JETHRO TULL

"IT WAS CALLED *A* FOR ANDERSON. THEN THE RECORD COMPANY HEARD IT." THE STORY OF JETHRO TULL'S *A*

PROG

KING CRIMSON

How Robert Fripp brought the band back from the abyss with *Islands*

NIK TURNER & YOUTH

The space rockers from different generations unite

DAVIS & TORABI

The amazing story of prog rock's unlikely lads

TAME IMPALA

Celebrate their acclaimed debut album, 10 years on

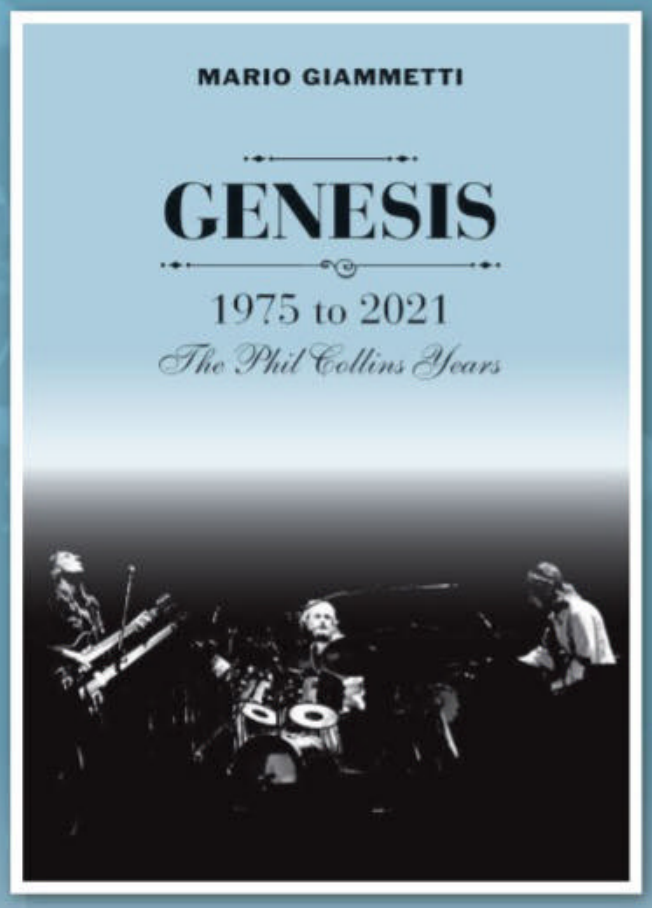
IT BITES

Reunion? New album? Find out inside

+

VOLA
KAYAK
STRAWBS
NAD SYLVAN
AA WILLIAMS
DENNIS DEYOUNG

FUTURE
PROG 120



MARIO GIAMMETTI

GENESIS

1975 to 2021

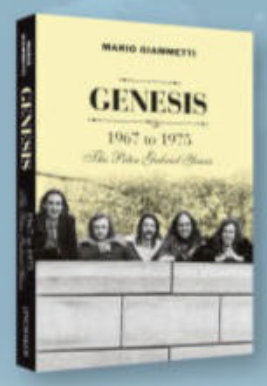
The Phil Collins Years

Praise for GENESIS: 1967 to 1975 – The Peter Gabriel Years

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

'As a long time Genesis fan who is familiar with their story, I really enjoyed this well written and informative history of their important early years.'
Mark Kelly (Marillion)

'Essential for anyone with more than a passing interest in the band.'
PROG



GENESIS: 1975 to 2021 – The Phil Collins Years is the follow-up to last year's acclaimed GENESIS: 1967 to 1975 – The Peter Gabriel Years.

Written by Mario Giammetti, one of the leading experts on the history of the band, this is the definitive biography of Genesis following the departure of Peter Gabriel.

Available for pre-order now from Burning Shed

KINGMAKER

BIG BIG TRAIN

The Underfall Yard

REMIXED & REMASTERED

'The definitive edition of a modern masterpiece.'
PROG

'The grandest British prog album of the 21st century gets even grander.'
CLASSIC ROCK

'The standard bearers of new UK prog... Big Big Train channel the prog ambitions of 50 years ago but mix in enough of themselves to create work that sounds vivid and fresh... Melodic inspiration and careful design that sets their music apart.'
MOJO

The 2CD/3LP re-issue of Big Big Train's 2009 breakthrough album **The Underfall Yard**, completely remixed and remastered in 2020 by Rob Aubrey. Features 48 minutes of additional material, including new 2020 studio recordings of Victorian Brickwork and the title track, new song Brew And Burgh plus a previously unreleased brass prelude.

RSK ENTERTAINMENT · PLANE GROOVE

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ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS

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ISSUE 120 28.05.21

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King Crimson p28

How Robert Fripp resurrected King Crimson in 1971.

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Dennis DeYoung co-founded the band that became Styx back in the 1960s, fed by a love of prog and hard rock. He's since added a solo career and musical theatre to his résumé but, as he readies his farewell album, *26 East, Vol 2*, he returns to that earlier sound. Here he looks back over a fascinating life.

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The It Bites reissues of *The Tall Ships* and *Map Of The Past* take top billing this month and there are also reviews of releases by Marillion, The Aristocrats, Jean-Michel Jarre, Rennaissance, Focus, Silver Lake By Esa Holopainen, The Mars Volta, Can, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Dennis DeYoung, White Moth Black Butterfly, Gleb Kolyadin, Airbag, Arthur Brown's Kingdom Come, Darryl Way, Matt Berry, Kansas, Amorphis, Sylvan, Rick Armstrong, Geoff Tate's Sweet Oblivion and loads more…

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KANSAS

Point of Know Return
LIVE & BEYOND

In Stores 28th May

America's legendary progressive rockers return with a brand new live album, featuring a full performance of their classic 'Point of Know Return' album, plus other tracks from throughout their career.

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WHITE MOTH BLACK BUTTERFLY

THE COST OF DREAMING

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White Moth Black Butterfly's brilliant 2021 return signals a sonic evolution in the bands' output while still retaining its core identity.

White Moth Black Butterfly are: Daniel Tompkins (TESSERACT) / Jordan Turner / Keshav Dhar (SKYHARBOR) / Mac Christensen / Randy Slaugh, Producer (ARCHITECTS, PERIPHERY)

New studio album featuring singles 'The Dreamer' & 'Soma'

28th May

Klone - Alive

Alive captures the true essence of Klone and includes stunning performances of the singles `Yonder' and 'Breach'

Recorded between two different shows at Sjiwa in Baarlo in 2016 and at Moloco in Audincourt in 2019, Klone return with their debut live album.

'Sleek, impassioned and thoroughly modern'
PROG

11th June

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Giancarlo Erra - Departure Tapes

UK based Italian composer, multi-instrumentalist and visual artist Giancarlo Erra (the main man and creative force behind Nosound) returns with a new spellbinding solo studio album.

Available on: gatefold oxblood coloured 180g vinyl LP / 2-disc CD/DVD with the DVD-A/V including high resolution stereo & 5.1 mix: DVD-V: stereo 24/48 LPCM lossless mixes, Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround, DTS 96/24 5.1 Surround and DVD-A: 5.1 Surround 24/48 LPCM lossless mixes / Digital

2nd July

Kscope Podcast

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The Red Planet

New 2 disc CD+DVD edition of the Top 40 & #1 UK Independent Album from the legendary keyboard maestro Rick Wakeman

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"Ground control to Major Rick" CLASSIC ROCK

"...a true visionary, a maestro, and a storyteller that has brought The Red Planet to life." ECHOES & DUST

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THOMAS WILLIAMS

Ed's Letter

Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog*. By the time you read this, if the government's roadmap out of lockdown holds, we'll be moving out of Covid-related restrictions. Our attention will return to the potential for gigs once more. Our upcoming report on what this means for progressive music of all levels will feature in issue 122, by which time we should have a much clearer picture of how the live landscape may look.

One of the great things about working with music with as rich a heritage as prog is that even though you think you might know everything, you're always learning something new. The years between King Crimson's explosive debut album and their 'rebirth' with 1973's *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* was a fascinating time for the band. As 1971's *Islands* celebrates its 50th anniversary, *Prog* writer and Crimson biographer Sid Smith explores the events surrounding the formation of the line-up that salvaged the band after *Lizard*, only to fall apart within months of the album's creation. The band's current use of *Islands* material in their live show for the first time in some 40 years has added to the album's critical reappraisal and quite rightly so. Sid's is a fascinating deep dive into Crimson in that period with some intriguing insights from the surviving players. I hope you enjoy it.

Elsewhere this issue we lift the lid on what's going on with It Bites, Ian Anderson explains how *A* almost ended Jethro Tull and former Styx singer Dennis DeYoung brings remarkable tales with Keith Emerson and Jon Anderson to the table. And there's equally fascinating interviews with Steve Davis and Kavus Torabi, Nik Turner and Youth, Nad Sylvan, Kayak, Tame Impala, Crack The Sky, AA Williams, VOLA, Field Music and more.

As the weather turns warmer it seems an ideal time to feel cautiously optimistic and look ahead. I hope you all feel the same way. 'Til next issue, prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor

You can subscribe to *Prog* at www.magazinesdirect.com. See page 112 for further details.

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VARIOUS ARTISTS
'BANQUET - UNDERGROUND SOUNDS OF 1969'
(3CD BOX SET)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the next release in their series of compilations celebrating the so-called "underground" rock music.
- "Banquet – Underground Sounds of 1969", is a 3CD clamshell boxed set which gathers together nearly four hours of music from 1969, a year that saw a huge progression in both musically and socially.

Release Date June 25 2021

NEW RELEASE

PROCOL HARUM
'MISSING PERSONS (ALIVE FOREVER)'
(EP)

- Esoteric Antenna label is pleased to announce the release of a new CD EP by the legendary PROCOL HARUM – Missing Persons.
- Completed during lockdown conditions imposed by the outbreak of the COVID 19 virus, the EP title track is a poignant and emotive song in the finest musical tradition of PROCOL HARUM. War is Not Healthy is also a fine observation of war and its impact on humanity.

PATTO
'GIVE IT ALL AWAY - THE ALBUMS 1970-1973'
(4CD BOX SET)

- Esoteric Recordings is pleased to announce the release of Give it All Away – The Albums 1970 -1973.
- A re-mastered four-disc clamshell box set of the four albums recorded by the legendary band PATTO between 1970 and 1973; Patto, Hold Your Fire, Roll 'Em, Smoke 'Em, Put Another Line Out and Monkey's Bum.

RARE BIRD
"BEAUTIFUL SCARLET – THE RECORDINGS 1969-1975'
(6CD BOXSET)

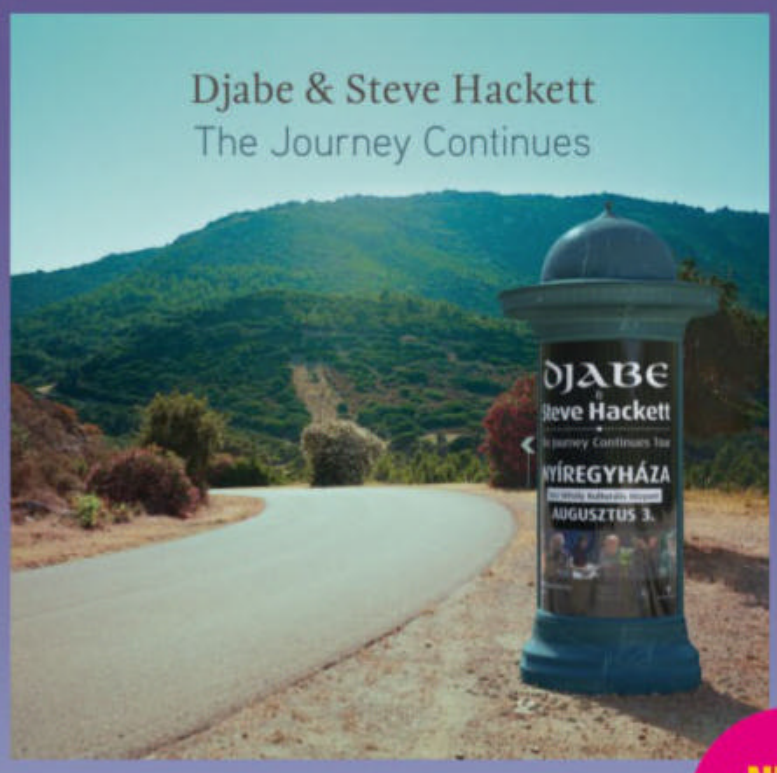
- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of BEAUTIFUL SCARLET – THE RECORDINGS 1969 – 1975, a newly re-mastered 6 CD boxed set featuring all of the albums and singles released by legendary band RARE BIRD on both the Charisma and Polydor labels between 1969 and 1975.
- Also included is an illustrated booklet featuring exclusive interviews with STEVE GOULD and MARK ASHTON and a facsimile of the rare poster given with initial copies of EPIC FOREST.

Release Date 30th April 2021

RENAISSANCE
'50TH ANNIVERSARY ASHES ARE BURNING – AN ANTHOLOGY – LIVE IN CONCERT'
(2CD, DVD & BLU RAY BOX SET)

- Esoteric Antenna is pleased to announce the release of 50th Anniversary – Ashes Are Burning – An Anthology Live in Concert, the wonderful new 4 disc CD, DVD and Blu ray set by RENAISSANCE.
- This 4-disc set captures this concert over 2 CDs and a concert film on both DVD and High-Definition Blu ray multi region formats (featuring a stunning 5.1 Surround Sound mix).

Release Date 30th April 2021



NEW RELEASE

DJABE & STEVE HACKETT
'THE JOURNEY CONTINUES'
(2CD/1DVD BOX SET)

- Esoteric Antenna is delighted to announce the release of a new 2 CD and DVD live album by Djabe & Steve Hackett; "The Journey Continues".
- This wonderful concert recording was mainly recorded in Nyiregyhaza, Hungary in August 2019.
- The NTSC / Region Free DVD in this set also includes the bonus features the tracks 'In That Quiet Earth' and 'After Limoncello', recorded in St. Veit, Austria in 2018 and 'White Bears', recorded in Washington DC in 2019.

Bloody Well Write

Send your letters to us at: *Prog*, Future Publishing, 1-10 Praed Mews, Paddington, London, W2 1QY, or email prog@futurenet.com. Letters may be edited for length. We regret that we cannot reply to phone calls. For more comment and prog news and views, find us on facebook.com under *Prog*.

RINGS A BELL!

Reading Jerry Clark's letter about using lockdown to go through your music collection [*Prog* 118], I recently rediscovered an artist that I had ignored for far too long.

Like most people I had Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* on LP but didn't get into the following releases. After lockdown began I started to investigate artists noted in *Prog* that I had little knowledge of. Mike Oldfield was certainly missing from my collection and what a wonderful journey it's been over the last year or so collecting the back catalogue.

I also rediscovered Todd Rundgren, Supertramp and ELP. All albums I had enjoyed but had not listened to for far too long. It's almost the same feeling listening to these again as it was the first ever time.

Mike Oldfield: taking readers on a journey.

With so much great music being released and back catalogues to explore, this truly is a great period for prog music (it would be a golden era if we could see this wonderful music played live). The new album *Altitude* by Lifesigns is certainly the cherry on top of the prog cake. What a superb album, highly recommended.

Thanks to everyone for producing this great magazine in such trying times

Paul Swanton, via email

A RARE TREAT

Thank you for the Rare Bird feature in *Prog* 119. It may not have been the most cheerful of reads but it was great to see one of prog's neglected but brilliant bands get some coverage. Now, if you can just track down the members of Swiss band TEA and find out what on earth *Cool In The Morning* is all about, I'll be a very happy progster indeed.

Greg Hughes, Leeds

PRESS/ESOTERIC RECORDS

The neglected but brilliant Rare Bird.

AQUADULL

I was a massive Jethro Tull fan up until Martin Barre was sacked. I bought [Ian Anderson solo albums] *Thick As A Brick 2* and *Homo Erraticus* but find them to be a pale imitation of what Tull used to be.

I'm going to say something controversial now: I wish Ian Anderson et al would get over *Aqualung* [*Prog* 117]. Yes, it's good but I only really like *Locomotive Breath*, *Cross-Eyed Mary* and *Aqualung*. And to be honest I got fed up with hearing them at concerts. In fact I used to leave before the encore because I knew what it would be.

I'd love to hear *Dun Ringill* [from 1979's *Stormwatch*] at concerts but I only heard it once and not a particularly good rendition then at all.

There are stacks of other good Jethro Tull songs apart from those on *Aqualung* to choose from.

Malcolm White, via email

Aqualung isn't the only Tull album celebrating an anniversary this year. Fans of A should turn to page 44 to read more about the record that nearly destroyed the band. — Deputy Ed.

PROG STARTER FOR 20

I was asked recently by an old school friend to put together a prog playlist

TWEET TALK

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BRUCE SOORD
@bsoord
What a lovely feeling it was to play live again...

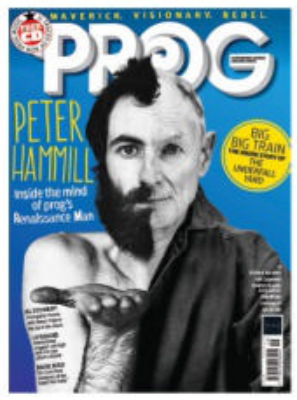
BRUCE SOORD

RHODRI MARSDEN
@rhodri
A collared dove sits on our chimney and coos down into the living room. This morning I have ascertained a) that he/she coos in 5/4 time, and b) at exactly the same speed as the classic recording [*Collard Dove*] by The Dave Brubeck Quartet.

FIELD MUSIC
@fieldmusicmusic
I miss drinking late-night lukewarm cava in travel taverns.

LETTER

Prog 119 fell through my letterbox yesterday – thank you to everyone involved for another excellent issue. I enjoyed all the articles, especially John Hackett, Big Big Train, Lifesigns and Cosmograf, but what really caught my attention were the concert ads at the back of the mag. I'm sure I'm not the only reader who has been missing live music and I was particularly encouraged to see two pages of gig ads and Jerry Ewing's comments about commissioning a special report on the return of live music.



It's been a long 12 months and I've lost count of the number of concerts I had tickets for that have either been cancelled or rescheduled, often multiple times. Steve Hackett, Big Big Train, Hawkwind etc. I'm optimistic that we will return to some kind of normal soon and I'm really looking forward to finally being able watch my favourite bands in person again. Thank you, *Prog*, for keeping the flame burning.

Nick Taylor, Basingstoke

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

for him. He knew I was a huge fan and was interested in broadening his musical tastes, particularly within the progressive sphere. He'd already listened to several tracks by Yes and Pink Floyd, which he'd liked, but sadly he had not been able to 'get into' Jethro Tull (he will learn!).

I collated what, to my mind, was a reasonable representation of the old and new of the progressive genre. I included a few classic tracks that I thought he would recognise, plus a number of newer artists, which when put together, showcased a wide range of musical styles. It then got me thinking, how would other progressive rock fans judge my 'prog smorgasbord', and if they received the same request, what tracks and artists would they put forward to friends as a progressive rock amuse-bouche?

So, here is the playlist I created: 20 progressive tracks, designed to enthral, entice and amaze a prog newbie:

1. Rush – *La Villa Strangiato*
2. Crippled Black Phoenix – *Times, They Are A'raging*
3. North Atlantic Oscillation – *Drawing Maps From Memory*
4. Public Service Broadcasting – *Go!*
5. Anathema – *Thin Air*
6. Lunatic Soul – *Out On A Limb*
7. Porcupine Tree – *Dark Matter*
8. The Pineapple Thief – *Kid Chameleon*
9. Sigur Rós – *Hoppípolla*
10. Brian Eno – *An Ending (Ascent)*
11. Dead Can Dance – *Children Of The Sun*
12: King Crimson – *21st Century Schizoid Man*
13. Focus – *Sylvia*
14. Emerson Lake And Palmer – *Fanfare For The Common Man*
15. Pink Floyd – *Echoes*
16. Tangerine Dream – *Thru Metamorphic Rocks*
17. Steve Hackett – *Spectral Mornings*
18. Amplifier – *Where The River Goes*
19. Steve Wilson – *Home Invasion/ Regret #9*
20. Klone – *Yonder*

Putting the list together made me realise just how spoilt we are! The great artists I omitted from this list: Genesis, Mike Oldfield, Vangelis, Jean-Michel Jarre, Opeth, Riverside, Sanguine Hum, Marillion, Ozric Tentacles, etc. All I can say is I hope my friend realises what he has started.

Andrew McKenna, via email

What a great starter playlist! We hope your old school friend enjoys the selection and uses it to build his own prog music collection. You're absolutely correct: we're very spoiled by all the fantastic music out there. – Deputy Ed.

FLYING HIGH

I thought you might be interested in my new acquisition - a bespoke flag, which is now flying proud in my garden!

Mike O'Connor, Yate, South Gloucestershire

***Prog* reader Mike O'Connor shows off his new flag.**

THE BLACKHEART ORCHESTRA
@blackheartorch
Springtime up north

PLINI
@plinirh
Written and read so many artist bios over the years that all the exciting words in my vocabulary have lost meaning

PROG

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

BIG BIG TRAIN'S MODERNISED SOUND

With a new line-up and a different approach to songwriting, David Longdon and Greg Spawton explore how recent times have changed us and them on their album *Common Ground*.

The past year's unprecedented events have weighed heavily on Big Big Train. That's why, instead of their epic historic narratives, their 13th studio album *Common Ground* looks through the lens of the pandemic, drawing on influences closer to home. It's released via English Electric Recordings on July 30.

Last year also saw significant band departures, the unit reduced to four core members — vocalist David Longdon, bassist Greg Spawton, drummer Nick D'Virgilio and multi-instrumentalist Rikard Sjöblom. Spawton and Longdon set up home in Real World Studios, with long-distance input from their colleagues. New bandmembers Carly Bryant (Freakpower) on vocals and guitarist Dave Foster (Steve Rothery Band), together with fiddler Aidan O'Rourke from folk group Lau, also made contributions.

For the live shows next year, they will also be joined by violinist Clare Lindley (ex-Stackridge) plus a five-piece brass ensemble. Longdon says: "With everything happening in the world during the pandemic and to us, we were presented with an ideal opportunity to do something different and reinvent ourselves to a certain degree. As a result, we made a conscious effort to stretch out in a musically different way."

His personal lens was further clouded by the death of Judy Dyble, his musical collaborator. "When Greg and I were speaking about the album's direction and what we would do, I told him I could only write about what's happening and where I am at the moment," he reports.

The result is the nine-track *Common Ground*, which is split into two parts and opens with Longdon's scene-setter *The Strangest Times* — although Spawton had reservations at first. "Naïvely, I thought [Covid-19] would be old news when the album came out," he laughs. "It's weird how we deal with the present circumstances.

"David wanted to tackle it head on while I never wanted to hear about the pandemic again!" He adds: "When it becomes a period piece, I think we'll all be happy."

Coming from a similar place musically is D'Virgilio's *All The Love We Can Give*. Spawton says: "He wanted to celebrate common humanity, doing things for each other, which is one of the themes of the album. Also, it's an opportunity for us to rock out more."

Spawton himself retreated to his history books, writing a track about ancient libraries called *Black With Ink*. "I felt there was something current in this song through what we know as fake news. The destruction of knowledge and

New Faces: The 2021 line-up of Big Big Train, who'll be joined by additional artists for next year's tour dates.

> **"I could only write about what's happening and where I am."**

scientific belief, bizarrely, still confronts us even now." He says *Dandelion Clock* goes on to offer a more wistful view of the world, "a metaphor for time passing and getting on with your life". The instrumental *Headwaters* starts the album's second half, steering it into more familiar Big Big Train territory. "There are lots of rivers running through it," Spawton says. "Near where David lives there's a small stream, and I live near the River Stour. It's another good metaphor for time passing."

D'Virgilio delivers a blockbuster instrumental, *Apollo*, which Spawton reports has been "brewing for over a year," adding: "There's something about iconic prog instruments and Nick has knocked this one out of the park. It's almost like a Bond theme in places."

Longdon's title track takes its name from Robbie Cowen's acclaimed nature book, which he has turned into a love song celebrating everything we have in common with others. *Atlantic Cable*, another "Victorian engineering" special, is one Spawton feels is very symbolic of "joining hands across the Atlantic" to North America.

The albums closes with *Endnotes*, another personal Spawton song, which is about "looking back at life and its moments that are important, such as meeting the right individual; the connection is there and life blossoms."

Big Big Train's new line-up will begin a lengthy tour in 2022 with 17 dates in the United States followed by seven in the UK during March, culminating in a show at the London Palladium on March 23.

See www.bigbigtrain.com for more. **AR**

SOPHOCLES ALEXIOU

This month, Intro was compiled by

Jeremy Allen
Joe Banks
Mike Barnes
Malcolm Dome
Jerry Ewing
Martin Kielty
Dave Ling
Gary Mackenzie
Rhodri Marsden
Grant Moon
Alison Reijman
Natasha Scharf
Johnny Sharp
Francesca Tyer
Phil Weller

HAWKWIND ENTER THE REALM OF SLEEP

New album *Somnia* explores Roman gods and visions in the dark.

Sweet dreams: Hawkwind.

ROSS JENNINGS

Hawkwind's new album, *Somnia*, will be released in September via Cherry Red, coinciding with a UK tour and following the return of their three-day Hawkfest event.

The record will be available on both vinyl and CD. It arrives less than a year after the Hawkwind Light Orchestra album *Carnivorous* and their *Hawkwind 50* live release.

According to Hawkwind leader Dave Brock, the 13-track album is an exploration of sleep. "Through Roman mythology and the god of sleep Somnus, the lyrics tell the tale of sleepless paranoia, strange encounters, fever dreams and meditation," he explains. Song titles include *Strange Encounters*, *Counting Sheep*, *Sweet Dreams* and *I Can't Get You Off My Mind*.

Brock is heard alongside the current line-up including guitarist Magnus Martin, keyboardist Tim Blake, bassist Niall Hone and drummer Richard Chadwick.

The band have also announced they'll be headlining the Big Top Stage at the Beautiful Days Festival on August 20 at Escot Park, Devon. Hawkfest returns on the weekend of August 27-29 in East Devon – and the closing date will mark the 52nd anniversary of their first ever gig at the All Saints Church Hall, Notting Hill, in 1969.

After that, Hawkwind are due to play a series of live dates in September in support of the new album, before their rescheduled *Arrival In Dystopia* show takes place at the London Palladium on October 28.

Full details can be found at www.hawkwind.com. **JB**

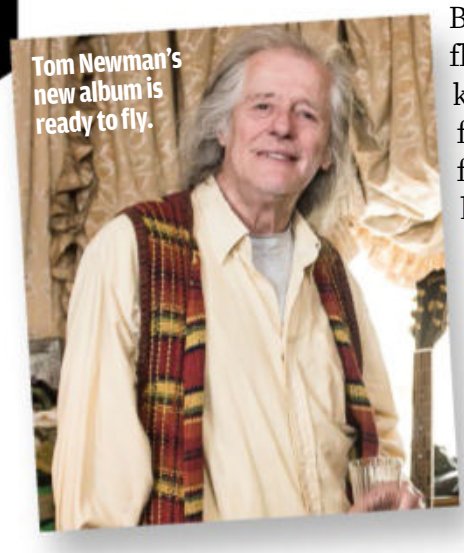
TOM NEWMAN PRESENTS A NEW *FAERIE SYMPHONY*

Album and EP develop themes from 44 years ago.

Tom Newman will release a follow-up to his album *Faerie Symphony* through Tigermoth on May 30 — 44 years after the original. *A Faerie Symphony II* was recorded during lockdown.

"I don't have a copy of my 1977 *Faerie Symphony*," says Newman. "But because somebody mentioned it on Facebook, I downloaded it and that's when the idea for this came to me." Aside from Newman, the album also features vocalist Jennifer Banks (his partner), bassist Jim Newman (his son), flautist Jon Field, guitarist Zak Sikobe and Magenta keyboardist Rob Reed. "Jon hasn't record anything fresh," Newman says. "I found an unused snippet for the first album. Jennifer and I developed a faerie language for the record."

Newman has also recorded an EP called *Dance Of The Stems* at Reed's suggestion, including new compositions and alternate recordings from the new album. Visit www.tigermothshop.co.uk for further details. **MD**



Tom Newman's new album is ready to fly.

WILL IRELAND/FUTURE OWNS

GENTLE GIANT LOVE WILSON'S *FREE HAND*

Derek Shulman believes remix of 1975 album demonstrates the band's strengths.

Close at hand: Gentle Giant in the mid-70s.

PRESS

Gentle Giant co-founder Derek Shulman says he can't wait to enjoy the reissue of the band's 1975 album *Free Hand* before its release on June 26 via Alucard Music.

With Dolby Atmos and 5.1 surround sound mix extras, a Blu-ray with visuals accompanying each track and the original quadraphonic mix, even Shulman is longing for physical copies of the fully buffed Steven Wilson remix.

"The Atmos and 5.1 mixes are extremely successful in emphasising the album's quality, the Blu-ray has some beautiful illustrations and stories, and an added bonus is the limited edition red vinyl, which I can't wait to get my hands on!" he says.

Originally released as the band's seventh studio album and their first for Chrysalis, *Free Hand* followed a relatively brief yet deeply unhappy period with the record label WWA. Some elements of the album certainly speak of the tension and wrangling behind the scenes. Shulman reflects: "We had reworked our business issues with management and record label and it felt that we were indeed free of some of the shackles."

The album provides glorious examples of Gentle Giant's trademark synthesis of musical styles and vocal gymnastics, marking a positive and productive period in the band's development. "We had come out of a darker patch of time and we felt more streamlined both live and in the studio," Shulman says. "The band had fully matured by the time *Free Hand* was being recorded."

Having previously remixed Gentle Giant's *Octopus* and *The Power And The Glory,* as well as early album selections for *Three Piece Suite*, Wilson has resumed his role and that's something the band had no qualms about at all. Shulman explains: "Steven always has the highest respect for the initial recording and does not stamp his mark on the music.

"His mixes are always truly superb in being able to clarify the instrumentation and placement in the final mixing stage."

> **"Steven's mixes reveal the playing. Truly we were damn good at what we did!"**

Shulman feels the new mix helps to emphasise the group's strengths. "This album in particular highlights the maturity of the band as progressive rock, soul, blues, classical, folk. Steven's mixes reveal the playing of the band. Truly we were damn good at what we did!" **GMM**

For more details on the Steven Wilson version of Free Hand visit www.gentlegiantmusic.com.

INTRO extras

KINGFISHER SKY ON THE *RISE*

Kingfisher Sky will release a new EP, *Rise*, on June 18. "It's four songs about hope, love, nuance and unconditional understanding and respect for one another, or lack thereof," the band report, adding that the music features a "vivacious, symphonic and sometimes folky sound." For more, see www.kingfishersky.com

Transformation: Giancarlo Erra.

CAROLINE TRAITLER

NOSOUND'S ERRA CHANNELS HIS PAIN

Giancarlo's second solo album *Departure Tapes* deals with his father's cancer battle.

Giancarlo Erra releases his second solo album, *Departure Tapes*, on July 2 via Kscope. On it, the Nosound singer plays piano and analogue synthesisers, with occasional vocals and voice samples.

He began writing the record in 2019, while he travelled between the UK and Italy during his late father's battle with cancer."It was just a way for me to cope with a situation that wasn't easy," says Erra. "I wanted to transform something that was painful into something that can be enjoyed by myself or by others."

The title initially derives from the fact that the music was worked up from ideas he had recorded on a four-track OP-1 digital tape recorder. "I liked the idea of a tape on which you record all your favourite music for going somewhere," he says. "The [album] title has several meanings."

He wanted to make a statement that was different to his more formally composed 2019 debut solo album *Ends*, so he recorded most of *Departure Tapes* live. "I think the tracks have got a very different vibe," he says. "Playing live it's less polished, but you have more of a sense of urgency. The first side of the vinyl is more experimental or minimalist, then side two has *Blues For My Father* – and the second part of the track *Departure Tape* was edited and released as a single with a video. It's more melodic and more developed."

Visit www.giancarloerra.com for more information about *Departure Tapes*. **MB**

CAST MARK FOUR DECADES OF PROG WITH 20TH ALBUM

Mexican veterans return with "very diverse" *Vigesimus*.

Mexican prog veterans Cast have marked their fourth decade with the release of 20th album *Vigesimus*. Bassist and manager Carlos Humaran says the record is a reaffirmation of their classic style.

"It has very epic and very symphonic passages," he adds, "but the post-production work takes us into different textures, with a light touch of world music." He singles out the track *Unknown Wise Advice* for its "very diverse passages that go from beautiful melodies to powerful guitar riffs, culminating in a display of virtuosity of melodic lines."

Humaran reports that the current line-up are proud to be part of founding member Alfonso Vidales' catalogue, noting: "We believe that friendship and art will continue to drive us. We aim to offer another new album in the near future with a lot of quality and heart."

Vigesimus is available directly from the band via www.castofficial.com. **MK**

Proud legacy: Cast.

PRESS

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STYX CRASH BACK TO THE PAST ON LATEST

New concept album seeks to offer positive message with lessons learned.

Back in time: Styx.

TODD GALAPPO

Styx continue the journey back to their early prog/pomp years with new album *Crash Of The Crown*, released on June 18 via Alpha Dog 2T/UMe.

Just like its predecessor, 2017's *The Mission* — which related the sci-fi tale of a voyage to the planet Mars in the year 2033 — the group's 17th studio set is conceptually based. Its 15 songs cover an amalgamation of historical events from 1066, 1455, 1775, 1861, 1941, and even 2001.

It was written before Covid-19 struck and recorded at the Nashville home studio of guitarist/vocalist Tommy Shaw, with players rotating during the pandemic. Chuck Panozzo, the co-founding bassist who has been living with HIV since 1991, appears on the songs *Our Wonderful Lives* and *Lost At Sea*. "I travelled over 900 miles by car to record with Tommy and Will [Evankovich, producer] in person," comments Panozzo, whose medical condition means he's at high risk of Covid-19 complications.

Stylistically speaking, Styx have returned to the genre that first inspired them, their self-titled debut from 1972 having included a cover of *Fanfare For The Common Man* — later popularised by Emerson, Lake And Palmer — as part of an ambitious larger piece called *Movement For The Common Man*. It's far proggier than *The Mission*, with the extravagant keyboard flourishes of Lawrence Gowan (who replaced co-founder Dennis DeYoung back in 1999), a prime focus.

"I got to use some gear I never thought I'd have the chance to play on a Styx record, like Tommy's Hammond B3 organ," says Gowan, whose artillery included the Mellotron and a vintage Minimoog.

With an overall theme of "a new era of hope, survival, and prosperity", one of the album's selections, *Save Us From Ourselves*, sees them sampling Winston Churchill's legendary "We shall fight on the beaches" speech from World War II.

"We've never been a protest band. We're more like a gospel caravan trying to send out positive messages wherever we go," explains Shaw. "In order to share those messages, you have to look at what the problems are, to figure out the ways you can make sure everything's going to be alright. That's a very important part of how we do what we do." **DML**

"We're a gospel caravan trying to send out positive messages."

Crash Of The Crown will be available on CD, 180g clear or black vinyl and via digital platforms. For more details visit www.styxworld.com.

INTRO extras

MICHAEL WOODMAN'S SINISTER NOSTALGIA

Michael Woodman of Thumpermonkey will release solo album *Psithusism* via Believers Roast on August 6. Filled with "sinister narratives and the warm, sad ochre of nostalgia," it features bandmate Sam Warren on bass plus sax by Knifeworld's Josh Perl and drums from producer John Simm. For more, see www.thumpermonkey.com

A sense of accomplishment: Dim Gray.

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

DIM GRAY EXTEND DEBUT ALBUM *FLOWN*

Norwegian post-prog trio offer glimpse into their early days with first physical versions.

Following the success of their 2020 debut record *Flown*, Norwegian post-progressive outfit Dim Gray have announced their first physical releases on June 11 via Grim Day and Plane Groovy. Both CD and double vinyl editions include bonus tracks.

Dim Gray formed in 2012 in Oslo, honing their sound and beginning to write songs that would eventually become their debut album. *Flown* was tracked with engineer Leif Johansen at Stable Studios, with additional recording taking place in "rehearsal spaces, living rooms and stairways" between 2017 and 2019. After four teaser tracks, it was released as a digital-only record, with the band unsure how it would be received. Luckily for them, their hard work was rewarded.

"This being our first album we didn't know what to expect," the band's Håkon Høiberg explains. "But the reception has been great! We've only had positive reviews." Perhaps more importantly for the band they also had "plenty of people reaching out to say how much they enjoyed the album. It means a lot and gives us a real sense of accomplishment."

The bonus tracks offer a glimpse into Dim Gray's earlier days. There's live reworkings of the album tracks *Again* and *Song For E*, but also three recordings from the band's beginnings in 2014-15. One of those is an extended version of early single *Paper Bird*, while *Ice And Sea* and *Wakeless* are exclusive to the CD and LP versions respectively.

Full details can be found at www.dimgray.no. **AL**

PLENTY RAID ARCHIVES FOR MORE THAN *ENOUGH*

Tim Bowness' 80s trio return with double-length release.

***Enough* is the** new double album from Plenty, the art rock trio that prog star Tim Bowness fronted in the 1980s. The three members — Bowness, guitarist-keyboardist Brian Hulse and bassist David K Jones — reunited for 2018 release *It Could Be Home*, and during last year's lockdown they remotely worked on updated versions of seven songs from their back catalogue. "I'd always felt that the Plenty material was among my best," Bowness says. "Redoing these pieces was a means of kickstarting the creative process for my next solo album. But after a while we realised this was quite a substantial album in its own right."

Also included are seven recordings from the band's archives plus five newly minted cover versions, including It's Immaterial's *New Brighton*, *Tiny Children* by The Teardrop Explodes, and Hank Williams *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*.

Enough is out now via Burning Shed. For more details on the band and album visit www.timbowness.co.uk. **GRM**

Plenty in the 80s.

ROBERT WHITROW

FAD GADGETS

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

POCKETGUITAR

"The most attractive portable guitar ever," runs the blurb for Aeroband's Pocketguitar, although a pedant might argue that guitars are already very portable. Anyway, this comes in the form of a giant plectrum (about two inches across) which connects via Bluetooth to your smartphone. It then enables you to play a constrained form of air guitar. If you hold it and strum up and down, chords or notes selected on your smartphone (using your other hand) will sound. Playing the more traditional air guitar is probably more fun, but it may not teach you quite as much about rhythm.
www.aeroband.net

KALIMBAGO

Kickstarter seems to be rammed with clever devices that teach you how to play instruments via flashing lights: *put your fingers here, now!* We've featured a bunch of them in this column, including ukelele, piano and guitar assistants. The craze has now expanded to the kalimba, a 17-key thumb piano with its roots in Zimbabwean culture. Part of the joy of the kalimba is picking it up and twanging it and seeing what happens, but if you'd rather use it to play a slightly stilted version of Pachelbel's *Canon*, that's now possible: simply attach this WiFi-enabled LED panel which shows you when and where to pluck.

www.iwalya.com

MICTIC

More movement detecting magic. This Swiss company has worked with dancers and musicians to create wristbands that transform a wave of the arms into smartphone sound. Having made them, they're now turning them over to us, "the unruly, untameable public." Mictic is "a new musical tool with literally no rules," they say, which ignores the fact that you're triggering a bunch of pre-programmed soundscapes. Advanced users can hook them up to MIDI for a go at becoming the new Imogen Heap.
www.mictic.com

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Time and a work: Ciccada aim to avoid compromising artistic vision while facing the issues of modern life.

CICCADA

Greek collective aim to balance global ambitions with the reality of being located in "a small country in the far corner of Europe."

Nicolas Nikolopoulos, the flautist-keyboardist and founder of Greek band Ciccada has, alongside his bandmates, had to balance work with music. Their third album, *Harvest* — a mystical menage of classic prog influences à la Jethro Tull and Gentle Giant with classical, jazz and folk textures — comes 16 years and many line-up changes after their formation in 2005.

"Greece will never have a huge progressive rock scene," says Nikolopoulos candidly. "It'll never be like what you have in the UK or the USA, but there is a small ascending scene here. The paradox, though, is that while people buy progressive music, they don't make it to the gigs much. Most bands play to 70 to 100 people, maximum.

"We're good friends with some excellent Greek artists. We support each other — but the only way to form a real community is with festivals. We hope that Prog Days, which has been happening in Athens every two years since 2017, will work in that direction."

He explains their "relatively slow" pace of work is a result of "all working day jobs to survive." But it's also down to being "very meticulous about details while building our music."

Nikolopoulos asserts: "For most of us, this isn't a hobby. The way we work is absolutely professional in terms of knowledge, technique, musicality and hours spent training. Life situations have made having day jobs imperative. I was a professional flautist but I had to work as a music teacher in a school if I wanted to continue with the band."

Even with the impressive *Harvest*, conquering the world remains a challenge on the scale of ancient Greek literature. "We're from a small country in the far corner of Europe," says Nikolopoulos. "To play a festival in Britain to get some more attention, the event has to be really special. Then there's the cost of travel. Consider how much easier that is for a band from Holland or France."

Nevertheless, he says, "we want to spread the word about Ciccada around the world and play our music to wider audiences." **POW**

"People buy progressive music, but they don't make it to the gigs much."

Harvest is available now via Bad Elephant Music. For more see www.bit.ly/ciccada.

PROG IN BRIEF

Dream Theater (right) will release a "treasure trove" of material based around their Ytsejam Records catalogue via InsideOut. The *Lost Not Forgotten Archives* will launch with *Images And Words - Live In Japan, 2017* on June 25.

Multi-instrumentalist and Syd Arthur member **Raven Bush** releases debut album *Fall Into Noise* on August 13 via PRAH. He says it "looks to document living in the moment, allowing listener to find their own meaning." facebook.com/allsoundismusic

Carl Palmer has edited the first official book about **Emerson, Lake And Palmer**. *ELP* is published later this year via Rocket 88. "This is the story as it happened, as the group told it, because it's in our own words," Palmer says. See www.elpbook.com.

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CALIGONAUT

Self-effacing Airbag acolyte makes solo hay with a little help from his friends.

THERE'S SURELY NEVER been a better time to do it yourself. With you-know-what reducing face-to-face interaction, record labels preferring low-maintenance solo acts, and technology making self-production easier than ever, it's a tempting option for any aspiring musical visionary.

But great work can also be achieved by careful delegation, and proof of that can be found in the debut album by Ole Michael Bjørndal, aka Caligonaut.

"I'm not a full-time musician," he tells *Prog*, "I'm more of a hobby guitar player who plays for enjoyment." For an enthusiastic amateur, he's made some useful friends.

The four lengthy compositions on *Magnified As Giants* journey through symphonic prog via bucolic folk, space rock, dreampop and pastoral psychedelia, creating musical visions coloured by the contributions of some notable backing musicians.

Aficionados of Norwegian prog may recognise Bjørndal's name from his role in Airbag's touring band and on Bjorn Riis' 2019 solo LP, *A Storm Is Coming*, as well as his work as part of Oak.

For Caligonaut ("it kind of means 'traveller in the mist'"), he enlisted three members of Oslo proggers Wobbler to flesh out his sound: bassist Kristian Hultgren ("I knew he was capable of working with any idea I threw at him, and coming up with his own"); keyboard multitasker Lars Fredrik Frøislie ("he's always great"), and singer Andreas Prestmo, who contributed the backing response to Bjørndal's lead vocal on *Emperor* — "He's an amazing singer, and he contributed his own ideas on the spot, which were just amazing."

Airbag's Henrik Fossum drummed on the album, as did Arild Brøter, leader of Oslo fusionists Pymlico (featured in *Prog* 116). Violinist Asa Ree, meanwhile, not only contributed strings but also choral backing vocals ideas.

