ALSO IN THIS ISSUE!

"I'm a musician, it's what I do..." **Back to basics for Mike Oldfield?**

New album! New label! Gerald Bostock lives! **Ian Anderson rocks back.**

"I'm an escapist, a romantic." ***Hounds Of Love*: Kate's purple patch revealed.**

PROG

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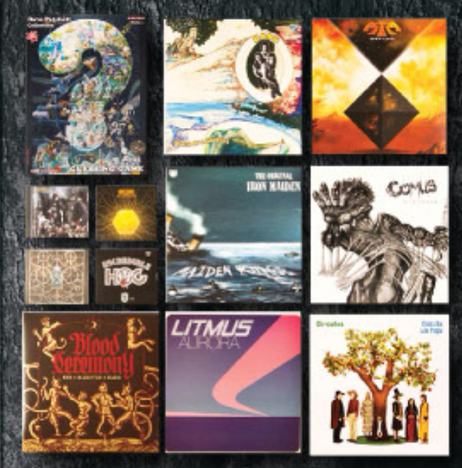

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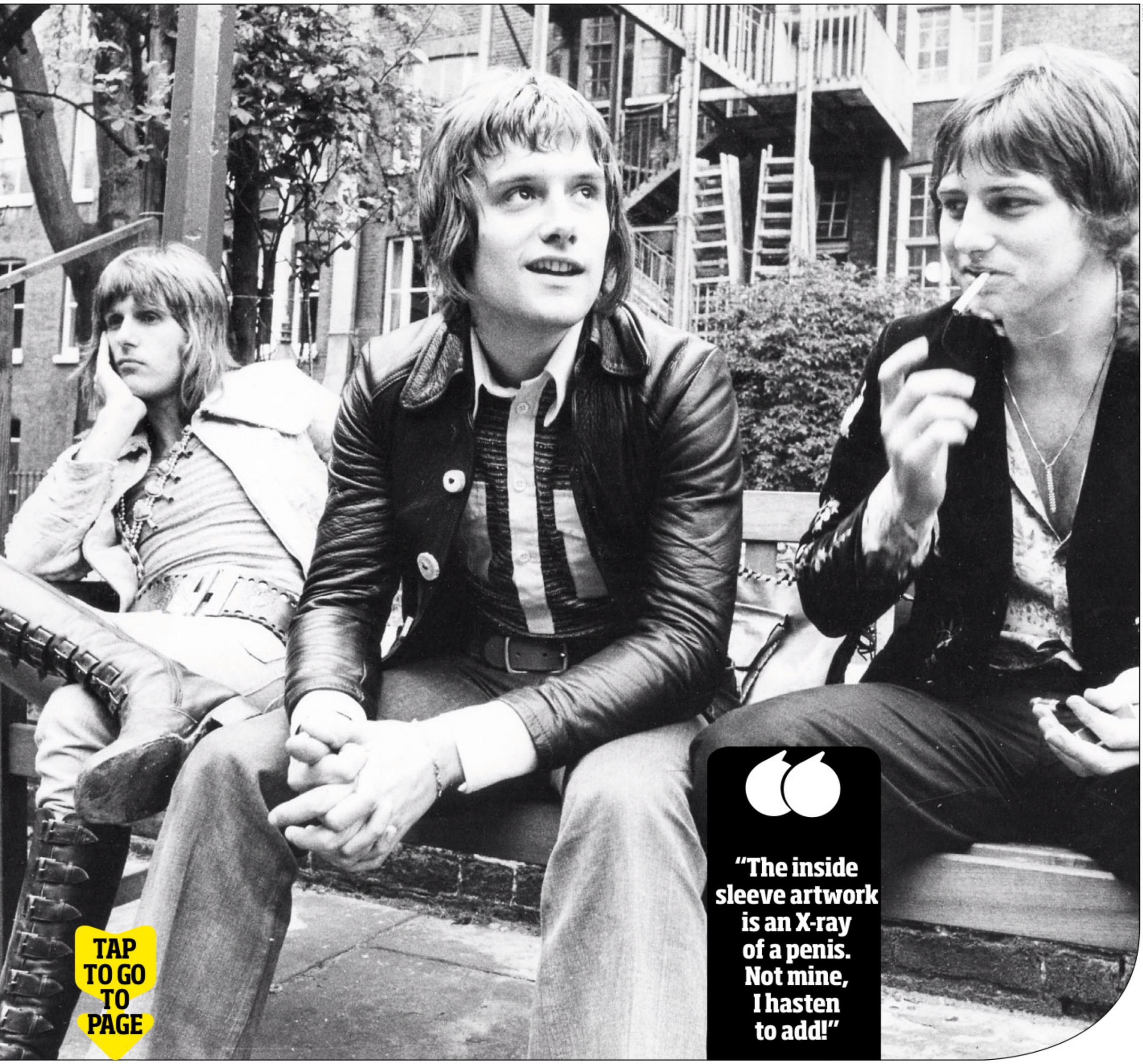

"The inside sleeve artwork is an X-ray of a penis. Not mine, I hasten to add!"

TAP TO GO TO PAGE

SONY MUSIC PRESS

ELP p34

Keith Emerson, Greg Lake and Carl Plamer come clean on *Brain Salad Surgery*.

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THE OUTER LIMITS pg70
"It probably sounded incredibly cool if you were listening on acid," says drummer Carmine Appice. LSD-laced or not, how prog were Vanilla Fudge?

THE MUSICAL BOX pg92
Bigelf throw themsleves back *Into The Maelstrom*, plus Motorpsycho, Anette Olzon, Messenger, Alan Parsons Project, Jon Anderson, Kevin Ayers, Kerry Livgren, Todd Rundgren and lots more...

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Transatlantic kick off their Kaleidoscopic world tour in the US and Dream Theater play a blinder in London town! Plus Blackfield, Family, Hawkwind, Protest The Hero, Aristocrats, Alcest, Knifeworld, Tarja, Goblin and more...

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Putting our upcoming second prog weekender on the map - quite literally!

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★LEGEND★

GLENN HUGHES

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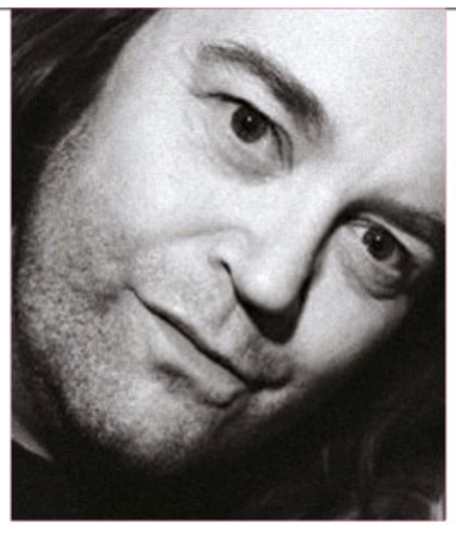
"I'd been studying the rawness of old Stones records. Rather than make the future of music, I decided to rewind..."

Mike Oldfield is a *Man On The Rocks*, page 62.

IAN WITLEN

Ed's Letter



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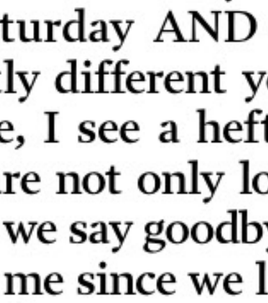
Welcome to the latest issue of *Prog* magazine. As I write we enter a time of change. The *Prog Magazine Radio Show* now airs twice a week on TeamRock Radio – you can hear Philip Wilding on both Saturday AND Sunday evenings between 8-10pm, with two distinctly different yet very proggy shows. And, looking to the right of me, I see a hefty pile of CVs awaiting my attention, which says we are not only looking for a new member of staff for the *Prog* team, but we say goodbye to an old one.

Jo Kendall has been with me since we launched this magazine back in very early 2009. She has been, as some who have worked with her will know, an absolute delight to work with, a hugely inspirational and popular member of the tight-knit *Prog* team, unstinting advocate of the tote bag and a good friend. Without her breezy cheeriness (against my distinct curmudgeonliness), boundless enthusiasm, intuitive musical awareness and acute attention to detail, not to mention her unsurpassed knowledge of all baked confectionary goods, one wonders if we'd have managed to get *Prog* this far! We'll be very sad to see her go, even if it will be just 10 feet away to our parent title *Classic Rock* on the other side of the office. On a personal note, I know we could not have achieved what we have without her. Goodbye Jo.

So, next month, hopefully, we'll be introducing a new face. Yet life on *Prog* carries on regardless. So up and at 'em and prog on...



Jerry Ewing - Editor

Contributors Of The Month

MIKE BARNES
If, as a teenager, Mike had been told that one day he'd interview all three members of ELP, he'd have shaken his head in disbelief. But it's happened and it was great fun. As was an evening spent as – amazingly – one of Family's younger audience members. Read about both on pages 34 and 118.

IAN GITTINS
Ian is a music writer for *The Guardian*, and the co-author with Nikki Sixx of Mötley Crüe of the New York Times bestseller *The Heroin Diaries*. He is currently co-writing the sex, drugs and rock'n'roll story of Vanilla Fudge drummer Carmine Appice. He presents the Fudge's prog story on page 70.

CLAY MARSHALL
When not working with the likes of Marty Friedman, Skeletonwitch and Scale The Summit at Prosthetic Records, LA-based baseball fanatic Clay tries to justify his dust-collecting journalism degree by writing about some of the acts he doesn't work with. He reviews Transatlantic on p114.

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We regret that we cannot reply to phone calls. For more comment and prog news and views find us at facebook.com under *Classic Rock Presents Prog*.

THE BEAR NECESSITIES

I've been thinking of a couple of acts that haven't been mentioned in your mag yet, one current and one long gone.

1. Minus the Bear. I personally consider this underrated band to have definite prog tendencies. Their sound is multi-layered with parping keyboards and nifty guitar playing (including liberal use of two-handed tapping). Even the name sounds proggy. I do accept however that their songs lack 'prog length' and the lyrics don't cover lofty themes — but none of that did Asia any harm either. So, over to you — How Prog Are Minus The Bear?

2. Golgotha. Not a doom metal band as the name suggests but the early 90s symphonic brainchild of the probably certifiable Karl Foster. They started out life as a NWOBHM band but Mr Foster always had grander ideas in his head. So when technology caught up with him he locked himself away and crafted two overwrought rock symphonies at an unsympathetic time musically — namely *Unmaker Of Worlds* and *Symphony In Extremis*. Although both albums suffer from poor production, the music is a nonetheless bonkers but thrilling journey through the single-minded vision of one man. Surely an influence on Arjen Lucassen's Ayreon project?

I think both albums deserve a critical revisit. Anyway, keep up the good work!

Dean West, Manchester

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

I have to confess that I have just bought Sophie Ellis Bextor's *Wanderlust* album. Now, before you laugh till you cry — it's actually more "prog" then some of the bands that you feature in your magazine and on your freebie CD!

