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PATTERN-SEEKING ANIMALS

PREHENSILE TALES

In Stores 15th May 2020

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HAKEN

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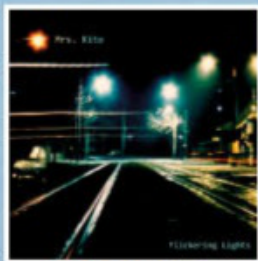
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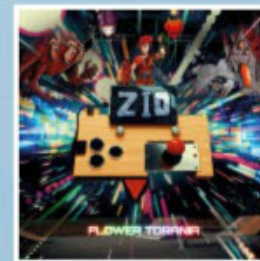
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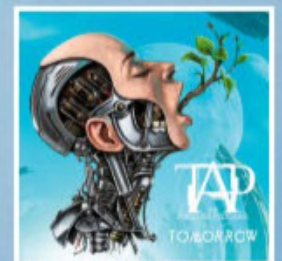
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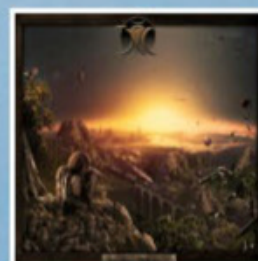
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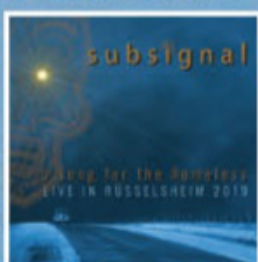
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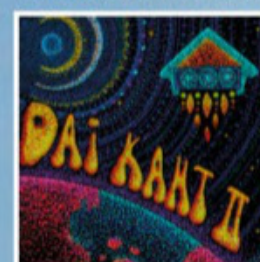
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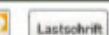


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"I was taken over to one side by our manager at the time who said, 'The band have decided to fire you, and we are going to keep you on as a solo artist and they're going to carry on as Strawbs.' I said, 'Over my dead body.'"

Dave Cousins

Ed's Letter



Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog*. I hope this issue finds you as well as can be expected under these most unique of circumstances.

First of all, I'd like to thank all of you who bought the last issue of *Prog*. Obviously you can still buy *Prog* in the shops here in the UK, so our heartfelt thanks go to those who ventured out to buy it. More copies are now being made available to purchase online as well, and although we know there are currently some delays with the postal service, we hope these aren't proving too frustrating for those who have bought their issues of *Prog* online.

Of course we're seeing big increases in people buying the digital version of the magazine – for many readers it makes a lot of sense during the current Covid-19 crisis. Keep your eyes peeled for special deals that are cropping up all the time, such as those on page 15.

This will be the second issue of *Prog* that we've finished from home, and new challenges are arising all the time. Getting new photos for bands who are still releasing albums is becoming increasingly problematic, while advertising revenue has largely collapsed in the music sector as everyone reels from the current crisis. Album releases are also being delayed on a daily basis.

But these issues seem paltry compared to what we're all experiencing in our daily lives. Hopefully getting your new issue of *Prog* offers some light relief from everything else that's going on around us. Bands are still releasing music, still performing online, and coming up with ever more innovative ways to reach out to the public.

I for one am extremely thankful for our musicians continuing to create great art, as much as I am for your continued support of this magazine.

Prog on...

Jerry Ewing - Editor



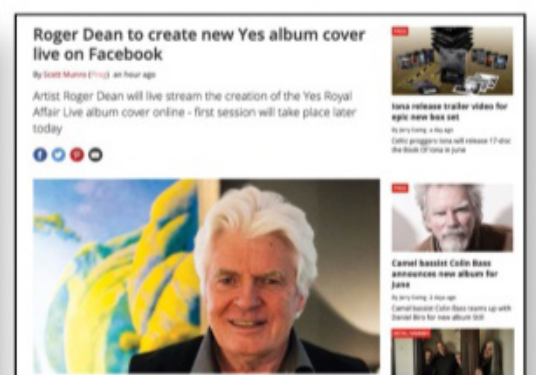
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SAT. 19 SEPTEMBER
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+ SUPPORT COMEDY OF ERRORS

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SAGA

FRI. 16 OCTOBER
STEVE HILLAGE BAND
+ GONG

SAT. 31 OCTOBER
ARENA

FRI. 6 NOVEMBER
PINK PROJECT

SUN. 8 NOVEMBER
STICK MEN WITH
DAVID CROSS

SAT. 14 NOVEMBER
STILLMARILLION

SAT. 28 NOVEMBER
MYSTERY

FRI. 4 DECEMBER
MOSTLY AUTUMN

SAT. 12 DECEMBER
IQ

SAT. 19 DECEMBER
RAY WILSON BAND

SUN. 20 DECEMBER
LONELY ROBOT

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RUPHUS
Inner Voice

When Ruphus' fourth album "Inner Voice" was released in 1977, they cemented their reputation as a leading band in European Jazz Rock. Produced by Terje Rypdal and remastered by Jacob Holm-Lupo.

Out 22.05!



SHAMAN ELEPHANT
Wide Awake but Still Asleep

Shaman Elephant has an uncanny skill in the art of blending 60's and 70's psychedelia with progressive rock. Their 2nd album demonstrates just how much the band has matured as songwriters and musicians, whilst not losing any of that considerable Shaman Elephant charm.

Out 27.05!



ARABS IN ASPIC
Madness and Magic

Yet another great piece of heavy progressive rock from these Norwegians. The new album from Arabs in Aspic takes the listener on a journey through life's "Madness and Magic", both musically and lyrically, and what an awesome journey it is!

Out 12.06!



AIRBAG
A Day at the Beach

Inspired by the resurgence of 1980s electronica, new wave and movie scores, Airbag has created a powerful sound combining ethereal soundscapes with their signature guitar driven progressive rock. The result is a stunning selection of songs revealing a mature band looking forward, with an impressive legacy.

Out 19.06!

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](https://www.facebook.com/Prog) under *Prog*.

THE MISSING LINKS

No revolution was to be found with regard to the greatest songs by Yes [Prog 107]. Sadly, all the old stigmas resurfaced like *The Ancient*, which is the worst side of *Tales From Topographic Oceans*, and, God forbid, don't mention *Union*, or even *Talk*.

Maybe my age is the key, as I reached my mid-teens as prog reached the end of its original time. That said, thanks to my brother's record collection, I was already fluent in *Tales...*, and had always decided that Side 3 (*The Ancient*, of course) was my favourite side of the album. Actually (say it quietly), I'd always preferred *Tales...* to *Close To The Edge* anyway.

When given the opportunity to vote for my favourite songs, I found it harder than I thought it would be. While it was obvious that *Close To The Edge* would be shoehorned into the No.1 position I looked at it from another angle, that being, what do I listen to by them today? What has lasted the test of time?

Recently listening to the live *Topographic Drama* rekindled my musical love affair with their music. I'd never actually noticed *Machine Messiah* before! But *Topographic Drama* is a kind of 'best of', so what standalone albums or songs do I occasionally listen to now? Well (whisper it) there's *Talk*, where I thought *I Am Waiting* is one of the best prog songs ever! Then there's the underrated *Magnification* album, which was possibly the last Yes album of note. *Union* gets a play with *Miracle Of Life*, and needless to say its predecessor *Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe*, which should really have

Prog 107, featuring Yes' 40 greatest songs, as voted by readers.

been included in your poll and puts 90125 and *Big Generator* right in their place.

And then lastly, there is *Tales...*, which I guess is part of me now, and is always a pleasure to listen to. I like a punchy Jon Anderson just as much as a hippie one, and we as fans are lucky to have had the variety given to us.

As primarily a Genesis fan, there's also an interesting comparison. I still listen and enjoy Gabriel-era Genesis, and despite songs like *Entangled*, *Blood On The Rooftop*, *Duke's Travels* and *Home By The Sea (Part 2)*, the stuff I return to is rooted in the early era.

Yes, by comparison, have provided many differing styles that enabled their studio albums to be taken seriously right up until 2001. They've not always got it right for sure, but I reckon that the odd gem is to be found away from the mainstream and those old stigmas.

Ian Rumens
Uckfield

IT'S A SHAME ABOUT RAY

I've been reading through the *Genesis: The Complete Story* bookazine during the last weekends, always a little bit about my favourite band at a time. There is, however, one piece constantly missing in the press about Genesis: Ray Wilson and *Calling All Stations*.

Like Steve Hackett, he's also presenting old Genesis songs but he regularly gets overlooked because he mainly tours elsewhere, especially on the continent. He is often regarded as "only the singer" of the very last Genesis studio album. Which, in my personal opinion, often gets overlooked as well. For years now I have held the opinion that *Calling All Stations* is rather nostalgic, because to me it sounds a bit more like pre-*Trespass* Genesis. Without the strings and orchestra, but with more modern technology and more mature players on it.

I would really like to read an interview with Ray Wilson on how he sees his work with CAS, how he sees Genesis, especially considering the compositions, the music, as it flows. And, of course, how he recalls writing music together with Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks. About that, we have virtually

no information. Especially since a few non-album tracks are indeed credited as collaboration work.

I saw Ray Wilson live once, and I must say that for a former Genesis member who gets constantly ignored, he does a pretty good job with his small band. So, concluding, I'd really like to read an interview with Ray Wilson in *Prog* about his Genesis time. Plus, I recommend listening to his Genesis cover albums.

Andreas Krämer
Germany

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Okay, I admit I'm one of the two prog fans and magazine readers over 60 that 1) did not listen to Rush growing up, 2) did not have friends that shared or discussed the band and 3) still does not own or currently listen to any Rush music. I blame the oversight on many different things and the literal definition of ignorance is certainly one of them. After hearing of Neil Peart's death, then listening to the SiriusXM Rush tribute, and now your articles on the man, I am highly motivated and inspired to explore everything Rush-related.

I can imagine how much the music meant to others growing up as Yes, ELP, Genesis, King Crimson, Gentle Giant, and many other bands meant to me. And now I'll get to discover this music for the first time at my leisure discovering all that greatness like a kid again going to the record store and listening to something new for the first time.

Thank you for your magazine dedicated to the music I and many others grew up with, still listen to, and utilise to discover new, and sometimes "old" music we missed the first time around.

Rob Pilkington
via email

PRAISE FOR PETE

I was so pleased to see the item about Pete Atkin in It's Prog Jim [Prog 108]. I have been listening to Pete Atkin and Clive James' songs since the very first album, *Beware Of The Beautiful Stranger*, now 50 years old. The albums are all wonderfully crafted songs with lyrics that are always interesting and draw on many varied cultural reference points.



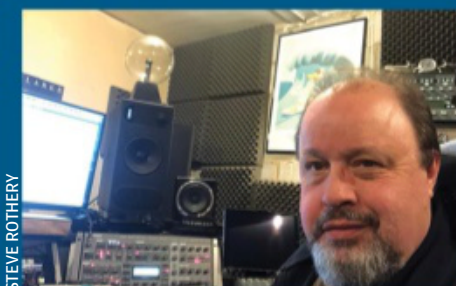
TWEET TALK

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MARILLION

@MarillionOnline

Greetings from my garage studio! Listening to the writing ideas for the next Marillion album. It's exciting and frustrating in equal measure as we can't currently work together in the same room but I can tell that it's going to be a great album! Stay safe and sane xx



GODSTICKS

@Godsticks

Hope everyone is staying safe and looking out for each other! Big thanks to all the key workers in the NHS, education system and beyond who are keeping our country operating! What are you doing to pass the time? We'll share what we're up to as well

LETTER



My Prog arrives regularly through the post and I thank you for that – just received issue 108 with masses about ELP, and Nick Mason (from the more obvious subject groups) and very interesting material on Roedelius and Pure Reason Revolution (not so obvious).

Before getting my magazine through the post I got it from local newsagents and the first I discovered there was issue 24 with Ian Anderson on the front (usual suspect – thank you) but also Enochian Theory, who I saw supporting The Enid; Mars Volta who I think your magazine introduced me to; Richard Barbieri who I was always a bit guilty back then of liking because Japan had been a “pop” group (a very fine one!).

Between the time of the present issue and the distant past of issue 24 I had

picked up a couple of earlier Progs but being isolated I have been trawling the internet far, far too much and came across the issue printed in December 2009.

What a splendid issue – Tull, Pentangle, John Martyn, Fairport, Roy Harper (the creator of my all-favourite album) and even Comus – but I especially liked a multi-page article on Nektar, which concentrated on the artwork of their output. I know from other issues you did this Art For Art’s Sake regularly and it is an idea you could revisit for this particular reader.

This may be the record length of time between an issue and a thank you, but it just had to be typed.

Keep up the good work.

Steve Broadhurst
via email

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

Pete Atkin went on to have a successful career as a radio producer for the BBC. However, he still turns up to play the odd gig from time to time and is always entertaining in a self-deprecatory way that belies his and Clive’s skill.

This month’s magazine arrived just in time to save me from insanity as I enter my third week of self-isolation due to being on the vulnerable list and I shall be reading every word.

John Baxter
Andover

MY HEART GOES ON

For various reasons Prog 107 is just seriously being read. As usual I opened my subscription copy and flicked through pages as soon as it was delivered. But this morning I sat down, tea in hand to read properly and it made me think about how on earth the next copy, due out in a week or so was going to appear.

Jerry and the team, I wish you to put your own health and safety first, and if the next copy is delayed, so be it. Whatever you decide to do re: the next couple of editions is fine with me, you shall continue to have my support in these strange times.

I wanted to simply say I love the magazine and the support you provide to prog. I know on social media there is frustration at times about delivery etc, but that’s because readers care about the magazine and really enjoy it.

So a real big thank you again to the team for putting out a great magazine, which is actually far more than that,



Pete Atkin, as seen in
It’s Prog Jim, Prog108.

it’s an institution, one that I’m proud to be a member of.

I, for one, really appreciate the time and effort the team and contributors put in and await the next issues whenever they appear.

Paul Swanton
via email

Thanks for the kind words and support, Paul. Much appreciated at this time. - Ed

TIME FILES

I’ve just finished reading Prog 107 and I downloaded the special Prog Collection. I’ve been buying Prog magazine since edition three (I only missed the first two) and I have had a subscription ever since. You have covered so many new and old artists over the years, with great stories and images. Thanks for that. Looking at the special, I went up to my music room where I keep the (almost) complete collection wondering if there was a quick way to find another interview with Steven Wilson? I had to manually go through my collection. So I wondered: do you have a sort of a database with the all the articles that were in Prog? It would surely help me to find stuff.

Marcel van Dommelen
The Netherlands

Thanks for writing in Marcel. I know a reader created a database for the cover CDs. Now people have a bit more time on their hands with lockdown, maybe it’s the ideal time for someone to take up the challenge? - Ed.

PROG

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NICK BEGGS

@NickBeggs

Went to the post office today and was informed by a member of staff that they had received overseas fan mail for me. Did I just wake up in the 80s?

KAVUS TORABI

@Knifeworld

Fuck it all and fucking no regrets.



CHARLIE CAWOOD

@CharlieCawood

I wanted to help combat the virus outbreak myself, so I took an online course in epistemology. Now all I’m aware of is my own ignorance. That backfired.

INTRO

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

HAKEN COMPLETE STORY ARC WITH SIXTH ALBUM VIRUS

Vector companion release continues the legend of the Cockroach King.

► When British prog metal giants Haken release their sixth album, *Virus*, on June 5 via InsideOut, they'll complete an ambitious narrative that began with 2013 song *Cockroach King* from their acclaimed third album, that year's *The Mountain*.

The title of the new 11-track record has no connection with the global health emergency, but instead indicates a theme that's a direct follow-on from 2018's *Vector*.

"We always planned for *Vector* to be a double album," says guitarist Richard Henshall. "So while we were writing it, we were deliberately saving some of the riffs and ideas for what would become *Virus*."

He adds: "In terms of the music it's arguably our most eclectic album to date. Its influences range from Fear Factory to Elbow — so to make sure it sounded focused rather than derivative we had to find the right balance across the album as a whole."

The latest material was the result of greater collaboration between the band members, which

Henshall argues has continued to increase since their earlier records. This was important to the development of *Vector* too. "With both albums we've been collaborating fully as a band as much as possible," he reveals. "Sometimes it's tricky, as we have members dotted throughout the world, so we generally share and develop ideas together online."

"With this album we were lucky because we toured with Devin Townsend in late 2019, just before we were due to record. So we had about a month together on the tour bus, and we used that time to really refine the arrangements and bring them to life."

That month of face-to-face interaction had a hugely positive impact on the final product. "It can easily

become quite cold and mechanical when you're just sharing ideas online," Henshall explains, "so it's very important to take it to some sort of space, to work on the arrangements together and to properly realise them."

He adds, "We actually made a makeshift studio in the back of the bus and would go around in circles sharing ideas to see what worked best for a particular part. It made the whole process fun and very collaborative — it brought forward ideas we wouldn't typically have come up with on our own."

The guitarist is keeping his cards close to his chest when it comes to lyrics, but he does reveal that, conceptually, *Virus* centres around the protagonist from *Cockroach King*, and finds the band revisiting melodic themes from that song and *Vector*, as a way of binding both albums.

"Both *Vector* and *Virus* tell the back story of the protagonist in *Cockroach King*," he explains. "On *Vector* he's being institutionalised, whereas *Virus* represents his manic downfall. It was very exciting to delve into further his back story."



"We actually made a makeshift studio in the back of the bus."

Descent into madness:
Haken wrote new music while
on tour with Devin Townsend.



“In this narrative he loses his mind and undergoes some electro-shock therapy, so that allowed us to push the music into some interesting directions. It allowed us to explore more of our electronic influences, with glitchy ideas in the same vein as Aphex Twin or [IDM act] Squarepusher. It’s been exciting to develop these ideas into something that still sounds like Haken.”

Former Periphery man Adam ‘Nolly’ Getgood returned to mixing duties to give the partnering albums a sense of continuity, while the artwork has once been designed by the band’s longtime collaborators Blacklake.

“Virus has some of the heaviest stuff we’ve ever written,” Henshall adds, “but it also has a lot of mellower stuff; so the contrast of ideas is probably the most extreme we’ve ever had. We’re really excited to get it out there and see how people react.”

Virus will be available on CD, vinyl and digital formats as well as all streaming platforms. For more, see www.hakenmusic.com. **PW**

This month, Intro was compiled by

Chris Cope
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Jerry Ewing
Martin Kielty
Dom Lawson
Rhodri Marsden
Julian Marszalek
Alison Reijman
Natasha Scharf
Johnny Sharp
Phil Weller

ARABS IN ASPIC'S OWN WHITE ALBUM

Norwegian band get influenced by Edgar Broughton and a real-life “Doctor Death”.



Dance with Death: Arabs In Aspic

Arabs In Aspic’s guitarist-vocalist Jostein Smeby says the Norwegian band have created a masterpiece of invention with their latest LP *Madness And Magic*, released via Karisma on June 12.

“This is the most complex album we have recorded,” Smeby enthuses. “It shows the band’s playfulness at its best. No worries, no limits – you can feel that in our music. *Madness And Magic* is our *White Album*.”

The title was suggested by their hero and collaborator Edgar Broughton, but the project’s direction changed when Smeby’s mother died, and he subsequently rewrote many of the lyrics – particularly after meeting a healthcare professional he called “Doctor Death.”

“After two weeks at the hospital, he showed up like a diviner in white. He was not the guy I hoped would show up for the endgame. It was both fascinating and frightening to observe the guy who takes all the decisions hiding behind medical terms when he clearly didn’t have a clue what to do.”

Regardless, Smeby says the album remains easily identifiable as an Arabs In Aspic work: “We’re still a damn heavy rock band at times, but we also do acoustic parts stripped down and naked.” He adds: “I really like the sound on this album. It’s laid back, exciting and comfortable. I don’t get tired when I listen to it.”

The band are already speeding ahead into another recording project. For more, see www.arabsinaspic.org. **MK**

PROG OFF THE ROAD WITH COVID-19 CANCELLATIONS

Festivals, tours and shows postponed or called off.

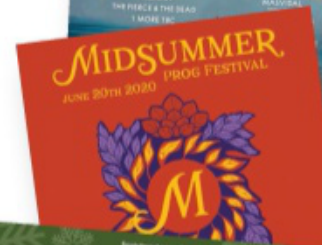
Prognosis Festival have announced new dates of September 4-5, after the original March 20-21 dates were abandoned at Eindhoven, the Netherlands. The fourth annual Midsummer Prog Festival, set to take place in Valkenburg, also in the Netherlands, on June 1, has been rescheduled over a year later on June 26, 2021.

Winter’s End Festival, planned for April 23-26 in Chepstow, has been moved back a year to April 22-25, 2021, with the intention of presenting the original line-up.

Van der Graaf Generator and Lesoir both rescheduled their November dates, while the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band moved their farewell show from May 29 to December 18 at the original venue, London’s O2 Shepherd’s Bush Empire.

Periphery announced that, “with heavy hearts,” their European tour was cancelled with no plans to reschedule.

Ticket holders should contact their retailer with any queries. For further schedule changes head over to www.progmagazine.com. **MK**





Old but new: Kansas aim for the best of both worlds with their 16th studio album.

KANSAS REVEAL FRUITS OF ABSENCE

First album with Tom Brislin arrives in June.

► **Kansas** are to put out their 16th studio album on June 26. Entitled *The Absence Of Presence*, it will be released by InsideOut.

Most of the songs were written by guitarist Zak Rizvi.

"I did six of the nine tracks here," he explains. "The way I write is that I tend to work out the arrangements as I go along, so by the time I'm ready to let the rest of the band hear what I have, it's in a state of near readiness."

Rizvi also co-produced the album, with help from drummer Phil Ehart and guitarist Rich Williams – both of whom were members of the band during the classic years of the 70s.

"Yes, the three of us are the co-producers, but I guess I took more of a leading role than the others," Rizvi says. "Inevitably there are a lot of references to what people would call classic Kansas in the way this album sounds, because I've been a huge fan of the band for so long. I grew up listening to the first five albums, so they are bound to have a big influence on my approach."

"But *The Absence Of Presence* isn't merely a nostalgia trip. What we're doing is using what's gone before, but giving it a modern slant."

The release also marks the recording debut of former Yes and Renaissance keyboard player Tom Brislin, who joined Kansas in 2018. "Tom's been great to have on board. He also contributed to the writing process," Rizvi reports. "When I ran out of creative juice I could hand things over to him."

The band's first album since 2016's *The Prelude Implicit* is to be made available on CD, double LP in 180g vinyl, and a limited-edition deluxe CD and 5.1 Blu-ray, together with an artbook. In addition, there will be a digital version.

Kansas aim to bring their *Point Of Know Return* anniversary tour to Europe in the autumn, starting at the

London Palladium on October 18 – assuming life on the road has resumed. "Right now, that is the plan," agrees Rizvi. "But as you can imagine, like everyone else, things are up in the air as far as touring goes."

"Assuming we do come over, we'll be introducing a couple of the new songs into our set, as well as playing the whole of the *Point Of Know Return* album, plus other fan faves and a few surprises." MD

Find out more at www.kansasband.com.

"We're using what's gone before, but giving it a modern slant."

INTRO extras

IO EARTH IN QUICK CHANGE

IO Earth performed a swift change of plans to make sure new album *Aura* arrived signed for those who'd pre-ordered. "We had to sterilise our studio, and get everyone in, one at a time, in full protective gear, to do their part," Dave Cureton reported. *Aura* follows 2018's acclaimed *Solitude* album and it's on sale now via www.ioearth.com.



Jacob Holm-Lupo has a Ratt in the cellar!

THE OPIUM CARTEL REVISITS THE 80S FOR LATEST VALOR

White Willow man enlists all-star cast.

► **The Opium Cartel** – the art rock/pop side project of White Willow's Jacob Holm-Lupo – releases third album *Valor* on June 5 via Apollon.

Valor is influenced by 80s bands like Japan, the Blue Nile, Ultravox, This Mortal Coil and Roxy Music, to whom Holm-Lupo listened while growing up. There's also a bonus track, a cover of Ratt's *What's It Gonna Be*. Guest musicians include Airbag guitarist Bjorn Riis, White Willow/Wobbler keyboardist Lars Fredrik Frøislie on drums, vocalists Silje Huleboer and Leah Maercu (from Israeli prog metallers Tillian), plus Holm-Lupo's 13-year-old daughter Ina A.

Holm-Lupo says *Valor* explores the optimism of youth. "When I begin working with sounds that have that kind of nostalgic resonance, it takes me on a very different lyrical path," he adds. "This album is about me revisiting memories from the past."

He explains that Frøislie was enlisted because he was looking for the "uncomplicated, groovy feel" the drummer could deliver. The singers were chosen because they all have distinct styles that complement each other. His daughter, though not a prog fan, was happy to sing on the synth-heavy *Nightwings* after her dad decided her expressive voice was ideal for the song.

Of his decision to include the Ratt cover, Holm-Lupo says, "I thought if I stripped away the glam metal trappings, I would get right to the heart of the song." For more information visit www.theopiumcartel.bandcamp.com. AR

HAWKLORDS GO LIVE FOR SPACE ROCK ANNIVERSARY

Tour recording features special guest Nik Turner.

► **Hawklords** mark 50 years of space rock with the release of *Hawklords Live* on May 29. It was recorded during last year's Generations Tour, featuring special guest Nik Turner.

"Releasing a totally live performance from one of our shows seemed a very good way to celebrate 50 years of space rock," guitarist-vocalist Jerry Richards says. "I thought we had a killer line-up and I'd say the band is thoroughly liberated, musically, at the moment."

He hails the "genuine exuberance" heard on the 12-track album, which includes fan favourite *We Are One* and four songs from 2019's *Heaven's Gate*. "The band stretches out the arrangements in a truly spellbinding way," he reports. "Having Nik on board was a real treat for the fans and for the band, too."

Hawklords are working on new studio album, *Time*, and they'll play HRH Prog XI in 2021. Visit www.facebook.com/TheHawklords. MK

Last year's live line-up, with Nik Turner second right.



PRESS/ MARK AMADEUS

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AIRBAG UP THE ELECTRONIC ON FIFTH ALBUM

Oslo trio head out on *A Day At The Beach*.



Then there were three: Riis, left, and his Airbag colleagues.

► **Atmospheric Norwegian prog** rockers Airbag will release their new album *A Day At The Beach* on June 19 via Karisma.

It's the fifth album from the group but their first as a trio, following the departure of keyboard player Jørgen Hagen and bassist Anders Hovdan a few years ago.

The six-track record sees Airbag — now consisting of vocalist Asle Tostrup, guitarist Bjorn Riis and drummer Henrik Fossum — hold onto their trademark sound but dip further into electronica and 80s soundtracks, with retro TV show *Stranger Things* among their influences.

"It's a bit of the old Airbag, I guess, but we've tried to evolve somewhat," explains principal songwriter Riis. "We've always been into combining classic rock and prog with the more electronic stuff, and we're also very much into movie scores. I think we've taken that a step further this time."

"A lot of the songs are heavy on the electronics, but at the same time the structure is rooted in rock. There's a lot of guitars and heavy drums, but I think the overall sound is a bit different. It's probably also our heaviest album."

Riis admits that it's "always tough" when band members leave for pastures new, but it seems life as a threesome has offered new opportunities for Airbag.

"This project started with us pretty much sitting down and trying to figure out how we were going to continue as a band," he says. "We realised that although we lost founding members, it gave us the chance to do something different. I think the music and album shows that we found some inspiration in that process."

The album was largely recorded as a trio, but Wobbler bassist Kristian Hultgren — who has performed with Airbag live — is among the guests.

The record, their first since 2016's *Disconnected*, was trailed by the near 10-minute track *Machines And Men*, which Riis said has attracted a "phenomenal" response.

Meanwhile, he admits the band contemplated changing their launch plans due to the current coronavirus pandemic.

"We were discussing maybe postponing the release, but as of now we're going ahead," he said, speaking in mid-April while Norway remained shut off. "But of course it's difficult to plan a tour right now. We're looking at maybe doing a tour early next year, I think." CC

To find out more, head over to www.airbagdisconnected.com.

INTRO extras

ABEL GANZ BACK AFTER SIX YEARS

Abel Ganz have launched a pre-sale campaign for new album *The Life Of The Honey Bee & Other Moments of Clarity*, which took six years to complete. The Scottish band call it an "eclectic mix of folk, rock, metal and celtic styles." Order now via www.abelganz.com.

Changing times: Goldray's Leah Rasmussen and Kenwyn House.



PRESS/TINA KORHONEN

GOLDRAY'S 'DARK BUT POSITIVE' DISC

Feel The Change is inspired by Neil Peart and seeks catharsis in uncertain times.

► **British psych rockers** Goldray will release their aptly titled second album *Feel The Change*, on July 31 via Akashic Records — and it represents an exciting "natural progression" from their acclaimed debut.

"It's more accessible this time, but there are darker and heavier moments too, so we're pushing both ends of the spectrum," reveals former Reef guitarist Kenwyn House.

"I've always had that heavier side in me — the first bands I truly loved were Rush and Black Sabbath — so it felt like the best way to convey the emotions of the record. Lyrically, it's about personal growth and discovering your own strength of mind: a journey from self-doubt to self-love."

House, along with vocalist and co-writer Leah Rasmussen, shared an eagerness to transform the negative emotions at play into positive ones, much inspired by the lyrics of the late Neil Peart. "He had hope for humanity and we do too," the guitarist explains, "so even when it goes into darker places it's still very positive and that was important for us. I think it makes for a cathartic experience. We're blessed to be as creatively free as we want to in Goldray: we've put everything into this and we're proud of the results," he adds. "Leah's voice sounds incredible."

While there are obvious question marks over when, House insists they will tour their sophomore release: "Experiencing music with fans is the most fulfilling thing."

Find out more at www.goldrayband.com. PW

SLEEPMAKESWAVES, FISH AND WAKEMAN DELAYED

Coronavirus lockdowns disrupt album release plans.

► **Rick Wakeman, Fish and sleepmakeswaves** are among the prog artists to postpone releases as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Wakeman's *The Red Planet* will be released in June instead of its original April date. "The reality of the current world situation is such that work on the project is affected by manufacturing and logistical issues," he explains.

Fish had planned to launch *Weltschmerz* by the middle of the year, but now believes it will happen in September. "No one is more frustrated than me just now," he says. "Thanks for supporting us in this difficult period in all our histories; it's sincerely appreciated and is enabling me to stay relatively balanced."

Australian post-rockers Sleepmakeswaves will now launch their *These Are Not Your Dreams* EP project on July 17. "Our heart goes out to all of you sharing in the anxiety and disruption," they say. Keep up to date with developments at www.progmagazine.com. MK



Red alert: Rick Wakeman's changed his plans.

"It gave us the chance to do something different."

FAD GADGETS

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

MYSTIK CASSETTE PLAYER

Back in the 80s, I bought my albums on cassette and spent long evenings in my bedroom taping hours of music off the radio. The format holds a special place in my heart but even I'd have to acknowledge it's had its day. A French company disagrees with me, however. It's manufactured



a 21st century cassette player, complete with rechargeable battery, Bluetooth 5.0 and a recording facility. Had I not thrown all my cassettes into a skip years ago I might even have bought one.

www.mystik-by-rtm.com

DRUM ROLLER

Cellists or tuba players have it hard, manoeuvring colossal instruments from A to B on a daily basis. However, drummers – that much-maligned species – have had to: a) learn to drive; b) buy a car; and c) lug 50kg of hardware in and out of it. Now Australian



chap Tim Burnham has invented a flat-pack style case to accommodate "the majority of standard-sized drum hardware", allowing car-less drummers to get to their gigs on public transport. It sounds hellish, but full marks for ingenuity.

www.thedrumroller.com

A LITTLE THUNDER PICKUP

Music technology is about making musicians redundant as quickly as possible. Now it's the turn of bass players to get their marching orders, with this new version of the A Little Thunder

pickup. You attach it to your electric guitar and the lower notes become magically doubled into bass guitar tones, allowing you to fire your bassist



immediately. The guitarist can now emulate a very unimaginative bass player who plays exactly the same as he does, with no deviation whatsoever. Now that's progress!

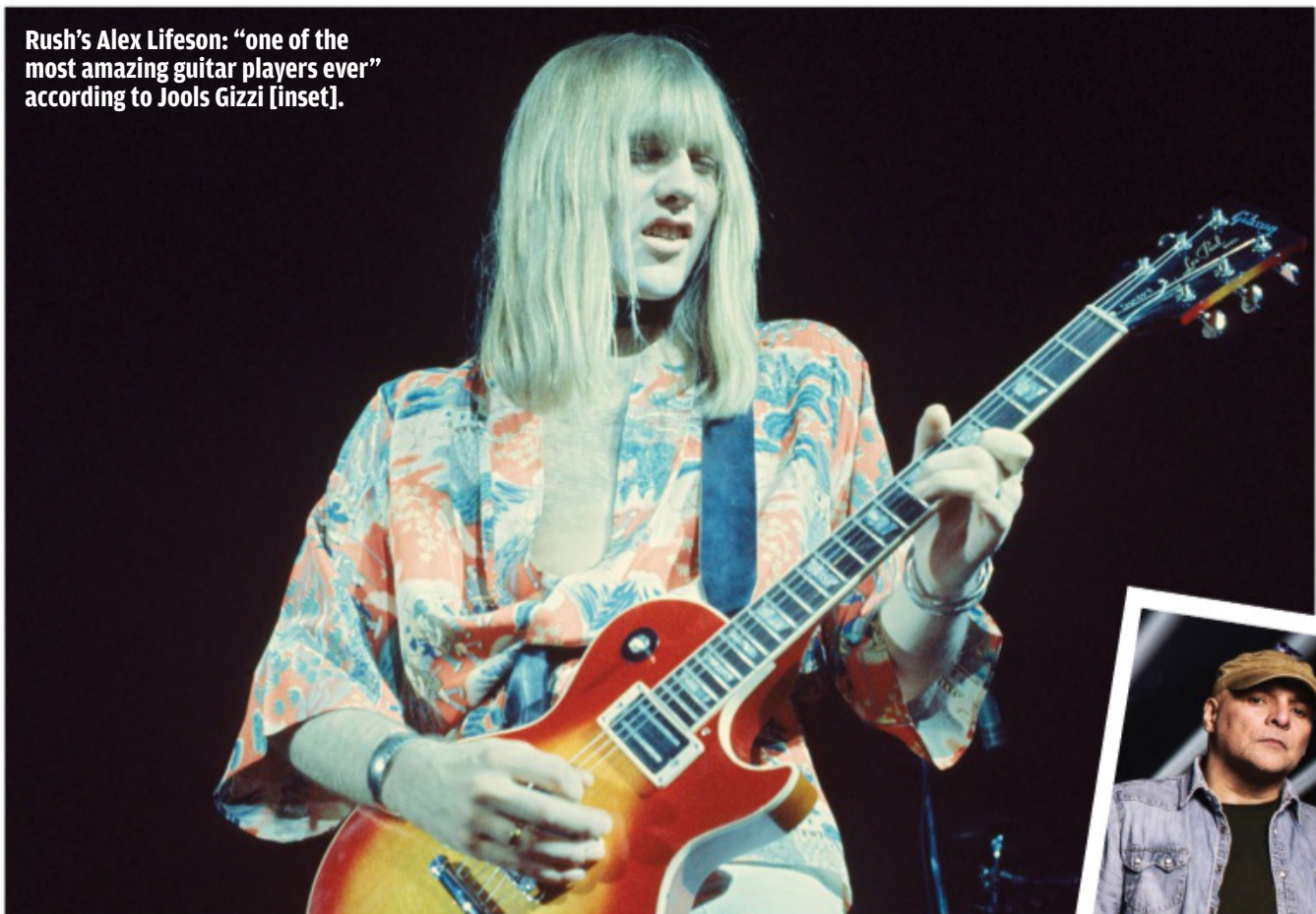
www.alittlethunder.com



MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

Rush's Alex Lifeson: "one of the most amazing guitar players ever" according to Jools Gizzi [inset].



FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

GIULIANO 'JOOLS' GIZZI

The guitarist from Scottish rockers Gun has always been *moved* by **Rush's** grand overtures.

"I first got into progressive music when I was a kid. We're talking around '76, just before the big punk explosion. My best friend's brother was a big Jethro Tull fan and into Pink Floyd and Tangerine Dream as well – I used to go over there to hang out and he would play all these records. That's how it all started.

"For me, though, Rush had better songs [than those other groups]. The phenomenal musicianship of that band just blew me away. Alex Lifeson is one of the most amazing guitar players ever. Geddy Lee – I'd never heard anything like that before. What a distinctive voice. That guy can play like hell as well. And Neil Peart was probably one of the top drummers in the world.

"I was about 12 or 13 when I started learning guitar and I tried to play along to Rush, but it was really challenging! [Laughs] Lifeson has such a unique guitar sound. I remember when I was a kid, trying to work out what extra notes he'd put in. I was so infatuated with it, I just practised and practised. I think *Bastille Day* from *Caress Of Steel* was the very first Rush song I learned, but *2112* was my favourite Rush

album – it had some great songs: *Overture*, *A Passage To Bangkok*.

"I had the chance to see them on that tour. To hear it all being played live just blew me away. A lot of bands change things when they play live but those three guys played it note-for-note. It was phenomenal. I saw them a good few times after that. Just watching them and hearing all those albums really inspired me and made me want to be a musician.

"Many years ago, Gun were recording at the Maison Rouge in London and someone told me that Alex Lifeson was doing guitar overdubs in one of the other studios. I hung around – but sadly I never saw him. That's as close as I ever got to meeting one of them.

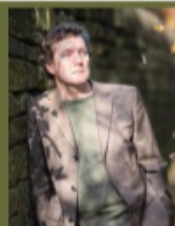
"Although my tastes have changed, we supported Uriah Heep for a couple of shows [in 2018] and Von Hertzen Brothers were on before us. They were really amazing and I remember watching them and thinking, 'Wow!' They reminded me of those early days of Rush." NRS

R3loaded is out now via Silver Lining Music. For more, visit www.gunofficial.co.uk.

"I remember trying to work out what extra notes Alex Lifeson would put in."

PROG IN BRIEF

John Carpenter will release a deluxe vinyl box set of the music from his horror classic *The Thing*. The vinyl set features Ennio Morricone's score and unreleased audio cues. Limited to 3,000 copies, it arrives on May 5. See www.sacredbonesrecords.com.

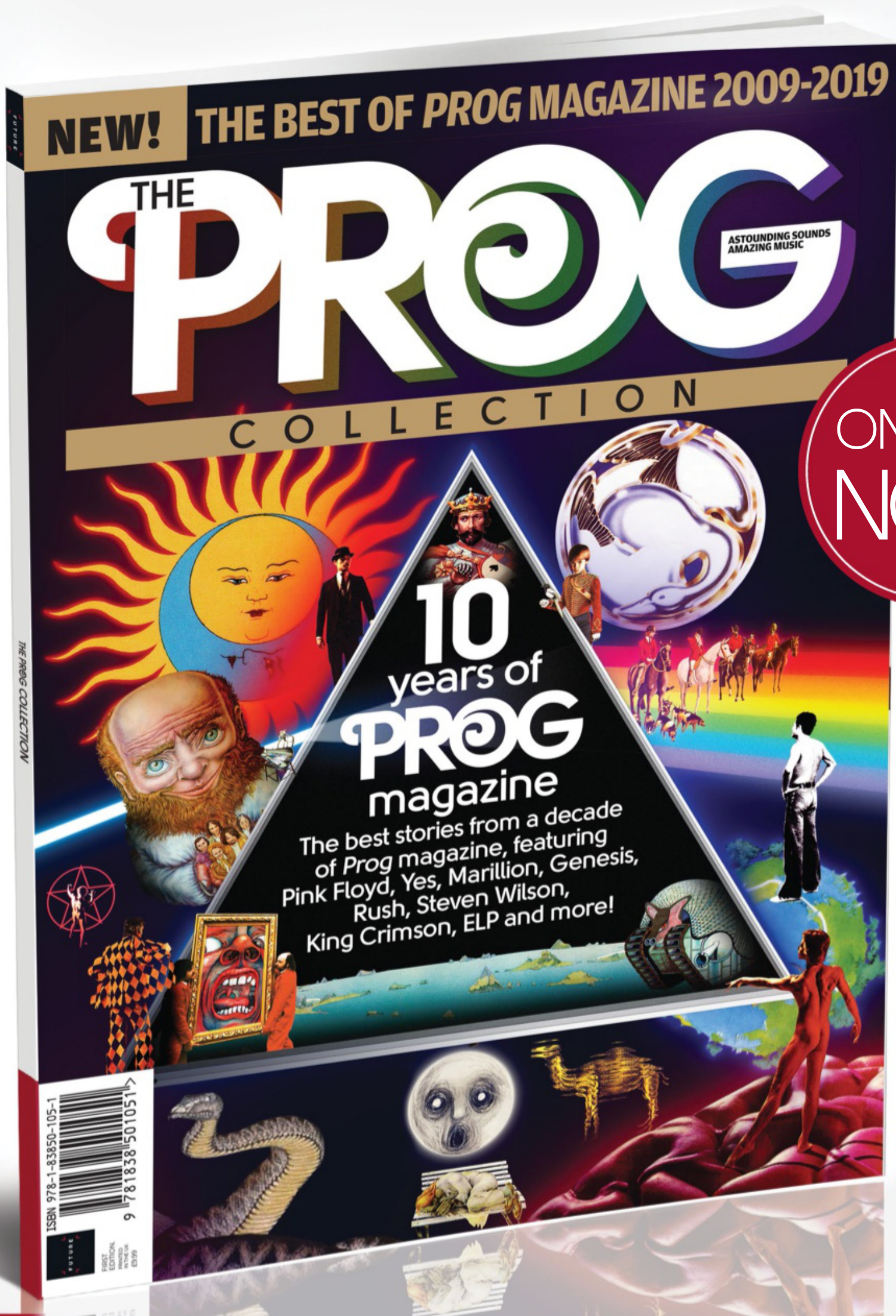


The next album from **Tim Bowness** (left) is likely to be called *Late Night Laments*, he's confirmed after releasing preview track *The Other Side*. He jokes that the LP "may or may not be released some time before 2054". See www.timbowness.co.uk.

Sanguine Hum will soon complete their fifth album after the coronavirus lockdown gave them the chance. They said they'd "pretty much called it a day" last year over time constraints. The LP's working title is *Hum 5*. See www.sanguinehum.com.

THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF PR@G'S FIRST DECADE

In celebration of *Prog* magazine's 10th birthday, we collated some of the finest features and interviews with the cream of the prog world for you to enjoy. Truly astounding sounds and amazing music.



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Watcher of the skies:
Alex Henry Foster.

ALEX HENRY FOSTER

Canadian musician bends time and emotion to present a deeper truth.

ALEX HENRY FOSTER emits a hale and hearty laugh at the observation that he doesn't do anything that's less than epic. And with his live sextet, The Long Shadows, behind him — that's a band that sometimes includes two drummers — delivering readings of songs that can last up to 25 minutes, he knows that this isn't the time for false modesty.

"There's a big difference between the studio and the live versions," he explains. "The biggest challenge — apart from having seven musicians onstage navigating lots of equipment — is to focus on the moment and remain on the edge. We had to unlearn everything we learned in the past about being professional musicians on tour and realise that everything is new every night."

Raised on an early diet of Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and King Crimson, Montreal native Alex Henry Foster's tastes then developed to embrace more avant-garde and noise rock influences including Swans, Glenn Branca and Sonic Youth. Already a music veteran thanks to his tenure with alt-rockers Your Favourite Enemies, Foster was forced to re-assess his life after the death of his father from cancer.

Relocating to Tangier in Morocco to recalibrate, Foster soaked up the local environment and confronted his grief by working on the songs that would go on to become his solo debut, *Windows In The Sky*. The result is an album of sweeping, emotional grandeur that seamlessly blends post-rock with progressive explorations to extend a lineage that includes Mogwai and Steven Wilson.

"This is a solo project," explains Foster. "But since I wanted to bring a band along, I have a foundation of friends that are really into this thing, while there are others who are coming and going."

Given the personal nature of the songs, Foster was initially a little hesitant about taking the project on the road. "My biggest worry was, if we're going live and playing those songs over and over again, would it become a rock'n'roll circus?" he says.

His brave solution was to unshackle the songs from their recorded versions and go with the flow of the emotions.

"It needed to be an open-minded interpretation of the songs, based on the moment," says Foster. "That's why my role is like that of a maestro and the band have to watch for my signal. It's very organic and based on the reaction of the crowd. And there are also the technical challenges given the amount of equipment that we use. There are a lot of things going on, so when you put that into improvisation, you have to be really focused on what's going on."

He adds: "We can play stellar concerts, but if it's sterile in terms of the emotions and remains self-centred musically, then for me, that doesn't make any sense. I need that level of danger and to be on the verge of collapse to know that it's real."

Alex Henry Foster pauses to allow himself a small chuckle before adding: "This is what we are and this is what we do." **JM**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Alex Henry Foster
(vocals, guitar, Moog, keyboards, percussion)

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Windows In The Sky is out now on Hopeful Tragedy Records

WEBSITE

www.alexhenryfoster.com



"I need that level of danger and to be on the verge of collapse to know that it's real."



COMING BACK TO LIFE

What will our prog scene look like after Covid-19? *Prog's* News Editor looks ahead.

There's no need to summarise the situation the world finds itself in right now with the coronavirus. There's hardly any point since it'll have changed significantly by the time you read this. It is, however, worth speculating on what good might come when the threat begins to diminish and the world goes back to work.

I'm not alone in having spent many hours in recent days, messaging the artists I know, making sure they're okay (there have been a lot of tears, and it's probably been the same for you) and then beginning, inevitably, to turn to the notion that this global happening is something that needs artistic interpretation. One of art's most important functions is to help us share abstract ideas and feelings – and prog is one of the best in that field.

