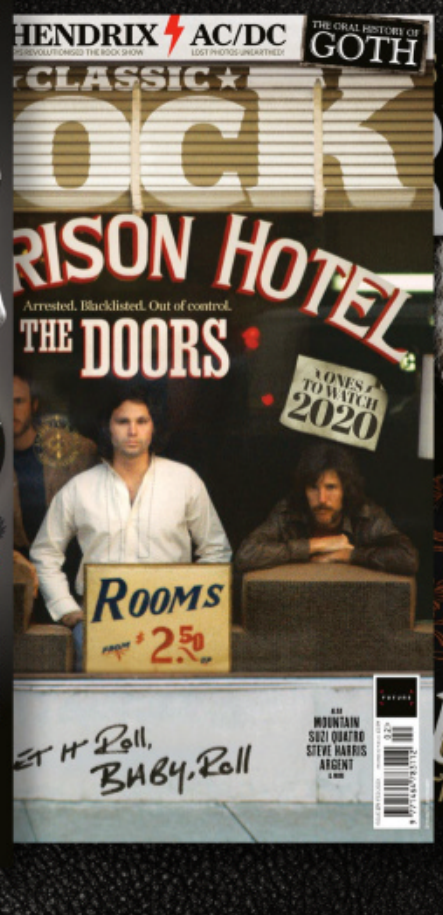
In a musical sense, Magenta return to a style that mirrors what they did at the start of their career. Inspiration comes from the 70s, as evidenced on *Bela*, which veers from initial jauntiness to a darker hue. Singer Christina Booth's vocals capture the way in which Lugosi's career disintegrated. *'I had it all'*, she sings at the start, before sighing later, *'No one to catch me as I fall'*.

A Gift From God has a genuinely affecting pathos, while *Reach For The Moon* portrays what it must have been like for Chaney Jr, forever compared unfavourably to his incomparable actor father Lon Chaney. *'It was cold in your shadow every day'* mourns Booth, as Peter Jones delivers a pained saxophone solo. Elsewhere, *Snow* has a jazz rock charm, and Nightwish's Troy Donockley adds effective uilleann pipes to the haunting majesty of *The Rose*, with Chris Fry providing elegant lead guitar passages. Finally, the title track is a love letter to the six legends and the joy they gave the world, whatever the sacrifices. Nearly 17 minutes long, it moves brilliantly through an entire spectrum of sound, from quietude to rousing splendour; Reed's keyboards act as the fulcrum as they do throughout.

A beautiful piece of work that gets better with each listen, there's also a DVD, featuring a 5.1 surround sound mix, plus videos and interviews. A limited VIP edition is available which includes a bonus CD, *The Lost Reel,* with alternate mixes of tracks from *Masters Of Illusion* and remixes from the band's catalogue.

MALCOLM DOME





CLASSIC ROCK

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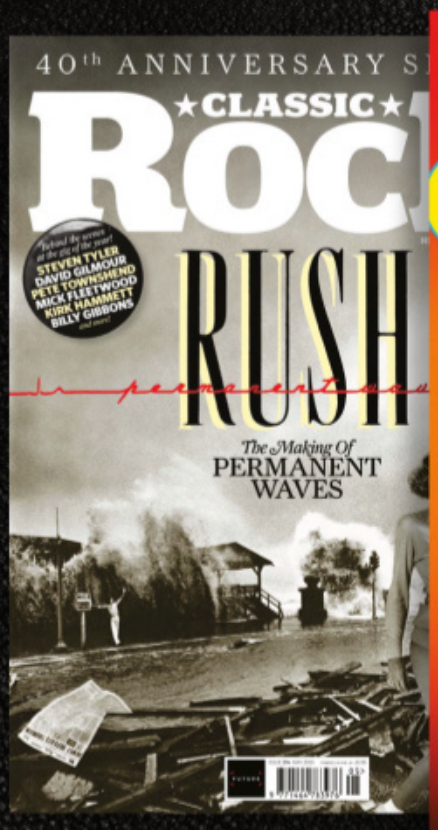

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KARIBOW

Essence KARIBOW

Live and acoustic recordings on the German group's new double album.

Oliver Rüsing has helmed various incarnations of KariBow since the mid-90s, building up a healthy international following with a catalogue of solid AOR leaning albums. His stock-in-trade is thoughtful, unreconstructed and highly melodic songcraft; KariBow's neo prog leanings are usually cleverly subtle, in the detail.

Their latest release, *Essence* is a double album with each disc showing their highly listenable and likeable music in contrasting settings. Disc one, *Essentially Acoustic*, sees the group rework a handful of past songs, but unplugged, three-chords-and-the-truth stuff this ain't – it's as highly polished as any of their full-blown studio albums. The catchy *Primeval* and mournful *9/16* buff up nicely with piano, acoustic guitars, a sparse rhythm section, some strings, samples, and Rüsing in full voice.

The performances on second disc, *Essentially Live*, were captured during their 11-date MOnuMENTour last year (ah, remember gigs?). The charging *Private Babylon* and singalong *District Of Dignity* (featuring ex-Karntaka soprano Hayley Griffiths) are highlights of a beautifully recorded, slickly executed set. **GRM**

LONG DISTANCE CALLING

How Do We Want To Live? INSIDEOUT

Floyd-like concept sprawl from German experimentalists.

Stalwarts of the European instrumental scene, German rockers Long Distance Calling return with their first concept album, a sprawling attempt to grapple with the implications of exponential technological progress. While thematically it doesn't quite work, instrumentally it's a coherent and compelling record.

Sonically it's a change of gear from 2018's *Boundless*. Though some of the darkness and melancholy of that album remains, there's more bombast and a sense of scale to *How Do We Want To Live?* that's beyond even their past ambitious efforts. LDC clearly want this to be their version of *The Wall*, and tie the narrative together primarily using canned samples (including one quite cheesy clip from *The Matrix*). But the Floyd comparisons go deeper. The guitar delay sound as *Curiosity (Part 1)* and *(Part 2)* segue into each other recalls *Run Like Hell*, while many of the slick lead lines bear a resemblance to David Gilmour's playing, especially at the climax of *Hazard*. It's on *Immunity* that everything comes together: electronic layers meet a classic prog sensibility that's aided by the dynamic production, and a fantastic, metallic breakdown to close. **AL**

MAUD THE MOTH

Orphne MÚSICA MÁXICA

Theatricality meets Greek myth courtesy of Madrid chamber-jazz ensemble.

Founded a decade ago by singer and classical pianist Amaya López-Carromero, Spanish avant-garde quintet Maud The Moth come over like the more experimental and over-the-top siblings of iamthemorning.

Their third album derives its title from a mysterious figure from Greek mythology, and it crackles with the kind of drama and theatricality that wouldn't be out of place in an ancient world play. Opener *Ecdysis* sets López-Carromero's striking multi-layered vocals to arresting percussion and atmospheric piano work, while the wails of *The Mirror Door* and *As Above So Below* veer towards the stark and haunting. Elsewhere, *Mormo And The Well* packs a more playful punch before *Epoxy Bonds* concludes the album with the kind of mournfully-orchestrated grandiosity that lingers long after it's finished.

It's not perfect – *The Stairwell* and *Finisterrae* are both less intricately woven and impactful, and consequently blander than the rest of the album. But that's certainly not enough to prevent *Orphne*'s mixture of heavenly and hellish elements from yielding a striking and unique outcome. **JMB**

POST-ROCK

Alex Lynham guides us through the peaks and valleys of essential post-rock.