Perhaps the biggest coup of all for Bjørndal though was to enlist church organist Iver Kleive to accompany his evocative guitar patterns on the sumptuous, widescreen *Hushed*. "He lives just by me. I can see his house from here," explains the songwriter.

With neighbours like that, who needs bandmates? Yet *Magnified As Giants* is still undeniably Bjørndal's vision. His versatile guitar playing shows mastery of styles ranging from metallic fret histrionics to the alluring acoustica of the title track, playing partly schooled by a key inspiration: "The album was written in the standard tuning that Robert Fripp used on his Guitar Craft courses, then I added layers with standard and drop D tunings."

Lyrically, parts of the album are informed by his background as a political science graduate, and witnessing the alarming developments that have taken place not only in his home country but further afield. On *Emperor* he sings from the point of view of someone seduced by the prospect of the strong populist leader who is actually a divisive force: '*Come into my life, my emperor… make us forget who we were and what we meant, a unity that's been here forever.*'

"I'm a huge believer in a liberal democracy," he says, "and I feel like as a society we're getting more and more fragmented. You used to feel like you were in a community but you no longer feel like that."

If anyone can show that a communal approach benefits the greater good, it's Caligonaut. *Prog* suspects more fellow travellers will be coming his way very soon. **JS**

"I'm a huge believer in a liberal democracy. I feel like as a society we're getting more and more fragmented."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Ole Michael Bjørndal *(vocals, guitars)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Emotive, melodic long-form prog compositions encompassing the heavy, the symphonic and the acoustic by turns

CURRENT RELEASE

Magnified As Giants is out now via Apollon

WEBSITE

www.caligonaut.bandcamp.com

With a little help from his friends: Ole Michael Bjørndal, aka Caligonaut.

SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT

A *Prog* writer says there's not enough distance between artists and fans.

Once upon a time in the 1970s, fans could only contact their musical heroes through record companies or fan clubs. As this writer fondly recalls, the distance invoked an air of tantalising mystery and secrecy around prog bands – while the internet was a distant spark in the ether.

More recently, meet-and-greets have offered a contact bridge between concert going fans and bands, albeit with a measure of control required when fans feel entitled to more than their allotted face time.

What's completely changed in this post-major label epoch is the digital genie being let out of the bottle, enabling fans to continuously press their noses up against artists' online windows. Bands have greater control and more channels to sell their art to wider audiences but do they feel, as part of this quid pro quo, that they *must* make themselves available to fans 24/7?

From conception to completion, musicians face a difficult process in this new musical matrix, especially when social media channels amplify opinions about how they should deliver it. Many have said they want to make fans feel as involved as possible, while retaining the integrity they've fought hard to build. And yet, all hell can break loose if a musician fails to adhere to the musical blueprint that some followers have come to expect.

Controlling content while managing expectations is a fact of life now. Some bands outsource their online presence to trusted fans, who scrutinise them for inappropriate comments that could damage either reputation or revenue, or both. But that's added a new kind of distance between the creator and the enjoyer.

And if an artist does happen to reveal controversial opinions, either deliberately or inadvertently, does it affect how we perceive their music? Should it matter if their personal views don't concur with our own?

With live gigs currently in stasis, we're not seeing the incessant mewling about why bands aren't playing in fans' front rooms on their latest tour. Instead, it's the cottage industry business models that are under fire. One exasperated prog artist opines that many fans don't understand the tight budgets to which they work. When some try to educate fans about the difficulties they face, such as competing against the profit-sapping streaming services, other followers weigh in to tell them how it should be done.

Like *Dragon's Den* in reverse, investing in their products gives some fans such a sense of entitlement that they feel they can tell musicians how to make their next record.

We can never recapture the mystique of that early prog era. But artists being savaged by a small minority of entitled fans demonstrates the need for defined digital boundaries, especially while artists sacrifice so much financially and emotionally getting their music to market.

ALISON REIJMAN

Got an opinion on the matter that you'd like to share? Please email us at: prog@futurenet.com. Opinions expressed in this column aren't necessarily those of the magazine.

HAVE A CIGAR

Saluting the scene's supporting crew

Family business: Kristian, right, and son Benjamin, have built a relationship with Opeth.

OPETH KLUB

Kristian and **Benjamin Mølgaard** share their mission to unite Opeth's fans via their Denmark-based online club.

Father and son Kristian and Benjamin Mølgaard are totally inseparable musically. When Benjamin was just eight, Kristian took him to an Iron Maiden gig, then to an Opeth concert in their native Denmark the following year.

Now aged 52 and 17, they're both drummers and write for a Danish metal magazine. Just over a year ago they founded Opeth's fan club, which they're now planning to expand.

"When Benjamin turned nine, I was going to interview Mikael Åkerfeldt so I asked Opeth's tour manager if I could bring my son to the gig," recalls Kristian. "We met them again six months later at a Hamburg gig where keyboard player Joakim Svalberg made horns at Benjamin because he was wearing red earphones. We met them outside afterwards and he said, 'Hey, that's the boy with the earphones!'"

They developed a bond with the band; and when they interviewed guitarist Fredrik Åkesson at the Wacken Festival in Germany in 2019, the idea of starting a fan club was mentioned. They were also invited to Opeth's backstage party at the Danish National Theatre in November 2019 — the final gig of their last tour before lockdown began.

"Fredrik loved the idea as did all the band, but we had to do it the right way," Kristian says. "We have a great relationship with the band, who contact us regularly… apart from Axe [drummer Martin Axenrod], who lives in the woods!"

They now have an English translator and dedicated webmaster onboard to help them realise their plans "to be bigger than the Iron Maiden fan club." Says Kristian: "It has been difficult up until now due to the coronavirus and because it has only been available in Danish. Now we are in the spring, this is the right time to do it."

With Benjamin at upper secondary school, Kristian is undertaking most of the work. "I have never pushed Benjamin to like the same kind of music as me, but luckily, he loves metal too," he says. "This is a club run by fans for the fans and we just want to create more possibilities for members, giving them a unique insight behind the scenes, like the ones we have been so lucky to have." **AR**

"We have a great relationship with the band."

For more details visit the fan club (in English): www.opeth-fc.dk/en/

PROG IN BRIEF

The Resonance Association (right) end a four-year hiatus with new album *You Will Know When The Time Is Right*. Daniel Vincent and Dominic Hemy say it took that long to "work out what we wanted to make." See www.trahq.bandcamp.com.

A New Day, The ***Jethro Tull*** *Magazine*, have completed work on a two-volume unofficial history of the band, set to be published via Gonzo Multimedia. Details of *Spin Me Back Down The Years* and *The Boy Scout Manual* will be available at musicglue.com.

Still Wish You Were Here is the title of an all-star **Pink Floyd** tribute album featuring **Rick Wakeman**, **James LaBrie**, **Geoff Tate**, **Todd Rundgren**, **Edgar Froese** and **Ian Paice,** among others. It's released via Cleopatra Records on May 28.

Spandau Ballet's **Gary Kemp**, who's recently been fronting **Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets**, launches his second album *Insolo* on June 18 via Columbia Records. He says working with Mason gave him the confidence to record it. See www.garykemp.com.

RÏCÏNN

Igorrr vocalist follows a more tribal path on her evocative solo album.

LAURE LE PRUNENEC'S haunting work has often been placed in the realm of funeral opera. As Rïcïnn, her mysterious compositions each tell a story, blending deep melodies with lighter notes. Asked to describe her sound, she replies: "I would say come and listen, but it won't give the exact picture because I do it instinctively. The music is a mix between something tribal and something dreamy. It's a dialogue with the universe, the result of everything that nourishes me."

Le Prunenec traces this instinctive ability to her early experiences of music. Her mother's passion for it played a part and music lessons built a solid foundation. "It's like I always had this ability," she muses. "I started the piano early, so I was in the context of music very young. I also had a lyrical opera teacher [but] I stopped because I was bored. I wanted to sing my own songs."

Known for her work with avant-garde metal act Igorrr, the French artist is now focused on finding her own identity. Her latest work, *Nereïd*, follows on from her debut, *Liän*, and took four years to complete.

"Nereïd [is] the muse, the goddess," she begins. "I had issues that made it harder to be on time [with the deadline]. I already had songs written, but life isn't easy sometimes. I'm a singer in different bands and I didn't have the necessary silence. Labels just have to wait because music isn't robotic."

The struggle to find silence means music is not a primary influence on Rïcïnn's work. She emphasises the idea that her creativity is nourished by the world around her. "I'm passionate about movies, photos and cinema," she reflects. "Everything has inspired me, even nature. Music isn't so inspiring because it takes [up] space. When I'm listening to a song, I can't do anything else. I need silence if I want something to happen."

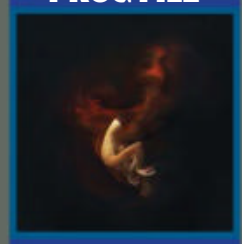
However, the power of music seeps into every fibre of Rïcïnn's new album. Her perception of life, her instincts, and her passion for the world emanate from each composition.

"I have an intimate link with all the songs," she comments. "I love the experience, because it's quite a thing to create a song. There's a path, a story. *Nereïd* is really about the movement of the soul, all that we're going through in this experience. You have freedom, but you're also conditioned by things which are bigger than you, stronger than you."

And like her musical heroes Magma, her lyrics transcend her native tongue: "I sing in a mix of all the languages I've heard," she reveals. "I use tones from different languages as a tool for being percussive or sweet to express what I need at the moment when I'm improvising."

Although now is the time to enjoy the album, Rïcïnn's focus is already elsewhere: "Enjoying it isn't my state of mind. I constantly think about what I'm doing now. I feel time flies and there are so many things to do in this life. I want to do the maximum I can, so I already have three, maybe four ideas." **FT**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Laure Le Prunenec *(vocals)*, **Raphaël Verguin** *(cello)*, **Mayine** *(violin)*, **Sylvain Bouvier** *(drums)*, **Eran Segal** *(guitars)*, **Antony Miranda** *(bass)*, **Nills** *(guitar)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Mysterious tribal sounds threaded with violins and dreamy notes. Imagine Atticus Ross remixing Magma with Björk on vocals

CURRENT RELEASE

Nereïd is out now on Blood Music

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/LAPAGERICINN

"I had a lyrical opera teacher but I stopped because I was bored. I wanted to sing my own songs."

Holding dialogue with the universe: Rïcïnn, aka Laure Le Prunenec.

PHOEN NOIR

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

April 2021

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1. **JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** Amazonia *(RCA)*
2. **JETHRO TULL** A (A La Mode) *(RHINO)*
3. **FIELD MUSIC** Flat White Moon *(MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)*
4. **LIQUID TENSION EXPERIMENT** LTE3 *(INSIDEOUT)*
5. **BIG BIG TRAIN** The Underfall Yard *(ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS)*
6. **GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR** G_d's Pee At State's End *(CONSTELLATION)*
7. **MOGWAI** As The Love Continues *(ROCK ACTION)*
8. **THE ORB** Abolition Of The Royal Familia – Guillotine Mixes *(COOKING VINYL)*
9. **JON ANDERSON** Olias Of Sunhillow *(ESOTERIC)*
10. **STEVEN WILSON** The Future Bites *(CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL)*
11. **AL STEWART** Year Of The Cat *(ESOTERIC)*
12. **JANE WEAVER** Flock *(FIRE)*
13. **PORCUPINE TREE** Octane Twisted *(KSCOPE)*
14. **NAD SYLVAN** Spiritus Mundi *(INSIDEOUT)*
15. **JON ANDERSON** Animation *(ESOTERIC)*
16. **RUSH** Permanent Waves *(MERCURY/UMC)*
17. **NIGHTWISH** Human. :II: Nature. *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
18. **THE PINEAPPLE THIEF** Soord Sessions Vol 1-4 *(KSCOPE)*
19. **WARDRUNA** Kvitravn *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
20. **MARS VOLTA** La Realidad De Los Sueños *(CLOUDS HILL)*
21. **FLAMING LIPS** American Head *(BELLA UNION)*
22. **PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS** SHYGA! The Sunlight Mound *(MARATHON ARTISTS)*
23. **MOTORPSYCHO** Kingdom Of Oblivion *(RUNE GRAMMOFON)*
24. **BRIAN ENO** Film Music 1976-2020 *(UMC)*
25. **TRANSATLANTIC** The Absolute Universe – Forevermore *(INSIDEOUT)*
26. **DREAM THEATER** Distant Memories – Live In London *(INSIDEOUT)*
27. **STEVE HACKETT** Selling England By The Pound And Spectral Mornings: Live *(INSIDEOUT)*
28. **SIGUR RÓS** Odin's Raven Magic *(KRUNK)*
29. **STRAWBS** Settlement *(ESOTERIC)*
30. **PERIPHERY** Live In London *(CENTURY MEDIA)*

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

WIN! ZAPPA FILM BUNDLE

It's been a labour of love, but finally Alex Winter's *Zappa* documentary is now out and to celebrate we have three sets of Zappa goodies to give away to three lucky readers. Each comprises a copy of the *Zappa* soundtrack on double vinyl, a poster and a free code so you can watch the film in the comfort of your own home. (Or in your garden, if you prefer!)

Winter was given unlimited access to the Zappa Vault to create the critically acclaimed documentary, which includes contributions from Zappa bandmembers Ruth Underwood, Mike Keneally, Steve Vai, and Bunk Gardner. The result is a modern exploration of an artist who was ahead of his time.

To be in with a chance of winning this bumper prize, visit www.bit.ly/zappa_doc and answer the following question:

Frank Zappa was a father to four, but which of these isn't his offspring?

a) Rain Shimmer

b) Diva Muffin

c) Moon Unit

Zappa is available to watch on all major streaming platforms in the UK and Ireland, and the soundtrack is out now on various formats. For more information, visit www.altitude.film.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from May 13, 2021-July 2, 2021. 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...

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Jerry Ewing

STONE GIANTS

West Coast Love Stories
NOMARK

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

BICURIOUS

(re)constructed
BICURIOUSBANDOFFICIAL.COM

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

VOLA

Witness
MASCOT

The Musician
Steve Babb

GENESIS

Selling England By The Pound
CHARISMA

The Writer
Holly Wright

PERSEFONE

Aathma
VICISOLUM PRODUCTIONS

The Reader
Colin Gibbs

SANGUINE HUM

A Trace Of Memory
BAD ELEPHANT MUSIC

LEAGUE OF LIGHTS

Irresistible art-pop project from Threshold's keyboard player and his vocalist wife.

THE BRITISH ART-POP/prog lite duo League Of Lights are back with a third album that was conceived largely during lockdown. The husband and wife team of keyboardist and multi-instrumentalist Richard and singer Farrah West set out to cheer up their fans, and consequently themselves, via *Dreamers Don't Come Down*.

"The album was mostly written and recorded during those months of ups and downs," comments Farrah West. "It's sometimes annoying but I have this habit of maintaining hope, which never dwindles, even when things look really awful. So it would be great if somebody listening got the sense that there is light at the end of the tunnel, even if it's a really, really long one."

The album's birth certainly proved therapeutic for the Wests.

"The first lockdown was a blur of writing, recording and walking for an hour a day," affirms Farrah, "and we have something now that we're massively proud of to show for that time."

Spookily, one of its best selections, *Twenty Twenty One*, was written before the pandemic, back in 2019. "It seemed to be so prophetic given the circumstances that we felt we couldn't wait to put it out there on the album," Farrah explains.

Dreamers... offers some interesting songs. *Modern Living*, for instance, rails at the impact of social media upon real friendships.

"That was the first song that we recorded for the album," she nods. "And yes you're right, it does a bit! Weirdly [due to quarantine] more of life is moving online than ever before, but at the end of the day, I think after the last year we do know who our real friends are."

The track *The Collector* will surely resonate with *Prog* readers. "In terms of them being collectors? We hope it does," Farrah says with a laugh. "It's actually about the non-physical things that we choose to collect, like insults or compliments, and how that affects us down the road."

League Of Lights inhabit the difficult, grey area that lies in between ethereal pop and electronic-based progressive rock.

"We've definitely picked up some open-minded prog fans, for sure," Farrah believes. "Some pop fans found us via YouTube and Spotify, too."

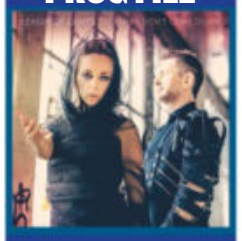
According to Richard West, who has served as the keyboardist of Threshold since 1992, some followers of that band are gradually coming on board.

"Although we're very different stylistically, Threshold songs like *Colophon*, *The Hours* and *The Man Who Saw Through Time* all started out as League songs, and some of our new League songs such as *Twenty Twenty One*, *Ghosts*, *Persephone* could equally have become Threshold tracks."

And talking of Threshold, Richard is happy to reveal that work is underway on a long-overdue successor to 2017's 11th studio record, *Legends Of The Shires*.

"We started writing last year and it's coming along very well," he confides. "Most of the songs are now written so hopefully the recording will begin soon. I don't know whether it'll be out late this year or early in 2022, but it's definitely on the way." **DML**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Farrah West *(lead vocals, backing vocals),* **Richard West** *(music and programming)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Retro-futurist arrangements crossed with irresistible pop tunes and just a hint of Ladytron

CURRENT RELEASE

Dreamers Don't Come Down is out now on Eightspace Records

WEBSITE

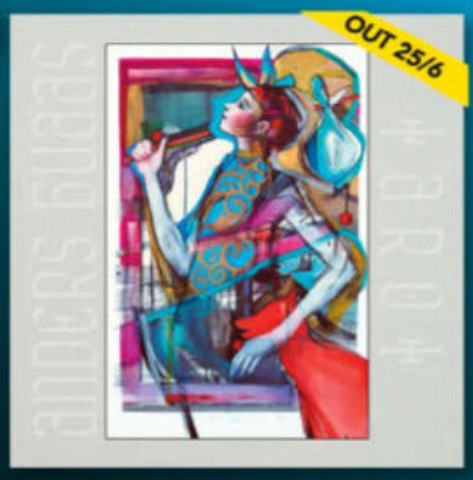
www.leagueoflights.com

"There is light at the end of the tunnel, even if it's a really, really long one."

Daydreamers: League Of Lights' Farrah and Richard West.

PATRICK ULLAEUS

NEW RELEASES FROM APOLLON RECORDS



ANDERS BUAAS
Tarot

ALWANZATAR
Den Glemte Dalen

MARIUS LEIRÅNES
(Pixie Ninja)
Langtidsperspektiv

OLE TEIGEN
(Superlynx)
Aske og Jord

35 TAPES
Home
2nd album from these melodic proggers from Norway

CALIGONAUT
Magnified as Giants
Debut album from Ole Michael Bjørndal (Oak, Bjørn Riis & Airbag, feat members from Wobbler, Pymlico and Airbag etc)

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CHRISTIAN RICHET

Kosmiche traveller harnesses celestial energy on his latest recording.

MUSICAL PRODIGY CHRISTIAN Richet enjoyed a classical training but it was discovering Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* in his dad's record collection that provided him with the musical epiphany that set him on his way: "It's the record I would take to a desert island," he says.

He grew up in Eaubonne on the northern outskirts of Paris during the 1970s and learned piano from the age of seven. Once he reached his teens, Richet enrolled in piano and percussion at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique. When not creating percussive dreamscapes, he now teaches music professionally.

But growing up in France, the young Richet had little time for 'popular' artists like Jean-Michel Jarre or disco king Cerrone — instead he tapped into something profound when he discovered Tangerine Dream, Klaus Schulze, Heldon and other kindred, kosmische travellers. Since 1989, Richet has been harnessing celestial energy in the form of eight exquisite electronic albums.

"For me, Tangerine Dream were always way ahead of everyone else," Richet confirms. "I love that classic composition style where you work on a theme or a motif with all the possibilities that engenders, all these incredible sequences, these fabulous musical and dreamlike landscapes."

As well as Edgar Froese and co, he has a deep love for King Crimson and the percussive thunder of Bill Bruford ("*the* absolute drummer"), as well as Miles Davis, Kraftwerk and Olivier Messiaen. It's this eclectic mix of the elaborate, jazzy and futuristic that drives Richet's mostly instrumental work.

His most recent album, *Two Visions Of Unreal Worlds*, evokes the Aztecs in an instrumental track called *Aztlan*. Split into two parts, the second half is 23 minutes long and driven by a percussive marimba-like ostinato held together by atmospheric cries from other instruments, including a soaring guitar by his friend and teaching colleague, Moulay Ait Si Ahmed.

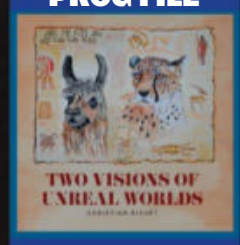
Richet has maintained a similar sonic aesthetic throughout his body of work, with the biggest changes coming from the technology, starting with a Revox tape machine and an 8-track Fostex in the 80s, then onto DAT, and now finally a computer. "I have almost endless possibilities to find a solution," he says, "but you can become a slave to technology. My motto is always: amaze me'" Richet applies this need to be amazed to the compositions he listens to, and the ones he writes himself. It's a benchmark, which has limited the amount of releases he's sired, but each one is a hermetic world, timeless and easy to get lost in.

"I don't think that my music is meditative, though," he says. "It's certainly an interior experience but it's also percussive, punctuated with dreamlike atmospheres, characteristic of my style."

And the one thing Richet is most proud of these last three decades? "Just keeping going," he says, "facing a wall of indifference. Composing is a pleasure, a passion and a drug, but promoting, sending emails, chasing people… it's exhausting and time consuming. But, alas, many artists are obliged to do that today." **JA**

"I love that classic composition style where you work on a theme or a motif with all the possibilities that engenders."

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Christian Richet *(synthesisers, percussion, vocals)*

SOUNDS LIKE

New age with bite. Relaxation with shock therapy. Soothing yet robotic. Richet's excellent seven album *Crépuscule* intimated there'd be darkness, and there was

CURRENT RELEASE

Two Visions Of Unreal Worlds is out now on Musea

WEBSITE

www.bit.ly/christian_richet

Q&A

DAVID COUSINS

Strawbs' new album, *Settlement*, is vivid proof that not even a global shutdown could stop them from adding to their powerful legacy. Fifty-two years after the band's self-titled debut planted their flag as progressive rock groundbreakers, frontman David Cousins describes the improbable creation of their latest recording.

Words: Paul Sexton **Portrait:** Sarah Banks

The colourful history of Strawbs contains a vast array of contributors who've left a distinctive footprint on the chronicles of modern British music. But they're not a band focused on celebrating their past. The energy and imagination running through current release *Settlement* would give artists a third of their age a run for their money. It's also been made by a line-up whose contribution to the band's story is indisputable. Long-servers Dave Lambert, Chas Cronk, Tony Fernandez and more recent addition Dave Bainbridge are accompanied by, among others, former members John Ford, as guest vocalist and writer on one track, and Blue Weaver, who gathered together and produced its distanced components.

Let's talk about how you make a new album without meeting any of your bandmates, and how it's been received.
The reaction has been remarkable, I'm thrilled with it. I felt very uncertain of it when we put it out, because it was put together in unbelievably difficult circumstances. I'm not exaggerating: I haven't seen, face-to-face or on Zoom, a member of the band for over a year. So everything was done in this tiny room here, and I'm not even living at home. There was a flood in the cellar of my house and I had to move out, the same time as lockdown came, and I haven't been able to move back because all the work is still going on. So it was all done in a friend's house, this is the spare bedroom. It had two single beds in it. One's still there, and the other one's on its side – that was the baffles for the recording! There is also a mic stand with a pair of underpants hanging over it.

"We've had such longevity because people identify with the lyrics, and the atmospheres."

Were there songs that were ready to go when the first lockdown hit?
I didn't have any songs at all. They all started in March [2020], and essentially they wrote themselves. *Strange Times*, the second song on the album, I wrote that first. I did it in an open D tuning, and I played the chords down the phone to Dave Bainbridge, who was in Lincolnshire. I didn't hear from him again until September. He was so busy with everything else, his contributions came in much later. So the whole album was put together in fragments.

What are some of the other highlights for you?
We Are Everyone, I wrote that in half an hour when I saw the sad news of the death of George Floyd. I heard that being an anthem the same as *We Shall Overcome*. I wanted the band to sing like a mass choir. We just didn't get around to it, then I got Cathryn Craig to sing on it with me, which changed the whole feel of it. Then *Judgement Day*, that was written when I saw on the news about homeless people [in the UK] being moved into hotels.

One of the most striking things about the album is the topicality of the lyrics.
The songs I've done through the years have always been reflecting what's going on in society. [1972's] *Grave New World*, for example, was when the IRA was at war with Britain. That was an angry [album]. In a way, that's the folk tradition, from which I come. The modal feel, and telling the story of what's going on around you, has always been inherent in Strawbs music. That's why we've had such longevity, I think, because people identify with the lyrics, and the atmosphere of the songs.

How did you communicate with the band, not being able to get together with them?
What I had to do with songs I'd written, and with Dave Lambert's song come to that, was to write out every chord with the words on it and number the bars, so the band would know where to play. "Dave, can you play a solo between bars 57 and 73?"

It's great to hear Blue Weaver, who replaced Rick Wakeman in Strawbs and had several spells as a member, on board as producer. How did that come about?
The sadness was that Chris Tsangarides, who was our producer before, died [in 2018]. So we had to have a new producer, and I thought Blue is the perfect person. We'd met up at our 50th anniversary weekend in the USA [in 2019] and all played together. I had four keyboard players on stage at one time there, playing with a 30-piece orchestra, doing Strawbs music. Having worked with the Bee Gees for all those years in the 70s, his knowledge of production is unbelievable. The sound of my guitar on *Strange Times* is the chamber in Capitol Studios in Los Angeles. He's got all those samples.

John Ford makes a great cameo on *Each Manner Of Man*.
I loved having John singing in the middle of the album, it sounds great to me. If I'd sung it all, it would have sounded drony. My voice is described as a Marmite voice by some people. So [there's] John's voice, to vary it, then it goes into Dave Lambert's voice, but it all flows.

Does this feel far removed from the band's heady days of hit singles?
It's all part of the evolution. I've never said, "Now we'll be a prog band, now we'll be a rock band, now we'll make hit singles." Everything has gradually evolved. As somebody new comes in, they bring something different in, and that's how it's always been.

You must be keen to get these songs on the road?
I've been trying to think which songs we would do live. *Settlement* for certain, that would be enormous. Our band when we tour is a soundman and a tour manager who drives and sells the merch, that's it. We don't have any road crew. It's a very simple organisation. We don't have any management. I suppose I do it. All these years of doing it, you think, "What can they tell me that I haven't experienced already?"

Settlement is out now via Esoteric. See www.strawbsweb.co.uk for more.

Clockwise from top: Mel Collins, Peter Sinfield, Robert Fripp, Boz Burrell, Ian Wallace.

"If I've learned one thing, it's never let people write songs about going on their fucking holidays."

Robert Fripp

"Who plays like that? Nobody"

The year was 1970 and Robert Fripp was on the verge of quitting **King Crimson**. Just 12 months after their original line-up had imploded, they were facing internal rifts again on third album *Lizard*. But along came *Islands* – the only studio recording to feature the touring line-up of Fripp, Mel Collins, Boz Burrell and Ian Wallace – and the band's trajectory was changed for good. As the Crimsons' fourth album hits the big 5-0, their biographer reassembles the cast and looks back on the reinvention and reshaping of one of progressive rock's most influential acts.

Letters: Sid Smith **Portrait:** © DGM Archive

It's early on the morning of January 6, 2010 and somewhere between Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead, Robert Fripp is looking out of his hotel window at the heavy overnight snowfall and his snowed-in car. He's in this neck of the woods to work with Steven Wilson, who is remixing King Crimson's *Islands* for the then-current 40th anniversary series.

Fortunately, help is at hand in the shape of Jakko Jakszyk who lives nearby and rings up Fripp. In addition to working on remixes of his old album, the guitarist is also engaged on a new project with Jakszyk that will eventually be released as *A Scarcity Of Miracles*. Given the scarcity of snow ploughs or shovels, Jakszyk's offer to drive Fripp over to Wilson's is gratefully accepted.

Dropping Fripp off at Wilson's house, Jakszyk goes home to work on tracks he

recorded with Robert and Mel Collins, who had been over the previous day before the snow. Aside from a guest spot on King Crimson's *Red*, this is the first time Collins has played directly on a full album session with Fripp since *Islands* in 1971.

At the appointed hour Jakszyk drives over to Wilson's house and waits for Fripp to emerge. Upon entering Jakszyk's car, Fripp doesn't even say hello but instead launches off with his normally demure Dorset accent now exasperated in tone and laden with expletives as he recites some of the Peter Sinfield's lyrics to *Formentera Lady*, the opening track from *Islands*.

'Here O-fucking-dysseus charm-ed for dark fucking Circe fucking fell/Still her fucking perfume lingers, still her fucking spell.' He turns to Jakko and sighing heavily says, "If I've learned one thing, it's never let people write songs about going on their fucking holidays." Convulsed with laughter, Jakszyk says to the man behind one of his favourite King Crimson albums, "Oh Robert, don't spoil the magic." To which, Fripp, digging deeper into his native West Country accent, smilingly replies, "Plenty magic still left there, boy!"

Alongside the obvious humour of the moment, what this encounter also highlights is the fact that at the time Jakszyk taxied Fripp from Steven Wilson's home, the events and associations surrounding the making of *Islands* was still capable of eliciting a deep, emotional response in Fripp despite being nearly 40 years ago in his past. Fripp once said that period from 1970 to the summer of 1972 was something he'd rather not go through ever again.

For a long time, the *Islands*-era band were very much the forgotten King Crimson, a group overshadowed by 1969's groundbreaking debut and eclipsed by the brilliance of the magical *Larks' Tongue* era that followed. This part of Crimson history was represented by an album hurriedly recorded on the hoof in between gigs and, until the 2000s, a live legacy that could only be found on the infamous *Earthbound*, whose dubious bootleg sonics meant that Atlantic Records declined to even release it in the country where it had been recorded. In just two years they released three albums that were by turns accomplished, challenging, bold, innovative, quixotic, and, for all their differences and idiosyncrasies, unmistakably Crimson despite the turbulence that was evident had you been following the pages of the music press at the time.

It was a period where King Crimson were in turmoil, unable to find suitable new members, and where a power struggle between the two surviving founder members was played out to poisonous effect. It was a time when Fripp and the band became estranged, when musical frustration, personal animosity and professional resentment bubbled under the surface, eventually

King Crimson at the Marquee in 1971.

© DGM ARCHIVE

boiling over into passive-aggressive brinkmanship and mass resignation.

In theory, 1970 and 1971 should have been the years that King Crimson capitalised on the giddy rush of *In The Court Of The Crimson King*'s transatlantic success. With sales of the hastily constructed follow-up, *In The Wake Of Poseidon* actually outperforming its illustrious debut, there was no shortage of promoters ringing up the offices of EG Management offering slots at festivals and tours in the provinces at home and abroad. What there was a distinct shortage of, however, was the right personnel that could be fashioned into a working band capable of going out on the road.

Along with Mel Collins on sax, the recruitment of Fripp's old school pal Gordon Haskell on bass and vocals, and another friend from his past, drummer Andy McCulloch, during the summer of 1970 it seemed like this new iteration of Crimson might yet rise from ashes. Such hopes were short-lived. The making of third album *Lizard* had proved to be a testing experience for nearly everyone concerned. What had been a cordial enough arrangement between Sinfield and Fripp during *Poseidon* now became strained and terse. Haskell and McCulloch disliked the way they were required to lay down their parts in isolation with only the sketchiest guide guitar as accompaniment. In particular, Haskell detested Sinfield's words, a dislike also shared by Fripp. Even the amiable and relaxed Mel Collins was unhappy at the way his and the brass players' parts were laid down on a bar by bar basis, making soloing feel stilted and uneven. Little wonder then, after *Lizard* was done the atmosphere in rehearsals was so toxic that within hours Haskell had walked out, closely followed by McCulloch.

To have one band fall apart could be viewed as an accident or just 'one of those things'. To see another collapse in on itself in such a short space of time was beginning to look like this group was cursed. In the press at the time there was talk of Crimson being deserted by their 'good fairy', that's the run of good fortune and the sense of being looked after by some benign higher force that had taken the original band under its wing. At the end of 1970 King Crimson released *Lizard*, their arguably most eclectic studio album yet, but at an enormous cost. Having somehow survived the collapse of the original band in 1969, one year on it had happened once again and Crimson looked to being finished for good.

Certainly, that's how Mel Collins remembered it. He'd been a member of Circus, one of the groups that had appeared on the Marquee's New Paths series along with pianist Keith

Tippett's band. Fripp's exposure to both these acts in 1969 had led directly to him asking Collins and Tippett to guest on *Poseidon*.

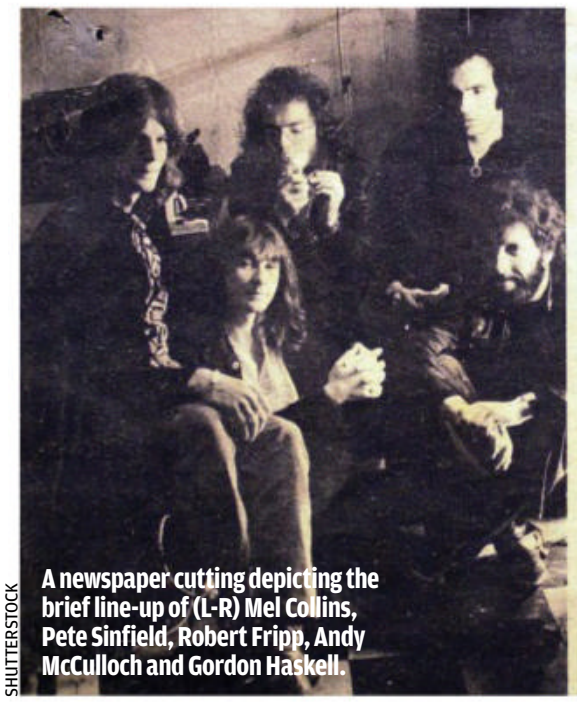
Fripp loved Collins' playing and invited him to sign on full-time, something the sax player had no hesitation in doing. What had once seemed like a no-brainer career move had now become a major headache for the 23-year-old musician. "It was awful really. I'd had to go back to Circus with my tail between my legs after *Poseidon*, and then quitting them again to join Crimson for *Lizard* didn't go down well with the guys in Circus or the management at Transatlantic who we were signed to. It was on then it was off then it was on again and it was doing my head in. My chance of being successful, being in a top-rated band and going to America, which was the big one, seemed to be disappearing."

Things went from bad to worse. Collins recalls when Fripp seemed to give up, unable to face another round of searching for the next Crimson line-up. "It was so traumatic that at one point Robert couldn't handle it anymore and he told me that if I wanted to carry on with Crimson and I wanted to get the band together that I should do the auditioning. All I can remember was Robert giving up completely, saying there's no hope." With auditions held in the basement of the cafe on the Fulham Palace Road where Crimson had started life in January 1969, Collins got on with the slightly surreal task of finding members for a band that technically didn't truly exist at that point.

Collins was quick to recognise the absurdity of the situation. "I can understand why Robert felt the way he did — I was also on the point of giving up on many occasions. Crimson was his whole life. All his energy had gone into the band and Peter [Sinfield, co-founder and lyricist], not being a musician, couldn't do so much. So there I am in this little rehearsal room auditioning bass players and drummers on my own. As green as I was back then, a saxophone player who didn't really know the tunes that well, it was unbelievable to be thrown into this situation, but I was hungry to do it. When I think about it now, I can't imagine how I did it."

He recalls meeting several hopefuls of varying abilities and sometimes no abilities at all. "You get all sorts of complete no-hopers who'd blag their way in and Robert was using me to filter all these people out. They were coming in and we'd talk and we'd have a jam. There wasn't much I could do as a sax player and so we'd do a little blues or something. It was crazy really. If I then found anybody I'd have to re-audition them with Peter and Robert, which was bizarre."

One person with a nicely developed sense of the bizarre was drummer Ian Wallace, who at that point had recently been working with various members of the Bonzo Dog Band and had once played drums on television backing comedian Marty Feldman while dressed as a rubber duck. Wallace rented a room in Keith Emerson's house, as indeed had Andy McCulloch, and now he



SHUTTERSTOCK

A newspaper cutting depicting the brief line-up of (L-R) Mel Collins, Pete Sinfield, Robert Fripp, Andy McCulloch and Gordon Haskell.

King Crimson are together

FOLLOWING unconfirmed reports, Robert Fripp officially announced this week that he had added three permanent members to King Crimson, and was planning a return to live appearances.

New members, who join FRIPP (guitar, Mellotron) and PETE SINFIELD (lyrics, lights and VCS3) include two musicians from K.C.'s 'In the Wake of Poseidon' L.P. They are MEL COLLINS (saxes, flute and Mellotron, originally from Circus) and GORDON HASKELL (bass guitar and vocals, singer of 'Cadence and Cascade'). Third newcomer is drummer ANDY McCULLOCH, recommended to Fripp by Keith Emerson and Greg Lake.

Says Fripp: "We're planning our first live dates for the beginning of the New Year, and we'll be using two Mellotrons on stage at the same time. At the moment we're in the studio recording our third album, which should be released at the beginning of November".

Meanwhile, Robert Fripp—on guitar—and Pete Sinfield—playing the VCS3, "a British version of the Moog"—make their first English live appearance for over a year when they join The Keith Tippet Band for a gig at London's Lyceum on November 15th.

"In the Wake of Poseidon", just released in America,

> "It was me, Fripp and Mel auditioning bass players and singers and it came very close to not existing."
>
> **Ian Wallace**

Mel Collins and Raymond 'Boz' Burrell at the Marquee, 1971.

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PETER SINFIELD: WHERE NEXT?

Post Crimson, Sinfield produced, wrote and even recorded his lone solo album…

Peter Sinfield and Fripp in the studio.

© DGM ARCHIVE

In the aftermath of his split with Fripp in December 1971, Peter Sinfield spent some time wondering what to do next. He didn't have long to wait. He was asked by EG Management to produce the debut album of their latest signing, Roxy Music. "I thought they were very original so EG let me give it a shot within the £5k budget. That really just paid for 10 days at Command Studios." Recorded over two weeks in 1972, Sinfield says, "I worked like a slave. I was in rehearsals for three weeks and went to gigs. I did everything I could to help. I was a bit brusque during the recording but one reason was that I couldn't mess about. It was like: 'Phil, that take was no good. Go away and practise another one' as opposed to: 'Yes, wonderful, blah blah.' I didn't have time to be producer smoothy-smoothy."

Roxy Music's debut album.

Sinfield returned to Command the following year to record his solo album, *Still*, when Crimson were in a different part of the building laying down *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*. The album marked Sinfield's first and only time as a frontman and, conscious of his shortcomings as a vocalist, he opted to place his voice lower in the mix and, on the title track, ceded the lead vocal to Greg Lake. In *Envelopes Of Yesterday*, Sinfield's lyrics deal with the rupture in his relationship with Fripp and Crimson, albeit with coded references. "Like all these things I nicked it from Lennon, who wrote *How Do You Sleep?* about McCartney. I thought I'd do one of those," he says. On the jazzy tour de force *The Night People*, Mel, Boz and Ian are reunited for a barnstorming appearance.

***Still*, Peter's solo album.**

After *Still* was released on ELP's Manticore label in 1973, Sinfield stepped out of the limelight as a solo performer and took up his role as producer for PFM's *Photos Of Ghosts*, on which he also provided lyrics. "I was working with wonderful musicians, the best musicians I've ever heard," recalls Sinfield. "So you have wonderful people, Italian food and great music and I can write anything I want on it. The only downside was the state of the vocals and trying to get them to sing in English. We just about got away with it."

***PFM's Photos Of Ghosts* album.**

It was a busy time for Sinfield, who was also engaged in providing lyrics for parts of ELP's *Brain Salad Surgery* and, later, *Works* and Greg Lake's best-selling *I Believe In Father Christmas*. For someone whose words have been decried by critics for being pretentious, Sinfield slipped into mainstream songwriting with surprising ease, scoring hits with pop acts such as Bucks Fizz, Leo Sayer, Celine Dion and Cher. In 2014, he was asked by Fripp to update the lyrics of *21st Century Schizoid Man* to spotlight the shift of American foreign policy from Asia in the original lyric to events taking place in the Middle East. **SS**

THE BURRELL AND WALLACE SHOW

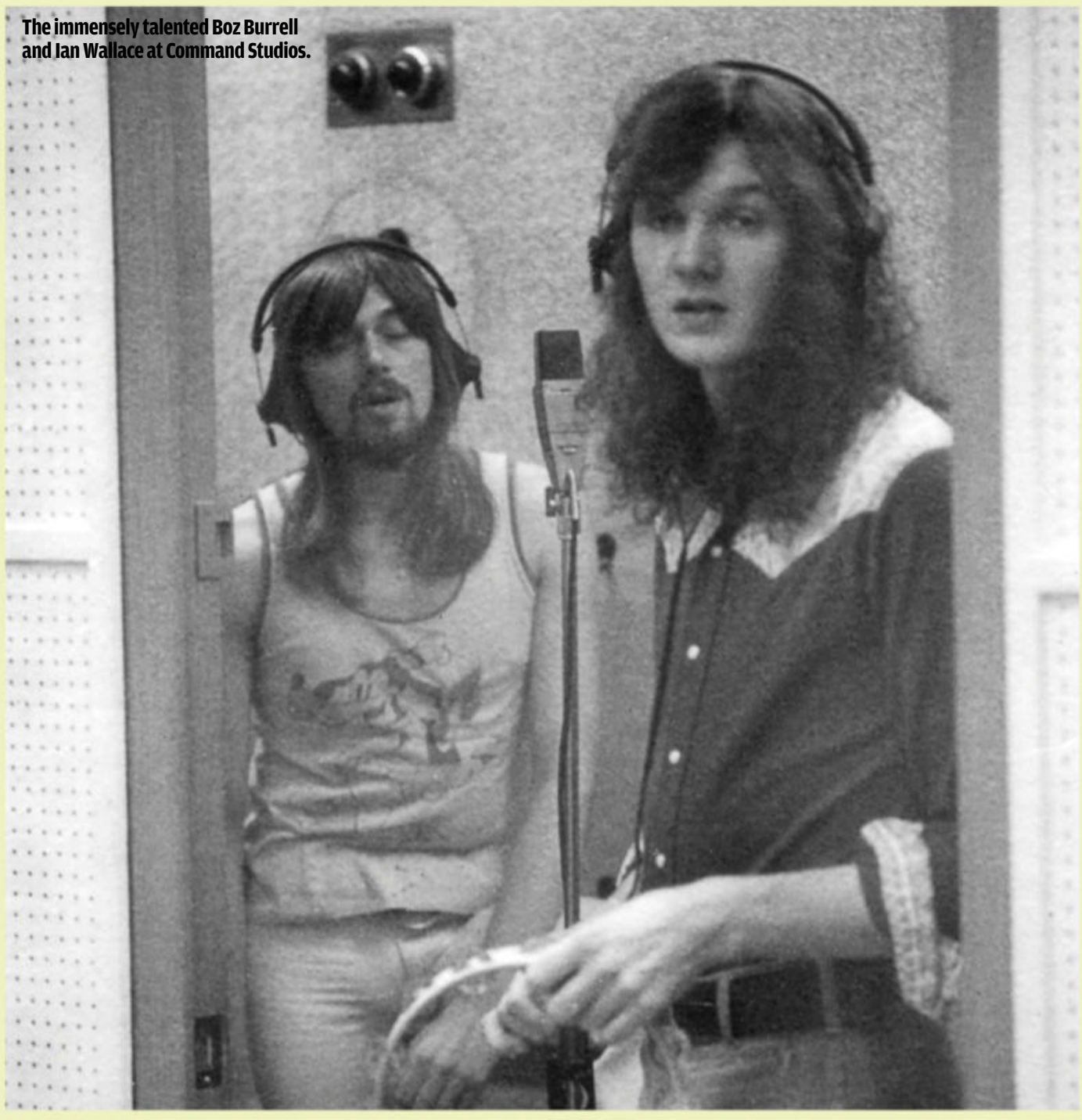
Despite their short tenure in King Crimson, both Boz Burrell and Ian Wallace made a considerable mark on rock music.