Many proggers I've spoken to (and people in other genres) are already engaged in the challenge of finding ways to express what the hell just happened to us all. They're exploring the moment of realisation that nothing would be the same again; looking at the now-happier past with new eyes; celebrating the spirit that's keeping us going; and, countless of other interpretations. There's going to be some great art created – and there's going to be a lot of people who, as a result of their own experiences, find that they interact with that art differently. Maybe they'll appreciate it more?

That leads in to another point: the music industry (like every other sector) will have to find ways to recover economically. Now, everyone knows there's been a lot of imbalance, especially since the digital revolution. The recovery will be a chance to strike a new balance, where each economic player treats each other with more understanding, and maybe even respect.

The balance started changing as artists reacted to the sudden loss of live income, and it's likely that there are even more creative things to come after the explosion of online live shows. It's worth noting that many of the most progressive (and prog!) corporations have embraced change already; perhaps they've been waiting and hoping for it, like so many artists and fans.

Despite how it might feel right now, it's not too optimistic to predict that things will be better post-virus. History shows that sudden changes in society enforce a change of relations between the haves and have-nots. People need to work together like never before (as we're doing now) and that gave the have-nots a stronger say in financial dealings. It's difficult to believe that, as the music business recovers, there won't be an increased fairness from the big players towards the small ones. Especially as fan power will have been seen to be greater than ever... and the big players don't stay big if they can't keep fans happy.

Perhaps this utopian vision – new art, revalued art, respect across the board, fairer deals – lies several false summits ahead on a steep hill. But the prog community, like so many others, have already started that journey. See you at the summit!

MARTIN KIELTY

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.



ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog



Carlos Regalado, right, and Aspic are creating a Crimson tide on the Pacific coast.

PRESS/FRANCO ROTH

ASPIC

Keyboardist **Carlos Regalado** explains how extreme metal is being remoulded into prog in Central America.

El Salvador is a Central American country on the Pacific coast, best known for military coups and overactive volcanos, but it also has a thriving heavy metal scene that sprang up in the 1990s. Now, prog metal is making inroads, with Aspic leading the charge.

The quintet were founded in 2016 by keyboardist Carlos Regalado and guitarist Jesús Figueroa in the country's capital, San Salvador. They'd met at a university talent show, then discovered their mutual love for prog and metal, and for writing their own compositions.

Aspic was to be an instrumental project until they enlisted singer Paola Guardado, who Regalado knew from school. "We made some music while we were there, but it never came to anything," the keyboardist says. "I thought of her when I formed Aspic because of her love of rock and progressive music."

Completing the line-up are drummer Samuel Ramos – who, at 30, is the band's "old man" – and bassist Carlos Quintanilla. Their first album *Stars Collide*, released last year, is a fresh, vibrant take on prog metal, with

Guardado's soaring voice the pivot between the stylish riffing, intense rhythms and sublime melodies.

Haken are currently Regalado's favourite band, and he also name-checks The Contortionist, Steven Wilson and recent discovery Gandalf's Fist. "My dad loves Rush and Genesis, but I discovered Dream Theater on the internet," he explains. "They helped me to think about music in a different way. Because of them, I wanted to play music."

"Making original music is the most important thing. Our name Aspic relates to King Crimson as that song [*Larks' Tongues In Aspic*] touched me. I saw *King Crimson Live In Japan* and it blew me away. Also, aspic is a jelly which you can mould in the way we can make the music any way we want. We wanted a different kind of metal to what was being played in El Salvador."

He adds: "People come to our shows and love it because of that."

One of Regalado's dreams is to play London's prestigious Royal Opera House, so watch this space! **AR**

Stars Collide is out now. For more, visit www.aspic.bandcamp.com.



"Dream Theater helped me to think about music in a different way"

PROG IN BRIEF

The latest **Snow Ghosts** release is a live EP recorded at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios, featuring three tracks plus Mogwai's remix of their song *Heavy Heart*. *Real World Sessions* is at www.snowghosts.bandcamp.com.



Devin Townsend (left) has made more tickets available for virtual concerts after the first two sold out in hours. A maximum of 5,000 tickets will be made available for each 50-minute set with audio to be sent to attendees later. See www.hevydevy.com.

The **Blackheart Orchestra** are preparing a limited-edition instrumental album, *Mute*, consisting of selected tracks from their previous LPs. The aim is to present a "different way to explore" the music. Details at www.theblackheartorchestra.com.

Reactivated icons **Nektar** released a concert movie, *Live From The Wildey*. It was shot in Edwardsville, Illinois March during their tour of North America and features 15 tracks spanning five decades. Download via www.nektarmusic.com.

ELDER

Psych-rockers whose prog credentials are rising with every record.

“I FEEL LIKE there’s some sort of logical progression to everything that we’ve been doing, moving from the riff-heavy thing to exploring more open, psychedelic soundscapes and jammy, improvised kind of stuff,” Elder guitarist and vocalist Nicholas DiSalvo says. “The thing just kind of rolls on its own.”

The latest evolution in Elder’s sure-footed journey is their fifth full-length, *Omens*, a five-track salvo that straddles sludgy stoner rock with spaced-out psychedelic ruminations edging the foursome ever closer to our beloved realm.

Open-minded fans of Floyd can grab nearly as much from the record as supporters of Sabbath or Mastodon. Here, dark comfortably aligns with light thanks to some drifting soundscapes, well-placed keyboard and a peppering of triumphant melodies.

“We certainly tried to make it sound different by working with a different producer, trying different stuff from the studio,” DiSalvo says down the phone from his current home in Berlin. “I do think in the end it’s made a big step forward in our sound, but I guess at the end of the day it’s up to the music critics to judge.”

Despite *Omens*’ brief tracklisting – the running time clocks in at more than 50 minutes, you do the maths – the lengthy, hypnotic meditations are a continuous theme which has streamed through Elder’s immersive career, indulging in drawn-out, post-rock atmospheres.

“I’m not necessarily into super-long music,” DiSalvo admits, somewhat sheepishly. “I got no problem with it, but it’s not like a fetish or something. I somehow just fell into this. Some people have their strengths in the three-minute song, but I don’t find that I can fully

develop an idea in that timeframe. There’s got to be something subconsciously that keeps me from doing that. It’s kind of become our format. If you’ve got a good idea or you’ve got a lot of ideas, I like to try and connect them. I think it makes for a fun and unpredictable listen.”

DiSalvo founded Elder alongside two schoolfriends in Massachusetts, USA in the mid-00s, and their organic growth heralded a self-titled debut album in 2008. Tours and line-up changes followed, as did a handful of well-received records, although somewhat unusually, their four members are currently split between two continents.

Three of the group live in Germany, and one solitary member resides in the US: a potential logistical nightmare. But, apart from the expensive flights, the disjointed living arrangements offers the band convenient bases to work from in the two touring epicentres America and Europe.

Looking ahead, taking *Omens* on the road will be Elder’s life from here on in, once global normality is resumed post-coronavirus. Beyond that, new material is always on their mind – and don’t bet against the quartet continuing to progress, continuing to stretch out into new sonic worlds.

“At this point sometimes I’m amazed that we’re still doing this after this long,” DiSalvo reflects. “There’s certainly some momentum going. So hopefully people will dig the album and we feel encouraged making music, otherwise we’ll do something else.” **CC**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Nicholas DiSalvo (guitar, vocals, keys),
Jack Donovan (bass),
Michael Risberg (guitar, keys), **Georg Edert** (drums)

SOUNDS LIKE

Mastodon and Baroness smoking a big, fat doobie together

CURRENT RELEASE

Omens is out now on Stickman

WEBSITE

www.beholdtheelder.com



“I think it makes for a fun and unpredictable listen.”

Showing some respect: Elder.



PHOTO: ANAT SAGOVAN



US, THEM & YOU

What got us all
grooving this month...

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

March 2020

Compiled by



- 1 TAME IMPALA** The Slow Rush (FICTION)
- 2 PINK FLOYD** The Later Years - 1987-2019 (RHINO)
- 3 THE ORB** Abolition Of The Royal Familia (COOKING VINYL)
- 4 TOOL** Fear Inoculum (MUSIC FOR NATIONS)
- 5 PURE REASON REVOLUTION** Eupnea (INSIDEOUT)
- 6 JEFF LYNNE'S ELO** From Out Of Nowhere (RCA)
- 7 PETER GABRIEL** Flotsam And Jetsam (REAL WORLD)
- 8 BRIAN ENO** Apollo - Atmospheres And Soundtracks (UMC)
- 9 JONATHAN WILSON** Dixie Blur (BELLA UNION)
- 10 PENDRAGON** Love Over Fear (TOFF)
- 11 RENAISSANCE** Turn Of The Cards (ESOTERIC)
- 12 MARILLION** Afraid Of Sunlight (RHINO)
- 13 WISHBONE ASH** Coat Of Arms (STEAMHAMMER)
- 14 AYREON** Electric Castle Live And Other Tales (MUSIC THEORIES)
- 15 ALAN PARSONS PROJECT** Ammonia Avenue (ESOTERIC)
- 16 MARILLION** Script For A Jester's Tear (PARLOPHONE)
- 17 FRANK ZAPPA** Hot Rats (UMC)
- 18 AL DI MEOLA** ACROSS THE UNIVERSE (EARMUSIC)
- 19 GENESIS** The Lost Radio Recordings (GOLDFISH)
- 20 FAIRPORT CONVENTION** Shuffle And Go (MATTY GROOVES)
- 21 KING CRIMSON** In The Court Of The Crimson King (PANEGYRIC)
- 22 TANGERINE DREAM** Recurring Dreams (KSCOPE)
- 23 FIELD MUSIC** Making A New World (MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)
- 24 WIRE** Mind Hive (PINK FLAG)
- 25 OPETH** In Cauda Venenum (MODERBLOGAT/NUCLEAR BLAST)
- 26 SIGUR RÓS** Ágætis Byrjun - A Good Beginning (KRUNK)
- 27 NEAL MORSE BAND** The Great Adventour - Live In Brno 2019 (INSIDEOUT)
- 28 PORCUPINE TREE** In Absentia (KSCOPE)
- 29 BE BOP DELUXE** Modern Music (ESOTERIC)
- 30 STEVE HACKETT** Genesis Revisited Band & Orchestra - Live (INSIDEOUT)

Find out more at www.officialcharts.com

WIN! PORCUPINE TREE IN ABSENTIA DELUXE EDITION



The chances of a new Porcupine Tree album might be as rare as hen's teeth but this deluxe box set is a welcome reframing of the band's iconic 2002 album, *In Absentia*.

Spread across three CDs and a Blu-ray, the special package includes Steven Wilson's remastered mixes of the album, additional studio recordings, unreleased demos and a new feature-length documentary directed by Lasse Hoile. Also included are the previously unreleased tracks *Imogen Slaughter*, *Watching You Sleep* and *Enough*.

What's more, this deluxe set also contains a new 100-page hardback book with exclusive content including photography by Lasse Hoile, Carl Glover, Richard Barbieri and John Blackford, along with extensive liner notes and a track-by-track commentary by journalist Stephen Humphries.

For your chance to win a copy of this fantastic set, visit www.bit.ly/In_Absentia and answer the following question:

Which member of Porcupine Tree recently released a solo album called *Infinite Regress*? (Clue: He was interviewed in *Prog 106*)

- 1) Richard Barbieri
- 2) Steven Wilson
- 3) Colin Edwin

For more information on Porcupine Tree, visit www.porcupinetreec.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from May 7, 2020-June 12, 2020. By entering the competition you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futurepic.com/competition-rules). The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing



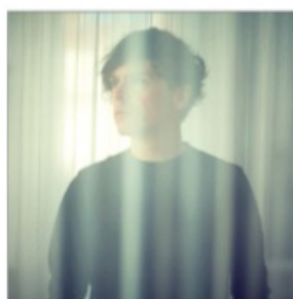
MARTIN GRECH
Hush Mortal Core
MARTIN GRECH SONGS

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother



HAKEN
Virus
INSIDEOUT

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf



ALEX HENRY FOSTER
Windows In The Sky
HOPEFUL TRAGEDY

The Musician
Alexandre Gaudencio



LEPROUS
Pitfalls
INSIDEOUT

The Writer
Martin KIELTY



GLASS HAMMER
Dreaming City
GLASS HAMMER RECORDS

The Reader
Susie Moss



LAZULI
Le Fantastique Envoi De Dieter Böhm
L'ABEILLE RÔDE

POST ANIMAL

Eclectic Americans showcasing the fruits of a creative democracy.

WHEN PROG SPEAKS to touring Chicago quintet Post Animal during their pre-Covid-19 UK tour, they have just made an exciting discovery. “I’m just sat in a ‘Spoons,” enthuses singer and guitarist Javi Reyes. “Second day in a row. All that you want for, like, six bucks. It’s amazing, man!” While his enthusiasm is tempered when *Prog* informs him of Wetherspoon’s founder Tim Martin’s recent controversial media statements, we’re not about to argue over his band’s hostelry choices if they keep making records as good as their new LP, *Forward Motion Godyssey*.

A brilliantly freewheeling tour through a range of progressive styles, from floating psychedelia and thundering space rock to kraut-ish electronica and dewy-eyed dream pop, their second album represents a band coming of age as a multi-limbed, multi-talented beast.

In fact, until recently Post Animal, who formed in 2014, were a four-guitar-wielding, mic-sharing sextet, sharing writing and vocal duties. And before the release of debut album *When I Think Of You In A Castle* in 2018, attention would often focus on erstwhile guitarist Joe Keery, thanks to his day job as an actor playing Steve Harrington in Netflix series *Stranger Things*.

“It was a blessing and a curse,” Reyes admits, referring to the profile boost offset by the difficulty of getting anyone to look further than the bloke off the telly. But the band have since undergone an amicable parting of ways with their celebrity member, the result being that their fast-evolving sound has the spotlight all to itself.

Recording this album in the “big sky country” of Montana “inspired us to make it larger than life, max it out with big dramatic sounds,” says Reyes, but applying any one adjective to their music is no simple task, given their shape-shifting approach to songcraft.

That said, *Forward Motion Godyssey* is no calculated dilettante attempt to show off their versatility.

There’s a natural, organic feel to the softly lysergic, Tame Impala-like *Schedule*, replete with twin guitar flourishes, just as there are to the Afrobeat polyrhythms on the infectious odd-pop of *Safe Or Not*, the Sabbath sludge riffing of *Damaged Goods* and the aquatic Tangerine Dreamscapes of *The Whole*.

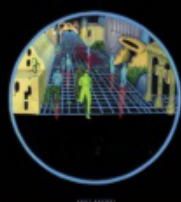
It reflects a bunch of musicians who seem to have achieved that rare and fragile thing in a band: a true democracy.

“We do a pretty good job of making sure everybody can bring their own unique style to the table,” says Reyes, “and we’ve always been open to the band being many different things at different times. It keeps us excited.”

Nonetheless, they have progressive influences in common. “We’ve all had a dose of Rush and listened to a lot of Yes,” says Reyes. “One record we listened to a bunch while recording was *Moonmadness* by Camel — like a proggy Pink Floyd. But in general we appreciate the adventurous nature of prog, the way the songs pivot and turn on a dime, switch time sigs or keys and make these dynamic shifts that keep it interesting.”

We’ll drink a cut-price beverage to that. **JS**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Javi Reyes (guitar, vocals), **Jake Hirshland** (guitar, keyboards, vocals), **Matt Williams** (guitar, vocals), **Dalton Allison** (bass, vocals), **Wes Toledo** (drums, vocals)

SOUNDS LIKE

A carefully curated mixtape cooked up by fans of Tame Impala, Hawkwind, The Shins and Camel

CURRENT RELEASE

Forward Motion Godyssey is out now on Polyvinyl Records

WEBSITE

www.postanimal.us



“One record we listened to a bunch while recording was *Moonmadness* by Camel.”

Life’s a beach in Post Animal.



PHOTO: MARIE RENAUD

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Ahoy there! It's Je Schneider (front) and Isle Of The Cross.

Limelight

ISLE OF THE CROSS

Je Schneider's latest musical collage pushes musical boundaries.

SINCE WE'RE ALL very much in need of distractions from ordinary life right now, Isle Of The Cross' debut album *Excelsis* seems exquisitely tailored to the needs of anxious prog fans. An astonishing 70-minute conceptual journey through multiple textures and moods, it takes in everything from Meshuggah-style math-metal to effervescent folk rock, via skittering electronics, melodramatic ambience and plenty of prog metal melodicism. Remarkably, the whole thing emerged from the creative mind of one man: multi-instrumentalist Je Schneider. Assisted by guitarist Eric Gillette and vocalists Diane Lee and Eric Castiglia, he's conjured an all-encompassing and occasionally bewildering masterpiece.

"I've been into prog rock and a variety of metal sub-genres ever since I can remember," he reveals. "Putting together a complete prog metal album had been on my mind for some time. It was just a matter of being up to date on other projects. It also helped that my dad was reading a passage from Herman Melville as we were talking about his genius writing, and the words 'Isle Of The Cross' fell off the pages. *That* was a bit inspiring."

Excelsis has plenty of accessible, melodic moments, but it's also an album with many uncompromising, aggressive moments. This combination may alienate as many as it entices, but Schneider's music is also incredibly cinematic: *Excelsis* flows like a movie, and has enough thematic substance to easily make it a crossover success. In troubled times, depth and poetic humanity are always welcome.

"I think we all wonder what this existence is all about and especially what the next existence is all about," says Schneider. "So the album really stemmed from that basic premise: if we indeed carry on, is it possible we also reunite with our loved ones? Can the love between two be strong enough to find one another beyond their mortal existence?"

Citing everyone from Dream Theater, Camel and Circus Maximus through to Erik Satie and Beethoven as influences, Schneider is a musician with few boundaries. He began his musical life aged five, starting on the drums and then progressing to piano as a teenager, which led to a burgeoning career as a contemporary classical composer. But while *Excelsis* is full of virtuoso musicianship and sophisticated arrangements, it's also a deeply romantic, wistful piece of work.

"My greatest desire is for someone to be moved by some of the more cinematic elements and melodies on the record," he reveals. "I enjoy prog albums that offer that aggression here and there, but most importantly, that offer sensitivity and heartfelt emotion, something that tugs at your heart! I think that's always important."

Schneider is already working on a follow-up. It's too early to predict what it'll sound like, but its creator remains spellbound by prog's flexibility.

"*Excelsis* a bit of a proggy collage. Some don't like the overall spread of sub-genres but there are those who seem to love it, and I'm happy with that!" **DL**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Je Schneider (vocals, guitar, keyboards, drums), **Eric Gillette** (lead guitar), **Diane Lee** (vocals), **Eric Castiglia** (vocals)

SOUNDS LIKE

Wildly cinematic, epic and occasionally monstrous prog metal with a huge heart

CURRENT RELEASE

Excelsis is available now via Rockshots

WEBSITE

www.isleofthecross.net



"My dad was reading Herman Melville and the words 'Isle Of The Cross' fell off the pages."



DENNIS DEYOUNG

From prog to pomp and back again, the former Styx man teams up with Julian Lennon and revisits some early inspiration on his latest solo album.

Words: Dave Ling **Portrait:** Rebecca Wolf

Having co-founded Styx in 1972, keyboard player and singer Dennis DeYoung wrote many of their finest songs, including *Come Sail Away* and *The Grand Illusion*, as well as the US chart-topping ballad *Babe*. Styx broke up following 1983's poorly received concept record *Kilroy Was Here*, and although he was part of a reunion in 1990, DeYoung was controversially replaced by the band nine years later when a medical condition prevented him from touring. His first solo album in almost a decade, *26 East, Vol One* (a second part is to follow), is named after the Chicago address where Dennis and most of his Styx bandmates grew up. It's also set to mark his recording swan song.

How did you fall in love with music of an adventurous nature?

The vast majority of prog influences in Styx, when we had that going on, they came from me. It had begun with Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Yes, but earlier than that there was The Moody Blues and some of the things The Beatles did. I was playing my Hammond organ, trying to be Jon Lord or whoever. That style of music gave a keyboard player a chance to show off like they were a guitar player, and of course I wanted some of that.

Do you consider your music to be progressive?

We brought some of that into Styx, but we were an American rock'n'roll band. I want you to write this: 'The next prog rock lyric I understand will be the first.' And also write: 'He laughed' afterwards. But we were never a fully fledged prog band. I'd say that we were a hybrid.

In the 1970s when Styx were labelled as pomp rock, did that bridle with you?

It all depends on the context. Rock critics have an impossible job: how do you describe music? It's organic and touches our souls, so summing that up in words is pretty much impossible.

Save for ...Part Two, which will follow, why is 26 East your final album?

Have you noticed that rock music is dead? Or that there's no radio anymore? Not to say that people aren't still trying to play it, but it's gone. The internet has ruined it, or maybe rock'n'roll played its part – I don't have those answers. Anyhow, I had to be talked into making a new record by Jim Peterik [formerly of Survivor] and Frontiers Records. They wore me down.

Peterik played a massive part in that decision.

Yeah. Jim sent me a song called *Run For The Roses* that made me think, 'Okay, you got my attention.' And slowly it came together.

Even at 73 years old your voice still stands up magnificently.

Because I knew early on that I had got lucky I did everything possible to avoid screwing up my gift. I wasn't a drug taker, an alcoholic or a smoker, and when somebody was needed to yell at the children I hired a large Ukrainian woman. A voice is finite, singers must respect that.

The album offers some definite reminders of Styx, notably its Paradise Theater-style finale of AD 2020.

I'm most noted for being in Styx – shouldn't I give people what they want? If you listen to *East Of Midnight* [a throwback to the band's classic era] and don't know what this is, then I can't help you. I had that ending [AD 2020] in mind right from the beginning. I wanted to say goodbye in those last notes that you hear.

To The Good Old Days is a song you wrote as a duet with John Lennon's son, Julian.

It's important for me to say that The Beatles changed my life. I had never met Jules, and I never expected a response to my email, but he wrote back and said he'd love to do the song. He sang the shit out of it and I harmonised. And cooler still, Jules told me that he wasn't doing music when I contacted him, and now he's back in the studio.

In the album's biography you say that To The Good Old Days is about "the sweetest days of my past with my fans, friends, family and forgiveness" – does that last part extend to the current Styx line-up?

I don't believe that I have to forgive them, I've never said that. They replaced me when I was sick and then had to convince the fanbase that they hadn't fired a sick colleague. They even said I had ruined the band, though why is still beyond me. Nevertheless, I still believe that we [the classic line-up] should do one last tour for the fans. They've said a thousand times that they're not interested, so what can I do? That reference to forgiveness was a more general one. All human beings are flawed.

The record label bio also says that you will be doing a lot of touring this year.

[He guffaws loudly] I wrote that before coronavirus came along! That could be a very serious business.

Covid-19 notwithstanding, what are the chances of a Dennis DeYoung farewell show in the UK?

Here's how it works: a promoter takes a risk and gives me money to fly in and play a concert. Right now, nobody's doing that. It's not that I don't like Europe and the UK, it's nothing personal. Of course I'd love to do it. If you give me a couple of grand then I'll come and play at your house.

Should these two albums turn out to be your grand finale, how would you like to be remembered as an artist?

Good grief. Look, it's very simple: I really don't care whether or not people remember me. The music is so much bigger. If in 50 years' time people are still getting what they need from what I have created then I'll be very happy with that.

26 East, Vol 1 is out on Frontiers on May 22. For more information, visit www.dennisdeyoung.com.


"The vast majority of prog influences in Styx came from me. That style of music gave a keyboard player a chance to show off."





CHARLES SNIDER

The mastermind behind a unique reference guide gets his favourite albums out and tells us how an American kid covered a world of progressive music and wrote it up for all to enjoy. *Strawberry Bricks* forever...

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Anthony Barlich

“**E**verything starts with **The Beatles**. We’re talking Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the 60s. I had two older sisters that had all the 45s and they’d play them and I’d jump up and down in my crib yelling, ‘The Bees, The Bees!’ When I got a little older I discovered *Revolver*, and then I really got into the more psychedelic stuff, *Tomorrow Never Knows*, which was an explosion of sound.

In the early 70s, at 11/12 years old, I got into AM radio. We had one in the car and that’s when I heard *Roundabout*. I had a birthday coming up and one of my sisters said, ‘What do you want for birthday gift?’ and I go, ‘I don’t know,’ to which she says, ‘Well you’re getting older now, you’re almost a teenager. Why don’t you get yourself a record?’ And I thought, ‘Yeah, okay. How about that album by **Yes** that has *Roundabout* on it [*Fragile*]?’ So that was the first record for me that started my collection.

We had a family room. The stereo was a Panasonic plastic thing with two removable speakers. One thing that was really nice for me is that my mom loved music – she had studied opera then took the route of the 50s housewife, but she really loved my love of music. She’d listen to Yes and say, ‘Oh, this is very interesting.’ *Fragile* was for my birthday; for Christmas I got *Close To The Edge*.

British music was huge for me, like it was for all of America. You’d have The Beatles, Stones and Kinks, then you move through The Who, Jethro Tull, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd. Then Charisma did a licensing deal with Buddah Records and it was all *Foxtrot*, *Nursery Cryme*, *Genesis Live* and *Pawn Hearts* by **Van der Graaf Generator**. These albums were ‘cut outs’ [a discounted version with a portion of the sleeve snipped out] so they were very inexpensive, \$2-3. We had a record store called 1812 Overture and another called Galaxy Of Sound, which was also a head shop. I’d wander by the paraphernalia as a kid and they’d redirect me – ‘The records are over there.’

For a teenage boy, the image of Peter Gabriel on *Genesis Live* was magnetic. Back at home you got a black [ultra violet] light bulb and you put it in your room. When you turned it on, ...*Live* looked even cooler. I remember hearing *Musical Box* and *Watcher Of The Skies*, loud and fantastic.

Then I heard about the Canterbury scene, **Caravan** and **Soft Machine**. I somehow found

Soft Machine’s Volume Two. You can’t get any more British than Robert Wyatt’s voice, and the fuzz bass and organ was such an intense listening experience that it immediately sucked me in.

I remember finding **Focus** albums. *Hocus Pocus* was a hit on the radio. But I most remember *Hamburger Concerto*: when you flip to the back side of the album and you see Thijs is playing half a dozen different keyboards – Mellotron, Hammond, a Moog and the ARP synthesiser. I liked all of those sounds.

My dad would travel for his job and one time he said to me, ‘I’m going to Paris’ and I go, ‘There’s this band, **Gong**, I think they’re French. Can you find me any albums?’ He brought home *Continental Circus* and *Angel’s Egg* and I was blown away. *Angel’s Egg* is such a wonderful album and Gong’s a band that I’d go to see throughout the years, as soon as they started touring the US. I’ve seen Gong all around the world. What a rebirth they’ve had with Kavus [Torabi, frontman and guitarist]. That is a treasure right there.

One album I loved was what we called *Expresso* but you call *Gazeuse!*. I got this on import, when I was about 15/16 and it featured Allan Holdsworth. Later, I was my local record store, saying, ‘Hey, I heard this guitarist Allan Holdsworth has an album called *Velvet Darkness*,’ and the manager overheard me. He said, ‘How do you know about Allan Holdsworth?’ and I go, ‘Oh, I got a Gong record.’ He says, ‘Do you want a job?’ and I was hired on the spot.

In those days vinyl records were sealed so you couldn’t play them unless it was an import, which came in a plastic bag. We’d get promo copies that you *could* play but the manager took those home, right? However, working in a record store gave me the best musical education. Every employee brought something different to the table, and my manager, Jeff Clifford, was an early Fairport Convention fan and a Cropredy [Festival] guy. So he had a love of British music that we could discuss, like some people discuss sports teams.

Kraftwerk were on AM radio but had a little mystique to them. I remember buying the 45 for *Autobahn* and there was a big revelation, like, the Germans make really good music! Later I got into **Tangerine Dream**, *Stratosfear*. It sounded like nothing I’d heard before. They toured and I begged my parents to take me but they weren’t interested. A few years later I spent a summer in Germany with an uncle who lived there. He had a gazillion records and played me **Stockhausen**. I was like, ‘What? I’ve never heard anything like this.’ The Germans I met said to me, ‘You probably think Chris Squire is the best bass player. But you’ve not heard Hellmut Hattler from **Kraan...**’ It gave me a different perspective. They would go, ‘Listen to **Neu!**. This is German music.’ Absolutely phenomenal.

I ended up living in Germany for a couple of years. I discovered bands like **Grobschnitt** and **Hoelderlin**; some people call them the German Genesis. I think they’re just a fantastic German band, and *Clowns & Clouds* is a fantastic record.

Now, you can just search for anything on the internet and everything shows up. But back in the 70s, even the 80s, if you wanted to learn something you had to find someone who knew about them, or wrote about them, and record guides were slowly emerging. I went to a lot of reference sources, and at some point in the 80s I had a job where I travelled a lot in the US. I can remember going to a city, checking into my hotel and looking in the *Yellow Pages* for the record store page, which I’d tear it out and plan which stores I could take in before I left.

I lived in Los Angeles in the mid-to-late-90s. CDs were in and people were dumping vinyl like crazy, so wrecker services had tons of it, and there were record conventions. This is when *Strawberry Bricks* came about. I thought, ‘I should do a guide to this stuff.’ I started by sharing information on the [pre-AOL] Prodigy online service, which had email and chat rooms. *Strawberry Bricks* was originally a poster on a forum with a timeline of bands on an X and Y axis, then I filled their albums in. Eventually, I had the book idea when I had kids and I had time to be at home. It took about 10 years to write and first one came out in 2007.

What I like about music is the community. We all have different tastes but we’re all on the same side. When I hear from people who’ve read *Strawberry Bricks*, talking about albums they’ve discovered or rediscovered, that’s fantastic.”

Strawberry Bricks’ third edition is out now. See strawberrybricks.com.





When Shall We Three Meet Again?

No one thought it would happen, but **Genesis** have reunited for one (possibly) final tour. *Prog* catches up with Mike Rutherford, Phil Collins and Tony Banks to find out what caused their 13-year itch, their plans for The Last Domino? tour and why they're not ruling out releasing new music.

Words: Dave Everley

New Portraits: Patrick Balls and Martin Griffin

It was a basketball game that gave it away in the end. On January 22, Phil Collins, Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford were spotted sitting together in the crowd at New York's Madison Square Garden, watching the New York Knicks vs Los Angeles Lakers.

It seemed an unlikely place for three Englishmen of a certain age to be hanging out, and the rumour mill instantly sparked to life: the trio were in New York to discuss playing together as Genesis for the first time in 13 years.

"A guy said to me, 'Why are you over here?'" Tony Banks tells *Prog*. "I just said, 'Oh, for a wedding.' Obviously, he knew we weren't there for a wedding. I think people who cared about Genesis knew what was really happening." 

"People go, 'It would be a lovely idea for Peter to rejoin', but he left 45 years ago. And Steve left 43 years ago. People don't think about how it works – who sings what? No, it was always going to be the three of us."

Mike Rutherford



Banks, Collins and Rutherford:
now *that's* something to
look forward to!



What was really happening was that, yes, a Genesis reunion was in the air. Except it was way further down the line than anyone could have guessed.

Banks, Rutherford and Collins weren't just in New York to watch some basketball and discuss getting back together for a belated, and unexpected, follow-up to 2007's *Turn It On Again* tour. They were actually holed up in a rehearsal studio in the Big Apple, testing the waters on a musical – and in Collins' case, physical – level.

"It wasn't a foregone conclusion, because we had to see how things would work out," says Rutherford. "You can't just go and book some dates. You've got to have a little play together."

In all, they spent two-and-a-half weeks rehearsing in New York, joined

the world got its first inkling that something was afoot. Banks and Collins are holed up in a suite in one of west London's fancier hotels (Rutherford has prior commitments, we speak via phone a few days later).

In 24 hours' time, the announcement will go out confirming the worst-kept music industry secret of 2020: Genesis are reuniting for a series of UK dates in November and December 2020 under the banner *The Last Domino?* tour, the question mark clearly there for a reason.

Here in the hotel room, Banks looks exactly as he has done for years now. With his grey hair and crisp shirt, he's like the headmaster of a well-heeled, modern private school.

Collins is a different matter. He enters the room in a wheelchair before



by longtime live guitarist Daryl Stuermer and Collins' 18-year-old son, Nic, on drums. At the end of it, the three core members sat down together for a cup of coffee.

"I said, 'What do we all think?'" says Rutherford. "I didn't want anybody to feel like they were being dragged along. I wanted Tony and Phil and myself to be keen to do it – to *want* to do it. I wanted it to feel like fun."

All three men agreed that, yes, this was something they wanted to do, and, yes, it did look like fun. They finished their coffees, shook hands and agreed to let their manager and promoter move forward with booking shows for late 2020.

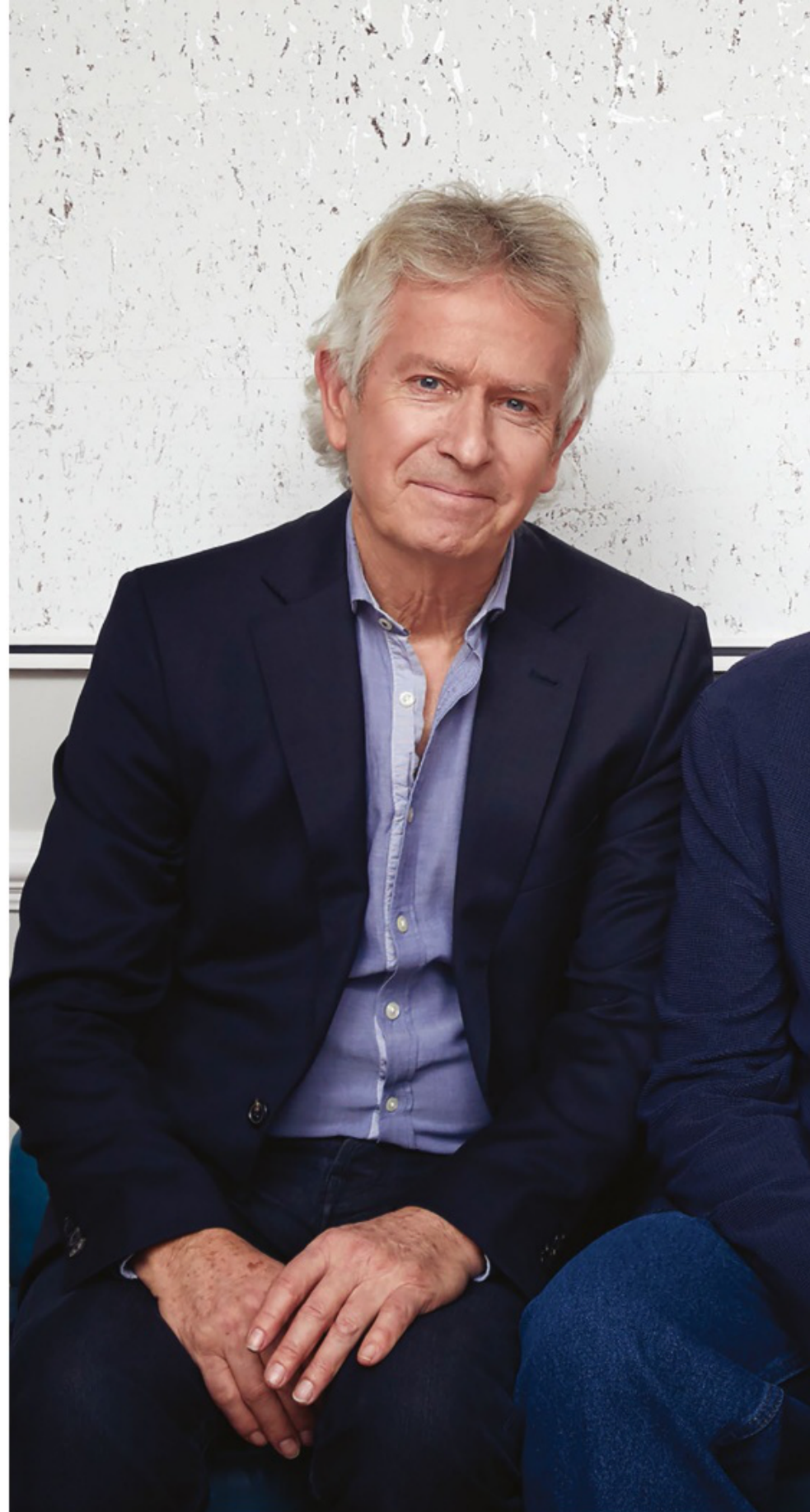
It wasn't a hard decision to make in the end. As much as anything, it was a chance for three men with half a century of shared personal and musical history to reconnect on any number of levels. Or as Collins puts it today, "There were more reasons to do it than not to do it."

It's now early March 2020, six weeks after the basketball game when

navigating himself into a high-backed armchair for the interview. He doesn't look to be in pain, though standing is clearly a problem. "Oh, I'm okay," he says by way of explanation. "Obviously, I've had various health issues. If we were going to be doing this the way we used to do it, I don't think I'd be doing it. But nowadays it can be done differently. I've been doing that for the last couple of years. It's not like it's physically impossible to do it, it's just not necessarily pleasurable."

The pull of Genesis must be strong, given the apparent severity of Collins' ailments. It's not immediately obvious what it is that's brought the three of them together now, at a point in their career when they can presumably afford to take things a little easier. Is it unfinished business? Are they missing the camaraderie? Or is it the money?

"Banks always says it rather well," says Rutherford. "When he's asked that question, he says, 'Well, you know, we are musicians, this is what we do.' So you start with that, and it makes sense. We're good friends, why wouldn't we?"



Above: Sofa sounds.
Left: Nic Collins plays drums at his dad's concert at the Royal Albert Hall in 2017.

Banks says: "I think the answer is that we can. And if we've got an audience that wants to see us, that's sort of reason enough. It's not a duty, but there's almost a feeling that we can and we probably should in a way."

"You've got nothing to prove in a way," he continues. "It's all old material, you're not trying to sell anything to anyone, you're not trying to convince people, you're playing to the converted. Last time what was really gratifying was how many younger people came to the show. Because we're not so young ourselves."

For all his health issues, it's Collins who holds the key to this reunion. The frontman announced his retirement from music in 2011, partly as a result of health issues stemming from the Genesis reunion tour four years earlier.

Six years later, he effectively unretired himself with the archly named *Not Dead Yet* tour, which grew from a handful of European and UK shows into a full-blown world tour that eventually ran for 97 dates from the summer of 2017 to October 2019 and



“There are certain things you have to play at a live Genesis concert now, for better or worse, and that takes up a lot of the show. But we’ve got quite a big catalogue to choose from. There are one or two songs we haven’t done for a long time, which could sound great.”

Tony Banks

featured Nic Collins taking his father’s place behind the drum kit.

It was towards the end of that tour that the idea of a potential Genesis reunion began to shift from the realm of fantasy into something more realistic. “You always think that it’s not impossible,” says Rutherford. “But when Phil retired, it was almost too big an ask for everybody. It wasn’t until he started touring again with his son drumming that I thought, ‘Well, it might be different, because the circumstances have changed.’”

Rutherford had spent some time in his old bandmate’s orbit during the tour. His band, Mike + The Mechanics, were on the bill at Collins’ solo show in London’s Hyde Park in June 2017, and appeared at six European shows in the summer of 2019. During the latter, Rutherford joined Collins’ band on stage for a version of Genesis’ 1978 single *Follow You Follow Me*.

“We had a chat after his tour finished along the lines of, ‘What do you think?’” says Rutherford. “He’d done around 100 shows on his own and

it felt naturally the right time for him to maybe look at something different.”

None of the three can remember who actually floated the idea first. Or if they can, they’re not admitting it.

“It was suggested by everybody,” says Banks diplomatically.

One thing they do agree on is that neither Peter Gabriel nor Steve Hackett were asked to participate. The trio went down that route before they reunited last time around, with Gabriel prevaricating as to whether he wanted to be involved or not before deciding that no, he wasn’t actually interested, thank you very much.

“It’s very difficult to get Peter to commit,” says Banks. “We’ve probably moved too far apart in that respect. So, no, we didn’t approach them. We’re doing very little from the period when they were in the band for a start. But Genesis has really been the three of us for the last 45 years, on and off. To get everyone on board would be quite difficult anyhow.”

Rutherford is blunter. “People go, ‘It would be a lovely idea for Peter to rejoin’, but he left 45 years ago. And Steve left 43 years ago. People don’t think about how it works – who sings what? No, it was always going to be the three of us.”

And so it was the three of them, together with Stuermer and Collins Jnr, who ended up in New York at the start of the year. “Once we’d decided it was a possibility, we wanted to work out whether we could still play together,” says Banks. “We spent a couple of weeks just seeing how we sounded. First of all, Mike and I needed to get back up to speed, and then to see how Nic fitted in. And of course he was way ahead of us completely.”

All three men say that the 18-year-old is a significant part of the reunion. “We had to work out how to get around my frailties,” says Collins Snr. “Of course, Nic being able to prove that he was a great drummer and able to sound a bit like me when he wanted to was a great help. Mike said something that showed me that it could work. He said, ‘Well, he gets it, doesn’t he? He gets what it’s supposed to be like.’”

“For Mike and I, that was quite exciting,” adds Banks. “You can play some of the songs you haven’t played with Phil as the drummer for a while.”

What exactly those songs will be is the killer question. A tension has always existed between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Genesis, with *Duke* acting as the pivot point. Fans of the former understandably want to see them diving back into the deep past, dusting down Gabriel and Hackett-era classics. But given the vast majority of their modern fanbase hews closest to their imperial 80s pop phase, it’s unlikely that they’re going to be dusting down

The Knife for these shows. “No, I don’t think so,” says Rutherford drily.

In fairness, last time around they did a decent job in reconciling both halves of their past. The old days were represented in the form of a medley that took in parts of *In The Cage*, *The Cinema Show*, *Duke’s Travels* and *Afterglow*; elsewhere they touched on *Firth Of Fifth* and *I Know What I Like (In Your Wardrobe)*, the latter appended by a snippet of *Trespass’ Stagnation*. They unexpectedly dusted down 1976’s *Ripples*; even more unexpectedly they closed the show not with *Invisible Touch* or *No Son Of Mine*, but *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* centrepiece *The Carpet Crawlers*. They were never going to please all the people all the time, but this was about as close as they could humanly get.

Frustratingly, though not unexpectedly, they’re being tight-lipped on exactly what they will be

opening two verses. So yes, the plan is to do part of that. I think the lyric is quite poignant.”

More Fool Me?

Collins: “Oh, God no.”

Banks: “That’s the set-closer isn’t it?”

How about *Duchess*?

“That was sounding really good in rehearsals, let’s put it that way,” says Banks.

That all sounds promising. What about the big one: *Supper’s Ready*?

Collins pauses for a second. “At the moment, yes. Parts of it are probable.”

Banks: “Possible, I’d say. I’m all in favour of doing a bit of it, particularly for a British audience, because I feel it’s such a strong part of our history. But at the moment it’s on the fringes, so we will see.”

Collins: “We had lots of interesting things on the first couple of setlists we drew up, and Nic went away and learned them. Every day, he’d come



PRESS/GENESIS



JOE SOHM/VISIONS OF AMERICA/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/GETTY IMAGES

playing next time. “Well, it wouldn’t be a surprise,” says Banks, perhaps not unreasonably. “Some of the same old ones, and some new old ones. There are certain things you have to play at a live Genesis concert now, for better or worse, and that takes up a lot of the show. But we’ve got quite a big catalogue to choose from. There are one or two songs we haven’t done for a long time, which could sound great.”

Still, it’d be rude not to at least try to prise out some info out of them. “Well, you can try,” says Banks, smiling. “But we’re not going to tell you. There’s a bit of a clue in *The Last Domino?* — that’s one of the songs we will do,” he says, referring to 1986’s *Invisible Touch* era-pop-prog epic *Domino*.

Okay, that’s one down. What about *Fading Lights* from *We Can’t Dance*?

“It’s interesting you should mention that,” says Banks. “I think I have persuaded the other two to do the

down and say, “Tell us about this piece, what’s the time signature of that piece?” A lot of that stuff has fallen away. He’s said he’s going to form a Genesis tribute band so he can finally play all the bits that he’s learned that we ain’t doing. I think he’s joking.”

Nic Collins’ presence will let his dad focus on singing, though that’s as much out of necessity as it choice. Collins admits that his movement is still compromised by his physical issues. “I think I have to be seated for these shows,” he says. “I know I have to. I just can’t stand too long without it being painful.”

While the likelihood of Collins prowling the stage is slim to non-existent, the chances of him getting behind the drum kit are, surprisingly, less remote. “I really am going to make a concerted effort to try to play some drums,” he says. “Just on some of the instrumental parts, because there are

Genesis, with Phil Collins, play the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, 2007.

“*Supper’s Ready?* At the moment, yes. Parts of it are probable.”

Phil Collins

much more of those in our show than there was in my solo shows. But that’s a work in progress.” (He’s not the only one aware of the aches of age. “I don’t want to play for more than two hours,” Rutherford admits. “That’s about my limit physically, for my wrists and everything else.”)

‘Work in progress’ could describe *The Last Domino?* tour itself. The day after our interview, 12 dates in the UK and Ireland were announced, selling out in minutes. Additional shows were added soon after, although the coronavirus outbreak has put to a stop to any further announcements.

Still, that playful, yet challenging, question mark is loaded with plenty of frustrating ambiguity. The *Turn It On Again* tour was originally earmarked as 25 dates before being bumped up to 50, but once it was finished, that was it. It’s unclear whether the *The Last Domino?* tour will follow the same pattern or if it



will be something more open-ended. Or possibly even permanent.