Phillip Wells, via email

IT'S A 'SCHNITT BUSINESS

With great interest and pleasure I read the short article about the fantastic German band Grobschnitt in issue 39. I was extremely puzzled that the story ended in 1989 with a negative statement regarding a possible reunion. Grobschnitt *did* reunite with the main former members Willi Wildschwein, Toni Moff Mollo, Milla Kapolke. They played lots of terrific gigs (like in the olden days), released new live albums (2008 and 2010) and even recorded some new music! Grobschnitt (still) rules!

Ulrich Grouven, Cologne

***Prog* 39: read here for the case of the missing Grobschnitt.**

Minus the Bear now add a mention...

Ellis-Bextor: There'll be murder on the dancefloor if this ends up on the prog disco.

THE FORGOTTEN FESTIVAL?

Of all the festivals around the world there is hardly any mention of the Weeley Festival Of Progressive Music held on August 27-29 1971. It was an amazing weekend and one, that if you were there, you would never forget. For the princely sum of £1.50 (or £2.00 at the gate) one saw the likes of T.Rex, The Faces, King Crimson, Colosseum. Curved Air, Edgar Broughton, Grease Band, Groundhogs, Mungo Jerry, Rory Gallagher, Quintessence, Stone The Crows, Van der Graaf Generator, Caravan, Arthur Brown's Kingdom Come, Barclay James Harvest & Symphony Orchestra, Juicy Lucy, Status Quo, Head, Hands & Feet plus about another 15 more acts. We didn't sleep the whole weekend it was one incredible act after another — and the Sunday was free, so you could see the headliners for nothing!

Yet to my knowledge nothing has ever been released legally from the time, no CD or film, what a wasted opportunity!

Martin Badgers, a true Prog OAP

What a line-up! There are stories online, but Weeley seems to have slipped through the cracks otherwise. Are there any other forgotten festivals to highlight? — Dep Ed

COLD TURKEY

I was disappointed to read Paul Henderson's dismissive review of Wild Turkey's *Battle Hymn* and *Turkey* (*Prog 41*). I bought both of these as vinyl and about five years ago, in CD format.

I first saw Wild Turkey at a small club in Liverpool in 1971 and thought they were a great band. I saw them a further three times, including when they supported Black Sabbath and blew them off stage.

I take the point about some of the lyrics being a bit banal (many others were in the early 70s!), but they were a strong band musically with musicians of the calibre of Glenn Cornick, Tweke Lewis and Jeff Jones.

I also can't understand the criticism of the late Gary Pickford-Hopkins, he had a different and tuneful voice and went on to join Rick Wakeman — would he pick a 'weak' vocalist?

I hope your readers ignore this review and give both of these great CDs a play — I still listen to them today.

John Swift, via email

WHY CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

Reading the letters page of *Prog* is always interesting. Just as varied as the genre that the magazine so wonderfully celebrates, are the fans who love it so much.

The "Geoff Off!" letter from Graham Waldwyn in *Prog 42* was a disappointment. He says some very unkind things about Geoff Downes and writes off the current Yes. Graham is not alone in making these kinds of statements and I think it represents a bitter, childish and really quite silly attitude that people adopt about music.

Personal dislike of a band or artist does not actually reflect their talent and is not a reason to write nasty stuff about them. Yes, I prefer the Jon Anderson and Rick Wakeman-era stuff but the current band is actually pretty good and Geoff Downes is a fantastic keyboard player. His style is different to Wakeman's but who cares?

Personally, I can't stand listening to King Crimson (beyond the first three albums) but I know other people like them and that's fine. I also think *Invisible Touch* was a great Genesis album but I know other people hate it and that's fine. My housemate thinks all of Steven Wilson's music sounds the same but she's wrong and this was a bad example.

Can't we all just get along? Pining for the glory days is not just useless, it actually prevents progression of a band and their music so let's stop being so silly and spiteful and accept that bands change and musical tastes differ.

As for Graham's suggestion that Geoff

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TWEET TALK

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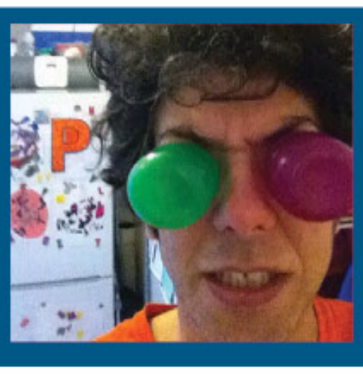
JOHN WETTON
@arkangel260
Was recently described as 'pragmatic'. Probably a criticism, but if my pants are on fire, & I'm standing on a bridge, I will jump in the water.

KAVUS TORABI
@Knifeworld
Well, hello Monday morning.

RHODRI MARSDEN
@rhodri
The Incredible String Band did a Top Gear session for the BBC. It wasn't that Top Gear. It was a different Top Gear.



NIK KERSHAW
@SarahKKershaw
has abandoned me for a week. Got 20 mins in before realising I didn't have to sit through "ask the fucking midwife"

KARNATAKA
@Karnataka
Having only 140 characters is a pain when you want to say something important

LETTER

WELL, WHAT A MISERABLE LOT you are! I've just read Letters in *Prog 42* and it sounds more like the kind of mindless en masse debating synonymous with Facebook than a quality music magazine.

Graham Waldwyn's comments about Geoff Downes having no talent and not being a worthy ivory tinkler for Yes were especially surprising – he reckons that Rick Wakeman, Keith Emerson or even Eddie Jobson would be better. Mr Waldwyn, who is of the tedious 'bring back Rick and Jon' brigade, suggested Downes 'buggled off' someplace else.

For your information, Downes is the only one to actually complete a course at music college and get all his grades, Wakeman having left because of itchy feet, Keith only ever had limited private tuition and Jobson not even that.

I appreciate that certificates aren't everything, but let us not forget that every time that Rick and Jon have rejoined, shortly afterwards the band has split or gone into a lengthy hiatus. With time no longer on their side (some members are approaching 70 years of age) if this was to happen again, they would all have to be pushed on stage in wheelchairs by the time they got back together again.

Steve Wilkinson, Shropshire

It's good to appreciate 'classic' Yes, but Steve has a fine argument for new blood – Dep Ed

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

Downes "buggle off and play with the likes of Jools Holland and Tony Banks", am I the only one who would love to see the formation of Gooly Dowllanks?

Ben Moore, London

THEY COME IN COLOURS...

Having listened to Transatlantic's Kaleidoscope I think we may have already heard the album of the year! Simply stunning album. Add to that the second disc of cover songs, including a fantastic cover of Focus' *Sylvia*, it doesn't get any better or proggier.

Scott Manger, Bellshill

VERY 'EAVY, VERY 'UMBLE

A while back you posted an email of mine, a grumpy Dream Theater fan reeling at Mike Portnoy's shock decision to quit (*Prog 13*, January 2011). I was fairly critical of his decision in my email stating there was more to it than meets the eye.

I'd like to retract that. I believe now that was the correct decision. Seeing the banter between the various members of Transatlantic plus the sheer quality of *Kaleidoscope* seems to indicate that Mike is in a far happier place creatively and musically. I gladly eat humble pie.

Karl Charlton, Luton

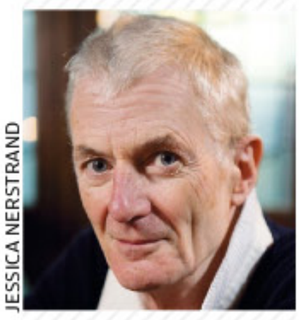
ANIMAL MAGIC

While flicking through *Prog 43* I was delighted to see Prog Boy pet-sitting for Mike Rutherford's pet Squonk. Last summer I got two Siamese kittens, one of which is called Squonk (the other one is called Cthulhu which I suppose is kind of prog). And while I'm distracting you with banal pics which probably only I think are cute, I may as well take the time to ask if there is anything in the pipeline about the band Solaris, stunning bonkers Hungarian prog!

Cthulhu and Squonk: the prog pets deluge starts here.

James, West Sussex

Prog dogs, cats, budgies, salamanders etc always welcome James! Good tip-off on Solaris. We'll pass this on to our Around The World correspondent – Dep Ed



JESSICA NERSTRAND

REX FEATURES

H to He, which is the only one? Peter Hammill and James Dyson go head to head.

CHAMELEON IN THE SHADOW OF THE NIGHT...

Watching Peter Hammill onstage with Gary Lucas at the Union Chapel recently I was struck by how like vacuum entrepreneur James Dyson he is (or vice versa). They've both certainly, er *cleaned up* in their respective fields...

Mike Stand, Flightcaseshire

CAIN, AND ABLE

Re: Kevin Thompson letter in issue 43, the Pendragon gig in Edinburgh was at The Venue, and just for the record, the support band was Citizen Cain.

Don Burnett, St Andrews, Fife

but run out of space. Anyway, the title of the new album is...

CHLOË
@chloealper
Write > record > write > record > write > record.

I haven't seen the sky in weeks. #pale

CHRÏS
@WhiteRhinoTea
Disaster. Halfway over Atlantic I've broken the jack on my B&W earphones. Does St Lucia airport have a Dixons?

SIMON GODFREY
@simonsimple
If there is such a thing as intelligent design, how does it explain nipples on men?

PROG

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CONTRIBUTORS
Mike Barnes, Geoff Barton, Mark Blake, Lin Bensley, Louise Brown, Steve Davis, Malcolm Dome, John Doran, Lee Dorrian, Claudia Elliott, Dave Everley, Ian Fortnam, Pete Fowler, Ian Gittins, Polly Glass, Paul Henderson, Rob Hughes, Patrick Humphries, Stephen Humphries, Emma Johnston, Richard S Jones, David Keevill, Tina Korhonen, Dom Lawson, Paul Lester, Dave Ling, Roger Lotring, Alex Lynham, Gary Mackenzie, Rachel Mann, Rhodri Marsden, Clay Marshall, Julian Marszalek, Ben Myers, Greg Moffitt, Rob Monk, Kevin Nixon, Tim Ponting, Raziq Rauf, Chris Roberts, Natasha Scharf, Ester Segarra, Paul Sexton, Jonathan Selzer, Johnny Sharp, Amit Sharma, James Sharrock, Nick Shilton, Sid Smith, Joe Stannard, Karen Toftera, Marco Vittur, Rick Wakeman, Ben Walker, David West, Philip Wilding, Rich Wilson, Sarah Worsley, Holly Wright.