Having stayed in the USA with Ian Wallace and Mel Collins as members of Alexis Korner's new band Snape, Boz Burrell enjoyed renewing his relationship with some of the blues-based music that had very much been part of his early career. In 1973 he became a founding member of Bad Company. His rock-solid bass playing provided a strong foundation for the best-selling stadium-friendly rock band comprised of ex-Free members Paul Rodgers (vocals) and Simon Kirke (drums) and ex-Mott The Hoople guitarist Mick Ralphs. Famously describing King Crimson's music and lyrics as "airy-fairy shit", Boz had found his natural comfort zone and would remain with the band until their initial split in the early 80s. Although he briefly rejoined Bad Company in the 90s, in the aftermath of the group he spent time working as a member of Alvin Lee's band and gigging with ex-Family vocalist Roger Chapman.

In the 21st century Boz took things a bit easier, spending time at home, putting a golf ball around and working with his old friend vocalist Tam White as part of White's Celtic Groove Connection band. In 2006, White was with Boz at his home in Marbella when Boz suffered a heart attack. Neil Warden, Tam White's guitarist, recalled that they were going out to party and play with some friends: "Boz picked up a guitar and sat back in his seat and slumped over and passed away. Efforts were made to revive him before the emergency services arrived, but with no luck." He was just 60 years old.

After leaving King Crimson, Ian Wallace became an in-demand drummer, eventually relocating to the USA and working in live and studio settings with Peter Frampton, Jackson Browne, The Traveling Wilburys and Alvin Lee. He had two stints with Bob Dylan in the 70s and 90s, and also worked with Warren Zevon, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Jon Anderson, Eric Clapton, Joe Walsh, Steve Marriott, Don Henley, Bonnie Raitt and many others. For a long time Wallace was keen to put quite a lot of distance between himself and King Crimson, but made his peace with Fripp in the late 90s and, in a strange case of history repeating itself, he replaced Michael Giles in the 21st Century Schizoid Band in 2003 after Giles abruptly quit. Wallace also formed the Crimson Jazz Trio, releasing *King Crimson Songbook, Volume One* in 2005, featuring a reworking of a career-spanning selection of Crimson tunes for piano, bass and drums. *...Volume Two*, released four years later, included a guest spot from Mel Collins and an imaginative reworking of material from *Islands*. On hearing of Boz's death, Wallace wrote, "Boz, wherever you are I hope you don't rest in peace. I hope you're playing your balls off somewhere with people you love... Save a place for me, my brother."

Wallace died from cancer just five months later in February 2007, also aged 60. At his memorial service held in London the following month, Robert Fripp led the eulogy and Mel Collins and Jakko Jakszyk performed the title track from *Islands*. **SS**



The immensely talented Boz Burrell and Ian Wallace at Command Studios.

© DGM ARCHIVE

jumped at the chance to try out for the vacant drum stool. Understanding that Wallace was a serious contender, Fripp was re-energised enough to get back involved in the process of bringing King Crimson back to life. Wallace recalled that after the elation of getting the job, it was grim working in that cramped basement space. "It was me, Fripp and Mel auditioning bass players and singers and it came very close to not existing. We auditioned so many people, dozens and dozens, and we despaired of finding the right combination."

One person who did make his way down the basement stairs was aspirant rock star Bryan Ferry, then still a teacher by day and writing quirky songs with a band called Roxy. It's hard to imagine Ferry getting his tonsils around the lyrics of *21st Century Schizoid Man* or *Pictures Of A City*, and even harder to imagine an alternative rock history had he been successful in the task. Although Fripp liked what he heard it wasn't judged right for Crimson. The guitarist did, however, give Ferry the telephone number of Crimson's manager, David Enthoven, and in urging the singer to make the call, set in motion a course that would lead to Roxy Music's remarkable 1972 self-titled debut, which was produced by Peter Sinfield.

Raymond 'Boz' Burrell was another hopeful who made it to the basement, but unlike the others, got offered the gig. Initially, this was as vocalist only. Burrell had been searching for a musical home since the early 60s, first in local bands in Lincolnshire and then in London. Something of a mover and shaker blessed with good looks and quick wit, Burrell was mentioned on the front page of *Melody Maker* in 1965 when he was rumoured to be the replacement for Roger Daltrey after the singer had briefly stormed out of The Who. Later, Burrell would try his hand as a jobbing solo vocalist doing covers as diverse as the title song to the comedy film *Carry On Screaming* and a more creditable rendition of Bob Dylan's *I Shall Be Released*.

Taking something of a punt on the Crimson audition, any doubts Burrell might have had about whether or not this was the right move for him were quickly dispelled by the unanimously enthusiastic reception given to him by Wallace, Fripp, Collins and Sinfield. In Burrell they had found not only someone whose gutsy but soulful vocals also conveyed a raw power, he was someone they got on with instantly, with a sense of humour that lifted the somewhat gloomy spirit that had pervaded the rehearsal space of late.

The addition of bassist Rick Kemp, who'd later enjoy a career with Steeleye Span, turned the mood into one of celebration. For three days the band

King Crimson live at the Hyde Park Free Concert in London on September 4, 1971. L-R: Mel Collins (playing Mellotron), Boz Burrell, Robert Fripp.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

jammed but were dealt a blow when Kemp decided it wasn't for him and pulled out. "That was the lowest point. When we got that message we were all sitting in the basement and it was pretty much that Crimson wasn't going to happen. That was it really, the band was all but finished," Wallace later recalled.

After a few more applicants had tried but failed, Burrell, who'd played rhythm guitar earlier in his career, picked up the bass guitar left behind by one hopeful, plucking a few notes on it. Mel Collins remembered it had belonged to ex-Brian Auger bassist Dave Ambrose. "It didn't work out with Dave but, for some reason, he'd left his bass behind and that's the one that Robert picked up when he decided to teach Boz to play the songs." Burrell was given a week to see how things worked out. Fripp told *NME* at the time, "We had had plenty of competent professional musicians audition but they didn't have the feel. Boz felt the bass parts while he was singing, whereas the musicians could play it but couldn't feel it. And if he could feel it, it could only be a matter of time before it crept down from his head through his hand and into his fingers."

> "Boz felt the bass parts while he was singing, whereas the musicians could play it but couldn't feel it. And if he could feel it, it could only be a matter of time before it crept down from his head through his hand and into his fingers."
>
> **Robert Fripp**

Having spent four days in April doing a short residency at Frankfurt's Zoom Club, where the set was significantly more open-ended and experimental than it would later become, King Crimson next embarked on a lengthy run of UK dates in May 1971, the first time a band bearing that name had performed live in British venues since October 1969. It had been touch and go but somehow, against the odds, they had made it back to the stage. The sense of relief was palpable. Sometimes they felt like robbers who'd pulled off a heist, a feeling that despite all the uncertainty and despair they'd gotten away with it.

There were some wrinkles, of course, not everything was as they would have it. In Frankfurt the band had been given to expansive improvisations in which they stretched out ideas across themes and motifs. On their UK tour, however, much of that openness had been penned into a more conventional set that revisited older Crimson pieces *The Court Of The Crimson King*, *Get Thy Bearings*, *Pictures Of A City*, *Cirkus* and, of course, *21st Century Schizoid Man*.

As glad as they were to be working at last, some felt uncomfortable about playing material that they'd had no hand in recording – a bit like having to wear an ill-fitting suit or a uniform that belonged to somebody else, as Wallace once put it. Accepting that a setlist would have to represent the broader, historical repertoire, the hope was that all bandmembers would be encouraged to write and contribute music over time. Yet time was the one thing they were short of. Making up for lost months meant that there was no question of taking a break from the road to compose new material in preparation for their first album together. Expediency demanded that they went with what Fripp had available in the way of compositions and their schedule was such that recording dates would have to be fitted in between gigs. In practical terms, that meant after playing a show in the provinces, they'd drive back to London overnight to clock in at Command Studios for 10am. Given that Collins, Burrell and Wallace were fond of a post-gig drink, mornings

Pete Sinfield mixing it up in 1971.

© DGM ARCHIVE

weren't always the time when they were at their best. If you've ever noticed the strange halo around Boz Burrell's voice on *Ladies Of The Road*, it was achieved not through some elaborate effect but by having the microphone positioned next to his head as he leaned over a metal fire bucket held in place in the event of him having to vomit.

Hangovers aside, the guerrilla raids on Command Studios yielded some impressive results. Although *Islands* continued King Crimson's penchant for mixing contrasting styles and dynamics that veered between *The Letters*' gothic melodrama, *Formentera Lady*'s laid-back reveries, *Ladies Of The Road*'s raucously skewed blues, or the genteel chamber orchestra heard on *Prelude: Song Of The Gulls* and the poignant title track, it was *Sailor's Tale* that stood out as a break with the past and pointed towards a future Crimson. Propelled by Wallace's insistent cymbals and Collins' acerbic sax break, the spiky, fiery onslaught of a guitar solo tore up the guitar solo rule book and presaged what was to come. Although not released until 41 years later, during the *Islands* session they attempted early versions of music that'd later surface on *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* and *Starless And Bible Black*. Sounding awkward and unable to find the right feel within this line-up, the tracks were shelved.

This new direction beckoning Fripp partly explains why, during the autumn tour of the UK, he had lost confidence in the band and distance grew between them. Collins remembers how strained relationships between Fripp and the band became. "There was a period where Robert couldn't talk to us. We were travelling in a little Transit van so we were in a confined space every day and it got to be emotional. He was obviously going through some terrible trauma within himself. We were discussing this every day, 'What's wrong with Robert. Maybe there's something terrible that's happened? Had his father has died or something? He can't bring himself to tell us?' But that caused a lot of problems within the band on the road. We ended up towards the end of the tour at a gig where Boz smashed his guitar up against his amp and the amp went tumbling over and Ian kicked his drum kit all over the stage. It was like King Crimson visits The Who [laughs]. This was how intense it was. Musically and personality-wise, it wasn't an easy band. We were above the fisticuffs, unlike some bands, but it was very tense and emotional."

Tensions between Fripp and Sinfield had also reached a point of no return. At the end of what had been a generally positive tour in the USA, Ian Wallace

remembered Fripp asking them to make a choice: to go with him or Peter. "We saw that Crimson wouldn't have continued without Fripp and, although he gave us a choice, there really was no choice."

Back in the UK, Fripp made the call telling Sinfield their partnership was over. This was, as Fripp saw it, the inevitable climax to what he described as "18 months of managing increasing personal criticism and hostility, quite apart from the specific professional context, which was disintegrating".

For his part, Sinfield saw the tensions in their relationship as essentially a way of keeping creative sparks flying but views the root of the problem as being caused by Fripp resenting his interventions and suggestions for Crimson's musical future: "I think the famous 'big' problems really occurred leading up to *Islands*, where I musically wanted to find a softer, Miles Davis-with-vocals sexy package."

Over the years, Sinfield has been quoted as saying that he regarded his final album with King Crimson as being "my *Islands*". It's an assertion that Fripp dismisses. During the remixing and remastering process in 2010 where he was listening to the music in close detail, he offered this perspective on the issue: "I'm not sure why Peter Sinfield would consider *Islands* to be his album, although it became clear at the time that Peter was increasingly using KC as a vehicle for his personal ambitions, rather than a joint/group undertaking. On *Islands* Peter expanded his brief to include cover design, rather than using an outside artist [in the US Atlantic declined to use Peter's cover, preferring the inner sleeve of the nebula cluster]. At live shows, VCS3 explosions and effects from Peter's FOH desk suggested a metaphorical climbing-onstage. EG Management, experiencing the difficulties of managing an offstage member of KC who wanted the visibility of an onstage presence, put the sound mixer of their next band onstage right from the beginning, in order to head off the problem: Eno with Roxy Music.

"The creative power that brought KC to life in 1969, which we called the 'good fairy', did not originate in the young men that formed the band: it acted through and upon them. I don't doubt that Peter's feelings are genuine, that he honestly believes himself to be KC's Good Fairy. This would explain the bitterness, ongoing to this day. But realistically, how was *Islands* Peter's album? Peter didn't compose or play music… Which musical route did Peter want for KC? That of *Formentera Lady*? *Ladies Of The Road*? Scored music for chamber orchestra? And how could any route have been continued,

THE KEITH TIPPETT JAZZ CONNECTION

Although he declined Fripp's invitation to join King Crimson, Keith Tippett and Robert Fripp have had a lasting impression on each other's work.

L-R: Mark Charig, Nick Evans, Elton Dean, Keith Tippett.

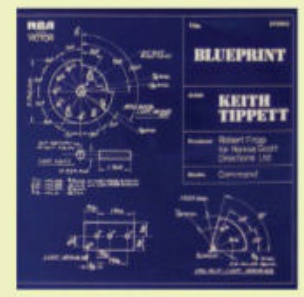
JEREMY FLETCHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Having arrived in London from his native Bristol in 1967, Keith Tippett found himself without access to a piano, so he carved a dummy keyboard into an old table in his flat in order to keep practising. A scholarship led to him attending the Barry Jazz Summer School in Wales, where he met Nick Evans (trombone), Mark Charig (cornet) and Elton Dean (sax). They soon formed Keith Tippett Group and recorded two highly acclaimed albums. The force of Tippett's compositions and the power generated by these players quickly established them as one of the hottest jazz tickets in town. Their residency at the Marquee Club's New Paths series with King Crimson in 1969 only enhanced their reputation. Evans, Charig and Dean were also found augmenting Soft Machine, with Dean eventually staying on full time.

The crossover between jazz and rock at the time proved to be fertile ground and during 1970 Tippett was invited to play on *In The Wake Of Poseidon*. He would return again, later that year for *Lizard*, this time with Evans and Charig in tow, and again in 1971 with Charig and bassist Harry Miller to guest on *Islands*. It's also worth noting that Charig also guests on Crimson's 70s swan song, *Red*. Fripp was so impressed with the pianist's brilliance as a player and writer that during 1970 he offered Tippett, not just a full-time role within King Crimson but an equal say in the creative direction of the group. Although Tippett declined, preferring to continue his explorations within a more jazz-oriented setting, the pair remained close collaborators.

Centipede's *Septober Energy* album.

When Tippett's electric 50-piece orchestra, Centipede, played live, Fripp not only gigged with them but he was asked by Tippett to produce the resulting album, *Septober Energy*, released in 1971. A combination of scored and improvised sections for string, brass, three drummers and a rock ensemble plus vocalists, including Boz Burrell, *Septober Energy* was an ambitious and audacious undertaking that attracted significant coverage and included live work in Europe. By contrast, the next Keith Tippett album Fripp produced, *Blueprint*, released in 1972, was a quietly intimate and sparse trio. Given the cross-fertilisation of ideas, it's perhaps no surprise that long sections of *Blueprint* wouldn't sound out of place on *Islands*.



***Blueprint*, Tippett's second album produced by Fripp.**

Fripp also acted as producer for a Nick Evans-led ensemble of free improvisation that featured Dean, Charig, Miller, Tippett and other luminaries in 1972. Unreleased at the time and thought to be long lost, the master tapes were discovered and eventually came out in 2008 under the name of the Command All-Stars. There were a further two Fripp-produced Tippett albums in the 80 and 90s, with the pianist describing the guitarist as "a safe pair of ears". On hearing of Tippett's death in 2020, Fripp stated, "Keith Tippett is one of three musicians of my generation who continues to influence and guide my musical thinking. Keith's music speaks for itself. Perhaps less well-known is Keith's stature as an ethical musician, a good man. Fly well, Brother Keith! My gratitude to you." **SS**

Command All-Stars album.

LOCKDOWN LUNACY

From Metallica to Britney Spears, the Fripp-Willcox's Sunday Lunch series has shown off another side to King Crimson's serious guitarist.

"When things are really bad in England, what you do is begin laughing and do silly things," says Robert Fripp of his and Toyah's lockdown videos.

The average prog fan could be forgiven for thinking they'd never see Robert Fripp laugh. But that's one of several shocks served up in the weekly clips he's made with his wife during lockdown.

Starting in April 2020, *Toyah And Robert's Sunday Lunch* has run on YouTube and provided music hall-style entertainment. Each episode features an interpretation of a famous song; but the couple's antics really bring them to life. Most episodes take place in their kitchen and take the form of Toyah Willcox dancing wildly in over-the-top and often revealing costumes, while Fripp sits to her side, playing guitar and providing classic straight-man support.

Memorable moments include seeing him as a tattooed rock god for Black Sabbath's *Paranoid*, Willcox's eye-popping performance during Metallica's *Enter Sandman* and their rendition of King Crimson classic *Fracture* with Willcox as a tap-dancing mouse – because that's what the track sounds like to her.

Fripp told *Prog* that he'd said everything necessary in a recent *Rolling Stone* article. "Performers have a responsibility to perform and at this particular time to keep people's spirits up," he told the magazine. "When things are really bad in England, what you do is begin laughing and do silly things. A good reference point is the Ministry Of Silly Walks on *Monty Python*. Now it's: 'Robert puts on a tutu and dances to *Swan Lake* at the river's edge with his wife.'"

He's enjoyed the challenge of adjusting some famous songs to match his custom tuning – naming *Enter Sandman* as one of his favourites – and adding that he'd been surprised by the technical brilliance of the original guitarists. "They're all utterly stunning things," he said. "I go back, listen to the original versions on record, see live performances, look at different interpretations and guitar covers. Then I have to honour the spirit of the music while making it my own."

He was glad that the sense of surprise had worked both ways, explaining: "One of my personal interests in this is to give a hefty kicking to received opinion. In terms of the received opinion of Fripp, it's: 'We know he's a terrible man. He's heartless, raging and venal' and all the rest. In terms of actually engaging, I don't think it's possible. But in terms of the *Sunday Lunches* there is an entirely different aspect of me that my wife has been keen to present for a very long time – the side of Robert that really no one gets to see."

While Willcox hailed Fripp's wholehearted embracing of the concept, saying he'd "broken every rule [he] set himself in his career", he argued that the videos made another important point in the era of women's roles in the world: "My wife is a cultural influencer from the late 70s through the 80s. And I've seen her airbrushed from history in a way which I continue to find incomprehensible. So here we are at home presenting essentially my wife's visions, here and immediately." **MK**

Scenes from *Toyah and Robert's Sunday Lunch*: wonderfully barmy.

ROBERT AND TOYAH'S SUNDAY LUNCH/©TOYAH WILLCOX LIMITED

even were Peter to have remained within the band? Peter's considerable talents were not musical. Peter had no musical and performing experience, compositional or executant skills. And personally, I prefer *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*, *Fracture* and *Red* to *Formentera Lady*; with due respect to all the talented characters involved."

The musical partnership that had formally begun in January 1969 and the circumstances that had thrown them together was finally dissolved in December 1971 when Fripp asked Sinfield to leave. He was now the sole survivor from the original King Crimson. When the quartet reconvened in January 1972 to rehearse for the upcoming US tour, a dispute caused by Fripp's refusal to play a piece composed by Collins on the very first morning resulted in the rest of the band quitting in solidarity with Mel. The new King Crimson had broken up on the morning of their very first rehearsal. Persuaded by EG Management that they were contractually obliged to complete the tour, this strange happy, and unhappy, band of brothers landed in North America and, between February and April 1, 1972 played more than 30 gigs. At the end of it, Collins, Wallace and Burrell stayed Stateside to join forces with Alexis Korner while Fripp headed back alone to the UK to compile a live album of the tour, which

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All smiles? King Crimson in 1971.

with his customary deadpan wit he titled *Earthbound*.

For decades the *Islands* band were regarded as not quite being up to the level of other Crimsons. The truth was they were simply different. Over the years their reputation has been rehabilitated through the release of numerous live albums, which reveal a band that, on the one hand, did like to boogie in a most un-Crimson like manner if they got the chance, but were also capable of some absolutely hair-raising, impassioned performances.

Although their paths did not cross for many years there was a rapprochement with Collins and Wallace. In one of those truly cosmic coincidences, Collins remembers that in August 2002 he was at home in Germany transcribing music for the 21st Century Schizoid Band when the phone rang. Out of the blue, it was Robert Fripp calling from Nashville where he was recording material for King Crimson's 13th studio album, *The Power To Believe*. "We were offering each other congratulations on the various things we'd done since playing together," recalls Collins. "I told him how good I thought what we were doing back then was, and in the course of this, he apologised for the hurtful things he'd said to me 30 years ago. He felt he could have put it all in a different way and that he wished he had. I'm glad we made our peace."

For Jakko Jakszyk, the unwitting recipient of Fripp's ire that wintry afternoon in 2010, his life was utterly transformed in ways he could not have imagined when he saw Mel, Ian, Boz and Fripp perform at Watford Town Hall in 1971. *Islands* is one of his favourite King Crimson albums, he says. "Obviously it has a place in my heart that's to do with a time and a place, I guess. I love Boz's voice. I know it's maligned by some of the Crimson aficionados, but I don't really get that. Both Mel and Ian were incredibly defensive about that. They really loved Boz. They loved his bass playing too, even though it wasn't overly technical. They said he had an amazing groove and an amazing vibe, that he really made those things sing." As a member of Crimson now, invariably his favourite songs to sing are the ones from *Islands*.

When King Crimson reformed in 2014 and Jakko stood onstage as a member between Collins and Fripp, it was exciting enough. To then discover that Fripp intended to include tracks from the *Poseidon*, *Lizard* and *Islands* eras was especially pleasing, recalls Jakszyk. *Sailor's Tale* and *The Letters* hadn't been performed live in more than 40 years and he says their inclusion represented the fact that Fripp had come to terms with the music he'd for so long wished to disassociate himself from. "I think finally he could hear the music in those pieces. He'd avoided not so much because he dismissed the value of the material or the content, but because of the hellish memories he has of trying to bring that particular music to life. So I think that's why he hated that period for so long because in his head it represented this torturous process that he didn't want to revisit. Obviously remixing it on occasion has helped him come to terms with it all and certainly playing this stuff again has made him re-evaluate it, which is why it was such a joy to do it."

Hearing Fripp take on the chordal solo of *Sailor's Tale* while standing next to him was another spine-tingling moment for Jakszyk. "Listening and watching him do that live for the first time was unbelievable. Robert's soloing with those kinds of chords and intervals, with that sound, it's such an extraordinary example of tension and release and the places it goes is truly unique. Who plays like that? Nobody." Jakko recalls that in one of the first band rehearsals he was using a Kemper audio modelling processor that was able to precisely emulate vintage amp configurations and guitar settings. "The first time we ran through *Sailor's Tale*, after we finished Robert said to me, 'The sound you're using there, what is it?' And I said, 'It's a preset on the Kemper called 'Early Fripp.'" He absolutely cracked up. He thought that was hilarious."

King Crimson: The Complete 1969 Recordings is out now via Panegyric. See www.dgmlive.com for more information.

"I'm not sure why Peter Sinfield would consider *Islands* to be his album, although it became clear at the time that Peter was increasingly using KC as a vehicle for his personal ambitions, rather than a joint/group undertaking."

Robert Fripp

Kavus Torabi and Steve Davis: living their utopia.

THE (UN)LIKELY LADS

He's the snooker legend and *Prog* columnist, and his companion the frontman of Gong and Knifeworld, together they became the unlikely voices of a prog radio show and two-thirds of otherworldly trio The Utopia Strong. Now **Steve Davis** and **Kavus Torabi** have teamed up for their joint memoirs, *Medical Grade Music*. *Prog* gets the lowdown on their latest extra-curricular activities.

Snookered: Rob Hughes **Image:** Simon Holliday

Steve Davis is a big believer in the power of chance. Without it, he would never have encountered the band that changed his life. "Things often happen as a consequence of unexpected events," he reckons. "When I was 16 or 17, me and a school friend went to watch Isotope, the band that Hugh Hopper was in after Soft Machine, at the Roundhouse [in June, 1974]. The headliners were Magma. I'd never heard of them, but they were jaw-dropping. I became such a heavy-duty fan. My favourite album of all time is *Köhntarkösz*. Looking back, I was so lucky to be there at the right place at the right time."

Fast-forward to the mid-2000s and the French prog-jazz titans were at the centre at another pivotal moment. Davis was watching the band play in Paris when another Magma fan, Kavus Torabi, came over to introduce himself. "We went out for some drinks after the gig and hit it off," recalls Torabi, who was then juggling his time between guitar duties in Cardiacs and fronting Knifeworld. "We met up a couple more times, then stayed in touch."

A few weeks later, Torabi invited his new ally to a live show. "I'd never heard of Cardiacs," Davis confesses. "So when Kavus told me he was in a band and they were playing in London, I was thinking it'd be in some crappy pub somewhere and one of them might play a Bontempi keyboard. It was almost like I'd be doing them a favour by going along."

Instead, Davis found himself at the Astoria. "I walked in the place and it was a gobsmacking moment," he says. "All these disciples chanting along to this incredible music. All I could think was, 'How have I missed this?' Kavus was all dressed up, with a big fucking white guitar, at the front of the stage with Tim [Smith]. And I'm thinking, 'That's my new mate!'"

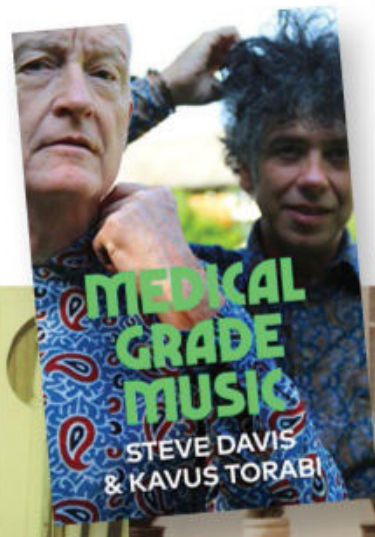
It was an evening that cemented what is, at least on the surface, an unlikely union –

"I can't really describe the euphoria of being involved in it. I've been very fortunate to have had this second life that's appeared. And the catalyst is Kavus, it wouldn't have happened without him."

Steve Davis

the six-time Snooker World Champion and the wild-haired psychedelic visionary. Yet it's a bond that's not only endured, but flourished, especially on a creative level. First came the *Interesting Alternative Show* on Phoenix FM, followed by DJ sets, a spot at Glastonbury and a musical project, The Utopia Strong. Now comes *Medical Grade Music*, a joint memoir that maps their musical loves and the friendship that's developed as a result.

Speaking to *Prog* via Zoom, both men are in good spirits. Torabi apologises for being slightly late, only "I had to take my dog up the estate for an emergency shit." On cue, his wirehaired fox terrier, Teddy, duly clambers onto his knee and barks. Davis, seated on his sofa with a neat stack of albums on the floor to his left (Terry Riley staring up from the top), chimes in by saying he took an emergency dump after his last coffee.



The morning business dealt with, it's not difficult to see why they get on. Both are genial, easy-going and obsessive about the music they love. This provides the core of *Medical Grade Music* (unofficial tagline: "sorting the heads from the haircuts"), in which Davis and Torabi steer alternate chapters. Cue formative experiences with Magma, Gentle Giant and Voivod to Spacemen 3, XTC and other left-field pursuits, among them bands that Torabi has been directly involved with: Die Laughing, The Monsoon Bassoon, Gong and, naturally, Cardiacs.

Initially conceived as a bunch of recommendations from the outer reaches of prog, psychedelia and avant-rock, *Medical Grade Music* instead became something much richer. "We were due to write about 52 albums," explains Torabi. "But it got to the point where I thought, 'I can't really keep doing this. I can enthuse about this music, but I've run out of superlatives. And I'll keep repeating myself.' Once we realised that we could write about our adventures *in* music, then it became easier. Music is so beyond language, so all we could do was write about the *effect* it's had on us."

"It blossomed into this thing where we could recount stories," Davis adds. "All of a sudden, a lot more possibilities opened out. We could write about meeting up, DJing on stage together, forming a band. And it's been great fun to do. I'm not trying to be anything other than a music fan, so I'm just relating what's happened to me, like DJing at Glastonbury. You really couldn't make it up, it's such an unlikely story."

The book reads like a series of epiphanies. Torabi grew up listening to Stray Cats, Iron Maiden, The Smiths and Rush, but "when Cardiacs came along I realised that's what I'd been looking for. It was kind of a scorched earth thing. After that there was just no going back to normal rock'n'roll." He also writes movingly about late Cardiacs' captain Tim Smith ("a beautiful, benign presence who would float into any room and light it up") and the 2008 heart attack that resulted in Smith's dystonia, effectively putting an end to the band that had gifted Torabi what he calls "the adventure of a lifetime".

As the timelines of *Medical Grade Music* begin to overlap, they finally converge at The Utopia Strong. Formed in 2019 with Michael J York (whose various credits include Coil and another Torabi pursuit, Guapo), the synth-heavy trio released a debut album later that year. They've since issued three live recordings on limited edition vinyl, through Bandcamp, which sold out almost immediately.

The band's improvised jams, with Davis operating a modular synth, are wondrous things to behold, full of melodic abstraction, post-techno grooves and radiant ambience. "If I hadn't been in this band, I'd be raving to you about The Utopia Strong," says Davis. "This is the music I've always wanted to listen to. It's psychedelic and it's got drones, all the stuff that I've started to gravitate to as I've got older.

"Can you imagine what it's been like for me?" he continues. "There I am, a retired snooker player and music fan, who, through a series of circumstances, is suddenly involved in music that I'd be desperate to buy anyway. So it's just been this ridiculous journey. I can't really describe the euphoria of being involved in it. I've been very fortunate to have had this second life that's appeared. And the catalyst is Kavus, it wouldn't have happened without him."

It's been an education for Torabi too. "What's been really interesting about watching Steve's journey is it's confirmed to me how important taste and judgement are," he observes. "I've yet to hear anything coming out of Steve where I think, 'Oh, shut up, mate', which can't be said for some of the very technically adept musicians I've played with over the years. With the modular synth you're creating pure music. So what comes out is defined by your taste."

The Utopia Strong are hopeful of releasing a widely available successor to their 2019 debut later this year. Torabi reveals that "we're maybe two-thirds of the way with the new album. We don't have a title for it yet, but there's one song on there — and I think Steve and Mike will agree — which feels like our *Stairway To Heaven*."

While we await the final results, Torabi is keen to point out that it's all a product of a new way of working for everybody. "We always played really rehearsal intensive music with Cardiacs," he explains. "And while there's a degree of improvisation in Gong, it's usually to get from A to B, so we know where it'll end up. But The Utopia Strong is completely free, other than deciding what note to start off on. It's a way of operating that I've never experienced in any other bands I've been in before. Our proggy side definitely comes out in the improvising. It's exciting and terrifying at the same time."

Medical Grade Music is out now via White Rabbit in hardback, eBook and audio formats. See www.facebook.com/theutopiastrong for more.

And so it begins: Torabi with his first guitar.

Steve and his motor.

Mates on tour! At Festival No.6 in Portmeirion, 2017.

"Once we realised that we could write about our adventures *in* music, then it became easier. Music is so beyond language, so all we could do was write about the *effect* it's had on us."
Kavus Torabi

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The Future Bites

It was the album that should have launched Ian Anderson's solo career, but *A* nearly broke **Jethro Tull**. The frontman revisits the heady 80s and discusses the Big Split, nuclear war and inadvisable stagewear.

Flyingdale Flyer: Johnny Sharp **Images:** Jethro Tull Archive

New decade, new Tull. That's the simplistic potted history version of what happened to Ian Anderson and his band before they made the album *A* in the spring of 1980. Three members of the line-up that had made the folk rock triptych of *Songs From The Wood*, *Heavy Horses* and *Stormwatch* over the preceding three years, namely drummer Barriemore Barlow, keyboard player John Evan and fellow keyboard player and pianist Dee Palmer, were now out, while Roxy Music alumnus Eddie Jobson and ex-Fairport man Dave Pegg were in, alongside new drummer Mark Craney.

"Jethro Tull – Big Split" barked the headline in *Melody Maker*, and the redux version of rock history has since cemented the event as such.

The truth, of course, is considerably more complicated. And having just revisited the album to help produce *A (A La Mode)*, a handsome 40th Anniversary Edition reissue box, Anderson can now reflect on a turbulent time for Tull. Regrets? He has a few...

"There was a general feeling of 'Let's do something else, try some other projects, other interests in life, you know?'"

That's Ian Anderson's recollection to *Prog* over an 8am phone chat ("I've always been a morning person"). And for his part, that led to him writing and recording a solo album.

He had got to know Eddie Jobson from the keyboard player's role in fusion proggers UK, alongside John Wetton and Terry Bozzio, when the supergroup (by that time no longer featuring original members Allan Holdsworth and Bill Bruford, and soon to call it day altogether) had opened for Tull on a North American tour the previous year.

"I wanted to do something that sounded different, hence working with Eddie," says Anderson. "He was a very quiet, thoughtful guy – but on stage he had this grand and rather bombastic sort of way of performing, and he played a Yamaha CS-80, this analogue leviathan that produced these huge, big fat synthesiser sounds and sweeping portamentos. I was writing music where I felt he would work within that context."

> "It was a finished product, called *A* for Anderson, still intended as a solo record. Then the record company heard it."

Jobson suggested they also use an American drummer he had been rehearsing with – Mark Craney. Dave Pegg, by then part of Tull's touring line-up, also had sufficient time off from Fairport Convention to contribute bass and mandolin. No harm in working up a few songs together, right?

Initial sessions, though, made it clear to Anderson that the sound needed other elements.

"It was meant to be more of a keyboard sound to the album but

It'll be all-white... except it won't.

we thought, wouldn't it be nice to have a guitar solo there and a guitar riff there? So I called Martin and asked if he could come in and do a couple of overdubs."

At first Barre recalls being reluctant, having earlier encouraged Anderson's desire to do something outside Tull with new musicians. But once he was persuaded, it proved a turning point in the evolution of *A*:

"We immediately seemed to have some synergy within the band at that point," says Anderson. "So what started off as a solo album was increasingly sounding more of a band unit."

Once the album was in the can, other forces came to bear.

"It was a finished product, called *A* for Anderson, still intended as a solo record. Then the record company heard it. They didn't control everything by any means. But they did begin to exert strong... *advice* that it would be a lot easier to market this as a Jethro Tull album. And it wasn't me strumming an acoustic guitar and singing wistful singer-songwriter pieces — it was a full-on band album. So, I went along with it... and I genuinely regret that."

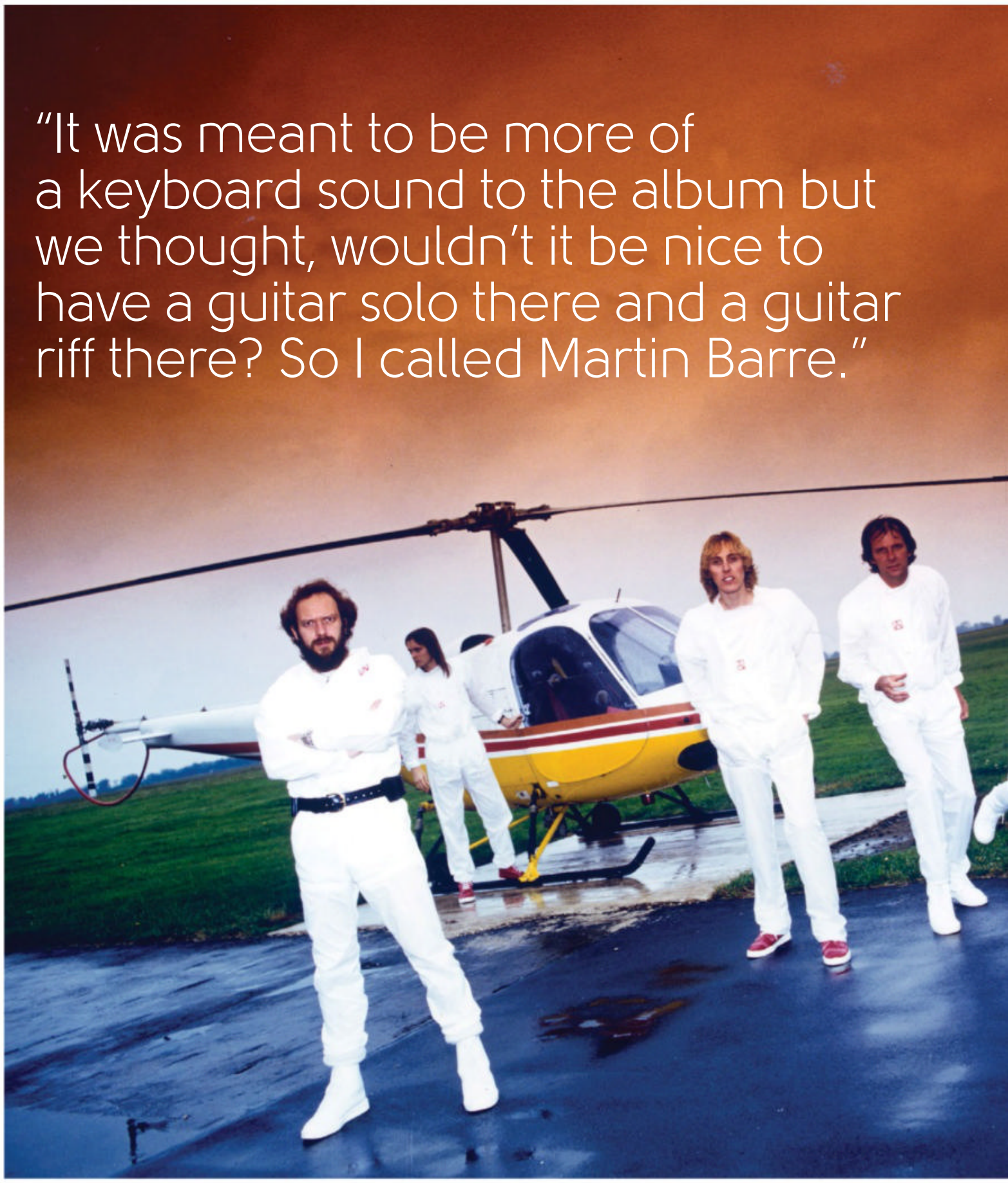
Those sentiments have much to do with the upset it caused the three Tull members not involved — feelings heightened when the aforementioned *Melody Maker* story broke at the start of July 1980, a few weeks before the album's release.

Anderson had written to John Evan, Barriemore Barlow and Dee Palmer explaining his decision to make the album without them, but they took this as a cold, impersonal dismissal from the band. In hindsight, wouldn't it have been better to, say, call them, if he couldn't tell them face-to-face?

"Well," says Anderson with a touch of irritation, "I like to put it in writing. It seems to me more formal, much more considered, I am not someone who waffles on the phone to risk there being a misunderstanding or, you know, words poorly chosen in the haze. I write letters, and I write emails. If you are offended by getting a letter from me, you would have been more offended if you had nothing at all. That's the way I work and if you don't like it, tough shit."

In any case, it doesn't seem like Tull had been a happy camp towards the end of the *Stormwatch* era, with at least one of the exit-bound trio already considering their options according to Anderson.

"John Evan became less engaged with the band during the latter part of the 70s... [he] kind of indicated that he didn't really want to carry on doing the Jethro Tull thing anyway. Barrie Barlow had made it *very* clear he didn't want to carry on... so, you know, at least a couple of them had jumped ship anyway."



What's with the outfits? Who knows, but we can blame Anderson.

***A (A La Mode)* is out now via Rhino.**

Nonetheless, he admits, "It's one of those messy things. It just would have been better if I stuck to my guns [with the label]. Then I could have said, 'next year' to the other guys, you know. 'You wanna get going again, do you want to carry on?'

"But that opportunity never really came, because we went out on tour doing the *A* album and then Martin, Dave and myself moved on into a period of working on new music over the next year or two, then [drummer] Gerry Conway joined for the *Broadsword And The Beast* album [in 1982] and Peter-John Vettese [keyboards] came into the band for the latter part of the recording that album. So it was a transition period."

It was also the start of a stylistic evolution. From the outside looking in, Tull fans over the years have come to view *A* as a diversion from Tull's creative trajectory, and a not-entirely-welcome one to some ears. That's another reason, one might argue, that *A* could have stayed under the Anderson solo name. It might have acted as a signpost towards 1983's actual solo debut *Walk Into Light*, a much more synth-focused record co-written with Vettese. As it was, though, after the more familiar feel of *Broadsword And The Beast*, 1984's *Under Wraps* moved further down the road towards an electronically oriented sound.

And yet, when you listen to the reissue of *A*, with Steven Wilson's remastering polishing the sound considerably, the perception of it as an album full of futuristic digital affectations isn't really borne out by the reality.

For one thing, it's still full of distinctly proggy sounds and song structures. *Protect And Survive* employs

anxious time signatures to underpin first Anderson's panicky flute flurries and then Barre's uneasy guitar lines, before *Batteries Not Included* is punctuated with juddering, staccato rhythms and angsty fretless bass licks.

Elsewhere, other customary Tull influences abound. *Fylingdale Flyer* blends folky vocal harmonies with proggy tempo backflips and feisty guitar soloing, while *Working John, Working Joe* builds from familiar acoustic building blocks. And *The Pine Marten's Jig* is a jaunty instrumental that sounds pretty much how you would expect from its title.

One reason why *A* left the impression of a modernistic, welcome-to-the-future record was that its subject matter was distinctly contemporary, with lyrical themes including nuclear paranoia, a love-hate relationship with technology and consumerism — in *Batteries Not Included* and *4WD (Low Ratio)* — and, in the case of opening track *Crossfire*, terrorism.

On that track, Anderson sings from the point of view of a hostage inside the Iranian Embassy as the SAS attempted to storm the building — a real event that played out on live news broadcasts in May 1980, as Anderson was writing songs in his home studio.

"I wrote it, if not the same day, then the day after," he recalls. "And that's not that unusual for me. Often things I write are topical in the sense that maybe not everyone has read about it, but I have."

That seemed to be the case on tracks such as *Fylingdale Flyer* (*'Forget the things that you saw'*), based on an incident where a malfunctioning early warning system led the Americans to believe Russia had launched a nuclear attack, and *Protect And Survive*, borrowing its name from the public information campaign briefing the population in case of nuclear conflict.

"That felt poignant at the time," he says, "because we were living with a very real sense of threat. Look at the average plume from the largest Russian nuclear bombs at the time, and it would have been curtains for at least a third of the population of the UK.

"I studied the available science and information quite carefully at the time, and, you know, without being panicky or survivalist about it, I had a plan B and a plan C as to at what point I would do what and in terms of moving my family and heading somewhere else. The prospect was horrific."

The idea that the record had a futuristic theme (by implication rejecting Tull's more organic, folk-oriented past) was doubtless reinforced by *A*'s sleeve art, which featured the band dressed in white boilersuits in some kind of air traffic control centre, looking up at the album's logo, displayed as a mysterious sign in the night sky. It was the kind of look one might sooner have expected Heaven 17 or Devo to adopt than a bunch of hairy proggers, but it was a striking image nonetheless.

"It wasn't quite as high-tech as we made it look," Anderson admits. "We did the photos at a small provincial aerodrome that once hosted Spitfires and Hurricanes. And just for an afternoon, it hosted us wearing some rather silly outfits, which were unfortunately my idea…"

His rueful recollection of the costumes is perhaps coloured by their adoption for the subsequent tour. And while any discomfort they caused doesn't seem to have affected the quality of the performances (a muscular, remastered LA Sports Arena show from that year is included in the reissue package in full), the frontman has rather compromised memories of wearing them.

"I wore one from parachute material," he says, "while the other guys wisely chose to have some made in cotton or something more sensible. I wore my white one onstage and of course I find out halfway through the first show that it made me sweat even more profusely than I usually would.

"As a result, it became completely transparent, ha-ha! So I had my comeuppance, by showing everybody what I had for breakfast basically…"

Perhaps mercifully, there are no plans to reanimate the jumpsuits if and when Tull get to tour again later this year. But even if the UK dates scheduled for September onwards can go ahead, Anderson envisages still having to adopt certain rules in terms of apparel.