“Permanent is the wrong word,” says Rutherford. “But to continue, yes, I would like to. It’s an awful lot of work for four weeks’ work. But let’s get this one going first.”

Collins: “It’s the kind of thing we can pick it up and put it down, as and when. I don’t think these dates will be the only dates. But I don’t know what else.”

Banks: “We don’t really look that far ahead. The question mark: is this the last time? We don’t know that, nobody knows that.”

Would you like to do more together in the future?

“As long as it’s still fun and we can work it out,” says Banks. “You’ve got to keep it spaced out — you don’t want it to be a grind. A manager’s three weeks is a normal person’s five weeks, so everything gets extended.”

What about new music? Could you ever see Genesis putting out another album? Or even a new song or two?

“Don’t see why not,” says Collins with a noncommittal shrug.

Banks: “We’d never rule it out. It’s just a question of being in the right place at the right time and doing it the right way. We’re all writers, so I don’t see why not. But we haven’t talked about it. It’s a question of whether it’s worth doing. You can write something, but is it worth it? Is it worth doing?”

Rutherford provides a dissenting voice. “At the moment it’s not really on my radar,” he says. “We’re pretty full-on doing this. Plus the trouble with new music is, what do you do with it? In the old days it had an airing all round the world. It hasn’t got the same kind of reach any more.”

It hasn’t, though there’s always the counter-argument inadvertently provided by Tony Banks: well, they *are* musicians. In reality, the idea of new Genesis music does feel like asking a band to run before they’ve relearned to walk. For now, The Last Domino? tour is an unexpected post-script that most people had ever given up on seeing.

“You talk about camaraderie, I think that’s one reason we want to get back together,” says Banks. “I think shared responsibility too. Sometimes when you’re not doing something, somebody else is, and that can mean the whole thing is working, is quite nice — it’s quite relaxing, less tense.”

“People forget that there’s 50-plus years of anecdotes and memories and reference points that the three of us share,” adds Rutherford. “When the three of us are in a room together, that’s when it all comes out. And it’s things like that which make this so special for me.” 🙏

The Last Domino? Tour begins in Dublin in November. See www.genesis-music.com.

Take a bow: Genesis in September 2007.

Mike Rutherford and Phil Collins perform with Chester Thompson at the VH1 Rock Honors in Las Vegas, May 2017.



KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

THE MAKING OF Trespass

"On *Trespass* we became a band!" Mike Rutherford tells Mario Giammetti. In an extract from the book *Genesis: 1967 To 1975 - The Peter Gabriel Years*, Peter Gabriel, Mike Rutherford, Tony Banks, Anthony Phillips and their former road manager Richard Macphail share the story behind **Genesis'** Charisma debut.

Words: Mario Giammetti



Over two years had passed between the recording of *From Genesis To Revelation* and *Trespass*. A long time by any new band's standards, but for Genesis it was an eternity in terms of style and growth. At the same time, the period was so overwhelmingly hectic that any attempt at pinpointing the watershed moment is purely arbitrary.

[In the book] we have already mentioned a few decisive events, including a demo with four songs – *Family*, which would evolve into *Dusk*; *White Mountain*; *Going Out To Get You* and *Pacidy* – recorded on August 20, 1969 thanks to their friend, Brian Roberts, and the band's stage debut where Genesis incorporated their third drummer, John Mayhew. During their early live shows, the band began to experiment with a new repertoire, gradually abandoning the simple songs to bring in new, more challenging material. The two weeks of rehearsals at Anthony Phillips' parents' home, Send Barns, between September 22 and October 3, 1969, also proved to be of fundamental importance.

One day the band received a very welcome visit from Richard Macphail. The former lead singer of Anon had just come back to England after spending a few months away working on a kibbutz. He went to listen to his ex-school mates and was astounded by their unexpected technical and creative progress. Spotting the potential, Richard asked his father if he and his friends could stay at the Macphail weekend retreat in Wotton, Surrey, a house called Christmas Cottage.

Richard Macphail: "In the summer of 1969, the cottage was broken into and burgled. Even though it was



Paul Whitehead's cover art for *Trespass*.

actually quite close to London [an hour's drive from the centre], it was very remote. After the burglary, my mother was nervous about going there and the decision was made to sell it. It was autumn and my father thought

Christmas Cottage: Genesis' home for six months.

it was best to wait until the springtime, when the cottage was at its best. In May, when all the trees are out, it's just wonderful. So essentially it was going to be empty the whole winter and that's why we were able to use it. My father worked for a large baking company and they had vans for delivering bread; he managed to get us one and they got it serviced and painted up. So I was able to provide accommodation and transport and the guys did the rest. I provided food as well, I cook. That's basically how I became their road manager."

The band's retreat to Christmas Cottage lasted six months, through to April 1970, possibly a rather excessive period of time which would take the five young men almost to breaking point. It would, however, have an



COURTESY OF THE GENESIS ARCHIVE

"Trespass was the first opportunity
we had to make a real album
where we felt we were in
the driving seat."

Peter Gabriel

EXTRACTED FROM GENESIS: 1967 TO 1975 - THE PETER GABRIEL YEARS BY MARIO GIAMMETTI, PUBLISHED BY KINGMAKER AND AVAILABLE NOW FROM WWW.BURNINGSHED.COM

Genesis at Newark Abbey in 1969. L-R: Mike
Rutherford, Anthony Phillips, Peter Gabriel
(sitting), Tony Banks, John Mayhew.

enormous impact on their future and, from an artistic point of view, it was priceless. It was there, in fact, that Genesis started to reveal its true colours. Shedding the constraints of pop imposed on them when they worked on their immature debut album, they began to create a sound that was to become legendary. But living together 24/7 in a secluded place, far away from any distractions, was enough to put even the most resilient natures to the test.

Gabriel: "We were used to having this passive-aggressive tone to rehearsals and, although Tony and I were best friends, we would often be at loggerheads about the music. He was a lot more nervous back then and not at ease within himself. He would try to hold on to controlling as much as he could, in a lot of ways, and I would always want to push it wide open, you know, let the sunlight in, the rain, and see what grew. Ant and Mike, for the most part, got on pretty well but occasionally I would be battling it out with one of them. Mike tended to avoid confrontation and, in later years, the same could be said of Phil and Steve. Tony and I were the ones most frequently at odds. Without question, we were passionate about creating something great, but I think we were also both awkward buggers, so it was a personality thing as well."

Despite the unavoidable conflicts, Genesis managed to overcome their difficulties and concentrate on the music. During those weeks, the band

songs. It was very formative in how we would go on to operate, forever really. It was a mixture of jamming and bringing things into the band that we'd written as individuals."

Phillips: "When we wrote *Looking For Someone* and *The Knife*, we were very excited because we were charging off into new territory, down roads no one else had been down. It was kind of exciting to break out of the constraints of the verse-chorus song."

Day after day, Genesis focused on their music, sometimes rehearsing for 11 hours a day. The only moments of distraction involved walks in the surrounding countryside and reading sci-fi novels and books on mythology, which would greatly influence their lyrics. In the meantime, promotional activities were being handled by Macphail and, above all, Peter.

Gabriel: "I was always the one promoting the band. I just realised that this was a pipe-dream and unless we actually got income, gigs, record deals, this whole thing was going to fall flat on its face. I worked my arse off just trying to sell the band around the place and that was frustrating sometimes for the others as I would be off making phone calls. We tried every week to get agents and promoters, social secretaries, A&R people, everybody to come down. It was absolutely extraordinary the number of flat tyres and breakdowns that occurred between London and Dorking! Every week there'd be a different excuse from a different person and it was hard to

"For me, Anthony was the group leader, he was the one who wanted to go live, he was the one who wanted to go professional, he kind of motivated the rest of us really."

Tony Banks

managed to distil some of their previous concepts and, bursting with inspiration, give greater expression to their songwriting. It's hard to estimate just how much music bounced off the walls of Christmas Cottage, but one thing is certain, the five young men emerged as a new creative force at a totally different level in terms of compositional abilities. The qualitative leap forward, compared to *From Genesis To Revelation*, was quite simply phenomenal.

Rutherford: "In the Christmas Cottage period we just wrote and wrote and wrote for six months. We had sections and long bits and 20-minute

get the live work. I think it's even harder today yet you learn so much from being in front of an audience, you know. A lot of musicians are dreamers, fantasists, and you create this little world for yourself, but as soon as you stand in front of an audience it's like a big pin that is ready to pop your balloon. And that's actually a useful part of the evolution of music and of a song. Not everything has to appeal to everyone but you have to know when people are feeling it and when you're just missing it. When it's dying."

Putting their music to the test in a live scenario consequently became a crucial factor. In the last quarter of



COURTESY RICHARD MCPHAIL



1969 opportunities to play live were few and far between, but the situation began to improve at the turn of the decade.

On January 9, 1970, the band was called into the BBC studios to create the soundtrack for a film based on the work of painter Michael Jackson, in turn inspired by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Being a silent movie, Genesis were given the task of creating a score to accompany the artist's paintings. To date, it is not clear whether or not the band actually got to see these paintings, which appear to have been of a particularly violent nature. What is known is that the band rushed into the BBC studios in Shepherd's Bush under



JAMES SHARROCK

the guidance of Paul Samwell-Smith, formerly of The Yardbirds and already a successful producer.

The Jackson Tapes (an exceptionally important missing evolutionary link between the band's first two albums) disappeared without trace for over 30 years, and it was believed they were gone for good until a copy surfaced in 2001, together with some written notes providing indications as to what the music was intended to evoke. The material was finally released in 2008 as part of the bonus disc included in the *Genesis 1970-1975* box set. In the notes, Peter Gabriel puts the poor quality of his vocal performance down to the

Above: Richard Macphail reminiscing about the early days. Inset: Macphail as lead singer of Anon.

limited recording time available (just a couple of hours in all), explaining that the vocals on the tape were only intended to act as a guide track. Musically speaking, the band used this opportunity to experiment and test material which, despite being in a different form, was beginning to take shape in rehearsals and live shows. On listening to the tracks, which consist of about 15 minutes of previously unreleased material divided under four titles: *Provocation*, *Frustration*, *Manipulation* and *Resignation*, it becomes clear that this recording session planted the seeds from which future tracks were destined to grow.

Provocation, for example, is a combination of the initial organ sequence of *The Fountain Of Salmacis* which would see the light of day one and a half years later, and what would eventually become the second part of *Looking For Someone*. *Frustration* is, for the most part, an early incarnation of *Anyway*, a song which in 1974 became part of *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* album, but also includes a short section from a 1967 track, *Hair On The Arms And Legs*. *Manipulation* is an embryonic version of *The Musical Box*, making *Resignation*, which used to go by the title *Peace* in their live shows, the only track to feature completely 

previously unreleased music (although there is just a hint of a re-use of the opening chords from *The Fountain Of Salmacis*).

Just over a month later, on February 22, 1970, Genesis returned to the BBC studios, this time in Maida Vale, for the radio programme *Night Ride*. On this occasion the band played six new songs live in the studio, this time complete with final lyrics and arrangements: *Dusk*, *Shepherd*, *Pacidy*, *Let Us Now Make Love*, *Looking For Someone*, *Stagnation*. The difference between these and the naivety of their debut album is startling; the songs, albeit pleasant, on *From Genesis To Revelation* were as linear and unpretentious as the new ones were complex and variegated. The growth in musicianship was truly staggering: Gabriel, playing flute as he had on the *Jackson Tapes*, revealed a more mature and confident voice; Tony had begun to master the organ, an instrument which now represented a signature sound for the band, replacing the piano; Ant and Mike had the task of weaving brilliant and highly original harmonies on guitar; and, without reaching superlatives, John Mayhew turned out to be a solid drummer.

That same February, thanks to a push from promoter Marcus Bicknell, the band began to pick up the very first signs of real interest from audiences at a series of concerts held in and around the capital. Having finally attracted the attention of various talent scouts, including the producer of Island Records, Guy Stevens, Genesis appeared to be on the brink of signing a contract with Threshold Records, the label founded by The Moody Blues, so much so that their keyboard player, Mike Pinder, invited them to the De Lane Lea studios to record *Looking For Someone*. However, not everything lived up to Banks' expectations; hitting a wrong note on the organ, he ended up arguing with Pinder, who didn't think another take was necessary.

Charisma was still a small label at this time, but it was already considered a rising star of the British record industry. Its artists already included Rare Bird (who had just had a huge hit with *Sympathy*), The Nice, Van der Graaf Generator, Audience and Lindisfarne. It was producer John Anthony who was so impressed by Genesis that he insisted label boss Tony Stratton-Smith checked them out. For Stratton-Smith, it was love at first listen and he signed them to the label, while at the same time prohibiting them from accepting a commission to write the music for a radio theatre production by George MacBeth entitled *Sunken Gold*. It was the producer of the radio programme *Night Ride*, Alec Reid, who had

recommended Genesis to the Scottish poet and producer Michael Mason. The *Sunken Gold* project, after initially being shelved, was later picked up and transmitted by the BBC in 1984, featuring material by other artists. For Stratton-Smith, it was more important for the band to concentrate on new music and the Charisma boss wanted no distractions.

So, schedules were mapped out and Genesis, while waiting to book the studio to record their second album, resurrected a song which hadn't made it to the *From Genesis To Revelation* tracklist, *Visions Of Angels* (a completely new version) plus a few fragments dating back to the Oxford period at John Silver's house. The rest of the songs came from the music written in the Macphails' holiday cottage.

When the five young musicians crossed the threshold of Trident Studios in London, the problem as to which songs they should choose for the album did not arise. The amount of studio time they had was very limited, so Genesis were forced to select the songs they knew best, the ones they had tried and tested in their live shows.

Pre-Trespass gigs, where the band honed their skills.

MARK KENYON/WWW.THEGENESISARCHIVE.CO.UK



PRESS

Phillips: "If we'd had more time, we would have actually gone back to some of the music we'd jettisoned because recorded music is different to live music. The tendency then was to record the music that you were touring with, particularly if it was complex, simply because there wasn't enough time to rehearse anything new. We'd jettisoned all this sort of what you might call more adult progressive music written after *From Genesis To Revelation* because it'd just died on the road."

Banks: "We were finding our feet. We were rehearsing in this cottage for a long time, writing all these songs



“We were used to having this passive-aggressive tone to rehearsals and, although Tony and I were best friends, we would often be at loggerheads about the music.”

Peter Gabriel

and some of them didn't end up on the album. We were playing live, something we'd never really done, finding out how it went, getting used to playing in front of an audience, how to construct sets and everything, and *Trespass* was just a selection of songs we had at the time. I mean there were two or three other songs that were good that didn't end up on this record. What we recorded is a bit arbitrary, I think. It was very rushed, you went into the recording studio and had a day or two to do it in.”

Phillips: “I seem to recall that we rehearsed and then recorded the main part of it in a few days. Then we had

Above: Peter Gabriel, whose voice became more mature and confident by *Trespass*.

to go off and do some gigs and come back in to do some additional bits. But I think all the main stuff must have been done at one time, because it was too complicated to come back in and set up the mics for the 12-strings and Tony's organ. We knew it all back to front and there wasn't really any time to try out other things. There are some additions of note, extra piano parts from Tony and some extra acoustic guitar in *Looking For Someone* and *Dusk* by Mike. John Anthony added a few effects on the vocals, obviously, because that's where he came into play, getting the right sound. But most of the time it's just as we did it live

really, including the drums, in Trident Studios. And quite far apart as well which didn't help. Behind screens and stuff so it was quite difficult to get the vibe of being a group.”

John Anthony was the obvious choice for working on the production desk and the results can be heard immediately, despite the limitations in terms of equipment.

Phillips: “*Trespass* was a slightly more sophisticated recording than *From Genesis To Revelation*. Eight-track I think it was. I know that John Anthony wouldn't let anybody drop in. I was able to double track a guitar solo on *The Knife*, which would



have been unheard of on the previous album. I remember Mike had a bit of a clash with a guitar at the end of *Stagnation*, about six minutes in. He had to just sit there, listen to the whole track and, of course, by the time it got to his bit he was so nervous that he fluffed it, you know, 'start again'."

Rutherford: "You couldn't drop in, so if you made a mistake in a 10-minute song you had to go back to the beginning and play it through 'til your mistake came again and overdub it. Don't know what that was about, it took forever. John Anthony actually made it a nice atmosphere and I think we overdid it. *Stagnation* is a prime example where Ant and I put on far too many acoustic guitars. I mean so many. Layer after layer of stuff, completely betraying the principle of 'less is more'. We were just so full of ideas."

Banks: "I remember being quite nervous. You didn't want to make any mistakes because there wasn't the option of going back and repairing and over-dubbing stuff. The whole band went in there and we all played it, and you went on and did a take until you got something that was halfway decent from all of you. Particularly for the drums it was a problem, because that was the one you really couldn't do anything about."

Overdubbing apart, John Anthony proved to be a very collaborative producer.

Phillips: "*From Genesis To Revelation* was embarked upon in a very naive way but with a huge amount of fun. I think we always felt that we had a lot of say despite Jonathan King obviously being head honcho. With both the first album and *Trespass*, I don't think we felt that we were not doing what we wanted to do. With *Trespass*, I don't think we felt emancipated from some sort of odious yoke and this was going to be different because we had John Anthony as producer. For me the recording was kind of pleasant because it wasn't too difficult, we knew exactly what we were going to do. Nice sounds, nice crowd of people, John Anthony was really fun, very humorous and told a lot of bad, bad filthy jokes, and I went through it on auto-pilot. There were no arguments, there'd been so many when we were writing that there was nothing left to argue about really, and I suspect the level of the organ was higher than the guitar or whatever, but John Anthony was in charge of that."

Gabriel: "*Trespass* was really the first opportunity we had to make a real album where we felt we were in the driving seat. John Anthony was there as a producer and he was a great man for performance and getting the energy. But the style, the arrangements and the approach were all determined by us for the first time."

"I don't think there was any thought in our minds that we were recording a classic, you know, that in 40 years' time people would still be talking about the solo in *The Knife*."

Anthony Phillips



Anthony Phillips.
"We always felt we
had a lot to say."

WILL IRELAND/FUTURE OWNS

Phillips: "In terms of writing we were going back to something that was familiar to us, but what was different was doing it in a live context, with the power. By the time we got to record it, John Anthony probably helped to re-invent it for us. A lot of our friends liked the album, but I don't think there was any thought in our minds that we were recording a classic, you know, that in 40 years' time people would still be talking about the solo in *The Knife*."

Rutherford: "You make an album out of the best songs you've got at the time. *From Genesis To Revelation* had material in it that went way back but, with *Trespass*, we were already in the next phase, with songs written between concerts. This is where the process of touring, gigging, recording and writing started. We had some good songs, although they were probably better live than they were on the record."

Even though the songs were developed as a group, the truth of the matter is, each one had a very different story behind the writing.

Banks: "Some of the songs developed out of things that Ant and Mike had written together or Peter and I had written. In particular, *The Knife* was something Peter and I put together, which we then developed in the studio. The same goes for *Looking For Someone*, then obviously things like *Dusk* and *White Mountain* came more from Ant and Mike's side."

Phillips: "Originally it used to be very much a case that Mike and I would write and Peter and Tony would write. Then, during the period at the cottage, where we started doing these longer instrumental pieces, it all got much more mixed up. Mike and I might kick something off with two 12-strings and then Tony would add some organ. Very, very early on, *Stagnation* came from that sort of mixture. Obviously, Pete sorted the lyrical aspect, the vocal lines and flute. So there was a lot more 'cross-fertilisation'."

Gabriel: "The writing was still, to some extent, a continuation of where we'd started, in pairs, although some overlapping was beginning to happen. For example, *Looking For Someone* started with things I had begun and in *The Knife* there's one section which Tony did musically, whereas *Dusk* was an Ant thing, as was *Visions Of Angels*."

Phillips: "*Dusk* and *White Mountain* were Mike and myself with everyone else mucking in. I think the significant difference was Mike's involvement, because he wrote very little on *From Genesis To Revelation*. He played a bit of bass and told a lot

of good jokes, but he didn't do a lot in terms of actual writing."

The instrumentation used also became a lot more complex and, as well as occasional additions and background sounds from Peter on accordion, Ant on dulcimer and Mike on cello, the overall sound was far richer than on the debut album, above all thanks to Peter's flute and Tony's organ.

Phillips: "The flute was part of the music scene, wasn't it? It was used by bands like Traffic, and Ian McDonald had blazed a trail with it on the quieter King Crimson numbers, which had a huge influence on us.

I think where we were slightly different was that we were using folky sounding instruments but in a slightly more classical way so it sounds a little bit different. We would experiment with these cross chord textures: Mike would be playing one chord and I'd be playing another."

Gabriel: "Tony was extraordinarily possessive about the keyboards. I'd done a bit of flute at school, I always liked the sound, and a little bit of oboe — I was an even worse oboe player, but it made a couple of good noises now and again. Then the bass drum was something physical, visual, that I could kick hard and occasionally it was in time!"

Phillips: "We went through a period of experimentation with the live sound. Tony found the organ

BY DEFINITION, Genesis is the production of something new. And the group of the same name certainly justify their name, so much so that of all Charisma's array of talent, they are regarded as "the baby."

The band was formed at Charterhouse school, and despite making an album for Decca they were wandering in the wilderness when Charisma took them under their wing, gave them a sympathetic and indulgent producer in John Anthony, and an extremely fat cheque to cover the cost of two months in Trident Studios.

This is exactly what Genesis required to compile the beautiful *Trespass* — the time and patience to achieve perfection. In recent months several eminent figures in the music business have acclaimed the group's talents and now, without doubt, they have come of age. At the famous Mothers Club, they are regarded as the best small band to have appeared there.

□ □ □ Their lead singer is Peter Gabriel, frantic and aggressive on stage, yet strangely correct and diffident off stage.

He explained: "Since the album was made, we've lost percussionist John Mayhew, and lead guitarist Anthony Phillips, who was one of the original four. We've had one or two drummers in the past, and we've now got Phil Collins, who actually played the part of the Artful Dodger in the West End production

Charisma's new baby

of *Oliver Twist*: Anthony was very good indeed but he was getting very depressed going on the road, so Mick Barnard has replaced him on lead guitar. We're just about settling down and finding our feet again now."

□ □ □ Genesis went into the studios in June and Charisma thought that they'd taken up permanent residence in Trident. "There was quite a lot of tracking and we spent quite a lot of time arranging songs; not only that but there are certain effects you can't try until you get into the studios," Peter explained.

Prior to this the group had rehearsed extensively at the G & M Club, deep in Surrey where they live. "And before that we spent a time in a cottage in Dorking, but built up debts all the time," he added.

Peter recalled the formation of Genesis. "The four of us originally began as four separate songwriters in different groups at school. Then we thought we'd combine our talents so we made a tape that was pushed around to several people and pushed back again. We eventually got Jonathan King mildly interested; we'd writ-

ten 300 songs between us and no-one was interested in any of them until Jonathan let us do a demo session and we got four songs into reasonable shape. This eventually led to the album and in order to make that, we began playing together; then in order to make something out of the album we decided to start working."

This album, incidentally, was called "From Genesis To Revelation", and like so many debut albums it was constructed at drastic speed, not really giving the group an opportunity to display their talents.

□ □ □ Then followed a worrying period for Genesis who were left wandering around aimlessly with little predictable future. "I was doing the hustling," Peter recalled, "driving round in an old taxi. John Anthony saw the group playing at Ronnie Scott's, and was so enthusiastic that he brought down Charisma boss Tony Stratton-Smith for the remaining ten minutes of their act; and this was sufficient to convince Tony of Genesis' musical timbre."

"We didn't really have an album to record then, although 'Visions Of Angels'

was already in our stage act," added Peter. This is one of the six tracks on an extremely picturesque album where the lyrics are highlighted in the foreground of some fat, melodic chords. Liberal use of keyboards and twelve string guitars captures the mood of the stories admirably. Every structure and every scene has been meticulously threaded together, and to have rushed such a delicate operation would have been akin to imposing a time limit on a famous landscape painter.

□ □ □ "We've got very little ambition in terms of instrumental techniques — we are more interested in having available textures of sound. I think we are getting the more satisfaction out of writing and recording, and we will do that as often as possible. That doesn't go far as saying we don't enjoy live gigs but we play very tightly and we can't always recapture the goodness of a song when it is first organised. It's very difficult to get the circumstances and the set-up to recreate the sound for instance when you create a sound in a rehearsal room you get a really exciting moment when things haven't got a shape. But we can always decorate this in a way which completely satisfies us, and on a lot of gigs it'll come out as just the skeleton."

"But we can grow up hell of a lot." — JERRY GIBBERT.

● GENESIS: Charisma took them under their wing.

Making headlines: *Sounds* newspaper, January 19, 1971.

An interview with *Trespass* producer John Anthony in *Melody Maker*, 1970.

MELODY MAKER, December 12, 1970—Page 9

Dr's

however, he believes in a total involvement with the artists. "Often I go down and sing with the bands in the studio. Like, with Genesis' singer, Peter Gabriel, who lacks confidence when he goes into the studios. It helps him to build confidence in his singing. In essence it's having a love of the artist and his work, and the idea in your head of what to do with it."

He got into production by the backdoor. He knew Yes, and he went along to one of their sessions one day at Polydor, got the session together and mixed the tapes. A lot of people liked it, and in Spring 1969 he got a job with American Mercury — not a wholly successful position, apparently ("I learnt the wrong way to do things first").



JOHN ANTHONY reciprocal thing

However, he met Van der Graaf Generator. "Who were locked away in a filing cabinet with Mercury, tucked under V." The record company then decided to close down its London office, but he got the O.K. to cut an album with Van der Graaf; eight to mix — everything done in one or two takes. Tony Stratton-Smith, boss of the new Charisma label, liked what he did on the album and asked him to produce Rare Bird. Their first single, "Symphony", became a hit record and sold one and a half million copies.

Like all producers he has his gripes, though. "So many bands go in under-rehearsed and don't groove with the producer. There's one right way to do an album and 400 wrong ones. That's the point of having a producer. Groups don't know what their faults are. They just go in, take a look at the console, and say, 'O Christ! They're lost in a deluge of technicalities.'"

JOHN ANTHONY used to be a singer with a group from Windsor called Hogsart Rupert, a disc-jockey at London's The Pheasantry and Speakeasy, where he zapped people with a combination of soul records and freaky sounds like "Saucerful Of Secrets," and then a promotion man with American Mercury.

Now he is busy in the job that he likes best — one of a vocation — producing.

In little more than a year he has built up a sizeable reputation with his work for the Charisma label and three of their bands — Van der Graaf, Lindisfarne and Genesis.

He has a definite plan now, though. "I have to like the artist first, and that has to be a reciprocal thing. Then I go to lots of their gigs, and listen and watch how they play. After I demo the album, and just play around and talk about ideas and structures, and usually, when I've heard the songs I've an idea how the album will change and look during full production."

Probably more importantly,

difficult. I always remember him referring to it as a box of tricks. A lot of pianists don't like organ: for a start, you've got no light and shade of the touch, and if you're used to that expressiveness it's terribly different, it takes a lot of time. I think he was a bit at sea and, in a sense, lost his power base slightly, and for Peter it was difficult as well. So, while they were adapting their writing to the new medium, Mike and I started this two 12-string thing, we just had a period where we wrote more. I think it was easier for us really and that probably explains the folky feel because *Dusk*, *White Mountain* and

Stagnation were all born out of 12-string guitar stuff, and *Visions Of Angels*, although that was a piano song, it was developed as a guitar-based song for live shows. I remember some guy in the *East Grinstead News* labelled us 'folk blues mystical'."

Without doubt, the dominant instrumental role of Genesis during this phase was given to the intertwining sounds of Ant's and Mike's 12-string guitars. And this is the instrument which was behind the most stressful moment during the recording session.

Phillips: "Up until then, most 12-strings were recorded as a background instrument that accompanied the song and often they'd put the mic right on the sound hole and you couldn't really hear the notes, you'd just get a very strummy sound. But, of course, the notes were important so I had a set-up where the 12-string went through an old tape recorder. Robin

CHARISMA'S NEW BABY CLIPPING: EXTRACTED FROM GENESIS: 1967 TO 1975 - THE PETER GABRIEL YEARS BY MARIO GIAMMETTI, PUBLISHED BY KINGMAKER AND AVAILABLE NOW FROM WWW.BURNINGSUED.COM

Cable came down and said that it didn't sound like a 12-string to him and I answered: 'But it does to me.' And that was quite difficult, because Robin Cable was an engineer of high standing. But I had the support of the others because that's how we did it live."

Rutherford: "The album started a bit like our live shows used to in those days. We'd start with a soft song. For half an hour we'd play quiet acoustic music and very often the drummer wouldn't come in until the *Stagnation* bit, which is like 20 minutes into the set. So the album, in a way, reflected that. Part of our operation was an acoustic area. Myself and Ant on guitar, Tony playing piano or organ and Pete playing flute. A lot of our music was acoustic mixed with the heaviness of a song like *The Knife*. In those days there was a lot going on acoustically all around us: Crosby, Stills & Nash, who had a great sound, and Joni Mitchell, a lot of good artists whom we enjoyed listening to wrote great sounds and acoustic background."

What finally emerged was a record that was unique to the rock scene of those extraordinarily fertile years.

Banks: "We didn't think of ourselves as part of any kind of movement.

seven or eight minutes, just seemed a lot more exciting to us."

Phillips: "Tony was more from the classical side but loved pop, whereas Peter was probably heading more towards soul. The guys into the heavy stuff were Mike and I because we'd been in the school bands doing The Stones, Kinks and Beatles. We were the ones writing really third rate kind of blues riffs. We were much less sophisticated to start with. What sorted Mike and me out was switching to 12-strings and finding a bit of refinement there. We used to do a song called *Going Out To Get You*, which was in the direction Mike and I wanted to go in, but it's a good thing we didn't early on because we weren't very good at it."

Gabriel: "The folk sound of the album was definitely from Ant and Mike and their 12-string combination, and I think that was really quite innovative. I loved it and I tried to encourage it. They would do these things where one guitar would be playing one chord while the other played another and you would get a composite of the two. The effect gave us a sound that was quite unique. We were always trying to blend our influences. Nowadays that seems

"We were playing live, something we'd never really done, finding out how it went, getting used to playing in front of an audience, how to construct sets and everything, and *Trespass* was just a selection of songs we had at the time."

Tony Banks



Obviously in the early days our influences were The Beatles, The Beach Boys and The Kinks, but by the time we got to the second album we'd heard groups like Family and the Procol Harum albums, *Shine On Brightly* and *A Salty Dog*, as well as Fairport Convention, and the way they were doing things interested us, it just showed slightly different approaches. We weren't trying to write hit songs but to do a little bit more than that. And the idea of having a bit more room to breathe, with songs creeping up to

nothing special, everyone takes whatever they want, but at that time music was very segregated. I remember sitting in some publisher's office or was it a record company, and they were saying: 'No, you can't. You have to decide what you want to be. You're a folk group, or you're a blues group, or whatever, you can't try and cross all these borders and barriers.' And yet I feel that's what I've been doing my entire musical career: whenever someone puts up a barrier, I try and find a way through it. Which I think is the most

Top of the tree: *Trespass* on the Charisma Christmas advert, 1970.

interesting thing for any creative person. The worst thing you can ever do to an artist is give them complete freedom because they go right up their arse; they don't know what they're doing, where they're going. However, if you say to an artist, 'You can't go here. You definitely can't do that and you mustn't touch this,' then they'll start, in their devious way, to get really creative."

While still remaining predominantly acoustic, the new songs also required a more daring rhythmic component than the simple songs on the debut album.

Banks: "On this album we had John Mayhew on drums, who was actually our third drummer, someone we picked up through an ad, and we were slowly getting some cohesion going between the five of us. It was quite difficult for John, I think, because we had all been to public school and



KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE OWNS

behaved a certain way which must have been very irritating to him. We had our own language and we used to fight an awful lot, and we had terrible arguments and shouting matches. I was probably the main instigator.”

Gabriel: “John was much more of a professional musician; he’d actually played with real bands of musicians rather than with a bunch of songwriters pretending to be a group. He had different sets of experiences and he worked really hard and was very dedicated and delivered well in some places, but it still felt a bit of a struggle. Ant was the other person who was also drum-sensitive, so he and I sort of overlapped in some of those areas. Between us, we would have a lot of ideas for what the drum parts should do, in much the same way that I think Paul McCartney did with Ringo in The Beatles.”

Tony Banks: “Seven- or eight-minute songs just seemed a lot more exciting to us.”

Compared to the blatant naivety of the debut album, *Trespass* revealed a band which had matured in all aspects: technique, composition quality and personality. The disparity is so great that the two records seem to be the work of two completely different bands.

Rutherford: “On *From Genesis To Revelation* we were really a bunch of kids on holiday time, but between that album and *Trespass* we’d become a band. We’d done live concerts, we’d done the cottage-era, where we wrote stuff for six months and the band started to take shape... and it’s a strange album because it’s the only one we ever did where we actually played it live before we recorded it. Which I wouldn’t do again, funnily enough. To be honest, I could barely play bass on the first album. I’d been playing more guitar with Ant and, of

course, he’s the lead player so I had to play bass as well as acoustic guitar.”

Phillips: “I don’t like much of the guitar playing, I’m afraid, but apart from that, the sound could have been better, the sound wasn’t powerful enough, but it had its moments. Quite creative for the time. Not as good as King Crimson but not bad at all.”

Rutherford: “*Stagnation* and *The Knife* are a great example of what we do. The contrasts are always how we think to create our music in a sense, and that album contained both those things. *The Knife* was our heaviest song and a popular live song too and with a good performance from Pete. On that album we were still working in pairs. Myself and Ant wrote the acoustic sound with guitars picking out harmony parts. *Stagnation*, *Dusk* and *White Mountain* were very atmospheric and that was a part of what we were doing on stage and on the record.”

Banks: “I think it was a pretty good second album. *Stagnation* is great, as is *Looking For Someone*. The other songs on the album don’t do much for me anymore. I always felt *Dusk* was a bit of a B-track whereas *White Mountain*, well we used to do that live and it was quite atmospheric, but I don’t think it’s as strong as what was to come.”

Rutherford: “What the album did suffer from was the fact that we’d played the songs for so long live, so when we met in the studio we were fairly inflexible. We’d found a sound and that’s the way it stayed, and it was in a way a little frustrating. The way we worked after that, we went in with songs we’d never played live, so actually you could mess around with the sound. You didn’t quite know where you were going sonically. But with *Trespass*, we’d defined how the parts went, so in a way that was kind of a unique experience.”

Phillips: “I think of *Trespass* as a very good early Genesis album. Obviously, there were many better later ones, but I think there’s a sort of prototype there, in a lot of the tracks, for things that came later. I mean the 12-string stuff we did on this album is developed more later. And obviously, the longer format songs like *The Knife* and *Looking For Someone* were the precursor of things like *The Musical Box*. It was a very important, early stage in the band’s later development.”

Rutherford: “We were considered part of that era with bands like Yes, Emerson, Lake & Palmer and stuff, but actually they were very different. I mean you only have to listen to songs like *Stagnation*; it’s an acoustic album. We were always about songs. The playing came secondary to the songs.”



Gabriel: “*Trespass* was a good start. It definitely had a personality that was different to other prog bands. We had some minor success in Belgium, which felt like conquering the world at the time.”

Unfortunately, by the time *Trespass* had reached the record shops in October 1970, the band was already desperately seeking a solution to what would be the most dramatic defection in its still very short history: the departure of Anthony Phillips.

Rutherford: “In a sense, people never realised that in a way, apart from Peter, who was always very get up and go with agents and managers and the business side of thing, in many ways during that first era, Ant was the strongest driving force. He was an extrovert on stage, musically he was very strong, so the concept that he might leave was probably nowhere near our thoughts at all.”

Phillips: “My leaving was nothing to do with the music, it was just due to stage fright and my health, really. I found it really tough. There was no kind of ‘left for musical differences’ or huge personality clashes. I just found the touring had taken a huge toll. You know people glamourised this life, they imagine it’s all high-living and groupies and stuff but we were living a fairly monastic life. I mean, we were living on top of each other in a cottage. We never went anywhere else, nobody saw anybody else. At one stage we got so irritated with each other that we wouldn’t talk. I mean it’s understandable if you’re living in the same place for six months. I didn’t have a girlfriend at the time but two of them never saw their girlfriends. So, looking back on it, the idea of getting together in a country cottage and never get away from it, living 24-hours-a-day music was pretty silly. Pete has pointed out that I was probably the most driven member of the band. I loved the illusion, I believed in it.”

Banks: “There was parental pressure on Ant and that was probably one of the factors that made him leave. It was certainly the reason our previous drummer, John Silver, left. You should remember that, back in those days, pop music was not a respectable profession, but those of us who just love music, just wanted to be in it and didn’t really care one way or the other how it was, we stuck at it. For me, Anthony was the group leader, he was the one who wanted to go live, he was the one who wanted to go professional, he kind of motivated the rest of us really. Peter and I were not sure at all it was what we really wanted to do. Initially, I think we said we’d stay just for the first summer, with the intention that we probably wouldn’t

KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE OWNS



stay, that they’d find somebody else. And then, of course, we got more into everything after that, so we were very surprised when Anthony was the one who suffered from stage fright.”

In January 1970, Phillips, who was still battling with the after-effects of glandular fever, began to suffer from acute stage fright. Then in April, he contracted bronchial pneumonia.

Phillips: “I stopped touring when I got pneumonia. I had to stop for two weeks, which felt really bad, but I realised the problem wasn’t going to go away. I was advised by the doctor to leave, but there was a part of me that didn’t want to let go of the dream and I also didn’t want to let the others down. But I was pretty clear that I was

Mike Rutherford: “We completely betrayed the principle of ‘less is more’. We were just so full of ideas.”

dispensable. So, whilst there was a feeling of not wanting to let the others down, things had moved on. Tony was very confident now with the organ and Mike had grown hugely into an all-round musician and writer. Their success was all very gradual, the right way really, which makes you appreciate it and not take things for granted. I used to go and watch them to start with [after leaving]. I used to enjoy it. You used to know all the people in the audience, but then obviously things got bigger and more impersonal. It would be unnatural if I had walked away and then never thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to be part of that’, but there are lots of things in life you just aren’t cut out for.

THE record label boss was quite ecstatic over him. "He has a touch of evil about him when he gets onstage," said Tony Stratton-Smith, solemnly and slowly, in a long-gone conversation. "He almost reminds me of Jagger at times."

Jim Morrison? Lou Reed? No? Er um. Well, then, less Stodge. Wrong again, huh.

The truth is, he doesn't look much of a charismatic figure off stage. Like, he's sitting in this office while we're talking and he's wearing this shapeless sweater and nondescript slacks, an anxious, painful little smile keeps flickering across his face, and every time you ask him a question he looks at this other guy, another member of the band, as if he wants to be reassured that he is not talking out of turn.

He is a most unlikely pop star. Peter Gabriel, but then pop stars are most unlikely people. May he "star" indeed is unlikely word to use as yet about him.

Gabriel, in fact, is lead vocalist with Genesis, a five-piece band who last year produced "Trespass," an album which in its lyrical depth and flawless technique, constituted a minor masterpiece.

His vocals are among the best things on the album: with an expressive hoarseness but mostly steeped throughout in a desperate romanticism, reaching out for something that he can't quite grasp.

The band essentially began in 1968 as four songwriters, Gabriel, Tony Banks, Michael Rutherford and Anthony Phillips. Some of their demo tapes were heard by Jonathan King and they got a contract with a record company, whence their releases disappeared into oblivion. "Fame and fortune somehow evaded this merry combo," their press handout puts it whimsically.

Since then they have run the whole group gamut: the country cottage, the Soho hustlers, the big evanescent promises. They found a friendly soul in Stratton-Smith, however, the Matt Busby of the record business, who signed them to his recently-formed Charisma label. Under his avuncular direction they are achieving a growing reputation as one of the country's "Thinking" bands.

Over the four years the personnel has altered, not

Reading from the book of Genesis



GENESIS: with vocalist Peter Gabriel (second from left)

surprisingly, with Phil Collins, ex-flaming youth on drums, and Mick Barnard, formerly of a band called Farm, replacing Phillips on lead.

I said that from their album they seemed very much a studio band. Some critics had even suggested that "Trespass" was essentially the creation of its producer, John Anthony.

I don't agree, it's not a producer's album. He paused a while. "I think he did a good job, a very good job, but it's always a compromise. There was very little that we didn't want done in the studio."

"We look on him as another member of the band, rather than the one with all the power, the one who dictates what we want and what we don't want. The group did all the arrangements and we considered the type of sound we wanted before we went into the studio."

Was he pleased with the

outcome?

"I don't think people are ever really satisfied are they? By the time the album comes out the original conception has gone. You lose a part everywhere. The stage it is at its fullest is in your head, and you lose all along the line from there. Personally, I think some of the songs were too long. We started very ambitious for more adventurous things getting out of pop but also with straightforward melodies. Ambitious, because not so much complexity... we take music there and work around that, as a piece, not as a song. With the addition of Phil and Mick it's made me more rhythm conscious."

The band had a spot not long ago on Disco 2, which was fairly disastrous. What had been the reason for that?

"Well, I've always got an idea of what the songs should sound like, but John (Anthony) is our cohesive force. Left to ourselves, as we were on television, we

were a drag. With insufficient technical knowledge. As a band we'll always need a producer."

"On that show the backing track was the same as the album but I did the vocal on top and I was very nervous on that occasion. I don't want to do TV again for a long time. It was a shocking performance and I'm not trying to excuse it. I'm just not an animal, a performing animal being put through his tricks, bow the sound engineer saw it."

"You should have a say in shows like that. You should have some control, like you do with an album sleeve. We're not performers to be manipulated by those people. I think the BBC has a condescending attitude to pop and pop musicians. It's only entertainers who are required to give a good performance every night, to put on a show. To try and get a BBC producer to understand what you want to do in a programme... The whole problem is that they don't believe the intricacies of sound balance make a difference to us. They think it's a fuss about nothing."

"When we first went out on the road we thought we'd just get the music out and play behind a black curtain, but it wasn't working out. So we have to perform a bit, but it's now just as a means to an end, to get the music across."

He paused, clenched his hands together and smiled. "I see the band as sad romantics, you see," he said quietly.

— MICHAEL WATTS.

Preaching to the choir: *Melody Maker*, January 23, 1971.

If I said, 'I've got no regrets about it,' no-one would believe me anyway, but if I look at the situation at the time it was just untenable. The combination of unresolved stage fright, which I never spoke or sought advice about, and physical frailty made the decision to leave unavoidable. And, to be honest, you can't have four composers all in the same sort of space. I think they ended up with a very workable unit because everyone — Phil, Mike and Tony — made their own separate power

"You couldn't drop in, so if you made a mistake in a 10-minute song you had to go back to the beginning and play it through 'til your mistake and overdub it. Don't know what that was about, it took forever."

Mike Rutherford

blocks. You hear stories of groups where there's no co-composing, where they all fall out and hate each other and throw guitars at each other. But you try co-composing where you get someone saying: 'If you take my chorus, I'll take your verse', it comes down to who's got the strongest will, and if the person is just not prepared to back off, it gets quite wearing. I think they got it to a stage where it really worked, there was just mutual respect with no treading on anybody else's toes. That doesn't mean to say you loved everything."

Steve Hackett's advert in *Melody Maker* on December 12, 1970. It was answered by one Peter Gabriel...

IMAGINATIVE GUITARIST/
writer seeks involvement with
receptive musicians, determined
to strive beyond existing stagnant
music forms. — Steve 730 2445.

Gabriel: "Ant's departure was a great loss. In many ways, he was the most musically gifted of all of us. He was also the most obsessive and transmitted that culture to the band: it was a bit like joining the Army, there was this really powerful group mentality that it had to be 100 per cent total commitment. But this also has its costs. I think Ant was very uncomfortable playing live. It was also extremely stressful, which in part was self-imposed and partly group-imposed. He was definitely the most closely focused on becoming a professional musician, whereas the rest of us were just aspiring musicians and songwriters."

Rutherford: "After hearing Ant's side of things in the band's biography [*Genesis: Chapter And Verse*, 2007], I was kind of saddened that I hadn't quite clocked what was going on at the time. Ant and I were very close, but at this stage I had a girlfriend and we saw each other less, I kind of drifted away a bit. I wasn't really aware of just how bad his stage fright was, along with his other health issues. I'd have thought, knowing him so well, that I would have been able to pick up on what was going on but I often miss things. So in a sense, it was a shock when he told us he was leaving."

Anthony Phillips' departure put Genesis in the very difficult position of having to decide whether to quit or carry on. They opted for the latter, albeit with heavy hearts, mainly thanks to the sheer determination of Richard Macphail.

Macphail: "When Ant announced he was leaving, I found myself in the van at the back of the Marquee Club in the summer of 1970 with Peter, Tony and Mike who were seriously thinking of calling it a day. I convinced them to carry on, and it has since been said that if I hadn't insisted so much, there's a chance they would have quit. Tony agreed to carry on but said we needed to find a better drummer. And it was obviously one of the best things that ever happened because the difference that Phil [Collins] made... we just couldn't believe it. It was unbelievable."

Banks: "When Anthony left I thought we would probably split up. He was certainly the most influential person in the group. Mike and Pete were very keen to carry on and Richard Macphail, who was our roadie and good friend, wasn't for letting us quit. We decided that we had to do better on the drums. We liked John and

everything, he was good, it's just we felt we needed someone more creative in the drum seat."