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Commercial Manager Ian Williamson
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Advertising Sales Manager John Biscomb
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Sales Executive Lucy Hellings
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Sales Executive Laura Richardson
Laura.Richardson@weareteamrock.com 020 7042 4261
Sales Executive Richard Pita
Richard.Pita@weareteamrock.com 020 7042 4141
Head of Digital and Mobile Simon Binns
Simon.Binns@weareteamrock.com 020 7042 4105
Head of Promotions & Sponsorship Katy Adair
Katy.Adair@weareteamrock.com 020 7042 4103

MARKETING
Group Marketing Manager Alix Thompson
Alix.Thompson@weareteamrock.com
Marketing Manager Hannah Burch
Hannah.Burch@weareteamrock.com
Marketing Executive Lydia Higgins
Lydia.Higgins@weareteamrock.com
Direct Marketing Product Manager Ashley Hickman
Ashley.Hickman@weareteamrock.com

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INTRO

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

EARTH WORKS!

Journey... tour on the horizon and raft of **Rick Wakeman** reissues in the can!

Keyboard king Rick Wakeman has catapulted into spring 2014 in a flurry of major activity. Not only is he deep into rehearsing for the eagerly anticipated *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* tour but he has also signed two deals for his extensive back catalogue, one with Esoteric Recordings who will release 16 titles. The first two are 2003's *Out There* and the DVD *Classical Wakeman – Live In Lugano*, which was filmed in 2009, which are scheduled for release on March 24 and April 28 respectively. *Prog* will reveal exclusive info on the second deal shortly.

In the meantime, Wakeman is spending over 18 hours a day working on the production for the *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* 40th anniversary shows. "I start at 5.30am, and if I'm lucky then I finally get to fall into bed at about midnight," he reveals. "Pulling this together has been like dealing with the biggest jigsaw puzzle in the world."

One of the largest problems he has faced is that every venue on the tour is unique: "Each one has a different size and depth of stage," says Wakeman. "So, there's no such thing as uniformity. We have to know in advance how we're gonna accommodate a full orchestra, a choir and a band into the space available."

He has also had to make certain musical adaptations that take the crowd's reaction into account. "When we recently did *Journey...* over four shows in Argentina, they were presented as one continuous piece of

"Pulling this together has been like dealing with the biggest jigsaw puzzle in the world."

KEVIN NIXON

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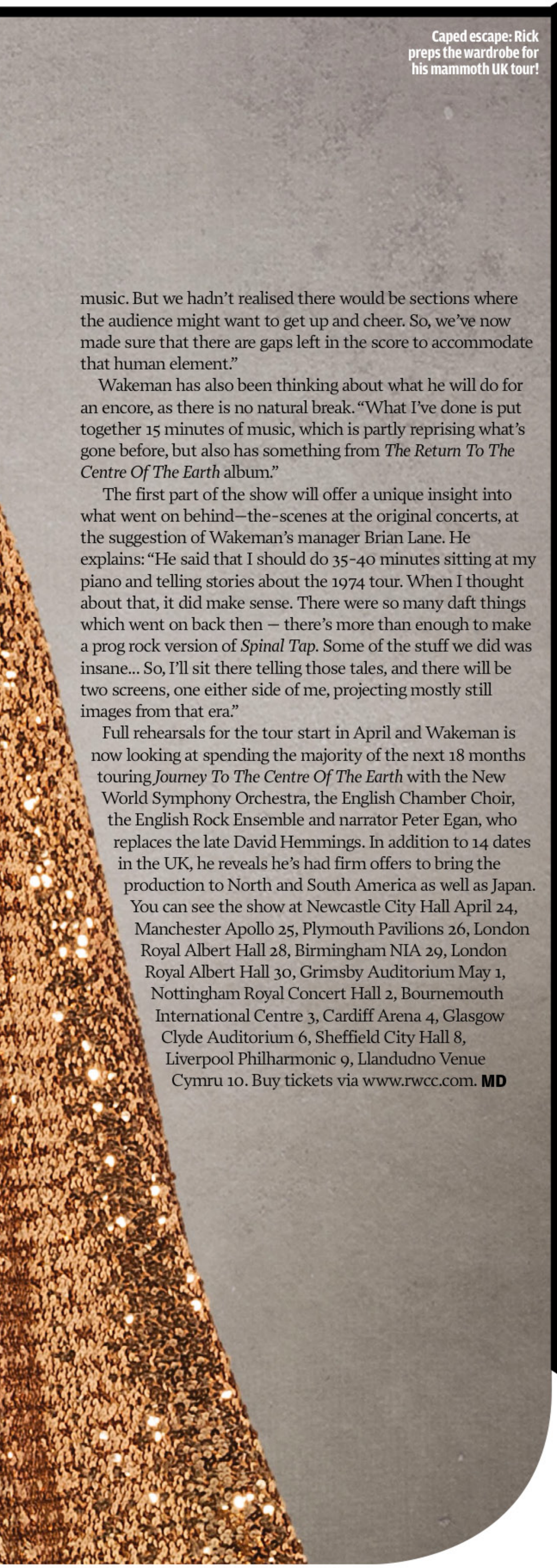

Caped escape: Rick preps the wardrobe for his mammoth UK tour!

music. But we hadn't realised there would be sections where the audience might want to get up and cheer. So, we've now made sure that there are gaps left in the score to accommodate that human element."

Wakeman has also been thinking about what he will do for an encore, as there is no natural break. "What I've done is put together 15 minutes of music, which is partly reprising what's gone before, but also has something from *The Return To The Centre Of The Earth* album."

The first part of the show will offer a unique insight into what went on behind—the-scenes at the original concerts, at the suggestion of Wakeman's manager Brian Lane. He explains: "He said that I should do 35-40 minutes sitting at my piano and telling stories about the 1974 tour. When I thought about that, it did make sense. There were so many daft things which went on back then — there's more than enough to make a prog rock version of *Spinal Tap*. Some of the stuff we did was insane... So, I'll sit there telling those tales, and there will be two screens, one either side of me, projecting mostly still images from that era."

Full rehearsals for the tour start in April and Wakeman is now looking at spending the majority of the next 18 months touring *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* with the New World Symphony Orchestra, the English Chamber Choir, the English Rock Ensemble and narrator Peter Egan, who replaces the late David Hemmings. In addition to 14 dates in the UK, he reveals he's had firm offers to bring the production to North and South America as well as Japan. You can see the show at Newcastle City Hall April 24, Manchester Apollo 25, Plymouth Pavilions 26, London Royal Albert Hall 28, Birmingham NIA 29, London Royal Albert Hall 30, Grimsby Auditorium May 1, Nottingham Royal Concert Hall 2, Bournemouth International Centre 3, Cardiff Arena 4, Glasgow Clyde Auditorium 6, Sheffield City Hall 8, Liverpool Philharmonic 9, Llandudno Venue Cymru 10. Buy tickets via www.rwcc.com. **MD**

This month, Intro was compiled by

Malcolm Dome
Steve Davis
Jerry Ewing
Pete Fowler
Polly Glass
Rob Hughes
Jo Kendall
Alex Lynham
Rhodri Marsden
Rick Wakeman
Natasha Scharf

ASIA GET GRAVITAS

Brit supergroup promise "raw energy and emotion" with their new long-player.

Dignified poses from Carl, John, Geoff and Sam.

Asia are to release their first studio album in two years on March 24, marking the recording debut of guitarist Sam Coulson, who has replaced Steve Howe.

Gravitas will be issued on March 24 by Frontiers, and was written/produced by John Wetton and Geoff Downes and mixed by It Bites' John Mitchell.

"This is pure, unadulterated and stereotypical Asia, with raw energy, enthusiasm and free from any outside impurities," says Wetton. "The album has the full spectrum of emotion and colour, from real life agonies to ecstatic fantasy of escapism. So it spans what we've done through the years. These are great songs, played very well. *Gravitas* is Asia by Asia. At last."

The album is to be made available in a regular CD format and also in a deluxe CD/DVD edition, with bonus songs, a music video, plus classic Asia songs, recorded live with the Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra in Bulgaria. The first single, *Valkyrie*, will come out a week after the album, on March 31.

"As with any new Asia album, putting it all together is a challenge," adds Downes. "But everyone involved rose way above and beyond what was expected. We have a new energy."

The full track listing is: *Valkyrie*, *Gravitas*, *The Closer I Get To You*, *Nyctophobia*, *Russian Dolls*, *Heaven Help Me Now*, *I Would Die For You*, *Joe DiMaggio's Glove* and *Till We Meet Again*. The deluxe edition will also feature acoustic versions of *Joe DiMaggio's Glove*, *The Closer I Get To You* and *Russian Dolls*.

Pre-order at www.originalasia.com. **MD**

THE REALLY WILD SHOW

Prog metal trio **Animals As Leaders** prepare for ...*Motion*.

Animals As Leaders release their third album on March 24 through Sumerian Records – and it has a real surprise on one track.

The album is called *The Joy Of Motion*, and the trio – featuring guitarists Tosin Abasi and Javier Reyes plus new drummer Matt Garstka – have taken a calculated risk on the song *Paramexer*. "It's the first acoustic track we've ever done," reveals Reyes. "We nearly left it off, because it's so different."

Reyes believes this is the album to finally define the instrumental band's sound.

"The first album in 2009 [self-titled] was about Tosin's riffs. Whatever style came out was by accident. This time, we worked hard on developing the music. You'll hear Animals As Leaders being more melodic and progressive than previously.

Band of joy: Matt, Tosin and Javier.

"Various people like Diego Farias of Volumes, plus Misha Mansoor and Adam Getgood from Periphery, were involved. But the overall sound is about the three of us."

Hear samples and find out more at sumerianrecords.com. **MD**

SCROOGED!

Nightwish mastermind **Tuomas Holopainen** talks comic-inspired soundtrack plus plans for new 'Wish album...

Nightwish's keyboard maestro Tuomas Holopainen is to release his debut solo album *Music Inspired By The Life And Times Of Scrooge* on April 11 via Nuclear Blast. The pseudo-soundtrack tells the story of the musician's favourite Disney character Scrooge McDuck, as penned by US illustrator Don Rosa, and features contributions from bandmate Troy Donockley, Battlefield Band's Alan Reid and Tony Kakko from Finnish symphonic-power metallers Sonata Arctica.

"Troy is one of my best mates," Holopainen enthuses, "and because Scrooge originates from Scotland, I really needed to have a Scottish touch and the Uilleann pipes in there. I leaned heavily on him for this production." Less symphonic metal and more pure progressive, the whole package has been orchestrated by Pip Williams and also includes harmonica, banjo and even a didgeridoo to make it stand out from the rest.

Feathered friends: Tuomas and Scrooge.

The idea for this dramatic score first entered Holopainen's head about 15 years ago when he read Rosa's comic book and instantly fell in love with it. Although the strips aren't very well-known in the UK, they're extremely popular in Finland and it was during one of Rosa's signings there that Holopainen told him about his grand plans. The musician from Kitee got to realise his dream last year when the album was recorded in the UK and Finland. "I just felt that I had to get this music out of my head," he says, "and on a more practical level, it was the first time that I had the money to do it. The orchestra and the choir were pretty expensive but I finally had enough savings to cover them."