"I'm an old guy — I don't have that many years ahead of me, and I expect to be wearing a mask for the rest of my professional life," he says. "We'll be trying to find our way around Covid for the foreseeable future. But it's something I've got used to now."

Anderson is similarly philosophical about the obstacles placed in touring musicians' paths by Brexit.

"At the moment it's an absolute nightmare. We can only hope for some sense. We travel very light, we have local backline instruments and production wherever we go, so hopefully we won't have to change our habits too much. But I'm being optimistic — it could be way more difficult than that."

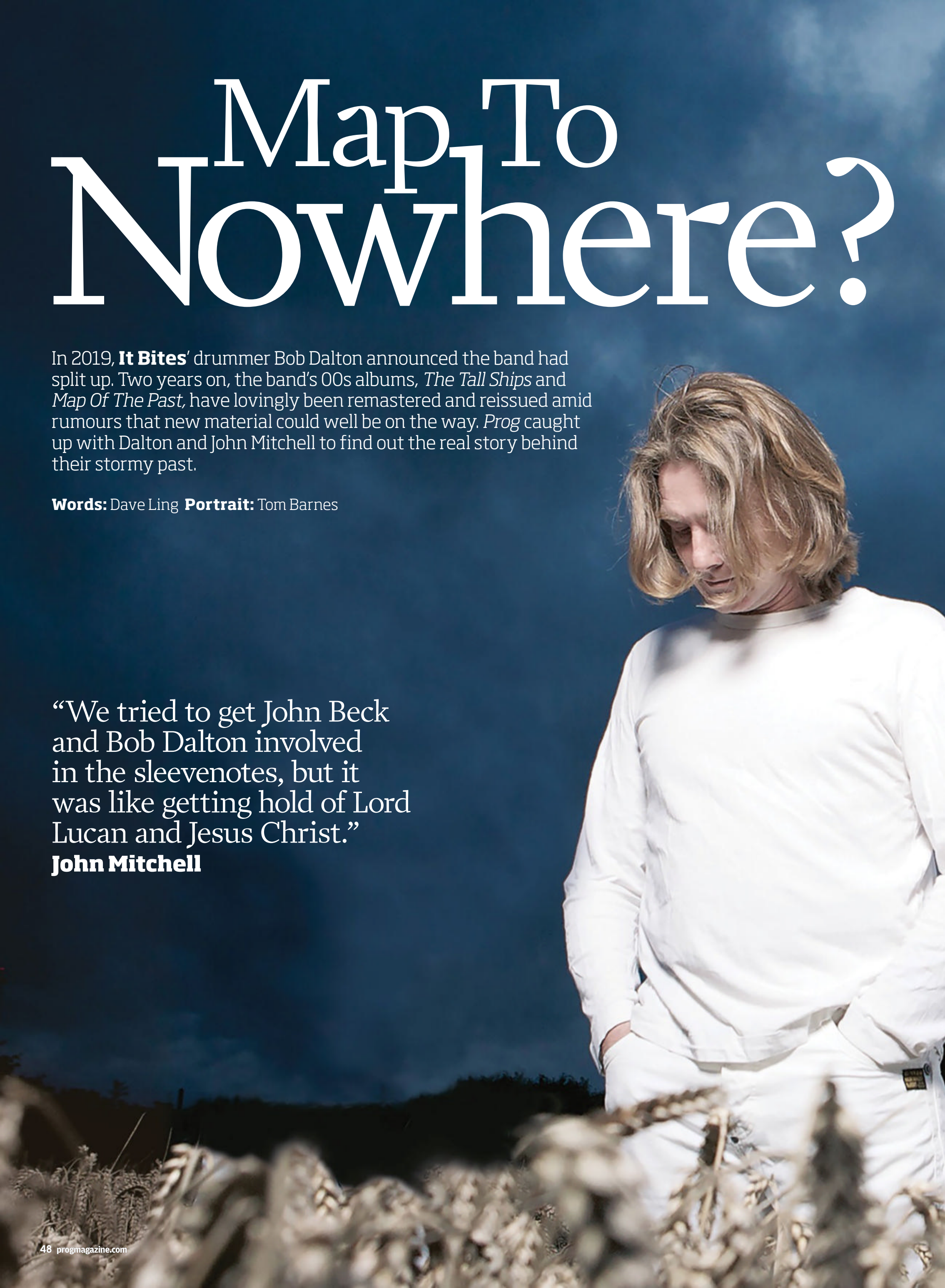
Still, life for a prog musician has never been straightforward. And given that 40 years ago Ian Anderson was facing in-band mutiny, malfunctioning wardrobes and the prospect of nuclear annihilation, maybe it's just business as usual for Jethro Tull.

A (A La Mode) is out now via Rhino. See www.jethrotull.com for more information.

Map To Nowhere?

In 2019, **It Bites**' drummer Bob Dalton announced the band had split up. Two years on, the band's 00s albums, *The Tall Ships* and *Map Of The Past,* have lovingly been remastered and reissued amid rumours that new material could well be on the way. *Prog* caught up with Dalton and John Mitchell to find out the real story behind their stormy past.

Words: Dave Ling **Portrait:** Tom Barnes



"We tried to get John Beck and Bob Dalton involved in the sleevenotes, but it was like getting hold of Lord Lucan and Jesus Christ."
John Mitchell

The saga of It Bites could easily fill an entire issue of *Prog*. Formed in Cumbria in '82, the quartet made some of the most exciting music of the 1980s before crash landing in the most spectacular fashion in the early 90s during the buildup to their fourth album. Having just completed a tour that included a date at London's Hammersmith Odeon, expectations from fans and their record label were sky-high, and the band flew to California to write and record. What happened next perfectly highlights the volatility that went hand in hand with such Olympian levels of creativity.

"Frank's first conversation with me in Los Angeles was: 'Let's get rid of John Beck,'" recalls drummer Bob Dalton. "He had decided that we should become a guitar band like The Black Crowes."

***The Tall Ships* (2008).**

Although Frank, aka guitarist/vocalist Francis Dunnery, was the group's talisman, the other three members — Dalton, keyboardist John Beck and bassist Dick Nolan — realised that Dunnery, who was heading out of the door, was more of a loose cannon than they had suspected. The first chapter of the It Bites story was over.

So strong was the identity of the classic-era It Bites, few considered the possibility of a Dunnery-less line-up. And yet in 2006, the band attempted a reunion. Beck, Nolan and Dalton recruited fanboy John Mitchell for what would be a tantalising two-album reunion. This pair of records is being reissued as a prelude to an all-new sixth album that's now in the pipeline.

***Map Of The Past* (2012).**

Due to their complex inner machinations, right from the start the odds against success were stacked against either incarnation of It Bites. Dunnery was just too unpredictable. Now the issue was lethargy. Trevor Rabin once likened the turning circle of Yes to that of a blue whale. In the case of It Bites, try the oil tanker that was recently stuck in the Suez Canal. Indeed, this story came perilously close to being scrapped when it proved impossible to get hold of an original member to complement our new quotes from Mitchell. And then just as deadline loomed, Bob Dalton saved the day.

"John Mitchell did an amazing job, because those were gigantic shoes to fill," Dalton reflects. "He was a perfect fit for the band and without him it wouldn't have happened. I thought we made two really good albums together, but it was the same old story:

Standing tall: Bob Dalton, John Mitchell and John Beck in 2008.

It Bites are so impossible to categorise. We change with every album, that's always been our undoing."

Fifteen years ago, having played with John Wetton, Arena and The Urbane, Mitchell freely admits that compared to the other three members he was "pretty much an unknown quantity". This was exacerbated by the fact that the IB reunion was preceded by the all-star project Kino, which aside from Mitchell featured Beck, Marillion's Pete Trewavas and former Porcupine Tree drummer Chris Maitland. When Maitland was unavailable to play live, the band brought in Dalton and a lightbulb went off.

In fact, Mitchell had auditioned for It Bites a few years earlier by recording a version of Peter Gabriel's *Red Rain*. In 2003, Beck, Nolan and Dalton reunited with Dunnery during a gig at London's Union Chapel and Frank agreed to rejoin, only to be reminded of the snail's pace at which the band worked. So IB tried out Mitchell. Only the second time around it was happening for real.

What the newcomer had on his side was a self-confessed "obsession" with It Bites. Mitchell had even been a member of their fan club. "Yeah, but call it the Appreciation Society please, that sounds a bit more highbrow," he chuckles when reminded of this fact. "It felt great to be up there alongside my heroes playing those songs I had studied as a kid in my bedroom. In a way it was an easy gig for me because I had learned to play the whole of *Once Around The World* [the almost 15-minute title song of the band's second album, from 1988] at the age of 16."

But Mitchell got a rude awakening during his first show with It Bites at a gig in Workington.

"Two Scottish guys stood up and abruptly walked out [during the set]," he relates. "They were so nonplussed by this new abomination of their favourite band. But I think on the whole people liked what we did together."

PHOTOS ON THIS DPS: PRESS/LEE BLACKMORE

It Bites with Lee Pomeroy in 2012.

Mitchell's debut with It Bites, *The Tall Ships*, arrived in 2008. Regrettably, it was made without Dick Nolan. After the bassist quit, It Bites were joined by Lee Pomeroy, and when Lee was unavailable due to commitments with Take That or ELO, Nathan King stepped in.

"My time with It Bites was full of false starts," admits Mitchell. "Dick Nolangate was our first setback. There were various 'gates' with managers, too. The way it ended with Dick was unfortunate. He went on a three-day bender as we were supposed to do a gig and it had to be cancelled. That was embarrassing."

Mitchell admits to finding the concept's dilution a little disheartening. "Yeah. I had wanted it to be those three guys and me, and that's no disrespect to Pommsy or Nath."

However, the results spoke for themselves. *Oh My God*, *Ghosts*, *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* and the title track of *The Tall Ships* were a match for the so-called classic-era It Bites, although Mitchell volunteers that he felt pressure in writing to style.

Are It Bites ready to reunite again?

"That's why I prefer the second album, *Map Of The Past*," he explains. "With *The Tall Ships* we chased our tail trying to sound a bit too much like It Bites, whereas *Map Of The Past* was a bunch of people enjoying themselves. It's in the top three of the albums I ever did."

Issued in 2012, *Map...* was the band's first full-blown concept piece, exploring the theme of history viewed through old family photos. As before, John Beck's fiery keyboard runs and fearless arrangements lay at the heart of the band's style. Dalton and Mitchell agree that Beck provides the creative spark. It's why the band has indulged his traditional state of torpor. Back in 2014, Dunnery told *Prog* that Beck was "gloriously, stark raving mad", adding: "We wrote outrageous shit together. If I didn't have to wait three hours outside his house in a van every time I wanted to play music with him then I'd go round there right now and I'd sleep with him."

"What people fail to understand is that John's [Beck] DNA runs through It Bites," Mitchell theorises. "Some think it was Francis, but John is responsible for more than 50 per cent of the band's sound."

"Frank was the driving force, but John could take an idea and make it special," Bob says. "It annoyed John that Frank would leave an idea unfinished, while Frank became increasingly frustrated by John dragging his heels in everything, and that ate into their relationship."

One thing's for sure: having tolerated the drama supplied by Dunnery during the band's heyday, the Mitchell-fronted It Bites was a far less volatile place.

"Oh, absolutely," Dalton laughs, "but the problem was you could light a fire beneath the two Johns and neither would have moved. That started to get me down, too."

With *Map...*, Dalton knew It Bites were on their last legs. "For me the reason the band broke up was a basic lack of continuity. It was stop-start, stop-start. With the second album I realised that I didn't want to do it anymore, so I played on it as the drummer only."

Despite the excellence of *Map...*, the wheels were once again coming off.

"I had been confident we could get the band running again and even take things up a gear, but there was a third party derailing things," Mitchell sighs. He isn't referring to a bandmember, more one of the backroom team. "Important decisions were being made without me. The trust had gone and in a way that's why I did nothing until Lonely Robot. Then Fish got hold of John Beck and we didn't see him again for a couple of years."

Could the band have fought harder to avoid the break-up?

"Yeah, probably," Mitchell considers. "I just remember saying: 'That's it, I quit.' It was quite petulant. I hold my hand up. John Beck and I are not the most motivated of people, and it was always difficult getting the It Bites motor running."

Mitchell reveals that much of the decision to re-release *The Tall Ships* and *Map Of The Past* is due to a desire to see the former pressed on vinyl at last. Each comes with two outtakes from the original sessions.

"They're there as a curiosity," he explains, "I can't vouch for their quality, though I do like *Lighthouse* [from *Map...*], and *When I Fall* [taken from *...Ships*] is full-on AOR/yacht rock. We should have had Kenny G on it."

Besides remastering both records, Mitchell wrote extensive sleeve essays. "We tried to get [Beck and Dalton] involved in the notes, but it was like getting hold of Lord Lucan and Jesus Christ," he quips.

Optimistic fans continued to cross their fingers, though those hopes seemed torpedoed in May 2019 when Dalton announced that the band would no longer write, record or play live.

> "The problem was you could light a fire beneath the two Johns and neither would have moved."
>
> **Bob Dalton**

"At no point had we said: 'It Bites will never make another record', I always thought that we would," Mitchell clarifies. "The matter has since been put to bed, but Bob doesn't always think of the ramifications of his words."

So why make the statement at all?

Dalton: "John [Beck] and John Mitchell had been on Facebook saying they were writing, but it didn't amount to a hill of beans. It felt unfair to the fans; either you do it or you don't. It felt like it would never happen."

Mitchell later posted that "communication permitting" the band would indeed make new music, only for Covid-19 to throw another spanner into the works. Yet work is ongoing.

"It'll be myself, John and Bob," states the guitarist. "The fact of the matter is that we've signed a contract, so we deliver an It Bites album or we end up in prison."

The plan is to release the album "by the start of next year", Mitchell predicts.

Stay tuned, but don't hold your breath.

Remastered versions of The Tall Ships and Map Of The Past are out now via InsideOut. See www.facebook.com/oncearoundtheworld for more.

VOLA: constantly changing direction.

All change!

Never a band to repeat themselves, **VOLA** have created their most diverse album yet with *Witness*. *Prog* catches up with singer Asger Mygind and drummer Adam Janzi to discuss their new sound and why one track even found them searching for "a hip hop vibe".

Words: Holly Wright
Images: Nikolai Linares

It was, perhaps, inevitable that VOLA would do something unexpected in 2021. When they rose to fame in 2016 it was their disparate mix of heavy-bottomed djent riffs and luscious melodies seemingly inspired by the New Romantic era that caught people's attention. The Danish-Swedish outfit injected their soulful arrangements with modern progressive heaviness in ways that had not quite been done before and as a result their debut album, *Inmazes*, offered up something rare, memorable and exceptional. When fans wanted more of the same two years later, they dropped a record that side-stepped the familiar staccato crunch of their debut in favour of soft balladry, pop-electronica and keyboard-heavy passages. Those mechanical djent sounds — perpetuated by the likes of Meshuggah and TesseracT — made a cameo but were no longer VOLA's bedrock; they were treading a different path with their follow-up, *Applause Of A Distant Crowd*.

"Sometimes we go to the rock scene as well," says frontman Asger Mygind about their second album, fully recognising the deviation from their metallic start. Fast-forward to 2021 and VOLA have landed another album that's taken a detour. Ask them what vibe they're pursuing these days and they use words like 'big' and 'produced'. The four-piece, who've always had a thing for spacious sounds, have reached a new level of ambition.

"It wouldn't feel inspiring to create something too similar to *Applause Of A Distant Crowd*," Mygind explains. "It just felt more fresh to do something different, even if that means being closer to *Inmazes* again. But that's not really a conscious thing, that's just what happens. For me it's more about what we've just done and doing something fresh based off that."

Does this mean that *Witness* is a return to their nascent metallic tones? Not entirely. This band have a few more tricks up their sleeve.

Witness was recorded during the summer of 2020 at Mygind's family cottage. Just a stone's throw from Copenhagen and located close to the sea, the retreat provided the perfect getaway for VOLA to lay down their tracks in the quietude of a national lockdown. Despite the restrictions of the pandemic the creative process was relatively hassle-free. "It was kind of nice," Mygind says, recalling their time at the cottage. In this distraction-free environment, Mygind and his bandmates Martin Werner, Nicolai Mogensen and Adam Janzi recorded vocals, bass, guitar and percussion for the album. But when it came to mixing the tracks, VOLA decided to take a detour.

"The big difference this time for *Witness* was that we had an engineer and producer called Jacob Hansen from Denmark mix the album," Mygind states. "I've done it before but we thought it was time for something different."

It took some guts to trust an external engineer. Mygind, an avid fan of Steven Wilson's production chops, had, until this point, through a process of "trial and error" produced, mixed and mastered all of VOLA's music.

"In the beginning we didn't have any money so it was all about seeing how much we could do ourselves before we got professionals into the process," says Mygind about his days as VOLA's primary knob-twiddler. "I enjoy it a lot, just working on the different layers of the song." But album number three required something different, a new perspective and an outsider's touch. Enter Danish producer and engineer Jacob Hansen, famous for his work with Volbeat, Katatonia and Evergrey.

"We liked what he had done before and he has this very big hi-fi sound. It's very sleek, in a good way," says Mygind. "We also had to keep in

"We have all these ideas in us so we're just going to continue, make new music, tour, meet up with new fans and old fans."

Adam Janzi

mind that we had to go with someone who could still keep the base of our sound alive, like the soaring wide choruses. That's also a reason why Jacob felt like the right pick for this."

VOLA emailed Hansen and he agreed to work with them but it turned out that his involvement had more influence on their album that they bargained for.

"He became a sort of beacon for the sound," says Mygind. VOLA's drummer agrees: "Him being in the process was an inspiration from the start," says Adam Janzi. "I definitely had his sound in mind when I was working."

It doesn't take long to spot the noticeable differences on their third album. The first explosive bars of *Straight Lines* highlight VOLA's return to their heavier roots but with a glossy upgrade. Harmonics, pervasive synth, impossible rhythms and dense atmospherics are seamlessly fused together thanks to Hansen's crisp mixing and mastering techniques and the result is impactful. There are other surprises too, like VOLA's first foray into urban beats on *These Black Claws*. The creeping electro track, featuring rapper Bless, one half of experimental hip hop duo Shahmen, is unlike anything VOLA have done before.

"The hip hop beat is very prominent in that song," Mygind explains. "And making that just inspired us to get some rap vocals over the song. That definitely makes it stand out from what we've done before."

Convincing Bless to collaborate with a prog act wasn't exactly an ordeal. "We reached out and he replied saying he was onboard to try something out," Janzi recalls. "So we were like, 'Holy shit, let's go!'"

"He basically just did his own thing, writing his own lyrics for it," Mygind adds. "I think he sent us three takes of him rapping it and it just sounded really, really good, so it was very easy to incorporate. I like how it gives the song a sort of demonic layer because his voice is so low pitched. I think that was actually how I discovered him because I like Tyler, The Creator a lot and I was just searching for more hip hop that had that kind of vibe and his name came up in a YouTube comment and I checked it out. I'm very happy that we discovered him."

VOLA: creating characters, inspired by Steven Wilson.

> "It wouldn't feel inspiring to create something too similar to *Applause Of A Distant Crowd*."
>
> **Asger Mygind**

Injecting a new sound into VOLA's repertoire has also given Mygind an opportunity to flex his own vocal muscles in previously unexplored ways, including adding harsh vocals to *These Black Claws*.

"I haven't tried to sing that way before," says the frontman. "I like that mix between having a note in there and shouting at the same time. It's sort of aggressive but has a melody in it at the same time."

VOLA are certainly a band of contrasts. Here we have a group toying with lush vocal melodies and harsh industrial influences, who feel perfectly at ease blending 80s-inspired pop with crushing off-tempo rhythms plucked from Meshuggah's playbook. While *Applause Of A Distant Crowd* explored the more melodic end of their skillset, *Witness* indulges in some moments of startling heaviness, not least on the album's first single, *Head Mounted Sideways*. Supported by a video that features dystopian sci-fi scenes, the song depicts man's inability to accept responsibility for the decline in civilisation. Metaphorically speaking, these are the heads that chose to look 'sideways'.

"I think I will probably always take the melancholy way to look at the darkness," says Mygind, revealing his morose side. "I think about the dysfunctionalities before looking at the

happiness and the things that work. I just think that's a more inspiring place to be when writing lyrics."

Witness doesn't have an overall theme but the lyrics, like many elements of VOLA's work, were triggered by a seminal figurehead in modern British prog.

"It doesn't necessarily have to be a reflection of what mood I am in myself, it's just that I like to create characters that are in miserable situations for some reason," the frontman explains. "It's something that Steven Wilson has inspired me to do, to create lyrics based on characters and their point of view, because it gives you the opportunity to dive into their existence and to make up problems that they might have. I guess it's similar to when an author writes characters for a novel. But at the same time, of course, they have to have some relation to me or something that I can relate to, so that it can be an emotional experience to sing the lyrics."

Steven Wilson is mentioned more than once throughout the interview, in relation to many aspects of the band's craft, from composition to production. His genius, it transpires, has had a significant impact on VOLA's melodic heft, which some may argue is their secret sauce.

"He's really good at layering and just making this very wide, full sound with lots of harmonies, and it's just very gratifying to listen to, I think. That's something I like to try to achieve," Mygind enthuses. "Some big albums for me are *In Absentia* and *Deadwing* by Porcupine Tree – those might be my favourite ever albums. They were inspiring in the sense that I think they're filled with great hooks, really good melodies that should be on the radio just because they have a really wide appeal. But at the same time, there are these great mood dynamics and different genres blended in that make for repeated listens where you discover new things every time. It's just very interesting for the ear, I think."

***Witness* is out now.**

VOLA also cite Meshuggah, Soilwork, Opeth and Oceansize as major influences, on one hand revealing their taste for all things heavy, while on the other demonstrating a passion for being what they describe as "dynamic, and creating different moods".

"I was playing *World Of Warcraft*, just listening to Meshuggah for a month straight without knowing what's going on in the music," Janzi reveals. "And then after a month I just noticed that now the rhythms actually begin to stick."

Off-kilter rhythms, visceral riffs and mood-enhancing atmospherics is a recipe that most certainly works for the Scandinavian band and the proof has manifested itself in some delightful ways.

"We get more and more reactions and people are making covers of our songs, which is just awesome," says Janzi. "I'm just enjoying the journey basically and there will probably be some moments where I actually realise what's happening, like when I'm sitting in our tour bus and me and Asger realise that, 'Okay, we're actually on tour in a tour bus.'"

With three albums under their belt and the world very slowly gaining some semblance of normality, life is looking peachy for VOLA.

"We're just going to continue with all our energy. Hopefully the venues will open up when it's safe again soon, safety is of course paramount," says Mygind. "We have a lot of music in us, so it's just about giving it everything."

Happily, Janzi agrees. "We have all these ideas in us so we're just going to continue the grind, make new music, tour, meet up with new fans and old fans. Yeah, just keep on going basically."

And if all goes to plan there will be an album number four before we know it; just don't expect it to sound like the one before.

Witness is out now via Mascot. See www.volaband.com for more information.

“When I was still at school, I remember buying Hawkwind’s *Warrior On The Edge Of Time*.”

Youth

Space Lords

Martin 'Youth' Glover: mixing it up.

"The great time lord of space and cosmic psychedelia", Nik Turner.

Nik Turner and Killing Joke bassist/remixer extraordinaire **Youth** have reunited for a return journey to kosmische city with *Interstellar Energy*. *Prog* catches up with the pair to find out the story behind their inspired collaboration and their future plans.

Words: Rob Hughes **Portraits:** Jaime Walfisch and Elkanah Evans

"It's all about Nik for me," raves Youth. "He's the great time lord of space and cosmic psychedelia, one of the true 60s innovators and pioneers. I love his egalitarian passion for music. And let's not forget that he's in the tradition of the great British mystics, there's a magical energy around him that's very powerful. He's a space warrior, a grand old wizard of the cosmos."

It's fair to say that Youth is enthused. The celebrated producer and Killing Joke bassist is talking up his latest collaboration with ex-Hawkwind magus, Nik Turner. Backed by The Space Falcons, *Interstellar Energy* sees the pair voyage deep into heliospheric space rock, fuelled by rhythmic kosmische and a keen sense of discovery. A thrilling ride it is too. Improvised riffs, drones and pulses push upwards and outwards, cooled by Turner's pure, melodic sax lines.

This is the second time that Turner and Youth have made an album together. Informed by Sun Ra, Alice Coltrane and Vangelis' soundtrack to *Blade Runner*, 2018's *Pharaohs From Outer Space* was a multi-layered ambient piece with bluesy sax. *Interstellar Energy*, by contrast, is heavier, gnarlier, more psychedelic.

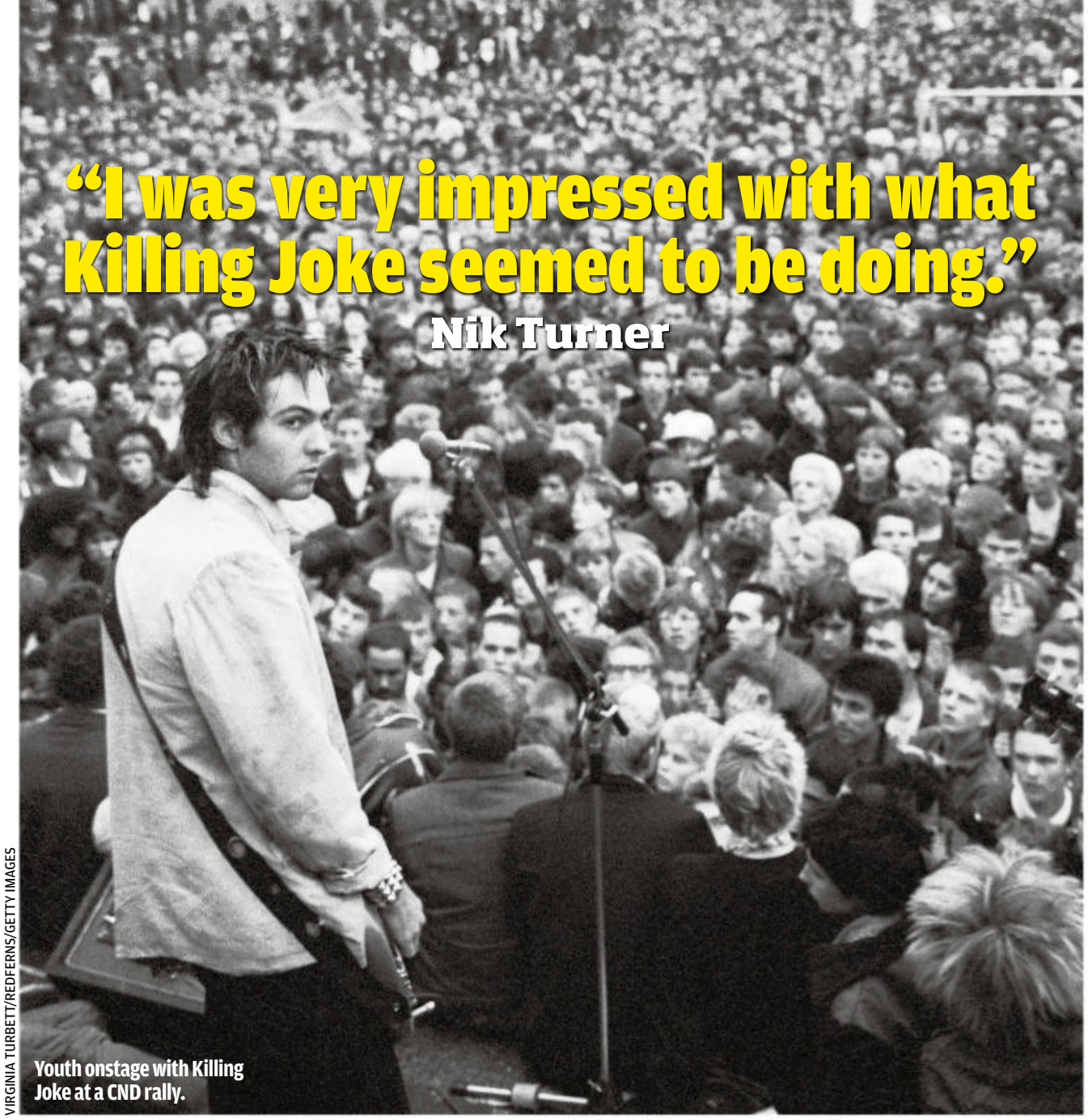
Both men have made careers by colluding with others. For this one, it seems they have Steve Davis to thank. At Glastonbury in 2017, and again in 2019, the prog mad ex-snooker ace invited Turner to corral various musicians for a set. "Steve was curating a stage [there]," explains Youth. "He'd got Nik booked in and I was at the festival too, doing something else. Then Bruce [Welch, onetime Hawkwind guitarist] asked me if I'd like to jam with Nik. So we did a 40-minute jam around two tracks, while Steve Davis would be wading through the crowd, passing me pints of beer. There were a few other cats there as well, who became The Space Falcons. Afterwards I said, 'That was amazing! We should record that.'"

Turner recalls: "It all started with a live stage with everybody playing that wanted to, where anybody could join me. Then when Youth turned up it all really came together. It sounded so good, so we decided to go into the studio. I think the chemistry worked so well because everybody was listening to each other, giving each other room."

Curiously *Interstellar Energy* is a product of reverse practice. Whereas most artists make a studio album, then attempt to replicate it live, Nik Turner, Youth and The Space Falcons — Welch, keyboardist Matt Smith, percussion player and second bassist Will Hughes, drummer Richard Lanchester and violinist Chris Barnett — spent time trying to recapture the magic of a stage performance in the studio.

Welch, who began as Hawkwind's roadie before occasionally filling in on stage circa 1971/72, joins us on Zoom. "I steered a few of the riffs during the gig, because these pieces usually start somewhere around guitar," he says. "Then I went back in the cold light of day and set the tracks out in frameworks, half a dozen of them, and sent them over to Youth to play around with. When we got in the studio we were able to flesh them out."

The ensemble repaired to The Kinks' Konk Studios in north London for a couple of days. "We'd lay down these pretty spontaneous jams, then I'd edit them, doing subtle overdubs and things," says Youth. "But there were a couple of takes that were pretty complete already. Those two Glastonbury jams were very much in a psychedelic, space rock, krautrock



VIRGINIA TURBETT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Youth onstage with Killing Joke at a CND rally.

vein. In the early 70s I think the idea was that everybody would take acid, pick up their instruments and then start playing and seeing where it ended up. There was an element of that in terms of how we approached these tracks — there was no real structure, it was very loose.”

This philosophy is fully expressed on finale *Slider*, in which Turner’s sax orbits around a circular guitar figure, before pulling off into the stratosphere towards somewhere far more esoteric, and on *Solar Probe*, built around a nebulous Eastern drone and Fripp-ish soundwaves. Then there’s the 10-minute *Space*, with its vague echo of *Shakin’ All Over* eventually swarmed by clouds of racing psychedelia. “Youth put in that lovely techno beat in the middle and I’m just brought forward 50 years every time I hear it,” remarks Welch of the latter. “It’s like jumping on some sort of rocket. It’s essentially one take, with all its sort of Grateful Dead highs, lows and fades.”

Youth and Turner only hooked up relatively recently, but each had been on the other’s radar for some while. “I’d heard about him and I’d seen a lot of graffiti on the walls around the area where his band had been rehearsing,” recalls Turner of his first exposure to Killing Joke in the late 70s/early 80s. “And I was very impressed with what they seemed to be doing.”

For Youth, it happened through a series of revelations. “When I was still at school, I remember buying Hawkwind’s *Warrior On The Edge Of Time* [1975] and a couple of other things,” he explains. “I was more into Pink Floyd than Hawkwind, but I loved the parallels: the light show, the performance aspect, the extended psychedelic jams. I liked that they got Michael Moorcock on the introductions and the album sleeves had that lovely sci-fi fantasy element. They had their own thing that was different from Floyd or the Dead, but it was only when I saw them live that it really made sense. It was a space ritual, a ceremony.

“When we started Killing Joke,” he continues, “we were rehearsing in the People’s Hall in the Latimer Road squat scene [in west London]. This space was incredible, because we shared a room with Motörhead downstairs and The Clash had the room upstairs. I remember having an LSD meltdown and going to Lemmy for advice. He always took the time to be considerate, not like the other two members of Motörhead; I put that down to the influence of him being in Hawkwind with Nik. Of course, Nik was a legend around Ladbroke Grove at the time. Later on, when I was involved with the free festival crowd and then the rave crowd, I realised that so many of the people in those scenes came out of that Hawkwind culture. They were synonymous with that spirit.”

The pair finally met five or six years ago, at an album launch for legendary underground poet, Lee Harris. Both men were friends of Harris, who’d invited them to the event, just off Portobello Road. “Nik was billed to perform and Lee asked me to do a poem over his playing,” Youth recalls. “So I started reciting *The Last Of The Bohemians*, which I’d written to honour Lee, and halfway through I turned it into a kind of homage to Nik. I wanted to point out that, like Lee, Nik was one of the last of those 60s dandies who were still going. And the fact that Nik is still at the rock face today, doing his thing with such enthusiasm, continues to inspire me.”

Neither man is short of work. Aside from producing a stream of artists on his own Youth Sounds label, Youth is readying a new solo album (“It’s in that classic English psychedelic folk tradition”), while Turner is busy on a project with Zion Train’s Colin Cod, due in September. “There’s always a lot of people who seem to be interested,” Turner says. “I’m always amazed when my record company says something like, ‘Do you want to be on an album with William Shatner?’ He ended up doing a version of *Silver Machine*.”

Other collaborations notwithstanding, the mutual love-in between Turner and Youth is set to continue. Youth suggests an “Afro-cosmic jazz fusion album” inspired by Pharoah Sanders and Don Cherry, which Turner is agreeable to.

Then he has another idea: “What would be amazing would be to put a whole orchestra of space cats around you — Nik Turner’s Arkestra — and do a Festival Hall show or something. What do you think, Nik?” Turner grins beatifically. “Oh yeah,” he nods. “I’d love that.”

Nik Turner playing with Hawkwind in London, 1975.

ROGER MORTON/CLEOPATRA RECORDS/GETTY IMAGES

Interstellar Energy is out now via Youth Sounds/Cadiz. See www.youthsounds.net for more information.

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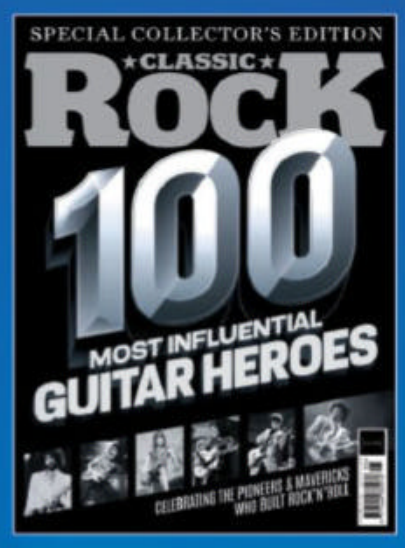

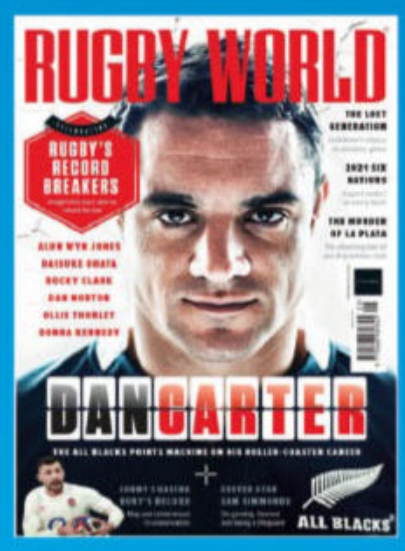

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"I don't really feel I belong in this world, to be honest. Throughout 40 years I was trying to get somewhere with my music; I was always rejected and always overlooked."

Nad Sylvan is giving new, musical life to the works of WB Yeats (right).

Poet's Corner

At first glance **Nad Sylvan** might have little in common with WB Yeats, but appearances can be deceptive. On the Swedish vocalist's latest release, *Spiritus Mundi,* he closes the coffin lid on his Vampirate trilogy and finds inspiration in the work of the celebrated Irish writer who was once awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Words: Julian Marszalek **Images:** Nad Sylvan

There's a palpable sense of relaxation if not outright serenity emanating from Nad Sylvan. The Danes and Norwegians call it 'hygge' — a mood of domestic coziness and contentment — whereas over in Sweden, which is where we find Sylvan, the locals refer to this concept as 'mysig'. But whichever of these Scandinavian notions of creature comforts you plump for, Nad Sylvan is radiating it.

"I'm about 30 miles south of Stockholm city out in the wilderness," he explains from his home. "I'm out in the country and live in this 26-year-old log house that was imported from Finland by a Finnish couple who used to live here. They got divorced, the house came on the market and I fell in love with it. So I bought it."

Sylvan is something of a country boy at heart: "My first 47 years I lived in the city. I lived in Malmö and Stockholm. We had a summer residence in Gothenburg and we also had a cottage in West Cork in Ireland and so I always loved the rural life. I was always drawn to that. After so many years in the city — I was approaching 50 — I thought this must be the time in my life where I settle down, so I bought this house. I'm happier than I've [ever] been."

Prog suspects that a large part of Sylvan's happiness is down to the upswing of his solo singing career. It's been a long road. While he's arguably better known as the vocalist in Steve Hackett's Genesis Revisited project, Sylvan has been chipping away at music's coalface since the halcyon days of prog in the 70s. His dedication to the cause saw him become a key figure in prog's Swedish revival in the opening overs of the 21st century where, following two solo albums, *The Life Of A Housewife* (1997) and 2003's *Sylvanite*, he collaborated with compatriot and multi-instrumentalist

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Bonamici (that's Christian Thordin to his mum) in the shape of Unifaun, who released their eponymous and only album in 2008. This was swiftly followed by the co-founding of Agents Of Mercy with The Flower Kings' linchpin Roine Stolt, who released three studio albums — *The Fading Ghosts Of Twilight*, *Dramarama* and *The Black Forest* — in a particularly fecund burst between 2009 and 2011.

And then, of course, there are Nad Sylvan's further solo releases.

"I'd done a trilogy of albums and of course you wonder, 'Where do I go now?'" says Sylvan as he ponders the origin of *Spiritus Mundi*, his latest and sixth solo album.

And who can blame him? After spending three albums — *Courting The Widow* (2015), *The Bride Said No* (2017) and *The Regal Bastard* (2019) — in the company of his Vampirate character (a fusion of vampire and pirate), it was clear to Sylvan that a change was needed as much as it was wanted.

His new direction is fully in evidence with *Spiritus Mundi*. Working with Canadian multi-instrumentalist and songwriter Andrew Laitres, Sylvan's latest work sees the pair bring music to the poems of WB Yeats. As Sylvan explains, the project took began to take root as he was bringing *The Regal Bastard* to a close.

"Andrew asked if I would be interested in tracking my voice for a song of his for his solo record [recorded as The Winter Tree]," he recalls. "I listened to it and I thought, 'Nice melody! I wonder who wrote the lyrics?'"

Unbeknown to Sylvan, these weren't lyrics but the poem *The Lake Isle Of Innisfree*. Concerned with the longing for the tranquillity of the countryside in the face of being overwhelmed by city life, it's not difficult to see how the poem's central theme would have appealed to Sylvan. So much so, in fact, that it also appeared as a bonus track on the final instalment of his Vampirate trilogy. The seeds had been sown and were soon taking root.

William Butler Yeats is one of the most intriguing figures of 20th century literature. In addition to his poetry, he was also a celebrated dramatist and prose writer who did much to revive the Irish literary and storytelling tradition. An occultist and spiritualist, he joined the secret society The Hermetic Order Of The Golden Dawn, whose members included the writers Bram Stoker and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as well The Great Beast himself, Aleister Crowley, with whom he developed a feud over questionable lifestyle choices. An ardent Irish nationalist, he was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood before serving two terms as a Senator of the Irish Free State.

With such a huge body of work that leads from an early romantic idealism through to a more pragmatic realism, the appeal of WB Yeats as source material for a musical project is entirely understandable. Indeed, Yeats has been reinterpreted by a variety of musicians including Christy Moore (*The Song Of Wandering Aengus*), The Chieftains (*Never Give All The Heart*) and The Waterboys on their own full-length project dedicated to the poet, *An Appointment With Mr Yeats*.

"I knew that The Waterboys had done something similar but this a completely different take," says Sylvan.

He's not wrong. Although fundamentally acoustic in its approach, *Spiritus Mundi* eschews the folk default setting of previous interpretations into something more pastoral, considered and direct. Indeed, compared to Sylvan's previous releases, this is an album that's characterised by a simplicity of arrangements and a feeling of space that gives room to Sylvan's voice as much as it does the instrumentation surrounding it.

"I wanted to go very organic and I think it worked really well," states Sylvan. "Here, you have the poetry holding it together and Andrew's acoustic guitar holding it all together. This is a much more coherent album than I've ever done before."

Sylvan admits he wasn't altogether familiar with the work of Yeats prior to the project. Yet for all that, the poems possess a resonance and meaning that are every bit as relevant now as they were when they were written. The album's opening numbers — *The Second Coming* and *Sailing To Byzantium* — are easily songs for the here and now. The parallels with the former, written in the aftermath of the First World War and against the backdrop of the 1918-19 Flu Pandemic, are easy to see. Drawing on Biblical symbolism, here the death of the old world is replaced by the rebirth of a new one, an apt metaphor as our world begins to look ahead. Similarly, it's not difficult to see some of Sylvan in *Sailing To Byzantium*, a paean to the spirit and wisdom that nestles down with the oncoming autumn of life as well as the endless battle between spirituality and the physical form.

> *"I wanted to go very organic and I think it worked really well. Here, you have the poetry holding it together and Andrew's acoustic guitar holding it all together."*

But if there's friction at the heart of those words, then how much of challenge was it for Nad Sylvan and Andrew Laitres to turn the source material into songs?

"It was very different from my usual routine of writing because the lyrics come last because I always focus on the melody," admits Sylvan "This time around, Andrew had already come up with some of the song structure and melodies. I pretty much sang what he came up with, only I would paraphrase and maybe try something different."

Despite the circumstances of its creation that found musical files being sent back and forth across the internet, *Spiritus Mundi* is an album that boasts an impressive cast of supporting characters including bassist Tony Levin and The Flower Kings' rhythm section of Jonas Reingold and Mirkko DeMaio. Oh, and a certain Genesis guitarist who plays on bonus track *To A Child Dancing In The Wind*.

"You can clearly hear that's Steve Hackett; it's his way of playing and it sounds like something from one of his records," says Sylvan. "I thought it was a nice way to end the album and it gives you a lot of after-thought."

Since delving into the works of Yeats, Sylvan has come to see some of himself in the poet. But which aspect is it? Is it Yeats the occultist? Yeats the politician, perhaps? Or could it be Yeats the reviver of the Irish literary tradition?

"He's just like me — he was absolutely obsessed by the occult and sex!" jokes Sylvan.

Composing himself, Sylvan ventures: "On the more serious side, he was misunderstood by his contemporaries. Not always, but there was a phase in his life, especially when he wrote the poem *The Fisherman*: *'The living men that I hate/ The dead man that I loved...'* his contemporaries didn't understand what he wanted. He has more reverence and respect for the past times. This is of course his ageing and, in a way, I feel the same. I don't really feel I belong in this world, to be honest. Throughout 40 years I was trying to get somewhere with my music; I was always rejected and always overlooked."

Sylvan continues: "But endurance is the key, I guess, but he was more successful in his day than I was. I feel in a way that he's a kindred spirit and I can connect with the lyrics very much and I think they're so strong. Complexity also within a person, I guess that has to deal with very broad references to life and being able to solve a lot of things rather than just going through life. You take it all in and it becomes a melting pot in your mind. That's very much Yeats and it's very much me."