American cult math duo **Giraffes? Giraffes!** have just released a single track, 15-minute EP, *Rite Of Summer* (self-released). The genius of Giraffes? Giraffes! has always been their ability to balance melody with sometimes gratuitous intricacy, and *Rite Of Summer* is in this regard one of their best realised works. The elastic tempo shifts, masterful use of looped layers, and eventual blow-out, guitar hero solo provide so much variation that it's hard to digest in a single pass.

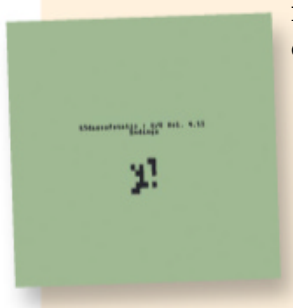
Another instrumental two-piece that are back with a vengeance is **El Ten Eleven**, with triple-LP *Tautology* (Joyful Noise Recordings). There's a grit and organic feel to the production that emphasises the shifts in register of the guitar and bass parts, while tying together the many looped riffs into a coherent whole. The new focus in production is echoed in the melodies as well — with the highlights on *Tautology I, Jejeune* and *Entropy* easily ranking among their best work to date.

UK underground metallers **Ohhms** have managed an impressive feat with their new album *Close* (Holy Roar). Its atmospheric elements are more pronounced and smoothly interwoven into the flow of the record, on segues like *Flaming Youth* and *Strange Ways*, as well as the album's centrepiece, *Revenge*. At the same time, its heaviness is refined to perfection, with huge post-metal riffs on *Alive!*, *Destroyer*, and the closer *Unplugged* that totally command the listener's attention. Bonus points to anyone who's spotted that they've named all their tracks after classic Kiss songs and albums.

Kaguu's debut LP, *Rosewood* (self-released), couldn't be more different. Their light and effervescent riffs recall the bro-rock of the US math scene, but luckily, Kaguu's main influence lies elsewhere. Borrowing heavily from the sounds of vintage Japanese video games results in not only a more interesting harmonic and timbral palette for the melody instruments and percussion, but also a more interesting aesthetic for the band.

A lot of groups are releasing live recordings in the absence of touring plans. One of the more notable is *Live Sessions 2020* (self-released) by Polish post-rockers **Tides From Nebula**. The tracklisting draws heavily from last year's excellent *From Voodoo To Zen*, before an encore of sorts with two older tracks — a rousing take on *The Lifter* and *We Are The Mirror* from 2016's *Safehaven*.

Closer to home, Sheffield's **65daysofstatic** have concluded their *Unreleased/Unreleasable* EP series with *Endings* (self-released). In an act of showmanship, they've saved some of the best tracks for last, with a diverse set that nicely complements their groundbreaking last record *Replicr, 2019*. Huge in scope, tracks like *Gorecki* forsake the crazed beats found on other EPs like *Ptolyweirds* and instead focus on huge, cinematic atmospheres and creeping, sinister melodies. *Rounds*, meanwhile, leans heavy on the beats, offsetting a techno drive against 65's trademark battling synths and guitars, before *Pollen* swings in with a breakcore palate cleanser to close.



MCSTINE & MINNEMANN

McStine & Minnemann SELF-RELEASED

Modern prog journeymen go toe-to-toe on collaborative album.

The debut album from Randy McStine, the singer-guitarist who's worked with Dave Kerzner and In Continuum, and Marco Minnemann (The Aristocrats, Steven Wilson) was meant to just be an EP before they decided they had enough material for a full-length release. They perform all the parts and instruments, with the exception of one guest, and the album takes its influence from the smart end of 80s progressive pop, with a little 90s alternative and prog, all given the gloss of modern production.

> **There's an EP of great material here, but a full album is a stretch.**

It's easy to hear the influence of Porcupine Tree and Minnemann's time in Steven Wilson's solo band seems to have imbued him with some of Wilson's melancholia. Minnemann's contributions tend to have a much darker mood than those by McStine; both *Catrina* and *Tear The Walls Down (No Memories)* are downbeat break-up songs. That's not to suggest that McStine is all sunshine and lollipops but even when he's reprimanding a self-centred ex in *Your Offenses*, the music feels brighter and bouncier. That song exemplifies what the album does best, with a big hooky chorus and catchy refrain. McStine's lyrics tend towards abstraction and it's not always clear what he's reaching for. *'I'm gonna fly my faith,'* he declares in *Fly* and despite the impassioned delivery, his meaning remains elusive.

The focus is squarely on the songs, rather than on flexing chops. There is none of the 'Look ma, no hands!' technical wizardry of Minnemann's recordings with The Aristocrats, there's nary a drum solo in sight. Sure, the drummer can rip out a lightning fast fill on demand — and he does so regularly — but even his busiest breaks here are succinct and to the point. In a similar vein, McStine never goes into full guitar hero mode, keeping his lead work confined to tidy short solos. *Activate* is an album stand-out, with a lush chorus and a creative drum lick from Minnemann that brings to mind Matt Cameron with Soundgarden, although there's nothing here as heavy as the Seattle grunge titans.

The Closer is the big ballad on the record, with no drums at all and guest pianist Harry Waters accompanying McStine. The singer is in fine voice, although again the somewhat vague, slightly generic lyrics dilute the emotional impact. *'We can watch the cities burn, while we take another turn,'* could mean everything and nothing. *Voyager* sees Minnemann sharing lead vocals and the track typifies the whole experience — Minnemann's sections are menacing and sombre, then it switches into dreamy power pop when McStine takes over. There's definitely an EP's worth of great material here, but perhaps a full album was a slight stretch.

DAVID WEST

MOGWAI

ZeroZeroZero OST ROCK ACTION

Scottish linchpins drop excellent new soundtrack LP.

Mogwai have several soundtracks under their belt from the last decade, including *Atomic*, *Kin* and *Les Revenants*. This, a soundtrack to Italian cocaine trade drama *ZeroZeroZero*, is perhaps their darkest yet.

Despite the format, there are plenty of song-length pieces, among them the pensive *Moon In Reverse* and electronic rager *I'm Not Going When I Don't Get Back*. There's an intense tautness to several songs that's clearly inspired by the series itself, but rarely do Mogwai give in to the post-rock impulse toward easy crescendos. Of course, being a soundtrack there are tracks that are atmospheric to the point of aimlessness; here, *Chicken Guns* has a sinister *Blade Runner* vibe to it, but not a lot of sticking power. On the other hand, there are segues and interludes that are quite the opposite, even as the band make use of many of the same instruments, timbres, and layers. As cases in point, the achingly beautiful *Telt*, synth-driven *Nose Pints*, and piano-led *Space Annual* and *He Loved Trees* are highlights.

Soundtrack albums are usually firmly for the fans only, but on this LP, Mogwai have once again created a score that stands up on its own. **AL**

MORSE PORTNOY GEORGE

Cov3r To Cov3r/Cover To Cover Anthology Vol 1-3 INSIDEOUT

Eclectic trio of covers albums from the busiest men in prog.

Mike Portnoy says these are the CDs he gives to family and friends, and this anthology – comprising new album *Cov3r To Cov3r* (also out as a standalone) plus two previous volumes, which include covers of Jethro Tull, David Bowie, Squeeze, Tom Petty and many more – feels like a personal collection of classics, slickly recorded by three prog stars (Portnoy, Neal Morse and bassist Randy George).

It's is no soulless 'hits' selection. They nail Jethro Tull's *Hymn 43* with gusto. George Harrison's *What Is Life?* retains the bittersweet looseness of the original. Current Yes vocalist Jon Davison guests on Richie Havens' *No Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed* (itself covered by Yes on their second album). Their enthusiasm is audible.