The first single *A Lifetime Of Adventure* has just been released; the accompanying video was directed by Ville Lipiäinen and shot during the recording process. It also includes some footage of Rosa sketching the new cover art.

> **"I had to get this music out of my head and it was the first time that I had the money to do it."**

Although there aren't currently any plans for live shows, Tuomas Holopainen admits he would love to perform the full album on stage when he's able to make some more time in his schedule. In the meantime, the keyboard player is writing new material for Nightwish's eighth album, which is tentatively scheduled for release sometime next year. "It's too early to speak about themes yet but I think it will be heavier than *Imaginaerum*," he teases. "Of course, every song will still have some orchestra because I love it too much!" Watch this space. **NRS**

INTRO extras

ARENA TOP TRINITY FEST

Arena have been announced as the main headline act for the **Trinity Live** charity show which takes place at The Assembly in Leamington Spa on May 18. They will appear with Touchstone, The Reasoning, Rob Reed, Heather Findlay, Alan Reed and Matt Stevens. The concert raises money for various cancer charities. Tickets cost just £20 and are available from the venue and online.

ALEX PAVLOU/PRESS

Belinda and Justin: ready to take a *Fall*.

THE FALL GUYS

New duo **Se Delan** rise from Justin Greaves' Phoenix!

Crippled Black Phoenix offshoot Se Delan have signed to Kscope Records, and will release debut album *The Fall* on April 14.

A duo, they feature multi-instrumentalist Justin Greaves, the mastermind behind Crippled Black Phoenix since their formation in 2004, and Swedish vocalist Belinda Kordic, who has previously recorded under the name of Killing Mood. The music all comes from Greaves, with Kordic providing the lyricism.

"The difference between Se Delan's music and that of Crippled Black Phoenix is that here I am being a lot simpler," reveals Greaves. "There are no long tracts of epic trippiness here. Belinda's been great in telling me if I stray too close to CPF. The aim is to be different, to make Se Delan stand on its own."

The full track listing for *The Fall* is *Intro, Chasing Changes, Beneath The Sea, Little One, Today, Tonight, The Hunt, Dirge, On My Way* and *Lost Never Found*.

Se Delan have also announced their debut live shows around the date of the album's release, at Leamington Spa Assembly on April 14 and the Islington O2 Academy in London the next night, in support to label mates Gazpacho.

"I have never been so nervous about playing live. But it won't just be Belinda and me. There's so much instrumentation on the album that we have to put together a band to make it work live."

To whet your appetite for the album, tasters are online at soundcloud.com/se-delan. **MD**

HM TRUANTS RIDE AGAIN

Charity bike ride to Download back for 2014.

It was one of the biggest success stories in the rock calendar last year, and for 2014 it's back and bigger than ever.

Once again, Heavy Metal Truants will be strapping up and getting down to the business of a 161-mile charity bike ride from London's Alexandra Palace, all the way to Donington for Download Festival.

Last year saw a host of fans and industry names, including *Prog* Editor Jerry Ewing and TesseracT guitarist James Monteith make the journey up, with £96,000 raised for charity and some epic laughs had along the way.

Ed Jerry confirms he's nicked the Chafe-Ease out of the Ed-In-Chief's rucksack...

"Aside from being a memorable experience, not least for Monteith's anal anguish for the duration of the ride, the best thing was that it didn't matter who you were, the sense of camaraderie and knowledge that you were doing something good for charity really helped pull you through the toughest parts of the challenge," says Ewing.

If you're interested in joining this year's ride, or donating, head to www.heavymetaltruants.com. **JE**

"Messenger are totally unafraid to mix it up; the flutes of prog and Americana-style violins meet hard-rocking drums and pop-sensible vocal work, and it all amounts to a most novel and prodigious production."

- Kristoffer Rygg, Ulver

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PROG ME!

Five things that rock our prog stars' worlds...

ESTERSEGARRA

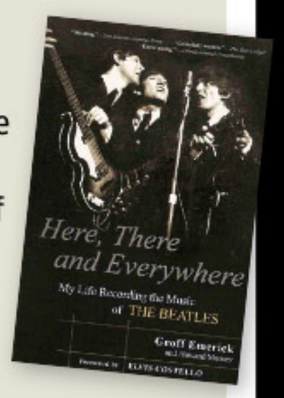
THIS MONTH: ROSIE CUNNINGHAM, PURSON

OK COMPUTER?

I'm a real luddite. I use a computer for home recording but other than that, I like to bury my head in the sand and play 'let's pretend it's 1971'. I do have a toaster with an egg poacher on the side, though. It's pretty tech.

MASTERMIND?

Beatle-ology. I've been a student of the Fabs since birth and have too many books to count. My favourite is *Here, There And Everywhere* by Geoff Emerick, their incredible engineer. It's got all the juiciest recording nuggets and some really close-up anecdotes written in a very endearing way.



RELICS?

I have a pretty extensive collection of 60s and 70s clothes. I started dressing that way in my early teens, mimicking my musical heroes. I'd trawl the charity shops of Southend and then get (and just as quickly lose) jobs in vintage shops in London. I'm a bit of a whizz on the sewing machine and make or alter a lot of my clothes. My favourite piece was given to me by my friend Heidi and I wore it when I was her bridesmaid – it's a floor-length turquoise brocade cape with purple silk lining. I wear it on top of my pyjamas to go to the shops. The people staring are none the wiser.

SOUND & VISION?

Recently I've been particularly digging The Beach Boys' *Smile* sessions, Kevin Ayers' *Shooting At The Moon* and Giles, Giles and Fripp. Some top films would be *Slade In Flame*, *The Holy Mountain* and *Suspiria*.

SUPPER'S READY!

Simply: Japanese food and red wine. **JK**

INTRO extras

ENID HEADLINE RESONANCE EVENT

Resonance Rocks is a charity event in aid of MacMillan Cancer Support which will take place at the Bedford Arms in Balham, London between Thursday July 31 and Sunday August 3. The event will feature three stages and thus far acts such as The Enid, Änglagård, Mr So & So, Luna Rossa, Aeon Zen, Lifesigns, Henry Fool and Synaesthesia have been announced. See www.facebook.com/resonancerocksuk for info.

Voyager: journey to the centre of the Perth.

IN SEARCH OF SPACE

Aussie proggers **Voyager** announce fifth kick-started album.

Perth prog metallers Voyager are to release their next album in mid-May – and it's all been funded through Kickstarter.

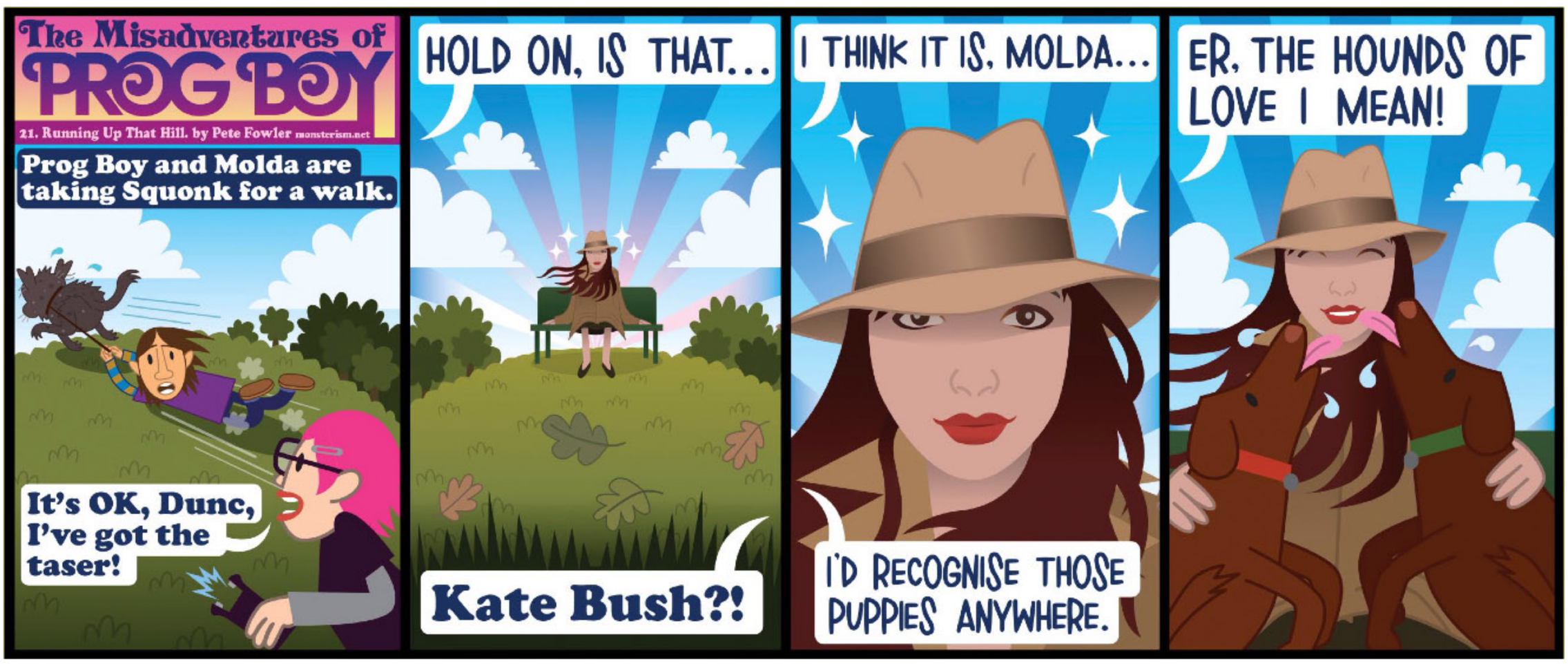
Their fifth album, it will be called *I Am Voyager* and the band reached their initial financial target in just three days.

Says guitarist Simone Dow on the advantages of using this funding system: "It allows our fans to be a part of our recording process, and it's not all for the benefit of the artist. This sort of thing usually comes with some awesome sweeteners for the fans. What better way to help your favourite bands continue to make the music that you love! We're all for it."

As for the musical style fans can expect to hear on the album, Dow says: "It's essentially 80s dark pop, but done while on progressive narcotics. I'd say the mood is catchy, heavy yet melodic. So, we have the best of both worlds, being able to stretch out musically, while also having an appreciation for a good tune. If you take our last album, *The Meaning Of I* (2011), as a starting point, this goes further."

Voyager first featured in *Prog* in February 2012 at the time of *...Meaning*, and have just released new single and lyric video *Breaking Down* as a prelude to the new work.