And from a purely Yeatsean perspective, Nad Sylvan sees himself as idealist rather than a realist.

"One hundred per cent idealist," he asserts. "Realism, I try to avoid it because it's too depressing. I like to create my own little space in my own world. That's why I bought this house out here so I don't have to have any stomping neighbours on the floor and people banging on the radiator like they did when I lived in my apartment. I'm an idealist and I sort of believe in hanging on to my own values and not being put off by negativity from outside my bubble."

Sylvan allows himself a smile: "I was always driven by my music. And whether I liked it or not, it was never a question of quitting. I did not have any success for about 40 years but that didn't seem to matter. It was all about expressing myself through music. And I'm not a trained musician; I'm completely self-taught. I don't read music but I have a very good ear."

And judging by his use of WB Yeats' poems, he's got very good eyes, too.

Spiritus Mundi is out now via InsideOut. See www.nadsylvan.com for more information.

Sylvan found himself relating to the Irish bard.

Penny Rimbaud

Anarcho punk and prog? Has *Prog* completely lost the plot? Not at all! The Crass co-founder started his musical career in the avant-garde performance art groups EXIT and Ceres Confusion, collaborated with jazz musicians with Crass Agenda, and has recently revisited the world of concept albums with a full-length recording inspired by John Coltrane and the life of French poet Arthur Rimbaud. So it's high time we asked: **how prog is Penny Rimbaud?** **Words:** Rob Hughes

In 1967, Penny Rimbaud moved into Dial House, a derelict farm cottage on the fringe of Epping Forest in Essex. He and visual artist Gee Vaucher duly set about turning the 16th century pile into a centre for radical creativity and anarcho-pacifist ideals. For Rimbaud — then still going under his birth name of Jeremy Ratter — it marked the beginning of the rest of his life.

"I moved here when I was teaching part-time at art school," he tells *Prog* via Zoom, seated by the window inside Dial House. "After a while I got very tired of teaching and walked out. That's when I set up this open house, partly because I didn't know what else to do. I'd got all this sort of debris built up — of trying to make a life as a semi-professional teacher — and the only way I could deal with it was by getting rid of everything and seeing what happened. One weekend I invited as many people as possible to come along and just take what they wanted. All I had left was a cooker, a bed, a bookshelf and a book of Greek philosophy. It felt fabulous."

> **"Musically, I'm open to anything. But I constantly return to Benjamin Britten and John Coltrane. Those two have been with me all my life."**

Stripped of all but the essentials, Rimbaud painted, wrote poetry, grew vegetables and provided a roof for anyone who wanted to explore an alternative lifestyle. In the early 70s he and Vaucher formed EXIT, a short-lived performance art group with links to the Fluxus movement, at Dial House. It was also where Rimbaud and underground figure Wally Hope hatched the idea of the Stonehenge Free Festival, inaugurated in 1974.

Three years later, Rimbaud got together with another temporary Dial House resident, Steve Williams, and formed Crass. With Williams (renamed Steve Ignorant) on vocals and Rimbaud on drums, this primitive setup was driven by political fury and fierce self-determination. They may have been an unusual fit — the arty ex-public schoolboy and a working-class punk 14 years Rimbaud's junior — but they bonded at a crucial level.

"We didn't have the same tastes," explains Rimbaud, whose primary influences were free jazz and European classical music. "Steve didn't like my avant-gardism and I didn't like his rock'n'rollism, but we were both very pissed off, for different reasons. So there was a certain coming together on that simple front. It was — and still is, in a strange way — a wonderful relationship. We're miles apart in virtually anything you could come up with, but we have these strange meeting points and that's really beautiful. Crass was pretty broad on all fronts, partly due to the diversity of age and class, which created very interesting tangents."

Quickly growing into a libertarian collective, first heard on 1978's *The Feeding Of The 5000*, Crass concerned themselves with all manner of social and ideological issues: animal rights, the environment, feminism, CND, anti-fascism, the perils of religious dogma. The startling sound they made — savage lyrics spitting

Crass perform at St Phillips Community Centre in Swansea, Wales on September 24, 1981. Penny Rimbaud is on the drums.

STEVE RAPPORT/GETTY IMAGES

PRESS/MARYANN MORRIS

Drummer, poet and radical thinker, Penny Rimbaud.

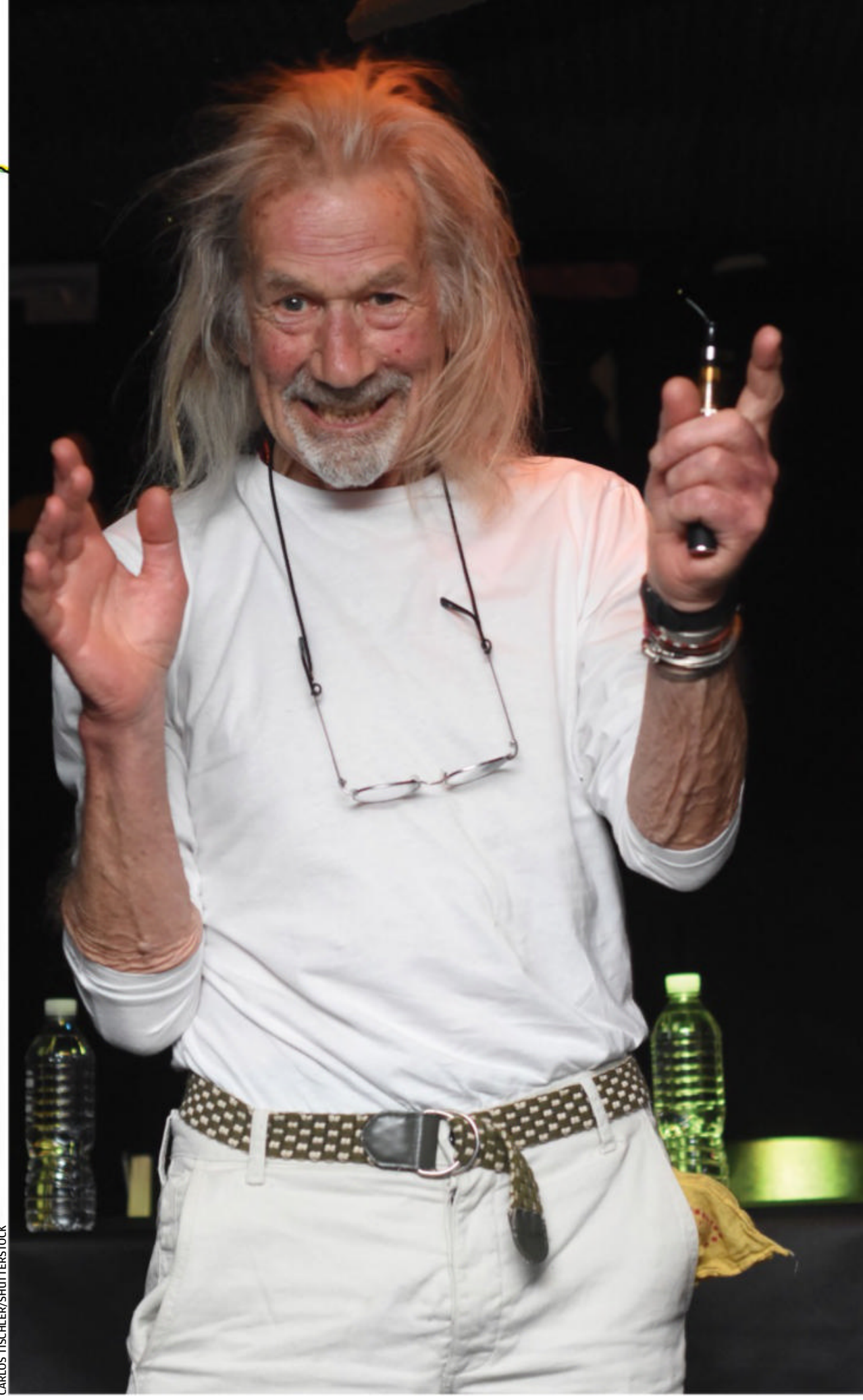
indignation over raw guitars, feedback and relentless beats — was just as uncompromising. Crass attracted enemies and devoted fans alike. "*Feeding*... really took us by surprise, selling thousands when we really didn't think we'd sell any," Rimbaud says.

Driven by their DIY approach to the music business, the band founded their own label for 1979 follow-up *Stations Of The Crass*. It sold 20,000 copies within a fortnight, lodging itself at the top of the indie charts. "One of the guys at Small Wonder [Crass' previous label] had said a crazy thing to me: 'You could be as big as The Beatles!'" recalls Rimbaud. "And I think I got carried away with myself on *Stations*.... A lot of people like that album more than any other, because it actually conforms to certain rock'n'roll principles. And that's partly because I was feeding vanities. To me it doesn't have the fierce outsider-ness of *Feeding*... or the avant-garde rock feeling of *Penis Envy* [1981]. It's our weakest album, in my opinion, but it's our biggest-selling. Sometime afterwards, [critic] Jon Savage said to me: 'Don't listen to other people's opinions and don't read your own press.' I'm grateful for that advice."

Unsurprisingly, Crass didn't go unnoticed by the powers that be. Everything came to a head, in quite bizarre fashion, around the time of 1983's *Yes Sir, I Will*. Having been given classified information from several members of the armed services, Rimbaud and co set about making a fake recording of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan discussing the sinking of ships during the recent Falklands War. Crass anonymously sent the tapes to the British press.

Nothing happened for a few months. Then *The Sunday Times* printed a story about the Pentagon coming across the tape and declaring it part of a covert KGB ploy to undermine American democracy. Tipped off by an unknown source, *The Observer* identified Crass as the culprits soon after. The success of 1983 single *How Does It Feel (To Be The Mother Of 1000 Dead)*?, aimed squarely at Thatcher, didn't exactly endear Crass to officialdom either.

Questions were asked in Parliament, and various organisations, including the KGB, started calling Dial House. Says Rimbaud: "If it hadn't been for what happened to Wally Hope and my experiences with the authorities around the Stonehenge festival, it would've been a surprise [Hope died in suspicious circumstances in 1975; Rimbaud holds the opinion that he was murdered]. I knew the extent to which the state would oppose anything that wasn't in line with their narrative. We started getting opened mail and hearing the phone being tapped. They'd been very active around my activities investigating Wally's death and I was given some pretty obvious warnings — in the very polite way that the British police and secret service operate — but it was basically, 'Watch it, mate, or you'll be following Wally.'



CARLOS TISCHLER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Always expect the unexpected from Rimbaud.

Crass' albums, from the top: *Feeding Of The 5000* (1978), *Stations Of The Cross* (1979), *Penis Envy* (1981), *Christ – The Album* (1982) and *Yes Sir, I Will* (1983).

> **"Crass was pretty broad on all fronts, partly due to the diversity of age and class, which created very interesting tangents."**

"On one hand that's great, because you think, 'This is why I'm doing it, to challenge these people,'" he continues. "But on the other hand it's also terrifying, especially living in a house with no locks and living a very open life, where anyone might be at the breakfast table in the morning. There have been periods where I've had a very large cudgel by my bed, just in case anyone *does* try something. I know it's a strange way of living, but that's what I vowed and determined when I finished art school. I wanted to set up a human experiment — what can happen? And I have to say it's been much love and beauty."

From the get-go, Crass vowed to disband in 1984. Having disseminated their message, they kept their word and played a final show that July — a Welsh benefit gig for striking miners.

PRESS/PENNY RIMBAUD

One man and his kit...

A swan song, *Ten Notes On A Summer's Day*, landed posthumously in 1986.

Rimbaud holed up in Dial House, writing poetry, plays, novels and essays. He returned to the public forum at the turn of the millennium, as a performance poet. And while he and various ex-members of Crass have shared stages at shows in subsequent years, sometimes under the Last Amendment umbrella, poetry remains Rimbaud's main focus.

Onstage and on record, his verbal riffs are often set to improvised jazz. His deep love of jazz has been a constant throughout his life. There's a great YouTube clip of him, from March 1964, receiving a prize from John Lennon on TV's *Ready Steady Go!*. The 20-year-old Ratter/Rimbaud has just won a viewers' competition to produce the best piece of Beatles artwork. Rather than choose albums from the Fab Four as his booty, Rimbaud selects LPs by Shostakovich and Charles Mingus.

"Musically, I'm open to anything," he says today. "But I constantly return to Benjamin Britten and John Coltrane. Those two have been with me all my life. Jazz is revolutionary music by nature, it's not something you play in polite clubs. Coltrane was always out there with that roar. To me, the best jazz is in-your-face."

The same guiding spirit is at play on his latest album, *Arthur Rimbaud In Verdun*. Backed by tenor saxophonists Evan Parker, Louise Elliott and Ingrid Laubrock, it's a fictitious spoken-word piece that places Rimbaud and the French poet whose surname he uses (who died in 1891) alongside each other at the Battle of Verdun in the First World War. It's a visceral, intense, often nightmarish experience, peppered with allusions to mythology, art and philosophy. Rimbaud's piercing words explode like shells, exposing a fetid world of pus, gore and desperation, its characters struggling between life and death.

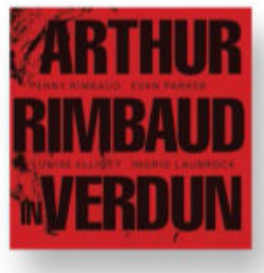
The piece came about when he was asked to perform something Rimbaud related at the National Poetry Library in London's Royal Festival Hall: "I wanted to approach it from a Dada angle and let Rimbaud do the talking. I imagined seeing it all through the eyes of Jackson Pollock and hearing it through the ears of John Coltrane. So I just let myself rip."

Penny Rimbaud is still very much the curator of the Crass legacy, regularly overseeing remasters and redesigns. It disappoints him that no one has fully grasped the baton they held out as a weapon of personal autonomy. "Crass is probably more pertinent now than back in the day," he rues. "It's not vanity to think that nothing's even come close to *Reality Asylum* as an all-out social attack."

At the same time, he believes that the work he's done since is "much more radical than anything I did with Crass. It's far more inclined towards testing the limits of endurance and persistence, the very things we have to break. I'm not an anarchist, I'm a deconstructionist. I'm trying to take the mask away from what is around me, including myself, to exist in one moment. We only have one life to live, but we're so wrapped up in the swaddling of conformity.

"I like the finishing lines of *...Verdun*: *'Fuck you and your hollow whimsy,'*" he adds. "The hollow whimsy is the material world; that's what I'm talking about. Why am I forced to battle to be here? Why do people put up brick walls? Why do they tell me what I am? All this sort of rubbish that we have to cope with. So I'd be happy for just one moment of existence. I could drop dead then. But here I am at 77, still bloody hunting every little corner, turning over every little stone."

New album, *Arthur Rimbaud In Verdun*.



Arthur Rimbaud In Verdun is out now via One Little Independent See www.facebook.com/pennyrimbaudofficial for more.

YOUR SHOUT!

Concept albums, experimental jazz collaborations and performance poetry: there's far more to Penny Rimbaud than just anarcho punk. But is he really prog? It's over to you!

"Never heard of them. Him? Her? It?"
James Spencer

"Crass were very progressive."
Matt Stevens

"No thanks."
Brian Stanbrook

"One can draw a straight line from Crass to Andy Tillison and The Tangent. *Christ - The Album* was as progressive as anything released in 1982 (or any other year for that matter). A true artist that Penny Rimbaud."
Wedgepiece

"Before my prog awakening when I saw Marillion on *Top Of The Pops*, I was into punk. I was a big fan of Crass. They made double albums and concept albums in the middle of their anarchist dream. Crass and particularly Rimbaud never saw the hippies as the enemy, in fact before Crass Rimbaud was a co-founder of the Stonehenge Free Festival, that hosted bands like Hawkwind, Gong, Man, Wishbone Ash, The Enid, Ozric Tentacles etc. alongside punk and reggae bands. Today he releases albums of spoken poetry accompanied by free-form jazz artists. He is one of the most progressive minds out there, and to me that makes him prog."
Paul Leader

"A visionary."
Dean Thorn

"Nope. I got nothing."
Mike Sargent

"I'd say he is, Crass were certainly lyrically more progressive than most bands at the time. If some people still pigeonhole progressive as 20-minute songs with rampaging keyboards then Crass aren't for you!"
Jason Richards

"Who?"
John Kayser

"Penny is a legend. Crass is one of the most important punk bands ever and the ethics behind the label spot on. His post-Crass stuff with Crass Agenda and under his own name has been interesting and diverse and I recommend *Arthur Rimbaud In Verdun*, which you can find on his Bandcamp page."
Rob Hurst

"Are you deliberately trying to annoy me? Punk rock? You've lost your minds!"
Matt Tielman

"Never heard of him. And proud of the fact."
Ed 'True Prog' Reid

"Penny Rimbaud is a really interesting choice. I'd understand a lot of your readers' knee-jerk reactions will be to start shouting because of the Crass connection. But prior to Crass he had strong connections with the free festival scene and his solo material is really interesting. Conceptual and quite jazzy, which I think brings it pretty close to progressive music."
Valerie James

“I feel terrible about the political situation. There’s a new paradigm of political action where essentially it doesn’t matter what you do as long as you don’t take responsibility for it. People say that’s a terrible immoral thing that you did, then you say, ‘Well, I didn’t do that. And if I did, it doesn’t matter, let’s talk about something else.’”

David Brewis

David and Peter Brewis: family business.

Lunar Rovers

For their eighth album *Flat White Moon*, multi-instrumentalist Sunderland siblings **Field Music** have found much needed comfort, joy and inspiration in the sounds they grew up with, and their favourite ever records. They've also been spreading the love with community projects all over their city – sorry, "town".

Words: Jo Kendall **Images:** Christopher Owens

"I'm gonna go home and listen to *Broadsword And The Beast*. That was one of the big albums in our house when we were little," laughs David Brewis, sat in the Field Music studio as *Prog* wraps up a Zoom session with him and his brother Peter, who's at home in his kitchen. In an enjoyable 90-minute chat, today has mostly been an amble down memory lane, reminiscing about favourite music and the inspiration for their latest, and eighth, album, *Flat White Moon*.

It's been just over a year since their last record, *Making A New World*, was released. A project commissioned by the Imperial War Museum, it was a weighty 19-track concept album that explored life in the 100 years after the First World War – culturally, technologically, politically. *Making A New World* and its fabulous 2018 predecessor *Open Here* were "really difficult to play live," says David. Field Music had found themselves in complex musical foxholes, reliant on click tracks, locked to continuous visuals and grappling some heavy themes. With *Flat White Moon* they've loosened the stays a little; the intention being for the sound to "have some swing," says Peter, and "to capture me and Dave and the other members of the band playing together, a lot."

If you already know Field Music – alongside David and Peter on vocals, guitars and drums, there's Andrew Lowther (bass), Kevin Dosdale (guitar) and Liz Corney (keys) – you'd be familiar with their consummate musicianship and eclectic take on indie art rock. You'll hear Prince, 10cc, Steely Dan and Status Quo often all in one song. *Flat White Moon* was inspired by the brothers' all-time favourite records, and when Peter mentions that they said, "We're gonna be free!" when making the LP, he actually meant: "We're gonna be Free!"

"We were just thinking about all the rock stuff we liked – Free, Cream, Fleetwood Mac – and soul music, funk," Peter says. "But the one big inspiration was *Odelay* by Beck. You forget how progressive that is as a pop and hip hop record. I realised that I'd been listening to it for years and had never figured out how it was put together. It was the producers, the Dust Brothers, bringing their record collections into it. It got me thinking: 'How do you do that?' and 'How would you use the sound of classic British drummers?' I wanted to create a collage."

Field Music: an underground band?

If readers are thinking, "Well, that doesn't sound very prog," then a) go and listen to the ingenuity of *Odelay* and b) never forget the inventiveness of Field Music. Reckon they'll play something straight? No chance. Example: "We'll say, 'What if we make a song that's like *Under Pressure*, but it's the opposite of *Under Pressure*?'" That's how they make a pop tune.

Flat White Moon was mostly written before the pandemic, and *does* have a loose theme. "We want to make people feel good about things we feel terrible about," they said in their press statement. So what do they mean?

"Shall we do the silly things first?" Peter asks of his brother. "You can start, that's your forte… [chuckles]"

"I feel terrible about the political situation," says David. "This is what [recent single] *No Pressure* is about. There's a new paradigm of political action where essentially it doesn't matter what you do as long as you don't take responsibility for it. People say that's a terrible immoral thing that you did, then you say, 'Well, I didn't do that. And if I did, it doesn't matter, let's talk about something else.'"

"We're both feeling bad about the pandemic and being stuck in the house and being denied the chance to see people," David continues. "I *really* want to sit and have a coffee with me dad. He's not much of a hugger but I'm going to hug him when I can, and he's gonna be really embarrassed."

Prog wonders what *Flat White Moon*'s silly things will be; so far it's quite serious.

"Those *were* the silly things," says David. "Our mam passed away just before *Open Here* came out, she'd been ill for a long time, it was third primary cancer." Looking at Peter, he's attentive but understandably quiet as David speaks. "When it happened it took me a long time to figure out how to think about it, and I'm still figuring it out, because when it happened, we had things to do," David nods. "*Making A New World* came along and that meant we weren't directly trying to deal with the mess of thoughts about our mam not being there. This record is a bit more about the mess of thoughts about our mam not being there."

In their effort to process their emotions, the siblings have created another gorgeous slice of innovative and intelligent progressive pop with the "off-the-cuff", demo style that they were seeking. Lead-off track *Orion From The Street* takes a spacey, twinkly turn around on *Tomorrow Never Knows*, *Not When You're In Love* has touches of Rotary Connection's *I Am The Black Gold Of The Sun* mixed with Joni Mitchell, and *Out Of The Frame* and *In*

This City nudge at XTC territory. There's a bit of Spirit there, Neu! and Os Mutantes in *The Curtained Room* and a metric ton of Beatles, George Harrison and Led Zeppelin all the way through (and some Kool And The Gang, apparently). But for all the spontaneity, it sounds as tidy as ever, and will appeal to fans of their fêted 2012 album, *Plumb*. "There's more mistakes in Field Music records than anyone realises," smiles David, as his brother nods, knowingly.

If readers have ever wondered how to compose their own Field Music song, the duo just gave all the secrets away in a YouTube tutorial video. Kinda. Realising a full-band performance video would be out of the question for a while, *No Pressure* is a tongue-in-cheek version of t'internet how-tos with David hosting from his 'guitar shop' (the studio, with all the amps and a curtain behind him), cut with parts played by Tim, Kevin and Liz. Oh, and Peter, who truly looks the part in cargo shorts, backwards baseball cap and sleeveless *The Thing* tee. "The video to *Orion From The Street* was a bit sad and introspective," says Peter. "We thought, 'Let's do something sillier', and the next thing I knew Dave was Sharpie-ing a John Bonham tattoo on my arm."

"Peter came up with the original idea, though, and I misunderstood it," says David.

Peter: "Isn't that always the case?"

"Yep, that's how it goes," says David. "I half-listened to what you said and what I half-listened to became this great idea. That video really represents the Field Music sense of humour in the van."

With touring off the agenda for now, the Brewis brothers have been far from idle. If you follow them on Twitter you'll have noticed their involvement in Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens' event, Paint The Town In Sound. "We were approached to curate an exhibition," says David. "We decided to do something on the links between music and art and how that informs your sense of identity, your sense of place."

"The video to *Orion From The Street* was a bit sad and introspective. We thought, 'Let's do something sillier', and the next thing I knew Dave was Sharpie-ing a John Bonham tattoo on my arm."

Peter Brewis

Researching record sleeves, bands and local artists – "we scoured Discogs for slightly knackered copies of a Shadows album or *Pipedream* by Alan Hull" – the duo had a labour-intensive few months up to the end of 2020, also recording a short series of accompanying podcasts. The exhibition is open to the public until July 6.

And that's not all; David and Peter have been putting time aside to work with Northumbrian poet Paul Summers on a project called Poems Of Town, making music with young people in isolated communities, helping to develop their music and lyrics. Was this related to Paint The Town?

"Only in that we keep using the word 'town' in things that we do – and that's a bit of an in-joke as Sunderland is proud of being a city," laughs David.

It seems like the city will be keeping them busy for a bit.

"We've got all sorts on," says Peter. "We just keep saying yes."

Flat White Moon is out now via Memphis Industries. See www.field-music.co.uk for more.

Hang on... weren't they the other way round a second ago?!

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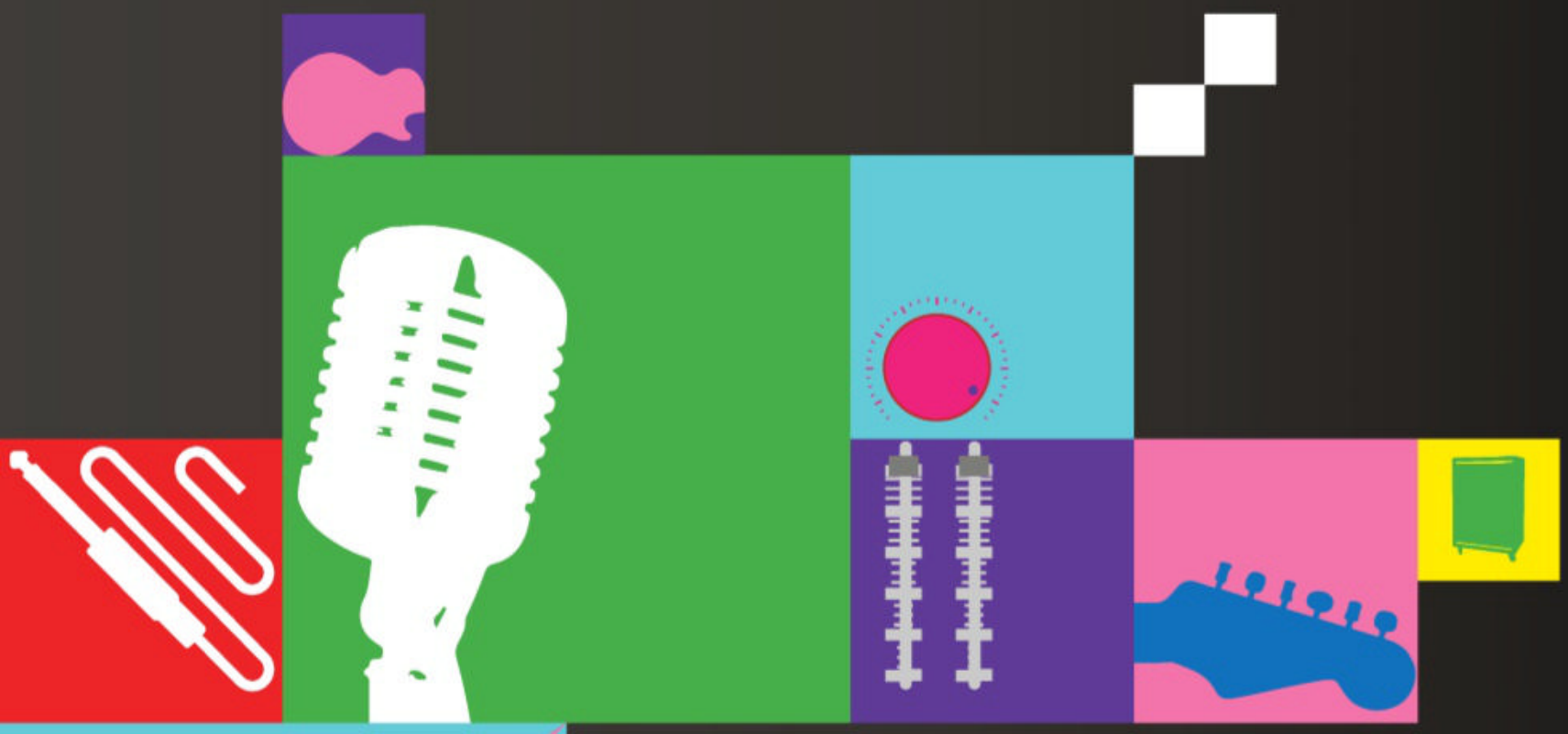

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Against all odds **Kayak** have returned with their 18th studio album, *Out Of This World*. *Prog* catches up with co-founder Ton Scherpenzeel to find out more and take a glance over the Dutch band's career so far.

Words: Johnny Sharp **Image:** Rudi Huisman, Jan Banning and Ronja Gildenlöw

DON'T STOP

There haven't been too many reasons to be cheerful for musicians in the 2020s so far. But Ton Scherpenzeel, founder member of Dutch prog mainstays Kayak, freely admits, "The last year, 18 months, have been very good for me. I've learned a lot."

That's not the result of enforced isolation, though. Rather it's an upbeat attitude that's been reinforced through the relentlessly turbulent history of a band that have released their 18th studio album and are approaching 50 years since their original formation in 1972.

The most recent tribulation to confront them could have spelled the end not just of Kayak but of their driving force. Keyboardist and songwriter Scherpenzeel suffered a heart attack in 2019, which forced him to re-evaluate his lifestyle as well as his attitude to his art.

"It made me realise how precious life is," he tells *Prog*. The lean, fair-haired 68-year-old looks sprightly enough on the other end of a Zoom call. "I mean, I'm not going to make another 20 albums. So now I'm approaching every album as if it's the last. I'm as dedicated to this one as I was with the first one.

"Over the last 18 months, I've learned not to trust my body anymore. So I'm working more on the body, which I never did. I'm not an excessive drinker or smoker, but this can happen to anybody. So I'm walking every day for an hour, which for me is exceptional. You know, I like playing piano and normally that's enough movement. But my attitude has changed because I still want to go on for a little while yet..."

The hoary old wisdom that whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger may be a cliché, but for Scherpenzeel it's proving true, spiritually and also creatively, judging by the quality of the band's new album *Out Of This World*, a 15-song, 70-minute set that blends vintage symphonic prog with stridently tuneful AOR.

It's arguably the best they've made since Scherpenzeel reformed the band at the turn of the millennium after their initial 1982 split. And although the current line-up sees no fewer than four members take the lead mic at certain points, Kayak have long since moved

beyond being a band of one voice. This, after all, is a group whose lead singer has regularly switched, amid personnel changes resulting in no fewer than 19 former members being listed on their Wikipedia page. Several of those have left, returned, then left again. Or died.

Kayak forged a role at the forefront of the Dutch prog scene in the early 70s after teenage friends Scherpenzeel and drummer Pim Koopman put a band together with Max Werner on vocals, Johan Slager on guitar and Cees van Leeuwen on bass.

After early albums skilfully blending Yes and Genesis influences to captivate Dutch audiences, Koopman left in 1976 suffering from respiratory problems. His replacement, Charles Schouten, only lasted two years.

By 1978, their sound had evolved into a noticeably more radio-friendly AOR style, and Max Werner, always a reluctant singer and troubled by stage fright despite his striking tenor voice, pulled a rare move known in the trade as "a reverse Phil Collins" by switching from lead vocals back to the drum kit that was his first love (Werner would return to the mic briefly as part of the 1999 reunion before having to leave after the first tour due to health problems).

That left centre-stage open for Kayak fan Edward Reekers to join the band, and for casual observers he's probably the most recognisable face by virtue of arriving just in time to front Kayak's biggest hit, the 1979 power ballad *Ruthless Queen*.

The group split in 1982, and Camel fans may remember Scherpenzeel's subsequent tenure alongside Andrew Latimer and co in that band, but after a one-off live show for a Dutch TV show in 1999 Kayak decided to reform, with former Vandenberg man Bert Heerink replacing the ailing Werner up front a few months later, only for Reekers to rejoin again on vocals in 2005.

Still with us? Well, let's not disregard Cindy Oudshoorn, who injected a new dimension into the Kayak sound as an additional lead singer from 2003.

This second coming of Kayak saw them increasingly explore their progressive roots with Scherpenzeel's classically influenced keyboards and fascination for myths and legends returning to the fore on albums

"I'M APPROACHING EVERY ALBUM AS IF IT'S THE LAST. I'M AS DEDICATED TO THIS ONE AS I WAS WITH THE FIRST ONE."

Keeping the change: Kayak as they are now.

BELIEVING

such as 2003's *Merlin — Bard Of The Unseen* (a more successful, proggier reworking of 1981's *Merlin* album with new tracks added), and the multivoice rock opera *Nostradamus: The Fate Of Man* in 2005.

Readers should expect the unexpected in this band, though: in 2009, midway through a tour, co-founder and key songwriter Pim Koopman died suddenly of a heart attack. Of all the blows to strike Kayak, this was perhaps the most grievous.

"After Pim died, it was really up to me whether the band would continue or not," says Scherpenzeel, "because we started the band together, and we restarted the band together. And in the end what kept me going — still keeps me going — was the endless drive to create. It's not like I want a band because it's so cosy and nice playing with people. It's a drive to create something that wasn't there before."

He ended up recruiting a whole new line-up in 2017, who would make the following year's *Seventeen* album. It reached No.6 in the Dutch album charts, the highest placing they'd achieved since 1980.

The only way was surely up… then came not only the aforementioned heart attack but a global pandemic, sweeping touring plans off the table and giving him further pause for reflection. He said recently, "it made me realise, once more, how fragile we all are. How connected everything and everyone is, with actions and consequences that touch us all."

By the time Covid struck, though, he'd already bounced back from his near-death experience and written much of the new album, including the title track of *Out Of This World*, a storming prog tour-de-force geared around a brilliantly baroque quasi-classical synth motif. Its lyrics would soon take on

L-R: Bart Schwertmann, Marcel Singor, Hans Eijkenaar, Ton Scherpenzeel, Kristoffer Gildenlöw.

PRESS/DERYA VERRA

"I'M LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH FANTASTIC PLAYERS AND SINGERS AROUND ME."

It's never easy, though, and after 2014's ambitious, crowdfunded rock opera *Cleopatra — The Crown Of Isis* suggested the post-Koopman Kayak still had plenty of creative potential, Scherpenzeel was stunned to learn that both the band's singers, Edward Reekers and Cindy Oudshoorn, wanted out.

"Yeah, we had troubles in the band," he says. "It took me two years to get myself together and convince myself we should continue. I took time off. If you want to carry on, you will carry on naturally."

Sure enough, the unstinting creative drive won through. "I started writing again. I thought, you know, I'm not gonna let two singers leaving decide whether I should call it a day or not."

extra layers of resonance as much of the planet locked itself down.

'Why don't we get out of this world and fly to a place we could live in?' Kayak's (relatively) new frontman Bart Schwertmann sings. It speaks of a wanderlust and the search of relief from a screwed-up planet.

"It's a theme that's been in the back of my mind for a long time," Scherpenzeel says. "In fact it actually quotes a song of ours from 1975, *Chance For A Lifetime*, about a similar idea. *'Remember Noah wrought his ship a long, long time ago?'* It's about a man who takes off in a spaceship with a selected few. They were sort of tongue-in-cheek lyrics, but it's the same idea with this new song, the desire to escape the world's problems, and building a new world. Then of course, Corona hits and it seems to fit even better to the current times…"

Elsewhere on the new album the styles diversify considerably: the short, sharp *Waiting*, on which Scherpenzeel handles lead vocals, is funk-inflected soft rock that has a distinctly 80s feel, *Cary* is irresistible accordion-led folk-pop and *Kaja* is a transcendent instrumental passage that's a sublime showcase for the emotive melodic strokes of new guitarist Marcel Singor. Meanwhile, the rich banks of harmonies characterising *Mystery* recall Asia or Yes at their most accessible.

On the proggier side of things, the irresistibly bombastic *Under A Scar* feels like an emotional high point of a rock opera yet to be written, slow-burning nine-minute fable *A Writer's Tale* is imbued with bewitching pomp rock melodrama, and *Critical Mass* adopts an breathless time signature to hopscotch around another beguiling Scherpenzeel piano riff and gnarly, angular volleys of guitar.

Ton Scherpenzeel's "learned a lot" over the last 18 months.

PRESS/JO DE BOECK

Regardless of style, though, what strikes the listener right away is the immediacy of the songs — with hooks, riffs and instrumental flourishes demanding attention at the first time of asking.

"It's natural to me," says Scherpenzeel. "I'm not thinking, 'Okay, I have to grab the listener quickly.' I'm always trying to make every song stand out, so you need hooks, you need lines you remember, you need strong melodies. But those come out naturally in the way I write."

Another stand-out upbeat track is *Traitor's Gate*, a gutsy rocker geared around a stabbing central riff and a theme of romantic treachery. Given that it's preceded by a bittersweet ballad, *The Way She Said Goodbye*, are we to deduce that Scherpenzeel has had to deal with heartbreak as well as a heart condition?

"Well, thankfully I've been married 45 years this year, so it's not really personal," he smiles. "With *Traitor's Gate*, it all stemmed from coming up with that title. We were in London touring two years ago, and we went to the Tower of London, where I noticed the Traitor's Gate sign. The same with *The Way She Said Goodbye*. I had the title and then I put myself into the role of the person in the song."

Traitor's Gate was co-written and sung by top session drummer Hans Eijkenaar (who departed with the Reekers/Oudshoorn-led line-up and later rejoined), and along with Schwertmann, Singor and Swedish former Pain Of Salvation bassist Kristoffer Gildenlöw, Scherpenzeel now feels galvanised by his band.

"I'm lucky to have such fantastic players and singers around me," he says. "I'm so fortunate to know they are willing to work weeks and months on this album and do their thing, give their input, and I'm really lucky. That also kept me going. It's one thing writing songs, but then you have to find the right people who want to play it."

Perhaps the most poignant song on the record is the piano lament *One By One,* which ponders the passing of so many musical heroes in recent years, and how "for some vague and selfish reason we expected them to last."

"It was inspired by losing David Bowie, hence the mention of *'heroes'*, then every year it gets more as everybody's ageing, which is the basic theme of the song. Later in the song I wanted to make the point that it's gonna happen to us all, your time is gonna come, it doesn't matter if you're famous or not. We can't expect our heroes to be any different. Ironically, I wrote it before my heart attack!"

Assuming Scherpenzeel's conservative estimate is right, and he's not likely to make another 20 albums before he joins the great rock'n'roll hall of fame in the sky, we can only hope he sticks around long enough to make a few more records as good as *Out Of This World*. Who knows, he might have the same band alongside him too. But maybe that's asking a little too much.

Out Of This World is out now via InsideOut. See www.kayakonline.info for more information.

"Unique and complicated": Crack The Sky have finally found their tribe.

"Anything that could go wrong did. There were no records in the shops. We couldn't get airplay or promotion. So, basically we were hung out to dry."

The Best US Prog Band You've Never Heard [© Rolling Stone]

They've been around for five decades but *Prog* readers might be forgiven for not knowing about **Crack The Sky**. Now they're back with a new album called *Tribes*, singer John Palumbo is ready to be vocal about the "complicated" band that should be on your radar.

Words: Malcolm Dome **Images:** Rei Perri

If circumstances had been kinder, Crack The Sky would now be regarded as one of *the* most important American progressive bands. Right up there with Starcastle, Styx and Kansas. Sure, there are countless others who can claim that, instead of caressing their careers, fate brutally slapped them into oblivion. But consider this. When the West Virginia band released their self-titled debut album in 1975 it was hailed by *Rolling Stone* as "one of the year's most impressive debuts". But despite critical praise from many quarters, the LP was a commercial disappointment.

This writer bought it on import because the owner of the local record store said, "You're a Styx fan. You'll love this." He was right. And we've waited for 46 years to ask vocalist John Palumbo the obvious question: what went wrong?

"Our label, Lifesong, were new at the time, so anything that could go wrong did. There were no records in the shops. We couldn't get airplay or promotion. So, basically we were hung out to dry."

Crack The Sky released a second album, *Animal Notes*, in 1976, but this fared little better and Palumbo left before third album *Safety In Numbers* came out in 1978.

"I had this idea for doing a rock opera based around the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Heaven knows what I was thinking!" he laughs. "But the record company were after a hit single and I hadn't written what they believed could be one. So they rejected my idea for this concept album. The rest of the band also wanted to go in a different musical direction. So I quit. They ended up using three of my songs on the first side of *Safety In Numbers*, but I had no involvement in the recording process."

New album, *Tribes*.

Soon after the album came out, the band split up. Occasional brief reunions happened from 1980, but since 1996 they've been consistently recording and touring, with all the original members bar guitarist Jim Griffiths once more part of the line-up, although these days bassist Joe Macre only contributes as a guest. *Tribes*, their latest studio album, showcases a band still capable of making everyone take notice.

Safety in numbers...

“Crack The Sky has had the same musical influences since we began in the 70s. That’s The Beatles, Yes, Genesis and King Crimson. Nothing has changed in that respect.”

“Crack The Sky has had the same musical influences since we began in the 70s. That’s The Beatles, Yes, Genesis and King Crimson. Nothing has changed in that respect. I will occasionally hear something new on the radio that grabs my attention, [but] this never makes any difference to what we do.”

Palumbo does feel an affinity to at least one band he toured with in the 70s.

“We went out on the road with anyone and everyone. One of these bands was Rush, and we got along really superbly with them. We were their support act and they treated us amazingly well. There was definitely common ground in the music both bands loved, and we also picked up on their work ethic, which was phenomenal. The guys’ level of commitment made a huge impression.”

The 1975 debut, *Crack The Sky*.

However, Palumbo sadly found the Rush attitude toward Crack The Sky was a rarity.

“Most of the others we played with treated us terribly. I’m not prepared to mention any names, even though it was a long time ago. But I think more than a few were intimidated by us, because we were a great live band and they didn’t like that at all! And we’re talking about some major names here.”

Although not a concept album, the recently released *Tribes* does deal with current global conditions. And the frontman isn’t too optimistic about the immediate future.

“How can you not write about what you see all around you? The extremism, the negativity and the divisiveness. I’m not naturally a pessimist, but I can’t see a way out of the situation we find ourselves in for some time to come. I’m not just talking about the pandemic, but also social and political issues. As a writer, it fascinates me. But as a human being it’s depressing.”

Work on the album started two years ago, when Palumbo — very much the main songwriter — began to assemble the material.

“All the members of Crack The Sky are scattered around the USA — for instance, I now live in Philadelphia — so, it’s hard for us to get together. But these days that’s no barrier. Once the tracks were written, I recorded them in my home studio to a high quality. I then sent the files to Rick Witkowsi, who added his guitar parts. Bobby Hird, the other guitarist in the band, then went to Rick’s home studio to do his bit. And the recordings were then dispatched to the others to add their contributions. That was the most sensible way to assemble the tracks. We had everything finished a year ago. It’s just taken this long for Carry On Music, who are our current label, to release the album.”

But given the absence of any live shows at the moment, wouldn’t it have been prudent to delay the release until touring is possible?

“No, because Carry On had given us a deadline to meet for delivering the tapes, as they had slotted *Tribes* into the release schedule, so, we had no choice. Of course, we’re frustrated, because it’s not a good situation to be in when you try to promote a new album without the opportunity to play live. But every band is facing the same craziness.”

***Animal Notes* (1976).**

Palumbo hasn’t been idle as he’s waited for *Tribes* to come out.

“I’m constantly writing. It’s what I do, and being unable to go anywhere has meant that not only have I got material ready for the next Crack The Sky album, but also have a new solo record in the can.”

Crack The Sky do have a couple of outdoor shows lined up in the US for June, and they hope 2022 will see them able to make their long-overdue live debut in the UK and Europe.

“I can’t wait to play for crowds in Britain, because that’s where our roots lie. What we’ll probably do is play no more than three songs from the new album. I know that as a fan I never want to go and see an artist I love and then endure them playing loads of stuff I don’t know. I want to hear the popular songs. That’s our philosophy. First and foremost we’re entertainers, and not on stage to educate people about our new album!”

Palumbo also believes Crack The Sky have little in common with modern prog bands.