There are missteps. Steely Dan's *Rikki Don't Lose That Number* loses too many edges and introduces a few unwelcome ones. The *Southern Man* portion of a Neil Young medley acquires plodding guitar beef it never wanted or needed. But it's certainly not enough to derail it.

For radical reworkings, look elsewhere. For lovingly recreated classics, with a few (mostly) tasteful twists, check this out. **PG**

OUTSIDE IN

Karmatrain AAA

Sprawling conceptual debut from Auckland five-piece.

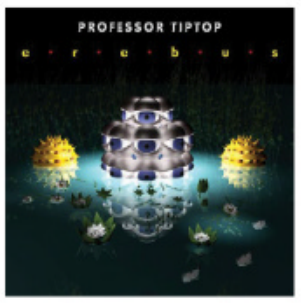
It says something about Outside In's headspace that the starting point for their first album was Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, a philosophical tract no self-respecting hippy would be seen without as the 60s bloomed. Perhaps even more tellingly, Hesse's meditation on the path to enlightenment and self-discovery was singer Mikey Brown's holiday reading. It comes as little surprise that *Karmatrain*, though clearly in thrall to A Perfect Circle and Karnivool, isn't afraid to let its freak flag fly with occasional blooms of harmony that recall the cool notes of Crosby, Stills & Nash.

Like the curate's egg, it's good in parts. Though in fairness, when Outside In are good, they are very good: full of verve and promise on the colourful and spiralling *Blue Dragon*, they quickly switch to the overdrive of *Om*, and the relatively discordant thrum of *Pass On The Flag*. The latter is especially impressive, its musical brevity a happy antidote to some of the moments when the band drift away, possibly wreathed in smoke and locked in happy fascination with the passing clouds overhead. Despite that there is, as Outside In might themselves say, much to dig here. **PW**

PROFESSOR TIP TOP

Tomorrow Is Delayed APOLLON

A new voice for the psychedelic space explorers.



Bergen, Norway has given the world everything from the trippy acid rock of Shaman Elephant to the progressive metal of Enslaved. By contrast Professor Tip Top have a Canterbury-inspired vibe and a sound as warm and comforting as a hot bath after a hard day.

There's a new face and voice fronting the band on their sixth album as German singer Sonja Otto replaces the departed Svein Magnar Hansen. This gender swap hasn't impacted their approach, with Sam Fossbakk, Stein Høgseth and Charles Wise all still onboard and their penchant for sci-fi themes remains intact. Otto isn't an excessively flashy singer: there are no dramatic, acrobatic vaults through the octaves, but her cordial style fits perfectly with the band's laid-back, chilled-out moods. Fossbakk is the star instrumentalist of the four, bringing beautiful, bluesy lead work to *In The Mirror* and sterling organ playing to *Beneath The Silence*. Elsewhere, *Objet Petit A* takes the listener into outer space with impressive vocalising from Otto over swirling synths, but the whole album is full of inviting melodies and the title track is a psychedelia inflected highlight. **DW**

PROTEST THE HERO

Palimpsest SPINEFARM

Canadian prog metallers bring back the good times.

Some six years ago, one user of the discussion website Reddit proclaimed Protest The Hero to be the "Best Canadian prog [band] since Rush." Some statement, considering the country has birthed Devin Townsend and Voivod since Geddy Lee and co were in their pomp. But for fans of the heavy stuff, they might just have a point.

Protest The Hero appear to have hit their stride again after a routine six-track EP a few years ago. *Palimpsest* is frenzied and fearless, but bloody fun too. At its best it's a ferocious flurry of white-knuckle prog metal bombast, head-scratchingly adroit guitar riffs chucked around like finger-charring hot potatoes, and odd time signatures that manage to marry with towering, pop-friendly choruses that cut through the commotion.

The Canary features spidery fretwork that's as groovy as it is grandiose and *From The Sky* serves up a sonic cataclysm, with three piano-led interludes providing much-needed breathing space. The punky pace of the drums can get a tad tiring, and a couple of moments threaten to derail things, but it proves that those who hailed Protest The Hero as one of Canada's finest exports have a point. **CC**

SHORT-HAIRED DOMESTIC

Short-Haired Domestic CALCIUM CHLORIDE

Talk Talk producer's avant-pop pleasures.

Here's a novel concept: nine different songs sung in nine different languages including Latin, Yoruba, and Hindi, with each one revelling in splendidly literal titles such as *A Song In Japanese About Trying Things Out Before Committing* and *A Song In Spanish Addressed To Men Who Drive Big Cars*.

The brainchild of Talk Talk associate Tim Friese-Greene and partner Lee, whose previous credits include Sidi Bou Said, this collection of short engaging tunes is built upon chunky breakbeat loops, growling synth bass and clipped scratchy guitar, whose time and place pulsates with a saturated, retro-90s vibe.

For the most part mesmeric and jaunty, it's a lusciously detailed album whose glittering lustre stands in stark contrast to the darker cogitations of Tim's earlier solo work. Lee's deadpan vocals occasionally bringing to mind Kirsty McColl's airy clarity.

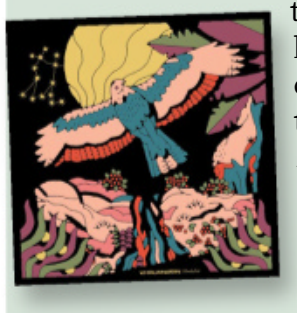
Any language barrier is easily traversed thanks to the accessible exuberant aspect of the music. Yet beneath that agreeably poppy veneer, ambiguous textures swirl with small, painterly abstractions resulting in a deep, smartly subversive sound. **SS**

PSYCHEDELIC PROG

Take a trip with **Rob Hughes** as he seeks out the latest mind-expanding music.

Grooves rule when it comes to **Bananagun**. Debut album *The True Story Of Bananagun* (Full Time Hobby) sees the Australian five-piece shape a dizzying spread of influences — Afrobeat, tropicalia, cosmic jazz, funk, garage rock and classic psychedelic pop — into something rhapsodic and pretty wonderful. Singer, flautist and guitar player Nick van Bakel leads his troupe through infectious delights like *The Master*, *Out Of Reach* and *Bird Up!*, the latter featuring animal hoots and chatter.

There's also plenty of exoticism in *Mordechai* (Dead Oceans), the latest from Texan trio **Khruangbin**. The band draw inspiration from afar — India, Pakistan, Korea and West Africa included — filtering disparate musical styles through the eclectic hub of their Houston hometown. The result is lush, woozy dream pop with mutable rhythms, from the post-Santana groove of *Connaissais De Face* to the dubby *One To Remember*. Previously known for instrumentals, there's considerably more emphasis on vocals this time round, with bassist Laura Lee Ochoa stepping up to the mic.



Closer to home, Sheffield's **International Teachers Of Pop** unleash *Pop Gossip* (Desolate Spools). It's a record planted firmly in clubland, although the dystopian visions of *Flood The Club* and *Gaslight* hint at darkness and disease beneath the lurid dancefloor lights. Adrian Flanagan, Leonore Wheatley and Dean Honer have a gift for unlikely turns, not least prog-disco anthem *Ein Weiterer Stein In Der Wand*, a German-language shimmy through Pink Floyd's *Another Brick In The Wall*.

More outré tastes are catered for on *Simurg* (Sdban Ultra), a collaboration between Belgian oddballs **Compro Oro** and Turkish psych-folk couple, **Murat Ertel & Esma Ertel**. Described as a story of attraction, existential research, purification and rebirth, the improvised album travels way out into the ether, exemplified by the space-weird *Valley Of Gossip* and the heavy fuzz distortion of the deeply trippy *Ben*. The minimal *Valley Of Loneliness* sounds like a less sweaty, avant-garde recital of Serge Gainsbourg's *Je T'aime*.