The band will be play three Australian shows in late March with Orphaned Land and Orsome Welles and will announce further shows soon. See voyager-australia.com. **MD**



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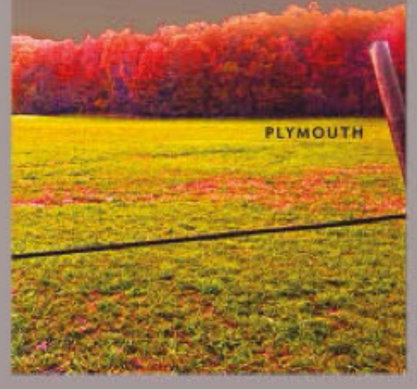

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FAD GADGETS

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

TIMBERCRAFT SPEAKER CABS

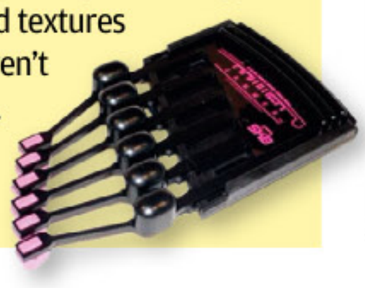
As the son of an ex-woodwork teacher, I'm only too aware of the appeal of top-notch woodcraft, even if my own attempts generally ended with a chisel embedded in my thumb. TimberCraft Cabinets were born out of the notion that a guitar cab is a better guitar cab if it's sumptuously encased in oak, and when you look at the lustrous finish on these after they've been buffed up with a squirt of Mr Sheen, who's to say that notion isn't correct? I wouldn't fancy the shipping charges from Florida, but maybe it'll inspire you to get out the Black & Decker.
timbercraftcabs.com

NYNE AQUA

Tradition has it that electronics and water don't mix, and it would be a foolish person who attempted to disprove this assertion without medical professionals on standby. However, gadget manufacturers have begun to recognise our deep-seated need to take our music into the bath or the pool – and lo, the Nyne Aqua. This floating Bluetooth rechargeable speaker can handle extended submergence and will stream music in a swimmingly efficient manner – over 10 metres, for 10 hours, with 10 watts of power.
nyne.com

HAMMER JAMMER

Many people are suspicious of slap bass. Excessive abuse by large-thumbed bass players in the 1980s turned it into a rehearsal-room no-no. But let's stay open-minded, because hitting a string is not an inherently more evil act than plucking one. This $30 (£18) device enables guitarists of all kinds to embrace the slap-and-tap technique. It sits over the strings, providing the player with small keys to hit, piano-style, coaxing out new sounds and textures that I assure you aren't remotely offensive.
bit.ly/hammer jammer



RICK WAKEMAN'S CAPED CRUSADES

JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE GIRTH

Rick's pre-tour check-up is more thorough than he expected.

"Did you read the pamphlets we sent you, Mr Wakeman?"

"Err... oh yes, of course. Riveting stuff."

"And did you watch the DVD we sent outlining the procedures today?"

"Oh yes... Oscar-winning performances, I thought."

I sat back in the chair opposite the doctor feeling concerned as I had dropped the pamphlets and DVD in the bin shortly after receiving them. I was sure there was nothing of interest and it was only for insurance purposes for the upcoming tour.

Things started off badly.

"Mr Wakeman, please go to the bathroom and give a sample of your urine in one of the small bottles."

Unfortunately, I'd drunk copious amounts of tea on the way there and my bladder was bursting. I filled 11 small bottles and labelled them Wakeman 1 to 11. I returned to his consulting room where I was then weighed.

"I think I'm a little above the weight I should be," I proffered meekly.

"You're fat," he said. "Lose weight."

Then came the heart testing, followed by lots of prodding.

"Drop your underpants please, Mr Wakeman."

Little Willy Wakeman was not keen on this happening and was even less keen when a strange hand grabbed hold of his attached dangly bits and the doctor uttered the immortal words: "Cough!"

"You have a double hernia," the doctor announced afterwards.

> **"My bladder was bursting so I filled 11 small bottles and labelled them Wakeman 1 to 11."**

"Will that affect my insurance for the tour?" I asked.

"Not if you sort it out quickly – and indeed I suggest you do as it's likely to strangulate!"

"What happens if it strangulates?" I asked.

"Well, it's not good." The doctor shook his head. "You can die."

(I had it sorted within the month.)

"While you're in a state of undress," he said, "please lie down on the bed, face the wall and bring your legs up in a foetal position."

More than slightly worried, I obliged. I then heard the sound of rubber gloves being pulled on.

"Now, Mr Wakeman. You said you'd read the pamphlets about what was going to happen today, so this will come as no surprise."

It *was* a surprise. I was convinced his entire arm was disappearing.

"Can you not check my Adam's Apple from the other end"? I ventured.

He removed his hand, arm, elbow and shoulder from my 'exit only' area and smiled.

"You didn't read any of it, did you?"

"No sir," I mumbled. "Is there anything else I should be expecting that I'm not going to like?"

"Of course there is," he smiled... and handed me the bill. "Good luck on the tour!" he added, offering his hand.

"I hope you've washed that," I replied as I shook it. Just for safety, I washed mine on the way out – briefly glimpsing 11 bottles of anguish lined up on the shelf for later.

KEVIN FEBRUARY

I AM THE MORNING

Wake up to Russia's hottest new prog-folk band.

Morning glories: Maryana Syomkina and Gleb Kolyadin.

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Gleb Kolyadin *(piano)*, **Maryana Syomkina** *(vocals)*

SOUNDS LIKE

The dainty neo-classical soundtrack of a magical journey across windswept mountains in search of a secret fairy grotto

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"In Russia, I'm mostly known as the only female musician who listens to progressive rock!"

"IN RUSSIA, I'm mostly known as the only female musician who listens to progressive rock!" laughs I Am The Morning's softly spoken singer Maryana Syomkina. Formed in 2010, the St Petersburg-based duo mix elements of progressive folk and classical music in a delicious way to create a sound that's caught the attention of not only local music fans but also those further afield. "We only play in venues that have a piano and we try to bring in live strings as well," the singer explains. "It's unusual for a band to play with an orchestra or strings here but it feels like we're working as a team this way."

Their debut album, simply titled ~, is a mesmerising collection of dainty songs that are left open to the interpretation of the listener. "When you name an album, you're trying to put a mood into words, which is difficult," Syomkina explains. "People will look at a title and try to decipher its meaning so we decided to just use a symbol, like Sigur Rós."

Her choice of the tilde as that symbol is a nod to the influences of the sea and landscape that can be heard throughout the album, and work is already underway on their second release which is being financed through a successful crowdfunding campaign. "We're apparently the first musicians from Russia to use Kickstarter," Syomkina reveals, admitting it was a complete surprise when they managed to double their target over the funding period.

The additional cash raised by the campaign has afforded them the opportunity to track and mix the album in London, England. "I don't believe in miracles but amazing things are happening to us," the singer laughs. Tori Amos's sound engineer Marcel van Limbeek contacted us after he heard our songs and I've made friends with Danny Cavanagh [Anathema]. He gave me some advice and told me to get in touch with Gavin Harrison from Porcupine Tree, who recorded new drum parts for us."

The duo haven't yet decided whether this new album will be self-released or put out by a label but either way, they're planning a 2014 delivery.

Ask Syomkina about touring and she bemoans the strict visa laws in Russia, which make it difficult for bands to travel in and out of the country. Although IATM recently supported Polish prog rockers Riverside in their home city, the singer admits: "It's almost impossible to find progressive music here and a lot of bands don't normally play here. It's sad that we can't often see them, although Anathema came here several times and Porcupine Tree played here a few years ago."

With touring currently on hold, Syomkina is enthusiastic about plans to release an intermediate EP to plug the gap, and there are also some promotional videos in the works as well. "We worked so hard to make this happen and when the album comes out I will be the happiest girl," she grins. "We're just making music that we love and a lot of people seem to appreciate that." **NRS**

STEVE DAVIS' INTERESTING ALTERNATIVE

FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

Don't like women vocalists? Get your ears around this lot...

After reading *Prog* 42, I was a tad peeved that the icon that is Steven Wilson faltered in two categories of the Readers' Poll 2013. OK, I can understand him not delivering the goods in the Best Venue category, but no podium Top 10 for Best Female Singer is at the very least an oversight and at worst a sexist snub. This narrow-mindedness by the readers is laughable, but then perhaps I have identified the reason for this voting debacle.

Recently, an online progressive music writer (remaining nameless) confided that he didn't much care for girlie singing in prog. I got the impression from him that he wasn't alone in his views. If a significant proportion of the voters were of a like mind, then acknowledgement of Steven's undeniable prowess as a female vocalist would have resulted in a juxtaposed de-iconisation of a living legend. A true catch-22 dilemma!

Italian singer Elaine di Falco was my personal choice in this category, but an overwhelming sense that the artist formerly known as Mr Wilson was a shoo-in caused me to not bother voting, hence her barely sneaking into the top 3,000 for her vocal performance on Empty Days' self-titled CD (Altrock ALT036). Words like 'ethereal' and 'haunting' spring to mind, but I can't really be arsed to put them into a coherent sentence.

My current favourite female artist (2,374th this year) has to be Katherine Blake after her superb live performance at the Phoenix FM studios (check out the Interesting Alternative Show page on Mixcloud) and, of course, her excellent Mediaeval Baebes CD *The Huntress*. This CD also features five other female vocalists, which will have blighted the Baebes' chances of eligibility into any prog category.

My other current favourite female artist of 2013 is Sharron Fortnam for her work on the North Sea Radio Orchestra's *I A Moon* from 2011. We wait with some form of breath for Craig and Sharron to get their NSRO mojo on ASAP, although it is understandable that an addition to the family can disrupt things. I feel a little envious of young Sam though, as no one-year-old is currently being lullabied to sleep in finer style!