Phillips: "He was a good drummer but we were very, very demanding and I think he always felt he came up short. He didn't really, he did a fine job. The trouble is that history hasn't treated John well because his successor just so happens to be one of those very, very special drummers, not only a drummer but a singer and a brilliant musician. I think, had they found a more prosaic drummer afterwards, then history would speak more kindly about John, but he's cast in a rather dim light, which I always think is rather unfair. We were very demanding and we spoke the same musical language, we'd grown up in the same environment for a long time and there was no way John could really understand what we were on about most of the time. He lacked that sort of sunny character and confidence which I think it's best for a drummer to exude. I think a drummer is the foundation of the group, like the goal-keeper in a football team: if you have a dodgy goalkeeper, there's a chance the defence will feel more insecure."

John Mayhew quite literally left the scene, emigrating to New Zealand and then moving to Australia. He disappeared without a trace for 30 years. He eventually came back to the UK at the end of 2002, without anyone knowing about it, until he was recognised by a colleague in the company he was working for as a carpenter. In 2006, Mayhew agreed to take part in some Genesis fan conventions held in England, Italy and Germany and as a result came into contact with the band's management. Shortly afterwards he was given all the royalties which had accumulated from the sales of *Trespass* in his absence, a considerable sum of money with which he intended to go back to Australia. Fate, however, decided differently and on March 26, 2009, the day before his 62nd birthday, Mayhew died from complications associated with a heart condition shortly after being admitted to a hospital in Glasgow.

Once the decision to carry on without Ant had been taken, the Gabriel-Banks-Rutherford trio officially set out to recruit two new band members. The first step was taken by Tony Stratton-Smith who placed an ad in *Melody Maker* looking for 'a drummer sensitive to acoustic music, and a 12-string acoustic guitarist'. 🎧

This extract is taken from *Genesis: 1967 To 1975 — The Peter Gabriel Years* by Mario Giammetti, published by Kingmaker and available now from www.burningshed.com.



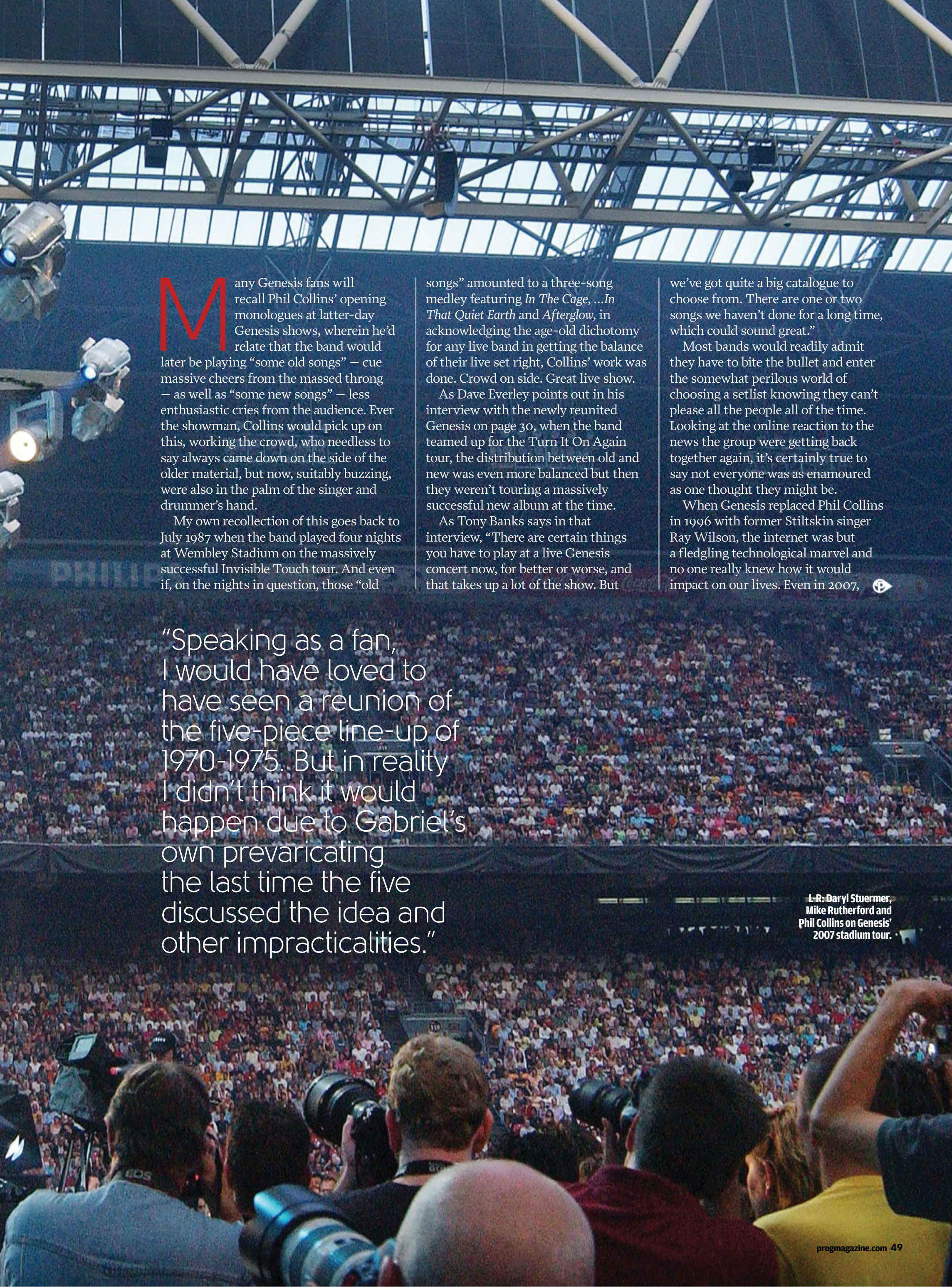
Taking It
All Too

Hard

For many, the news of the **Genesis** reunion was a cause for celebration. For some fans, though, it represented a missed opportunity, and they certainly made their feelings felt online. So how do the band try to keep all factions of their fanbase happy? And what on Earth might they play in order to do that?

Words: Jerry Ewing

Image: Rob Verhorst/Redferns/Getty Images



Many Genesis fans will recall Phil Collins' opening monologues at latter-day Genesis shows, wherein he'd relate that the band would later be playing "some old songs" — cue massive cheers from the massed throng — as well as "some new songs" — less enthusiastic cries from the audience. Ever the showman, Collins would pick up on this, working the crowd, who needless to say always came down on the side of the older material, but now, suitably buzzing, were also in the palm of the singer and drummer's hand.

My own recollection of this goes back to July 1987 when the band played four nights at Wembley Stadium on the massively successful *Invisible Touch* tour. And even if, on the nights in question, those "old

songs" amounted to a three-song medley featuring *In The Cage*, ...*In That Quiet Earth* and *Afterglow*, in acknowledging the age-old dichotomy for any live band in getting the balance of their live set right, Collins' work was done. Crowd on side. Great live show.

As Dave Everley points out in his interview with the newly reunited Genesis on page 30, when the band teamed up for the *Turn It On Again* tour, the distribution between old and new was even more balanced but then they weren't touring a massively successful new album at the time.

As Tony Banks says in that interview, "There are certain things you have to play at a live Genesis concert now, for better or worse, and that takes up a lot of the show. But

we've got quite a big catalogue to choose from. There are one or two songs we haven't done for a long time, which could sound great."

Most bands would readily admit they have to bite the bullet and enter the somewhat perilous world of choosing a setlist knowing they can't please all the people all of the time. Looking at the online reaction to the news the group were getting back together again, it's certainly true to say not everyone was as enamoured as one thought they might be.

When Genesis replaced Phil Collins in 1996 with former *Stiltskin* singer Ray Wilson, the internet was but a fledgling technological marvel and no one really knew how it would impact on our lives. Even in 2007, 

"Speaking as a fan, I would have loved to have seen a reunion of the five-piece line-up of 1970-1975. But in reality I didn't think it would happen due to Gabriel's own prevaricating the last time the five discussed the idea and other impracticalities."

L-R: Daryl Stuermer,
Mike Rutherford and
Phil Collins on Genesis'
2007 stadium tour.

when Genesis last reunited, I don't recall much in the way of online debate about the ensuing reunion. But in the last 10 years the grip that social media has over many aspects of modern life has become ever more mephitic.

There was an interesting article in one of the daily UK newspapers as the coronavirus crisis worsened and lockdown approached, highlighting how the internet has turned the modern world into the 'now' society. Advances in technology and the ubiquity of retail sites, such as Amazon, in our daily lives mean we expect almost everything right here and right now, not tomorrow. Our reactions when that expectation is not met are magnified out of all reasonable proportion, to the extent that a missed delivery slot for our groceries is now dealt with in a manner once only used for, say the ending of a personal

relationship, or even worse.

Ascribe that attitude to something people feel incredibly passionate about, such as music, and it doesn't take a genius to work out it's a potential minefield these days whenever a band does

anything. Tour dates are a fine example. Back in the day, a tour announcement in the press was greeted largely with delight, off people trotted to buy their tickets and wait to enjoy the show. Today, we've barely pressed 'send' on a social media announcement and we can guarantee the first reaction will be someone moaning: 'X isn't playing near me, typical!' and often in a manner that would make their mother blush.

Give people a mouthpiece and of course they'll use it. Those who like the sound of their own voice more than others. Almost everyone reading this will have raised an eyebrow at the 'No Jon, No Yes' mantra so beloved by a certain faction of the Yes audience. With Pink Floyd, these days one can't mention Roger Waters without a swarm of abuse because of his pro-Palestinian views. With Jethro Tull it's whether Ian Anderson should

continue to use the band's name, or worse, the nature of the ravages of time on his voice. And with Genesis, it's normally that since the departure, more than 40 years ago, of both Peter Gabriel and Steve Hackett, the band aren't what they once were. We get it, but it's not a point of view this magazine largely subscribes to.

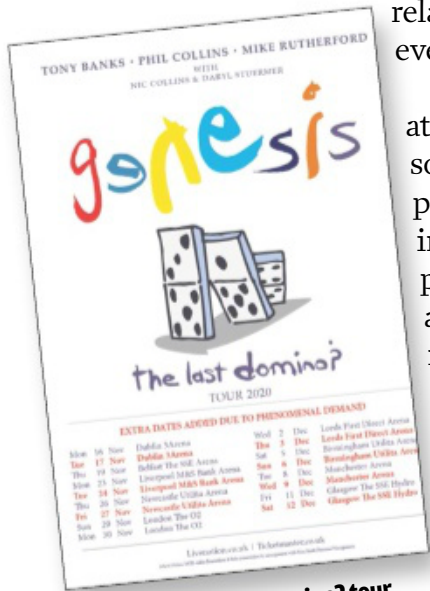
This latter ethos was largely behind the wave of wailing and gnashing of teeth that greeted news of the current Genesis reunion because Peter Gabriel and Steve Hackett weren't taking part. Given that Gabriel has been working on a follow-up to 2002's *Up* for 18 years now and that Hackett has his own tour announced and booked towards the end of the year, their involvement was always highly unlikely. Equal anger was aired at the price of tickets (which in fairness didn't seem out of sync with other massive shows of this ilk), to some rather discourteous comments about the health of Phil Collins.

Speaking as a fan, of course I would have loved to have seen a reunion of the five-piece line-up of 1970-1975. But in reality I didn't think it would happen due to Gabriel's own prevaricating the last time the five (who remain friends) discussed the idea, and other general impracticalities. Equally, I totally understand Mike Rutherford when he says: "People go, 'It would be a lovely idea for Peter to rejoin', but he left 45 years ago. And Steve left 43 years ago. People don't think about how it works – who sings what? No, it was always going to be the three of us."

Needless to say, despite some online resentment, (you suspect from people who would undoubtedly chastise their own children were they to act in such a manner) the Genesis tour dates sold out in a matter of minutes, suggesting firstly that their fanbase remains strong – hardly surprising for a band who have sold somewhere in the region of 160 million albums. Secondly, there are just as likely to be as many people reading this who will be going along to enjoy the show than there are those doggedly sticking to their maxim that they don't listen to any Genesis album

after 1975's *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*.

Which brings us to that volatile minefield, the setlist? What will Genesis play when, Covid-19 permitting, they hit UK arenas in November? It's something every Genesis fan is going to have an opinion on, probably even those who have written the tour off as something not worth their time or attention.



Poster for The Last Domino? tour, which has sold out in a record time.



CARL DE SOUZA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Genesis announce details of the Turn It On Again reunion tour in a central London hotel in November 2006.



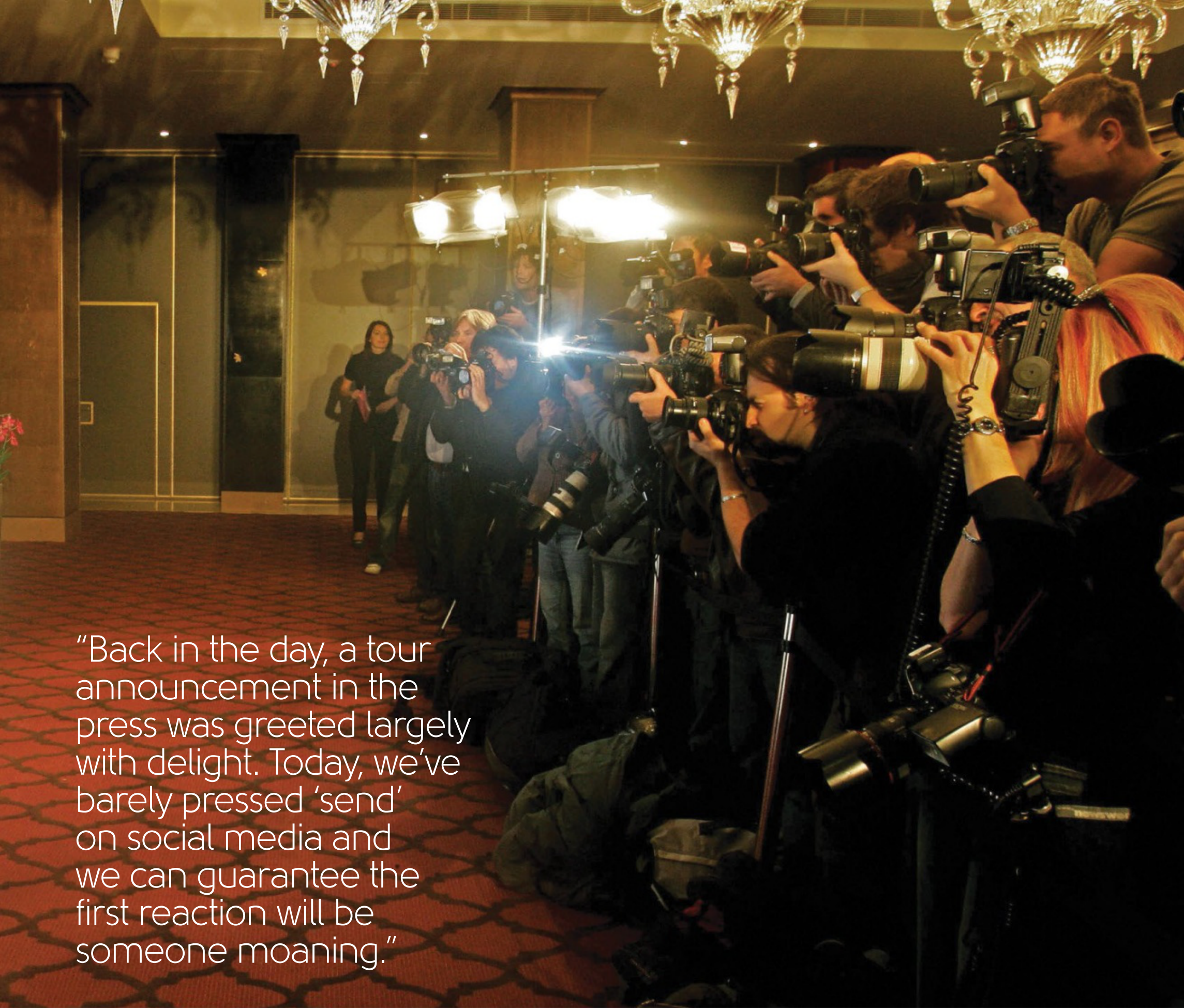
Duke (1980) and Genesis (1983).



There's going to be the big hits, for sure. I'd expect at least several from the likes of *Turn It On Again*, *Land Of Confusion*, *Invisible Touch*, *We Can't Dance* and hopefully (as far as this writer's concerned) *Mama*.

Understandably, in their press interviews the band were reluctant to give much away, but what they did reveal offered hope for diehards hankering for the proggy end of their repertoire, none more so than the admittance that they're considering *Supper's Ready*. Not the whole thing, of course, given the amount of material they have to draw on and Rutherford's admittance that the set is unlikely to go beyond two hours. But bits of it are better than none at all. The band last dusted it down with Ray Wilson for 1997's *Calling All Stations* tour.

"I'm all in favour of doing a bit of it, particularly for a British audience, because I feel it's such a strong part of our history," is what Banks had to say



"Back in the day, a tour announcement in the press was greeted largely with delight. Today, we've barely pressed 'send' on social media and we can guarantee the first reaction will be someone moaning."

about the importance of *Supper's Ready* to the band, 48 years after they wrote and recorded it.

Another long-held bugbear for those Genesis fans who want to hear the band "playing some old songs" is that Genesis are more pop than prog these days. This is, perhaps, a bit more understandable, but shave off the extremist points of view at either end and you're still left with a fanbase who are just as happy to lap up *Duchess* from *Duke*, a song that the band admit they have been working on in rehearsal, as they are whatever bits of *Supper's Ready* we do get offered.

Equally, both Banks and Rutherford have long held the belief that Genesis never abandoned long-form progressive music, even when the hits started rolling in. This is a view both have expressed to this writer in interviews over the years, and it is backed up with the epic *Duke's Travels* and *Duke's End* from 1980's aforementioned *Duke*,



1986's *Invisible Touch*, which includes the expansive *Domino*.

***We Can't Dance* (1991) featuring *Fading Lights*.**



which last aired on the 2007 tour, *Dodo/Lurker* from the following year's *Abacab* (which for many took on new life with the excellent rendition on 1982's *Three Sides Live*), the superlative ghost story *Home By The Sea* and *Second Home By The Sea* from 1983's Genesis, the expansive *Domino* from 1986's *Invisible Touch* and both *Driving The Last Spike* and *Fading Lights* from 1991's *We Can't Dance*. All excellent slices of a more modern take on prog, although probably not to the liking of those for whom prog is something that was recorded in the 70s and has remained frozen in time ever since.

Given the title of the tour, *The Last Domino?*, we're definitely getting *Domino*, and this writer would be a very happy man if the *Home By The Sea* suite got an airing. And *Fading Lights*, the gentle, pastoral 10-and-a-bit minutes that closes off *We Can't Dance* is another song the band have said they've been looking at.

This latter is interesting. Largely overlooked at the time of release by the more upfront and equally lengthy *Driving The Last Spike*, yet for many it now stands as the album's finest offering. "I remember Tony being interviewed about this song," one-time Genesis singer Ray Wilson recently said. "And he said that he felt it was like the last thing they'd ever do. He had a feeling in his soul that they wouldn't record another album, and this song captured his emotions at that time."

One thing that is certain, is that Genesis won't please all their fans. Something deemed essential is bound not to make the cut. But the chances are they'll please most of the fans who have bought tickets. And imagine if they bow out with *Fading Lights*, now knowing how the song's writer felt as he penned the lyrics. Now that would be something I, for one, certainly wouldn't want to miss. Far away, away, fading distant lights... 🎵

The Electric RECLUSE

When **Ayreon** first began in the mid-90s, **Arjen Lucassen** struggled to get a record deal. Now, three decades later, his ambitious rock opera project has not only grown to an all-star extravaganza, but it's even coaxed the reclusive Dutch musician back onto the stage. *Prog* catches up with Lucassen to chat about his vision, those live shows, and his decision to release *Electric Castle Live And Other Tales*.

Words: Rich Wilson

Portrait: Kevin Nixon

In a world of musicians restrained by carefully worded, PR-driven responses to questions, it's refreshing to discover that Arjen Lucassen doesn't follow that debilitating trend. Honest and engaging, the mastermind behind Ayreon is a self-confessed perfectionist and social recluse, and recounts with good humour the origins of the Ayreon project back in the early 90s.

"It was the days of grunge and Nirvana, and here I come with a progressive rock opera," he laughs. "It was stupid, man. I went to 30 record companies and most of them said, 'We love it, it's great, we're going to play it each evening but we're not going to sign you because we can't sell this.' I still have a lot of the faxes from all the record labels, telling me they loved it but weren't going to sign me. I actually put all of those record company faxes on the sleeve of the re-release of my first album."

Lucassen wasn't easily dissuaded by the apparent lack of interest. Eventually signed by a pair of small labels in Holland and Japan, Ayreon's debut, *The Final Experiment*, gradually started to generate sales, and a second album, *Actual Fantasy*, was swiftly recorded and released. However, as Lucassen explains, it wasn't the success he had hoped.

"I was a bit recalcitrant in those days," he reveals candidly. "I did something completely different, which wasn't a rock opera and didn't have any guest musicians, and that one kind of flopped. So, after that, I decided to do something huge. I wanted to get all my favourite musicians on there, whatever it was going to cost, I really didn't care. I would have sold my house and it really was all or nothing. It was a big gamble, but I just *knew* that, after the first album, there was an audience. I really felt that people were waiting

for it. I wanted the album to be so over the top, but that's what I like anyway: making an album that people either love or hate. The worst thing is indifference."

That album would eventually become 1998's wonderfully bombastic rock opera, *Into The Electric Castle*, and central to the appeal was the cast of guest musicians who appeared on the recording. Notable inclusions were Fish, Anneke van Giersbergen, Pendragon's Clive Nolan and the former Threshold frontman Damian Wilson. So, did Lucassen have difficulty in persuading such artists to be part of the bold project?

"Oh yes. In those days it was pretty hard for me," he says. "Back then, and even now, prog and metal are dirty words for a lot of musicians. As soon as they heard it's prog or a concept album, they weren't interested. Someone like Fish, I think it took me maybe

Anna van Giersbergen attracted quite a gathering.



PHOTO: TIM TRONKOE

Fish schooled the assembled throng.



PHOTO: WILLIAM VAN DER VOORT

Damian Wilson made it a knight to remember.



PHOTO: STEPH BYRNE

“It is terribly anti-social what I do. Instead of going to 64 countries, I have 12,000 people from 64 countries come to me. It was amazing when you see where people came from for Into The Electric Castle live.”

Arjen Lucassen, stepping out from the shadows.

six months to get through to him and convince him. It was the same with Anneke, who was with The Gathering in those days. The Gathering were huge back then and they didn't want their singer to do anything other than The Gathering. That took a lot of convincing for her to do it anyway, against the wishes of her band. Of course, some money was involved in that too, which helped convince some of them. For each singer that works with me, I will have asked four different ones. I remember, for instance, for *Into The Electric Castle*, I asked Tony Martin from Black Sabbath, but he wanted so much money that I just couldn't do it. I even asked Steven Wilson and although he said he loved the album, the production and my style, for him it was too proggy and old-fashioned.”

The album was a commercial success, and enabled Lucassen to avoid his greatest fear: performing live. Stage fright is something that's crippled him from his earliest days as part of Dutch rockers Bodine and Vengeance. Perhaps feeding into that is his lifestyle, which he readily admits to being somewhat solitary.

“I started the Ayreon project so I didn't have to play live,” he explains. “I'm a weird recluse. I never leave the house; I'm always at home. I've really created my own bubble and universe around me. For me, being on stage isn't creative at all and I have to be creative all of the time. Of course, I toured the world for 15 years with Vengeance and Bodine and every night was the same thing. The travelling and waiting in hotels is such a waste of time. The stage fright is because I don't see myself as a performer. I'm a composer and a producer, and that's what I'm good at. Performing isn't one of my specialities. As I'm such a perfectionist, it makes me very nervous to go on stage, as I know that I'm not as good as the other people on there. When I'm on stage, I'm a total loser, especially as



a singer, and it's very scary to be on stage with all these amazing vocalists around me."

All of which would lead you to believe that the likelihood of Ayreon performing live would be virtually non-existent. Yet Lucassen was persuaded to consider staging live performances after a successful, unofficial theatre production of their *The Human Equation* album in 2015. This was followed by a pair of Lucassen-led dates in 2017, before he decided to tackle putting together performances of *Into The Electric Castle* in 2019 to mark that album's 20th anniversary. Performed over four consecutive nights in Tilburg, the show – replete with an immense castle stage set and multimedia backdrop – was rightly recorded for DVD and CD release. Most of the original guest musicians were able to perform, and the gigs attracted audiences of more than 12,000 people. As Lucassen notes, he was stunned by the level of interest, even

if he confesses to feeling slightly remorseful for not taking the show on the road.

"It is terribly anti-social what I do," he admits. "Instead of going to 64 counties, I have 12,000 people from 64 countries come to me. It was amazing when you see where people came from for *Into The Electric Castle* live. I feel a bit guilty about that but on the other hand, it's their choice and they probably went to all four shows. We arranged an amazing weekend for everyone in Tilburg and took over the whole city. All the restaurants had Ayreon burgers and there was even Ayreon beer, which sold out the first day. We knew the shows would sell out, so we understood how much we could invest in it, as we really wanted to make it an amazing show. Building that castle with all the visuals and setting that up took a lot of phone calls.

"We'd go to a beautiful studio to rehearse it and we have a great team where everyone would have ideas. It was very creative. We worked on it for a year and prepared it well

so that nothing could go wrong. That's the only way to do a show like that."

With Lucassen continually creating music, and a variety of monikers from Ayreon to his Guilt Machine project to his name, he remains somewhat coy about his next challenge. Seemingly, an ambitious album has been in the works for more than three years but even now, he remains unsure as to in which guise it will ultimately appear.

"Well, I do but I'm not going to tell you because I may lie to you and change my mind next week," he admits playfully. "It's about time to finish that off. I always start the music and don't restrict myself as to which project it will be. It evolves. It could start as a solo project, turn into a Star One album, then Guilt Machine and end up being Ayreon. I'm in that process at the moment, so we'll have to wait and see." 

Electric Castle Live And Other Tales is out now on Music Theories. Visit www.arjenlucassen.com for more information.

The new DVD has Lucassen in full Technicolor.

PHOTO: CRISTEL BROUWER

Well, if you're going to play a rare live show, you might as well go all out!

**“I decided to do something huge.
I wanted to get all my favourite musicians
on there, whatever it was going to cost,
I really didn’t care. I would have sold my house
and it really was all or nothing.”**





Opus

Monty Python silliness? **Mike Oldfield**, creator of the legendary *Tubular Bells*, sets the record straight. On the eve of the album's third release, Grant Moon heard the story of its creation, in this feature that you might have missed from *Prog* issue 2.

Words: Grant Moon

It's autumn 1972. John Cale is vacating the studio. A picturesque residential studio in the Oxfordshire hills, The Manor is a recent acquisition by one Richard Branson, a hirsute, budding music impresario. The next artist booked in is a wan, taciturn 19-year-old unknown called Mike Oldfield. Noticing a shining set of tubular bells among Cale's equipment, he asks if he can add it to the two dozen instruments he'll use to record his one-man symphony, tentatively titled 'Opus One'. Released the following year, that

***Tubular Bells* (1973) propelled Mike Oldfield to superstardom.**

The Whole World, L-R: Dave Bedford, Lol Coxhill, Kevin Ayers, and Mike Oldfield, on stage in 1970 in London.



GUSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

CHARLIE GILLET/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

album, redubbed *Tubular Bells*, would become a commercial and cultural phenomenon, launching Oldfield as one of the UK's most acclaimed composers, bankrolling Virgin Records for years to come and setting Branson on course to become the country's most recognisable captain of industry.

Thirty-six years on and with the rights to the album now his again, Oldfield, the arch-tinkerer, remixed it again. Surely it's hard for him to remain objective about an album he knows inside out?

"It's actually easier now. Listening back, the sound quality is actually great, and the most amazing thing about it was that it was all first take. Nobody, myself included, would dream of doing that now. One of my first decisions about this remix was to leave it as played. There's a spontaneity about it, a dynamic drive that would've been lost, so I left in the squeaks and pops and the few bad notes. They're far overshadowed by the power and purpose of the playing."

Back in the day, the music's main purpose was to keep the troubled teenager on an even psychological keel. A loner since childhood, Oldfield suffered with a sense of otherness, amplified by his mother's mental illness and alcoholism. He himself came to rely heavily on the bottle, and one extremely damaging acid trip led to decades of crippling panic attacks.

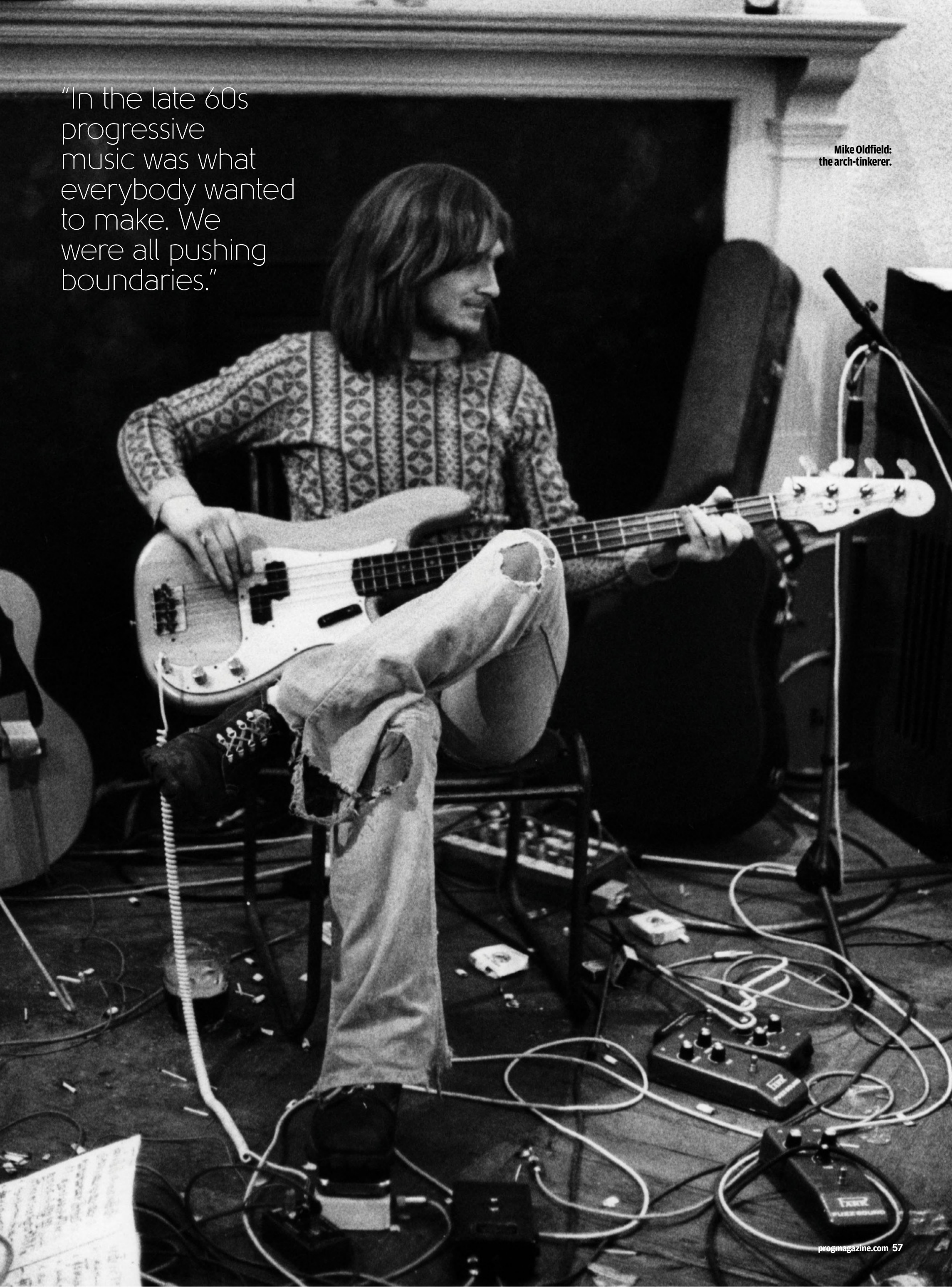
'Young Mike', as he was known, discovered his talent for music early on. He began his career on the 60s folk circuit in acts including The Sallyangie, a duo with his vocalist sister Sally, and later joined Kevin Ayers' The Whole World as bassist and guitarist. By that time rock's horizons were expanding.

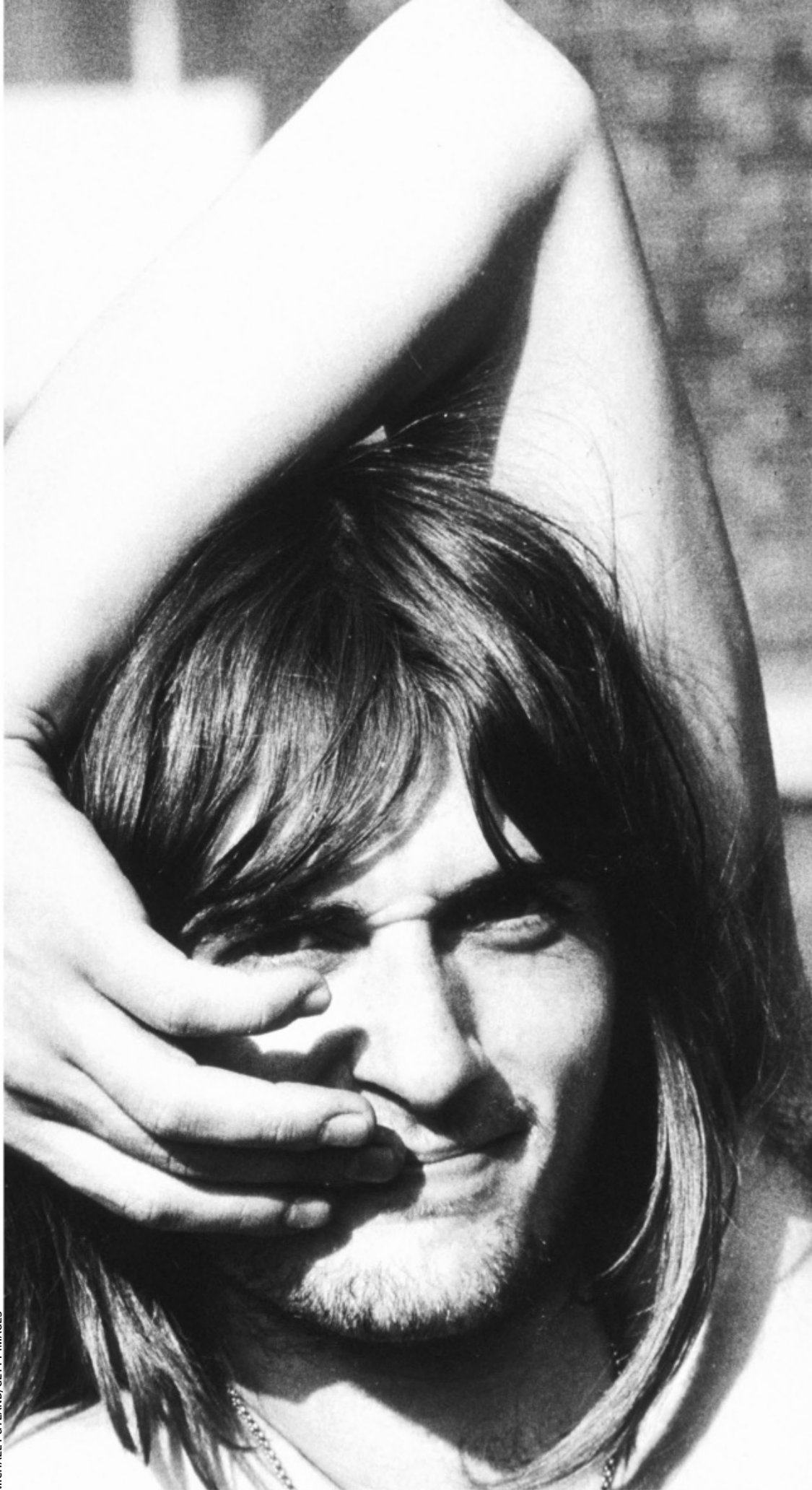
"In the late 60s progressive music was what everybody wanted to make. There was experimentation all over the place; we were all pushing boundaries seeing what could be done. I was very much part of the live music scene, going up and down the motorway, and we'd often be on the bill with groups like Pink Floyd, Free and even Black Sabbath. I never set out to absorb any influence, it was all just there."

Oldfield absorbed eclectic musical ideas however: classical structures, minimalism, unusual scales and odd time signatures. A rough demo he recorded was rejected by every record label, but when he first set foot in The Manor in 1971 as bassist for Jamaican singer Arthur Louis, resident engineers Simon Heyworth and Tom Newman heard promise in the youngster's recording. They passed it on to Manor owner Richard Branson and his business partner Simon Draper and a year later, with a disillusioned Oldfield contemplating a move to Russia for a career as a state-funded musician, he

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Mike Oldfield:
the arch-tinkerer.





Ringing the changes: *Tubular Bells II* (1992), David Bedford's *The Orchestral Tubular Bells* (1994) and *Tubular Bells III* (1998).

Coming out of his shell: Mike Oldfield in the 70s.

Life's a beach: Mike Oldfield on vacation in the Bahamas in 2009.



was invited to record the piece properly for Branson's fledgling label, Virgin Records, at The Manor.

"It was a lovely big country house with a complete recording studio," recalls Oldfield. "Lots of people running around doing things, we had a cook so I'd get great big plates of wonderful food, and I made lots of new friends."

With instruments ranging from organs to mandolins to Cale's bells, Oldfield set about recording his *Opus One*, filling 16 tracks of tape with thousands of overdubs to achieve the sound in his head. *Part One* was finished in one manic week, with the voice of the 'Master of Ceremonies' provided by Vivian Stanshall of the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, who'd arrived early for their own recording sessions. *Part Two* came together slowly during studio downtime over

the coming months, and for its creator the whole process was cathartic.

"You can hear it in the music. It was the only time I felt sane and vaguely happy. I suppose it describes in a nutshell the anguish of teenagerhood, which most people can relate to. It personifies all that.

"Nothing can take away from the fact that I'm very, very proud of the composition, the way one idea runs into another idea and the variations of ideas scattered around the place. It's got a great introduction, great riffs, lovely little tunes. It's fortuitous that Viv Stanshall was there at that time, and what a good idea to put the bell in there. It all seemed to fall into place, as if some wheel of fortune had swung in my favour at that time."

Artist Trevor Key was commissioned to design the now-iconic cover, and

Tubular Bells became the inaugural release for Virgin Records on May 25, 1973. Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side Of The Moon* had landed that March, and with it the progressive era was in full flow. Oldfield's inspired, one-man symphony earned rave reviews in the press and won fervent support, notably from Radio 1's John Peel. *Tubular Bells* entered the Top 10 and stayed in the album charts for five years straight. Worldwide sales were spurred further when William Friedkin selected the haunting opening section for the soundtrack of his movie *The Exorcist* (a film Oldfield claims not to have seen until years later), and this earned its composer the Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Composition in 1975.

Still plagued by the panic attacks and a morbid fear of flying, Oldfield refused to take the album on the road at home or in the US, despite Branson's pleas. He did agree to one concert though, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, but only after his boss gave him his vintage Bentley as an incentive. Oldfield also prepared a tourable, orchestral version of the album. "I didn't like it too much," he says now. "It was Virgin's idea because at the time I didn't want to go on tour."

He subsequently tempered his demons through Exegesis therapy [the root of which is based on the idea that one's problems are self-caused and not the fault of others] and his distinguished career has innumerable highs — the cracking 1975 album *Ommadawn*; his No.4 single *Moonlight Shadow* with Maggie Reilly in 1983; his underrated soundtrack to Roland Joffé's harrowing



Mike and his sister Sally as a folk duo.

movie *The Killing Fields*; 2008's acclaimed classical suite *Music Of The Spheres*. Yet it's *Tubular Bells* — and its franchise — for which he'll forever be known. When his original, contentious contract with Virgin Records expired in 1992, Oldfield delivered *Tubular Bells II* for Warner Bros. Co-produced by Trevor Horn, it was a UK No.1 hit, and just six years later the brand continued with *Tubular Bells III*, itself a Top 5 success. In 2000 he saw in the New Year by performing the specially commissioned work, *The Millennium Bell*, in front of an audience of thousands in Berlin, and the eyes of the world were on him when he played at the 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony in London. The nerves were conquered then, but it hasn't all been a success.

"The re-recording rights for *Tubular Bells* came back to me in 2003, which encouraged me to re-record it, for its 30th anniversary. That was great fun to me, but nobody else seemed to like it. I'm scared to listen to that now in case I think it was a big mistake!" That re-recording flopped, perhaps because the so-called flaws in the original had become part of its very fabric. Four years later the *Mail On Sunday* did a deal with EMI/Virgin to give away the CD free with the newspaper. Oldfield was furious at the time but is rather philosophical now: "It devalued it in a way. It was like saying, this music's so old that we'll just give it away. On the other hand it marked the end of that era and gave me the impetus to really want to remix it."

That opportunity arose when the album's absolute rights devolved to him in 2008. Fifty-five years old at the time of our interview, and with no new music planned, Oldfield is busy remixing his back catalogue, starting with that iconic debut. The squeaks,

pops and duff notes have survived, but there's been one high-profile casualty.

"The original bell had some distortion that was impossible to get rid of. In the mid-70s I was convinced to replace the bell with one that didn't have distortion and I foolishly agreed, and we rubbed it off. We haven't been able to track down the original multitrack master — I've been working from a copy. I was pulling out my hair thinking, what can I do? In the middle of *Part One* there's a simple flute tune and in the background is the same bell. It was playing some of the right notes, so I spent days reproducing exactly the original bell using that, and with some jiggery pokery I think it's even better than the first one now, and it hasn't got the distortion."

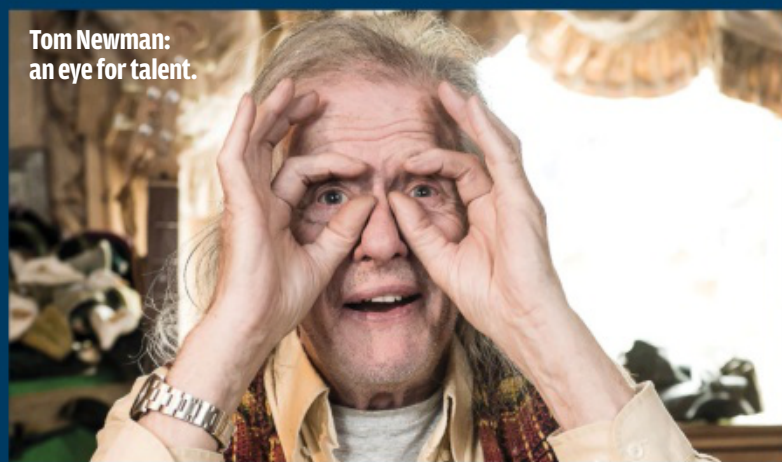
Yet he is mindful of keeping the mix in balance with the classic version.

"The beginning has a spooky feel that reminds you of things like *The Exorcist*, and if you clean it up too much then it doesn't have that. I didn't duplicate some of the production, the phasing and flanging; we were trying

"It's not a concept album. It has extremes, but I think people miss the humour in it. There's been nothing like it before or since."

to be modern in 1973 — now it didn't seem necessary. I hope I've done it as best as I could, I certainly enjoyed doing it. I was listening to [his 1982 album] *Five Miles Out* recently and I didn't like it. I seem too tense, I was trying too hard. *Tubular Bells* is trying too hard, but succeeding."

Tom Newman: an eye for talent.



WILL IRELAND/FUTURE OWNS

TOM CATTIN'

Prog tracks down the original *Tubular Bells* producer, Tom Newman.

"I think it's an album that everyone's heard at some time or another," says *Tubular Bells* producer Tom Newman. "I feel a lot of young people have used it as a way of getting an introduction into the world of modern classical music."

Newman came to prominence as rhythm guitarist of UK psychedelic outfit July, but by 1970 he was working with the youthful owner of Virgin Records, Richard Branson, helping to build the now-legendary Manor Studios in Oxfordshire. It was during this time that Newman became acquainted with an 18-year-old musician, Mike Oldfield. Oldfield passed Newman his demo, thus helping to forge one of the most successful, if unheralded, production teams in musical history.

"It was one of the first albums to explore multi-track recordings," says Newman of *Tubular Bells* today. "We used the 16-track facility to its greatest extent, and beyond. The number of overdubs we had was incredible. It always amazes me that, 10 years after we did the album, you could buy exactly the same 16-track set-up for about £2,500. It cost us £25,000!"

Newman continued his own musical endeavours with 1975's *Fine Old Tom* and has continued as a musician in his own right ever since. His 1977 solo album, *Fairie Symphony*, was reissued on Esoteric in 2009. As a producer he continued his work with Oldfield, collaborating on *Hergest Ridge*, *Platinum*, *Islands*, *Amarok* and *Tubular Bells II* and he also produced Hatfield & The North's 1974 debut album.

Update: Since this feature originally ran in *Prog* issue 2, Newman has been working with Magenta's Robert Reed on his Oldfield-nodding *Sanctuary* album series, of which there have been three so far. A new two-part *Sanctuary* album, tentatively titled *The Ringmaster*, is due later this year, preceded by a single, *Heal Yourself*, featuring John Mitchell. **JE**



With almost four decades of perspective, the album's creator has definite views on the reasons for its enduring success. But just be careful what you call it.