Those familiar with Allah-Las will welcome *Spiritual Vegas* (Mexican Summer), the second solo work from singer-guitarist Pedrum Siadatian under his guise as **PAINT**. Sung in Farsi, the Persian disco of *Ta Fardah* salutes his Iranian heritage. Siadatian indulges his love of The Kinks and The Beatles on psych-pop gems like *Strange World* and the terrific *Land Man*, while the whole thing — fittingly, given his alias — is flooded with colour.

At the noisier end of the spectrum, **Peter Bibby's Dog Act** offer potty-mouthed pleasures on the uproarious *Marge* (Spinning Top), the Australian (backed by 'Strawberry Pete' Gower and 'Dirty Dave' Taylor) yelping his frustrations with daily life on songs that ricochet between psychobilly, thrash-punk and guileless folk.

THAT JOE PAYNE

By Name. By Nature. WWW.THATJOEPAYNE.COM

Dazzling debut solo album from ex-Enid singer.

When Joe Payne left The Enid in 2016, a chunk of the band's fans were glad to see the back of him. In their eyes, this upstart was too young, too charismatic, too good-looking and — oh, the irony — too gay to front this stateliest of bands. Even the protective force field of Enid mastermind Robert John Godfrey, who recruited him specifically because of those attributes, couldn't keep the haters at bay. Payne tried his damndest to please people, but his damnedest just wasn't good enough for some.

> **By Name. By Nature. is many things, but boring isn't one.**

Four years on, he's returned to the fray with his first solo album. Released under the name That Joe Payne, *By Name. By Nature.* (think about it…) uncorks years of bottled up emotion and lets it all gush out. It's frequently over-the-top, occasionally all over the place, sometimes exuberant, often heartbreaking. It's many things, but boring isn't one of them.

There are actually two albums in one here. The first is the work of the Joe Payne who wants to do *everything right now.* Songs such as the clamorous title track and *Nice Boy* set the phasers to dazzle. Payne throws all he can into the mix: robotic voices relate all the personal and professional criticism he's ever received, gymnastic time signatures perform Olympic-level backflips, vocals are stacked so high they threaten to totter and come crashing to the ground, and his own phenomenal voice soars and swoops around it all. This is what happens when you take prog's innate ambition and douse it in glitter.

But there's another album that reveals itself through the showboating. *What Is The World Coming To*'s carefully escalating dramatics and the late night jazz of Amy Birks duet *Love (Not The Same)* are more measured. You can hear Payne taking the threads of his major influences (the bravura musicality of Freddie Mercury, the adventurousness of Kate Bush, even the vocal athletics of Mariah Carey) and weaving them into something of his own. It reaches a crescendo on *I Need A Change*, the album's high point. Written in the aftermath of his acrimonious departure from The Enid, this starkly confessional ballad carries not just the scars of his time in that band but what sounds like the baggage of a lifetime of turmoil. It's defeated and triumphant, revealing and cathartic in a way that prog's fantasy world rarely allows.

Naturally, *By Name. By Nature.*'s look-at-me! approach will send his detractors into fits of apoplexy. And sometimes it's all too much — even the man at the heart of it gets lost in the hubbub. But it also sounds like an album that Joe Payne needed to make to release whatever angst and anguish he's been carrying. And on that level alone, it's a resounding success. **DAVE EVERLEY**

SOFT MACHINE

Live At The Baked Potato DYAD/PROPER MUSIC

Full strength 21st century Softs blow *hard.*

The Soft Machine reunion has been one of the most delightful musical events of recent times. After years of various amalgamations of the group's myriad line-ups, bassist Roy Babbington, guitarist John Etheridge, drummer John Marshall and reedsman Theo Travis reclaimed the brand name and, in 2018, delivered the album, *Hidden Details*. It was extremely audacious and gave the band something to hang their impressive live performances around.

Recorded at the legendary Los Angeles jazz club in February 2019, *Live At The Baked Potato* is a testament to their musical muscularity. *Hazard Profile Part One* (from 1975's *Bundles*) demonstrates just how far jazz-prog can go, *Hidden Details* scorches just as it did in its studio incarnation, and *Life On Bridges* is a perfect snapshot of men growing old disgracefully. Of all the founding fathers of the group, it is Mike Ratledge's spirit that hovers over the proceedings – his *The Man Who Waved A Trains* is a particular highlight. Like musical cowboys returning to town to rightfully claim what's theirs.

If you haven't yet sampled this late flowering incarnation of the Softs, this is the perfect opportunity to do so. **DE**

TODD SUCHERMAN

Last Flight Home AQUA PULSE

Styx drummer's first foray into the solo spotlight.

The drummer with Styx for the last 25 years, Todd Sucherman has scant history as a songwriter and none at all as a singer. Surprisingly, in *Last Flight Home* he's produced an accessible and accomplished debut collection which finds him flexing his muscles on both fronts.

Written with collaborator JK Harrison, the songs here sit somewhere between Flying Colors and Neal Morse's more poppier output. There's lilting AOR on the title track and a slice of Americana in *It's Perfection*, multi-part harmonies in *Do You Know Me* and grittier workouts like *The Damage*. Given the impressive technical faculties he displays in Styx, Sucherman's drumming is deliberately sparse throughout, focusing more on the songwriting and the groove and less on dazzling the listener with an excess of rhythm and beats.

While perhaps not as musically experimental as some might like, it nevertheless raises questions as to why on earth he hasn't been given more writing and vocal opportunities with Styx over the years. As for his singing, it turns out that there are drummers who also possess genuinely strong, terrific voices! Who knew? **GM**

THEODOR BASTARD

Volch'ya Yagoda THEO RECORDS

Bastard by name, not by nature.

Theodor Bastard may sound like the aristocratic bass player from a ropey 70s punk band, but the name is the reddest of herrings. The St Petersburg collective's evocative music is pitched between countrymen Iamthemorning's billowing romanticism and the otherwordly new shamanism of Wardruna and their ilk, adding subtle electronic touches to bring it into the 21st century.

Their ninth album, and first in five years, *Volch'ya Yagoda* (translation: Wolfberry) is a work of frequently startling beauty and protean ideas. Where the slo-mo tribal pulse of *Urzala* sounds like it's beamed in from another time and place, *Skejgored* bears the imprint of Björk in Yana Veva's spiralling vocals – albeit a Björk who has divested herself of the trappings of modern culture and gone for a walk in the forests of Siberia. Similarly, their use of traditional Northern European instruments such as the stringed and bowed nyckelharpa and the lyre-like jouhikko butts up against the kind of 21st century effects that stem from Veva and co-founder Fedor Svolotch's work soundtracking computer games. The result is utterly unexpected and totally unique. **DEV**

UBI MAIOR

Bestie, Uomini E Dèi AMS

Italian prog merchants' bellissimo epic.

Marking their 20th anniversary with only their fourth album, Milanese five-piece Ubi Maior have crafted an emotionally-charged Italian prog masterclass to join classics made over the years by names such as PFM, Le Orme and Goblin.

After the extended panoramas of 2014's *Incanti Bio Meccanici*, the band have forged a more compact six-song theatrical concept work inspired by dark mythological figures, monsters and alien creatures (the title translates as *Beasts, Men and Gods*).