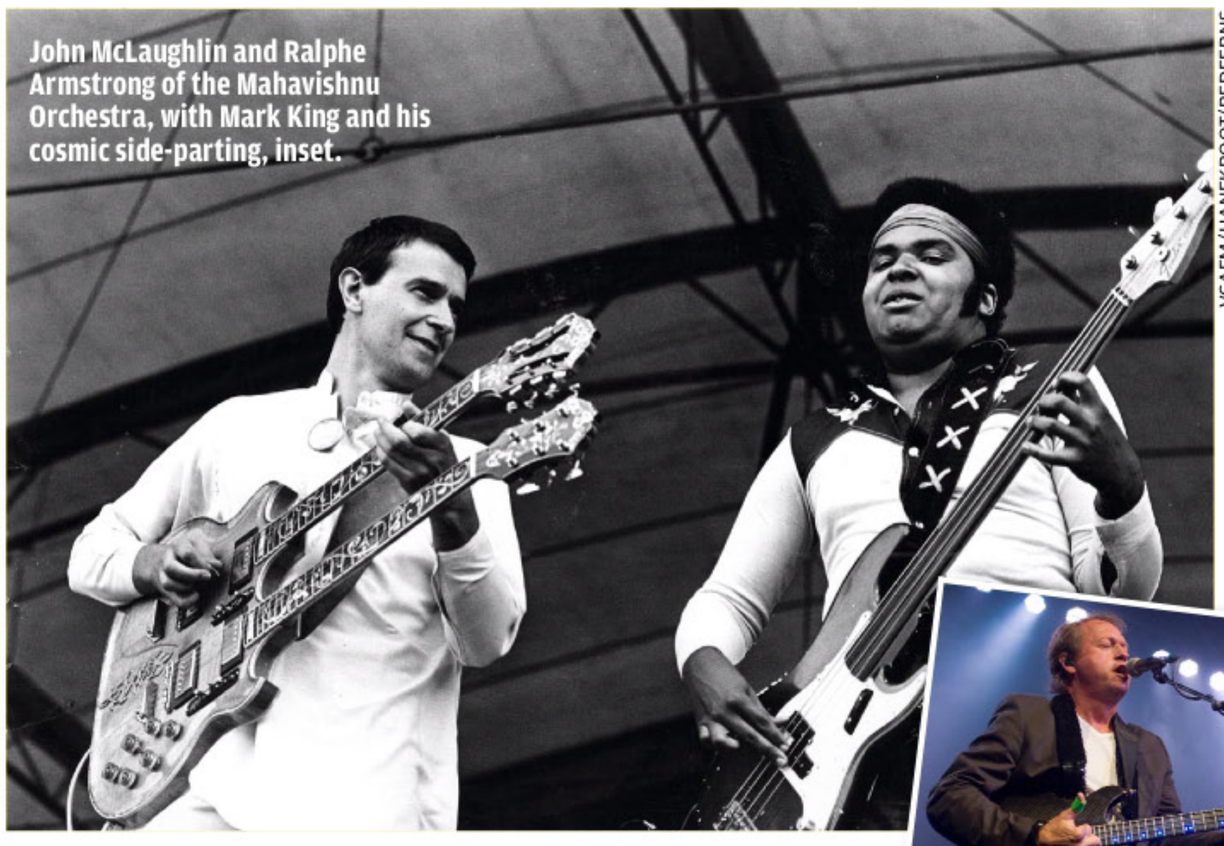
My latest 'discovery' are the Warp-label legends Broadcast, featuring Trish Keenan, who tragically died in 2011. For prog fans who have never investigated the ways of Broadcast but may have had a fleeting foray with White Noise's cult LP *An Electric Storm* back in the day, then perhaps check out 2009's *Broadcast And The Focus Group Investigate Witch Cults Of The Radio Age*. Be interesting!

Catch Steve's Interesting Alternative Radio Show every Monday 10pm-midnight at www.Phoenixfm.com

AL OVERDRIVE

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...



John McLaughlin and Ralphe Armstrong of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, with Mark King and his cosmic side-parting, inset.

VCAEM/HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

STEVE PERKS/RETNA LTD

MARK KING

Level 42 bass supremo recalls his spiritual and sartorial awakening by **John McLaughlin** and Mahavishnu.

"Although I've ended up ploughing this jazz-funk thing, my first fave band was Cream, then Hendrix. Then I discovered John McLaughlin and the Mahavishnu Orchestra when I was 14, in about 1972.

"My parents had just bought a new colour TV. I just hit the wrong button and saw this *In Concert* logo. It was all very psychedelic. They were playing the first strains of *Meeting Of The Spirits,* McLaughlin doing this riff on the 12-string side of the double-neck.

"I stood there with my jaw hanging open. Then the drums kicked in and I saw this muscly dude behind what looked like a glass drum kit. This was, of course, Billy Cobham, tucking in on a Vistalite perspex kit. I was a drummer at the time, nowhere near taking up bass, so I was mesmerised by the power he had. There was this bizarre violin playing by Jerry Goodman, and I saw Jan Hammer and thought, 'Mother of God, what instrument is he playing?' It was a Fender Rhodes, but he'd taken the top off so you could see the tines. Even Rick Laird on bass, I've always thought he was so perfect for the band. The whole thing was really intoxicating – I'm sure I didn't breathe for a couple of minutes.

"Living on the Isle of Wight, my method of transport at 14 was a Raleigh bike with a basket on the front which, much to my chagrin, my dad bought me instead of a racing bike. I cycled down to the one record store in Newport, Happy Days, who had one McLaughlin album, *My Goal's Beyond*. The inside sleeve had this great shot of him playing an Ovation, dressed all in white. I went to the hairdresser in Cowes and said, 'Can you cut my hair like this guy?' I walked out looking nothing like him. My next stop was Witcher's, The Wight Man's Clothiers, where I got a load of cricket gear.

"So I'm wandering about, cricket gear and a duffle coat, side parting, being all spiritual. And people wonder why I've been stylistically challenged ever since! Heady times, all inspired by this bizarre band called the Mahavishnu Orchestra." **PS**

"The whole thing was really intoxicating - I'm sure I didn't breathe for a couple of minutes."

Level 42 play the Rewind South and Rewind North Festivals in August, before a major UK tour in October. Their Sirens EP is out now via www.level42.com.

MASSIMO PEDRAZZINI

PROG IN BRIEF

Swiss neo-prog rock outfit **Clepsydra** (right) have a four CD box set released through Gonzo Multimedia. *3654 Days* features the band's four albums to date, over an hour of bonus materials and a 12 x 12-inch biography of the band.

Sontaag, a new Anglo-American prog outfit, release their debut album, described as "the rock opera Pink Floyd never wrote", through Esoteric on April 28. The album has been co-produced and mixed in New York and London by Youth of Killing Joke.

D'ACCORD

D'accorD III

The third album from the Norwegian prog band D'accorD.
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KEESMONKEESMONKEESMONK

Schnauser, l-r: Holly McIntosh, Jasper Williams, Duncan Gammon, Alan Strawbridge.

SCHNAUSER

Spiky Bristolian quartet deliver psychedelic prog-pop with bite.

SCHNAUSER CERTAINLY KNOW what they like — and what they don't. "None of us are very much into what's labelled 'prog' nowadays — emo/metal bands throwing complex time signatures into turgid riffage," says the band's singer-songwriter Alan Strawbridge. "For us, the best of modern prog equates to people who write inventive, melodic music, like White Denim, Stephen Malkmus, Field Music, William D Drake and Electric Soft Parade."

As suggested by that little bundle, Schnauser favour the kind of coltish prog-pop that's high on originality and imagination. The Bristol quartet's latest album, *Where Business Meets Fashion*, is just that: a rapturous confection of itchy time signatures, fat hooks and psych-centric weirdness. One of its highlights, *Good Looking Boy*, details Strawbridge's 80s addiction to crisps and the ZX Spectrum. "They combined to make me the fattest kid in my school when I was 13," he recalls. "Meanwhile, my best mate was modelling himself on 'The Ice Man' from Top Gun and doing the rounds with the ladies. So we used to chat about girls while playing computer games."

If there's a defining strand to the Schnauser sound, it's a shared enthusiasm for "mid-to-late-60s psych-pop". Strawbridge lists albums by The Pretty Things, Love, Blossom Toes and The Turtles as treasures they've all bonded over. XTC are also clearly a key influence, not least in the singer's airy delivery, as is a very home-grown sense of the absurd. There is, he admits, a "dour, fatalistic humour that runs through a lot of our lyrics, which is a very British trait, I guess. Ray Davies sings Chris Morris perhaps?"

The band's beginnings can be traced back to 2005, when Strawbridge was still busy with his previous outfit, The Lucky Bishops. During downtime from cutting their third LP, he began writing and recording a new bunch of tunes, before inviting friends to join in. The result was Schnauser's self-released *Kill All Humans*, which landed later that year. Second album *The Missing Link* was primarily a solo project too, though by then he'd been joined at regular open-mic nights in Weymouth by Holly McIntosh. They began gigging occasionally as a duo before moving to Bristol in September 2008. "That was when Schnauser became a proper band," says Strawbridge.

They soon recruited drummer John Fowle, who went on to feature on their next opus, 2010's *The Sound Of Meat*. It was an album that drew praise from many quarters, including comedian Stewart Lee in *The Sunday Times*.

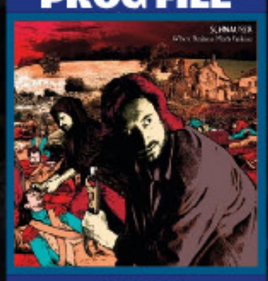
The final component arrived after a local gig supporting Euros Childs and Norman Blake the following year, where they met keyboardist Duncan Gammon. Strawbridge was particularly taken with the latter's eccentric solo LP, *Lord Gammonshire's Guide To Everyday Sounds*. "It reflected very similar influences to Schnauser's," he says.

With Fowle quitting due to family and work commitments, the band have recently welcomed new drummer Jasper Williams and things are looking pretty rosy. They'll be touring the UK this summer and have just signed to Esoteric Antenna for a new album, due before the year's out. So what can we expect?

"We've already recorded the bulk of it," offers Strawbridge. "So far there's our slowest song yet, one about wasps, Duncan's prog epic *National Grid*, an Italian Christmas tune called *Buon Natale* and an exploratory 15-minute suite of conjoined songs."

In other words, expect the unexpected. **RH**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Alan Strawbridge *(guitars/vocals)*, **Duncan Gammon** *(keyboards/vocals)*, **Holly McIntosh** *(bass/vocals)*, **Jasper Williams** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

XTC, Syd Arthur and early Soft Machine fighting for top billing at the UFO Club

CURRENT RELEASE

Where Business Meets Fashion is out now on Bitter Buttons

WEBSITE

www.schnauser.co.uk

"For us, the best of modern prog equates to people who write inventive, melodic music."

PHOTOSBYBERLIN.CO.UK

RADIOWAVES

Prog is on the air every week on DAB, online and on radioplayer and TuneIn apps!

Welcome to the brand new *Prog Magazine Radio Show* column. Each issue we'll be bringing you all the latest news on what's coming up on the show on TeamRock Radio, with any special guests and events.

The show launched on July 7 last year, broadcasting every Sunday at 6pm, and quickly became the most-listened to specialist show on **www.teamrockradio.com** (thank you, dear listeners).

The big news this month is that not only does the *Prog Magazine Radio Show* move to a new time slot, there are now *two* shows per week. That's a double dose of prog now from host Philip Wilding (pictured) on Saturday AND Sunday evenings, at the new time of 8pm-10pm. Saturday's is based more around the reviews section of the magazine, giving much needed airtime to some of the more obscure bands featured, while Sunday's show focuses on features in the magazine and star interviews as well as being able to throw some of your much-loved longer prog tunes into the mix.

If you've missed a recent show you can hear the last five via our On Demand service at **www.teamrockradio.com/on-demand**. And you can get involved with the show too by sending your track requests to **progshow@teamrockradio.com**, or join us on Twitter while the show is on air for a lively dose of progtastic banter.

Tune in, turn on and prog out! See you at the weekend... **JE**

LOCUS FOCUS

Rock gazetteer **David Roberts** puts prog on the map.