"I have got no patience for people who call it new age or who go on about it being a concept album. It's not telling a story, there's no concept of anything. What it does have is extremes — delicate mandolin sections, the pounding rock of the 'caveman' section, the next section is the dreamiest little piece. Also I think people miss the humour in it. There's a honky-tonk piano with drunken people humming along, the Sailor's Hornpipe, it's got that *Monty Python* silliness. There's been nothing like it, before or since." 🐉

For more, see mikeoldfieldofficial.com.

Out Of The Darkness

Green Carnation are rediscovering their progressive roots with their first studio album in 14 years. Vocalist Kjetil Nordhus reveals the reason behind their split, why they've decided to regroup and what the revived Norwegian band's plans are for the future.

Words: Jonathan Selzer **Images:** Petter Sandell

Over the last three decades, Kristiansand's Green Carnation have striven to wring hope from the bleakest of circumstances, and to dig deep within themselves to nurture the most fertile of musical shoots. Having emerged from the heart of Norway's metal scene – founder member Terje Vik Schei, aka Tchort, played bass on Emperor's landmark 1994 album, *In The Nightside Eclipse* – the band expanded into richly progressive realms far beyond their gothic and doom-laden origins. Their second album, 2001's *Light Of Day, Day Of Darkness*, a seminal and widely regarded masterpiece, took the form of a single, hour-long track whose unforgettably resonant core motif and far-ranging tonal explorations endeavoured to come to terms with the death of Tchort's daughter while welcoming the birth of a new son. After covering varied yet immediately identifiable ground with three more albums, the band split up in 2007, reconvening seven years later, initially as a live entity only.

Fourteen years after the release of their last album, *The Acoustic Verses*, Green Carnation have emerged from the studio to further their legacy once more, only for their new album, *Leaves Of Yesteryear*, to arrive in the middle of a global pandemic that's seen the planet grind to a near halt. For vocalist and co-lyricist Kjetil Nordhus, the current situation might be terrifying, but neither he nor his colleagues are going to be daunted by the strange new world they've returned to.



New album, *Leaves Of Yesteryear*.

2001's *Light Of Day, Day Of Darkness*.



"These are worrying times," he admits, "both for the music scene and the world as a whole. But there's been an explosion of online activity and live streamed concerts, and we are doing the same. The album release show we were going to play on May 23, we're going to stream live instead. Of course, everything could be back to normal again by then, but I kind of doubt it. We're a 'more is more' kind of band, so it's probably not just going to be a concert, it's going to be several hours of different kinds of interviews and stuff. We have to see it in a positive way and make the best out of it."

Green Carnation's reunion was never a certainty. As Nordhus recalls, "For the first five years after that split I thought it would be permanent. It was Tchort who decided to call it a day and when we talk about it now, the reason was that we really didn't know what to do next. I think he felt that he'd lost a bit of control over the band and we'd all just moved in different directions all at the same time."

The decision to reconvene came after they were asked to return to the unique site of a 2006 concert, recorded for the DVD *A Night Under The Dam*, where they played *The Acoustic Verses* in full with a string orchestra under the 30-foot Nåtun-3 dam deep in the Norwegian mountains.

"It was a crazy location," says Nordhus, "with millions and millions of gallons of water behind us. They were going to tear it down and they asked us if we wanted to do the last show there. And now everything is underwater. So that was enough for us to come back together and talk about whether we wanted to do this. That DVD holds a very special piece of Green Carnation's history, and that was a good enough excuse to try to see if we still enjoyed playing together, which, luckily, we did."

"Soon after that we started planning the 15th anniversary of *Light Of Day, Day Of Darkness*, because that was only two years away at the time. So we thought that could be our way back into the scene, and the original plan

was just to play together for those shows and maybe, if it felt right, to do something more after that."

If it was confirmation they were after, those shows playing *Light Of Day...* in full offered it to an extent the band themselves weren't prepared for.

"The response from the crowds at the live shows was out of this world," says Nordhus. "I remember when we were playing the first show in Bergen, the first show at a festival called Blastfest, and we didn't expect it to be that emotional. We were a bit shocked afterwards. I talked to people who felt, as we say in Norway, chewed up and spat out again. It was mentally draining, and many of the people I talked to needed some time for themselves afterwards. Of course, we know that *Light Of Day...* is very special for people, but you don't see people crying at a concert every day. So there was a lot of emotion going around, and it's very powerful."

As momentous as those shows were, including another rapturously received set at Tilburg at Netherlands' revered Roadburn festival, the sense of triumph and reconnection, both to the band's fans and their own sense of who they were, soon gave way to a period of soul-searching when it came to deciding how they were going to move forward.

"When we started doing a 2017 set," Nordhus admits, "which consisted of everything else other than *Light Of Day...*, we weren't quite able to recreate that magic live, and so we did a lot of thinking and adjusting. We went into ourselves and asked ourselves: 'What are the best sides of Green Carnation? What are we doing best with this line-up? What don't we do that well, for example?' And you could say that, maybe, from 2000-2006, when we were quite active, it was kind of a searching period for us, because all our albums were so different. So we started to work on that live, and do the things we do best, that nobody else does. So getting back together, we talked a lot about what is Green Carnation in 2019?"





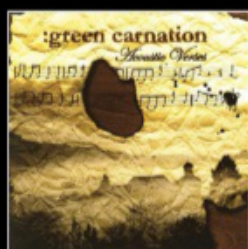
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“This album is a tribute to the past, because we have done a lot of work in the early years that’s important to us now. It’s also a tribute to the band’s future.”



The answers emerged when they went into the studio to record what was to become *Leaves Of Yesteryear*. Originally intended as an EP, but expanded to a full album due to both the advice of labels and the creative roll they found themselves on, the (mostly lengthy) five-track release sees Green Carnation looking back to the past for inspiration as well as looking ahead to the future.

Its three original songs unveil a tantalising array of progressive powers at the band’s command. The title track’s epic, narrative scope is urged on through huge, juddering riffs into realms of soaring yet plaintive grandeur. *Sentinels’* sloshing riffs rise up into wild, Hammond-led turbulence and take-off. *Hounds’* spacious, loping nods to the Sabbath-tinged classic rock of countrymen Sahg are given a further, sonically



Green Carnation’s last album, 2006’s *The Acoustic Verses*.

aerated sense of wonder and bird’s-eye view of a broad musical landscape unfolding once more. But as well as a sumptuously pastoral cover of Sabbath’s *Solitude* that carries even more atmosphere steeped echoes of *The Acoustic Verses*, the 15-and-a-half-minute *My Dark Reflections Of Life And Death* is a re-recording of the track from their debut album, *Journey To The End Of The Night*, whose lyrics contained the seed for what was to become the *Light Of Day, Day Of Darkness* album.

“We have done a few things that are very typical of Green Carnation in the past,” says Nordhus. “We needed to work on that and give it a new sound, but I think we succeeded in that, and it’s easy to hear that this is still us. It’s maybe an untraditional thing to re-record a song, and it’s 20 years now since that was first recorded, but the

main reason we bought it on to the album is that we started playing it live and we made a live-friendly version of it. But we needed to do it with the essence of the band today, and we thought it worked out really well, and we really wanted to give our old audience something new, which they knew from before. I do really think that sounds like a Green Carnation song in 2020.

“You could say that this album is a tribute to the past,” he continues, “because we have done a lot of work in the early years that’s important to us now. We do have quite a lot of new music on the album, but to be poetic, it’s also a tribute to the band’s future.”

With the bandmembers pulling in different musical directions at the time of the spit in 2007, how did they ensure everyone had a shared vision this time around?



“We’re still very different when it comes to bringing our own musical leanings into the studio,” Nordhus explains. “We have Sabbath and even pop influences, and our keyboard player is originally a blues and jazz man. But we all have hindsight now, and these Green Carnation genes in us, so we use that part of our musicality when we’re together, and our producer, Endre Kirkesola, played keyboards on *Light Of Day...*, so that’s another parallel that binds us together.”

Light Of Day, Day Of Darkness would have a great musical impact for years to come, not least on French metal band Gojira, whose use of third-eye-open, voice-of-the-cosmos vocals echo that album’s ability to transpose deeply personal trauma into the most universal of frequencies. Aside from this, the impact of Green Carnation – along with the band that splintered

**Green Carnation
practise their
hard stairs.**

from their first line-up, In The Woods... – can be measured by the extent to which they helped lead their native scene from stark underground to a broader, more progressive palette.

“Kristiansand is a small town, and it was a sound there of that time,” Nordhus explains. “The bands admired each other, and I do think that the geography has something to do with that, because you have the same musical references as the other people of your age. In The Woods... were really inspired by a Norwegian band called Tula, and Jan [Kenneth Transeth, original ITW vocalist] says you can hear their albums and draw a picture of where they live. So there was an element of pastoralism going around musically; I’m sure ITW drew a lot of inspiration from that, and that rubs off. You can hear that we were from the same family.”

That process of transformation is also the continuity that binds the Green Carnation of then, now, and for whatever it is that the future holds for the band.

Nordhus concludes, “When we signed to [metal label] Season Of Mist after *Light Of Day...* we gave them a prog rock album, and they didn’t understand what we were doing. We joke with them when it comes to that now. And then we went on to *The Acoustic Verses* just a few years afterwards. Even so, at the time we found it really interesting to search in new genres and for new inspirations for each and every album. What you hear today could be an essence of what we found at the time.” 

Leaves Of Yesteryear is out via Season Of Mist on May 8. For more, see www.greencarnationmusic.com.



A full 14 years after their genre-mashing debut as **Chimpan A**, Steve Balsamo and Robert Reed return to take us down the rabbit hole and into the future with *The Empathy Machine*.

Man Machine: Grant Moon

Images: Graham Harries/gphotography

Driving from his hometown of Swansea to Robert Reed's studio in Porth, Steve Balsamo would look out over the green Welsh valleys he'd known all his life, and at the huge alien structures now standing across them like sentinels. "Wind turbines," he says, his soft voice struck with hazy awe, "they loom out of the landscape. They're sci-fi, proggy things. There's been a big revival in folk horror recently – *Black Mirror*, *Inside No.9* – and a resurgence in the psychogeography movement, how the landscape plays a big part in things. All this fed into the music Rob and I were writing."

Though you might expect it, you don't get the usual showbiz spiel from Balsamo. The successful singer and songwriter came to prominence in the 90s through his star-making run in the lead role of West End smash *Jesus Christ Superstar*. He's also done well with his country band The Storys and Americana duo Balsamo Deighton, and he's worked with a slew of big names, Eric Woolfson, Jon Lord and Robert Plant among them. But to speak to Steve Balsamo is to take the red pill.

He's fascinated by a theory, espoused by Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom, that we could already be living in a *Matrix*-style simulation. His conversation is scattered with references to countercultural figures, from noted psychonaut Terence McKenna to *The Illuminatus!* writer Robert Anton Wilson to comedian Bill Hicks. He raves about Timothy Good's book, *Above Top Secret*. "It's a classic in the field. It's about how the government have known about the extra-terrestrial interaction with humanity for a while, and how there are breakaway civilisations..."

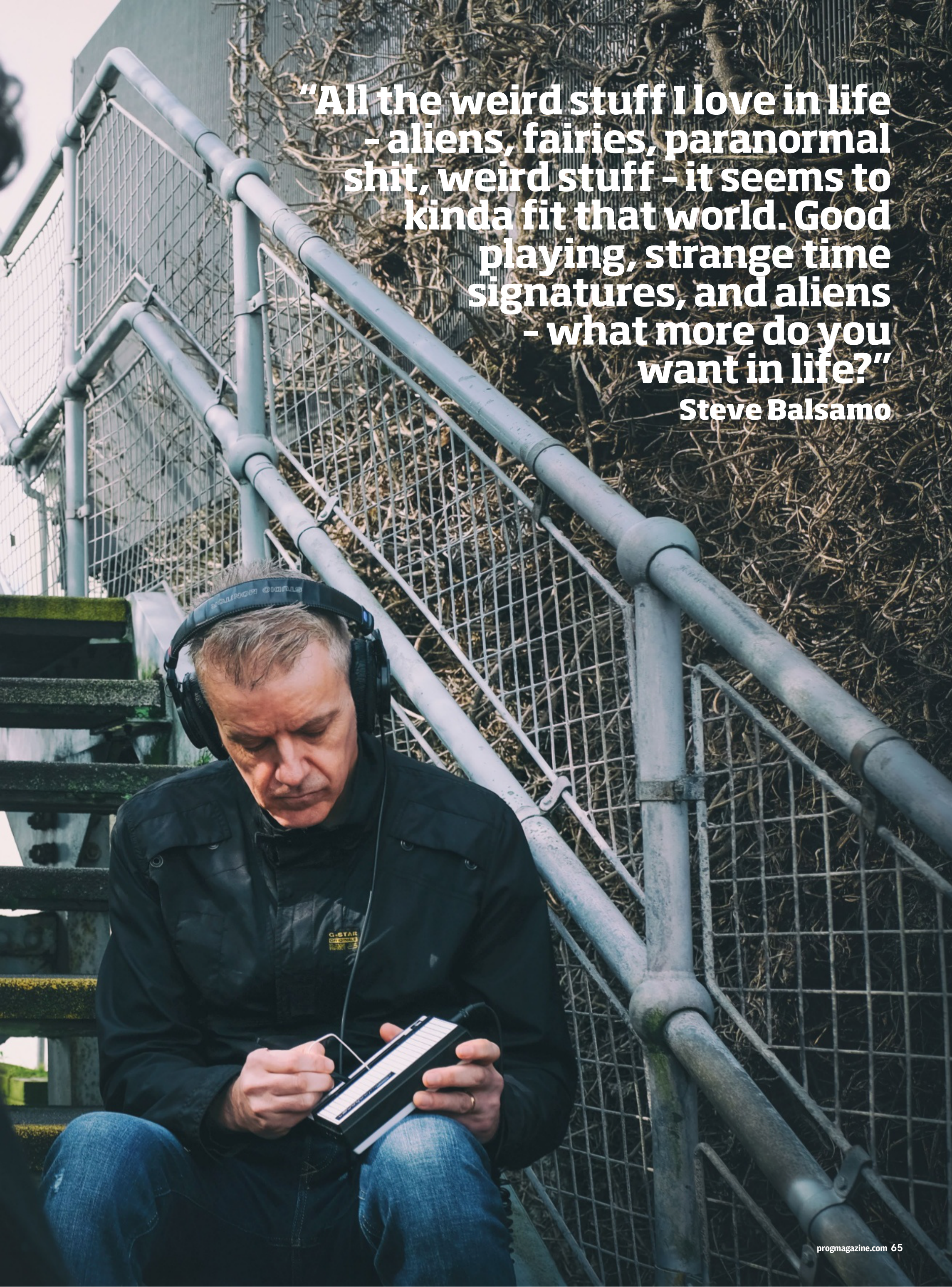


Steve Balsamo and Robert Reed offer us the red pill.

Building Empathy

**"All the weird stuff I love in life
- aliens, fairies, paranormal
shit, weird stuff - it seems to
kinda fit that world. Good
playing, strange time
signatures, and aliens
- what more do you
want in life?"**

Steve Balsamo



“Steve loves all that!” says Robert Reed, with a ‘what’s-he-like?!’ laugh. The unlikely pair met through friends on the Welsh music scene in the early 2000s, and hit it off through their mutual love of sci-fi, Hammer horror movies, and the music of – among many others – Talk Talk and The Blue Nile.

“I love the idea of aliens being amongst us,” admits Reed, “but I come at it from a filmic angle, whereas Steve has studied this stuff and it’s all in his lyrics. We have long chats and, to be honest, a lot of it goes over my head. But for songwriting it’s great to have this kind of subject matter, because then you’re trying to get the music to create the soundscape to go with it. And it goes without saying, Steve’s voice is amazing.”

It’s 14 years since the pair – along with guitarist Rob Thompson – released their first, self-titled record as Chimpan A. That highly eclectic, guest-heavy mash-up of musical styles has sold steadily for them over the years since. “It was every type of music we liked,” Balsamo remembers. “It wasn’t commercial, it was these pastoral scenes of strangeness, but Rob and I couldn’t get away from writing choruses and hooks, and a load of people liked it. We didn’t get much press but my favourite review was from Q magazine, who said it was ‘drowning in a sea of pretentiousness’. We loved that so much we used it to sell the album! After that Rob [Thompson] did his own stuff, Rob did Magenta and I did The Storys, but Chimp was always our secret place where we’d go to for solace and comfort.”

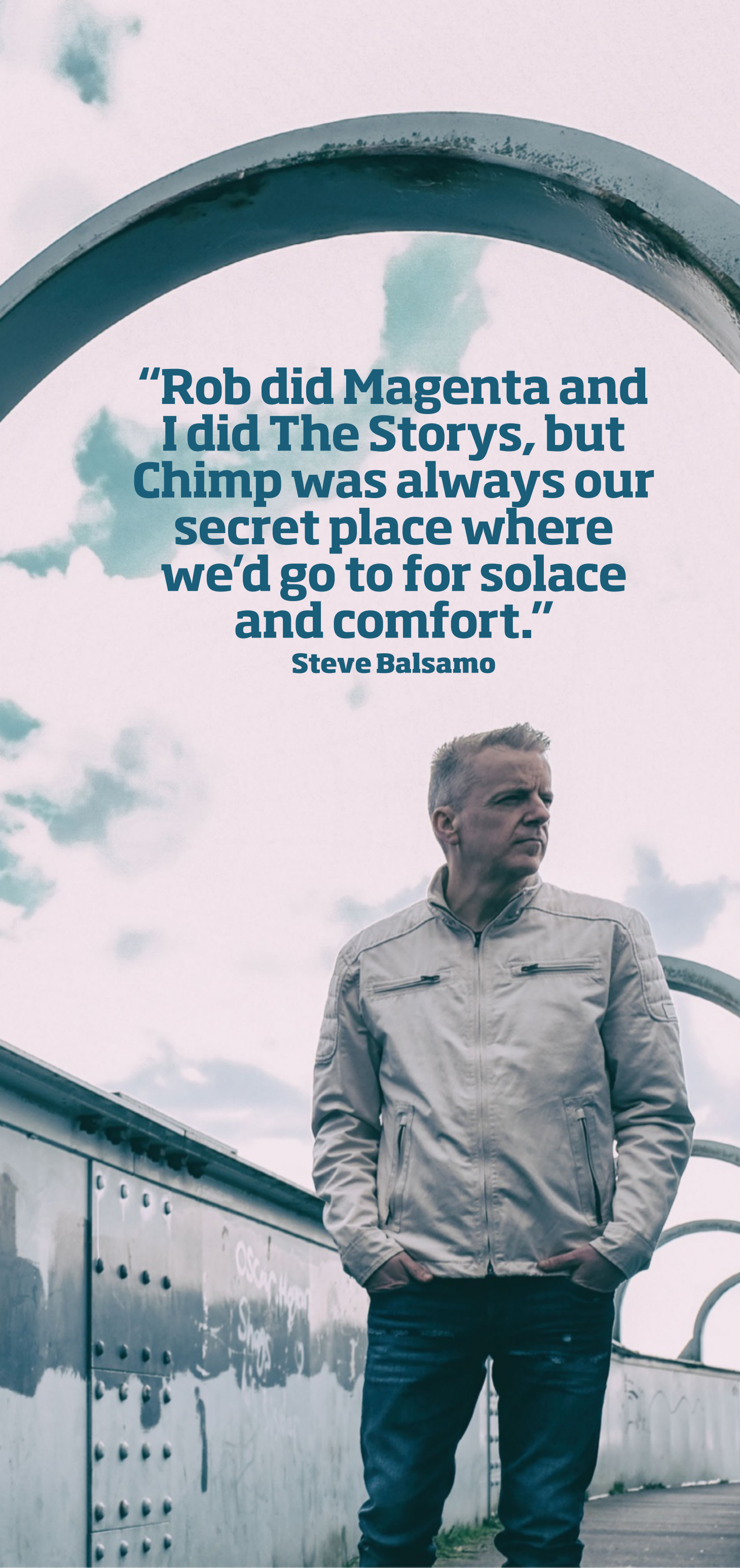
With Thompson no longer involved, the follow-up, *The Empathy Machine*, is another deep dive into Chimpan A’s kitchen-sink-’n’-all soundworld. Over the ensuing years, Balsamo would make an occasional trek through those turbine-studded valleys to Reed’s studio. Lyric book in hand, he’d sing stream-of-consciousness melodic ideas, while Reed improvised on piano underneath him, their songs developing in the moment. “Then I’d bugger off and Rob would do his thing – because he is a wizard – and when I came back a year later it would be this whole new song.”

There’s a lot of music on *The Empathy Machine* and for all its futuristic, sci-fi outlook, there’s a late-90s retro flavour to it. Cascading piano arpeggios introduce *The World Through My Eyes*, among whose charms are vocoded speech, Supertrampy electric piano and some lovely, melodic bass. Magenta’s Christina Booth adds angelic vocals here and elsewhere, with voiceover artist Tony Dallas delivering the deep, creamy spoken-word part that gives the song its title. *The Calling* is a brooding, multi-layered piece studded with woodwinds and electric guitars. Rosalie Deighton adds her strong vocal talent to the poppy, Moby-like *It’s So Real*, and *Speed Of Love*’s Massive Attack beat and Tangs-flavoured synths are topped by the stunning Welsh soprano Shân Cothi and illuminating words from western Zen scholar Alan Watts.

Balsamo reckons that song broaches one of the album’s main themes. “We’re in the age of artificial intelligence, and we’re going to rely on it heavily in the future. When computers become sentient, then we’re in *Westworld*,

Bonkers... and loving it.



A man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a light-colored jacket and dark jeans, stands with his hands in his pockets. He is looking off to the side. Behind him is a large, dark metal archway, and to his left is a wall with rivets and some graffiti. The sky is visible in the background.

"Rob did Magenta and I did The Storys, but Chimp was always our secret place where we'd go to for solace and comfort."

Steve Balsamo

Skynet territory, and that's coming — the genie's out of the bottle. We need a firewall, and there's this idea of having to build empathy into the machines' learning, otherwise they won't have it, and then we're fucked."

Given his incredibly powerful voice, Balsamo's an intense but restrained presence on the whole, in the vein of Tim Bowness or a low-key Steve Hogarth perhaps. That said, he throws in some ethereal Tuvan throat singing on the epic, trip-hoppy *Jack*, and unleashes his full power on *Scream*. "Steve's got that up his sleeve, but doesn't always do it," says Reed. "He's got such a great tone, it really connects with people."

With elements of jazz, folk and Led Zep rock, *Scream* is a paradigm for the album. Add in the beautiful Kate Bush-y harmonies and Wakeman-esque Moog solo, and it's not surprising Balsamo reckons it's the nearest you'll get to looking inside Reed's brain.

"Rob's prog to his bones," says Balsamo with a laugh. "Me, I've got prog impostor syndrome! I've accidentally become a prog musician by osmosis. But all the weird stuff I love in life — aliens, fairies, paranormal shit, weird stuff — it seems to kinda fit that world. Good playing, strange time signatures, and aliens — what more do you want in life?"

Maybe what makes Chimpan A work is that it's the sound of two distant musical worlds colliding. Reed thinks so.

"Steve balances up my love of prog, and as a result together we come up with something different, something new. With my work with Magenta I've been called a one-trick pony, with my *Sanctuary* records I've been called a Mike Oldfield clone. But this album is really me."

Chimp's videos are very him too. The promo for *The Calling* was filmed in the Brecon Beacons — its bleak, wintery horror vibe evoking Jonathan Glazer's brilliant sci-fi movie *Under The Skin*, and the tone of *The Kill List* director Ben Wheatley. The cool clip for *Speed Of Love* features some *Tron*-era wireframe graphics; Balsamo a handsome presence in both.

If logistics and finance allow, the pair also plan to create a live Chimpan A experience. "Rob asked, 'Can we do something in an old haunted house?'" says Balsamo. "Yeah man, I'd be up for that! A promenade theatrical thing where people go from room to room, each one with different music going on." Factor in their shared love of classic horror films and that could be the kind of unsettling night worth paying money for.

The word that keeps coming up between the two of them is 'bonkers'. "Chimp is bonkers," says Robert Reed with glee. "It's like a toybox full of stuff, like musical Lego. I love having all these ingredients to play with. In the purest terms this is the most progressive album I've ever made. It touches so many bases, but it's really accessible."

Hooks, choruses and strangeness prevail; you can see why these guys get on. Chimpan A are back in that sea of pretentiousness, but they're not drowning. They're waving. ☺

The Empathy Machine is out now through *Tigermoth*. See www.chimpana.com for more.

WHALE

Music teacher turned band leader Michael Whiteman makes a splash with **I Am The Manic Whale**'s third album. *Prog* catches up with the vocalist and musician to find out why *Things Unseen* holds a very special place in his heart.

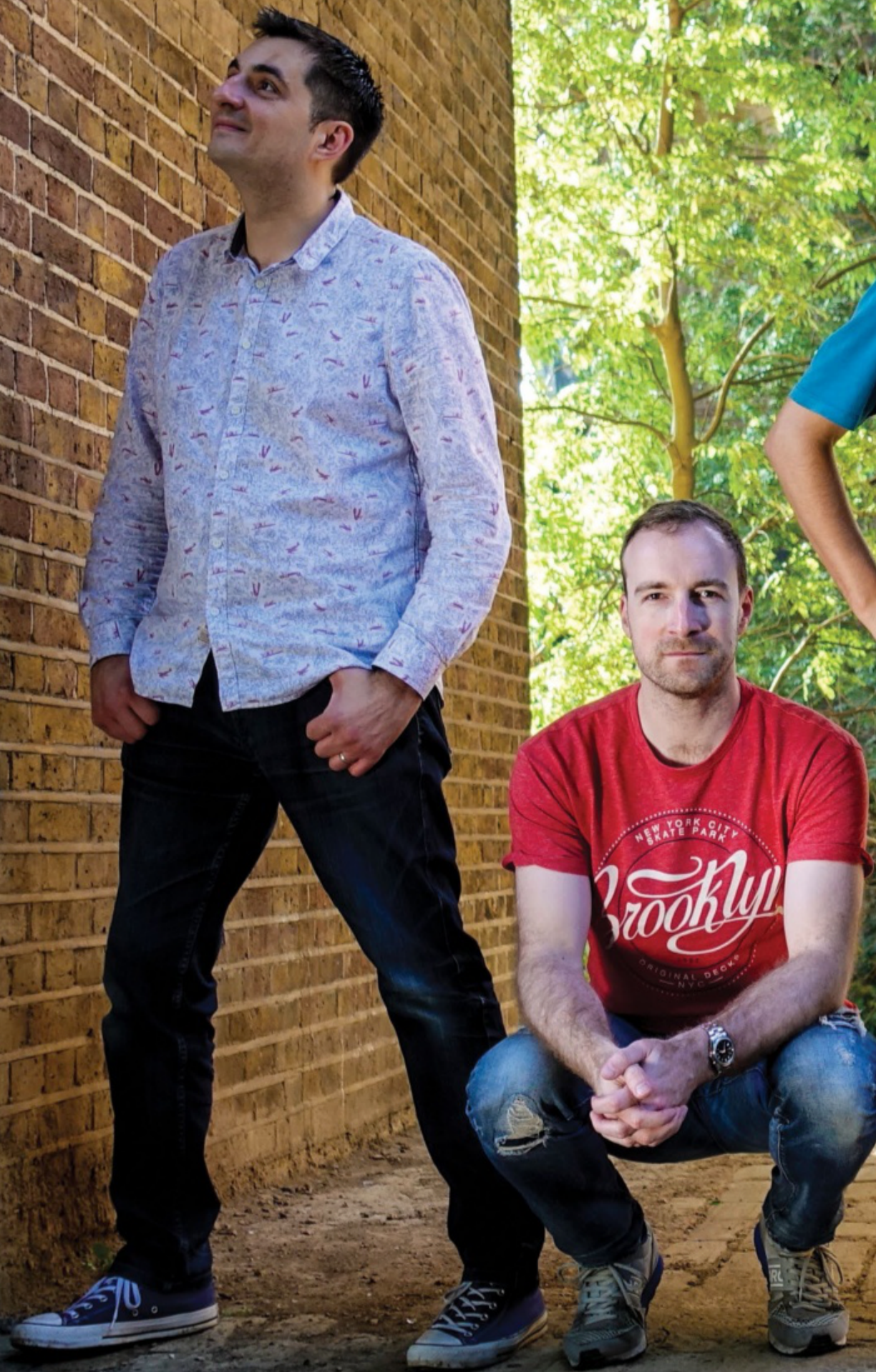
Words: Sid Smith

Images: David Addis and Iona Garvie

When *Prog* caught up with I Am The Manic Whale's Michael Whiteman via Skype, the UK was on the second day of the government-advised lockdown, part of the ongoing effort to curtail the spread of Covid-19. Consequently Whiteman, who earns his living as a music teacher, was confined indoors and coming to terms with the fact that his principal means of income had come to an abrupt halt. Happily, he says, his wife is able to continue working from home so things are not as bad as they could be.

When not talking to *Prog* about the release of the band's third studio album, *Things Unseen*, the bassist and vocalist is home-schooling his two young children, his time spent previously working as a secondary school teacher really coming in handy. "We've been doing numbers and letters and things this morning," says Whiteman, speaking from the sanctuary of his home recording studio, "and this afternoon we're going to be doing some gardening. So I'm trying to keep it interesting and varied for them. I'm actually quite enjoying it although I don't know how long the excitement will continue," he says.

It's rapidly apparent from chatting with Whiteman that he's very much a glass half-full kind of guy and it's a quality that's clear through his writing for I Am The Manic Whale over the last five years. *Things Unseen* picks up from where 2017's *Gathering The Waters* left off with a typically eclectic and, perhaps in



SONGS



“I never thought anything I’d do would ever end up on vinyl.”

Killa tunes! L-R: John Murphy, David Addis, Ben Hartley and Michael Whiteman.



Ah, the fine days before social distancing...

a ska band called Sounds Of Salvation. We were a church band and used to play lots of Christian music festivals, that sort of thing. But when that wrapped up I thought that now I had this time on my hands I had loads of ideas that I'd been writing for the last decade that didn't quite work with this ska setting. My first love has always been progressive rock so I decided to dig into prog rock a bit deeper."

As work got underway on a project that wasn't necessarily intended for public consumption, Whiteman says he became aware of his own limitations and a desire to broaden the musical palette. Having studied

Having their own vinyl record is a tremendous achievement.

some cases, eccentric range of subject matter. That aspect of his personality has become part and parcel of the group's appeal. Urban myths; the notions underpinning fame and celebrity; the romance of British engineering applied to public transport; fantasy literature; and the joy of seeing a child's smile all provide starting points for the album's eight songs. Whiteman argues that there should be no barriers when it comes to sitting down to write a song.

"Anything should be up for grabs. I'm really interested in using the songs and using the music to tell a story, not just lyrically, but in the way the melodies work and where everything comes together to create a long-form story."

You get an idea of the musician's varied influences when asked to name his top five albums off the top of his head. "Queen's *A Night At The Opera*, Big Big Train's *English Electric Part Two*, ELO's *Out Of The Blue*, The Beatles' *Abbey Road*, and probably a Genesis album. I'm going to go with *Foxtrot*," he says.

Releasing a new album is always a time of mixed emotions. There's the joy that something you've spent a portion of your life working on is finally about to make its own way out into the world, but that happiness is quite often tempered by an underlying concern that it may not be well received. While accepting that an artist's primary goal is to be true to themselves and not worry what others may think, it certainly helps with the ability to continue on an artistic journey if people actually like what you do enough to go out and buy it. Whiteman says he's surprised by the way in which *I Am The Manic Whale*, which began life very much as a solo project five years ago, has taken off. "I wasn't expecting it to be as big as it's become when I started. I was a member of



“I’m really interested in using the songs and using the music to tell a story, not just lyrically, but in the way the melodies work and where everything comes together to create a long-form story.”



piano as a child and despite being a capable multi-instrumentalist, he could see that the music he was writing would benefit from extra input. “As I was working on these songs I thought, ‘Well, it needs a pretty great guitar solo.’ Now, I can play the guitar, but I can’t play a *great* guitar solo.” Help in that particular department came from his childhood pal, David Addis, who added several distinctive solos. Soon drummer Ben Hartley and also keyboardist John Murphy were drafted in.

“It just grew from there really,” he reveals. “By the time I finished this first CD, it wasn’t really a solo album anymore. It had these other three guys on pretty much every track and it was a band. I’d never really said to them, ‘Shall we form a band?’ I just said, ‘Can you come and play on this song and how about this one too? And this one as well.’ And it just kind of kept going.”

Things Unseen continues a partnership with producer and engineer Rob Aubrey that began with *Gathering The Waters*, which he mixed. Aubrey’s impressive and lengthy CV includes many different strands of the progressive rock community both old and new, including Asia, Pendragon, Transatlantic, Big Big Train, John Wetton, and, more recently, A Formal Horse, to name but a few. However, Whiteman says, Manic Whale’s relationship with Aubrey is far from just a technical studio transaction. “Although he’s not involved in the recording phase, he has opinions and he’s not shy about sharing them. Quite often, when I’d been slaving over a thing for two years and I’m really happy with it, Rob would come back saying, ‘You need to do this again’, or ‘This isn’t in time’, or ‘That bit’s out of tune.’ He’s got a great set of ears and it’s good to have an outside perspective on these things. Sometimes you can be so involved in something and just be so wedded to an idea, it needs someone else that can take a step back and see it from the outside. There’s a few things when I’ve disagreed with him, and we’ve not done what he suggested. But most of the time he’s right. To be honest, even if I resist it at first, I usually come around to his way of thinking eventually,” says Whiteman.

For the first time, the new album is being simultaneously released on vinyl via Plane Groovy and the format holds a special charge for him. “I never thought anything I’d do would ever end up on vinyl,” he says. “People endlessly argue about what’s the better quality between vinyl or CD or the various high-quality downloads. None of that interests me. I like vinyl but it’s not because of the sound quality. It’s because it’s *big*! [Laughs.] People say it’s irritating because you put it on and 20 minutes later you’ve got to get up and turn it over again. Listening to a record is an experience, isn’t it? It’s not a background thing. I make myself a really nice coffee. I put my record on, I sit down, I don’t do anything else. I’m listening to a record, drinking my coffee and looking at the artwork. It’s about the quality of the engagement rather than the quality of the sound.” ☺

Things Unseen is out now. For more, see www.iamthemanicwhale.com.

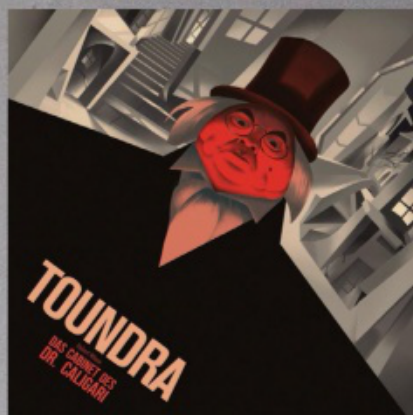
Toundra, coming to you in
widescreen (hopefully).

**"I studied cinema for my
degree, so I knew what the
film is about: it's not a [horror]
film, it's a political film about
authoritarianism and the
danger of things like the
Nazis in Germany."**

After completing their 2018 album, *Vortex*, Toundra had just started to size up their next challenge when a promoter came to them with an idea: would they be interested in re-soundtracking the 1920 silent horror film *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*? The band said yes, and set to work.

"They proposed for us to do this film in December 2018 just for one show in May 2019," guitarist Esteban Girón explains. "We were on tour with *Vortex*, we came home in March and we'd been writing the music from Christmas to March/April."

Such was the buzz after the multimedia event that their label, InsideOut, suggested recording and releasing the results. The finished album, which is out now, has rapidly picked up critical acclaim. There are many readings of Robert Wiene's expressionist classic and one is that it's a warning against authoritarianism, an interpretation that the band feel is tragically relevant on the 100th anniversary of the film's release. It's a timely statement, and one that could be a main point of discussion at any other time, but the prospect of an ordinary conversation about the record seems like a luxury from another era. When Girón picks up



New album, *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*.

the phone, it's on the evening of March 20. Spain has already been on lockdown for several days, and the UK will follow with a total lockdown a few days later.

After comparing the state of then-current quarantine measures in the UK versus Spain, it's time to dig through the wreckage of the week. Girón is stoic about events; the band were supposed to be playing a show in Germany, but instead that's off, and Toundra have now postponed all their tour dates until September. In the UK, Glastonbury festival has been cancelled, and we speculate that other, more niche events may well be next. "I work as a PR for five festivals here, and I was fired yesterday," he reveals with a shrug. "It's hard days right now in the

country, but I hope this is going to be a chance to learn how to live and consume less than we have been doing all these years."

Moving on to discussing the soundtrack, Girón wants to make clear how keen the group had been on a project like this. "Making music for images was an idea that was in the band's atmosphere since the beginning. Since 2007, we've been talking about this a lot, but the only thing that we have been doing before this project was just lending some songs of our normal albums to short films or documentaries."

It's easy to see why they would discuss soundtracks. Post-rock is a genre that lends itself to cinematic comparisons, and there's a lot

When Spanish post-rockers **Toundra** began reworking the soundtrack to 1920's expressionist film *Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari*, little did they realise how prescient its eventual release would become. Guitarist Esteban Girón tells *Prog* about their "side album" and why it's got their creative juices flowing.

Words: Alex Lynham
Images: Sergio Albert

Moving pictures

of crossover between the genre and film scores. That said, Toundra's music is unusually well-suited to being paired with moving images on account of its relative sparseness and prominent, orchestral climaxes.

There were several things different about the writing process this time around, with the most obvious being that the band were constricted by the shape, flow and structure of the film when they were composing. Far from making things more difficult, in some ways this made it easier, as Girón explains: "It was helpful, because you have a guide, you know?"

As for the mechanics of sequencing and arranging the material, it should come as no surprise that by this point Toundra are a well-oiled machine. "It was really easy for us, because we have been playing together 13 years. Across these years, people have told us that our music makes them think of images, and *this* music came from images. It was really interesting because you base the composition of the music in a different way because you have to write music based on the narrative of a film from one century ago. It was easy for us, but it was different and [that] was interesting."

Although the band didn't personally choose the film as their subject, they were familiar with it, and that was part of the reason for their enthusiasm for the project in the first place. "The thing is that I studied cinema at university for my degree, so I knew what the film is about: it's not a [horror] film, it's a political film about authoritarianism and the danger of things like the Nazis in Germany, you know? So on the one hand we had this inspiration, based on the images, on the expressionism of the film, and on the other hand we had this motivation, which was based on the plot, and the message of the plot. How, 100 years later, we are having the same problem around Europe."

The band's plan for subsequent live performances is simple: to play the album in full with a projection of the film. "It's not a normal Toundra album, but a soundtrack," says Girón. "This music depends on the images of the film, so [it's hard to] listen to it not knowing what this was made for."

This does, to some extent, beg the question of how much a soundtrack can work on its own, without the images that it responds to. Toundra's recorded effort does stand up, but Girón is still quick to

"People have told us that our music makes them think of images, and this came from images, so it was really interesting."





Scenes from the original 1920 film and a poster (centre).



LMPC/GETTY IMAGES



LMPC/GETTY IMAGES

observe that it's fundamentally different from a normal Toundra album. In some ways it can't be considered one, as its motivation is very different. "It's a side album, it's like a side project for us... Maybe after [all] these years, you need some extra motivation, to keep on going, not just playing typical rock'n'roll songs in typical rock'n'roll bars. With our side projects, sometimes you need to go outside of home to want to come back."

There's one upside to the unprecedented situation that the band – and, well, everybody – now find themselves in, and that's that they can devote more time to writing their new album. "We only can go to the supermarket and it's hard. Right now, we've been at home for one week, and it's going to be [this way] for, like, two months. We're going to write a new album. We have some tunes from the summer and we are going to start working on the new album. I moved from Madrid to a small city about 500 kilometres from there, so right now maybe quarantine will almost be like a [writing] holiday for us. Well, it will be at least for me because I was travelling a lot to Madrid," says Girón.

Though they're now spread out rather than in one place, quarantine means that the inconvenience of remote writing has become the status quo overnight for many bands, Toundra included. Notwithstanding their live plans being delayed, they're still aiming to have their next – and as yet unnamed – album ready for release next year, although an exact date is not yet firm.

If there's one thing that can be learned from the last few weeks, it's that even our best plans can be derailed by unforeseen events. Maybe Toundra's dark, foreboding soundtrack album is accidentally the perfect counterpart to the world as we find it now? Six months ago, the rise of a resurgent far right was the main concern of many across the Western world; now something even more sudden, unexpected and more stark stalks the shadows of Europe's cities. Wiene's film came out in the wake of the last pandemic to gut Europe, Spanish flu, and the continent then had to endure the swaggering destruction wrought by fascism on top. If Toundra's record finds itself also ominously in the shadow of a pandemic, then let's hope at least we can avoid a repeat of the descent into mindless fascism that the film tragically presaged. 🕒

Das Cabinet Des Dr Caligari is out now via InsideOut. See www.toundra.es.

Toundra, rolling with Esteban Girón (front).



JG Thirlwell

He's the experimental mastermind behind post-punk project Foetus, and has collaborated with Nick Cave, Swans, Zola Jesus and even the Kronos Quartet. This Australia-born singer and instrumentalist, now living in Brooklyn, NY, is a singer, sound artist, producer and arranger whose only boundary is his imagination.

So now we have to ask: **How prog is JG Thirlwell?** **Words:** Dom Lawson **Portraits:** Marylene Mey

If you listened to a lot of weird music in the 1980s, there's a very strong chance you will have come across JG Thirlwell at some point. He's best known for releasing extraordinarily eccentric and perverse records under such names as You've Got Foetus On Your Breath and Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel, and was one of the post-punk world's wildest mavericks. His sound drew from the nascent industrial music scene and punk's more left-field tendencies, but also from soundtracks, cartoon music, big band swing jazz and even experimental noise and musique concrète. More than 30 years on from early career milestones like 1984's classic *Hole* album (featuring fan favourite Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel anthem *I'll Meet You In Poland, Baby*), Thirlwell is now simply one of modern music's great polymaths, with a huge and insanely varied catalogue of music performed both as a solo artist under a variety of pseudonyms and in endless collaboration with all manner of likeminded musical anarchists.

Today, Thirlwell allows himself a wry smile at the thought that our readers might question his prog credentials. "Funnily, there's definitely Yes and Genesis and ELP in my DNA, and particularly King Crimson," he says with a shrug.

"If you listen back to that music, it really was about shedding the shackles of rock. So I feel that not only do I have a lot of that music in my DNA, but I feel I'm constantly questioning my own musical vocabulary in the same way, and wanting to move forward and try different things."

In truth, JG Thirlwell has always been incapable of following anyone else's creative path. In his late teens, he moved from his native Australia to London, fascinated and enthralled by

"There's definitely Yes and Genesis and ELP in my DNA, and particularly King Crimson."



Spite Your Face: the single that started it all.

JG Thirlwell performs at the Paradiso, Amsterdam in September 1988.

the explosion of underground music that was happening in the city as punk entered its death throes. Starting the Foetus story with 1981's debut single *Spite Your Face/OKFM*, released as Foetus Under Glass, he was in the right place at the right time.

"The whole Foetus thing was facilitated by punk rock and the explosion of independent labels, and then it was informed by being a musical obsessive for my entire life," he says grinning. "Everything that I absorbed culturally was spewed out through my distorted lens, but at the same time I was living in London, so I was going

to see bands like Throbbing Gristle, Joy Division, This Heat, The Pop Group and Cabaret Voltaire... it was a very exciting time for music and all these things went into the mix. The secret sauce was not necessarily knowing what I was doing but having the audacity to do it anyway."

It would take a few years and several synapse-frazzling records for James George Thirlwell's new persona to truly emerge, but a taste for surrealism and intuitive art rock sensibilities were clearly present from the start.

"On that first single, the first thing I did was create a mythology around Foetus, where I didn't want to be a personality up front," he says. "That was kind of influenced by The Residents and that kind of myth-making. I quickly discovered that if you write a press release, and you put whatever you want into it, often that gets reprinted by the press. So I said that Foetus Under Glass were two Brazilian statistics collectors and their pen pal from Athens, Georgia, and that got reprinted!"

By the mid 80s, Foetus had mutated into an intermittently terrifying entity, with Thirlwell delivering his Grindhouse-cum-gothic lyrics in a rasping, Deep South drawl over musical landscapes of increasing complexity. Although still ostensibly connected to the industrial scene, Foetus records existed in their own self-contained universe, with Thirlwell playing every single instrument on every record. With no restrictions imposed on how he should realise his vision, he admits that he cheerfully allowed his alter-ego to run riot, which probably explains songs like 1987's sleazy jazz epic *Bedrock* (performed by The Foetus All Nude Revue) and unforgettable lyrics like 'I'm a two-fisted fucker gettin' hard in my pants!' 



FRANS SCHELLEKENS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Foetus (is on his mind):
the adaptive JG Thirlwell.





"I was exploring my dark side and exploring *the* dark side. That's just what I was inspired to write about, that *viewpoint*. Often I was taking the *opposite* viewpoint from the character that I was portraying, and often that was misinterpreted! [Laughs] Sometimes I was singing in first person, but there was a blur between the two. Of course, I was putting out records under the name Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel. I don't deny that one of the early impetuses for that was that there was a shock element to it, but also an almost Dadaist element to it, a sort of absurdity to the juxtapositions of things I was putting together."