“We’ve done a few festivals in the States where the majority of those on the bill are what would be described as young progressive artists. They’re all fine bands and have talented musicians. But their stuff is multi-layered with a lot of intricacy, with lyrics that seem to border on the medieval. We’re different to these bands, and I’ve often stood at the side of the stage, wondering what the reaction might be when we kick into gear. Thankfully, the fans have always accepted us.

“Are we a genuinely progressive band? If you define this in relation to Yes, Genesis or King Crimson, then we don’t fit that category. We have them as influences, but what we have done is follow our own path. The way I’d describe Crack The Sky is that we are essentially a rock’n’roll band who have a unique and complicated dynamic.”

Tribes is out now and John Palumbo’s new solo album Hollywood Blvd is out on May 21 — both via Carry On Music. See www.crackthesky.com for more information.

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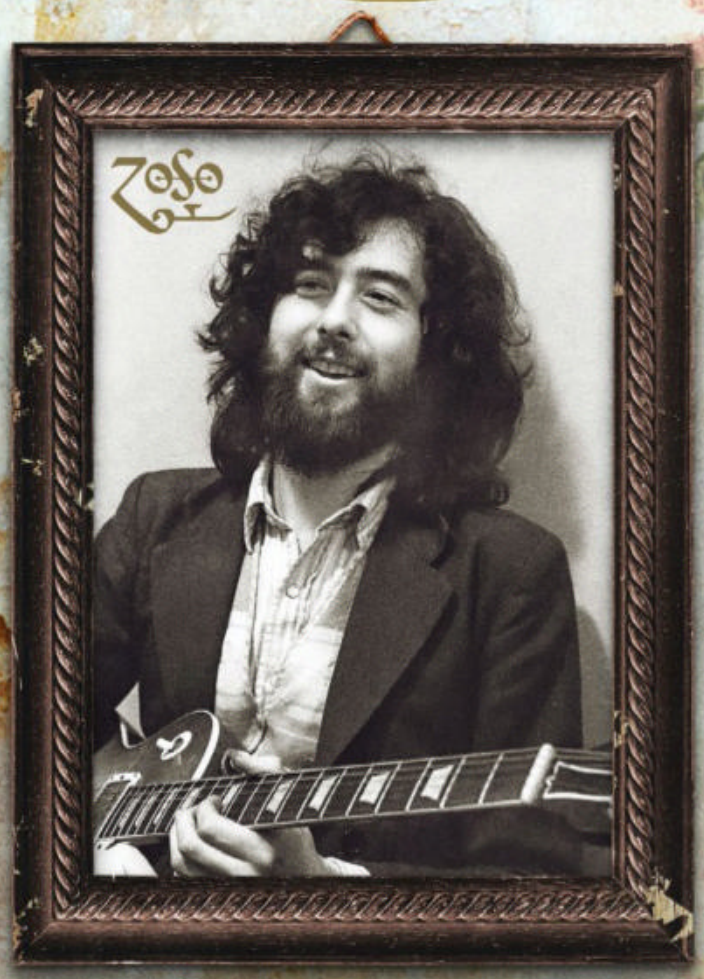

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Inner Visions

In 2010, **Tame Impala** released an album that would change the course of modern psychedelic prog. *InnerSpeaker* took Kevin Parker on a journey from western Australia's underground clubs to international arenas and led to him becoming a sought-after music producer. *Prog* takes the reluctant rock star on a trip down memory lane to celebrate the LP's 10th anniversary reissue.

Words: Dave Everley

Even before he became famous, Tame Impala's Kevin Parker had no time for rock'n'roll showboating. Whipping audiences up into a frenzy? That was someone else's job.

"The bands that rose to the top were always the crowd-pleasers," says Parker of the scene in his hometown of Perth when he was starting out in the mid-00s. "I always thought that was so lame. For us, the more zonked out the crowd were, the more they were into it."

Shaky phone camera footage on YouTube backs this up. A short clip filmed at a small Australian festival in September 2008 sees the then-three piece playing on some backwater stage to a sparse crowd, most of whom are sprawled in the sun. Not that Parker cares — he's got his head down, noodling away. The audience could be doing naked cartwheels for all the attention he's paying them.

That stubborn refusal to please other people has never left Parker. When he released the first Tame Impala album, 2010's *InnerSpeaker*, what psych rock scene there was existed largely underground — which is, by rights, where this cultish Australian band whose warm-bath psychedelic pop wreathed in spliff smoke should have remained. Yet the album launched the man who made it on a journey that has seen him become a bona fide pop star and the collaborator of choice for everyone from Kanye West to Lady Gaga.

A new deluxe reissue of *InnerSpeaker* is a reminder of just how far Parker has travelled,

***InnerSpeaker* – the 10th anniversary edition is out now.**

but how little distance he's really come. The rippling, disco funk of Tame Impala's 2020 album *The Slow Rush* may sound a world away from *InnerSpeaker*, but both draw on the same spirit of adventurousness and refusal to bow to exterior influences. Kevin Parker's peers have changed, but Parker himself hasn't.

When he conceived Tame Impala as a one-man project in 2007, those peers were his fellow members of Perth's psych scene — though 'scene' is stretching it. "There were maybe 10 people, and six of us lived together," he says with a laugh, speaking via Zoom from Australia's west coast.

For a music obsessive like Parker, living in a shared house with other music obsessives was the perfect setup. They would listen to psychedelia, prog and "weird cosmic electronic music", then try to come up with their own versions of it all.

"The more ambitious the chords were, the weirder the structure, the more mind-blowing it was to us," says Parker. "Like, "There's *this* part, then it goes into *this* part, then there's a drum break, then there's this 7/8 section? Wow…' It was prog in the classic sense."

Theirs was a self-contained universe, one where everyone and everything merged into a big, amorphous musical collective. A *Rock Family Trees*-style illustration of the Perth scene would look more like a small tangled bush, with branches knotting together and looping back in on themselves. "We had about seven bands and side-projects and stuff going on," says Parker, "and we were all writing songs for all these different things."

Some of the configurations were identifiable as bands, but from the start Parker envisioned Tame Impala as his thing and his alone. Creative autonomy gave him the freedom to experiment with sounds, styles and structures without the hassle of compromise. Some of the music he was writing was progressive, some of it was more pop, but it was all heading in broadly the same direction. "It was more than just the kind of stoner rock we were listening to at the time," he says.

For a while, Parker's ideas outstripped his recording abilities. He had a digital 8-track, with guitar, pedals and microphone plugged straight into it. Whenever he hit on something,

PRESS/TAME IMPALA

“Knowing now just how little of a clue I had with a lot of what I was doing makes me realise that maybe I have come a long way after all.”

It was meant to be! Tame Impala’s Kevin Parker.

TITIA HAHNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

he would just play and record — a process that was as scrappy as it sounds.

"I had to basically write as much of the song as I could and play it out over a metronome, then build it up with different guitars. It was good because it made me think ahead."

Starting songs was never a problem, he says, but finishing them was. What he had on his side was a disregard for the rules and conventions of traditional songwriting, something that sprang from the music he loved. "With a pop song, you've got all kinds of constraints, which is kind of the challenge of it," he says. "But with the kind of music I listened to, the palette was wide open."

He was ambitious, too, even if he wasn't sure exactly where he wanted that ambition to take him. "I couldn't pinpoint what I wanted, but I wanted it to be a career," he says. Not that Parker was actively chasing success. Early gigs — featuring drummer Jay Watson and bassist Dom Simper — were played purely on Tame Impala's terms, irrespective of whether crowds were zonked out or not. "We'd do, like, four songs in 45 minutes," says Parker.

A record deal with hip Australian major label subsidiary Modular in 2008 did little to curb their musical excesses. "After we got signed, we played a showcase for the label, and we played three songs in 30 minutes," says Parker. "They said, 'That's not gonna fly, guys.' That made us dig our heels in further."

This obstinacy was justified by the buzz that sprang up around Tame Impala's self-titled second EP — their first for Modular — released in October 2008 and featuring a trio of tracks that Parker had recorded at different points over the past couple of years. It didn't take long for word of these psych rock flag-bearers to spread overseas. In March 2009, Tame Impala arrived in the UK to play a short tour. Their first gig was at Manchester's Deaf Institute, supporting long-forgotten indie rockers The Invisible. The following night they headlined their own show at north London pub The Lexington, where comedian and psych aficionado Noel Fielding turned up to watch them.

"We'd spent the last 18 months stoned on the couch at home watching *The Mighty Boosh*," says Parker. "And then he came to our show. That was truly out of this world. I remember getting back to our hotel, just sitting on the balcony and smoking a cigarette in the middle of the night after everyone had gone to bed, trying to process it." The conclusion he drew? There was no going back.

Parker began work on Tame Impala's debut album a couple of months later. There was talk of it being a double album — partly a reaction to the nagging paranoia that his friends might view signing to a major label as selling out.

"It was just one of our stoned, mischievous ideas: 'Fuck it, let's do a double! Having a double album as a debut is definitely not selling out!' It seemed a lot more feasible in our heads than it would have ended up being on paper."

> "There are a lot more prog moments on *The Slow Rush* than on *Lonerism* and certainly on *Currents*."

Chilling out with Jay Watson (left) and Dom Simper (centre).

PRESS/TAME IMPALA

Kevin Parker backstage at the Lowlands Festival in the Netherlands on August 20, 2010.

InnerSpeaker ended up being a single album, although shrinkage wasn't the only thing that changed in the run-up. Parker had initially planned to record as a three-piece, with Simper and Watson. "But it didn't seem right." he says. "We accepted that it should be what it had been up to that point, which was a solo recording. We were at peace with it by then."

Parker recorded the album in the summer of 2009 at Wave House, a rented wooden property on the shores of the Indian Ocean. The roof leaked when it rained and the whole place rattled when the wind blew, but to Parker it was a palace. "One of the beautiful things about making music in that house was that anything you did sounded majestic because of the surroundings."

The finished album was as expansive as the views from Wave House's floor-to-ceiling oceanfront windows, yet as insular as a mushroom trip. *InnerSpeaker* drew on Parker's love of psych and prog, but married it to the big pop melodies he'd loved ever since he heard his dad's Beatles, Beach Boys and Supertramp albums as a kid. His own stamp came with the shape-shifting percussive barrage that propelled every track. "I'm obsessed with drum sounds," he says. "I wanted to make almost electronic-sounding beats, except on real drums."

If there's one song that unlocked what was going on in his head at that point, it's *Solitude Is Bliss*. '*There's a party in my head and no one is invited*,' sings Parker over what's effectively an Antipodean take on krautrock. "That was one of the lyrics that my friends thought was the cheesiest," he says. "We'd scoff at each other's lyrics sometimes, and that was very much one of the ones everyone scoffed at."

Solitude Is Bliss was the first single from *InnerSpeaker*, released in April 2010. The album followed six weeks later. Parker was confident with what he had. "I wasn't arrogant, but I was aware that I had a kind of winning combination of things, in terms of the styles I landed on."

InnerSpeaker charted at No.4 in Australia, but not everyone in the media was impressed. "I remember a lot of bad reviews," he says. "One review said, 'Possibly Australia's most uninspired band.' We were used to getting reviews that said we were lost up our own arseholes, so that shit didn't affect us at all."

The reaction overseas was better. Thanks to high-profile celebrity fans such as Fielding and Oasis guitarist Noel Gallagher, Tame Impala's music began to bleed beyond the boundaries of the psych scene. They toured the US and appeared ever higher on European festival bills. By the time they returned to the UK in 2011, they were headlining London's Roundhouse. Yet the growing attention was having an adverse effect on the man at the centre of it all.

"I kind of flipped out after *InnerSpeaker* came out," he says. "It felt like the whole thing was kind of taken out of my hands, and that made me really frustrated. I was afraid for the spirit of it all."

He told the people around him that he was done with the circus. "I basically said, 'I'm gonna make another album but I'm not gonna tour, fuck you guys.' It took me a while to go back home and chill out."

By the time he returned with 2012's *Lonerism*, this weird project he'd cooked up in a bedroom in Perth had inadvertently helped instigate a full-blown psych revival. For Parker, the 'p' word had become unwanted baggage. "'Psych' was something I cringed at, because it was thrown around so much with my music," he says. "Any time anyone called my music psych rock, I wanted to prove I wasn't that."

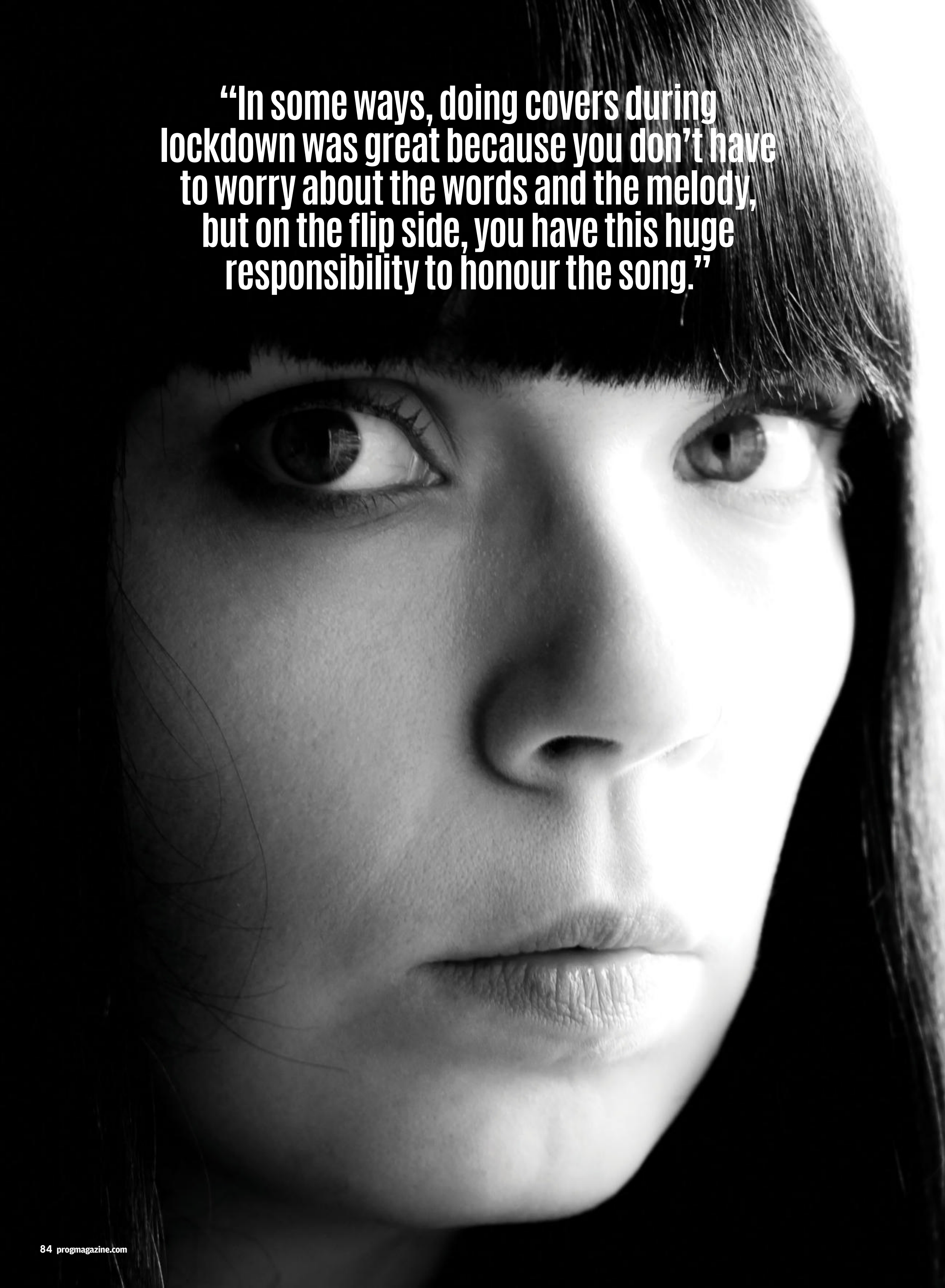
Things have changed. He's not just happier with the term these days, he says, but he feels more connected than ever to his roots. "*The Slow Rush* reminds me a lot more of that kind of free-flowing music that *Innerspeaker* has. A song like [*The Slow Rush* opener] *One More Year* isn't really pop — structurally it's a lot more open-ended. There are a lot more prog moments on *The Slow Rush* than on *Lonerism* and certainly on [2015's] *Currents*."

That's not to say he's planning on revisiting the sound of *InnerSpeaker*. "There are fans who think they want an *InnerSpeaker 2.0*, but they really don't. They wouldn't love it as much as they did the original, even if it was better."

InnerSpeaker isn't necessarily the definitive Tame Impala album because Parker has redefined himself on each of their four records. But it is the wellspring from which everything that followed came, no matter how smooth or polished things became. It's the sound of a musician doing things his own way, stubborn and single-minded from the start.

"The strength of the album is the fact that it was just one person putting it all together in a weird and wonderful way - just throwing all these things together, not really know how to execute it," says Parker. "Knowing now just how little of a clue I had with a lot of what I was doing makes me realise that maybe I have come a long way after all."

InnerSpeaker (10th Anniversary Edition) is out now via Fiction. See www.official.tameimpala.com for more information.



“In some ways, doing covers during lockdown was great because you don’t have to worry about the words and the melody, but on the flip side, you have this huge responsibility to honour the song.”

Fables Of Deconstruction

She made her debut on the UK's post-rock scene in early 2019 and sold out her first headline show at London's Southbank Centre less than a year later, but even 2020 couldn't slow down **AA Williams**. When the cellist-turned-singer-songwriter decided to add a new sheen to some old musical gems last year, she had no idea the result would help her not only find a new audience but also develop new skills. She takes *Prog* on a journey through *Songs From Isolation*.

Words: Hannah May Kilroy **Images:** Thomas Williams

During the first UK lockdown, AA Williams soothed us through our screens with a regular series of cover versions from Nick Cave to Radiohead. Filmed in Williams' London home and stripped back to just piano, guitar and her haunting voice, the songs felt warmly familiar, yet unique — just what the world needed in lockdown.

"At the beginning, I just wanted to do some videos — there was no goal of it being an album," AA Williams says of the music that's now been released as a full album, *Songs From Isolation*. "A lot of people were doing livestreams, but I wasn't convinced at my technical ability, so I wanted to make something that wasn't live. I put a little note out on Instagram asking people what songs they'd like me to play, and we had hundreds of replies — the whole thing kind of snowballed."

Williams' musical success has similarly snowballed since she released her self-titled debut EP three years ago. Classically trained from a young age — "I think I learned piano before I could read!" she laughs — she already had a career as a professional cellist when one day she spotted a guitar in the street with the words 'take me' slipped under the strings. She decided on a whim to take it home and teach herself how to play. Before this, she'd never written her own songs.

"I hadn't considered that I could be creative in that way," Williams says. "I'd spent so much time playing other people's music as a classical player, that I'd never thought to do my own thing. It took me quite a while to be comfortable enough to tell anyone that I was even doing it."

It seems as though things were meant to be. Few artists make such an impact with only an EP to their name, but Williams did. Her string and piano-augmented post-rock that veers smoothly from minimalist to heavy captivated music fans across genres from indie to metal to classical, and they weren't disappointed when she dropped her highly anticipated debut full-length, *Forever Blue*, last summer. Williams' diverse fanbase is certainly indicative in the cover songs they requested, and on *Songs From Isolation*, a Deftones cover sits neatly alongside a reworking of a Moody Blues classic.

"My listeners have quite varied record collections," Williams agrees. "At first I wanted to tackle one that everyone would know, so the first was *Creep* by Radiohead. There aren't that many people who don't like Radiohead!

"In some ways, doing covers during lockdown was great because you don't have to worry about the words and the melody," she continues, "but on the flip side, you have this huge responsibility to honour the song, and not anger anyone for whom it's their favourite song of all time!"

After her fans chose the tunes, Williams would look at which ones were suitable to be deconstructed and put back together, using the limited setup she had at home in lockdown.

Familiar yet unique: *Songs From Isolation*.

"What I had was piano, guitar, and not much else!" she laughs. "There were plenty of ideas [of songs] from all spectrums, so I had to find a way to bring them all together into one kind of style. There were some songs suggested that had really heavy vocals, and I didn't want to force a melody onto something that didn't have one.

"Some I tried and couldn't make work," she admits. "I spent a long time trying to make Black Sabbath work. When a song is melody [and] riff, and there's not a huge amount in between, it isn't necessarily a bad thing but when you strip it back to just piano, it feels like not enough is happening, and you don't want to force new material onto a pre-existing song. David Bowie was another one I was defeated by — when you actually strip those songs down, they are very weird. It's like, 'What drugs were you on?' [Laughs] I was trying to do one video a week, and there's only so much time you can spend on the arrangement. So maybe one day I could have a banging version of *Space Oddity*!"

But when it did work, it was a joy, and Williams' classical training came in handy for deconstructing and rearranging these songs.

"I've never tried to write a song without classical knowledge, so I can't comment on how to do it without

that!" she laughs. "But I'm so grateful to have that training, and that knowledge. I think it certainly helps when I'm writing and doing more technical things. It helps you to look at your options a bit clearer.

"There's such a musical satisfaction of taking apart a song you love, and putting it back together," she adds. "It's like a puzzle. Nine Inch Nails' *Every Day Is Exactly The Same* was probably the most satisfying, because there are so many elements going on in that song. I also loved doing *Be Quiet And Drive (Far Away)* — I've loved Deftones since I was a kid, so it was a pleasure to revisit *Around The Fur*. It took a while to find a Deftones song that would work, because Chino [Moreno, vocalist] was shouting in most of them!

"I would try to make sure that all the original elements of the original songs were there," she continues. "They might be half speed, or at the wrong register, but they're all in there somewhere. So if it's a song you enjoy, you can pick it out!"

Being in lockdown, it wasn't only the music that faced logistical limitations; Williams was also unable to get any professional help with the filming. So, like a lot of people during the pandemic, she took up a new skill.

"We had limited equipment, we couldn't go to the studio, couldn't get anyone in to help," she says, explaining that she had no filming or editing experience before this. "My husband [Thomas, also the bassist in her band] very kindly filmed the videos for me. We tried it once with the handheld iPhone and it was so wobbly. So then we bought one of those gimbal things that stabilise your phone to make it more smooth. We would be doing really well filming, and something would happen, like he'd drop the camera, or his shoes would squeak on the floor and the mics would pick that up!" she says laughing. "So the first couple took a long time to put together because we were both learning."

Williams did all of the video editing herself and watching the smooth black and white clips, you'd never know they were edited by a beginner.

"Thank you!" she laughs, when *Prog* says this. "I did a lot of Googling, like: 'On Final Cut Pro, how do you do this?' Honestly, it took forever. You know what you want it to look like in your head, you want it to look professional, and more interesting than just a phone pointing at something! I didn't want people to go, 'This cover is great, but this song is horrific!' But you know, it was cool to have something to focus on, a creative project that was new as well."

With *Forever Blue* released less than a year ago, Williams isn't thinking about another new album just yet. But if all goes well, fans will be able to see her perform *Songs From Isolation* at a one-off show in London this September. And, if it does go ahead, we may get to hear an extended version of her Moody Blues cover.

"I loved doing that one," she says of *Nights In White Satin*. "The only thing about it was that I couldn't include the beautiful instrumental in the middle, because it wouldn't have fit on the vinyl. But if I ever perform it live, then I'll put it back in!"

Songs From Isolation is out now on Bella Union. See www.aawilliamsmusic.com.

No lazy Sunday afternoons for AA Williams!

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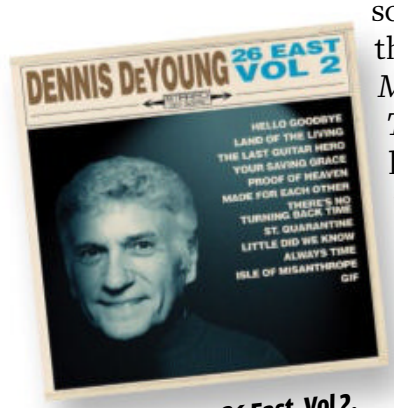
THE PROG INTERVIEW

DENNIS DE YOUNG

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Dennis DeYoung**. The Chicagoan singer began his career in the 60s aged just 15 in the band that would later be known as Styx. As lead vocalist, keyboardist and songwriter, he was responsible for hits including *Babe* and *The Best Of Times*, and released his first solo album in 1984. He's enjoyed a varied career, even appearing in the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and reunited with Styx in 1990 before leaving in '99. Now on the cusp of releasing his final studio album, DeYoung reflects on his extraordinary life so far.

Too Much Time On His Hands: Malcolm Dome



New solo album, 26 East, Vol 2.

After a half century of releasing albums, both with Styx and as a solo artist, Dennis DeYoung has announced that the upcoming *26 East, Vol 2* will be his final one.

The teenage DeYoung co-founded Styx with the Panozzo brothers Chuck (bass) and John (drums) in the 60s. Back then they were called The Tradewinds, but by 1970, with guitarist James 'JY' Young and John Curulewski (subsequently replaced by Tommy Shaw in 1975) onboard, the band had become Styx. As keyboardist, accordion player, vocalist and writer, DeYoung had a core role in the development of their sound, mixing progressive influences with AOR, creating what became known as pomp rock.

A rift over their 1983 album *Kilroy Was Here* led to the band taking a six-year break. During this period, DeYoung began his solo career, releasing the albums *Desert Moon* in '84, *Back To The World* two years later and *Boomchild* in '89. None achieved the level of success enjoyed by Styx, but the title track from that first album was a Top 10 single in the States – the only time any member of the band has had a hit on their own.

Styx reunited in 1990, but DeYoung left in controversial circumstances during '99. The band decided to move on without him when he had significant health issues. To this day, DeYoung remains angry about the way his one-time bandmates appeared to abandon him.

In the 21st century, he's pursued a varied career, not only recording albums, but also working on orchestral reinterpretations of Styx songs, acting and even writing a musical based on *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame*. He also accepted a role mentoring contestants on *Canadian Idol* in 2006.

Now, he looks back at his distinguished career and forward to what he plans to do next.

> "Hearing Yes play *No Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed* had a profound effect on all of us in Styx."

Styx, circa 1973. L_R: Chuck Panozzo, John Panozzo, John Curulewski, Dennis DeYoung, James Young.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Who made a big impression on you artistically in your youth?

The first one was my next-door neighbour in Chicago. He played the accordion. This was 1953, when I was six or seven years old, and hearing that had a big impact. In the early days of rock'n'roll loads of bands had accordion players. Then the guitar took over. But I never forgot the joy and sparkle in my mother's eyes whenever she heard the accordion. That's why I started to play it – to get her approval.

Then, the Panozzo brothers came into my life. They were also neighbours, and I heard them playing in their living room on hot summer days. So I invited them to my place in 1962, and they brought over their drums and guitar. The three of us jammed, leading to the

PHIL VELASQUEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS/SIPA USA/PA IMAGES

Piano Man: Dennis DeYoung at home in 2014.

formation of what became Styx.

I must also mention The Beatles. When I saw them on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, I knew what I wanted to do. Nobody created more jobs than they did. Every kid wanted to be in a band because of them.

Styx (1972). The album included Fanfare For The Common Man five years before ELP's version.

What made you want to play the keyboards?
I was embarrassed into it. The piano had taken over from the accordion, which was seen as outdated. So I had no option but to start playing one. I never had a formal lesson, just picked things up as I went along.

Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed had a profound effect on all of us in Styx. Oh, and Chuck played a Rickenbacker bass. Why? Because that was the model used by Chris Squire. This is how much Yes seeped into our consciousness.

Jon Anderson recently asked me to sing backing vocals on a new track he's written called *Everyone Wins*. Being asked by him was a nice compliment.

In your mind were Styx a prog band?
I would say we were *fake* prog.

having written a successful single mean to you?
That should have been on our first album, but John Ryan, who produced it, insisted on leaving this out, so instead it was on *Styx II* in 1973. *Lady* was the first song I ever wrote by myself. I was still learning the craft of composition. I had no clue if it was any good and when this first came out as a single in '73, it flopped. Then *Lady* was re-released, and became a hit almost by accident. But what it did was give me focus. I now knew what we should sound like. I took control as leader of the band, and insisted we had to expand on *Styx II*, which is how *Equinox* happened in 1975 — one of my favourite Styx albums.

were subconsciously trying to emulate the big prog bands!

You wrote and sang seven of Styx's eight Top 10 hits in the USA. Did this cause any jealousy with the rest of the band?
Absolutely. The green-eyed monster inevitably reared its ugly head. I never had any problems with JY. He was always true to what he believed in, which was essentially hard rock. I feel it was the combination of the two of us who created the classic Styx sound. But Tommy... well, he always insisted he was at heart a rocker. But that was never true. He wrote melodic songs on acoustic guitar. And he was

DeYoung recaptures Styx's prog glory on new single *Isle Of Misanthrope*.

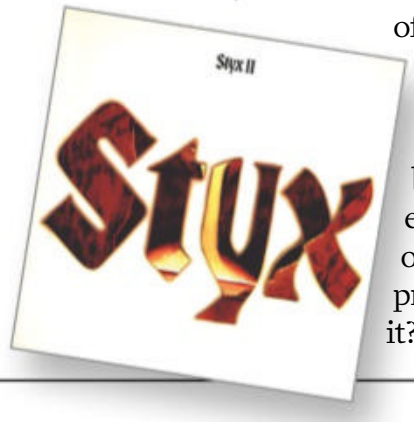
PRESS

> "I was puzzled how anyone could believe that the band who did *Babe* and *Boat On The River* could possibly be Satanic!"

Was Keith Emerson the biggest reason you wanted to use the synthesiser?
Absolutely. Keith came over to my house one day with a Minimoog and encouraged me to try it. I loved the sounds you could get. And hearing Keith playing synthesiser on ELP's *Lucky Man* was an epiphany. I could never match what Keith was able to do. But the synthesiser opened a new world of sonic possibilities.

The first four Styx albums, released by Chicago label Wooden Nickel, were very much in the Yes vein. Were they the main inspiration for the band in those days?
They were a big springboard for us. Hearing Yes play *No* Styx were essentially an American rock'n'roll band, but dabbled in different musical areas. We were very eclectic. When we started out, prog was really happening. So we were fully aware of Yes, Genesis and King Crimson. I loved the way these bands cleverly incorporated European classical music into their style. That has had an ongoing influence on me.

Lady was Styx's first big hit in 1975. You wrote it. What did



Styx II (1973), featuring the band's big hit, *Lady*.

Styx recorded *Fanfare For The Common Man* on their debut album, five years before ELP covered it. What made you do this?
I taught music appreciation in high schools around Chicago at the time and Aaron Copland was top of the list of American composers to tell the children about. I loved his music so I persuaded the others in the band that we should record one of his compositions. We actually did the whole of *Fanfare For The Common Man*, but then our producer edited it down without our knowledge. Was it pretentious of us to do it? Of course! Maybe we

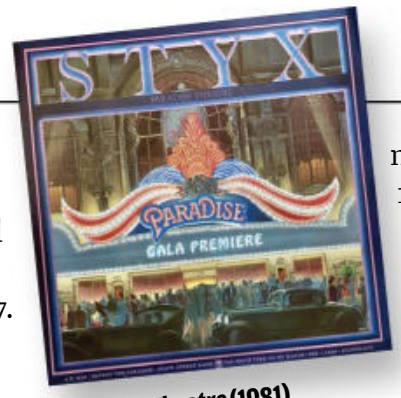
envious of the fact my songs were successful singles.

But songs were selected for our albums solely on the basis of what worked best. Not on who wrote them. I recall, though, that after *Babe*, which I wrote, was a hit single in 1979, our label A&M wanted to put out *First Time*, another of my songs, as the follow-up. If that had happened, then I believe it would have been another big hit, and possibly added a further million or two sales to the *Cornerstone* album. But Tommy blocked it, and so we lost out. Why did he block it? Because I had written this, and not him.

Why did you want to do the concept albums *Paradise*

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Reaching the cornerstone: DeYoung onstage at the International Amphitheatre, Chicago, on November 24, 1979.



Paradise Theatre (1981).

***Theatre* and *Kilroy Was Here*?**
Actually, this started with *The Grand Illusion* album in 1977. I had the idea that what major bands do onstage is create a larger-than-life illusion. And why do we do it? To sell you something. From there, I equated this to American consumerism, and the way marketing convinces you to buy things, even if you don't actually need them.

What I was saying to people was that they shouldn't be fooled by this grand illusion and the idea was developed even further for *Kilroy Was Here*. That hasn't really answered your question, though. Let me just say that doing conceptual albums allowed me to make certain points about the way society manipulates the consumer to service the giant corporations. The concept ideas did come from me. But it needed all five of us to make them work. Without the others, these couldn't have happened the way they did.

What was your reaction when the PMRC claimed there were backwards Satanic messages on *Snowblind*, from the album *Paradise Theatre*?
I was puzzled how anyone could believe that the band who did *Babe* and *Boat On The River* could possibly be Satanic! I saw that as dangerous. These people were making accusations without evidence. And this had an impact on the storyline for *Kilroy Was Here*. [It was about] the way music was being controlled by those with ulterior motives.

Is it fair to say that *Kilroy Was Here* caused a rift between you and the rest of the band?
It's not fair. At the time, none of the band had a problem with the album. Sure, they were a little concerned with the cost of the live production, which was a reasonable objection. However, they were okay with the concept and songs. It was only later that certain bandmembers claimed they hated it. That wasn't true at the time.

There was also the lie spread that we were booed off at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas on that tour. Rubbish! We got a fantastic reaction every night. At the Cotton Bowl, we went down as well as anywhere. Quite why this idiotic story has been allowed to fester for so long surprises me.

Kilroy Was Here (1983).

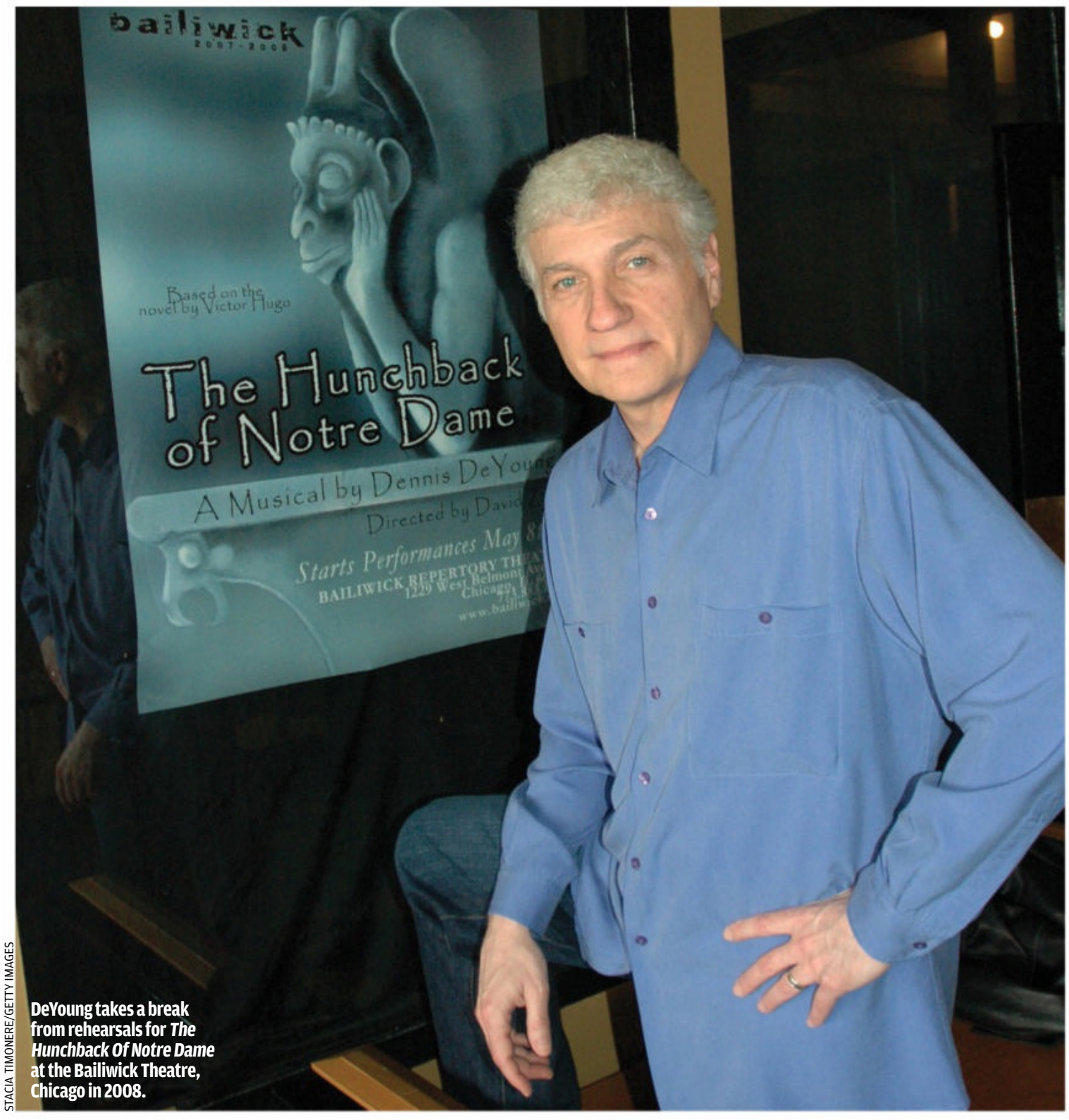
When Styx took a break in 1984, did you personally have ideas for the band's next album?
No, I didn't. The plan was for us to do a stadium tour in 1984 playing our greatest hits. JY wanted to do this, and I agreed that would be our next move. Then Tommy quit, because he wanted to pursue a solo career. The others were keen to bring in a replacement, but I was totally against that. I knew there was no way anybody could take over from Tommy in the minds of the fans.

So, the greatest hits tour was scrapped. As far as JY was concerned, I had gone back on my word. I don't think he's forgiven me to this day.

Did you want to take Styx in a more theatrical direction
Not at all. We'd gone as far as we could. After *Kilroy…*, there was nowhere else to go theatrically. I told the rest of the band that we'd reached the end of this road in our career. But that hasn't stopped JY and Tommy doing interviews, where they claimed that I wanted to take Styx in a Broadway direction. Bullshit! I had made it clear to everyone we had nothing left to do with big theatrical presentations.

You played Pontius Pilate in a touring production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1993. What made you want to take on that particular challenge?
What happened was that Styx were due to reunite in 1989, with Tommy included. But then he called to say that he was getting together with Ted Nugent and Jack Blades in Damn Yankees, so wasn't returning. That amazed me. Once again, the others agitated for us to hire a new guitarist to take over from Tommy and this time I reluctantly relented.

JY gave me a demo tape of Glen Burtnik, and he was brought in for the *Edge Of The Century* album and tour. But this was financially unsuccessful. Besides, grunge was happening and killing off a lot of bands like us. Styx were out of our record contract, and nobody wanted to sign the band. I also had no stomach for touring America playing state fairs, which was on the table. We were



STACIA TIMONERE/GETTY IMAGES
DeYoung takes a break from rehearsals for *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame* at the Bailiwick Theatre, Chicago in 2008.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Styx in New York, 1978. L-R: John Panozzo, James Young, Tommy Shaw, Dennis DeYoung, Chuck Panozzo.

too special for that! I didn't have a clue what I should do. Then my sister-in-law married someone who was an executive theatrical producer. At the wedding, he told me he was putting together a new production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and thought I'd be perfect for the role of Pontius Pilate. I had nothing else planned, so agreed. It was very successful.

Did this encourage you to try other roles?
It definitely led to me doing the *10 On Broadway* album in 1994. Danny Goldberg, who was a high-ranking executive at Atlantic Records, asked me to do this for the label. He offered a lot of money. So I chose my favourite show tunes and went with it.

I also played the singer in a Styx tribute band in the movie *The Perfect Man* [2005]. I was contacted by my publisher to allow some of my songs to be used in the film, I asked to see the script and thought it was really funny. Out of the blue, I was then offered this role. It was a two-day shoot for me, and a lot of fun.

How shocked were you when the band decided to move on without you in 1999, because of your health problems?
I was so ill that I nearly died. I just couldn't get better, and the doctors didn't know what was wrong with me. I recall telling the rest of the band how ill I was, and that I'd even lost my sense of taste and smell. They were unsympathetic. Tommy and JY genuinely thought I'd never tour again, so made the decision to replace me with Lawrence Gowan. Did I feel let down? Yes. Because without me neither of them would have even been in Styx. I personally brought JY in, and then hand-picked Tommy to take over from John Curulewski. I was concentrating solely on getting better, but was still angry. Can you blame me?

Is that why you sued them over the use of the name 'Styx'?
I had no intention of going down the legal path. Styx toured for 18 months without me, and didn't pay any of the money I was still owed. I was advised to sue them, but refused. Then they did the *Behind The Music* programme for VH1 in 2000; both Tommy and JY eviscerated me as a person and musician. At that point I realised the reconciliation for which I was hoping was never going to happen. And as I am a part-owner of the band name, I took action against them. As a result they've retained the rights to use the name 'Styx'. But I can use it in descriptive advertising, for instance if I play a set of Styx songs live.

> "Keith Emerson came over to my house one day with a Minimoog and encouraged me to try it."

You've been involved with many diverse projects over the last two decades. Was that deliberate?
I've not yet had to do a paper round to pay the bills, ha! But have done whatever's been offered. For instance, a promoter named Tim Orchard asked me to undertake a tour with a 50-piece orchestra doing Styx material. He made me an offer I couldn't refuse! Tim's now managing my career. And I am happy that I can sell out the same size venues as Styx do.

Why did you get involved with *Canadian Idol*?
I seem to be popular in Canada, and was offered the chance to do this. One reason I agreed was because Roger Hodgson [ex-Supertramp] was also involved. We got to hang out a lot and had a lot of laughs.

It must have been gratifying when your musical version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* premièred in Chicago in 1997?
I began working on this in the early 90s. Tommy and JY were convinced I meant it for Styx, but that was never in my mind. I was very pleased when it was finally produced onstage. And I hope it can be done again in May of next year.

You've always had an interest in the theatre. Do you have any plans to use your songs as the basis for a musical?
It has been suggested a few times, but could only work if the plot's good enough. So far nobody's come up with a decent storyline.

Actually, it's not very well known, but Paramount wanted to do a *Kilroy Was Here* movie in 1983. I turned it down as the project wasn't right for the time.

Why is *26 East, Vol 2* to be your last album?
For me, making rock records now is a lost cause. Everyone expects music for free. It's tough enough for kids to sell records without old timers releasing albums. So, I'll leave the building and let the young bands get on with it. I'm finished as a solo recording artist.

But will you still carry on writing songs?
I'm so lazy that I cannot be motivated to do it any more. But Jim Peterik, with whom I co-wrote many songs on the two *26th East* albums, is still driven to write. Without him I'd never have done these records. So maybe he'll force me back into writing.

What projects do you still want to pursue?
I'd take up animal husbandry, but cannot stand the smell of manure! Seriously, I'd *love* to tour soon. That's my one goal right now. The way I feel about it is that I am hoping for the best — with venues opening up — but preparing for the worst — not being able to play live any time soon.

And is there any hope for you doing one final tour with Styx?
That's what I want to do. There have been recent moves made to see if it's possible. But Tommy has blocked these. He believes it would undermine the current line-up. I disagree. So the only way this can now happen is if Styx fans make it known this is what they want. I'm sure at least 80 per cent would love a reunion. It's up to them.

DeYoung's final album, 26 East, Vol 2 is out on June 11 via Frontiers. See www.dennisdeyoung.com for more information.

Edited by Dave Everley
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New spins...

IT BITES

Francis who? It Bites' triumphant second act finally gets its time in the spotlight with the reissue of two 21st century prog classics.