NO 1. FRIARS IN AYLESBURY

Just an Assembly Hall, but with 87,000 members!

GEOFFREY TYRELL

No-one buying a music paper in the 70s can have failed to notice the weekly gig ads topped by the distinctive gothic Friars logo. The Aylesbury club opened with Mike Cooper and Mandrake Paddle Steamer on June 2 1969 at New Friarage Hall, before relocating to the Borough Assembly Hall (1971-1975), then the Civic Centre and its current Waterside Theatre home. In its early 70s heyday, Captain Beefheart, Genesis and King Crimson all appeared before new wavers and punks became Friars' customers by 1976. When Friars closed in 1984 the venue, much-loved for its fan-friendly spirit and camaraderie, had logged a staggering 87,000 members. Promoter David Stopps oversaw the conveyor belt of prog's finest, including the fledgling Marillion, that put Aylesbury on the music map and among musicians the affection for the venue and its organisers remain; Steve Hackett made sure he played there on his Prog Award-winning Genesis Revisited tour last May.

To learn more about what made this place so special, head to Buckinghamshire County Museum, where *The Evolution of Friars* runs until July 5. See www.aylesburyfriars.co.uk for more info.

Friars is location No.103 in Rock Atlas, out now via Ovolo Books/Red Planet, price £19.95.

HAVE A CIGAR

Saluting the scene's supporting crew

This is Hansi: the unique world of Progress.

PROGRESS RECORDS

The Swedish label's founder **Hansi Cross** on prog fans, the business and signing your own band...

"Prog fans come across as pretty intelligent to me," laughs Progress Records' Hansi Cross. "Or maybe I find them so because their way of thinking is similar to mine!"

Since its inception in 1998, his Swedish label has brought us over 16 artists, including Beardfish, Brother Ape, Silhouette and Introitus. Their big sellers have been Magic Pie's 2011 Scandi-symph set *The Suffering Joy*, and *From Land To Ocean* from the label's second signing, Galleon. Their first was the boss' own eponymous band.

As a kid, budding guitarist Hansi was a fan of The Beatles, Pink Floyd and Yes, and he was just 13 when he saw Frank Zappa live. He listened to *Over-Nite Sensation* on a loop and that inspired his own playing. By the 80s, he'd immersed himself in everything from the fusion of Weather Report to the art-rock of Japan. Cross were initially signed to UK label Cyclops, but when he was made redundant from his day job of 28 years, his payoff went towards his own business.

"We put out Cross' *Visionary Fools* in December 1998," he recalls," but we had no knowledge of the music industry at all. To generate income while we learned, we started a CD shop. I learned a lot about having a label, and saw how the artist-label-distributor-shop chain worked."

He quickly spotted a gap in the market for a good distributor for prog and closed the shop to focus on this, and the label itself.

Progress acts usually come with an album recorded, and the label then add their weight to mastering, packaging and sales. Recent releases have included *City Of Light* from Chris, and Violent Silence's *A Broken Truce*, with titles on the way this year from Adventure, Introitus and, once again, Cross.

"Music is my mission," asserts Hansi. "Without it, our lives would be poorer. Beyond its emotional pleasures, it also has a higher, sublime form of communication beyond our daily gestures. I believe it has some kind of positive impact on the way we think, on our intelligence."

If that's true, it *would* be progress... **GRM**

"Music is my mission. Without it, our lives would be all the poorer."

Find out more at www.progressrec.com.

THE PROG IN BRIEF

MICHAEL INNS

Prog legends **Curved Air** (right) will have their 2012 live album *Live Atmosphere* released for this year's Record Store Day by vinyl specialists Plane Groovy. Ony 500 copies will be released on April 17 on 180g heavyweight vinyl.

Prog-gothic trip-hoppers **Archive** have their latest album, *Axiom*, released on their own Dangervisit label on May 19. The album forms the soundtrack to film, *AXIOM*, subsequently made by Spanish film collective NYSU and released the same day.

Legendary South London psychedelic post-rockers **Loop**, who reformed last year, have added two new dates to their co-headline June tour with Justin Broadrick's **Godflesh**. They play Glasgow SWG3 on June 2 and Leeds Cockpit June 3.

UK prog rockers **The Gift** will release their second album, *Land Of Shadows*, through the Bad Elephant label on May 5. A single, *The Willows*, has just been released. Pre-orders for the new album start from March 31. Check the label website for details.

GOING FOR THE ONE?

VIEW PICTURES/UIG/GETTY DE AGOSTINI/GETTY

GO FOR IT TWICE!

New shows, new time, double the prog!
The PROG *Magazine Radio Show* is now on air
on Saturdays *and* Sundays...

That's right, **from March 2014 *The Prog Magazine Radio Show* will be double the size**.
On Saturdays presenter Philip Wilding will bring you news, reviews and the cream of burgeoning young bands while *Prog* Sundays will host the usual mix of classic tracks, star interviews and reader requests that have made *TPMRS* the most listened-to specialist show on TeamRock radio to date.

TEAMROCK RADIO

The Prog Magazine Show, Saturdays and Sundays from 8pm on DAB, radioplayer and TuneIn app and at www.teamrockradio.com. Tell us what you think at twitter.com/ProgMagazineUK and www.facebook.com/progrockmag.

top of the progs
The Prog Top 30 Albums

March 2014

Powered by burning shed

1 **IAN ANDERSON** Homo Erraticus *(CALLIANDRA)*
2 **GAZPACHO** Demon *(KSCOPE)*
3 **STEVEN WILSON** Cover Version *(KSCOPE)*
4 **KING CRIMSON** Live in Milan, June 20th 2003 *(PANEGYRIC)*
5 **JOHN WESLEY** Disconnect *(INSIDEOUT)*
6 **STEVE JANSEN** Slope *(BURNING SHED)*
7 **JETHRO TULL** Live In Switzerland 2003 *(LET THEM EAT VINYL)*
8 **MATT STEVENS** Lucid *(ESOTERIC ANTENNA)*
9 **KATATONIA** Dance of December Souls *(PEACEVILLE)*
10 **CARAVAN** Paradise Filter *(CPG)*
11 **JIM MATHEOS/HALO EFFECT** Halo Effect *(BURNING SHED)*
12 **THE CRIMSON PROJEKCT** Live In Tokyo *(INSIDEOUT)*
13 **TRANSATLANTIC** Kaleidoscope *(INSIDEOUT)*
14 **BRAND X** Missing Period *(GONZO)*
15 **BIGELF** Into The Maelstrom *(INSIDEOUT)*
16 **ANATHEMA** Hindsight *(KSCOPE)*
17 **STEVEN WILSON** Drive Home *(KSCOPE)*
18 **JACK LANCASTER & ROBIN LUMLEY WITH BRAND X** Marscape *(GONZO)*
19 **KATATONIA** Discouraged Ones *(PEACEVILLE)*
20 **OZRIC TENTACLES** Vitamin Enhanced *(MADFISH)*
21 **STEVE HOGARTH AND RICHARD BARBIERI** Arc Light *(RACKET)*
22 **THE BLUE NILE** Peace At Last *(UNIVERSAL)*
23 **COLIN EDWIN / LORENZO FELICIATI** Twinscapes *(RARE NOISE)*
24 **ELBOW** The Take Off And Landing Of Everything *(UNIVERSAL)*
25 **XTC** Nonsuch *(APE)*
26 **ANATHEMA** Universal *(KSCOPE)*
27 **TIM BOWNESS / PETER CHILVERS** California, Norfolk *(BURNING SHED)*
28 **GENESIS** Selling England By The Pound (Blu-ray Audio) *(UNIVERSAL)*
29 **PETER HAMMILL / GARY LUCAS** Other World *(ESOTERIC ANTENNA)*
30 **MAGMA** Trilogy *(CHARLY)*

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

WIN! A RISE ABOVE RECORDS 25TH ANNIVERSARY BUNDLE!

WORTH £150!

They've come a long way since 1988. Starting as a way of distributing founder Lee Dorrian's output with Napalm Death and Cathedral, this London label quickly established itself as a haven for progressive doom, sludge and stoner rock. Now with its buried treasure imprint Relics and a brace of 60s tinged psychedelic bands on the roster, Rise Above have literally done just that – and become a label of discernment and damn good grooves to boot.

To celebrate 25 years of their existence, we have a bumper bundle of RA goodies up for grabs! It features CDs from: Purson's *The Circle And The Blue Door*, The Incredible Hog's *Vol 1 + 4*, Cathedral's *The Last Spire*, Diagonal's *The Second Mechanism plus* vinyl copies of Bang's *Death Of A Country*, Astra's *The Black Chord*, the original Iron Maiden's *Maiden Voyage*, Comus' *Out Of The Coma*, Circulus' *Clocks Are Like People*, Litmus' *Aurora*, Blood Ceremony's *The Eldritch Dark and* a 1,000-piece jigsaw of Dave Patchett's artwork for Cathedral's *The Guessing Game*! Fancy a chance to win this little lot? Answer this question:

On 2005 album *The Lick On The Tip Of An Envelope Yet To Be Sent*, Circulus collaborated with which folk singer?

a) Bobbie Seagroatt from Comus
b) Marianne Segal from Jade
c) Clodagh Simonds from Mellow Candle

To enter go to www.teamrockradio.com/riseabove
Find out more at **www.riseaboverecords.com.**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This online comp will be open from March 19 to April 23 2013. Postal entries can be sent to: *Prog*, Team Rock, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. By entering online you agree to our competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Team Rock and carefully selected third parties. The winner will be drawn at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Team Rock 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.

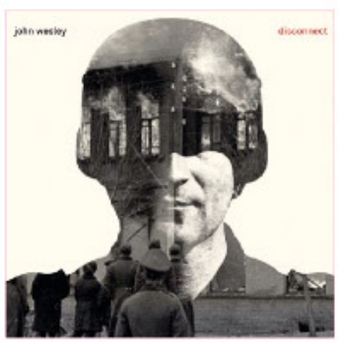
US, THEM & YOU What's got us grooving this month...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing

SE DELAN

The Fall
KSCOPE

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother



JOHN WESLEY

Disconnect
INSIDEOUT

The Lone Office Lady
Jo Kendall

MOTORPSYCHO

Behind The Sun
RUNE GRAMMOFON

The Contributor
Geoff Barton

ALCEST

Shelter
PROPHECY

The Musician
Dave Pegg

JETHRO TULL

Broadsword And The Beast
CHRYSALIS

The Reader
Derek Philpott

IT BITES

Once Around The World
VIRGIN

Space cadets! Exxasens from left: Cesc Céspedes, Oriol Planells, Jordi Ruiz, Sergio Ledesma.

EXXASENS

Barcelona post-rockers bring their space-obsessed sounds back down to earth.

"IT EXISTED only for me. The main reason was to enjoy playing and composing music and no more."