Ubi Maior's densely layered sound is bolstered by a rare maturity and depth born from the experience of playing together encumbered by only two personnel changes in more than 20 years. Cloaked in dramatic, relentlessly dynamic backdrops, singer/multi-instrumentalist Mario Moi sings in Italian but his operatic range and animated delivery grips throughout the monolithic *Wendigo*. Stoking the album's swirling mystery, *Fabula Sirenis* wraps its huge chorus in gossamer keyboard twinkle, yet *Nessie* is propelled by early 70s-style progressive rock organ motifs lashed with Arganese's mercurial guitar and Moi's trumpet and violin. World class. **KN**

WORLD SANGUINE REPORT

Skeleton Blush LIMITEDNOISE

A heart of darkness beating out of time.

The influence of Tom Waits looms large over World Sanguine Report's third release. Bandleader Andrew Plummer has a voice summoned from the dregs at the bottom of a bottle of rotgut whiskey and a delivery that swings from yearning to anguish.

Plummer's instrument is the electric guitar, but the arrangements are dominated by brass, drums, and piano, while the music blends late night cabaret with the sort of avant-garde, disjointed melodic lines of John Zorn or Zappa. *God Spat Human Blue Dance* staggers along on a tilted groove as Plummer barks out: *'Slow, slow, quick, quick, quick'* like a demonic dance caller and the title track is the theme for some frightening vaudeville of despair.

Plummer's regular collaborator James Allsopp brings a blaring baritone saxophone to *Blench*, while the clear, sultry tones of guest vocalist Seaming To provide a vivid counterpoint to Plummer's gruff lamentations in *Disinter* and *Phosphorescent Darling*. It's an off-kilter album that glories in unsettling moods, fractured spirits, and Plummer's lyrics read like free verse, but it offers an invigorating frisson for those who dare flirt with madness. **DW**

ZOMBI

2020 RELAPSE

Electronic rock duo get doomy on first album in five years.

Zombi might have hit the 20-year mark, but their instrumental electronic rock remains as vital as ever. And this is very much 'rock' we're talking about, not electronica in disguise – multi-instrumentalist Steve Moore is a man in love with riffs while powerhouse drummer AE Paterra drives the music forward with an organic rather than programmed feel.

Opening track *Breakthrough & Conquer* drops straight into the action: its synth arpeggio, galloping rhythm and chugging guitar are overlaid by orchestral string stabs. While there are nods to primary inspirations such as Goblin and John Carpenter, *2020* is notable for embracing more of a heavy doom rock vibe. *Earthscraper* churns away like an irresistible force, while the chewy riffs of *No Damage* could soundtrack a big screen superhero battle where galactic nemeses smite all in their paths.

Another big reference is *Moving Pictures*-era Rush, most apparent on *Fifth Point Of The Penta*. But ultimately, Zombi are way more than the sum of their influences, and as *2020* shows, they remain absolute masters of integrating rock and electronics into a seamless, pulse-racing whole. **JB**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

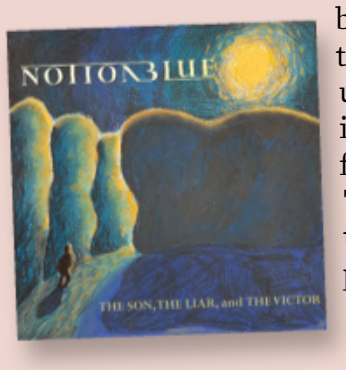
Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Swiss quartet **Marhold** hit the Top 10 in their home country back in June with their high-quality, self-released debut album *A Homemade World*, which deserves to bring them to broader notice. Taking humankind's place in the natural world as its theme, the record's packed with strong, crunchy songs, and singer/violinist Aleksandra Poraszka is a natural, charismatic performer who fully commits to the Marhold cause. Ones to watch for sure.

Formed in 2001, **Alter3go** are a five-piece prog metal outfit from Barcelona. Their second self-released album, *The Effect Of Light* offers plainer, less intricate fare than their heroes Dream Theater, but they're worth Spotifying if you're partial to spirited, melody-centric metal and ersatz Vai guitar histrionics. With a register akin to Agent Fresco's Arnór Dan Arnarson, vocalist Guillem Mitchel adds some warmth to the anthemic *Hope* and ambitious album highlight *Lost*, the latter of which features a chunk of dialogue from *The Matrix*.

Residing in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina's **WIND** are married musical duo Nori and Barbie Kelley. Their *PROGressive* compilation (available via windworld.bandcamp.com) brings together the proggier material from their steady 25-year career. The recording quality is variable, but Nori's an assured guitarist whose CV features Jon Anderson, Dave Hope of Kansas and Renaissance's Jon Camp. These influences inform WIND's gentle, retro set, with Barbie's wholesome voice giving it a refreshing Southern twang.

The Son, The Liar, And The Victor is the homemade debut by Connecticut trio **Notion Blue**. They pay tribute to bassist Johnny Barbi – brother of their keyboardist Max – who died unexpectedly in 2018 with an imaginative record that's rich with feeling and tinged with melancholy. The artistic ambition may exceed their technical grasp, but there's promise in Max's assured Neal Morse-style synth/piano moments, the CS&N-like harmonies, and their way with an arty, interlude.



Finally to Mexico for the ever-classy **Alpha Lighting System**. Their highly proggy and challenging third record *H+* was mixed by The Pineapple Thief's Bruce Soord, and its typically thinky concept is: "Transhumanism: the transcendence of our physiological, rational and emotional bearings. All of this leads to becoming more human." The music's fittingly lofty, with highlights including knotty instrumental *EVo1VE* and smart fusion piece *life.exe*, co-written with System Of A Down singer Serj Tankian.

LEPROUS

Coal/The Congregation INSIDEOUT

Revisiting the Norwegian nu-prog masters' recent past.

With their stock shooting sky high following the release of 2017's *Malina* and last year's excellent *Pitfalls*, it's perhaps not the biggest surprise that there's demand for a vinyl repressing of two of Leprous' earlier albums, 2013's *Coal* and 2015's *The Congregation*.

A reminder of the leaps Leprous have made as songwriters.

The Norwegians' third album, *Coal* is the lesser refined of the two, but it's also shorter and more immediate. It wasn't until *Malina* that the group completely dispensed with harsh vocals, and during *Coal*'s most intense moments they stray into the neighbourhood of black metal (unsurprising, given the band's links with that scene via frontman Einar Solberg's brother-in-law, ex-Emperor singer Ihsahn).

Yet for all the album's snappiness the band are still finding their feet as songwriters, and some tracks don't stick as much as they could. Exceptions to this are the opening song *Foe*, and *The Valley,* which despite being one of the longer cuts, feels like the point that the band really hit their stride. The concluding *Contaminate Me* is another gut punch, with the drum acrobatics going into its middle eight decrescendo briefly veering into breakcore territory.

Two years later, they began to tweak the formula with *The Congregation*. On opener *The Price*, the electronic elements on previous Leprous albums are brought to the fore, and it's this, among other elements of detail that really elevate the record compared to its predecessors. *The Third Law* is another early highlight, but *The Flood* is where the band land a killer blow with the album's essential track. Elsewhere there's also more fluent and interesting guitar work, such as the sinuous, staccato riffs in *Red,* and a heaviness on cuts like *Slave* that's greater than the sum of its parts. *Down* boasts some of the best rhythms on any Leprous track, with tight, locked down guitars and a headbanging, polyrhythmic groove.

The main criticism that can be levelled at both albums is with the production — it's very slick and over-produced, to the point of not being super dynamic. This works at times, such as when high and low-register guitar parts play to the grid, in lockstep. At others, it feels too robotic, and detracts from the songs, emphasising the parts that sound similar and obscuring the variety.