After a decade of terrorising the indie rock underground, Thirlwell decided to ditch all the complicated, confrontational identities and entered the 90s simply as Foetus. He even briefly ended up on a major label, subsequently releasing the magnificent *Gash* via Columbia Records in 1995. He also enjoyed a brief period of work as a producer and remixer, for a variety of alternative rock and indie bands. Meanwhile, the Australian's own creative urges were leading him in a new direction. With too many ideas for one project to use, he formed a new instrumental entity called Steroid Maximus, wherein all his jazz, exotica and soundtrack music fantasies were brought to life.

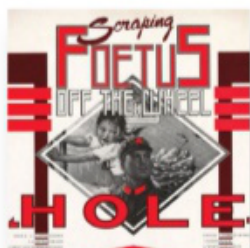
"The Foetus records were becoming increasingly instrumental, to the point where they were 50 per cent instrumental," Thirlwell recalls. "But I felt that the perception of Foetus was still of this misanthropic maniac making a lot of noise. So with Steroid Maximus I wanted to take that instrumental aspect and explore it more, let it breathe and let it have its own playground. It was a blank slate, so having done Foetus for 10 years at that



CATHERINE MCGANN/GETTY IMAGES

JG Thirlwell performs with Lydia Lunch at the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage in 1996.

Hole by Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel, 1984.



“One of the first albums I owned was Jethro Tull’s *Thick As A Brick*. Hearing stuff like that, which threw out the rulebook by having one long 40-minute song with many, many different movements, you think, ‘This is what music can be!’”



point, I'd built an identity and a certain set of expectations about what it was gonna be. But if you start something new, none of those rules exist yet."

With both Foetus and Steroid Maximus releasing multiple albums during the 90s, it was hardly a barren period for Thirlwell, but it's the last two decades that have really seen him blossom as an authentically groundbreaking artist. A decade after Steroid Maximus, he created another blank slate in the form of Manorexia: another instrumental project, but one that stripped back the intricacies of Foetus and Steroid Maximus in favour of atmosphere, ambience and freeform sound.

"Manorexia started with a drone piece I wrote but it took on a life of its own," says Thirlwell. "I wanted to create something more *spacious* with Manorexia. The music I'd been making with Foetus and Steroid Maximus was becoming so intricately arranged and dense, that I wanted an environment where I could let the sounds breathe. And *then* it took on other characteristics and was more informed by the avant-garde and 20th century classical music and soundtracks, and it had a different atmosphere to my other work."

With his reputation in the experimental music world growing, Thirlwell's next move may have



HIROYUKI ITO/GETTY IMAGES



Steroid Maximus' debut *Quilombo!*, 1991. An edited version of *Fighteous* is the theme tune of *The Venture Bros* cartoon.



Thirlwell's latest album, *Oscillospira*.



surprised some of his more ardent admirers. Since 2003, he's been creating music for Adult Swim cartoon series *The Venture Bros*. The perfect vehicle for Thirlwell's instinctively visual sounds, not to mention his self-proclaimed predilection for cartoon music, *The Venture Bros* project eventually led to him picking up the same role at FX's animated sitcom *Archer*. Thirlwell's intense enthusiasm for both is plain.

"When I approach these shows it's like I'm scoring an action film or a drama, but the stakes are lot higher because they can draw *whatever* they want," he enthuses. "They can draw some horrible android holocaust and then, in the next scene, everyone's sitting in a room together again. So it means that I can ramp up the emotional stakes on the music and make it *super-dramatic*, which I enjoy doing. *The Venture Bros* stuff is kind of like Steroid Maximus on steroids!"

Despite an absurdly busy schedule, JG Thirlwell is determined to cram in as much music-making and creativity into his life as possible. This year, he's hoping to perform some rare solo shows with a chamber group, playing new interpretations of Foetus classics alongside new material. There'll be a new album from Xordox, his latest "blank slate" and an immersive exploration of synthesiser minimalism. He's also just released one of the most astonishingly adventurous and absorbing albums of the year, *Oscillospira*: a collaboration with Swedish avant-prog/classical guru Simon Steensland, which will send fans of Art Zoyd, Univers Zero and Magma into a state of delighted froth. Zappa alumnus Morgan Ågren plays drums on it, too. It's extraordinary.

Meanwhile — and there's *always* a meanwhile with JG Thirlwell — the NYC resident has numerous other projects in the pipeline. Deep breath!

"Right now, I'm working on a new season of *Archer*. I'm recording an album of my string quartets this year, which will probably come out next year. I've started writing some stuff with [maverick sludge crew] Melvins, which I hope will turn into *something*, and hopefully there'll be an *Archer* soundtrack album. I've also started a new Foetus album. There's probably gonna be some connective tissue to what I've done before, but I want it to totally shatter the glass ceiling as well, because I feel I owe it to the Foetus legacy to do that. It could be the last Foetus album too. There's an arc to Foetus and this is the end of the arc. Oh, and I've got some other big commissions coming up this year, too."

At the heart of Thirlwell's brain-spinning 40 years of active service lies a wide-eyed fascination with music and its endless possibilities. As a result, he feels pretty comfortable with the possibility of being embraced by the prog world. Frankly, he's been neck-deep in it for decades.

"One of the first albums I owned was Jethro Tull's *Thick As A Brick*. Hearing stuff like that, which threw out the rulebook by having one 40-minute song with many, many different movements, you think, '*This is what music can be!*' For me, prog was more like classical, and I was introduced to *that* by cartoons, you know? You follow the dots and the next thing you know, you're listening to Ligeti!" 🎧

JG Thirlwell and Simon Steensland's *Oscillospira* is out now via Ipecac. See www.foetus.org for more.



YOUR SHOUT!

He's the zany one-man powerhouse of unbridled experimentalism. But the big question is: how prog is JG Thirlwell?

"Very arty in his output but more industrial and goth in style than progressive."

David Preston

"Foetus are amazing, *Nail* and *Hole* were both great albums as were all those wonderful early singles. Collaboration wise then you obviously have *Flesh Volcano*, the excellent *Wiseblood* album and the 12-inch with *Lydia Lunch*. His soundtracks have been great and his latest electronica project is very much worth getting."

Rob Hurst

"It's quite common for you to name people I've never heard. I think this is the first one I've never heard of."

David Meadows

"Oh aye, old JG Thirlwell... Nope, haven't a clue."

Laurie Laughland

"While not really prog, Thirlwell's body of work definitely deserves mentioning, at least from a pioneer/visionary standpoint. Interesting *Prog* would discuss the man who is Foetus and basically pioneered the industrial-punk-classical-blues-big band jazz-end-of-times-you-all-suck music. Fave tunes: *Bedrock*, *Theme From Pigdom Come*, *The Throne Of Agony*, *Stop Trying To Tie Me* (*Wiseblood*). Steroid Maximus is kinda neat too."

Dave McClelland

"Just listened to a couple of bits on YouTube. No, not prog. A noise, nothing more."

Paul Swanton

"Well he's definitely progressive in the literal sense of the word but your average stuck in the 70s prog rock fan would run a mile. If *Throbbing Gristle* and *Tomahawk* are progressive then Foetus hits the same sweet spot. Like *Atari Teenage Riot* jamming with *Stockhausen* at a free jazz tribute to *Zappa*. The man's a f**king genius!"

Chris Alexander

"*The Overture From Pigdom Come* - definitely."

Risotto Drake

"Did a great remix of *Reverence* by the *Jesus And Mary Chain*. Firmly in the goth/alternative camp [but] not really progressive rock in my view."

Matthew North

"Not a clue who this is. Off to Google. Still no idea even after checking him out."

Steve Harrison

"Er, who's that again?"

Mike Sexton

"Given that your average *Prog* reader would run a mile from krautrock I'd be amazed if they've ever heard of Jim. He's got a brilliantly progressive musical mind as far as I'm concerned."

Rick Spence

"Not certain about the Foetus stuff, but his soundtracky later stuff definitely fits the bill."

Mary Drake

"Love the *Nail* album and his *Wiseblood* stuff"

Andrew Prestidge

"Who?"

Chris Watkins

OLD WAYS

During these uncertain times, **Hexvessel** have chosen to tap into a gentler way of life. Leader Mat McNerney tells *Prog* why the Anglo-Finnish psychedelic folk rockers are embracing nature on their latest recording, *Kindred*.

Words: Dannii Leivers **Images:** Andy Ford

At the beginning of the recording we summoned spirits to take part, and then when we finished the record, we let those spirits go,” says Hexvessel founder, frontman and guitarist Mat McNerney, of the recording process for the band’s new album, *Kindred*. “It’s a very pagan way of working, working in harmony with the spirits of the place and nature. Out of respect, you don’t wear band T-shirts into the studio and you don’t bring in the wrong energy. We go somewhere else to do our drinking and talking rubbish. I just wanted it to be about that record.”

Hexvessel have always done things their own way. Having left the cramped bustle of London and lived in the Netherlands and Norway, McNerney eventually settled in the lush expanse of Finland and formed the band in 2009. Since then, Hexvessel have released five albums, including *Kindred*, each imbued with spiritual, naturalistic undertones that burrow underfoot like ancient tree roots. And although McNerney himself has described the band’s earthy, eerie sound as “psychedelic folk rock”, the tag doesn’t quite capture the progressive nature of their music, which is as intrinsically linked to the hushed whisper of the pine forest and traditional folklore as it is to any genre or instrument.

McNerney initially started the band as a solo project, enlisting the help of his pals and his wife Marja Konttinen, to record debut album *Dawnbearer*. The next few albums maintained a revolving door of musicians and collaborators, but since 2019’s *All Tree*, a solid line-up has been firmly in place and it’s now clear the quintet are moving forward into their latest chapter as a much tighter, cohesive entity.

“I think this is the line-up that works the best in Hexvessel so far,” McNerney muses. “It’s taken us quite some time, about 10 years,

to work to that point. Sometimes when you’re playing in a band, you’re like, ‘Maybe this isn’t someone I’d hang out with all the time, but we play great music together.’ Now we all happily spend time together. You can hear in the music that it’s a confident line-up.”

Does he look back on previous albums and hear an unhappiness due to band dynamic? “It’s never been unhappy,” he replies. “Instead

of unhappiness, I can definitely hear where we weren’t getting where we wanted to be. The albums where I can hear that, it’s really been a solo work you can hear me trying to bring a band feeling together out of a group that might not necessarily feel like a band. It feels now everybody feels like this is a band. The name of the new album – *Kindred* – means family.”

“A lot of people go to work on a record and it’s just a job. They’ll sit there, eating their microwaveable food and drinking their beer, they’ll get up and do a few takes then go to the pub and go home. I take it as a spiritual process.”



Mat McNERney:
nature boy.

"Getting out into nature here, that lifestyle is where I feel most complete and then that comes as a natural part of the music."

SAARA KUJANSUU



Mat called upon the spirits to help with the latest Hexvessel album, as well as his bandmates (above).

To record their fifth LP, Hexvessel returned to the same studio where they made their revered second, 2012's *No Holier Temple*, nestled in a suburb, close to the icy lakes and forests of their hometown, Tampere. Like that album, *Kindred* sits at the darker end of the band's motley spectrum, merging psychedelia and spectral textures under a shaded canopy, but it also broke new ground for the group. This was the first time they'd produced their own record and the first time they had worked without long-term producer Jaime Gomez Arellano (Myrkur, Messenger). It was, says McNerney, another example of the band coming together. "We wanted to take ownership back and focus on [the album] ourselves. We've done quite a few albums now, so we feel confident enough that we know what we're doing. We know how to get the best out of ourselves, we know enough about equipment. Kudos to working with Gomez all those years, now we don't really feel like we need him anymore! That's him doing the best job he can do. He's taught us everything we need to know."

Buoyed by a new energy, with *Kindred*, the band felt untethered and free to cast their exploratory net even further than usual. "There are a lot of 'found sounds' on this album," says McNerney. "A lot of things that sound like violins that might not be violins, it's actually a bowed piece of metal. If we wanted to have a gong sound, we could use a fire extinguisher for it, we didn't have to go out there and find the perfect gong. I can't quite remember if the actual fire extinguisher made it to the record but it was definitely played at some point!

There was a gas canister and fire extinguisher that we used as percussion. In the past, if an idea involved percussion our drummer would play it but now, if I have the idea, I'm just going to go in and play it. If someone had an idea, we let that person do it. Sometimes a certain key part sounds better if it's played by someone who doesn't know how to play the piano. There's a certain charm in feeling strange."

One of the tracks that will be most talked about on this album is Hexvessel's cover of Coil's *Fire Of The Mind*, a track the band have been working into their sets for a while. "We recorded that song in a mental institution that was closing down. I guess the term mental institution gives you the connotation of being locked up, but there was this calm, peaceful and tranquil kind of vibe," McNerney recalls.

"I got into Coil at a time when I was really becoming aware of the conscious invoking of magic through music. A lot of people go to work on a record and it's just a job. They'll sit there, eating their microwaveable food and drinking their beer, they'll get up and do a few takes then go to the pub and go home. I take it as a spiritual process, that's what I get from Coil so it's a tip of the hat to them for that."

Five full albums in 11 years is a pretty decent run, but McNerney always intended Hexvessel to be more prolific than that. Sure, the constant line-up changes between albums, as well as his involvement with other projects, namely his occult-charged post-punk band Grave Pleasures (previously named Beastmilk), have meant that Hexvessel have pumped out albums slower than he would have liked. But

with *Kindred* now arriving just 14 months after its predecessor, *All Tree*, it seems Hexvessel are settling into a long-awaited groove.

"I tend to write stuff all the time," says McNerney. "The new album is a formulation of some very old ideas, some brand new ideas and some ideas from the last album. Quite a big portion of this record was written at the same time as *All Tree*. It just wasn't right for that record and what that record became."

McNerney tends to talk about songs like this a lot, as though they're living entities who can breathe and feel for themselves, but having lost his heart to nature at a young age, that sense of belonging has stayed with him his whole life. "I feel more in tune with singing about nature if I'm working in harmony with it," he says. "Getting out into nature here, that lifestyle is where I feel most complete and then that comes as a natural part of the music."

That love for the natural world is the beating heart of what Hexvessel do, transforming their witchy folk into ritual magic and hitting home with a legion of passionate fans who have connected with the band on a spiritual level.

"We've been talking for a while that maybe we should put a closure to the forest theme and move on, but I don't think there is any other theme," McNerney says thoughtfully. "I think it's become quite clear that for Hexvessel, that's the central message in the albums. They're all part of the same story." 

Kindred is out now via Svart. For more information, see www.hexvessel.com.

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

Life, the universe and Everything

Trying to unravel the mind of **Christian Vander**, the enigmatic leader of Magma can almost be as difficult as trying to unravel the band's philosophies and own Kobaïan language. In an article from the second issue of *Prog*, the late Tommy Udo dissected myth from reality.

Words: Tommy Udo

Christian Vander is one of the most important musicians and composers of the 20th and 21st centuries, but I'm guessing that only a small minority of you reading this will be aware of this. Remember how you felt like an outsider at school because you were one of only maybe 10 kids who were into Yes? Well Magma fans were in an even smaller sub-set than that, but God were and are they fanatical.

If there's one thing that people know about Magma it's that 80s snooker ace Steve Davis promoted a London show by them. For Davis, an unashamed prog and jazz rock fan, Magma were like a visitation from beyond.

"It was at London's Chalk Farm Roundhouse, where I'd gone to watch the support act, Isotope. I was 17. I had planned to go home before Magma came on but I hung around and had the most musically life-changing experience of my life. I came out in shock; they blew me away. If I had a time machine and could go back to relive one day of my life, it would be that one," he told *The Guardian*.

"They're the musical equivalent of Marmite — you either like them or you don't. They were a 70s phenomenon but a bit too far-out for most people, even if you liked progressive music. I didn't dare put them on the communal record player at sixth form

Magma live: prepare to have your mind blown.

because they'd have been booed off. Maybe it's because they were French."

Magma were one of those bands that you knew you just *had* to hear as soon as you looked at them. In the early photos, Magma posed unsmiling, wearing black polo-necks with metallic medallions of their distinctive logo covering their chests. You'd believe it if you were told that they were members of some wacko Satanic cult who had just committed mass suicide. And you'd definitely believe that the man in the centre of the picture, Christian Vander, with that Robin Hood pageboy haircut, that mirthless smile and those Charlie Manson eyes, was the maximum leader.

And if you were told that they were France's most left-field jazz rock ensemble whose music synthesised the cosmic yearnings of John Coltrane with the vision of Wagner? Oh, you definitely would: those 'fuck you' shots of Magma in flared jumpsuits tell you almost as much about them as their music. Most bands want to have some hits, sleep with a few groupies and get a bit wasted. Magma looked like they wanted to cleanse the stain of humanity from the universe and fuse their souls with the cosmic supreme being.

Christian Vander grew up in the French jazz scene and claims that he decided — aged three — that he would become a musician. His stepfather was jazz pianist Maurice Vander, who had played with the likes of Stéphane Grappelli. Through his mother he met Billie Holliday, Chet Baker and drummer Elvin Jones, who played with John Coltrane. Vander learned drums from Jones and Baker gave him his first kit. By the time he was in his 20s Vander was one of France's best-regarded sticksmen.

When John Coltrane died in 1967, Vander was profoundly affected. Coltrane's music had been special to him. It reached beyond the confines

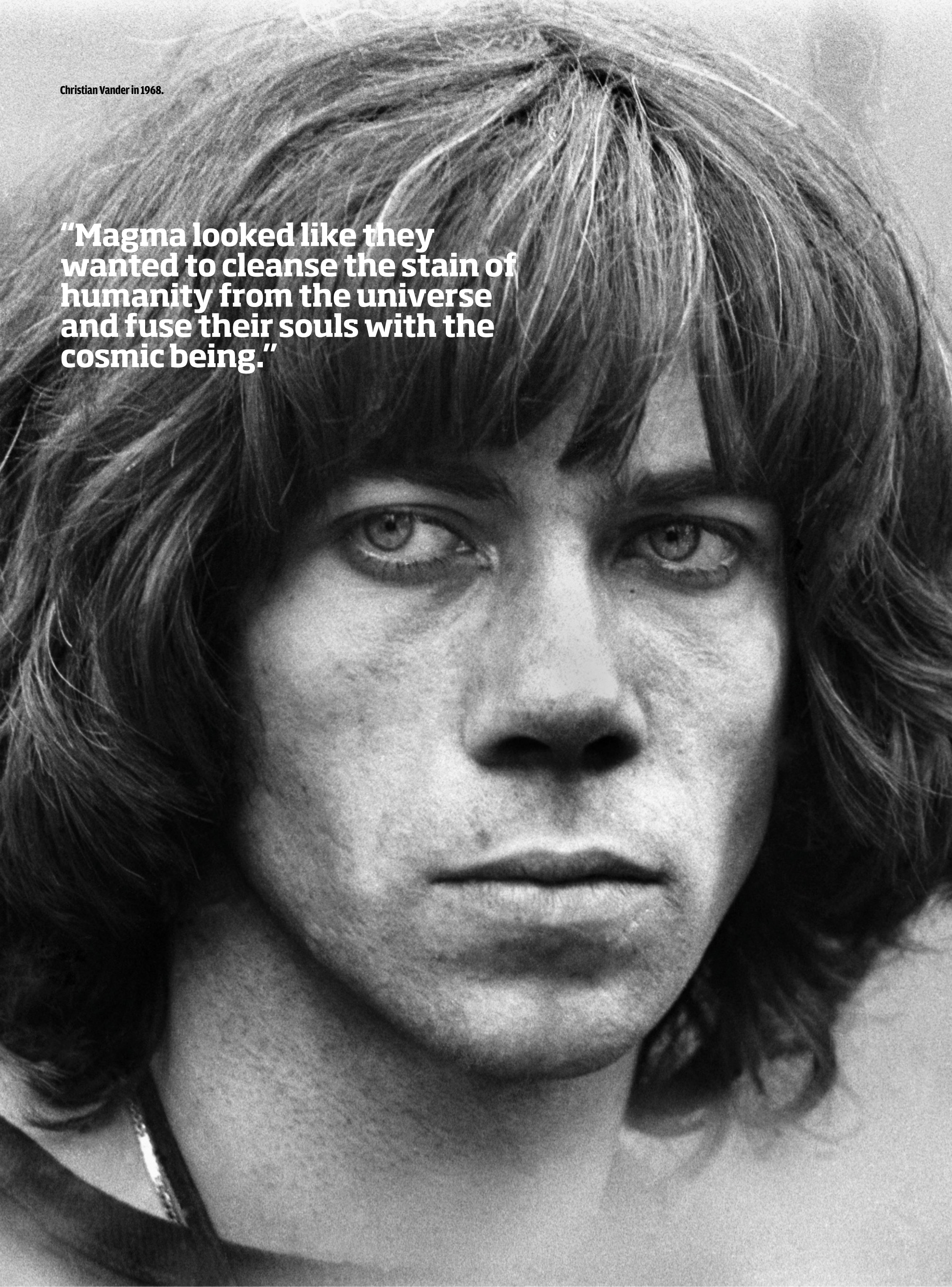


WILL IRELAND/FUTURE OWNS

PHILIPPE GRAS/LAMY STOCK PHOTO

Christian Vander in 1968.

**“Magma looked like they
wanted to cleanse the stain of
humanity from the universe
and fuse their souls with the
cosmic being.”**



Magma, circa 1974, with Stella Vander (top left) and Christian Vander (kneeling).



Kobaïan kommander: Christian Vander.

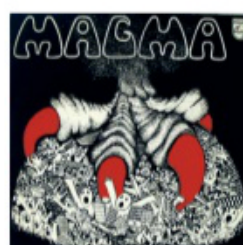
of jazz. It was profound music, even. Some might say, holy music. Vander too wanted to create something that defied genres and boundaries, something that was spiritual, healing and searching in the way that Coltrane had been. To this end, in 1969 he formed Magma.

“The year John Coltrane died, it seemed to me that afterwards it was as though music had to try to start all over again. Someone had to pick up the pieces, go on searching in the way that he had. Nobody could match him, but people could pick up the flame. It was almost impossible for anyone to do anything new after Coltrane, but you had to try to find other new directions. So that’s what I tried to do with Magma,” he told *The Wire* in 1995.

Vander claims he wasn’t so much the creator of the music as its conduit. He told one interviewer: “I started Magma because the music had to come out. I would call it a revelation. The music came out of me naturally, without the need to compose it. It came out through me but it could easily have been someone else.”

Magma became a vehicle for Vander’s huge spiritual visionary concept about the future of the Earth, humanity and our place in the cosmos. Although he was never political per se, in the late 60s the first stirrings of what would later grow into the green movement could be seen in Europe and the US. Vander saw that the future of the Earth looked bleak: industrial pollution and overpopulation were the scary ideas of the day which he took and wove into a vast operatic song cycle called *Theusz Hamtaahk*, or the *Time Of Hatred*.

The first self-titled album, recorded and released in 1970, tells the story of the future when things have gone beyond even the bleakest predictions. A small group of dissidents escape Earth in a private spaceship and find a colony on the distant world of Kobaïa. There they work out a new, more enlightened way of life, working in harmony with nature and the cosmic force of the universe. Some years later an Earth ship in trouble lands on Kobaïa. The crew are impressed by what they see and persuade Kobaïan missionaries to return with them to tell the Earth people about what they have achieved. The second album *1001° Centigrades*, released in 1971, tells of the arrival of the Kobaïans with their message of peace and love. But the Earth authorities don’t like what they hear and imprison the missionaries, sparking off a war between Earth and Kobaïa. Kobaïa gives Earth an ultimatum: release them or they will unleash their ultimate weapon, the *Mekanik Destructiw Kommandöh*.



Hot hot heat: Magma’s 1970 debut (top) and ’71 follow-up *1001° Centigrades*.

The Kobaïans escape, vowing never to return, but some Earth people have heard their message and remember their visit.

The third part of *Theusz Hamtaahk* is about the prophet Nēbehr Gudahtt, who remembers the message of the Kobaïans and preaches that in order to save itself, humanity must seek self-purification and communion with the supreme being, the Kreuhn Kohrman. Naturally this pisses everyone off and they form an angry mob, marching off to lynch Nēbehr Gudahtt. But en route they all miraculously see the light and accept the truth of his message. Then after a bit more marching and singing hymns of exorcism, they commit mass suicide, becoming transformed and purified and melding into the substance of the universe. This was the band’s incredible third album, *Mekanik Destructiw Kommandöh*, released in 1973.

It was apocalyptic music with a story that apparently connected all of Magma’s songs. And for these songs to work, existing languages such as

“The music came out of me naturally without the need to compose it. I would call it a revelation.”
Christian Vander

French or English were inadequate: Vander created his own phonetic umlaut-laden language to fit his cosmology. Kobaïan sounded like guttural German or Serbo-Croat.

This and its equally brilliant successor *Köhntarkösz* were not released on some weirdo European indie label: they came out on A&M, making them labelmates with Peter Frampton and The Carpenters. Both LPs were produced by former Rolling Stones and Yardbirds manager Giorgio Gomelsky, who had been a supporter of the band almost since their inception.

Vander composed the words and the music at the same time, the words seeming to flow as he wrote. ‘Kobaïa’ was the first word uttered in this new language. Vander and singer Klaus Blasquiz took the main vocal parts. Klaus Blasquiz sounded genuinely demented, while Vander was capable of sounding like Hitler working himself into a lather about Poland.

Although as a visionary artist and a gifted musician Vander commands

enormous respect with everyone who has worked with him, the impression from outside is that he is bloody difficult to work with. Ego clashes were inevitable, most famously with bassist Jannik Top, who was part of the line-up from 1973 until 1978. In his book *Repossessed*, Julian Cope recounts a story told by Martin Cole, who worked with Magma’s management.

“Martin told us how the original group had come to a stunning and savage conclusion in Spain after a wild magic battle between Magma’s leader, the percussionist Christian Vander, and the epically named bass player, Jannik Top. Vander had rented a hilltop castle for his own uses, which had annoyed Top’s ego. He had rented a similar place within sight of Vander and the two proceeded to wage magic war upon one another. Martin Cole told of how he had ended driving from one castle to another trying to patch the band up, only to discover Jannik Top with serious chest wounds, screaming that Vander had caused him to tear his own chest open.”

Top – who has subsequently played with Bonnie Tyler, Eurythmics and Céline Dion – puts his departure from Magma down to youthful inexperience rather than black magic, though has significantly avoided taking part in any Magma reunions despite regular invitations to do so.

One of the astonishing things about Vander is that through many incarnations of Magma and through many other projects – film music, children’s music, bands where he has played as merely a drummer – he is still refining and honing the visionary concept that possessed him back in ’69. Like Wagner, whose music was also hugely influential to him, everything is connected in a massive cycle.

And what’s more, Vander has actually spawned an entire genre. Zeuhl music – which means ‘cosmic music’ in Kobaïan – is a rich prog

Magma in 2014.



Mekaniik Destructiiv Kommandöh (1973) and *Köhntarkösz* (1974), both released via A&M.

sub-genre. Former Magma members who left or were booted out formed bands like Weidorje featuring keyboard player Patrick Gauthier and Bernard Paganotti, who replaced Jannick Top on bass. They paid a sort of homage to their former boss then disappeared without trace. Belgium’s Univers Zero have always been a sort of ‘brother’ band to Magma, as have France’s Art Zoyd.

Top himself formed The Utopic Sporadic Orchestra, who performed *De Futura*, the epic song that he composed for Magma’s 1976 album *Üdü Wüdü*. Current Zeuhl prime movers include Japan’s enigmatic Magma-influenced Koenji Hyakkei and the UK’s Guapo. Vander acknowledges the existence of these bands while never admitting that he’s listened to them.

As you have probably gathered, Vander is a bit of a riddle as befits any genius composer. Although he is hardly a recluse, separating truth from myth can be a tricky business because he doesn’t really give much away. He only really seems comfortable when discussing music and it is through the music that he speaks. Despite the fact that the meaning of the words are known only to Vander and to God, you can almost create your own story from the barrage of syllables. Like Coltrane or Stravinsky or Wagner, his music can raise you higher than the angels. But it can also take you on a swift tour of Hell.

Magma celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2019 and future plans may or may not include an 800-plus page book of philosophy and an orchestral version of *Theusz Hamtaahk*. Magma and Vander continue to perform and released the excellent *Zëss* last year.

Hopefully the universe is composing more cosmic music for Christian Vander to channel. ☸

Zëss is out now via Seventh Records. See www.magamusic.org for more.

THE PROG INTERVIEW

DAVE COUSINS

Every month, we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue, it's **Dave Cousins**. As a founder member of the Strawberry Hill Boys, he helped move the band through bluegrass and folk until they finally became international prog icons who could count Led Zeppelin among their fans. Now celebrating six decades in the business, the Strawbs leader chats about his journey from underground band to the household name that helped give Sandy Denny and Rick Wakeman their early breaks.

Words: Sid Smith

Having notched up 19 studio albums since Strawbs' 1969 self-titled debut, Dave Cousins has remained the one constant at the centre of the band throughout the 51 years that have followed, amid various shifts in musical directions and sometimes turbulent personnel changes. He turned 75 at the beginning of this year, yet the

prolific songwriter and vocalist intends to stay busy. "While I still enjoy it, I'll keep on doing it," he says.

In 2019, Strawbs celebrated their golden jubilee at a gala event in Lakewood, New Jersey. Backed by a 30-piece orchestra and a choir made up of staff members from New York's United Nations building, the gig covered their lengthy career from start to present day. Cousins recalls, "Tony Visconti, who'd worked

with us on our very first records, agreed to come and conduct. It was unbelievable to have Tony there and we did our very first single, *Oh, How She Changed*, with Dave Lambert singing and backed by the orchestra. We also had the choir sing an amazing rendition of *Lay Down* and they accompanied us on *We Have The Power* from our 2017 album, *The Ferryman's Curse*. That was extraordinary."

The three-day celebration, which included many of musicians who've either played live or recorded with Strawbs since they began, was a truly emotional occasion. "Strawbs are a family. You can never overlook that. And we all get on very well together. Even though [artists] left the band there was never really any hard feeling. Yes, there might have been aggravation at the time but by and large, we've all stuck together and looked after one another."

Whether it's touring on his own or with The Acoustic Strawbs alongside longtime members bassist Chas Cronk and guitarist Dave Lambert, 2020

“We'd been paying Rick Wakeman £25 a week and Yes offered him £100. Funnily enough, history repeated itself because we had Oliver, Rick's son, playing with us for a while and he left us to join Yes as well!”

Strawbs in 1973: Dave Lambert, Dave Cousins, Blue Weaver, Richard Hudson and John Ford.



looks like being another busy year for Cousins and Strawbs. When *Prog* caught up with Cousins at his home in Kent, he was still at the early stages of working on Strawbs' 20th studio album. "At the moment I've got ideas and a few scraps of paper with titles on them. I'm going down to my local pub, who've agreed to let me have the back room on an afternoon, where I can sit on my own and get on with the writing." Here Cousins looks back on his involvement in the music industry and some of the players he's met and worked with over a career that so far spans the best part of six decades.

You started out playing the folk circuit in the early 1960s.

Yes, though we were never a folk group as such. I was the

"While I still enjoy it,
I'll keep on doing it."
- Dave Cousins.





Absent friend: Sandy Denny with Dave Cousins and Tony Hooper at London's Marquee Club in 1966.

fastest banjo player around, Tony Hooper was the lead singer and we had a string bass player. But before that, we did a BBC audition which we passed and I started ringing up BBC producers trying to get us work. One of them returned our call and told us we were recording the next week. The show was broadcast in 1963 and we shared billing on Saturday Club with Chris Barber's Jazz Band and The Beatles. At the time I was also the cloakroom attendant at Eel Pie Island Jazz Club in Twickenham and Arthur Chisnall, who ran the club, heard us on the radio and asked if we'd like to do the intervals for a group he had coming in the next week. They were booked for the next six weeks and we got to play the intervals between their sets. They were called The Rolling Stones. No idea what happened to them!

A bit later you were a producer on a pop show for Danish radio. How did that happen?

Tom Browne, who was later a Radio 1 DJ, did an interview with me about the Strawberry Hill Boys and he helped set up a tour of Denmark. I got booked for a Danish TV show. Also on

there was The Who, promoting *I Can't Explain*, and I got chatting to them afterwards. Pete Townshend gave me his phone number and told me to give him a ring sometime. Anyway, Tom Browne had been asked by Danish radio to do a pop show from London called the *London News*. And he said to me, 'Well, I know nothing about pop music, will you produce it?' So I said, 'Yeah, okay.' He and I interviewed all sorts of people: David Bowie, Sandy Shaw, Marc Bolan, Mary Hopkin, Keith Emerson. We even interviewed Captain Beefheart on his first visit to England. We went up to his hotel off Oxford Street to interview him. He said, 'I can't do this interview without running water.' So he went into the toilet, put the tap on, came back in and then we talked. Of course, when we came to edit, it sounded as if he was having a pee throughout the interview!

How did you meet Sandy Denny?

I'd gone to The Troubadour in Earl's Court and there's Sandy Denny down there wearing a long white dress and a straw hat playing a Gibson Hummingbird singing the Gaelic song, *Fear a'*

Bhàta. I introduced myself after she came offstage and asked her if she wanted to join my group. 'What's the name?' she asked. 'Strawbs,' I told her, and she said, 'Yeah, okay.' It was as simple as that. [Laughs] I'm not exaggerating. It was in 1967. She was 20 at the time and living at home with her mum and dad. She joined us and we were booked to play in Denmark. We really got to know Sandy on the ferry from Newcastle to Aarhus where we sat up all night, rehearsing and drinking every bottle of beer that was on the ship. We got signed to Sonet Records, run by Karl-Emil Knudsen, and made a record in Copenhagen in an old cinema. We could only record during the day because people had to be let in to see the film in the evening. So we'd go off and play in Tivoli Gardens for a week singing with Sandy. It was the only time we performed on stage with her really. Sandy came back to England and, after three months, I still hadn't been able to get anybody in England interested in releasing it. By then Sandy went off and joined Fairport Convention, which I didn't mind. We were still the best of friends. She was an absolute icon.

And you were the first British act to sign to A&M Records, weren't you?

Yes. That was through Knudsen, who distributed A&M in Denmark. He played them the recordings with Sandy and although they were disappointed she wasn't with us anymore, Jerry Moss – the M of A&M – phoned me up to tell me they were excited to have us and wanted a single. We were in the studio with Gus Dudgeon as a producer, who shared his office with Tony Visconti. A&M had sent \$15,000 [£12,000], which at that time was a colossal amount of money, and it was all spent on that first record because Gus Dudgeon wanted to prove himself with orchestras and Christ knows what. So when they said they wanted another Strawbs

album we asked for more money and they told us that the cash they'd originally sent was to be spread across three albums! So we went from London back to Denmark but took Tony Visconti with us because Gus had buried my voice on the first album and so Tony Visconti produced [1970 Strawbs album] *Dragonfly*.

How did you hook up with Rick Wakeman?

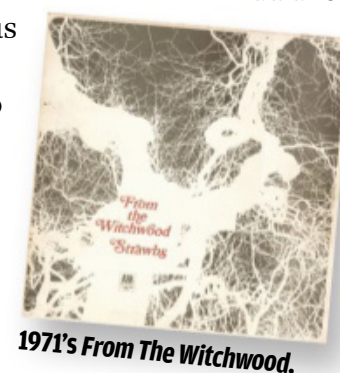
We'd been asked to do a session for the John Peel show and we wanted to do a piece called *The Battle* but we didn't have a keyboard player. Tony Visconti suggested he bring Rick along and it was great. We got on famously. When it came to *Dragonfly* we had him play on *The Vision Of The Lady Of The Lake*. I put his name on the sleeve notes and when it came out sent him a copy. He wrote back and said he was thrilled because that was the first time

he'd had his name on the back of an album sleeve. We met up and had a beer and I asked him to join the group. Our first gig with him would be in Paris a fortnight later but he said, 'Oh, I can't do that. I'm getting married.' So I asked him where he was going for the honeymoon. He said, 'Oh, we're not going on honeymoon because we can't afford one.' So I said, 'Well, I've got an idea...' [Laughs.] So he came to Paris with us and had his honeymoon there!

After *Dragonfly* your music shifted towards a more electric sound. Was that deliberate?

We'd been using acoustic bass but it just wasn't working for what we needed. At the time I had a folk club and then an arts lab in Hounslow and I'd booked Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera, which had guitarist Paul Brett who'd guested with us on *Dragonfly* and Richard Hudson and John Ford on drums and bass respectively. I thought they were great and invited them to join.

I still viewed us as a folk group and so the fact that Richard Hudson played percussion rather than a regular drum kit is what attracted me. It was only when





Chilling in the
Witchwood: Dave
Cousins in London,
August 1970.

we made [1971 album] *From The Witchwood* that we brought drums in for the first time but they were very much mixed down because I didn't want them to overwhelm the songs.

From The Witchwood has quite an eclectic mix of sounds and instruments, doesn't it?

Yes it does. On *A Glimpse Of Heaven* you've got multi-tracked voices to create a choir with Rick steaming in with a ferocious Hammond organ solo and me playing bluegrass banjo behind him. The title track, *Witchwood*, had me playing dulcimer and Rick

“

“Our first gig in the States was a week-long residency at the Whiskey A Go Go. Zeppelin would go flying out to wherever they playing that day and come back on their private jet to the Go Go and watch our last set. They did that two or three nights running.”

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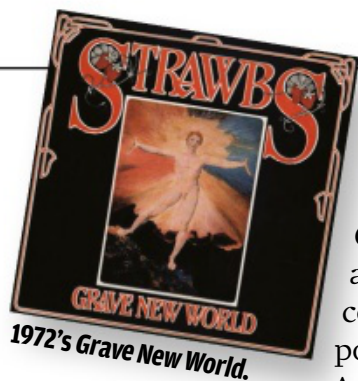
playing clarinet, which was his second instrument at college. *The Shepherd's Song* has that great Mellotron part as well as Rick's great synth solo. That was the first time we used a Mellotron and also in the studio was a Moog synthesiser, the really big one. Rick sat with Tony Visconti and they got a sort of piccolo trumpet sound which Rick overdubbed. I'd been influenced on that



song by *Alone Again Or* by Love. I adored that song and still do. So Rick dubbed that Moog on top of the strings.

You must have been really sorry to lose Rick to Yes.

Well of course, but we'd been paying Rick £25 a week and Yes offered him £100 so it was understandable really. Funnily enough, history repeated itself because we had Oliver, Rick's son,



1972's *Grave New World*.

thing. I was staggered. The William Blake painting [*The Dance Of Albion*, also known as *Glad Day*] on the cover is an immensely powerful picture as well. As for the middle picture I've got that hanging on my wall at home.

You had an unexpected hit single in the UK with *Part Of The Union*, which got to No.2 in 1973. Was that a blessing or a curse?

The song has been an albatross

much in my style. At the same time, Hud [Richard Hudson] and John [Ford] had recorded a demo of *Part Of The Union* and were going to put it out under the name of The Brothers. The publicity we got from the song at the time of the miners' strikes and the three-day week and so on, was colossal but the problem was we didn't come out and say whether we were left-wing or right-wing but kind of sat on the fence. I think, unfortunately, that clouded the judgment of us for a few people. We recorded a version of it which I wrote into it something that was far more left-wing but that wasn't released. I have that on a cassette still.

The album title, *Bursting At The Seams*, was very apt. Things in the band had become quite acrimonious, hadn't they?

Yeah. I was taken over to one side by our manager at the time who said, 'The band have decided to fire you, and we are going to keep you on as a solo artist and they're going to carry on as Strawbs.' I said, 'Over my dead body.' There was a bloodbath in Hollywood at the time where we were and so John and Richard went their separate way and had some success as Hudson Ford.

Your next album in 1973, *Hero And Heroine* is regarded as a classic, with John Hawken from the original Renaissance joining on keyboards.

When John came in he'd never touched a Mellotron or a synthesiser. 'What do I do

with this?' he said. But he was such a useful piano player with such a wonderful touch. I had first heard him on that very first Renaissance album [1969's *Renaissance*] back when I was producing my Danish radio show. *Hero And Heroine* was when we became a proper progressive rock band. It was probably our biggest album worldwide, especially in America. The most satisfying shows we did at the time were the double-header shows with King Crimson. Both bands liked one another's company. There was a sympathy



1974's *Hero And Heroine*.

“

“Hero And Heroine was when we became a proper progressive rock band. It was probably our biggest album worldwide, especially in America.”

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Strawbs recording in London in 1971. L-R: Dave Cousins, Tony Hooper, Rick Wakeman, John Ford and Richard Hudson.

playing with us for a while and he left us to join Yes as well!

1972's *Grave New World* had a grander, more dramatic feel to it and of course it had that fantastic triple fold-out sleeve which must have been very expensive to produce at the time.

Oh, the sleeve was immensely powerful. It was extraordinary. We'd become quite a significant band and so A&M didn't mind spending the money on it. We went from selling 5,000 copies of *From The Witchwood* to selling 98,000 in the UK with *Grave New World*. A&M did the artwork and we had no involvement, other than me writing the sleeve notes and choosing the bits of text from the Egyptian *Book Of The Dead* and the Tibetan book of the dead [*Bardo Thodol*] that were on the artwork. I had no idea what was going to go into the artwork until I saw the finished

round our necks since it came out in this country anyway. It was No.1 in Germany because it's an oom-pah song. In America, nobody had heard it. The first song we recorded for what became *Bursting At The Seams* was *Lay Down* and that was very



between the two sounds of the music that we were doing on *Hero And Heroine* and tracks like *The River* and *Down By The Sea* while King Crimson were doing a lot of *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* at the time.

Life on the road can take its toll in terms of relationships and personal health. How did you cope with it?

We weren't into drugs. We loved a good old drink, you know? Yes, we occasionally smoked a few joints, but you know, not coke or

Dave Cousins is strumming down the years.



anything like that. It's only when we met up with Led Zeppelin in Hollywood that I had coke with John Bonham, which was an extraordinary experience. He kept pushing my head down to the table, saying, 'More, more, more!' Our first gig in the States was a week-long residency at the Whiskey A Go Go. Zeppelin would go flying out to wherever they were playing that day and come back on their private jet to the Go Go and watch our last set. They did that two or three nights running. Our audience were astonished that Led Zeppelin were there watching us.

Your 1976 album, *Deep Cuts*, was given the deluxe reissue treatment last year. How you think it stands up?

It's probably the best-sounding Strawbs album of the lot but we were rushed into doing it. I didn't have any songs. I'd just sold

a cottage in Devon that I was about to move out of, so it had no furniture in it. I invited Chas [Cronk] to come down. We went down the pub first and then went back, sat on the floor with two guitars, and in less than five days we'd written six or seven songs for the album. It turned out to be more of a pop album due to the pressure of management saying we really needed a hit single.

Were you pleased by the reception that your 2017 album *The Ferryman's Curse* received?

Yes! It went into the prog rock album charts and I was thrilled. It wasn't easy to make that album. I had a terrible hernia and it made singing a lot of the songs incredibly painful. I was also suffering from kidney problems and in and out of the hospital a lot of the time. It was well received by fans and critics so that was great. Some of the

joy was taken from the album however because our producer, Chris Tsangarides [Colosseum II, Brand X] sadly died a month later, which really broke my heart.

What's the Strawbs album you would point to and say, 'This is what you need to listen to?'

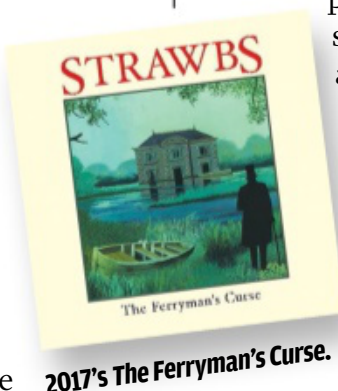
Grave New World. There's one thing that is wrong with the studio version, which we put right in the live recording we did at our 50th anniversary show, which we're going to release soon. We reprise *Grave New World* in a different key and suddenly the whole thing goes circular, comes to a resolution and makes sense. *Rolling Stone* magazine listed *Hero And Heroine* as one of the 50 greatest prog rock albums of all time. Universal owns the masters of the biggest albums on A&M. When Steven

Wilson started remixing all the classic albums by King Crimson, Yes, and others, I wrote to Universal and asked them if they could get Steven to remix it to 5.1 but they weren't keen on the idea. Yet 50 years on our albums are still selling. Twenty years ago we repaid our advance from A&M and have been receiving royalties ever since. They've totally recouped. Now, for argument's sake, say the royalty is 10 per cent and we've been paid over

£100,000, which means

Universal has grossed a million pounds over the last 20 years. Now, there aren't many bands from that era still selling those kinds of quantities.

Remastered editions of *Burning For You* and *Heartbreak Hill* (both pictured on the left) are released via Esoteric on May 29. For more, see www.strawbsweb.co.uk.



2017's *The Ferryman's Curse*.



New spins...

RUSH

It was the album that marked the end of one chapter and turned the prog icons into unlikely pop stars along the way. And now it gets the deluxe treatment it deserves.

Words: Johnny Sharp **Illustration:** Kevin February

There's a tendency among some prog fans to regard accessibility in their heroes' work with a certain contempt. Surely, this music wasn't meant to be remotely easy, right?

Inevitably, there were a few fans who reacted to Rush's first taste of UK singles chart success with that kind of dismay. The opening track of this seventh studio album, *The Spirit Of Radio* (a No.13 smash, pop pickers!) is short, snappy and irresistible from the kinetic buzz of that opening guitar figure, and it formed the first part of an opening double-whammy on this album that is a textbook example of how to make more concise prog compositions without dumbing down or smoothing off any jagged edges.

Freewill follows, and while managing to incorporate sections in 13/4, 15/4 and 12/8 time signatures, it still stands as one of Rush's catchier efforts thanks to a proudly anthemic chorus (in 3/4, since you ask).