Words: Dom Lawson **Illustration:** Kevin February

The return of It Bites in 2006 was greeted with widespread joy and only a tiny bit of affectionate concern. The latter was caused entirely by the absence of original frontman and co-founder Francis Dunnery. The maverick Dunnery had splashed his avowedly singular personality all over the three much-loved albums that the Brits had released during their first hurrah in the 80s. It would be reductive to say that It Bites had ever been a one-man band, and both drummer Bob Dalton and keyboardist John Beck were present and correct in the reborn line-up. But such was Dunnery's lyrical wit and musical ingenuity that an It Bites without him wasn't something that anyone had seriously considered.

As it turns out, the recruitment of John Mitchell as their new frontman was Beck and Dalton's shrewdest move. Now wholly familiar to readers of this magazine as one of modern prog's most prolific contributors, not least with his current project Lonely Robot, Mitchell's work with the likes of Arena, Kino and his own group The Urbane ensured that he had the necessary prog credentials to prevent delicate diehards from completely freaking out.

More importantly, he had been a huge fan of It Bites since adolescence, and was more than happy to cite the band's original trio of albums as a colossal influence on his own music. Throw in the fact that Mitchell was (and is) a skilled studio engineer and experienced producer in his own right, and It Bites had clearly found the right man for the job.

Fifteen years on, It Bites have never officially split up but seem to be on an indefinite hiatus. As a result, these lavish, remastered reissues of the band's two 21st century studio albums represent the entirety of the Mitchell era, albeit given the now expected sonic upgrade and, made widely available on vinyl again.

Originally released in the autumn of 2008, *The Tall Ships* was an It Bites album from tip to toe; from the flurry of harmonised vocals that kicked off opener *Oh My God* to the adventurous sprawl of centrepiece *The Wind That Shakes The Barley*, Mitchell's self-proclaimed adoration of the band he had just joined had simply enabled them to write more of the sparkling and ingenious material that had made the likes of *Once Around The World* such unassailable touchstones for 80s prog.

The Tall Ships/Map Of The Past

INSIDEOUT

> **The world needs more albums as life-affirming as these.**

It certainly helped that the new frontman's voice sounded similar enough to his predecessor's to slot neatly and immediately into It Bites' unique sound world, but the best of the new songs were plainly the equal of their esteemed forebears. Notably, Mitchell's melancholy rasp and somewhat gentler lyrical tone brought new warmth to the band's sound, something he would explore to the fullest on *The Tall Ships*' eventual follow-up. With his new bandmates' immaculate arrangements sparkling around him, he reached a first peak of bruised poetry on closing epic *This Is England*. Although not quite up there with *Once Around The World*'s expansive title track, it was a rather audacious statement that yes, It Bites could do the *really* mad, proggy stuff without Dunnery, too.

Having reassured and delighted the vast majority of It Bites fans old and new with *The Tall Ships,* It Bites returned in 2012 with a stone-cold masterpiece. *Map Of The Past* was the moment when John Mitchell's personality convincingly drowned out the lingering influence of his predecessor. A beautifully poignant exploration of the frontman's own ancestry, both real and imagined, it featured some of the most absurdly memorable songs the band had ever released.

Wallflower, *Flag* and *Cartoon Graveyard* were high-energy prog anthems, fizzing with the same, bright-eyed brio that had powered *Calling All The Heroes* three decades earlier; *Meadow And The Stream* was a joyous eruption of slickness, complexity and melodic cunning; *The Big Machine* and the title track were soaring, Billy-big-bollocks prog with deliciously crestfallen undercurrents; the quirky *Send No Flowers* was as gently acerbic and loaded with meaning as a raised eyebrow. It all sounded immaculate, too, with plenty of the high-quality sonic values that typified the band's 80s output, but with a depth and power that, arguably for the first time, accurately reflected the muscular majesty of an It Bites live show.

Until recently, the prospect of any more It Bites live shows seemed slender at best. In May 2019, Dalton announced on Facebook that the band "won't be touring or gigging again"; and yet, in late 2020, Mitchell revealed online that the band were "doing an It Bites album (communication permitting). We may be some time." Let's hope that they don't take too long, because the world needs more albums as life-affirming and substantial as these.

MATT BERRY

Blue Elephant ACID JAZZ

The actor-musician creates a multipart monster.

Among us freaks, weirdos and misfits there's a tremendous affection for Matt Berry. He's our ambassador of odd in mainstream entertainment, bringing us characters such as ageing, idiosyncratic actor Stephen Toast, providing silly voice-overs for mega corporations, and sneaking progressive ideas past the guards with his surrealist humour, sartorial style and over two decades of writing and producing music.

> **Shot through with disquiet, nostalgia and poignancy.**

Following his last release, 2020's stripped-back and countryfied *Phantom Birds*, ninth album *Blue Elephant* goes back to Berry's signature styles; 60s-influenced pop, folk-flecked jazz and psychedelia. Berry plays 18 instruments (!), sings and self-produces; percussion comes from prog maestro Craig Blundell, who contributed to *Phantom Birds* and is neighbours with the polymath. Fuelled by "lots of cups of tea, lots of laughs" *Blue Elephant* is one of the strongest things Berry's released to date, best consumed on vinyl with a continuous, multipart track per side.

Reflecting on the cover art — also painted by Berry — it's Joseph Merrick, aka The Elephant Man, in a blue tonic suit, lurking in a nightclub. This character might be a Berry favourite; he cropped up in Berry's 2019 Victorian detective sitcom *Year Of The Rabbit*, too. So Blue Elephant heads for somewhere — Swinging London? — in *Aboard*, all Mellotron, piano, groovy bass, funky drum breaks and ghostly background washes. It's *Walk On The Wild Side* meets *Histoire De Melody Nelson* that soon gives way to the upbeat *Summer Sun*, and Berry's first sung parts.

Berry has said that he wanted to retreat from song-based composition and his 15 'movements' deliver ideas descended from *Hot Rats*, *Odgens' Nut Gone Flake* and *Lonerism* with a home production style would suit Aphrodite's Child, Pentangle, or Jacco Gardner. Nuanced and shot through with disquiet, nostalgia and poignancy, *Blue Elephant* veers from Doors to The Moody Blues via some pleasingly over-the-top flanging. There's backwards word salad on side two, spirited away by fluttering electronics, and in *Safer Passage* something gorgeously otherworldly, with vocoder, Farfisa and manipulated vocals. By *Story Told* this could easily tip over into a musical… which Berry's done before with 2004's *AD/BC*, influenced by his love of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Ending in a funky epilogue for *Now Disappear (Again)* Blundell and Berry's collaboration works well. The humour of previous releases skulks in the background, but is outweighed by experimental and imaginative arrangements. Like his 2010 folk opus *Badger's Wake*, it's suite salvation.

JO KENDALL

AMORPHIS

Live At Helsinki Ice Hall NUCLEAR BLAST

Impressive unadulterated live thrills from Finnish prog metallers.

Recorded in December 2019, just months before touring ground to a halt, this double live album from Amorphis captures the band in front of a notably responsive hometown crowd. Where 2017's *An Evening With Friends At Huvila* featured an intimate acoustic performance, this is the full-blown prog metal experience.

The setlist isn't quite a career retrospective; while they go as far back as 1994's *Tales From The Thousand Lakes*, nearly half the tracks come from 2018's *Queen Of Time*. Older tracks like *Against Widows* and *Black Winter Day* highlight their folk metal influences, while the newer material steers more towards melodic death and symphonic prog metal.

Although Amorphis aren't a band for extended instrumental workouts, keyboardist Santeri Kallio impresses throughout, with spirited solos in *Heart Of The Giant* and *My Kantele*, and an excellent organ outro for *Into Hiding*. Frontman Tomi Joutsen tends to growl more than he sings, but he's got a strong voice able to deliver power and emotion in abundance. Sure to leave listeners hankering for the return of live gigs, this is a terrific outing from the Finns. **DW**

ASPIC BOULEVARD

Memory Recall Of A Replicant Dream BLOW UP RECORDS

Sicilian brothers' spacey soundtrack to sci-fi favourites.

Alessandro and Marco Barrano obviously spent their formative years devouring science fiction of all stripes, judging by this debut LP that's based on weighty tomes by everyone from John Wyndham to Dean Koontz to Valerio Evangelisti. So far so prog, but the Barrano brothers also took a keen interest in vintage electronic technology, resulting not only in a collection of analogue keyboards, drum machines and tape recorders, but also an array of sound devices they made themselves at home.

It's the latter factor that makes their debut album sound like little else out there. The anthemic synth washes of *Electromagnetic Playground* jackknife into avant-garde ambient space noise. Swirls of something resembling a fairground steam organ punctuate *Aerial Steam Horse* before macabre-sounding synth grunts and ghoulish theremin continue the nightmare ride. Elsewhere, there's an Eastern flavour to *Kubernetikos*' percussion accompaniment, as flourishes of Asian mantras and Bhangra melodies lace its techno pulses, along with strobe flashes of electronic melodrama. Old gear meets dystopian futures. The result is a truly unique record. **JS**

ARCHANGEL

Third Warning AMS RECORDS

Ubi Maior man's piano-led, symphonically inclined solo project returns.

Eight years since his gothic-themed second solo set, Gabriele Manzini has taken time out from his day job with Italian prog stalwarts Ubi Maior to create a more conventional symphonic prog set, albeit still centred around his florid way with the ivories.

Technological Anguish offers a misleading opening as dark techno textures introduce a protagonist darkly intoning man vs machine anxieties. But as Manzini's keyboards edge towards the foreground, they're joined by gutsy guitar motifs that veer into more familiar AOR-prog territory. Frustratingly, the apocalyptic lyrical themes are hard to pick up on in detail, as the cloudy production tends to submerge Giancarlo Padula's vocals. There's more to be had on the many instrumental passages, when Manzini tantalises us with evocative synth figures or indulges his Rick Wakeman fantasies on the organ.

The Last Days Of Beauty is a captivating piano-led reverie, while 10-minute closer *When The Eagle Hung His Head* finds mesmerising cascades of keys lifted up by muscular rock backing, background chants and crescendous percussion. The end of the world doesn't sound too bad, all told. **JS**

THE ARISTOCRATS

FREEZE! Live In Europe 2020 BOING!

Rip-snorting, genre-mangling set from the prodigious power trio.

As The Aristocrats turn 10, *FREEZE!* finds the trio of Guthrie Govan, Bryan Beller and Marco Minnemann as exuberant as ever, captured live in Spain near the end of the tour for 2019's *You Know What...?* They kick off with the freaked-out funk of *D Grade F*ck Movie Jam* as Beller lays down a bassline too dirty to ever come out in the wash. *Spanish Eddie* is a mutant hybrid between flamenco and Frank Zappa, and *When We All Come Together* is a twisted hoedown with Govan blending chicken-pickin' country guitar with fusion. *The Ballad Of Bonnie And Clyde* is a punchy rocker, followed by *Get It Like That*, the only selection from their self-titled 2011 debut, which features Minnemann's drum solo. Dedicated to Neil Peart, it sees the polyrhythmic monster throw in licks from *YYZ* and *Tom Sawyer* as he introduces a series of themes as springboards for improvisation. "We have an alien onstage with us tonight," declares Beller, before they conclude with the smoky moods of *Last Orders*. The musicianship is dauntingly good but it's the energy and excitement behind the outrageous chops that makes The Aristocrats so gleefully enjoyable. **DW**

RICK ARMSTRONG

Infinite Corridors RANDOM DISTURBANCE

Spacey solo debut from Edison's Children man.

Aside from being astronaut Neil Armstrong's son, Rick Armstrong is known chiefly as the guitarist in Edison's Children. His fine solo debut is rooted in the style of Tangerine Dream, and even Ozric Tentacles at their mellowest, possessing an epic soundtrack feel that conjures memories of the rippling musical backdrop to *Blade Runner*.

Armstrong's keyboard prowess is showcased on atmospheric opener *Hypernova* and pulsating *Chaos Theory*, which have an airy swagger rare in the electronic genre. The doom-laden keys on *Timespiral* provide a sense of imminent foreboding, with the mechanical *Sunstorm* being similarly engaging.

Armstrong shows restraint in unleashing his guest musicians, with contributions from Marillion guitarist Steve Rothery, John Mitchell and King Crimson bassist Tony Levin only appearing on the final two tracks. Of these, the Floydian *Shifting Sands* evokes flickers of *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*. That's not to imply the track isn't highly original. It just contains similarly spacious, mournful music that is performed with rare care and precision. It all adds up to an impressive statement of intent. **RW**

CHECKING FOR ECHO PROJECT

Life & Other Short Stories, Vol. 1 CHECKINGFORECHO.BANDCAMP.COM

A chance to check the credentials of a varied and engaging project.

Multiple guest artists can result in quality control sometimes being sidelined in favour of filling out an album's credits. There's no hint of such issues here. In fact, conceived and directed by the multitalented Jon Farley, there's real consistency in both delivery and composition that actually speaks more of a band than a glorified solo project.

For instance, it might take a couple of listens to realise that the female vocals on *Stillborn*, the revelatory cover of Frost*'s *Saline* and the gorgeous folk-tinged piano and voice of *When Tomorrow Comes* are actually courtesy of Dandelion Charm's Clare Shorthouse Fowler, Fearful Symmetry's Yael Shotts and Elaine Samuels of Kindred Spirit Band rather than one singer. This isn't to suggest that all 10 tracks here are unremarkably similar – there's real variety, including some stirring neo-prog in *Seen But Never Heard* and a cover of IQ's *Red Dust Shadow*, as well as thoughtful spoken word on the brief yet sumptuously ambient title track and some heroic guitar soloing on *My Suit Of Armour*.

With proceeds going to charity, *Life & Other Short Stories* is an album worthy of attention on many levels. **GMM**

DJABE & STEVE HACKETT

The Journey Continues

2019 live set with Hungarian jazz rockers throws up new surprises.

Given the fun he's had in recent years playing regular shows with Hungarian jazzers Djabe in Eastern Europe as well as fronting his own shows and Genesis Revisited tours, Steve Hackett must be feeling the absence of live gigs as keenly as anyone.

> **They're having a rare old time jamming new life into the songs.**

But does the world need another live album from him? Avid Hackett fans might wonder whether this 2019 live set performed in Djabe's home country really is an essential purchase. After all, the album whose songs make up most of the setlist (2017's *Life Is A Journey – The Sardinia Tapes*) was itself constructed from live improvisations, and 2018's *Life Is A Journey – The Budapest Live Tapes* contains performances of many of the same tracks.

One advantage of playing jazz rock, though, especially when improvisation is a key part of your act, is that no two shows are the same. So it proves on this 2019 performance. The bare bones of the songs may be fairly familiar, but you can tell they're still having a rare old time jamming new life into them. While there are some tracks that might ease newcomers into Djabe's world, such as the soothing, harmony-led *Life Is A Journey* and the softly yearning 2012 ballad *Tears Of Peace*, you can tell that Hackett and the band are happiest taking turns to steer the ship wherever they like.

They do just that on the freewheeling 17-minute jam of *Lava Lamp*, while the lithe, bass-led fusion of *Buzzy Island* is a more energised skirmish. At first Ferenc Kovács' trumpet flutters ecstatically over hyperactively slapped bass as keyboards hopscotch beneath, and Peter Kaszas provides an urgent percussive drive. Then Hackett steps up to add head-spinning guitar figures – initial volleys are full of knotty jazz angles, and then later in the track he conjures up blazing Catherine wheels of rock shredding.

The overhauls of Genesis material are less free-form, but they add intriguing touches. A newly introduced rendition of *Hairless Heart* is elegantly reworked, with Ferenc Kovács' trumpet playing the top-line melody, then they segue into the latter section of *Firth Of Fifth* before that classic is further embellished with some sublime guitar decoration from Hackett. Even without Tony Banks' timeless tumbling piano figures bookending it, it's still a breathtaking piece. Later, a brass heavy reading of *Los Endos* spirals into austere electronica before building up a warped, wearier reading of the reprise of *Dance On A Volcano* within that track, which then erupts into a thundering, anthemic big band crescendo.

Heard one live performance from Steve Hackett and Djabe? Don't think you've heard them all.

JOHNNY SHARP

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

Amazonia SONY

Jarre scores Salgado exhibition with Amazon grace.

This, insists Jean-Michel Jarre, is "not background music". It's the score to an exhibition, set to tour the world, by famed photographer Sebastiao Salgado, which explores the Brazilian Amazon: its forests, rivers and people. Jarre has created an immersive soundworld, mixing electronic and orchestral instruments with voices and recordings borrowed from Geneva's Museum of Ethnography. Only in phases is it recognisable as music as we generally understand the term: it's more interested in atmosphere and effect than melody or rhythm. Indeed Jarre's also recorded a binaural version — essentially listening in 3D.

> **Only in phases is it recognisable as music as we know it.**

Readers shouldn't be too surprised. Jarre has always been about more than the palatable crossover electronica of *Oxygene* (recorded in his kitchen), or breaking his own box office records. Ask the inquisitive artist about his favourite music, and he'll enthuse about Stravinsky, Miles Davis, Delia Derbyshire and Laurie Anderson. Learning his skills with Pierre Schaeffer as a mentor at Stockhausen's studio, he was in his youth a left-field experimentalist (perhaps rebelling against his largely absent father, Maurice, composer of the scores for *Lawrence Of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*), who tripped almost accidentally into vast popularity.

So now he's free, and emboldened, to go as out there as he likes. And the Amazon, as portrayed by Salgado's six-year investment in his visual creations, is a pretty inspiring place to do that. *Amazonia* is an eerie, alienating listen at first, but its humid depths and enveloping entanglements are magnetic. In nine parts, totalling 52 minutes, it rumbles and clicks with meandering intensity through a series of currents and ripples. Wordless chants float in and out, birds chirrup but vehicles drone. When Jarre allows a subtle wash of synth to paint a brushstroke, he does so with restraint and grace. Drum patterns do enter the picture at times, but underscore rather than drive the crackling, cryptic collage of sometimes enchanting, sometimes spooky utterances and captures.

It feels an awkward stretch to compare this to other music. At a pinch, there might be echoes of Tangerine Dream's early sketches, the atonal repetition of Schoenberg, or even, in brief flashes, the unsettling aggression of Einstürzende Neubauten. Really, though, it shouldn't be separated from Salgado's photographs and videos, which Jarre had scrolling in front of him, engulfing him as he wrote this in a kind of fever dream. The resultant marriage is as symbiotic as that of the 1982 Godfrey Reggio film *Koyaanisqatsi* and its Philip Glass score. *Amazonia* is busier, less minimalist, but attains a kindred preternatural high.

CHRIS ROBERTS

CAN

Live in Stuttgart 1975 MUTE

A collectors' club for Can fans.

The first in a promised series of live concerts curated by keyboardist Irmin Schmidt, the sole survivor of the quartet appearing here, makes quite an entrance and sets the bar for future releases very high indeed.

Five tracks vibrate with varying degrees of throbbing intensity, constantly in motion thanks to Jaki Liebezeit's pulsating drums and Holger Czukay's unflappable bass. Such is the nature of collective improvisation, players occasionally fall back on holding patterns, catching their breath as they resume their forward trajectories; this is mesmeric and utterly fearless.

Themes from *Bel Air*, *Quantum Physics* and others blur in and out of focus. Michael Karoli's guitar stands at the centre of the maelstrom, disseminating a skewed and skronky rock'n'roll while Schmidt's keyboards shimmer behind it like a heat haze, a liminal frequency signalling to other points in the musical galaxy. Anyone lucky enough to see Can performing what the liner notes refer to as a "great double album every night" will know all about it. If you weren't around then, *Live In Stuttgart* gets you so close you can almost feel the sweat from the stage. **SS**

CODE 18

Human Error! UNICORN DIGITAL

Lush neo-prog from Candian trio.

Francophone Canada remains a hotbed of progressive rock, with the charge led partly by the Unicorn Digital label run by Mystery leader Michel St-Père. Code 18 are a Québecois trio helmed by keyboardist Johnny Maz (who also plays alongside St-Père in Huis) and supplemented here by various guests, including St-Père himself.

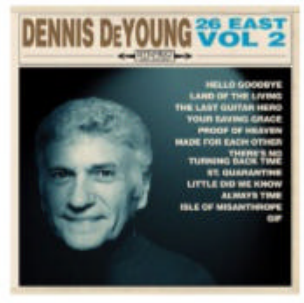
Despite toiling away since 2008, *Human Error!* is Code 18's debut album, so they've had plenty of time to work up these 10 songs. In truth, it sounds like it could have been recorded any time since the early 1980s as it's a slice of neo-prog owing much to the likes of IQ and Arena in terms of influences and sonic palette. Opening track *Crystal Of Time* launches the album with gusto. But there are plenty of changes of pace throughout and epics such as the 14-minute *Waste* will chime strongly with neo-prog connoisseurs.

Those for whom the definition of prog is a narrower one, involving uncharted musical territory and the spirit of sonic adventure, may be underwhelmed by the familiarity of *Human Error!*. But for listeners of a more relaxed disposition there's much to savour here. **NS**

DENNIS DEYOUNG

26 East, Vol 2 FRONTIERS

Former Styx keyboardist/vocalist ends his musical half-century.



Save for the announcement that it was bringing down the curtain on his career, the first volume of *26 East* – the street in Chicago on which DeYoung and fellow Styx co-founders John and Chuck Panozzo grew up – ranked among 2020's most pleasing surprises. Understandably, given they were conceived as a pair, *Vol 2* is a comfy, entertaining companion to its predecessor.

DeYoung had been cajoled into a formal sign-off by ex-Survivor man Jim Peterik, whose thumbprint decorates four of these dozen tunes. Progressive music played a healthy role in the development of Styx, but DeYoung is no fool and for the most part he chooses to stick with what his audience expects – the theatrically despatched pomp-meets-AOR that once sold by the million (even if *Last Guitar Hero* includes a solo from Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello).

However, it's the penultimate moment, *Isle Of Misanthrope*, that turns back the clock to the days of *Come Sail Away* and 1978's immortal *Pieces Of Eight album*. This six-minute piece is the type of spine-tingling valedictory statement that most fans would want from an artist taking his final bow. **DML**

FOCUS

Focus 50 IN FOCUS

The Dutch Masters' celebratory exhibition.

Prog performers can be broadly divided into two camps: showpeople (Gabriel, Wakeman, Ian Anderson) and discreet artisans (Fripp, Rutherford, etc). Focus leader Thijs van Leer straddles both camps: at once studious behind his keyboards, providing the spine of his mighty ensemble's work, then offering vocal acrobatics and flute work, leading like the best of them.

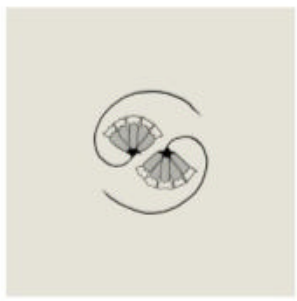
Recorded in Rio in 2017, *Focus 50* captures the current line-up offering their hot and spicy fusion of classical, hard rock and jazz with incredible elan. The 18-minute *Hocus Pocus* does not disappoint. Hearing Van Leer doing his thing today is akin to an uncle's party piece at a family do: you've heard it before, but it's always a delight. He isn't the only remnant of that fabled '73 line up: long-serving drummer Pierre van der Linden steals the show with a powerhouse performance, although Menno Gootjes handles Jan Akkerman's guitar parts well and Udo Pannekeet is a fine bass player.

It's a fitting golden jubilee celebration, and the double CD/BluRay comes with *Completely Focussed*, a newly recorded compendium of 12 tracks, all titled *Focus*, that the band have recorded during their career. **DE**

GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR

G_d's Pee At State's End! CONSTELLATION

Anarcho-punk orch-prog collective return with soundtrack for our times.



As Godspeed You! Black Emperor reflect in the communiqué that accompanies their latest album, the world has finally caught up with them in 2021, their shortwave radios full of "apocalypse pastors... yelling END TIMES NOW". The Canadians' seventh album is less formally melodic than 2017's *Luciferian Towers* and less nakedly aggressive than 2015's *Asunder...*, harking back to the eerie chamber rock of their earlier releases.

GY!BE often feel like they're building some intuitive sonic monument. The long-form composition that begins with *A Military Alphabet* emerges from the alien transmissions of a numbers station: a guitar blurts out a motif like a wounded foghorn, a decaying drone leads into a nervy Morse Code riff, a shuffle on the drums maintains the tension as layer upon layer of sound is gradually added.

GOVERNMENT CAME is the other big track here, gloomy bass notes and shivering violin creating a horrorshow atmosphere, tempered by a Morricone-esque swagger and grandeur. There's a descent into a slough of despond before the guitars rally, leading into a rousing, processional climax that will delight veteran fans in particular. **JB**

HANGING GARDEN

Skeleton Lake LIFEFORCE

Atmosphere and woe from the Helsinki shadows.

The road from doom metal to prog has been walked a few times over the years, and Hanging Garden are doing it with more style than most. There are prominent echoes of the Finnish band's heavier past throughout *Skeleton Lake*, but the overriding impression is of a group with extremities planted firmly in goth, shoegaze and windswept, post-Floydian grandeur, too.

Choking swathes of reverb enshroud stirring opener *Kuura*, as co-vocalist Riikka Hatakka soars across strident riffs and densely layered keys, her growling counterpart Toni Hatakka, a commanding but hostile presence. Even the most straightforward songs are rich with atmosphere: *Nowhere Haven* is a thunderous metal tune at heart, but with a chorus that would grace any 80s goth compilation; *Winter's Kiss* is a vivid and dynamic squall of elegant melody and post-rock melancholy; *When The Music Dies* builds from shimmering chamber pop to a gloriously pompous crescendo.

The closing title track is particularly stunning, as Hanging Garden return to the snail's pace crush of their early days, but with spine-tingling synths, spectral melodies and yet more of that magical, becalming reverb. **DL**

SILVER LAKE BY ESA HOLOPAINEN

Silver Lake by Esa Holopainen NUCLEAR BLAST

Amorphis founder goes it alone. With all his mates.

Despite being a palpably progressive force for most of their three decades, Finland's Amorphis have only recently begun to properly cross over to the prog audience their routinely great music deserves. Guitarist Esa Holopainen has been churning out magnificent songs with the band all along, contributing hugely to their folk-tinged and stridently atmospheric sound and never giving any indication that he quite fancied making a solo record.

> **Holopainen has thrust his most progressive influences to the fore.**

Having taken the plunge, Holopainen has thrust his most elegant and progressive influences to the fore, harnessing the multifarious virtues of a host of guest vocalists and delivering something gently but consistently surprising, albeit always within spitting distance of Amorphis' sonic world.

Holopainen is a fabulous guitar player, as demonstrated on the opening instrumental title track, but everything he plays here works in service of the songs and the people singing them. Katatonia's Jonas Renkse sings both the dreamy squall of *Sentiment* and the bruised meander of *Apprentice* with his usual wistful finesse, sounding utterly at home amid his new foil's billowing crescendos. *Ray Of Light* is succinct but spellbinding, with Leprous' Einar Solberg wielding that spectacular falsetto like a wizard's wand, oozing anguish and delivering a brilliantly hair-raising chorus that is as sharp and memorable as anything Holopainen has written.

Elsewhere, *Promising Sun* is a motoring, prog metal bruiser with an immaculate vocal from Soilwork and Bjorn 'Speed' Strid (Soilwork/The Night Flight Orchestra), and Anneke van Giersbergen sings the last remaining birds from any nearby trees on the symphonic rumble of *Fading Moon*. Naturally, Amorphis frontman Tomi Joutsen pops by, lending his unwavering bellow and caustic croon to *In Her Solitude*'s vivid shape-shifting.

It's not all rock and metal cameos, however: the rousing *Storm* features vocalist Håkan Hemlin from Swedish folk rock duo Nordman, and his charisma leaps from the speakers, even with Holopainen's mesmerising melodic sensibilities blazing away in the background. Likewise, Finnish actor-musician Vesa-Matti Loiri brings the kind of scene-stealing presence that you might expect to *Alkusointu*; his sonorous narration (which is, not unreasonably, in Finnish) blending perfectly with Holopainen's widescreen doom-prog backdrop, analogue synths and spiralling woodwind included. With friends like these, and songs this good, Holopainen should definitely not wait another 30 years to make a follow-up.

DOM LAWSON

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KANSAS

Point Of Know Return Live & Beyond INSIDEOUT

Inspired performance of a classic album and more.

In the annals of Kansas' distinguished history, 1977's *Point Of Know Return* album is a clear highlight. So, it was no surprise the band decided to play the whole of it a couple of years ago on a special anniversary tour.

Recorded here for posterity, it sounds magnificent. Performed with zest and style, what Kansas have done is bring out the colour and joy of the songs in such a manner that it doesn't sound so much a nostalgia trip, as marking out music that still carries a huge relevance. Sticking to the original track sequence works well, with *Dust In The Wind* and *Hopelessly Human* real highlights. But this isn't just about one album. Kansas also glide through their near half-century history, cherry-picking ripe moments, from 1975's *Song For America* through to 2016's *Refugee*. Inevitably, *Carry On Wayward Son* is included and is as climactic as it always has been.

These days, only Phil Ehart and Richard Williams remain from the glorious time when *Point Of Know Return* was originally released, but that doesn't matter. Still, the line-up here do a splendid job, with recently departed guitarist Zakk Rizvi particularly impressive. **MD**

KARMAMOI

Room 101 KARMAMOI.BANDCAMP.COM

Italian prog inspired by Orwellian premonitions.

The follow-up to 2018's *The Day Is Done*, Karmamoi's fifth album uses the concepts of George Orwell's iconic novel *1984* as the backdrop for their symphonic theatricality. This fusion is realised especially well on opener *Memory Holes*, its operatic melodies and vibrant prog/folk rock timbres decorated by chilling ambience and lyricism while guest vocalist Sara Rinaldi coveys power and vulnerability over the dynamic arrangement.

The same holds true for the invigorating *Drop By Drop*, as well as the fittingly grandiose closer *The New World. Dark City*, in contrast, prioritises sparse atmospheres and punchy industrial instrumentation over anything else, whereas the wordless *Newspeak* juxtaposes classical strings and piano with the textures of Ayreon and modern Marillion. They embody the anxious spirit of Orwell's story before the penultimate title track reigns as the most unsettling piece due to its hypnotic verses, dissonant synths, and beckoning rhythms.

A little variety would certainly give each piece more of an identity and make the hour-long runtime more palatable, but *Room 101* does do justice to the book's prophetic themes. **JMB**

KINOSCAPE

Eternal Child KINOSCAPE.BANDCAMP.COM

Agreeably bleak, low-profile European soundscapes.

In this largely mystique-free age, it's refreshing to be given a record that offers little information beyond the basics, and a few faintly cryptic comments. What we know about Kinoscape's first mini-album is that it's instrumental "music made in quarantine", self-written and performed without lyrics, but accompanied by a few gnomic statements, such as: "Kinoscape is a playlist for when the world is falling apart around you".

There's certainly a claustrophobic feel to the minimal techno textures of *Dark Orange*, in which only skittering beats, an austere synth melody and a forlorn guitar figure cut through the gloom. The Japan-like soundscape of *Chasing The Ghost* is all eerie electronic echoes and squelchy synth until bolder guitar patterns and airy atmospherics open up a crack in the curtains. But then *In The Sofa Room*'s languid electric piano, flanked by breathy background noise like trains passing in the tunnel next door, seems to soundtrack an arthouse film full of long pauses and urban alienation.

Hardly the sunniest sound, but when lockdown ennui is this beautiful, who needs the outside world? **JS**

POST-ROCK

Alex Lynham guides us through the peaks and valleys of essential post-rock.

First up are Floridian shoegazers **Her New Knife**. With elements of post-rock and even the heavy atmospherics of doom in their sound, their debut EP *Destroza* (hernewknife.bandcamp.com) is a welcome break from the swathes of first wave imitators out there. Check out lead track *Piled Up* for a sense of their sound. *Destroza* is a strong debut, and it'll be interesting to see how they build on it in future.

More in the lo-fi realm, another project making waves in the shoegaze space is South Korean artist **Parannoul**. He's just released *To See The Next Part Of The Dream* (parannoul.bandcamp.com). It's a fantastic record about dreams and nostalgia, lived out through an imagined or semi-imagined version of the 2000s indie scene. Although a bedroom album in production value, the rough edges add to the aesthetic of having found a lost classic of the genre. Moreover, the cassette-only release is a particularly effective part of the concept for those that remember trading tapes and crate digging in record shops. *Excuse* is the most immediate introduction, but for a more emotional, yearning track, try *White Ceiling*.

Sheffield's **65daysofstatic** have been busy. Not only have they started a generative livestream called *Wreckage Systems* that broadcasts 24/7, but they've also written a new EP, *Under The Summs* (65daysofstatic.bandcamp.com). "If the *Wreckage Systems* stream is the infinite, endless soundtrack to now (and it is)," they say, "then these accompanying releases that we cut out of it are the disjunctions." High concept stuff for sure, but the stutter-start rhythms of the title track, insistent build of *Move Quickly* and detuned, ambient growl of *NiteTimeUses* are stunning tracks. For some time the band have been playing with the line between generation, composition and curation, and with *Under The Summs* they've once again shown that this creative exploration is worthwhile.

Worriedaboutsatan have announced their eighth album, *Providence* (Box Records), is out now. Where their last LP, *Time Lapse*, saw mastermind Gavin Miller adapting to creative partner Thomas Ragsdale leaving, *Providence* feels like a more confident statement. Obviously there's tense drones, post-rock atmospherics and minimal percussion, but there's also a stronger sense that it's all going somewhere, with a refreshing urgency to *Everything Is Fine* and *Stórar Franskar*, which is Icelandic for 'large chips'.

Finally, there's a new project from Christian Savill of Slowdive. The self-titled debut from **Beachy Head** (Graveface Records), is worth a listen. While it's unlikely to surprise many in terms of sound, the songwriting is solid on standout tracks like moody *All Gone*. There's a raft of interesting collaborators too, with Rachel Goswell from Slowdive and Matt Duckworth from The Flaming Lips among them.

MARILLION

With Friends At St David's RACKET RECORDS

Aylesbury's finest extend their ensemble with stunning results.

There have been countless bands who've unconvincingly dabbled with orchestras. Indeed, the concept became something of a fad for certain artists, whose music was incongruous with the lush orchestral additions. The common outcome was a sense that the classical embellishments were simply bolted on, without any care or thought for the finished, clattering result. Marillion couldn't be accused of this when they experimented with strings and horns during their Royal Albert Hall appearance in 2017, something that encouraged them to re-record a number of tracks for their *With Friends From The Orchestra* album release two years later.

> **It enhances their sound with fitting, elegant additions.**

This live album, recorded in Cardiff in November 2019 and also released on a DVD of the same name, features a sextet of classical players, all of whom enhance Marillion's already layered sound with fitting, elegant additions. Critically though, the plush classical backdrop is used to enrich the sound, and isn't merely a novelty addition. Perhaps surprisingly, the set opens with *Gaza*, a song that at first consideration wouldn't be an obvious choice for orchestral adaptation. However, here it's given a fiery dramaticism with the addition of an impeccable string section, which provides a certain opulence, especially when working in conjunction with Steve Rothery's guitar parts.

Both *Beyond You* and *The Hollow Man* are delivered with a panache that, at times, supersedes their studio takes. Elsewhere, the cerebral lyrics that wind through *Estonia* and *Sky Above The Rain*, coupled with the emotionally wrought musical backdrop, will leave even the most hardened dewy eyed. There's also space in this set for a touch of light relief in the guise of *Zeparated Out*, a shrewd, bouncy mash-up of *Separated Out* and Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir* and the ever-endearing escapism of *Fantastic Place*.

It's Marillion's longer songs that benefit the most from the atmospheric reworkings. The 20 minutes of *Ocean Cloud* — an engaging tale of a long-distance rower — are captivating, while *The New Kings* (from 2016's *F.E.A.R*) captures the sparkling mood of the concert. But it's *This Strange Engine* that's the true highlight. Lyrically detailing Steve Hogarth's childhood and bounding through musical styles and aided by delightful horns, it's a mesmerising way to close a set.

Ultimately, this provides a reminder — as if it were needed — of this band's ongoing creativity and an exquisite musicianship that has pervaded for 40 years. There aren't many acts who could record a live album of this stature without the orchestral concept feeling forced and disingenuous. Marillion are one of them.

RICH WILSON

GLEB KOLYADIN

Water Movements GLEBKOLYADIN.BANDCAMP.COM

Iamthemorning piano man returns with understated solo pieces.

Iamthemorning pianist and songwriter Gleb Kolyadin's second solo album comprises spontaneous sketches and cinematic pieces. He's at pains to emphasise it's "a serene pause" and self-released fundraiser while he prepares the next "big" album. In fact its sparse beauty is emotionally huge, and fans of his Russian chamber prog duo will embrace its melancholy magic as another golden dawn. Its quietness speaks volumes.

Images of water and the creative flow helped him along, and the music, collectively, does what the best instrumentals do: conjuring up in the mind's eye a film not yet made. With Kolyadin effectively playing a solo concert, he's joined fleetingly on guitar by co-producer Vlad Avy. The result is personal, yet deeply resonant. There's an accumulative effect to the pieces: *Sea Song* and *High Tide* possess hints of Satie or Part, while *Frozen Light* finds both drama and pathos within two and a half minutes.

Iamthemorning are no strangers to the epic, but they also burrow into intriguingly intimate corners and this album taps into that quality while never denying the listener a fair share of dark, stirring, Petersburgian romance. **CR**

OSLO TAPES

ØR PELAGIC

A trip through the dark side of space from experimental Italian techno rockers.

ØR is the third album from this Italian avant-rock trio led by Marco Campitelli. There's a dense, hypnotic vibe to their sound, which swings between terror and ecstasy, but it's never just a droning wall of noise – the songs are driven by a complex internal mechanism, even if it's occasionally overwound.

Space Is The Place epitomises the album's cosmic atmosphere, though this is the void as a black corridor rather than trippy adventure. Campitelli breathily intones the title against an astro-Eastern riff, the guitar burning through the music in a way that recalls proto-shoegaze titans Loop. *Zenith* is a thrumming, driving slab of bassiness, its whispered incantatory vocals and sense of claustrophobia referencing Massive Attack's *Mezzanine*.

Despite the propulsive percussion, the songs seem to hover, as though orbiting some dark planet. *Bodø Dakar* is stoner rock as played by disaffected science lab workers, while the electro arpeggio of *Cosmonaut* flirts with the ghost of pop. Finally, *Obsession Is The Mother Of All* veers towards the industrial techno of Skinny Puppy or NIN. Yet for all those influences, Oslo Tapes forge an intriguing and singular path here. **JB**

POSSUM

Lunar Gardens POSSUMYYZ.BANDCAMP.COM

Spacey Canadian quintet make a return trip.

When a band cites King Gizzard, Thee Oh Sees and Miles Davis as references, it's worth taking notice. So here's a hello to Canadian quintet Possum, who, from opening track *Clarified Budder* could easily be initially mistaken for one of the colourful new Aussie crew alongside Pond and Psychedelic Porn Crumpets.

Yes, there's the breathless and playful garage-ness of Oh Sees/Gizzard style in their canon with some electric Davis squawk, but also jazz fusion in *Heywood Floyd*, *Zamrock In Moonjuice*, *Dance Of The Eclipse* and the excellent *Leyline Riders*, and stoned Canterbury touches in *Lunar Gardens*.

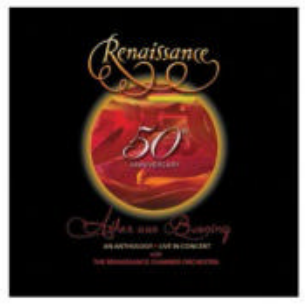
The musicianship is good – drummer Bradley Thibodeau serves up some nice rolls, fills and motorik beats – but not super-slick, and all the better for it. Teaming up with visual artists The Oscillitarium adds to the overall vibe; liquid wheels, foil-covered sets, op-art strobing and four evocatively named colours of vinyl for this debut album: cobalt, tangerine, orchid and violet.

Like your kosmische with some wah-wah and a side order of swing, or missing early Syd Arthur? Possum are here to fill that hole. **JK**

RENAISSANCE

Ashes Are Burning – An Anthology – Live In Concert ESOTERIC

Sweet capture of the renaissance of Renaissance.



For anyone who has never dabbled in the curious, baroque world of Renaissance, *Ashes Are Burning – Live In Concert* is a great place to begin exploring. Leader Annie Haslam's voice is in fine form and keyboard player/musical director Rave Tesar (who has been with them since 2001) ensures an authenticity to the original records that's admirable.

Backed by a full orchestra, this show offers an overview of Renaissance's entire career. Although they have experienced a great deal of personnel turbulence across the years, each new member has added to their own unique texture. Opener *Out/Day Of The Dreamer* from 1978's *A Song For All Seasons* evokes Genesis so much, it's little surprise that the track's original producer was David Hentschel.

There's added weight with founding member Jim McCarty playing on the group's debut single, *Island*, from the brief period of time before Haslam joined; its optimistic wash of folk and pop locates them right at the heart of the Fairports and Pentangles of the age. But it's the title track, from 1973's *Ashes Are Burning*, that brings everything sweetly together: its 16-plus-minutes never outstay their welcome. **DE**

STEFANO PANUNZI

Beyond The Illusion SP MUSIC

A vivid and wistful journey from Italian keyboard wizard.

Beyond The Illusion is a mostly triumphant comeback for keyboardist Stefano Panunzi, as it sees him picking up from where 2009's *A Rose* left off by once again using the talents of a few guests to craft eclectic arrangements and elegant songwriting.

The former is demonstrated almost immediately by *The Bitter Taste Of Your Smile*, a quirky and inviting instrumental dominated by touching piano chords and energetic rhythms. The subsequent *Acid Love* goes for a more sorrowfully orchestral and weighty vibe, while *Mystical Tree* and *The Bench* conjure the coarse flamboyance of early Porcupine Tree and Devin Townsend. Guest singers Grice and Tim Bowness bring a longing and hookiness to several songs, such as the contemplative *The Awakening* and the soothing *I Go Deeper* (which originally appeared, in a different form, on Bowness' 2019 album, *Flowers At The Scene*).

It's not all successful though. *Even Love Cannot*, *Her* and finale *I Am!* prolong their pleasantly adventurous templates to the point of boredom. Even so, they're minor blemishes on an otherwise beautiful, sophisticated and enduring return from Panunzi. **JMB**

THE PRIZE FIGHTER INFERNO

The City Introvert EVIL INK RECORDS

Coheed frontman's solo project shines bright despite dark roots.

Last March was a devastatingly perfect storm for Coheed And Cambria leader Claudio Sanchez. Not only was coronavirus becoming a household name, the musician's grandfather fell ill and his wife began her battle with an autoimmune disease. Looking within, Sanchez revisited his solo project The Prize Fighter Inferno for catharsis. The result is, on the surface, paradoxically brimming with good-time vibes.

Amplifying Coheed's hooks while ditching the rock attack, *The City Introvert* can be joyously sunny; *More Than Love* conjoins auto-tuned vocals with balmy synth, while the zippy chorus in *Roll For Initiative* would fit snugly on a Taylor Swift LP. The bait for prog fans is the ease at which Sanchez layers his tracks, but the heart here is a man lost at sea using music to navigate through troubled waters. For all its playful synth and drum machines, finale *Stay Where You Are* is one of the more touching moments, as vulnerable vocals marry with floral acoustic guitar. *'Isn't it so hard this way/letting go/but hold your fondest memory and hold it close,'* Sanchez sings, and in that aching moment you can't help but be right by his side. **CC**

PROGRESSIVE METAL

Dom Lawson buckles up for a delve into the darker, heavier side.

By definition, prog metal is all about looking for new and imaginative ways to make heavy music. With that in mind, London's **Urne** may be the best thing to happen to the genre in years. The trio's debut album *Serpent And Spirit* (Candlelight/Spinefarm) brings past, present and future together, with strong shades of *...And Justice For All*-era Metallica, early Mastodon and the dark, outer limits of post-hardcore, but with a brutal, imperious atmosphere all of its own. These are huge, skilfully constructed epics with colossal melodic payoffs and a ludicrous number of addictive riffs: in particular, *Desolate Heart* is an instant prog metal classic.