That said, these records serve as a reminder not only of how solid Leprous' discography is, but of the leaps they've made as songwriters on their most recent releases. It's sometimes hard to see a wider audience for these earlier albums beyond the progressive metal crowd — a fact not necessarily true of their latest output. For all that, *Coal* and *The Congregation* remain key parts of the band's journey. **ALEX LYNHAM**

DAVE COUSINS (& THE BLUE ANGEL ORCHESTRA)

The Boy In The Sailor Suit ESOTERIC

Strawbs leader's second solo album from 2007, remastered with live tracks.

The Boy In The Sailor Suit, Dave Cousins' first solo album since 1972's *Two Weeks Last Summer,* was recorded and mixed in a week and has a leanness and freshness about it. The band includes blues guitarist Miller Anderson – who played on its predecessor – and Strawbs stalwart Chas Cronk on bass, and it was produced by Chris Tsangarides, who is better known as a metal producer. Although there are a few big rock moments, like the sinuous riffing, Hendrixy rhythm guitar and wah-wah lead of *Mother Luck*, overall the music reflects the lyrical content of this particularly personal collection.

It begins with *Never Take Sweets From Strangers*, a tale of a one night stand with an enigmatic young woman, which has the feel of a straightforward autobiographical tale, until the denouement reveals that she was the ghost of someone killed in a hit and run accident. And although there's nothing as uncanny on the rest of the album, Cousins delves deep into family, memory and history, particularly on *The Smile You Left Behind* on which he addresses a treasured photograph of his father who died at sea in World War Two – and which prompted the album's title – set to acoustic guitar, with violin by Ian Cutler. *Wish You Were Here* reeks of old ballrooms, but is a series of seaside postcard images both nostalgic and ribald, and features a sweet solo from Anderson. *Hellfire Blues*, an account of wartime bombardment near his home in Kent, is set a tough R&B stomp.

Cousins has denied that he was ever a folk artist per se, but *Skip To My Lou*, about the execution of smugglers, has a jig-like tune that sounds steeped in tradition, as does the hymnal *Bringing In The Harvest*, its melody bolstered by church organ played by Tony Attwood. Cousins was surprised to be reminded that the young Tsangarides was a tape op for Strawbs' 1972 album *Grave New World*, and this song could have fitted on that album. **MB**

FRUUP

Maid In Ireland: The Best Of Fruupp ESOTERIC

Short-lived mid-70s second stringers get their day in the sun.

During the early 1970s, the UK gig circuit bustled with bands like Fruupp: solidly enthusiastic groups who commanded small, devoted followings but were eventually swept away by punk's tsunami. This nine-track compilation, put together by lyricist/manager Paul Charles, shines a light on them nearly 45 years after they split.

Named after the female ghost that haunted their rehearsal room (often pronounced as a strident belch), Fruupp were formed by Belfast songwriter-guitarist Vincent McCusker in 1971 to perform the songs he'd been writing, some with lyricist Paul Charles. McCusker recruited singer-bassist Pete Farrelly, keyboardist Stephen Houston (replaced in '75 by John Mason) and drummer Martin Foye.

Signed to Pye's Dawn offshoot, Fruupp grew a following by supporting Queen, Genesis and Supertramp, and released four albums over two years, starting with 1973's *Future Legends*. With their pastoral drifts and convoluted, organ-led staccato passages, the likes of the acrobatic *Graveyard Epistle* and the prog panoply of *Decision* (both included here) show why the band so often incurred Genesis comparisons, even if it was offset by *Toytown* jauntiness. A tendency to lace wistful ditties with autumnal strings and twinkling keyboards is evident on *Three Spires* and *White Eyes* from 1974's follow-up *Seven Secrets*. The convoluted neo-classical blow-out, *Wise As Wisdom,* goes pure *Foxtrot* in ambition before ending on an accelerated jazz gallop, even if it sounds like an exercise in endlessly-rehearsed technique.

The concept-heavy *The Prince Of Heaven's Eyes* is represented here by the eponymous single, along with widescreen epic *Knowing You*, 1975's *Modern Masquerade* was produced by ex-Crimson man Ian McDonald, who lends his alto sax to the frantic *Sheba's Song* and lightweight *Janet Planet*. Intricately-crafted and lustrously polished as it was, it wasn't enough to save Fruupp as their lifeblood gig circuit bowed to music's latest revolution. **KN**

OZRIC TENTACLES

Pungent Effulgent/ Strangeitude KSCOPE

Classic Ozrics albums remastered and reissued on heavyweight coloured vinyl.

By the time of *Pungent Effulgent*'s release in 1989 – their first vinyl album after a series of cassettes – Ozric Tentacles had become flagbearers for a burgeoning free festival scene that took its ethos from the underground of the early 70s, while paralleling the rise of acid house and outdoor raves. Cross-fertilisation resulted in a sound – freak rock and trippy vibes combined with utopian techno and repetitive beats – that the Ozrics made their own.

With their tie-died crusty image, whimsical artwork, and, of course, that name, the Ozrics seemed to conform to every possible headshop cliché, a band invented by Neil from *The Young Ones*, and reviled by the indie mafia. Yet before long, they'd become one of Britain's biggest independent bands, operating as a cottage industry and regularly breaking into the charts. With prog still in the wilderness, the Ozrics delivered a sophisticated, expansive sound embraced by a new generation of fans, a certain Steven Wilson among them.

From a viewpoint of 30 years hence, what's striking is just how modern these albums sound – they might be imbued with a new age sensibility, but there's nothing hippie-dippy about their execution. *Pungent Effulgent* skips gracefully between cosmic jams, jazz fusion, chill out and dub reggae, with subtle use of electronics throughout. The Echoplexed guitar of *Dissolution (The Clouds Disperse)* is wildly exciting, and the nippy, bass-led groove of *O-I* is alive with possibilities. Steve Hillage is clearly a major influence, with *Ayurvedic* slowly building towards the Ozrics' very own glorious om riff, while the thumping beat of *Kick Muck* anticipates the KLF.

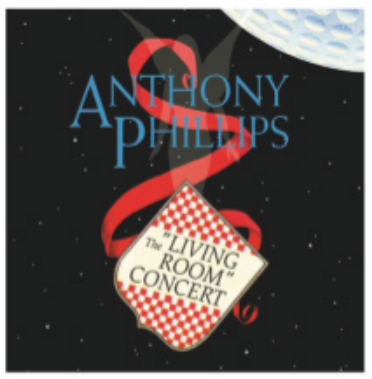
Strangeitude from 1991 updates their sound further: *White Rhino Tea* introduces some restless, Fripp-esque angularity; the loping *Sploosh!* is techno in a fractal jungle; *Saucers* is a hyper speed folk madrigal.

With both albums remastered by band leader Ed Wynne, it's time to reassess just how influential the Ozrics have been. **JB**

ANTHONY PHILLIPS

The "Living Room" Concert ESOTERIC

Sweet but slight at-home gig revisited.



Given that Anthony Phillips left Genesis a full half-century ago, when Jimi Hendrix was still alive and Heath had just displaced Wilson as prime minister, it must be strange for him to be eternally referred to as "the former Genesis man". Still, the other members always speak glowingly of the co-founder's brief contribution to their history, and it's certainly helped him find an audience for his work ever since.

The "Living Room" Concert was recorded in 1993 for a US radio show and released two years later. Now remastered and with tracks which didn't make the cut added, it's an unplugged pleasantry from a man who disliked playing in front of live audiences. In fact he wasn't keen even to do this at-home performance, and preparation wasn't helped by a injury to his left hand brought on by too much practising.