Lyrical too, Neil Peart is on incisive form. After *Spirit...*'s tribute-cum-warning about the importance of artistic freedom and the threat from 'glittering prizes and endless compromises', on *Freewill*, his libertarian philosophy produces a succinct response to the strict moral codes of organised belief systems. Some choice lines are also directed at religious zealots such as 'blame is better to give than receive'. But all that stands apart as a three-minute song-within-a-song, playing out before what stands as the highlight for a lot of Rush fans. Lee's lithe Rickenbacker bass decides to wander outside to energetically stretch its legs, and as Peart follows, paradiddles at the ready, Lifeson catches up with a splenetic outburst of jazz-metal fret histrionics. Some songs are taken to the bridge — this one leaps right off it, before resurfacing with a final triumphant chorus. Right there we see the end of an era — and a decade — for Rush and the start of a new one.

While nine-minute album closer *Natural Science* is the kind of vintage song-cycle of

Permanent Waves

UMC/MERCURY



The luxury box is a handsome beast.



freewheeling but hard-hitting guitar rock that could have graced any previous Rush record, elsewhere there's clear evidence of new influences creeping in. The synths that form the hinge on which *Jacob's Ladder* turns midway through channel the futurescapes of Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream, even as a stuttering tempo starts to rebuild around them. The romantic paean of *Entre Nous* also features analogue synth and then *Different Strings* fades out with a distinctly bluesy Lifeson solo. It's a source of eternal puzzlement why it tails off so quickly.

They even escape unscathed on that stickiest of wickets for any rock band — dabbling in reggae. Admittedly it's only for a bar or two during the final passage of *The Spirit Of Radio*, as they playfully ape Simon & Garfunkel's *The Sound Of Silence* with

Peart's sardonic lines 'For the words of the profits/were written on the studio wall... concert hall.' But it would be a trick they'd return to on subsequent albums, reflecting a fast-evolving musical landscape where the old genre barriers were no longer the cast iron dividing lines they had once seemed.

Forty years on, it may seem a little, well, rich to hear this band going on to music that 'echoes to the sound... of salesmen' on an album that was reissued in this (very fine sounding) remastered form on vinyl only five years ago, and only offering unreleased live cuts by way of reward for loyal fans shelling out once again. However, the luxury box set version of this release really is a handsome beast. A glossy hardback book of sleeve notes with new alternative cover art, copies of Peart's handwritten lyrics, a reprinted original tour programme and a fair bit more besides, as befits a price tag that will set you back £130.

Of course, to 21st century ears this is an album that leaves you wanting more — the six original tracks last barely 35 minutes, That's a fraction of an afternoon's worth of music that modern prog acts spread over albums these days. So at least fans can settle in for an extra 80 minutes of live tracks from the 1980 tour that followed the album's release. The sound quality is hardly comparable to the HD live recordings one can get these days, but if you can live with that, there's a lot to like. There's an agreeably hysterical edge to Lee's vocal on older track *Beneath, Between And Beyond*, and *By-Tor And The Snowdog* sounds positively avant-garde at points as Lifeson whips up a fearsome maelstrom of metallic noise. The readings of songs from this album also have an extra urgency, not least a feisty, emotive take on *The Spirit Of Radio* that pretty much defines the phrase "once more with feeling" and benefits from a real, life-affirming roar after the words "concert hall".

Rush, and prog, had arrived in the 1980s. And it still sounds pretty damn good at the start of the 2020s.



CALIGULA'S HORSE

Rise Radiant INSIDE OUT MUSIC

Brisbane proggers in their finest fettle yet.



Caligula's Horse usually find themselves flying under the progressive metal banner, but their fifth album suggests that tag may no longer be broad enough to describe their developing sound. There are tracks on *Rise Radiant* that certainly fit the bill, with dense guitar riffs and headbanging grooves – *Valkyrie* is one fine example – but they join Leprous and Haken in refusing to be bound by prog metal's proclivity towards musical machismo and any need to

They refuse to be bound by prog metal's musical machismo.

indulge in virtuosity for its own sake. Here, the quintet prove admirably that they're willing and able to explore subtlety and introspection. There are moments of quiet beauty, found in the elegance of *Autumn* and *Resonate*, both of which allow vocalist Jim Grey to display his range and control, using his upper register and vibrato to emotive effect.

Unlike a lot of contemporary albums, there's a broad expanse of dynamics here. The mix hasn't all been compressed into one narrow bandwidth, so when it's quiet, it's really quiet and you have to give yourself over to the music in these moments or risk missing all of the shades of colour in the arrangements.

Similarly, the band know how to build drama into a song, holding back on the moment of release so that, when a track like *The Tempest* reaches its full crescendo, the impact is exponentially magnified. *The Ascent*, the album's big, heavyweight prog tune, can be swaggeringly heavy when the two guitars of Sam Vallen and Adrian Goleby lock in with Josh Griffin's punchy drumming to create salvos of syncopated riffage, but that can all fall away when the band switches gear.

Caligula's Horse are always sensitive to the vocals, leaving plenty of room for Jim Grey when he wants to bring his delivery down to a whisper. While he can belt it out as the situation dictates, Grey never has to fight for space among the instruments. In an era of death metal growls and post-hardcore screams, Grey is a welcome reminder of the visceral power of a great set of pipes upfront.

Rise Radiant doesn't venture out as far as Leprous' *Pitfalls*, and the Aussies seemingly don't seem to share the Norwegians' enthusiasm for R&B and EDM influences, although *Resonate* touches on that territory, with warm washes of synth and poppy, dance-friendly drum sounds. *Slow Violence* has a serpentine guitar lick and dark mood that recalls Tool, and *Oceanrise* is a highlight, driven by a pulsing riff that grows in urgency and a superb performance from Grey. *Rise Radiant* is the best yet from Caligula's Horse, a triumph of passion and performance.

DAVID WEST

THE BLOODY MALLARD

Realm ONSLAUGHT MUSIC

Interesting shapes, smartly assembled.

The Bloody Mallard are the brainchild of guitarist Tom Walding, veteran of Camden scenesters Monsters In The Attic and punk metal shouters Midwich Cuckoos. His latest project is a more considered affair, and their debut album *Realm* is the culmination of much experimentation, with slivers of songs being corralled into a cohesive, compelling whole.

It's by no means perfect: the recording is somewhat subdued, and the guitars don't crush quite as mercilessly as they might on the occasions when doing so could be advantageous. But The Bloody Mallard



have turned the fact that they're not beholden to a singer to their advantage, and *Realm* is packed full of unexpected twists. They use tension and crescendo rather than race towards a climax, and this makes the eventual summit all the more triumphant.

With the exception of *Ceremonious Synapses (I)* – which starts with what could be a Brian May riff – all the songs start quietly and slowly unfurl. Opener *Haemoglobin* is the standout, 14 minutes that unwind from deftly picked acoustic introduction via a series of thudding riffs. Fans of Russian Circles will find much to enjoy here. **FL**

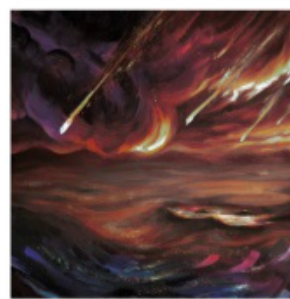
COLDBONES

The Cataclysm DUNK! RECORDS

Strong second LP from Kent post-rockers.

The concept of *The Cataclysm* is alarmingly on the nose at this particular point in time. It's a record about the end of the world, with two fictional narratives. The A-side is about a flood, while the B-side centres around the world burning – hinted at by the artwork. At its best, the record has some of the heft of a good metallic post-rock band, and the thickest riffs veer close to Tool territory.

Throughout the album there are diversions into progressive metal, though the percussive chugs sound more 80s or 90s than modern in their execution. *The Cataclysm* is slightly



held back by a lack of dynamics however – it's largely 'stop' or 'go' and the drum tracks feel very tight on the grid, without the organic timing and beat changes needed to carry longer instrumental sections. While Coldbones are good at sounding

massive for a three-piece, this album is tied to their live shape of just guitar, bass and drums.

The Cataclysm is at its best when extra synth layers and timbres are added that, particularly on *Hinterlands* and *Extinct*. It's a strong, timely record, but Coldbones could do more with these recorded iterations of their songs. **AL**

COYOTE MAN

Precognition COYOTE MAN RECORDS

Heavyweight noise taking aim at the state of modern America.

According to Native American legend, the Coyote Man was the east coast's deadliest hunter of assassins during the 18th century, infamous for slaughtering one hapless victim with his bare hands.

Stopping short of inflicting physical harm, Chicago's Coyote Man unleash a formidable onslaught on their second album. Between them, guitarist-bassist Augie Portugal and drummer Ian Wheeler whip up tumultuous waves of guitar, pummeling beats and sparking sheet metal gauze, heralded by *Perilous*, their strident, scathing single aimed at their home country's



laughable political shenanigans.

The stoner riffage of *Remnants* and *Death Before Dishonour* is bolstered by keyboard ectoplasm and complex counter-riffs, while *The Unseen Hand* is their idea of a ballad with soaring cliff-

top guitar and piano interlude.

The strongest affirmation of Coyote Man's potential comes on epic closer *Apocalyptic Love*, which evolves from thunderous canyon-rattling bombast to an astonishing giant-killer coda. *Precognition* may be instrumental but it still rages as a bludgeoning comment on America today. **KN**

LOUISE PATRICIA CRANE

Deep Blue PECULIAR DOLL

The new queen of psychedelic prog-pop has arrived.

Best known as one of The Eden House's revolving cabal of vocalists, Louise Patricia Crane has taken the slow, scenic route to launching a solo career. Supported by a cast that includes Ian Anderson, Jakko Jakszyk and Danny Thompson, *Deep Blue* is a beautifully crafted and characterful affair that firmly establishes its creator's identity while never coalescing around one dominant musical idea.

Recent single *Deity* is a lush, hypnotic riot of colour, Crane's sonorous alto buoyed by twinkling, Cocteau Twins jangle and swirling, shimmering chords. *Snake Oil* is one of several exuberantly



proggy moments, Anderson's flute blending with wave after wave of crescendos, sky-scorching lead breaks and muscular percussion straight from the Peter Gabriel handbook.

Crane particularly relishes a dark ballad, and both *Painted World* and the

title track are stunning; a dash of celtic folk informing the former, the latter awash with mournful strings.

Meanwhile, the wild, amorphous *Ophelia* conjures a world where Kate Bush forms a shoegaze band and jams with that bloke from Jethro Tull. Unique, immersive and captivating, this is an exceptional debut. **DL**

DERANGE

Senses (Part Two) SELF-RELEASED

Rising London tech-metallers return for round two.

Someone stumbling across a band called Derange and expecting bulging-eyed, wild avant-garde contortion might be a little disappointed. But ignore the name and *Senses (Part Two)* emerges as an impressive, left-field listen.

At five songs long, and with no tracks breaking the five-minute mark, the London quintet's new EP - the second part of a double-header - is deliberately concise. High-octane opener *The Hunted* sets the pace keenly with melodic metal drama, while *Take It All* nods to balladry but tugs at the right moments with well-placed feints.



Having performed at Tech Fest and toured with contemporaries Valis Ablaze, Derange's prog credentials shine through in the shape of sharply-pointed, djent-friendly metal chops and a penchant for curiously veering off the trodden path, pinpoint

radio-friendly hooks floating on top of Tesseract-esque bite. Extra brownie points too for formidable vocalist Cat Pereira, who flits between masterful melody-making and throat-wrenching screams with nonchalant ease and helps to make Derange shine that little bit brighter than many of their techy peers. **CC**

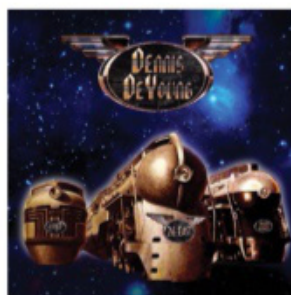
DENNIS DeYOUNG

26 East: Volume 1 FRONTIERS MUSIC

First instalment of pomp rock icon's two-part swan song.

Looking like a well-heeled accountant who liked to party hard at the weekends, and with an inimitable voice, original Styx vocalist Dennis DeYoung cut a swathe through the pomp and prog scenes of the 70s and 80s. For many fans of the Chicago legends - especially those whose inner child lived to sing the high parts on *Babe* and *The Best Of Times* in the shower - something died inside when he finally left the band in 1999.

Though this is billed as his penultimate album, DeYoung, with the help of ex-Survivor man Jim Peterik, sounds freshly minted still, his voice a



clearly struck bell. Excellent in the poppy opener *East Of Midnight*, a nod to his childhood neighbourhood in Chicago where Styx took their formative steps, and then suitably OTT in the sprawling *A Kingdom Ablaze*, probably the most ambitious song on the

record. With a gentle build ending in a roar, it sounds like something Jim Steinman wishes he'd written.

His conceptual bent was said to be the thing that somehow separated him from Styx, but when he flexes his musical muscle like this, it's hard not to stand back and admire DeYoung and his band as they light up the room. **PW**

CHIMPAN A

The Empathy Machine TIGERMOTH RECORDS

Magenta man's side-project re-emerges from deep storage.



Alongside Robert Reed's more high-profile involvement in Magenta and the Sanctuary project, he can also boast being a founder member of Chimpan A. It's understandable if that name doesn't ring a bell - their sole album to date came out back in 2006. Thankfully, Reed and writing partner Steve Balsamo have spent the intervening 14 years cultivating a collection of tunes that have taken the original premise of the project and refined it.



They've taken the project's original premise and refined it.



In the guise of Chimpan A, Reed and Balsamo have tried to move away from more traditional rock band or singer-songwriter structure. Instead, they've built compositions around spacious synth chords and arpeggios, drum machine loops and electronic dance music atmospherics. There are occasional excursions into more acoustic instrumentation - *Scream* has acoustic guitar and upright bass alongside old school keyboard sounds delivering a laid-back acid-jazz vibe which then moves into more intense territory with a John Bonham-esque drum groove - but musically the album is mainly about sounds created and juggled "in the box".

The piano intro to first track *The World Through My Eyes* may be vaguely reminiscent of *The Lambs Lies Down On Broadway's* opening bars but that's deceptive. Instead of morphing into an odd-time, classic prog anthem, it ushers in a bed of dramatic, slow paced EDM that frames the spoken word intonation of Tony Dallas. Although not necessarily a concept album per se, it's interesting to note a return to Dallas' monologue in the final track *Jack*.

It's So Real is an interesting juxtaposition of Massive Attack tropes and a contemporary R&B ballad, but it also underlines the thoughtful use of different voices across the album, providing shape and contrast. Reed's Magenta bandmate Christina Booth's work is exquisite - her fragile yet warm performance on *Stars* alone justifies her inclusion. Balsamo is no slouch in the vocal department though: his characterful, emotive tones shine on *The Calling*.

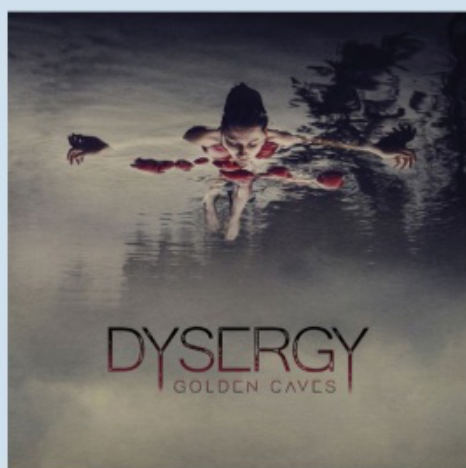
Many of these songs work as aural snapshots of aspects of 21st century humanity. The unhurried and unforced trip-hop rhythms and trance-like ambience on *The World Through My Eyes* or even *The Speed Of Love* offer immersion in the soundscapes on here, and shrewdly question our lives and relationships with the modern world. It's soulful music that invites deep introspection and creates expansive pools of sound that offer the listener the chance to choose to either float along in their currents or be slowly drawn down into their darker depths. Let's hope that it won't take another 14 years to release a follow-up.

GARY MACKENZIE

GOLDEN CAVES

Dysergy SUBURBAN MUSIC GROUP

New Dutch masters weave exquisitely fervent tapestries.



With their debut album, 2017's *Collision*, Golden Caves situated themselves among the most promising acts in modern progressive music. By mixing the atmospheric grace of Radiohead, The Pineapple Thief and Iamthemorning with the hardened edge of District 97 and Porcupine Tree, the Netherlands quintet made an irresistible impression. Three years on, they return with *Dysergy*, an even more unified and touching second helping that centres on internal turmoil and external withdrawal.

Solidifies their status as a passionate, and capable group.

The band – drummer Erik Stein, keyboardist Elise Polman, guitarist Alex Ouwehand, bassist Tim Wensink, and singer Romy Ouwerkerk – display feisty empowerment and tasteful emotion from the onset. *Chromosome* kicks things off with moody chants before giving way to Zeppelin-esque rhythms, razor-sharp guitar riffs, and operatic outcries, yielding a formula that's as dynamic as it is catchy. In particular, Ouwerkerk (who wrote all of the LP's lyrics) possesses great range, texture, and power from start to finish. Near the end, her angelic bridge – 'Cut me open/Cut it all out/Cut inclusion/Fix me' – merges with punchy musicianship for an immensely arresting conclusion.

The rest of *Dysergy* sustains that quality. For instance, the almost hip-hop attitude and sparsity of *Dignity*'s verses make for a great juxtaposition to the richness of its chorus. In contrast, the track *Hide & Seek* offers piercing harmonies and interlocking voices as it navigates gripping temperamental shifts, whereas *Temperature* features mesmeric syncopation and various progressive metal leanings. Later on, the purposefully repetitious *Happy Dreams* places some of the record's most infectious melodies within a delightful hodgepodge of digital beats, classy piano work, and other flashy arrangements. In fact, it feels like multiple songs in one, which is testament to how well Golden Caves can combine seemingly disparate components. Beyond that, *Little Lonely* is densely packed with instrumental and vocal poignancy, and closer *Somehow* leaves you in a state of profound, sundry, and epic introspection.

Dysergy solidifies Golden Caves' status as a striving, passionate, and capable group. True, their sound isn't especially revolutionary or fresh, but the myriad influences and techniques on display are nonetheless highly enjoyable. From a performance and lyrical standpoint, Ouwerkerk is commanding and versatile, and the rest of the band rise to the same level thanks to their determined and flexible musical prowess. They may still be up-and-comers, but Golden Caves deserve as much of the limelight as they can get.

JORDAN BLUM

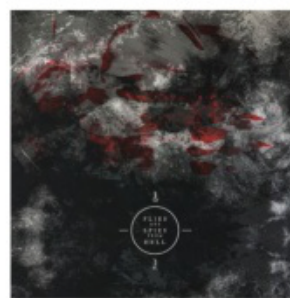
FLIES ARE SPIES FROM HELL

Final Quiet FIELD RECORDS

Dark, yet engaging post-rock instrumentals.

If you enjoy Pelican and Russian Circles, then *Final Quiet* should be mandatory listening. These Londoners, Flies Are Spies From Hell, match elegant passages of piano oriented sparseness with occasional moments of bleakness. And while it may seem a little foreboding, there's a genuine beauty here, and this makes it all seem perversely uplifting, because the band do have respect for the use of melody as well as an understanding of how to build tension.

A magnificently articulate musical passage led by some deceptively simple piano, *Nearly Saw The Light* is a near-10-minute metaphorical trip through



both urban decay and pastoral peace. The track *Last Hour* builds from a gentle introduction to an orchestral crescendo, whereas *Float Apart* serves as a brief meandering interlude, before *Always Bereaved* evokes Joe Meek in the way it complements

pop tunefulness with underlying complexity. These five musicians connect disparate ideas with such ease that the album flows with seemingly little effort. It concludes with the misty *Lost By Morning* which fades out on a solitary, echoing piano note. An impressively understated conclusion to an excellent work. **MD**

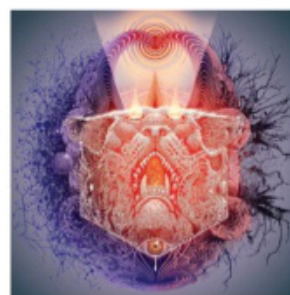
FORMING THE VOID

Reverie RIPPLE MUSIC

Stoner explorers expand their overdriven vision.

Depending on how much of your stash you've hoovered up, it can be tricky to distinguish one prog-tinged stoner rock band from another. Thankfully, it's a resilient subgenre and bands like Forming The Void can hardly fail to rise majestically to the top.

Reverie builds on the mesmerising, somnambulant psychedelia of 2018's *Rift*, taking the Louisiana quartet ever further away from cliché in the process. Thunderous opener *Sage* and the bullish *Manifest* deliver plenty of the souped-up fuzz that genre purists demand, but it's the trippy meandering and maxed-



out lysergic scree of *Trace The Omen* and the doomy *Satellite* that showcase a more dynamic side.

At times, Forming The Void generate such an overpowering din that it's more like listening to the hostile space rock of Loop than the cheery desert-

punk of Fu Manchu, as frontman James Marshall's deadpan bellow floats across undulating waves of distortion and reverb. Meanwhile, melancholy oozes from every pore of glacial closer *The Ending Cometh*, before the mother of all guitar freak-outs sends what remains of your earthly brain off into the cosmos. Don't do drugs, kids. Do riffs. **DL**

GLASS HAMMER

Dreaming City SOUND RESOURCES/ARION RECORDS

Tennessee veterans ride the synthwave.

Eighteen albums in and Glass Hammer continue to indulge their enthusiasm for concept albums with *Dreaming City*. This time they've gone for a swords and sorcery romp about a warrior called Skallagrim facing an evil wizard. So far, so Michael Moorcock.

Musically, though, bandleaders Steve Babb and Fred Schendel have updated their neo-prog sound with new wave and synthwave influences. These come to the fore in three instrumental interludes, although the synth-led tracks work better as atmospheric than standalone compositions. The songwriting is strongest when Glass



Hammer sound like a full band rather than a John Carpenter movie score, but it's best consumed whole rather than piecemeal. The title track includes a great wah-wah guitar solo, and *This Lonely World* has a laid back 80s pop vibe that leans towards Tears For

Fears, although Babb can't quite match Roland Orzabal's pipes. That said, there's plenty here to scratch your prog itch – closer *Watchman On The Walls* is a clear nod towards vintage Rush. While *Dreaming City* is not as immediately appealing as 2018's *Chrononaut*, it's refreshing to hear Glass Hammer moving into new sonic territory. **DW**

GOLD KEY

Panic Machine VENN RECORDS

Timely explorations of human fears and struggles.

In a move weirdly appropriate for our times, Watford's Gold Key sequestered themselves in perfect isolation in north Wales for this follow-up to 2017's debut, *Hello, Phantom*. The resulting intense, visceral alt-rock ride shifts slightly from the more artful leanings of the debut into a musical landscape far more Green Day and Stereophonics than Genesis and Steven Wilson.

Yet this is greater than a collection of raw and noisy riffs. There's real atmospheric tension before opener *Sweet Darkness* explodes into life, channelling the likes of Foo Fighters



and Manic Street Preachers, while *Don't Sleep* sees spiky guitar redolent of King Crimson's *Red* quickly escalating into an insistent, desperate portrait of insomnia. At the other end of the scale is *Enceladus*: a chest beating pop rock classic in the making.

While this all feels unquestionably like a band exercising a collective voice and a live approach to recording has certainly added a real edge, it's difficult not to recognise frontman Steve Sears' role in making the whole thing sound so consistently impactful and for imbuing every track here with an unerring emotional punch. **GM**

HAWKLORDS

Alive HAWKLORDS

First official live album since their 2008 reboot, includes Hawkwind classics.

Recorded live in Chester on last year's Generations tour, and including a guest appearance from Hawkwind's former Lord Of Misrule Nik Turner, *Alive* is impressive evidence of just what a vital live band Hawklords are.

Their legacy connection to Hawkwind will always be a selling point, but it certainly isn't the only one, as the catchy, aggro rock of opening number *We Are One* makes plain - Jerry Richards is in fine voice and there's some invigorating synth work from 'Dead Fred' Reeves. In fact, Reeves makes his presence felt throughout - on



the steel-plated version of Robert Calvert's *The Aerospaceage Inferno* he moves from crazed twiddling à la Tim Blake to jazzy piano runs in the dub breakdown.

Isle Of The Dead and *One Way Trip* demonstrate that Hawklords have

become a premier space rock band by embracing melody as well as thrust, while *Circus Freaks* positively swaggers. A frail-sounding Turner steps up for *Master Of The Universe* and *Brainstorm* but is bolstered by the rest of the band - the crunching take of the former is especially great, air raid siren and all. **JB**

THE HIRSCH EFFEKT

Kollaps LONG BRANCH

Teutonic trio hit on unlikely prog/metalcore crossover.

The Hirsch Effekt broke into the German charts with their last album, the German-language *Eskapist*, but reaching non-German speaking audiences may still prove challenging.

The Hannover trio's abrasive sound draws upon metalcore, post-hardcore and math-rock, and although there are sung passages, most of the vocals are screamed which will likely be a turn-off for many prog fans. They're certainly willing to shift gears and styles at any moment - *Noja* features a spoken, semi-rapped section that unexpectedly recalls 80s Austrian synth-pop star Falco among the



aggressive riffing and screaming. Many of the tracks are punctuated by staccato bursts of speed when everything locks together to punch out a frantic rhythmic phrase.

Domstol briefly eases off the intensity with a gentler opening passage, but it's

not long before the spitfire screams return, reminiscent of Mike Patton at his most unhinged in his work with Tomahawk or perhaps Dead Cross. In *Agera* and *Kris* they move closer to Arcane Roots territory, letting the melodies come to the fore but, overall, this feels like an angry - and unlikely - prog-metalcore hybrid. **DW**

ART-ROCK

Chris Roberts samples the new releases on the prog/rock boundary.



For years he's brooded introspectively in a fox(x)hole of minimalist electronica, but on the brashly beautiful surprise that is *Howl* (Metamatic), **John Foxx And The Maths** will thrill long-time Foxxaholics. It's wish fulfilment time for those who craved one more album in the early, pre-Midge, Ultravox! vein. With guitarist Robin Simon joining the equation, The Maths mutate into a glittering fusion of *Systems Of Romance* and *Scary Monsters*, dovetailing drama and dynamism. Even the imagery - ghosts, 70s New York, clowns and fools, strange beauty - feels like a happily haunted hurrah from the band who were too late for glam but too early for punk, while Foxx's icy-fire vocals sound timeless and 10 feet tall. A dazzling resurgence from one of the best minds of his generation.

Several generations have loved songs by **Graham Gouldman**, from hits by The Yardbirds and Hollies through his 10cc imperial phase and beyond. *Modesty Forbids* (Lojinx)

is his first solo album in eight years. Having toured the States of late with The All Starr Band, he's got Ringo guesting on *Standing Next To You*, essentially a fan letter to The Beatles. There are love songs, imaginary movie scores, dashes of blues and gospel and even a fling of swing on a set which shows the veteran craftsman is still

a master of the elegant middle eight.

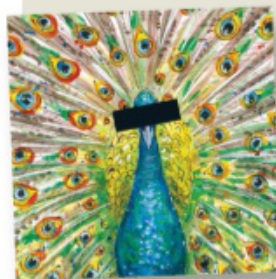
Absurdly talented singer-musician **Joan As Police Woman** goes generation-hopping on her second covers album, named - one guess - *Covers Two* (Sweet Police/PIAS). *Covers* is a reductive term for the way she fillets her favourites, breathing fresh life into their lungs. From Prince's *Kiss* to The Strokes' *Under Control*, from Blur to Neil Young, she sculpts their spines to her own imaginings, not least during her transcendent take on Talk Talk's *Life's What You Make It*.

Near-silence is golden on the sparse yet loquacious ambient murmurings of **Ed Clarke** on *Landscape* (House Splendid) and of **Jo David Meyer Lysne & Mats Eilertsen** on *Kroksjo* (Hubro). Clarke, who's worked with Van der Graaf Generator and Sakamoto, constructs pastoral soundscapes; the Norwegian pair are an art statement next to whom Eno would seem a rampaging wildebeest.

There's a hint of the vocal delicacy of Marjana Semkina or Amy Birks on the fourth **Braids** album *Shadow Offering* (Secret City), wherein

Raphaelle Standell-Preston's Montreal band (acclaimed in Canada) work up a dreamy candour. Its polar opposites - flash, sparkle, kinkiness and astrology - enliven fashionista **Daphne Guinness'** *Revelations* (Absolute), produced

by Tony Visconti, which suggests Gainsbourg hitting Studio 54: a fillip in fraught times.





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INVENTIONS

A Continuous Portrait TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

Eccentric, nostalgic ambient pop record from post-rock overachievers.

A *Continuous Portrait* is the third album from Inventions, a duo comprised of Mark T Smith from Explosions In The Sky and Matthew Cooper of Eluvium. As you'd expect from their day jobs in one of the biggest post-rock bands in the world and as a cult ambient artist, their collaborative output is in the broad wheelhouse of ambient electronica.

This nine-track album was recorded in a beach house on the Pacific Coast, and, without wanting to over-analyse, that makes perfect sense as musically it's akin to a washed-out Polaroid of a long distance beach visit. The overall



sound of the record sits somewhere between the more experimental, reverb-drenched end of dream pop – exemplified perfectly by the opening one-two of *Hints And Omens* and *Calico* – and the kind of avant-garde, ambient instrumentals one might

expect of an artist like Dustin Wong. At its best, the nostalgic tug of *Outlook For The Future* and *The Warmer The Welcome* carries an air of Fennesz, albeit without his trademark washes of noise and glitches. There's something more playful, if not more pop, about *A Continuous Portrait* that makes it hard to describe. **AL**

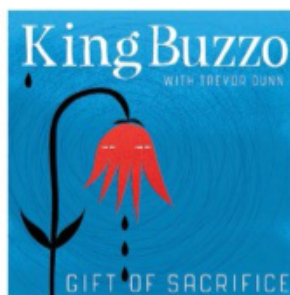
KING BUZZO WITH TREVOR DUNN

Gift Of Sacrifice IPECAC

Melvins mainman meets Mr Bungle bassist. As unsettling as you'd expect.

For those who know Buzz Osborne through his Melvins output and Trevor Dunn from Mr Bungle, the one thing they'll expect is the unexpected. And that's what's on offer here.

While short instrumental passage *Mental Vomit* leads this off with a tribal inflection, as soon as *Housing, Luxury, Energy* takes over the listener knows this is gonna be just a tad crazy. Osborne barks and yelps, butting his throat up against a psychedelic wash. *I'm Glad I Could Help Out* has the hallmarks of an acoustic gothic excursion, albeit with a enhanced sense of improvisation. And *Delayed Clarity*



boasts a menacing vocal mood, enhanced by the string driven instrumentation, *Science In Modern America* is chilling, in its use of simple rhythms to accentuate a sense of warning. And *Mock She* brings to mind Captain Beefheart in a vivid,

mind-altering state. *Acoustic Junkie* concludes this dissertation in a maze of confused backwards messages and effects. It's the perfect way to end an album that's equally unsettling and satisfying. The best thing to do is simply lose yourself in the peculiarities of two eccentric minds locked together on an unpredictable journey. **MD**

LESOIR

Mosaic GLASSVILLE RECORDS

Melancholic majesty from Holland.

Dutch quintet Lesoir came to the UK to record their fifth release *Mosaic* with Muse producers John Cornfield and Paul Reeve, and together they've crafted an album of beautifully refined neo-prog.

Mosaic feels like the natural evolution of 2017's *Latitude*, but it's simply stronger all around. Singer Maartje Meessen has a similar timbre to Magenta's Christina Booth, possessing a warm, inviting tone yet with the dramatic range to bring some venom to *Is This It*. The songwriting matches the quality of the production, from the sweeping lift of *Somebody Like You* to



the lush arrangement of *It's Never Quiet*, complete with Meessen playing the flute. *Dystopia* brings in some Pink Floyd stylings with outstanding, Gilmour-esque guitar work from Ingo Dassen which is married to a warning about the dangers of authoritarianism. Roger

Waters would surely approve.

There's a delicate touch to the introspective *Measure Of Things* while the album's closer, *Two Faces* is all melancholic moods and majestic dramatic swells. There's not a dud track here. If this doesn't win Lesoir a place in the hearts of prog fans, then frankly they're just being difficult. **DW**

KOYO

You Said It 88 WATT

Yorkshire quintet's assured second outing.



It's often remarked upon, as if it were a bad thing, that artists take longer to make records than they did in the 60s and 70s. Koyo may have taken their time following up their 2017 debut *Lost In The Kingdom*, but that seems a wise move. Not just because the way things are looking in the world, we'll have more time to devote to listening to it. No, it's also because they've spent time working on expanding their artistic horizons and broadening their sonic palette.



They've worked on expanding their artistic horizons.



All of which could have led the Leeds outfit to a common second-album trap of over-indulging and over-polishing at the expense of the raw but instinctive noise that won them so many fans in the first place. No such worries, as much of this album has an immediacy and a visceral impact that will turn your head on first listen. *Circles* is a classic example, grabbing the attention with a cavernous guitar motif before Huw Edwards' angst-wracked vocal digs further under your skin.

Their sound has got bigger and bolder since *Lost In The Kingdom*. That was hinted at by their live studio set *Live At RAK* earlier this year, where they attempted to remind us of their output to date while showing us how well they'd matured with an intense, pin-you-to-the-back-wall quality to readings of their older material.

This new sonic assault is something that we look forward to experiencing live when they, like the rest of rock'n'roll humanity, finally get to play the tour dates that would have been happening around now if a surreal twist of global pandemic-related fate hadn't got in the way. Indeed, the anxious open chords and noise banks of *Out Of Control*, are distinctly shoegazey in texture, but with added urgency compared to the fey, faintly diffident approach of those musical forebears. At certain points *Surrounded* even resembles Ride covering the Foo Fighters, imbued with the latter's extra punk rock heft. It's never predictable, though, thanks to the proggy instincts that inform the uneasy time-signatures of *Obelisk* and the mood swings that initially give *Ostracised* an ebullient, almost funky bassline and antsy rhythm, before gnarly guitar stabs and a dreamy vocal evoke Tame Impala having a paranoia attack.

The emotional resonance of this record is one of its strongest suits, epitomised by the heartbroken turmoil that informs the eight-minute album closer *Against All Odds*, a fragile lament that gradually winds itself up into swirling space rock despair. Yet in the middle of the album is a breathtaking intermission in the aquatic ambient electronica of *Murmur*, and if that's a sign of uncharted territory Koyo might explore in future, we patiently await their next step.

JOHNNY SHARP



MARTIN GRECH

Hush Mortal Core VIA PATREON

Long-lost art-rock maverick returns to the fray.



The coronavirus pandemic has few upsides, but forcing the hand of one of modern music's great enigmas is among them. *Hush Mortal Core* is Martin Grech's first proper album in 13 years: a work of sometimes startling, sometimes dislocated brilliance that provides a welcome distraction from the world outside the window.



A work of sometimes startling, sometimes dislocated brilliance.



Some backstory: between 2002 and 2007, this one time wunderkind released three albums whose unconventional greatness was in inverse proportion to the reception they received from the public. Following 2007's self-released *March Of The Lonely*, he stepped back from a spotlight that had virtually dimmed to darkness. It seemed that Martin Grech wasn't equipped for the music industry. Or maybe the music industry wasn't equipped for Martin Grech. Thirteen years on comes this. While Grech hasn't been completely lost in the wilderness — he's released music as Meatsuit and Lionface, as well as collaborating with Tesseract on their 2015 album *Polaris* — his sudden reappearance as a solo artist is unexpected, not least because he's been sitting on *Hush Mortal Core* for the last four years, waiting for a record label to bite. It was the Covid-19 outbreak that eventually forced him to finally put it out there via Patreon. Every cloud, etc.

Hush Mortal Core arrives like a radio transmission from a distant star, and not just in terms of time-lag. It's a deeply mysterious record — not unapproachable, but certainly unknowable, at least initially. There's nothing close to a chorus here. Instead, songs shift and change shape. Opening track *Maelstrom Spark* erupts from stark piano chords into a big, billowing cloud of noise that sounds like a universe coming into being. The interwoven network of acoustic guitars that ushers in *Auras Awol* are suddenly blindsided by grinding riffs. *Nymphs* is a sensual hymnal that hovers several feet above the ground, *Into The Sun* is prog metal dispensed of its clichés, and *Ecstasy Astral Melancholia* feels like rushing through deep space. In lesser hands it could be disorientating, but Grech turns it into a kaleidoscope where moods and shadows replace shapes and colours.

There's apparently a concept underpinning it all, though it's not clear what: it appears to be a journey from birth to death (the fact that the final track is called *Death* is a big clue). But the real spine running through this is Grech himself: his voice may shift from crystalline croon to distorted snarl, his music may cycle through styles and atmospheres, but his unwillingness to squeeze himself into any box remains constant. Thirteen years is a long time away, but the wait has been worth it.

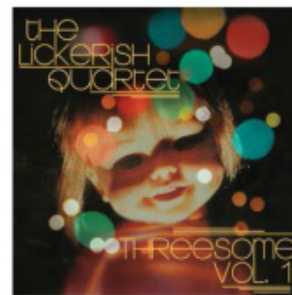
DAVE EVERLEY

THE LICKERISH QUARTET

Threesome Vol. 1 LOGIC

Jellyfish graduates revive 70s sheen.

There's a sting in the tentacle of the Jellyfish story. Three members of the 90s power-pop band reunite to radiate this four-track EP, the first in a planned triptych. Roger Manning Jr, Tim Smith and Eric Dover have played (separately) with everyone from Beck to Alice Cooper since, but one can sense the sheer fun they're having here as, perfect harmonies intact, they rattle through an infectiously vibrant flurry of art-pop tropes. Named after a 1970 Italian "erotic" film, they chuck in every 70s-spawned trick in the book, and as you grin ear to ear you'll know resistance is futile.



From the opening bars of *Fadoodle*, which simultaneously pilfer Roxy Music's *Virginia Plain* and Sailor's *A Glass Of Champagne*, you can guess the reference points to come: 10cc, ELO, Queen, Crowded House and, if you want to get modern (ish),

The Feeling (especially on *Bluebird's Blues*) and Lemon Twigs. *There Is A Magic* drafts in blue-eyed soul, while high-as-a-kite six-minutes-plus finale *Lighthouse Spaceship* is on a mission to convince you that the apex of rock history was Pilot and Sad Cafe. It's so lit up with enthusiasm and effervescence that you won't want to argue. **CR**

MOOD TAEG

Exophora HAPPY ROBOTS

Instrumental kosmische grooves aplenty.

A sideshoot of the Mood Taeg Kollektiv — a community of like-minded musicians, painters, DJs and filmmakers — Mood Taeg is a nebulous project split between Düsseldorf and Shanghai. Principal members Lowell Freeman, TDK and K'ko have described themselves as purveyors of all things analogue and metronomic, a claim fully justified by this debut album.



Their spiritual home is 70s Germany, rolling out motorik rhythms and overlaying synths, loops and effects. This is no exercise in hollow nostalgia though. Mood Taeg use their source material as a way to further their

connections, from freeform electronica to prog disco. The eight-minute *Mood Block*, with its funky undertow, even manages to swing a little, its cool grooves reminiscent of the sunnier elements of Cluster. The equally lengthy *2MR* keeps to a stricter tempo,

but is no less seductive. *Corpora* is beatific, shunted along by a twinkly synth figure that invites parallels with the best bits of early 80s New Romanticism. Most intriguing of all is *Deictics*, which is a gentler, more abstract piece, with sampled dialogue and a bobbing bassline, that reveals more of itself with every play. **RH**

NOISE IN YOUR EYE

Noise In Your Eye NIVE RECORDS

Instrumental duo enlist Nick Mason and others for debut album.

Listening blindfolded to *Noise In Your Eye*, there's something about its shape and feel, with themes and motifs that accrete then dissolve almost organically, that recalls electric Miles Davis — albeit in a rockier vein — and Tortoise offshoot Isotope 217. That might partly be due to the fact that it was created out of live ensemble improvisations with subsequent edits and reworkings. Adrian Chivers' sax and Daniel Pennie's guitar carry a lot of the melodic work here and the featured drummers include Nick Mason, Michael Giles and Kasabian's Ian Matthews. *Limits Of Control* is a polyrhythmic stew



with strings shimmering in and out of the frame, while *Zombie Johnson* begins with a syncopated conversation between double bass and drums, with trumpet, sax, electronics and FX'd guitar joining in. Keith Tippett's piano lines add extra spice.

Tippett plays beautifully throughout the impressionistic, textural *Touch The Water* shaping pellucid Bill Evans-like chords that fracture into dissonant runs. *Noise In Your Eye* might not be the first group to make music in this way, but this is a dazzling, inspired album that reveals its subtle details over repeated plays. **MB**

OHMME

Fantasize Your Ghost JOYFUL NOIZE

An appealing spectre from Chicago duo.

Macie Stewart and Sima Cunningham – aka Ohmme – are both classically-trained multi-instrumentalists and co-vocalists who have focused their manifold talents on the artier end of the indie rock spectrum. Their debut, 2018's *Parts*, was moody, scratchy and littered with melodic glimmers.

By contrast, *Fantasize Your Ghost* offers a confident one-two punch of their songwriting strengths. The pair's heavyweight harmonies hit you first, powering through the core of *Ghost* and *Selling Candy*. There's a touch of Wye Oak, in the velvet voices and woody



tones, and Kate Bush amid the smart arrangements and quick vocal turns.

Elsewhere, *Sturgeon Moon* proves Ohmme are unafraid when it comes to veering off the tracks into full Chicago-style, deep-dish improv work-outs. Indeed, whenever you begin

to suspect the saccharine, it's pulled away and replaced by rumbling distortions, skittering shuffles, or unsettling string scratches.

As such, it's an album of finely-honed balance and pace: immediate, yet unhurried; comfortingly melodic, yet still unpredictable. This ...*Ghost* is assertively alive. **MP**

THE ONCE & FUTURE BAND

Deleted Scenes CASTLE FACE

Balmy sounds for embattled times from West Coast quartet.

It's been three years since Oakland's Once & Future Band unveiled their self-titled debut – a wondrous concoction of soft rock, prog and fusionist jazz that suggested the 70s was a party that never quite stopped. Its successor is no less impressive, the quartet drawing on a multitude of influences to fashion something that is both vibrantly fresh and engagingly familiar.

Paul McCartney looms large on *Freaks*, which feels like a splash of late-period Beatles, complete with trumpet fanfare. The title track could be a space-pop 10cc, with singer Joel Robinow adding a buoyant synth solo that brings



to mind the more playful tendencies of Yes. The ghost of David Crosby's *If I Could Only Remember My Name* haunts the trippy Cali-folk of *Airplane*, complemented by the cosmic *Andromeda*, a song that the band have been trying to perfect for the

past 15 years. Here they manage it expertly, despite the presence of a spider on Robinow's face (you can just about hear him trying to swat it away).

Elsewhere there are traces of ELO, Supertramp, Steely Dan and Emitt Rhodes, although the band's dazzling interplay and melodic richness are entirely their own. **RH**

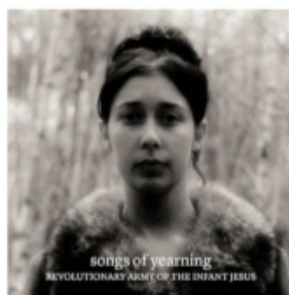
REVOLUTIONARY ARMY OF THE INFANT JESUS

Songs Of Yearning/Nocturnes OCCULTATION

Two new offerings from enigmatic northern ensemble.

Prior to this welcome double helping, RAIJ had released just three albums in their 35-year lifespan, a meagre output that's only served to make their extraordinary music even more treasurable. The Liverpool-born collective – centred around core members Paul Boyce, Jon Egan and Leslie Hampson – are masters of the experimental soundscape, investing their work with sacred imagery, field recordings and intense ambient drones.

Songs Of Yearning is a procession of sombre pieces, ripe with classical European textures and flitting between six different languages. A harmonium



underpins the lovely *Prayer*; religious whispers give way to something unsettling and grandiose on *Vespers*; sorrowful cello streaks the soulful balladry of the title track.

Nocturnes, its limited edition companion, is rather less austere. *I Carry*

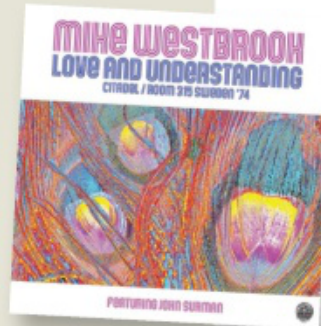
The Sun takes a WB Yeats poem as a springboard into pop folk, though it's offset by the opaque eight minutes of *Opening* and the quiet symphonic roar of *Overture*, all the more striking for its barely-maintained sense of restraint. Incidentally, Egan has since left the band, though RAIJ have vowed to continue. Long may they run. **RH**

JAZZ PROG

Sid Smith rounds up the best releases from prog's jazzier reaches.



Recorded live in Sweden in 1974, **Mike Westbrook's** *Citadel/Room 315* (My Only Desire Records) sees Westbrook and John Surman front the 16-piece Swedish Radio Jazz Group as they get to grips with Westbrook's soaring themes and orchestral bravura. As you'd expect, Surman is on fiery form as lead soloist weaving an agile path between Westbrook's bracing writing that's always zeroing in on where the heart and heat lie. Available on sumptuous limited edition vinyl



or CD, it captures British jazz at its tuneful, adventurous best.