Brazilians **Pentral** have a similarly sturdy knack for riffs: debut album *What Lies Ahead Of Us* (pentral.bancamp.com) noisily salutes the prog metal old school, via burly but nimble anthems like *All My Wounds* and a colossal production job courtesy of Tim Palmer (Tears For Fears/David Bowie).

On first impressions, **Isgherurd Morth** are a shadowy entity from black metal's weirdo fringe, but new album *Hellrduk* (Repose) owes just as much to the extreme avant-garde and the nebulous world of bleary, shoegazing post-rock. The sum of those parts is often mercilessly intense, but the Russians' grasp of dynamics and ability to shape-shift is genuinely dazzling.

You won't realise exactly how much you need a surf rock and death metal hybrid in your life until you spend some time with Seattle's **Sleep Terror**. Alive and mad-eyed with the wonky spirit of John Zorn's *Naked City*, fifth album *Above Snakes* (sleepterror.bandcamp.com) is a scintillating blizzard of crackpot ideas, hulking riffs and virtuoso showboating. Wholly instrumental, it whips by in what seems like half of its 28 minutes and should have you scuttling off to discover the rest of the duo's catalogue.

Their misspelled name will cause a few eyes to start twitching, but Denmark's **Suffocate For Fuck Sake** can be excused, because their fourth album *Fyra* (Moment Of Collapse) is an extraordinary thing. A sustained study in anguish and pitch-black atmospherics, it represents the full blossoming of the band's expansive blend of post-metal and left-field hardcore. Eighty minutes of songs, including scabrous single *15 Missed Calls*, may prove too gruelling for some, but if you've got the stamina, the rewards are immense.

Despite comprising members of various modern tech-death bands, **Interloper**'s debut album *Search Party* (Nuclear Blast) is an accessible beast, full of big melodies and harmonised vocals. Marrying the glossy sensibilities of metalcore with Rush-like levels of ingenuity and verve, this is an absorbing and colourful statement of intent.

WHITE MOTH BLACK BUTTERFLY

The Cost Of Dreaming KSCOPE

21st century prog-pop elegance from TesseracT's Daniel Tompkins.

Where White Moth Black Butterfly's 2013 debut album, *One Thousand Wings*, was a union between singer Daniel Tompkins — then on hiatus from TesseracT — and Skyharbor guitarist/programmer Keshav Dhar that had the whiff of an expanded solo project, 2017's follow-up, *Atone*, felt more like the work of an actual band.

> **It delves deep into lush electropop and ambient dance.**

Four years on, *The Cost Of Dreaming* picks up where its predecessor left off. Characterised by Tompkins as "an outpouring of love and a cry for help", it delves deeper into the lush electropop and ambient dance vibes explored on its predecessor — a world away from the music Tompkins makes with TesseracT, but no less striking on its own terms.

Ushered in via the thick, warm synth pad embrace of *Ether*, the singer's voice veering from plaintive to soaring, *The Cost Of Dreaming* is a series of vignettes that explore dichotomies within human experience — how happiness can create stagnation, how struggle can produce profound change for the better and how we might find beauty in awfulness.

There's little in the way of traditional prog here. *The Dreamer* wouldn't be out of place on nighttime pop radio, while the alchemy produced by the combination of Tompkins' voice and the rich, sensuous tones of co-vocalist Jordan Turner casts a two-handed spell over *Portals* and *Liberate*. Turner is by turns entrancing, beguiling and deeply moving, equally astounding with the fragile *Sands Of Despair* as she is with the vocal mischievousness of *Soma*.

A cinematic quality pervades the album, exemplified by *Under The Stars*, which could be the kind of atmospheric incidental music beloved by producers of moody Scandi Noir crime dramas. Elsewhere, *Use You* wraps up barely disguised threat, audible distress and uncomprehending impotence in the face of domestic abuse in a suitably discomfiting fashion. Similarly, *Darker Days*' eminently danceable vibe can't disguise its disquieting undertones. With much of the music built upon programmed keys and drum machine rhythms, *Bloom* is the nearest *The Cost Of Dreaming* gets to a straight rock song (and the point where flesh-and-blood drummer Mac Christensen gets to shine).

Tompkins and Dhar have clearly chosen their sounds with enormous care, resulting in a beautifully produced and meticulously arranged album. Not every fan of TesseracT and modern prog in general will enjoy it, but those willing to set prejudices aside and embrace everything the 21st century has to offer will revel in the journey.

GARY MACKENZIE

SOFT WORKS

Abracadabra In Osaka MOONJUNE

Magic in the air at early Soft Machine reunion.

Back in 2003, the idea of a touring group of ex-Soft Machine members drawn from different points in the band's history seemed fanciful. Yet this archive recording of Elton Dean, Hugh Hopper, Allan Holdsworth and John Marshall demonstrates what an inspired idea it was.

Newer material serves the quartet well. Marshall's ever-inventive drumming maintains a tight framework through which Dean's lofty sax scratches fiery trails and dreamy lines. Holdsworth provides tonal contrast against Hopper's probing bass, laying down elegiac folds of synth-enhanced chords from under which his legato playing scuttles free. Nods to their vintage repertoire, including a glowering reworking of *As If* from 1972's *Fifth*, gives them a foothold to explore their collective past without being overwhelmed by it – a tradition maintained by the current incarnation of Soft Machine.

Benefitting from Mark Wingfield's sensitive restoration and mastering of the source material, the package also offers useful insights with sleeve notes from MoonJune Records' Leonardo Pavkovic, and longtime fan Chris Hoard, the latter detailing the dream-come-true nature of this gathering. **SS**

SUBTERRANEAN MASQUERADE

Mountain Fever SENSORY RECORDS

Israeli seven-piece attempt familiar peaks in varied garb.

Prog metal has become a catch-all term that arguably doesn't communicate much. It's reasonable to label Israel's Subterranean Masquerade in this way, but it doesn't sum up everything they do.

Mountain Fever, the band's fifth album, draws on the writing and playing of all seven of its expanded membership, resulting in symphonic metal rubbing shoulders with Middle Eastern rhythms and sounds in the opening couple of minutes of *Somewhere I Sadly Belong*, klezmer music suddenly dropping in the midst of in the title track's classic rock workout, and theatrical vocals washing across the dark ballad *The Stillnox Oratory*.

Vocalist Vidi Dolev cruises chameleon-like throughout, shifting his delivery from James LaBrie-esque dramatics to flashes that evoke Saga's Michael Sadler, while occasionally summoning up death growls as in the very Opeth-like *For The Leader, With Strings Music*. It's refreshing to hear a different take on the genre and there are all manner of cultural, historical and artistic threads and powerful messages being drawn together on *Mountain Fever* as Subterranean Masquerade skilfully expand the envelope. **GMM**

SYLVAN

One To Zero GENTLE ART OF MUSIC

Stunning concept album from long-running German proggers.

Sylvan have never lacked ambition. Across their previous nine albums the Hamburg band have assembled a rich, diverse musical catalogue that naturally includes forays into the concept arena. With their 10th album they show no sign of dumbing down any time soon.

At the heart of *One To Zero* lies a concept that's purportedly the autobiography of an AI told from its own perspective over 10 songs. But even if listeners are left cold by the idea, the music is right up there with the very best that Sylvan have produced during their lengthy career.

There's plenty of diversity here too. Opener *Bit By Bit* has some intense riffing and darker hues, while by stark contrast *Unleashed Power* is a beautifully understated and underplayed waltz-like ballad. Sylvan aren't afraid to experiment either.

This time around, and particularly as the album progresses, the Germans have also incorporated some elements of electronica into their music. It's to their credit that they do so in a manner that appears complementary rather than contrived or gratuitous. With *One To Zero*, Sylvan compellingly go from strength to strength. **NS**

TARAS BULBA

Sometimes The Night RIOT SEASON

Ex-Earthling Society chairman's lockdown fever treat.

Formed in 2018 by former Earthling Society composer/multi-instrumentalist Fred Laird and named after Nikolai Gogol's 1835 novel, Taras Bulba follow up 2020's *Soul Weaver* with an album that melts hallucinogenic pagan psych into shimmering dream gumbos of lockdown exotica.

Inspired by a socially isolated diet of rockabilly cabin recordings, Nick Cave, and kung fu, horror and noir movies, Lancashire native Laird laid down cinematic mood pieces on a 24-track recorder in his spare bedroom, coating atmospheric panoramas in crackling electronic swells. Several songs are bolstered by drums and sax, while Daisy Atkinson's spectral vocals turn the epic title and Cocteau homage *Orphée* into shimmering David Lynch-evoking dreamscapes.

Many of the tracks are begging for movies to accompany. *One More Lonely Angel*'s pastoral piano is gouged with vicious guitar scrapings, the lysergic *Night Train To Drug Town* sits midway between *Apocalypse Now* and a Spaghetti Western, and *House In The Snow* is a piano-led funeral crawl. All told, it's a weird, wonderful masterclass in channelling lockdown obsessions into mind-blowing music. **KN**

SWEET OBLIVION FEATURING GEOFF TATE

Relentless FRONTIERS

Ex-Queensrÿche man plays to his strengths by keeping it old-school.

Nine years after his acrimonious firing from Queensrÿche, Geoff Tate recaptures the sound of his old group on his second album with Sweet Oblivion.

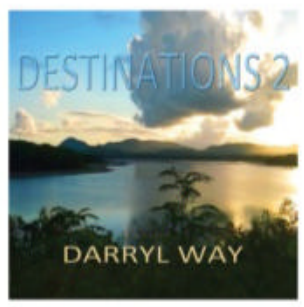
Recorded in Italy with a different line-up to 2019's eponymous debut, *Relentless* is built firmly around Tate's voice; his range and power seem undimmed even in his early 60s. Aldo Lonobile, from power metal band Secret Sphere, serves as guitarist and producer, favouring a bright, slick production style. Like a lot of late-80s and early-90s heavy music, it's a very compressed listen. There's not a lot of space in the mix but Tate has the power in his pipes to cut through. The arrangements of *Let It Be* and *Anybody Out There* almost demand comparisons with *Empire* or *Operation: Mindcrime*, far more so than Tate's other solo work, such as *Kings & Thieves* or the first Sweet Oblivion album. However, if the approach seems familiar, Tate takes complete command of the material, delivering one bombastic performance after another.

As an overall experience, *Relentless* can be guilty of not pushing the singer to try anything new, but there's no denying that Tate remains a progressive metal heavyweight. **DW**

DARRYL WAY

Destinations 2 SPIRIT OF UNICORN

Ex-Curved Air man's instrumental journey across the planet.



Darryl Way's 2019 album *Destinations* was a musical interpretation of a variety of places he'd travelled to around the world. With the follow-up, he revisits even more far-flung locations.

From the beatific *Mother Earth* to the bohemian *Café De Paris* and the gentle flow of *Ocean Blues*, it's all beautifully realised. The passion and admiration Way feels for the distinctiveness of each stop along the way is evident. Musical motifs reflect each locale: *Fiesta Mexicana* has the whirl of a Mexican festival and *Vegas* is glitz and jazzy glitter, while *Hungarian Rhapsody* acknowledges classical composer Béla Bartók. Every track is accompanied by detailed written explanations of the inspirations behind the composition. But while they're insightful, the music is as evocative and all-encompassing that it stands alone without any exposition being necessary.

The finale *Across A Wide River (The Immigrant Song)*, featuring vocals from Way and his wife, brings it all home, completing the journey he began two years back. Whether he plans a third volume of *Destinations* remains to be seen, but this album matches the high standards of the original. **MD**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

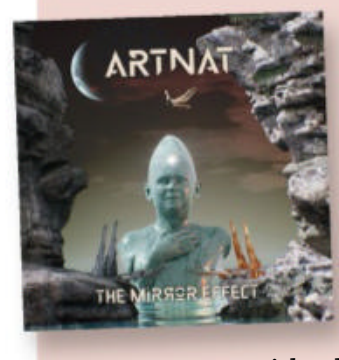
Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

They may be from Caen, France, but **Veik**'s heart lies in Berlin. This hip trio's debut album, *Surrounding Structures* (Fuzz Club), is a deep dive into kosmische, kraut, new wave and post-punk. Wonky analogue synths, crunchy bass guitars, and a plethora of cool grooves build into their wry examination of the modern world. Drummer/vocalist Boris Collet is almost horizontally laconic, but run him through a vintage echo unit and he becomes an enthralling presence on the likes of *Political Apathy* and *Life Is A Time Consuming Experience*.

Inaugurated in 2003, Kentucky's **Chest Rockwell** have always had a little filth in their sound, and they're focusing on big riffs on their latest. *The Existentialist* (chestrockwell.bandcamp.com) is strong, grinding, garagey stuff, owing a big debt to 80s metal, but with Rush and Voivod smarts in there too. Singer Josh Hines favours melody over grunts and screams, and steers the whole enterprise away from prog metal cliché to edgier places.

Malta's **Different Strings** are back with their fourth and best record. *The Sands Of Time* (ProgDome) is notably brought to life by Italian singer Andrea Casali, who elevates sweet ballads and tougher rockers alike. Trumpet and saxes add to the prog-lite feel, which is sure to appeal to fans of the direct, melodic approach of Neal Morse and his ilk.

Artnat is the new band from Manuel Cardoso of Portuguese proggers Tantra. That band's catalogue is full of pure symphonic prog with an exotic feel, and that's what you get on Artnat's *The Mirror Effect* (artnat.bandcamp.com). Cardoso's insistent guitar lines weave through some huge, dramatic female harmonies, dissonant riffs and memorable melodies. There's something here for fans of Yes, Crimson, and even Return To Forever, with a little Gong madness around the edges.



Buckingham-based guitarist **Rod While** offers up interesting and accomplished instrumentals on *Open The Cage* (Stardance). There's a little Satriani in opener *Breakout* and plenty of latter-day Jeff Beck across the board. While's judicious use of synths and electronics shows a shrewd producer's mind at work, and his music draws on prog, jazz and fusion, with some eco/world nuance too. It's a rich, intelligent record that lets its creator's talents fly free.

And another sterling, guitar-orientated album comes from **Corrado Rustici**, who played for Italian proggers Nova and Cervello in the 70s. *Interfulgent* (corradorustici-official.bandcamp.com) proves he still has plenty of creative fire, as he exhibits blazing/tasteful fusion fretboard chops that nod to Allan Holdsworth and (again) Jeff Beck. The backing music has a late 90s tinge, blending drum'n'bass, trip hop and fusion with electronics. Rustici's own production polish ensures *Interfulgent* shines brightly throughout.

ARTHUR BROWN'S KINGDOM COME

Eternal Messenger: An Anthology ESOTERIC

Five-CD trove of albums, sessions and unreleased archive recordings.

On March 23, 1971 BBC Radio 1's *Top Gear* broadcast a session from Arthur Brown's Kingdom Come, included on this five-disc box set. It starts with *No Time* from that year's *Galactic Zoo Dossier*. All turbulent organ lines, unpredictable blasts of VCS3 synth and feral shrieks, it's even more intense than the album version. "A touch of the Moodies here," intones DJ Brian Matthew as he introduces *Sunrise*, probably scratching his head about the whole thing. What follows is anything but, an astonishing performance, like an invitation to (very) *Stoned Soul Picnic* with searing cosmic blues guitar. The relatively straightforward *Simple Man*, also from that album, offers some respite. But Arthur Brown's signature sound came from synthesising his love of blues, soul, rock, jazz, classical and eastern music into a hybrid with a countercultural twist and Kingdom Come's live performances would culminate in his onstage crucifixion.

> ***Journey* stands out as an anomaly in the history of 70s prog.**

The earliest music on *Eternal Messenger* is a CD of Kingdom Come's first utterances, a previously unreleased nine-track studio jam session from 1970, which shares a similar approach with the improvised sections of The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown's 1969 album *Strangelands*. The jam is a sonic sketchbook, coherent enough in places, with some lyrical ideas that were used later on, but ultimately rambling. Amazingly it helped land the group a deal with Polydor.

Galactic Zoo Dossier followed, a concept album with the human race as part of some kind of cosmic zoo, and by the time of 1972's restless, musically complex *Kingdom Come*, the group producing some surreal satire reminiscent of early Mothers Of Invention, like *The Traffic Light Song* (it wouldn't go green, which was a metaphor for society's uptight squares). There's much larking about and also a generous helping of toilet humour on *A Scientific Experiment*.

The highlight of this box is the magnificent space rock of 1973's *Journey*. Brown had wanted to make an album along cleaner lines with the "feel of a string quartet". The band's drummer had left, and *Journey* became the first rock album to exclusively use a drum machine throughout. Victor Peraino's towering Mellotron and synth fanfares on *Gypsy* were surely an influence on Gary Numan's Tubeway Army and *Time Captives* is like a more electronic cousin of Hawkwind's *In Search Of Space*. It still stands out as a strange anomaly in the history of 70s prog rock and the alternative versions have a rawness and immediacy that also makes them well worth anyone's time.

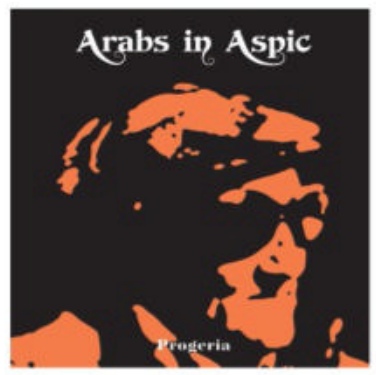
MIKE BARNES

ARABS IN ASPIC

Progeria/ Far Out In Aradabia/ Strange Frame Of Mind

KARISMA

Early doors splurge from Norway's prog preservers.



Veterans of the Norwegian prog scene, Arabs In Aspic have opened the vaults and given their first three records a fresh polish. Compared to its successors, 2003's debut EP *Progeria* has a few tentative and uncertain moments, as if the band were still searching for that sweet spot between nostalgia and ingenuity. The languorous, three-part ramble of *Shelob's Cave* veers from ponderous, low-key verses to choruses underpinned by thunderous, Sabbath-fuelled riffing, and Arabs In Aspic briefly sound as if they're torn between going full prog or just being a slightly trippy stoner doom band. The organ-drenched melodrama of closer *Megalodon* is much more effective and, when it needs to be, as knowingly brutish as mid-70s Van der Graaf.

From then on, the Norwegians have seldom put a foot wrong: 2004's *Far Out In Aradabia* showcased the fine-tuning of their analogue-loving bombast, while repeatedly veering into eccentric psychedelic territory that its creators' audibly relished. Like a turbocharged Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, the Arabs struck lysergic gold on the uplifting *Hair Of The Sun*, while closing *Butterpriest Jam* reworked the band's early meanderings as a focused yet freewheeling space rock ritual.

Strange Frame Of Mind from 2010 is the shiniest gem here, however. With enhanced sonic values, but still with the omnipresent hiss and buzz of analogue gear and occasional bursts of neanderthal riffing, songs like *Flying Norseman* and *Mørket* were sharper, catchier and yet considerably more inventive than anything that had gone before. From the title track's bucolic dreaminess to the surging blues-psych of *Have You Ever Seen The Rain Pt 2*, it was the sound of a band truly hitting their stride.

Although since outstripped by recent triumphs like last year's *Madness And Magic*, *Strange Frame Of Mind* proved that Arabs In Aspic were equipped for the long haul and every bit as inspired as the prog gods who paved the way. **DL**

PETER KNIGHT'S GIGSPANNER

From Poets To Wives TALKING ELEPHANT

Introduction to folk trio led by former Steeleye Span man.

It's a bit baffling how a lot of British folk remains ghettoised, as if existing in an alternative universe to rock and pop. Then again, you could say the same about a lot of modern prog. And the folk music former Steeleye Span violinist Peter Knight has created with his own trio since 2008 has been of a distinctly progressive, ruminative variety.

The name Gigspanner may not summon images of captivating, evocative instrumental beauty, but across this nine-track, hour-long compilation of their three albums to date, there's an intoxicating atmosphere created. All but one of the tracks here are arrangements of traditional songs, but they're a diverse-sounding collection, and unlikely to be much like versions the listener has encountered before. Over eight and a half minutes, an instrumental reading of Irish folk standard *She Moves Through The Fair* sounds faintly ambient, dreamlike even, at times, but then subtle Eastern-sounding percussion comes in, growing in intensity as Knight's bow picks up the tempo creating an almost cèilidh worthy vibe.

The Blackbird is a more rousing affair from the start, as a tap-dancing beat provides the platform for punches of guitar over which Knight's fiddle flutters hypnotically like the titular warbler. In a similar vein, the slow-building jig of *Urban's Reel* shows they can pen tidy tunes under their own steam.

When there are vocals, as in the stark tale of child murder *Bows Of London*, Knight's delivery is understated, his voice not needing to add melodrama to an already haunting story. But this is by no means a one-man show: In *Death And The Lady*, Vincent Salzfaas sets a funereal rhythm on tablas as malevolent bass notes pace the floor, then elegant nylon-stringed acoustic licks from Roger Flack offer further stripes of melancholic colour.

They might not be gigging again for a while, of course, but for anyone needing encouragement to book tickets next time Gigspanner are in town, this will be the perfect sampler. **JS**

GANDALF'S FIST

Road To Darkness NIGHTKEEPER PRODUCTIONS

Tenth anniversary celebration of the cult proggers' best work.

When Gandalf's Fist originally released this concept album in 2011, it was a bold, sweeping project that unfortunately fell slightly short of its ambitions. But here, *Road To Darkness* is effectively revamped. Not only has it been remixed and remastered, but much of what's here has been reimagined, adding new sections to bring more cohesion to the project.

The album was recorded over one weekend by Dean Marsh and Luke Severn back into 2011. Several years later, they, together with the rest of their bandmates, had time to adjust things, releasing it on vinyl for the very first time. This re-upholstered version retains the eerie dreaminess of what was there first time around, but to this has been added more depth and maturity, and the music shines brightly from the moment the twisted *No Place Cyclone* opens up this space rock opera.

Famously, the album is the band's interpretation of the famed L Frank Baum 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz*. Put in a sci-fi setting, what this offers is sinister and spellbinding. The band nod towards Pink Floyd and *The Dark Side Of The Moon* on *Emerald Eyes*, while the disturbing *Twilight At The Gates Of The Prism Moon* is reminiscent of Igor Stravinsky. Elsewhere, there are elements drawn from the 70s prog worlds of Hawkwind and Gentle Giant, meshed in with the classical universes of Chopin and Ligeti, and occasional daubs of Jean-Michel Jarre are also detectable.

Gandalf's Fist beautifully bind these disparate influences, ensuring uniformity and flow. There's also a wacked-out humour running throughout, ensuring the album, for all its potential pretensions, is never stifling nor too highbrow. And where does it all end? Final track *Assorted Lunatics* hints this is all in the mind of someone locked in a padded cell and that adds an extra layer of unease.

Tweaking classic albums can sometimes smack of opportunism, but with *Road To Darkness*, Gandalf's Fist have done themselves proud. **MD**

JUMP

The Myth Remastered DENTEL

Remaster of career-high fourth album from enduring sextet.

Now into their fourth decade, Jump have a career that epitomises dogged perseverance and a strong work ethic. The veteran High Wycombe six-piece certainly haven't experienced a meteoric rise to sunlit uplands. Instead, theirs has been a steady, gradual ascent, which continues to this day. After 14 studio albums and over 1,000 gigs, there's a sense that Jump enjoy every second of the journey rather than pining endlessly for the destination.

Yet there was a time when it looked as if their trajectory would be more dramatic. Back in 1994, Marillion keyboardist Mark Kelly witnessed a Jump gig, liked what he heard and offered his services as a producer. The result was Jump's fourth album, 1995's *The Myth Of Independence*.

Revisiting that cult classic more than 25 years on, *The Myth Remastered* does what it says on the metaphorical tin, with the original album's 11 songs given the spring clean of a remastering rather than the more fundamental overhaul of a remix. The band have taken the opportunity to refresh the artwork too.

All this serves as a valid reminder of a set of songs that Jump have arguably never bettered. If they're a prog band –and that's possibly a moot point in itself – then they occupy the meat and potatoes end of the spectrum. There are few frills here, but that's certainly not a negative criticism. Instead, this latest incarnation of the album is a collection of 11 finely honed songs, driven along by a rhythm section that grooves, with the twin guitars of Pete Davies and Steve Hayes dominating.

Vocalist John Dexter Jones has always been a towering, charismatic presence live, but it's his skill as a lyricist that shines in the studio and songs such as album opener *Tower Of Babel* remain entirely contemporary. Over a quarter of a century ago one of *The Myth*'s highlights was *Princess Of The People*. Preceding the death of Princess Diana by a couple of years, at first blush it's of its time, but dig deeper and its message is arguably more relevant today than ever. **NS**

THE MARS VOLTA

La Realidad De Los Sueños CLOUDS HILL

Alt-prog heroes unearth lost treasure for 18-disc box set.

When Clouds Hill acquired the rights to The Mars Volta's back catalogue, a grand vinyl reissue was inevitable. And this is truly grand: across 18 remastered vinyl LPs, *La Realidad De Los Sueños* lays bare the band's fantastic discography and acts as a reminder of just how potent their music was.

> **A reminder of just how potent The Mars Volta's music was.**

Each of the six studio albums they made between 2003 and 2012 are included. Received ambivalently at the time, their dense and contrarian third LP, *Amputechture*, has aged well, while most recent album *Noctourniquet* is also overdue a re-examination. The latter is their most ambitious release besides 2003's Rick Rubin produced debut *De-Loused In The Comatorium*, yet it stays consistent, firing on both cylinders right out of the gate on *The Whip Hand* and never letting up.

Most interesting for fans is be the inclusion of the unreleased eight-track *Landscape Tantrums*, fished out of guitarist Omar Rodriguez-Lopez's personal archives and the only part of the box set available digitally. Recorded and produced by the band themselves before they teamed up with Rubin for *De-Loused...*, it serves as an alternate reality debut.

TMV were known in their early days for chaotic live performances and unhinged sound design, and they have said that Rubin's subsequent versions of these tracks took that edge off. Where Rubin presented more consistent versions of Cedric Bixler-Zavala's acrobatic vocal performances and Rodriguez-Lopez's mercurial guitar playing, and noticeably tamed the sound effects and manipulation introduced by multi-instrumentalist Jeremy Ward, *Landscape Tantrums* is a chaotic, punk rock take on progressive rock that draws a much clearer line from their previous antics in post-hardcore outfit At The Drive-In than *De-Loused...*. It's psychedelic, disorienting, and, well, inconsistent. It has a lot more attitude than the released version, with a visceral energy that is much more in your face both in the performances and the mix. Except for the *Landscape...* version of *Eriatarka*, they can't settle on riffs, ideas or melodies quite long enough to make them stick.

So is *Landscape Tantrums* a revelation? The answer depends on your viewpoint. It's the record the fans hoped it would be, raw and uncompromising. At the same time, it illustrates that the Rubin version was, on balance, the version the band were right to release at the time. It seems unlikely that these raw, propulsive but unfocused songs would have been the breakout success that the debut proper was. If *Landscape Tantrums* is somebody excitedly giving directions down a bad phone line, then *De-Loused In The Comatorium* is a map.

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ROEDULIUS/CZJZEK

Weites Land BUREAU B

When two worlds become one.

Although the pair first worked together on Rodelius's *Wasser Im Wind*, released in 1982, it wasn't until 1987's *Weites Land* that saxophonist Alexander Czjzek and the man behind the keyboards in Cluster and Harmonia were able to really explore their full potential. With the original album long since out of print and entering into the twilight world of being a sought-after rarity, this reissue is a reminder of the seemingly unlikely chemistry that emerged from their sessions.

There's very much a relaxed 'at home' aspect prevalent with the piano hunkered deep in room ambience and resonant reverb. Anyone concerned that the addition of sax would lead to any brow-knitting atonal jazz blowing need not worry. The resulting improvisations between the two of them are as cool, calm and collected as you'd expect from a Roedelius album, who, in the notes proudly and wryly remarks, "Migraines have even been forever banished when confronted with my music."

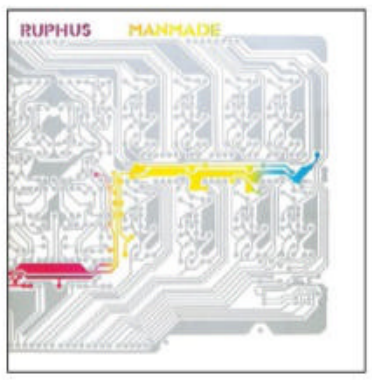
Czjzek's playing is like a series of smooth clean lines that skilfully articulate and emphasise the lean melodies that float and glisten throughout all eight songs. The cascading piano arpeggios of the Nyman-esque *Ballade* and *Weisst Du Noch?* provide Czjzek room to move and sway through a series of plangent choruses, with the title track, in particular, allowing him to tease freewheeling eastern-leaning scales from the drifting piano motif.

There can be a fine line between being gently pastoral and slipping into a new age stupor. For the most part, the pair avoid this fate via a finely judged fade out, perhaps recognising the dangers that too much sweetness can bring. *Nähe* has Czjzek on a breathy lower register that works well but it's on *Berühung* where they seem to make contact the most, working in a delicate interplay between a piece that artfully moves between major and minor modes, casting a subtle light and dark shading that wouldn't be out of place on an ECM Records album. **SS**

RUPHUS

Manmade KARISMA

Norwegian jazz prog linchpins bow out to a disco beat.



Karisma conclude their run of Ruphus reissues with the Norwegians' sixth and final album. Released in 1979 on Polydor, *Manmade* saw the return of vocalist Gudny Aspaas, who previously appeared on their debut, *New Born Day*, and 1976's *Let Your Light Shine*. By this point, Ruphus had been through multiple incarnations with only guitarist Kjell Larsen and bassist Asle Nilsen remaining from the original seven-piece line-up. They're joined by newcomers Bjørn Jenssen on drums and keyboard player Kjell Rønningen, both former members of jazz rock band Saluki.

On what proved to be their swan song, *Manmade* sees Ruphus migrating further away from their roots in prog. Instead, the music favours the jazz rock of their later output like 1978's *Flying Colours* and even disco. The latter style was a sign of the times: disco was very much in vogue with the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack and Donna Summer's *Bad Girls* topping the charts, and Chic releasing *C'est Chic* and *Risqué*. These influences are most pronounced in the song *Fashion Of Today* but they seep into *When The Tide Comes In*, with Jenssen laying out a disco beat on the drums.

The overall vibe is very laid-back. *Clear View* offers a sprightly groove and impressive vocalising from Aspaas, who sails right up to the limits of her considerable range, while Larsen brings funky guitar licks to *Greener Grass Everywhere*. The album's two ballads, *Snowy Days* and *Dear Friend*, are less interesting despite being good showcases for the singer. Musically, they're a little bland, although *Dear Friends* benefits from Larsen's expressive, bluesy lead work, showing great use of space and sustain.

After the band split in 1981, Ruphus reformed twice for live shows, Aspaas developed a successful solo career and represented Norway four times at Eurovision, while Larsen moved into blues and soul. *Manmade* isn't their proggiest work, but it's an opportunity to explore an oft-neglected corner of Norwegian jazz rock. **DW**

PATTO

Give It All Away - The Albums 1970-1973 ESOTERIC

And That's Jazz: Live 1971-1973 BEYOND BEFORE

OLLIE HALSALL

Lovers Leaping THINK LIKE A KEY

A welcome plethora of releases from underrated early 70s greats.

Patto proved too progressive for their own good when it came to reaping the rewards enjoyed by tamer contemporaries on the vibrant early-70s' UK gig circuit. Although singer Mike Patto humorously flaunted the necessary rock god strut and Ollie Halsall's quicksilver guitar extrapolations sent packed crowds crazy, their albums failed to sell, leading to the band's split in 1973.

> **One of progressive rock's idiosyncratic forgotten treasures.**

All Patto's recordings appear on long overdue box set *Give It All Away*. Having morphed out of R&B stalwarts Timebox, they released 1970's self-titled debut through Vertigo. Their complex yet contagious sound crystallised on *San Antone* and *The Man*, Halsall out-shredding John McLaughlin on *Money Bag*'s stunning free jazz flight and daredevil 14-minute out-take *Hanging Rope*. However, it failed to connect with the wider public, as did 1971's *Hold Your Fire*, despite Halsall hitting his blistering peak on *Air Raid Shelter* and Patto himself asserting his larger-than-life personality and lyrical eloquence on *You, You Point Your Finger*.

Producer Muff Winwood permitted them to loosen up on 1972's self-descriptive *Roll 'Em, Smoke 'Em, Put Another Line Out*. Stoned humour imbued *Cap'n P & The Attos*, while Halsall pummelled piano on *Turn Turtle* and sounded totally wired on *LoudGreenSong*'s rollicking boogie. Striving for success, Patto tried commercial songs for fourth album *Monkey's Bum*, but Halsall quit mid-recording, ultimately splitting the band and consigning the album to the vaults until it was finally unearthed in 2017.

The guitarist's brilliance is showcased on a separate release, the live album *And That's Jazz*, recorded in 1971 on Germany's *Beat Club* and France's *Pop Deux*, as well as at a scorching 1973 set from London's Torrington pub. Halsall rejoined Patto in Boxer, before the singer died of cancer in 1979, after which Halsall laid down the previously unreleased demos collected on *Lovers Leaping*. The latter found him swapping guitar pyrotechnics for singing lightweight pop-rock that evokes Shakin' Stevens or Gilbert O'Sullivan, his six-string dizz-bombs only rearing on *Airplane Food*. Halsall himself died of a drug-induced heart attack in 1992.

Today, Patto are a cult footnote in the annals of early 70s rock. But these earlier recordings are testament to them as one of progressive rock's idiosyncratic forgotten treasures. **KRIS NEEDS**

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HAYLEY GRIFFITHS BAND

Live POSH AND ROCK

Formidable live performances from ex-Karnataka singer's latest band.

Hayley Griffiths first came to the prog world's attention during her six-year stint fronting Karnataka. After her departure from that band in 2017, the classically trained singer put together her own eponymous group – one that's on a par with her previous outfit, as this two-disc DVD recorded in Holland and France during the Hayley Griffiths Band's debut tour in 2019 proves (a separate CD recorded, *Live At t'Block*, is also available).

The title is the only perfunctory thing about *Live*. Featuring more than three hours of material, it showcases Griffiths' bubbly personality and stellar voice, the latter blessed with grit, vulnerability and sensitivity. But while it's her name on the marquee, she has a way of engaging with the other musicians that makes it obvious they're equal partners. Guitarist Matthieu Spaeter is impressive, veering from the simple to the complex depending on what's needed. His partnership with keyboard player Çağri Tozluoğlu is crucial, the pair magnificently complementing one another.

Throughout, the music is controlled, atmospheric and dynamic, bringing to mind both Karnataka and Touchstone at their best, while the energy level and emotional commitment never drops. A thoroughly enjoyable watch. **MD**

MYSTERY

Caught In The Whirlwind Of Time UNICORN DIGITAL

Well-packed live DVD and more from masterful Canucks.

Like 2019's *Live In Poznan*, this new Blu-ray from Mystery was captured on the band's Live And Butterflies tour, so while there's a different running order, there's a lot of overlap in the setlist. Filmed at the Boerderij Cultuurpodium in the Netherlands, this a marathon performance, running to nearly three hours of music, and is available as a standalone Blu-ray or deluxe edition with three bonus CDs. The presentation looks and sounds great, multiple camera angles cover all six band members and the mix is crisp and clear.

The running order strikes a good balance between longer-form works such as *Looking For Something Else* or *Shadow Of The Lake*, and shorter tracks like *How Do You Feel?* But even at their most epic and ambitious, Mystery are always richly melodic. Bandleader Michel St-Père is a musician of impeccable tastefulness and the harmonies he plays with Sylvain Moineau, both wielding Stratocasters, are gorgeous. *The Willow Tree* boasts a terrific instrumental break when the players all trade off, while Jean Pageau is one of prog's most underrated singers, blessed with tone, range and passion, if a tad overly fond of masks and capes. An outstanding example of modern prog. **DW**

BABBLE ON AN' TING – ALEX PATERSON'S INCREDIBLE JOURNEY BEYOND THE ULTRAWORLD WITH THE ORB

Alex Paterson & Kris Needs OMNINBUS PRESS

Warm and richly detailed biography of The Orb's mastermind.

The Orb was, of course, the brainchild of Alex Paterson. His journey is fascinating: after a traumatic childhood, he used his intelligence, connections and talent to create the genre of 'ambient house' virtually single-handedly, patchworking together snatches of Pink Floyd, Mike Oldfield, dub and Minnie Ripperton in a manner that was uncommon in the early 90s.

Prog writer Kris Needs is the perfect biographer for this tale, as his career intersects with Paterson's at so many points. One of Paterson's oldest friends, Needs first met him while interviewing Killing Joke in the late 70s. Paterson had been at school with KJ bassist Martin Glover (Youth), and Paterson was to become their roadie. Needs was part of The Orb's circle, DJing for them, adding to the general spaced-out anarchy of their shows.

The 'anything goes' optimism of the late 80s and the explosion of sampling is captured well, as is the predictable muscling-in of major labels and lawyers. Topped off with a 46-page discography, *Babble On An' Ting* is warm, richly detailed and as idiosyncratic as you'd expect, full of amusing left turns, with few punches pulled. It's like a pub conversation between two old friends. **DE**

BEEFHEART: THROUGH THE EYES OF MAGIC

John 'Drumbo' French THE LAST MUSIC CO

Whopping 864-page story of Captain Beefheart's Magic Band.

John French is a devout Christian and was prompted to rejoin the Magic Band for the recording of *Doc At The Radar Station* in 1980 by a voice in his head from God telling him that Don Van Vliet aka Captain Beefheart was in need of help. His immediate reaction was, "No! I've tried working with him too many times! This can't be God!"

> **A colourful picture of the freak scene around Frank Zappa.**

But he dropped round to Van Vliet's trailer in Lancaster, California and found that one of his guitarists had quit. French played guitar on that album, as well as some drums, but jumped ship when Van Vliet gave him an unnecessarily long list of tracks to learn on his second instrument for an upcoming tour. But he'd usually relished a challenge, as on his first recording session — a demo for *Electricity* on *Safe As Milk* as an 18-year-old in 1967 — when Van Vliet suddenly decided to completely change the drum pattern.

Then there was the notorious spell in 1968-9 rehearsing and recording *Trout Mask Replica*. French took on the role as musical director and was able to make sense of Van Vliet's inchoate beginner's piano lines, transcribe them and teach the parts to his fellow musicians. It's hard to imagine the album being made without his input. Impecunious and malnourished, he had quit during the process, was persuaded back, and finally snapped when Van Vliet threw him down a flight of stairs.

All this and much more can be found in *Through The Eyes Of Magic*. French paints a colourful picture of the Californian music scene, and the freak scene that revolved around Frank Zappa, of which Beefheart and his band were a part. But the backbone of the book is the complex psychological drama of French being drawn back time and again to Van Vliet and his radical music, which he would never have made elsewhere, and having to deal with a bandleader who could be either warm and charming or a bully and a tyrant.

It's an extraordinary saga, well written and balanced by quotes from interviews French conducted with ex-band members, which provide alternative viewpoints and some humorous banter. That said, it's *very* long — and repetitive in places — and could have benefitted from some trimming. French describes writing this book as "cathartic" and one wonders what might have happened had he taken another course and drummed in a more conventional blues rock band or concentrated more on his own singing and songwriting. But this is his history and although it must have been hellish at times, this writer is rather selfishly pleased that he put himself through it for our benefit.

MIKE BARNES

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PRESS/ANNA MARSON

Scott Milligan (Kitten Pyramid)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's home?
Burton Upon Trent. Some of the best real ale pubs in the country, *and* a Nando's!

Earliest prog memory?
Seeing the video for *Another Brick In The Wall (Part 2)* – the hammers marching, the *Monty Python*-esque faces. It was my first experience of prog and surrealism.

Your first prog album?
Prince's *Sign O' The Times* – he skipped across all styles and genres. Bought on vinyl in 1987 from Woolworths in Lichfield, where I grew up.

And the last?
Van der Graaf Generator's *The Quiet Zone/The Pleasure Dome*. The track *The Sphinx In The Face* really grabbed me.

First prog gig?
Family at O2 Forum Kentish Town in December 2015. I loved it.

And the latest?
Super Furry Animals at Rock City, Nottingham in 2016. Gruff [Rhys] wore a massive helmet and put the microphone to his head.

The best prog gig you ever saw?
Easy – July 26, my birthday, seven years ago, the house band at Ronnie Scott's. Their guest pianist Grant Windsor was incredible – I'd never witnessed improvisation like that. He was like a man possessed.

Newest prog discovery?
I know I'm late getting to them, but it's Van der Graaf Generator.

Guilty musical pleasure?
Kanye West. I spent years hating him, but then listened to his music properly, and now I really rate him. His song *Ultralight Beam* blew me away in the same way *Paranoid Android* did.

What's your specialist subject on *Mastermind*?
The life and times of Nick Drake.

Kanye West: King of Prog?

TAYLOR HILL/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE MEADOWS

Favourite prog venue?
Hafan y Mor Holiday Park in Haven, Wales. We played HRH Prog there in 2015, incredible atmosphere. Wales Comic Con was there too, we went to get a Burger King and walked through loads of Stormtroopers!

> "I honestly believe I'm going to work with Kanye West at some point."

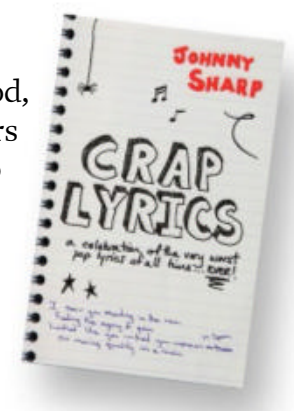
Who's your prog hero?
Paul McCartney. He did what people with his level of success should do – he explored lots of areas, with The Beatles and then solo. A true artist.

Outside of music what else are you into?
Filmmaking. I've got one more album in me, then I'll be going into film in a serious way.

Ever had a prog date?
[Laughs] I'm not even sure what that means, so no!

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Or Radiohead's *Paranoid Android*. Or maybe even Meat Loaf's *Bat Out Of Hell*...

Recommend us a good read?
Johnny Sharp's *Crap Lyrics*. It's a really good, funny book – he tears strips off people who deserve to have their strips torn off!



Which prog muso you'd most like to work with?
Kanye. I'm an unknown from Burton with two albums under my belt, but I honestly believe I'm going to work with him at some point. Or Björk.

Which proggy album gets you in a good mood?
Lou Reed's *Transformer*. There's loads of different styles on there. It's always in my top five.

Favourite prog album cover?
Without a doubt it's *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

And what are you up to at the moment?
KOOZY!! is out now. We're recording album number three with a new line-up – it's going to be called *IDIOT!!!* and that'll be ready for September. Then we hope to be gigging around November time.

See www.kittenpyramid.co.uk.

AIRBAG

IDENTITY

Following in the series of remastered, top end re-issues of Norwegian prog act Airbag's catalogue, we are thrilled to present you Identity – their acclaimed 2009 debut album. "Identity" has been remastered by Jacob Holm-Lupo (White Willow, The Opium Cartel, + + +), and is finally made available on vinyl again – in a special limited deluxe version with a 12 page booklet and die-cut sleeve. Also out on cd/ltd digisleeve cd.

CD/Digital Out June 11th • Vinyl Out August 13th

ARABS IN ASPIC

I - III

"Progeria" + "Far Out in Aradabia" + "Strange Frame of Mind"

Hailing from Trondheim in Norway, Arabs in Aspic has been mid-Norway's flagship of 70s inspired progressive rock and proto-hardrock for the past 15 years. The bands first three albums have been re-mastered by Jacob Holm-Lupo, and will be released both seperatly and collected in a limited box set on exclusive "Aspic coloured vinyl". The box also contains a 12 page booklet about the early years of the band, and a slipmat with their Crown logo. The booklet and slipmat will be exclusive to this box set.

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