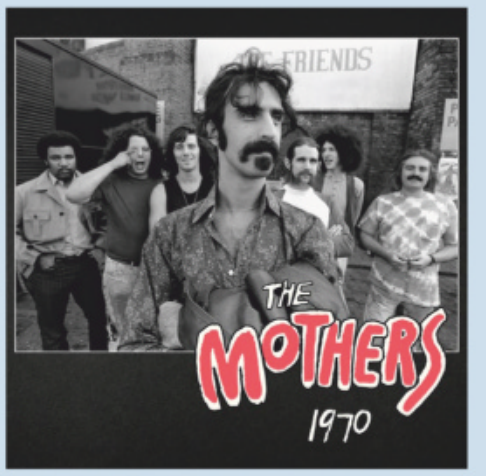
You wouldn't know that from listening, as it's a proficiently played solo set, mostly instrumental, on guitar and piano. He chooses pieces from his best album, *The Geese And The Ghost*, as well as from *Private Parts And Pieces*, *A Catch At The Tables* and others. There's also *Conversation Piece* (no relation to the Bowie number of the same name), a meditative movement on a 12-string guitar. The previously unreleased tracks lack discernible charisma: *Lucy: An Illusion* and *Let Us Now Make Love* fail to outshine their titles.

Phillips himself, whose singing voice won't worry Mario Lanza, has downplayed this as a "semi-impromptu run-through", and the bulk of it sounds like some earnest geezer is noodling away on his acoustic in the corner of a house party. There's a precious period charm to the Clifford T Ward-like warblings of *Sistine* and the counter-intuitively optimistic pluckings of *Reaper*, and the 12 minutes of dextrously-wristed strums which constitute *Henry: Portraits From Tudor Times* might get you sending Anne Boleyn to the Tower Of London, while never troubling Rick Wakeman's confidence. Purely for Genesis family tree completists, then. **CR**

FRANK ZAPPA

The Mothers 1970 UMC

Hardcore fun for Zappa fans.



The arrival of another large Frank Zappa box containing 70 previously unavailable tracks is always a cause for celebration. *The Mothers 70* includes four discs of studio and live material, performed by the short-lived line-up featuring Aynsley Dunbar, George Duke, Ian Underwood, Jeff Simmons and Flo & Eddie duo Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman. Despite the fact that some of the live material here has been bootlegged in the past, it's good to have this properly mastered and strutting about in all its official pomp.

> **It's good to have this material strutting about all its pomp.**

Arguably the main draw is a session the band recorded at London's Trident Studios with then unknown producer Roy Thomas Baker. Weighing in at just over an hour but still feeling frustratingly short, it's essentially an audio scrapbook of ideas, motifs and backing tracks, though *Red Tubular Lighter*, the delightfully meandering *Giraffe*, and an unheard version of a Dunbar-centric *Envelopes* will quicken the pulse of Zappaphiles everywhere.

The live material is made up of the heavily-circulated *Piknik*, originally broadcast on Dutch radio, together with shows from Santa Monica and Spokane edited into a hybrid concert, plus a final selection of Zappa's personal live tapes recorded in various locations.

At one point, Frank introduces a track from *Freak Out*, which emerged four years earlier: "Now listen, we've got this song called *Trouble Every Day* which is about a riot that happened in Watts, California a few years ago and has been repeated to death throughout the United States since that time..." Half a century on, that take on societal pressure and political issues remains depressingly relevant. But if the social commentary feels pertinent, the sexual banter that forms the basis of Zappa's cock-opera creaks with age. Even as satire, after 50 years it's all a bit limp and laboured.

Knob gags and groupie snark aside, these are good performances. *King Kong Parts 1* and *2* interspersed with *Igor's Boogie*, with Duke's roiling Echoplexed electric piano and in the later section, Ian Underwood's piquant sax absolutely cook. The Man Of The Match award, though, goes to Dunbar and his explosive, on-point drumming through this set. Along with some old Mothers cuts, the shows represent an enjoyably messy nexus whose content is variously embellished, distilled and refined across *Chunga's Revenge*, *200 Motels*, and *The Mothers Fillmore East — June 1971*.

Although the totality of *The Mothers 1970* may lack the revelatory buzz that accompanied 2019's *Hot Rats* 50th anniversary box, there's enough here to arouse and maintain enthusiastic interest.

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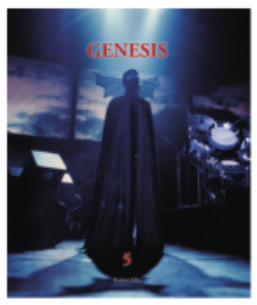
GENESIS

Robert Ellis THE ROCK LIBRARY

Genesis on stage and up close and personal.



I like to think I know a bit about Genesis, but Phil Collins with a moustache? Now, Phil Collins with robust beard? Yup, seen that. Steve Hackett sporting a Zapata-style 'tache? Tick. Even Peter Gabriel's own Amish-like facial hair shot at home in Bath in 1974. Yes. But Phil with a moustache? That's a new one on me. (It's from The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway European tour in 1975, btw.) All these and more feature in rock royalty photographer Robert Ellis' new photo book capturing Genesis from 1972's Great Western Festival in Lincoln all the way through to 1982's Six Of The Best show at Milton Keynes Bowl (Ellis' previous Genesis book concentrated on The Lamb... tour alone). While it may not be chronologically comprehensive – Ellis was elsewhere for 1976's A Trick Of The Tail tour and everything between *Wind & Wuthering* to that rainy Milton Keynes reunion. But what is here is a fascinating look at the band as they crept towards the megastardom the 80s would bring, both on stage and off. Almost 300 lavish pages in colour and black and white, an absolute treat for any Genesis fan. Interestingly, a year after the 'tache experiment we see Collins had reverted to a full beard look. Very wise! **JE**

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR – PAWN HEARTS: HISTORY IMAGES WORDS MUSIC

Paolo Carnelli SELF-PUBLISHED VIA KINDLE

Extended essay on VdGG's prog classic.

In the 49 years since its release, VdGG's *Pawn Hearts* has accrued the status of a benchmark in progressive music against those others in the field.

Italian journalist, Paolo Carnelli convincingly sets out why this work is so revered by a diverse fanbase that famously includes Johnny Rotten through to Steven Wilson and Gary Lucas, who provides an enthusiastic foreword.

Drawing upon press clippings, Christopulos and Smart's *The Book*, the 2005 comprehensive account of the band's career, and his own interviews, Carnelli does a good job conveying the time and place surrounding the creation of the record and its cultural impact. Conceived in the back of a van, rehearsed in a haunted house and expertly caught in the studio by producer John Anthony, the proportions of the album, three tracks in total with one of them covering an entire side, convey a gravity whose epic proportions and darkly turbulent musicality resonates still.

Carnelli's insightful coda detailing VdGG's *A Plague Of Lighthouse Keepers* tour in 2013, featuring reflections by the band's current members brings a useful and pleasingly detailed account of a landmark work up to date. **SS**

WHERE WE STOOD

The Pineapple Thief KSCOPE

Bruce Soord and co, at their best, live in Islington in 2017 – now on CD+Blu-ray.

By 2016's game-raising *Your Wilderness* – and this sold-out show at London's Islington Academy, captured here on film – The Pineapple Thief had finally established themselves as leading lights in modern progressive rock after almost 20 years of trying.

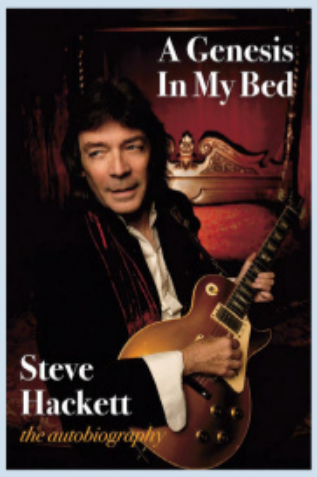
Originally only available as part of the deluxe edition of the 2017 live album of the same name, this standalone Blu-ray/CD package offers the show in every manner you could desire (concert film interspersed with interviews, concert by itself, interviews in one block, a low-key backstage documentary...) plus a generous selection of extras including an acoustic EP, a pleasingly nerdy 'making of *In Exile*' video, bonus album and full *Your Wilderness* record. And all in 24/96 DTS-HD MA 5.1 surround sound and 24/96 hi-res stereo audio versions.