Co-produced by Swiss Zen-funk maestro Nik Bärtsch, **Blaer's** *Yellow* (Ronin Rhythm Records) features pianist Maja Nydegger's intriguing compositions that sit between textures of real depth and detail arising from dual saxes and contrapuntal sparkles as the rhythm section shifts gears. Fans of Bärtsch's

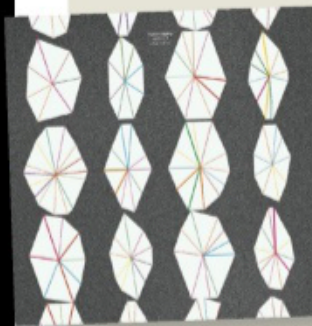


Ronin, Sonar, and AKKU Quintet, who Nydegger also plays for, will find much to captivate their interest here.

Aquatic pings, trippy beats, dub bass, sonorous trumpet and chiming guitar flood the opening bars of **Avishai Cohen's** *Big Vicious* (ECM). Though laid-back, the content rich mood keeps going through a distinguished album that takes in a dreamy reworking of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* and Massive Attack's *Teardrop*. Interspersed with more direct rocking out from his band, Cohen's unerring search for the emotional centre means cathartic enlightenment is never far away.



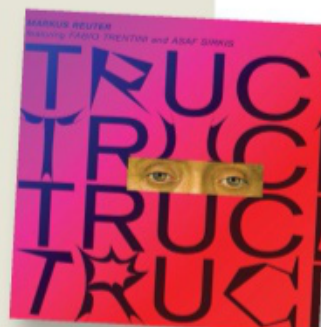
The second album from Norway's **Master Oogway**, *Earth And Other Worlds* (Rune Grammofon) harnesses fizzing, restless energies that bring to mind *Extrapolation*-era John



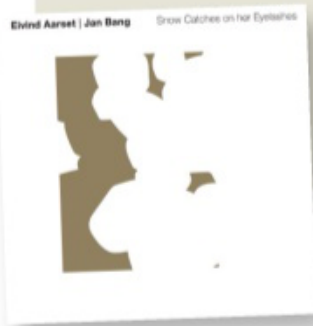
McLaughlin albeit amped up and shot through a highly saturated Day-Glo aura. Across a series of flamboyant tunes, Håvard Nordberg Funderud's highly mobile electric guitar digs deep into the surging bass and drums propelling the album. When combined with Lauritz Skeidsvoll's sax, the sparks really fly. Fans of Krokofant, Grand General and the current incarnation of Soft Machine

should embrace and welcome this vigorous set.

Markus Reuter's *Truce* (MoonJune Records) stalks a similar highly-charged territory to his regular gig with Tony Levin and Pat Mastelotto in Stick Men. Reuter's quicksilver, plangent soloing is pushed right to the fore, ably supported here by drummer Asif Sirkis and bassist Fabio Trentini. With Reuter's live looping providing amorphous backdrops that drift hazily in between the furious and ferocious blast of this live studio set. A sense of near delirious abandonment is discernible within the dense electric storm clouds generated by the trio.



Eivind Aarset and **Jan Bang's** *Snow Catches On Her Eyelashes* (Jazzland Recordings) creates a vibrant,

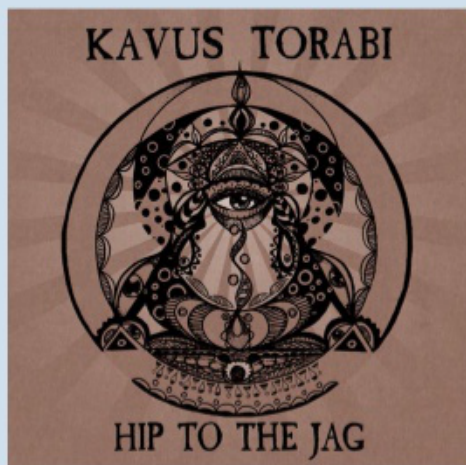


sonic painting that's suffused and glowing with mysterious colours, oblique angles and haunting reveries whose poetic beauty both beguile and impress.

KAVUS TORABI

Hip To The Jag BELIEVERS ROAST

Knifeworld leader tilts at the unknown on psychedelic solo debut.



Over the past two decades, Kavus Torabi has done his utmost to inject a skewed sense of wonder into our lives via numerous bands and side projects. Rising to prominence as a member of Cardiacs, he's developed a unique perspective on contemporary music, and shared his talents out most recently between the righteous psychedelia of Gong, the cosmic electronica of The Utopia Strong, and the ecstatic prog of his own band Knifeworld.



Torabi reconfigures psychedelia for the modern age.



And now, he's found time to record a solo album as well. In fact, it seems that some of the songs here were originally intended for the next Knifeworld album, but given the logistical challenges of bringing together an eight-member band, Torabi elected instead to record the material on his own — a decision that was sealed by his acquisition of an Indian harmonium, which strongly influenced the direction his songwriting was going in. Like the sitar, it's an instrument that produces a shimmering drone, an aural heat haze that hints at hidden depths. It's proved to be the perfect foil for Torabi's imagination: *Hip To The Jag* is a meditation on — and sometimes confrontation with — unseen worlds and the realm beyond the senses.

If that sounds like a throwback to the late 60s, then opener *Chart The Way* is happy to oblige, conjuring a Ladbroke Grove vibe of Hawkwind jamming with Quintessence. And Torabi's invocatory vocals and undulating melodies seem to emanate from the same era, like a blissed-out Syd Barrett.

But it soon becomes clear that Torabi wants to take us somewhere more mysterious. *Silent The Rotor* and *A Body Of Work* map out spacier territory, occasionally punctuated by an edgy guitar refrain or snatch of synth. *You Broke My Fall* is gentler, but pivots on the lyric, *'The friends I once made music with are now ghosts that clank their chains,'* evoking memories as apparitions we haunt ourselves with.

Cemetery Of Light has the album's most upbeat chord sequence, but from this point on, things get weirder. The percussive crashes and strident harmonium of *Radio To Their World* is oddly grandiose, while *My Cold Rebirth* finds Torabi on the threshold of revelation, not just solo but alone, the instrumentation peeking timidly around the door. Finally, the extended drone of *Slow Movements* achieves celestial oneness: Torabi is reclining on the cloud of unknowing, he's a man transformed. Like Gong's most recent album, last year's *The Universe Also Collapses*, *Hip To The Jag* reconfigures psychedelia for the modern age, but on a more personal level, for Torabi making music induces an altered state of being. It's a bold but rather fascinating trip.

JOE BANKS

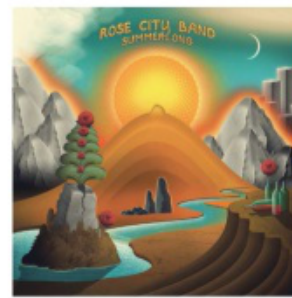
ROSE CITY BAND

Summerlong THRILL JOCKEY

Wooden Shjips/Moon Duo founder takes a pastoral detour.

Guitarist Ripley Johnson has been captain of US psych-rockers Wooden Shjips for well over a decade now, as well as co-piloting the more synth-heavy Moon Duo with partner Sanae Yamada. But he's evidently been fancying his chances in a country rock outfit too, if *Summerlong* is anything to go by.

Rose City Band is essentially solo Johnson, aided by drummer John Jeffrey. Less nebulous than last year's self-titled debut (described by Johnson as "sort of a back porch jam just as the 'shrooms are starting to kick in"), *Summerlong* feels like an extended



hymn to the freedom of the open road, driven by guitar and embellished with mandolin, lap steel and even a touch of jaw harp.

There are plenty of Shjips-like stonerisms in the warm air of *Only* and the meditative *Floating Out* — 'Off the floor/Out of this

world, to be born' sings Johnson in his hazy croon. *Reno Shuffle* heads for Nevada under a moonlit sky, powered by a bluesy vamp. *Wildflowers* leans into a droning groove, while the twangy *Real Long Gone* perfectly captures the album's wider yearning for a golden age that may have only ever existed in the imagination. **RH**

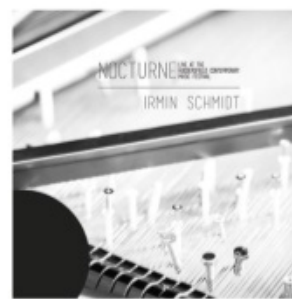
IRMIN SCHMIDT

Nocturne MUTE

Mesmeric live recording from Can's keyboard maestro.

Having studied with Avant-garde titans Stockhausen, Ligeti and Cage, Irmin Schmidt could have enjoyed a career in the rarefied circles of contemporary classical music and academia had he not diverted his musicality into Can.

Recorded live at the octogenarian's appearance at last year's Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, this album, featuring three compositions for prepared piano and tape (as it still might quaintly be called) provides a glimpse of how things might have turned out had he not followed a very different calling.



The gently exotic timbral pathways of *Klavierstücke II* and the title track are joined by field recordings in which insect chatter and the low drone of a passing plane combine into an intimate environment that's oddly luxuriant.

The shift from interior perspectives towards more expansive landscapes comes with *Yonder* wherein solemn piano is joined by cascading church bells. Their presence bring a profound intensity invoking Schmidt's childhood experiences in post-war Germany where the only thing left standing was a church tower sounding on the hour. A masterpiece. **SS**

SHAMAN ELEPHANT

Wide Awake But Still Asleep KARISMA RECORDS

Norwegian psych-proggers' fjord fiesta.

An irrepressible energy fills nearly every available minute of Bergen-based Shaman Elephant's second album. There's no shortage of strident anthems, head-shaking riffs and that ragged abandonment of the moment that seems to be present in the fertile soil of the Norwegian alt-psych scene.

While echoes of countrymen Motorpsycho are evident throughout, that sense of the familiar doesn't divert attention away from a vigorous set that's both self-assured and tightly controlled. The whirling, circular motif of the album's longest track, *Traveller*



gradually accelerates to a fevered spin that never loses focus. There's a touch of vintage Moody Blues in the luminous vocal harmonies that rise above the song's surging guitars, grinding fuzz bass and overdriven keyboards, with ethereal Mellotron layers

adding both startling colours and depth. It's not all as intense as this. There are several reflective pauses that bring moments of contrast, and *Steely Dan* will have fans of that band smiling at witty lyrics compiled entirely from the Becker/Fagan songbook. However, the momentum and sheer ebullience that dominates is positively uplifting. **SS**

SONIC BOOM

All Things Being Equal CARPARK

Ex-Spacemen 3 founder's first album under this solo alias for three decades.

Pete 'Sonic Boom' Kember's post-Spacemen 3 musical travels have encompassed Spectrum, who essentially grew out of his original band, the improvisational E.A.R. and his work as a producer for the likes of MGMT and Panda Bear.

A perennial signature of Kember's guitar, organ and analogue synth music is his use of drones, effects and shuddering delays, all of which feature on the throbbing musical systems of *Spinning Coins And Wishing On Clovers*, which is full of subtle detail. On *A Summer's Day*, with its sunny keyboards and lyrical sentiments –



'When I saw you/I adored you' – comes across like a four-bar section of a 60s Beach Boys tune repeated over and over.

Much of *All Things Being Equal* is based on similarly simple chord sequences, and you have to wonder how much of Kember's

use of repetition has a cumulative mantric effect – as on the instrumental *Tawkin Techno*, redolent of early Kraftwerk – and how much it's indicative of an inability to fully develop his ideas. A song like *Just Imagine*, in which he sings an unremarkable melodic cadence for eight minutes, certainly supports the latter view. **MB**

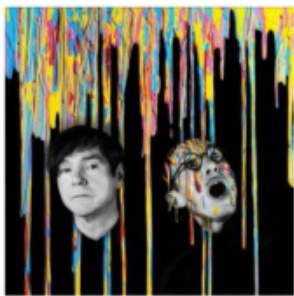
SPARKS

A Steady Drip, Drip, Drip BMG

Inventive pop oddballs return – and you really want to like it...

Some veteran acts retain so much goodwill from fans that they can pretty much do no wrong. Just don't ask anyone to name a song they've written recently. Sparks are a case in point. Their arch synth pop influenced generations of wry stylists, but despite 2017's *Hippopotamus* breaching the Top 10, even die-hard fans' "best of" lists are unlikely to feature much since the early 1980s.

Still, the septuagenarian duo show here that they can still turn out some neat nuggets of intriguing quirk pop. The minor acoustic chords of *Left Out In The Cold* have an alluring, faintly



Hispanic flavour, while *Self-Effacing* is similarly infectious and laced with Russell Mael's vocal melodramatics.

Elsewhere though, they try too hard. *Stravinsky's Only Hit* is a full of cod-operatic flourishes but completely without tune.

When, on *Lawnmower*, Mael's vocal line – 'My girlfriend is from Andover, Andover, she puts up with my lawnmower, lawnmower' – is backed by plinky electronica and barber-shop harmonies, the result is original, distinctive, and quite curious. But will you feel any inclination to hear it again after this album is over? Perhaps not. **JS**

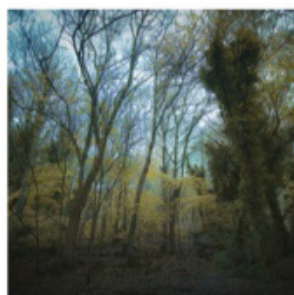
WORRIEDABOUTSATAN

Time Lapse NSMD

Forward-facing alchemy from Yorkshire maverick.

Gavin Miller has been releasing fuzzed-out ambient-techno dronescapes as Worriedaboutsatan since 2006's self-titled debut EP. On his seventh album, beats become crackling pulses in the undergrowth as his guitar leads four lengthy, multi-tiered mood cathedrals built on densely ominous drones that rear through its shimmering sonic blizzards.

Over its spectral canter, *Dawn* uncurls heavily-reverbed guitar overdubs, before *Point Of Departure* heats up a warmer floatscape, goosed by micro-feedback surgery. *A Lost History* turns darker, its tense guitar



motifs countered by glacial Mellotron-like strings.

Peppered with gauzy static, Roland acid machine flecks agitating in its Y-fronts, *Twin* deploys crashing drum then gentler beats as Miller's dramatic strums direct the ethereal traffic raging or leaving

vapour trails around him before bringing down the curtain with the three-minute jangle of *Mingels*.

Also available on forest green vinyl, *Time Lapse* is one of those instrumental album sets that, if its reclusive mood can be infiltrated, reveals a bathroom cabinet of meditative delights that linger long after. **KN**

PATTERN-SEEKING ANIMALS

Prehensile Tales INSIDEOUT MUSIC

Heartfelt odes and colourful playing from the Californian quartet.



Given Pattern-Seeking Animals' other life as part of American progressive rock juggernaut Spock's Beard, it came as no shock that their eponymous first collection blew everyone away last year. Indeed, the group – bassist Dave Meros, keyboardist John Boegehold, drummer/singer Jimmy Keegan, and singer/guitarist Ted Leonard – had already spent many albums creating superb work together. That said, *Pattern-Seeking Animals* did enough



Every melody, sentiment, and vocal is first-rate.



on its own to capitalise on their chemistry in familiar ways while also setting itself apart from that other outlet. Impressively, they're back less than a year later with *Prehensile Tales* a continuation of that magic whose blend of top-notch songwriting and seductively eccentric but welcoming scores are damn near flawless.

Previously, they relished a spacious arsenal of instruments, and on their second album, they go even further by including trumpet, cello, saxophone, pedal steel, flute, and violin. Produced by Boegehold and mixed by Rich Mouser, *Prehensile Tales* tackles subjects as wide-ranging as "second chances in life to vampires to shipwrecks to facing mortality". Although the quick turnaround from one record to the next is surprising, Boegehold began working on this immediately after the debut was done. Rather than seeming rushed or unambitious, each moment oozes meticulous planning, superlative ability, and a wonderful shared vision.

First and foremost, the songwriting is outright luminous. Once again, they're able to bestow sing-along hooks and universally imaginative yet sobering lyricism that's also deceptively sophisticated and nuanced. Specifically, the bittersweet ballad *Here In My Autumn* sees Leonard alternating between soaring declarations and tender realisations perfectly, prior to the epic and harrowing storytelling of *Lifeboat*. Every melody, sentiment, and vocal is first-rate, just as you'd expect.

Naturally, the quartet provide healthily vibrant and multifaceted doses of proggy goodness along the way, too. Opener *Raining Hard In Heaven* is filled with the same sort of beautiful tones and entangled intricacies that make Spock's Beard gems like *Jaws Of Heaven* so spectacular. Elsewhere, *Why Don't We Run* is organic and playful – with dashes of Latin and Middle Eastern trademarks – whereas *Soon But Not Today* wraps it all up with a deep dive into stylish zaniness as only these guys can provide. *Prehensile Tales* is precisely what you want out of Pattern-Seeking Animals: a sublime union of excellent songwriting outstanding singing and backing harmonies. It's a breathtaking collective statement.

JORDAN BLUM

BIG BIG TRAIN

Summer's Lease BELLE ANTIQUE

Japan-only comp from unlikely heroes of modern prog.



Big Big Train have flipped the usual music career curve on its head. Where many bands start strong then helplessly drift towards the margins over subsequent decades, BBT spent the first half of their 30-year lifespan paddling in the shallow end before an unexpected upswing in their fortunes culminated in the perfectly executed Top 40 high dive of 2019's *Grand Tour* album.

Summer's Lease works as a primer for Big Big Train.

This unlikely journey from cultdom to their current place in the vanguard of contemporary prog is charted on *Summer's Lease*, a two-CD, 14-track compilation put together for Japan by Tokyo prog connoisseurs' label Belle Antique. In truth, it isn't quite the complete BBT story. While their earliest years are addressed, they've been reframed to fall in line with the band's current incarnation. The instrumental *Expecting Snow*, from their 1994 debut album *Goodbye To The Age Of Steam*, has been tweaked, with the original keyboards swapped out for new parts. *Wind Distorted* *Pioneers* has been completely re-recorded, the new version musically lush and featuring current vocalist David Longdon in place of original singer Martin Read.

This isn't a bad thing. Big Big Train are a more refined proposition than they were in the 90s, and it's no coincidence that their fortunes began to accelerate when Longdon came onboard for 2009's *The Underfall Yard* (represented here by a live version of *Master James Of St George*, recorded at Real World Studios). Longdon isn't just a great singer, he's a great deliverer of songs: it takes some skill to shift between *Brave Captain's* twin narratives of paternal hero worship and World War I derring-do without coming unglued.

Summer's Lease works as a primer for BBT, or at least the second half of their career. *Victorian Brickwork* and the masterful *East Coast Racer* are intricate and evocative, bridging the past and the present lyrically and musically, while it's a hard heart that isn't stirred by the brass ensemble that ushers in *The Transit Of Venus Across The Sun*.

But there's enough to satisfy diehards too. The previously unreleased *Don't Forget The Telescope* is an unexpectedly funky instrumental written by drummer Nick D'Virgilio and *London Song* craftily edits together six existing capital-centric songs into one 30-minute suite, while completists will appreciate brand new artwork from resident artist and honorary member Sarah Louise Ewing.

As with so much in Big Big Train's world, there's something reassuringly timeless about *Summer's Lease*: it's an old-fashioned greatest hits by any other name. It might cost a little more to get hold of, but it's worth the yen.

DAVE EVERLEY

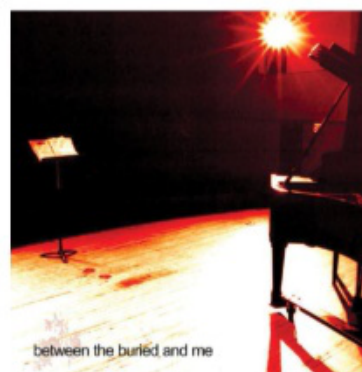
BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME

Between The Buried And Me CRAFT RECORDINGS

Glimpses of greatness on the tech-metal masters' remastered debut.

Few present-day progressive metal bands have evolved as ingeniously as Between The Buried And Me. In fact, their unparalleled knack for melding perpetually hypnotic, adventurous and virtuosic compositions (that switch styles at the drop of a hat) makes them the best at what they do. Taking that into account, it's eye-opening and endearing to realise how much their comparably basic and repetitious 2002 self-titled debut foreshadows that future supremacy. Remixed and remastered by longtime producer Jamie King, *Between The Buried And Me* remains an enjoyably brutal peek into their humble beginnings.

Like its successor, 2003's *The Silent Circus*, this initial collection leans heavily on metalcore proclivities. That central formula, coupled with the idiosyncrasies of its one-time line-up, make it feel noticeably different from where the current quintet would take things with 2005's *Alaska* and onwards. Nevertheless, the constantly shifting motifs and collaborations between lead



guitarist Paul Waggoner and the band's then-rhythm guitarist Nick Fletcher reveal that their illustrative six-string puzzles were essentially in place from the start.

Likewise, the contemplative breather within *Aspirations* undoubtedly sets a foundation on which

they would later expand. As for the singing, tracks like *More Of Myself To Kill* and *Shevanel Cut A Flip* reveal that mainstay Tommy Giles Rogers was already fairly settled into both his growls and clean singing identities. Additionally, those pieces bookend the LP and demonstrate a fluid and compelling oscillation between monstrous and mellow personas that's only become better over the years.

Only those who favour the most unrelentingly hellish side of Between The Buried And Me would prefer this to their most recent albums; yet, it's still a terrific entry into the subgenres it tackles, and this updated version allows the most predictively progressive, bizarre, and/or melodic passages to shine brighter than before. **JMB**

BREATHLESS

The Glass Bead Game TENOR VOSSA

Neglected 80s dream-poppers' first breath.

It's well documented that former 4AD head Ivo Watts-Russell described *Breathless* singer Dominic Appleton as "by far my favourite living male vocalist". He stands by that to this day. Back in the mid-80s, when everything on Ivo's label was eulogised, this group somehow never managed to catch the acclaim and commercial success they merited, and perhaps wished they'd won the golden ticket of being label-mates to The Cocteau Twins. That voice was, however, heard and marvelled at in more homes when Appleton guested on the This Mortal Coil project, often defining its majestic melancholy.

The same spirit floods through *Breathless'* 1986 debut album, now reissued. Like many dark gems of its ilk, it's not as florid or fey as one remembers. Joy Division, Bauhaus and The Comsat Angels were influences, and later records by The Cure or Cranes echo it, with the rhythms key to providing ballast for the vocal ether. After a Church-like, proto-shoegaze opening, the band toy with Bo Diddley grooves



and foggy, fuzzy atmospheres, allowing their songs to emerge like sunlight through clouds. There's a mature poise between the cryptic and the confessional, as *All My Eye And Betty Martin* glides along the fine line between restraint and rawness, and *Monkey*

Talk marries the murky mysteries of *Bela Lugosi's Dead* to the trippy mantras of early Pink Floyd or Can.

At that time, in "alternative" circles, it was perfectly normal to name your band after a Jean-Luc Godard film and your debut album after a Herman Hesse novel. What some might label pretentiousness was a tool in the perceived battle against the supermarket pop of Wham! or Madonna. Such high-mindedness was the USP of 4AD and others, and shy, bookish youth flooded towards it. *Breathless*, still active today, sound on their debut like the most 4AD band ever who weren't on 4AD. That quirk of fate was cruel to them, but the music has outlived such material practicalities and soars as sumptuously as always. **CR**

DIAMANDA GALÁS

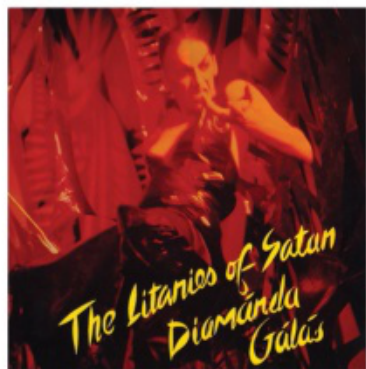
The Litanies Of Satan INTRAVENAL SOUND OPERATIONS

One of the most extreme debut albums of all time gets remastered.

When *The Litanies Of Satan* was released in 1982, it was so utterly contrary to the pop trends du jour, that rather than disappearing into obscurity, it attracted press coverage and launched Diamanda Galás's career as an artist who steered extreme vocal performance to the outer limits.

As a teenager, Galás looked set for a career as a concert pianist, but she was drawn more towards singing. Here her unique approach carries the melodrama of Maria Callas singing the 'mad scene' from Donizetti's opera *Lucia De Lammermoor*, Armenian opera singer Cathy Berberian's avant garde experiments and the complex, fractured structures of modernist composer Iannis Xenakis. She's said that without her formidable vocal technique and ultra-physical approach, she would have felt like "someone going to war who didn't know how to fight".

On the 17-minute title track she takes text from the poem of that name by Charles Baudelaire and sets it in a space with her textural electronics, ominous



loops of reverbed drum beats, multitracked vocal incantations and tape manipulations. The piece is structured into peaks and troughs as Galás howls, appears close to tears, then launches off into high-speed chatter and piercing single notes. Combined, it sounds

like an actual manifestation of the metaphorical demons that tormented the French poet. Galás has talked about the athletic discipline needed for this visceral approach, as if she was singing with her whole body and *Wild Women With Steak Knives*, which was originally performed live with a quadraphonic system to manipulate her babel of voices, is shorter but equally intense.

The Litanies Of Satan is both technically impressive and so extreme that, initially at least, it feels energising, like standing outside in a storm. But the fact that it's so concentrated and confrontational makes it difficult to engage with emotionally and it ultimately leaves the listener feeling rather squeezed out of the picture, as if watching a spectacle from afar. **MB**

STRAWBS

Burning For You/Heartbreak Hill ESOTERIC

Brace of underrated gems from the tail-end of the 70s.

By the mid-70s, Strawbs had notched up a pair of hit singles and a handful of moderately successful albums, but they seemed to struggle to find their place within the wider UK music firmament.

By the time they signed to Oyster Records, it seemed that mainman Dave Cousins' heart wasn't in it. Yet despite that, they weren't quite finished. Produced with Jeffrey Lesser, 1977's *Burning For You* contains its share of classic Strawbs moments. The melodrama of *Burning For Me* is matched by Robert Kirby's rich orchestrations. While guitarist Dave Lambert looks toward rock and bassist Chas Cronk generates ballads, it still manages to be Cousins' album: the delicate *Bacarole (For The Death Of Venice)* is warm and sweet, while his pop parody *Alexander The Great* crashes in like glam barrelhouse boogie. In 1977, simplicity was the key - and Strawbs were definitely not providing it.

Recorded in 1978 (following 1977's *Deadlines*), *Heartbreak Hill* became known as "the best Strawbs album that



never was." Reunited with producer Tom Allom and recorded among The Beatles ghosts at John Lennon's now-Ringo-owned Tittenhurst Park, it was a marked improvement on *Burning For You*. The title track is sweeping, grandiose, and then, the 10-minute *Starting Over*

tops it, complete with its generous Genesis-influenced interlude. Working with young keyboard player Andy Richards, there are Elton-style flourishes throughout. *Heartbreak Hill* offers the Strawbs in microcosm: powerful melodies, propulsive rhythms and tender ballads.

In many respects their work was now done: with a new wave of singer-songwriters such as Gerry Rafferty and Al Stewart stalking the charts, the group quietly disbanded, leaving this album unreleased until 1995. It goes without saying that Esoteric's love, care and audio quality courses through these reissues. *Burning For You* and *Heartbreak Hill*, although flawed, offer seamless entertainment, enhancing the Strawbs' mystique. **DE**

GENTLE GIANT

Gentle Giant/Acquiring The Taste/Three Friends/Octopus ALUCARD

Four remastered classics on vinyl from Pompey's masters of prog.



Not content with delivering the mother of all box sets with last year's spine-threatening *Unburied Treasure*, Gentle Giant seem to be in a very generous mood. A meticulous reviving of the archives continues apace here, with the first four studio albums from Portsmouth's finest all officially restored to vinyl for the first time in decades.



Octopus still dazzles 48 years after it was originally released.



The first thing the listener will notice is how beautifully the sleeves and artwork have been reproduced: the art is pin-sharp and vivid, the packaging of a laudably high quality. All of that would count for little if the music itself wasn't returned to plastic with a similar degree of care, but diehards can breathe a sigh of relief, because everything from 1970's startling self-titled debut to 1972's ageless *Octopus* (here in its Steven Wilson remix form) sounds glorious, with all the warmth and dynamic detail that digital rendering takes away now fully restored.

What a debut *Gentle Giant* was. Demonstrably distinct from every one of their nascent prog rock peers, the band's sound arguably shared some outlaw DNA with Van der Graaf Generator, but that was where any resemblance ended. It's hard to imagine a bunch of musicians in their early 20s writing songs as bold and barking mad as these in 2020. In fact, it's hard to fathom how it happened in 1970 either, but as these electrifying ensemble performances prove, Gentle Giant were a remarkable band, even as they found their feet.

Acquiring The Taste (1971) was arguably their first real swell of collective confidence: you can hear the band's glee as they experiment and flex their songwriting muscles on the iconic likes of *Pantagrue's Nativity* and *Plain Truth*, always with a sense of groove and swing that many, more successful prog bands failed to match. Although a slight affair compared to its successors, *Three Friends* is perhaps the unsung gem in the GG catalogue, with its understated flow from *Prologue's* Zappa-esque tootling to the plaintive wonkiness of the title track.

Let's face it, though, it's *Octopus* that fans will be putting on first, and as loud as possible. Steven Wilson's elegant reassembly of this timeless masterpiece has simply made every note sparkle and every mind-bending tempo or texture shift more dynamically telling. Fans may wish to nominate a later album as Gentle Giant's finest - *The Power & The Glory* is a decent shout, incidentally - but *Octopus* was their prog rock zenith, and it still dazzles 48 years later. It's not always worth buying your favourite albums for the 12th time, but on this occasion it's a pricey punt worth taking.

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UNITOPIA

Artificial PLANE GROOVY

Aussie prog pioneers' 2010 peak makes its debut on 180g vinyl.

Prior to the ongoing Antipodean post-djent avalanche, Unitopia were one of very few Australian bands to successfully pursue a progressive path on the international stage. Somehow, the Adelaide traditionalists seldom get a mention these days, which may be part of the motivation for this lavish vinyl reissue of their third album. After two promising albums, *Artificial* was the one that brought everything together in one cohesive, lethally melodic splurge of great songwriting.

After the tense ambience of opener *Suffocation*, *Artificial World* skitters in, like some souped-up Blue Nile out-take, drenched in melancholy but full of uplifting musical detail and earthy charm. In between the fluttering sax and hazy synths there's a pleasingly straightforward and catchy rock song working its magic, with a dash of Toto's fusion-rock chucked in at the last moment. In contrast, *Nothing Lasts Forever* wears its Beatles badge with pride, one direct reference to *Come Together* included, across a gorgeously



sepia-tinted, slow-motion shuffle. The remaining songs were clearly all crafted with the same meticulous attention to detail: *Artificial* is a truly beautiful record, on vinyl or not.

Diehard prog heads will pay their entrance fee for centrepiece *Tesla*:

14 minutes of evocative, poetic symphonic prog that pays a touching tribute to the eponymous scientist. Aside from earning themselves maximum nerd points, this was arguably Unitopia's defining moment: a dazzling blend of traditional ideas, subtly ingenious touches and big, heart-walloping tunes. Deliciously wistful piano ballad *Reflections* is truly lovely, too, while the lurching *Gone In The Blink Of An Eye* showcases an edgier side to the band's glossy aesthetic.

Unitopia only made one more record after this - 2012's *Covered Mirror* covers set - before fizzling out. Now that Aussie prog is very much back on the agenda, this profoundly classy reissue should redress that reputational balance. For real. **DL**

VANGELIS

Albedo 0.39 MUSIC ON VINYL

Greek synth warrior's first UK Top 20 album.

Originally released in 1976, *Albedo.39* was the first Vangelis album to crack the UK Top 20. It came at a time when the former Aphrodite's Child man had settled in London and had built what he referred to as 'his laboratory', Nemo Studios near to his Marble Arch flat, where

he would record his five studio albums for RCA (as well as a few soundtracks and unofficial works). Although it tends to be overshadowed by 1975's *Heaven And Hell*, *Albedo.39* remains a fine album, as the Greek keyboard wizard expanded his earlier progressive rock sound with banks of synthesisers. The album's title refers to the proportion of the light a planet receives that's reflected back into space. A perfect reflector would be 100 per cent. The Earth's albedo is 39 per cent, or 0.39. Unsurprisingly, the album is informed by Galactic physics, and the opening track, the strident *Pulstar*, has featured on countless TV programmes around the world, notably on Carl Sagan's groundbreaking 1980 series *Cosmos*, as was the ever-evolving *Alpha*. There are



seeming nods to Mike Oldfield's 1973 album *Tubular Bells*; little musical touches throughout the album, and notably on the final curtain call as album engineer Keith Spencer-Allen narrates various physical properties of the Earth, ending with the titular *Albedo*. Unlike

Heaven And Hell, which was effectively two suites of music, *Albedo.39* is a series of shorter tracks, but no less impressive. The lengthy *Main Sequence* gets almost funky, while *Freefall* utilises Gamelan influences that pointed ahead to 1980s *China*, while the mellow *Mare Tranquillitatis* throbs to the sound of Apollo moon landing recordings. The album was remastered by Vangelis and reissued by Esoteric Recordings back in 2013, although notably the RCA albums were left out of 2017's *Delectus* box set. This new Music On Vinyl release comes on transparent blue 180g vinyl with printed inner sleeve and sounds as good as ever. Whether that is enough, however, to make you want to part with your cash yet again of course, is entirely up to you. **JE**

PORCUPINE TREE

In Absentia: Deluxe Edition KSCOPE

Expanding the modern prog icons' watershed album.



After years of gradually moving in from the margins, 2002's *In Absentia* was a turning point for Porcupine Tree. Newly signed to Atlantic Records offshoot Lava it was their shot at the big time. Ultimately they wouldn't become a household name to match Radiohead, but for a moment here it looked like they might.



An AAA pass into the band's most exonerated era.



This is still widely considered their best record, so it's a natural choice for deluxe reissue treatment. Comprising Wilson's 2017 remaster, 5.1 mix, demos, bonus tracks, a feature-length documentary and 100-page hardback book from longtime collaborators Lasse Hoile and Carl Glover, it's generous without being exhausting - an AAA pass into the band's most exonerated era.

As the documentary shows, the muscle of a major label allowed Wilson to spend proper time writing songs. New drummer Gavin Harrison brought extra fire. They recorded in a fancy New York studio. *In Absentia* capitalises on all that, polishing and beefing up the cocktail of prog, metal, pop and electronic sounds that Wilson had been honing.

Of course, we also have Swedish metal and serial killers to thank. A year earlier Wilson had produced Opeth's *Blackwater Park*, and similarly cerebral Scandi metallers Meshuggah were on heavy rotation in the PT tour van. Throw in all the titles on Fred West and others that had lined Wilson's bookshelf since childhood, and you have the recipe for their heaviest, most deliciously messed up music yet.

Not that it's a total meat-fest. This is still audibly the work of a musician whose first release was called *Tarquin's Seaweed Farm*, so it comes with the sort of experimental passages and off-kilter twists that nod to his love of classic prog. And indeed classic rock'n'roll, as seen in the Beatles-flecked melody of *Prodigal* and gauzy psychedelia of 0.3.

This was also the point Wilson stretched into the territory he'd later embrace as a solo artist. You can trace the gnarliness of his 2011 solo album *Grace For Drowning* back to *The Creator Has A Mastertape* and *Strip The Soul* - the latter compressed from seven minutes into an impactful three-and-a-half in the bonus material.

Elsewhere the demo CD makes compelling listening for fans, but not because it's stuffed with genius - it isn't. Previously unreleased tracks *Imogen Slaughter* and *Watching You Sleep* clearly didn't make the album for a reason. But the sense of being Delorean-ed back a couple of decades through home-studio prototypes of *Trains* and the like - misfires, instant winners and all - is a joy. Not to mention a grounding insight into the mercurial nature of any creative process.

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CAMEL

Camel At The Royal Albert Hall CAMEL PRODUCTIONS

Andy Latimer and co glow in this *Moonmadness* live package.

Those who were at the Royal Albert Hall on Monday September 17, 2018 are unlikely to forget that evening of impeccable musicianship made even more emotional by the circumstances surrounding it. In October 1975, on the back of the band's concept album *The Snow Goose*, Camel sold out London's celebrated venue for the very first time. Now, almost 43 years on, Andy Latimer, having battled life-threatening blood cancer throughout most of the 2000s, brings the band back for another packed crowd to celebrate. It's 1976's *Moonmadness* we get in full on this DVD



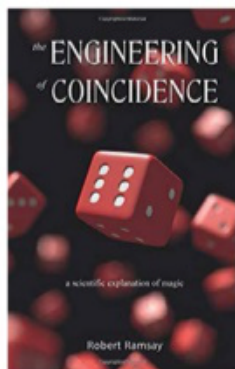
and Blu-ray, and no-one's complaining as Latimer's fluid guitar and occasional flute leads the way. Now augmented by Tiger Moth Tales' Peter Jones on keys and sax, who tackles *End Of The Line* in emotive fashion, this is very much a Camel for now, a second half set mixing evergreens such as *Unevensong* and a stunning encore of *Lady Fantasy* with selections from all three of the band's 90s albums, a jazzy *Rajaz* included. But it's Latimer's stirring and evocative guitar tone and the outpouring of love it invokes from a delighted audience that really stick in the memory. **JE**

THE ENGINEERING OF CONFIDENCE: A SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION OF MAGIC

Robert Ramsay WWW.ROBERTRAMSAY.ORG

Slim but demanding volume from Tinyfish's spoken word wizard.

"The only trouble with magic is that it doesn't work," wrote Aleister Crowley's biographer John Symonds. Former Tinyfish member Robert Ramsay thinks otherwise and draws here on ideas from the likes of Crowley and Arthur Koestler, and combines them with well-documented experiments that prove the existence of psychokinesis and precognition. In a display of what one might call prog science, he synthesises these strands and his own concept of the "Timeless Multiverse" to explain how we can effectively change outcomes.



It's complex stuff and Ramsay also explores the role of ritual in the magic act to separate the desire that focuses the individual from the distractions of conscious thought. Rather than dismissing magic by "favouring assumptions over facts", Ramsay provides us with a consistently argued framework as to how magic can work. He admits it can be either "fragile and unreliable" or "incredibly powerful", but the fact that he doesn't give us any specific examples of this, or what he or others have achieved, leaves it feeling rather unresolved. **MB**

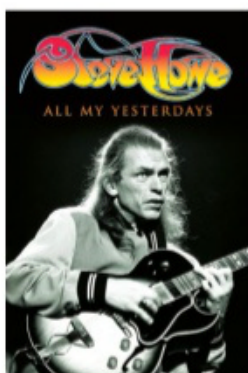
STEVE HOWE

All My Yesterdays OMNIBUS PRESS

His words are no disgrace.

In writing this engaging account of a remarkable career, Howe says he's not in the business of settling old scores, dishing the dirt or sharing backstage scuttlebutt. While laudable it does mean some parts become utterly baffling. On one page he's part of an Asia reunion but then, turning over, he's walking out of the door, wishing them well. Did he jump? Was he pushed? More often than not Howe refuses to elaborate and the reader is left with a tale untold, hanging in the air.

Away from his upbringing in north London and his journey through the



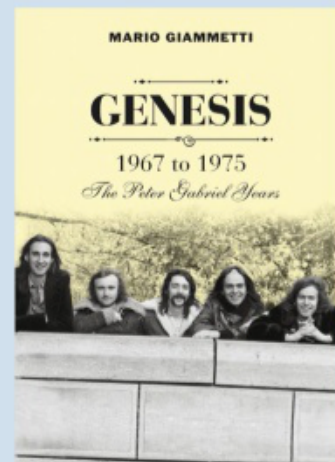
60s, much of the narrative relies heavily on Howe's tour schedule as an aide-memoire. Consequently, the narrative is date-driven as he swaps between his time in Yes, Asia or solo commitments. The reader frequently learns more about the type of car he likes to drive to get from one gig to the next than the motivations or thoughts of the driver himself.

His irritation at poor management and numerous bad decisions by Yes, while alluded to, aren't fully reflected upon in any meaningful depth. However, the tone of the book is bright, enthusiastic and appealing. **SS**

GENESIS - 1967 TO 1975: THE PETER GABRIEL YEARS

Mario Giammetti KINGMAKER PUBLISHING

A deep dive into the prog icons' imperial era.



For many progressive rock devotees, Peter Gabriel-era Genesis represents the pinnacle of the genre. After all, virtually no other band have ever achieved such a perfect blend of sophisticated musicianship, mesmeric songwriting, and fanciful yet erudite lyricism. Thankfully, Mario Giammetti's book does an excellent job of guiding readers through every decision, circumstance, and pinnacle moment Genesis faced during that period. It's not without its faults; nonetheless, it's surely the most inclusive, earnest, and charming retrospective the quintet has received.



The band offer candid but affectionate recollections.



Every chapter is dedicated to a specific album, and Giammetti puts each in context. He offers track-by-track and album art breakdowns, with plenty of first-hand insight from the various band members, before digging into the subsequent touring schedules. It can veer towards the academic and encyclopaedic, yet never loses its accessibility.

For many, Genesis truly began with the addition of Phil Collins and Steve Hackett, but Giammetti spends the first third of the book exhaustively detailing the band's formation, the highs and lows of creating *From Genesis To Revelation* and *Trespass*, and the impact of early members John Silver, John Mayhew and especially guitarist Anthony Phillips, whose brief tenure laid the groundwork for all they did afterward.

Once we get into their truly classic catalogue, the storytelling and moment-by-moment accounts become even more fascinating. As educational and fun as it is to read their positive reflections on every song, it's equally enthralling to see them diplomatically, but sincerely, voice distaste for certain compositions due to production, musicianship, or songwriting and lyrics. Talking of *Riding The Scree*, for instance, Banks says that "it was a nightmare," adding, "This was a devil; the first part is ridiculous". There's little doubt here that all five members are completely honest in their reassessments.

From their modest origins and initial pop/folk aesthetic to the peculiarities of *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* and the departure of Gabriel, Giammetti leaves no stone unturned. At times, it can be a bit extraneous — especially in terms of accounting for nearly every concert Genesis played. But having every key member offer candid but affectionate recollections of making each album is priceless, and the recreation of tour posters, publicity photos, and the like makes the book essential for anyone with more than a passing interest in the band.

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Where's home?
I'm in east Devon.



Earliest prog memory?

My brother bringing home *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967, when I was 11. Listening to it while poring over the cover, it felt like a new world.

First prog album you bought?

I bought Deep Purple's *Machine Head* with my first wage packet in 1972, and that really changed my life. It was closely followed by Yes' *Close To The Edge*.

And the last?

Tool's *Fear Inoculum*. I think it's brilliant. I've been a huge Tool fan for the past 25 years.

First prog gig?

Genesis at Friars Aylesbury in 1972 on the tour for *Foxtrot*. Everybody used to sit on the floor back then in their kaftans.

And the latest?

Tool in Zürich last year, at Hallenstadion. I've seen them three times and they've always been amazing.

Guilty musical pleasure?

Well, I don't feel guilty about it, but I love ABBA. Okay, I've said it!

Your specialist subject on Mastermind?

Arsenal Football Club 1970-71, the year they won the double. It was the most important thing



Mick Pointer

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

in my life as a 14-year-old, particularly when they beat Tottenham 1-0 at White Hart Lane to win the double.

Favourite prog venue?

The Boerderij in Holland. You get looked after the whole day,

they feed you well, everybody's incredibly pleasant, there's a great bar. If every venue was like the Boerderij you'd be on tour all year round!

Your prog hero?

Neil Peart. I was a bit late to the Rush party, but hearing him play on the *2112* album was a game changer for me. I was lucky enough to shake his hand after a Rush show in Brighton in 1980.



" I set Nick Barrett off on his illustrious career and I'm still waiting for the cheque! **"**

Outside of music, what are you into?

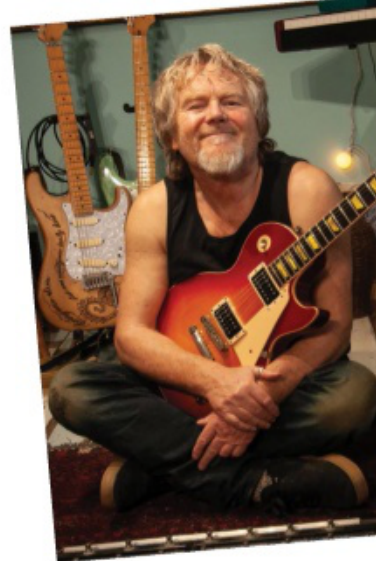
Hiking in the Alps or around the Devonshire countryside... anywhere really. And if there's a nice pub waiting at the end, even better.

Ever had a prog date?

I met my girlfriend Helga at an Arena gig two years ago. She was brought along by a mutual acquaintance and didn't have any idea about the band.

Who do you call in the prog community for a good night out?

Nick Barrett. I've known him since Pendragon supported Marillion almost 40 years ago. I set him off on his illustrious career and I'm still waiting for the cheque...



What's the most important piece of prog music?

The entirety of *2112*. When I heard it I thought, 'Now that's what prog music should be.'



Which prog muso would you most like to work with?

I've already been working with them for the last 25 years — John Mitchell and Clive Nolan.

Your favourite prog album cover?

The Visitor by Arena. I thought all Hugh Syme's artwork for Rush was brilliant, and I was lucky enough to work with him on that one in 1998.

He says it's one of his favourites too, and I'm very proud of that.

And what are you up to at the moment?

I'm in the process of writing Arena's new album, *The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance*, and I'm also compiling a book to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the band. These will be both ready for our tour scheduled for this October.

The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance is due out in October. Head to www.arenaband.co.uk for more information.



Mick Pointer's specialist subject: Arsenal, seen here beating Tottenham in 1971.

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