Soord has a brooding stage presence that befits his band's introspective (yet tune-centred) mix of softness, samples and heavy Porcupine Tree-esque menace. From *No Man's Land* to a gorgeous *Snowdrops* and their biggest 'hit' *Nothing At Best*, this is TPT at their best, and an unfussy, classy reminder of what gigs once looked like. **PG**

STEVE HACKETT

A Genesis In My Bed WYMER PUBLISHING

The life and times of a modest prog icon.



As guitarist with Genesis, Steve Hackett helped lay the foundation stone of prog. Yet his spectacular talents are in inverse proportion to his ego. Not for him the drama of some of his 70s contemporaries — he famously quit Genesis just as the curve of their success was about to hit a massive upswing, but you'll not hear a word of rancour about missing out on their subsequent superstardom or bitterness towards his former colleagues.

A reflective and engaging look back at Hackett's life.

That sense of humility pervades the pages of this autobiography. *A Genesis In My Bed* is a reflective but engaging look back at Hackett's life, chiefly defined by its author's unfaltering likeability. What it lacks in tales of rock'n'roll behaviour, it makes up for with telling observations, boundless curiosity and a keen intelligence.

Unlike his intricate playing, this is an unshowy 'my life story'. Hackett begins by detailing an upbringing in post-war London, where his "burgeoning wanderlust" and inquisitive nature often frustrated those looking after him. Writing in a blunt yet poetic and sometimes humorous style, he reflects on how his parents did all they could to provide for him amid the horrors of his life at school before music opened his eyes to everything around him. "The point of my crucial musical breakthrough made me feel [that] the world could be re-born anew," he writes, eloquently summarising his lifelong relationship with his art.

The rest of the book is a journey through his life and career, from early stints with long-forgotten bands, through his tenure in Genesis, and onto an album-by-album recollection of his solo career. In the process, he details how he conquered various insecurities, dealt with failed relationships, and connected with new cultures across the globe. At times he brushes past a few topics too quickly — you won't find detailed insights into key songs or life-changing events, and don't even bother looking for dirt of people he's worked alongside or crossed paths with (quite the opposite: Hackett is given to showering friends and peers with praise).

Still, fans will relish the colour photo section in the middle of the book: the newborn Hackett on his mother's lap in 1950; a glimpse of him recording *Please Don't Touch* with Richie Havens; a lovely staircase reunion with former Genesis bandmates Collins, Banks, Rutherford and Gabriel. Sometimes these shots are more revealing than his prose.

At less than 200 pages, *A Genesis In My Bed* feels on the slight side — more *Horizons* than *Firth Of Fifth*. But then when it comes to epic drama, Steve Hackett has always preferred to let the music do the talking.

JORDAN BLUM

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MY PROG

PRESS/WENDY VISSERS-HAGENBEEK

Dave Cureton, IO Earth

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's home?
Derbyshire. I used to live in Birmingham but moved out to the sticks about three years ago.

What's your earliest prog memory?
When I was 10 we had a video of the *Old Grey Whistle Test* at home, and Focus were on it playing *Hocus Pocus*. I remember thinking, "This is mental – that guy's yodelling over a rock song!"

What was the first prog album you bought?
A tape of Steve Vai's *Passion And Warfare* in 1991, from the Virgin Megastore in Birmingham. It's a prog album, big time.

And the last?
Empath by Devin Townsend. Love it – epic and full on. His voice gets better as he gets older.

Your first prog gig?
We played our first Summer's End in 2009 and Steve Hackett was on. He's a good guy.

And the latest?
We've done Cruise To The Edge every year since it started, and last year made a point of watching Adrian Belew.

The best prog gig you ever saw?
Steve Hackett at the Birmingham Symphony Hall, Genesis Revisited [the 2017 tour]. Everything about it was good, and he's such a great guitarist.

Newest prog discovery?
Telescope Road, a really good fusion-y prog band based in France. Their fretless bass player [William Kopecky] is the main focal point. Oh, and The Aristocrats – talented bastards!

Guilty musical pleasure?
Neil Diamond. I love him – a brilliant, prolific songwriter.

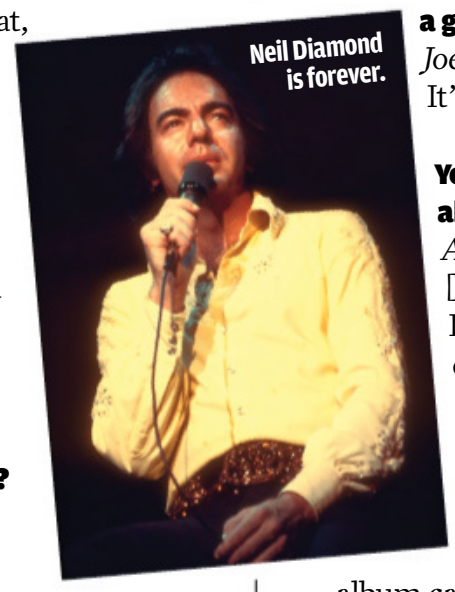
What would your specialist subject be on *Mastermind*?
Only Fools And Horses. Still hilarious. I take the DVDs on the bus when we tour.

Favourite prog venue?
Cruise To The Edge. You're in the Caribbean, the sun's shining. You can't beat that, can you?

Essential viewing: BBC sitcom *Only Fools And Horses*.

DON SMITH/RADIO TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Your prog hero?
Frank Zappa. He was so progressive and avant-garde. And slightly strange, in a good way.



Neil Diamond is forever.

Outside of music what are you into?
Our manager Wendy [Vissers-Hagenbeek] is my best friend and I go over and stay with her family in the Netherlands as often as I can. Everyone's cool there, ringing their bicycle bells at you. You certainly don't get that in Birmingham...

> "I saw a video of Focus when I was 10 and I remember thinking, 'This is mental!'"

Have you ever had a prog date?
[Laughs] No. I don't do dates...

Who do you call in the prog community for a good night out?
Marco Minnemann. We were at a margarita bar on the last Cruise with him, he's a fun bloke.

A good night out: Marco Minnemann.

PRESS/DANIEL WORK

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Maybe *Peaches En Regalia* from Zappa's *Hot Rats*. Not too hard on the ear but a lot of mentalness in there too.

Which prog muso would you most like to work with?
Mike Keneally [Frank Zappa Band]. He can play everything – it'd be nice to jam with him and pick his brains.

Which proggy album gets you in a good mood?
Joe's Garage, Zappa. It's just fun.

Your favourite prog album cover?
Aura by IO Earth! [Laughs] To be fair I do really like it. It's calming and nice.

ROBIN PLATZER/THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES

And what are you up to at the moment?
Aura's out and we're working on a new album called *Sanctuary*, hopefully we'll get it finished in all this madness. We've also just launched our subscription fan club via our website. We'll do live streams, exclusive content, discounts on tickets and merch, all that sort of stuff. It's all doing well.

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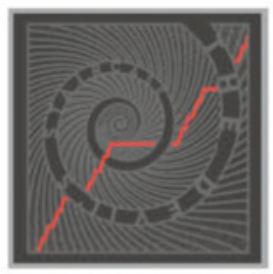

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