Spanish musician Jordi Ruiz is emphatic when describing the origins of his band Exxasens. Starting as a solo project six years ago, the former member of Kyba and Playmotive released his songs online, landed a deal with Belgian label ConSouling Sounds and found himself with a cult following. Fans compared his music to Mogwai, Explosions In The Sky and Tides From Nebula.

"For me, that was when it became more than a project," Ruiz explains, although the next step wasn't to come for some time. "Three years ago, after two albums, a promoter from Russia contacted me to play at an instrumental festival in Moscow. There was no band then, but it was a challenge to convert the project to a band, so I decided to take the opportunity and start playing that way. I called some friends, and four months later we played."

The project was worth pursuing. With their latest album *Satellites*, Exxasens are poised to become the post-rock force they always threatened to be. While previous albums *Polaris*, *Beyond The Universe* and *Eleven Miles* dealt with space exploration, the new record is a true concept album, with songs as episodes in the journey of a satellite into space and back.

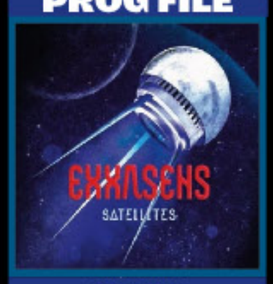
"I love space!" Jordi enthuses, before elaborating on how the album differs sonically. Whereas "the other albums had a lot of elements", *Satellites* is more direct. "For the last albums, the band didn't exist, so composing the songs was quite different. I had never thought these songs would be able to be performed on stage, but on the new album we're a real band, so when I started to compose I started with this idea – that a band could play these songs. The songs are different now because there are not too many layers; there are only one or two melodies. On the last album there were layers, melodies and it was very difficult to express on the stage. So this time I tried to be more direct."

Blending the established Exxasens sound with a krautrock intensity and kinetic drive, *Satellites* embodies its subject matter well. Comparable to psych-rock such as White Hills or grunge-space-rock crossover Failure, it's accessible, melodic and out-there. Guitars frequently take a back seat, allowing for different timbres and instruments to take the lead. Ruiz speaks with pride about the interplay of instruments on the record. "I like the electronics in other instrumental bands like 65daysofstatic and I tried to introduce these elements because I am trying to get a balance."

Having taken so long to discover exactly what Exxasens could be, you might wonder what motivates Ruiz. "Since I was 18 I've been playing in bands," he reflects. "It's a way of life." **AL**

"I never thought these songs would be performed on stage, but on the new album we're a real band."

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Jordi Ruiz *(guitars, synths, programming)*, **Cesc Céspedes** *(bass)*, **Sergio Ledesma** *(synth, keyboards)*, **Oriol Planells** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Mogwai, Porcupine Tree and Failure colliding in outer space

CURRENT RELEASE

Satellites is out now on ConSouling Sounds

WEBSITE

www.exxasens.com

Incura (clockwise from top right): Jim McLaren, Jono Olson, Kyle Gruninger, Phil Gardner, Boyce Whittaker.

"I've sat inside a serial killer's home, I've sat in graveyards, some very inspirational places..."

INCURA

Curtain up on Canada's hottest new heavy prog-rocking artistes

SOME SAY young bands don't care about fiddly record details. Incura are not one of those bands. The theatrical, hard-rocking quintet spent two years writing material for their self-titled debut, and Kyle Gruninger — friendly, chatty but unwaveringly driven vocalist/frontman — tells *Prog* that he would run songs for 12 hours straight, doing every take necessary to make each note and weird intricacy as eye-popping as possible. "We really pushed ourselves outside our box, which was already not a very normal box," he says of the recording process with King's X/Our Lady Peace producer Arnold Lanni. "We're creating a whole new shape here!"

Indeed, when your frontman adores Freddie Mercury, your collective inspirations span Genesis and Iron Maiden, and you're all technically first-rate musicians, you do end up with a decadent, genre-defying act. They're rather like a harder, electrified Dresden Dolls — in rich, drama-laden but mischievous slices like *Who You Are* — with prog rock skill and soul. It's rousing stuff, blending meticulous, tempo-changing arrangements with youthful zing.

Sources of lyrical inspiration are similarly intriguing: "I've sat inside a serial killer's home, I've sat in graveyards, some very inspirational places..." Kyle tells us. "That's what I'm looking forward to about coming to the UK [in April], because you have so much more history. I mean, I could sit inside a building built in 1527 and feel what that invokes in me and my writing."

It's odd to think it all began with *The Phantom Of The Opera*. A five-year-old Gruninger experienced this Lloyd Webber show and promptly fell in love with the stage. Back home, raised on the soprano lines of his singing mother and sisters, he laid the foundations for his spine-tingling, glass-shattering vocal range, which cuts strikingly through Incura's progressive influences — Yes, King Crimson and Rush, as well as satisfyingly heavy guitar work.

Formed through school in Lethbridge, Alberta, the group relocated to Vancouver in the late 2000s, having found their 'epic' finish with keyboardist Jim McLaren, a former keys/guitarist for a theatre group Kyle performed in. It's perhaps this diverse stage experience that gives their delivery undoubted flair.

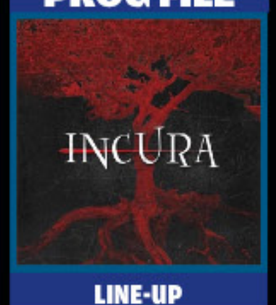
"After 10,000 shows and over 10,000 hours, you really should be a professional," says Gruninger, who still sings and dances with a professional musical theatre company in Canada. "It's great that people like the album, but I want you to want to see it live; to question if we can even do that live. And when people see it, I want to blow them away."

Oh yes, Incura are performers and not about to let perfectionism hinder gig showmanship.

"People want to see you sing, scream, sweat, bleed and jump in the crowd," he enthuses. "People want a show. So I could sing a slightly flat note, but hey, I was jumping off a speaker so it's okay!"

Sounds like a brief sensation? Think again. "Prog rock is timeless music," Kyle explains. "We could be playing this into our 40s, like Genesis, Yes and all those people, because it isn't bubblegum pop." **PG**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Kyle Gruninger *(vocals)*, **Jono Olson** *(bass)*, **Jim McLaren** *(keys)*, **Royce Whittaker** *(guitar)*, **Phil Gardner** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

King Crimson and Queen teaming up for a rock opera - with a youthful, sportingly heavy backing band and a *big* amp stack

CURRENT RELEASE

Incura is available now via InsideOut

WEBSITE

www.incura.net

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May 03	Symphony Hall, BIRMINGHAM
May 04	New Theatre, OXFORD
May 06	Colston Hall, BRISTOL
May 07	Swan Theatre, HIGH WYCOMBE
May 08	G Live, GUILDFORD
May 09	Corn Exchange, CAMBRIDGE
May 10	Regent Theatre, IPSWICH
May 11	De Montfort Hall, LEICESTER
May 13	Assembly Rooms, DERBY
May 14	Palace Theatre, MANCHESTER
May 15	Grand Opera House, YORK
May 16	The Sage Gateshead, GATESHEAD
May 18	Festival Theatre, EDINBURGH
May 19	Concert Hall, PERTH
May 20	Music Hall, ABERDEEN
May 21	Eden Court, INVERNESS
May 24	O2 Shepherds Bush Empire, LONDON
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METAL HAMMER GERMANY

GAZPACHO

Demon (CD / LP)

Norway's Progressive art rockers return with a dark tale of mystery and manuscript.

Special edition features bonus track 'The Cage' mixed by David Bottrill (Placebo / Muse)

APRIL TOUR DATES

4 PL, WARSAW, Progresja
5 PL, WROCLAW, Sala Koncertowa Polskiego Radia
6 GER, DRESDEN, Tante Ju
8 GER, BOCHUM, Zeche
9 GER, OSNABRÜCK, Rosenhof
11 NL, UDEN, De Pul
12 NL, ZOETERMEER, De Boerderij
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My Record Collection

JOEL DOMMETT

The *Skins* actor and star of BBC Three prankster hit *Impractical Jokers* reveals how fancying someone can open up a world of music, and how his beloved 90s rock and nu-metal yielded the newest wave of progressive young minds……

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Will Ireland

"I'll be honest. I didn't know a thing about music. My first album was Will Smith's *Big Willie Style* and I loved it. Then in school there was a girl I really fancied called Holly Black. She was the person I first kissed, and she was properly into rock music and loved Green Day. Once I'd heard them, they were my gateway to lots of other stuff. It was the start of something big!

The next step was seeing bands live. My first ever gig was Skunk Anansie and **Muse** were supporting them. It was 1999, I must have been about 15 and we travelled from Bristol, to Cardiff University. In front of us were these people in Muse T-shirts and I remember thinking 'Who the hell are Muse?' and 'What absolute idiots who really like *the support band*!' In hindsight they were clearly right. At that time Muse were supporting nearly every band that was on tour and they started to get big. They were totally different to what I was listening to, and didn't have enough angst for me. But I got to see their evolution, I love what they do now. This band have really pushed things forward on every album, and with *The 2nd Law* they excelled themselves. It's so far removed from the early days and that massive Queen influence. Muse are a perfect example of a rock band that you get into when you get older when you can understand that they're incredible musicians, and that vocally you don't have to scream to make yourself heard.

"Then I thought 'Who the hell are Muse?' Now I see them as a perfect example of a rock band who don't have to scream to be heard."

I say Muse weren't angry enough for me; the problem with rock music is that I'm quite middle class and not necessarily angry enough to listen to it. Take the mosh pit, you've got to be angry in there. I'd see people whirling around, like, 'arrrgghh I grew up on a council estate!' and I'd be like, 'arrgghh, my mum's lasagne's pretty good!'

Nu-metal came along and I got into Korn begrudgingly. I didn't understand what they were doing, and its appeal crept up on me. But listening to what seemed impenetrable, eventually you hear the merits of it as you battle through the noise to get to the music. The same with Slipknot. I was a bit 'whatever' about them until I saw them live. They were so good, so many strands woven together, really mind-blowingly different. But aside from the incredible music, it was proper angsty stuff that I couldn't quite grasp as the worst thing that could happen to me is when my mum didn't give me a lift into town. At this point I was in a band called Psirus and we only played one gig at Thornbury Cricket Pavilion, just to contradict our anger. We started with Korn, played some of our own songs, and then finished with Papa Roach. Or didn't, actually, as the guitarist refused as he said 'his fingers hurt'. Pah.

From nu-metal I found **Tool**. Along with their intensity, they brought calm, spirituality and relaxation. The first album I got was the one *everyone* had, *Lateralus*. It was another step on from what I was listening to and their artwork and videos were amazing, especially the one for *Schism*. I was watching cable music TV all the time and the videos that came around that time were so brilliant, but quite disturbing. I wonder if they'd be able to play them now? Crazy, weird, really strange. Frontman James Maynard Keenan is also in **A Perfect Circle** and I liked them a lot too. They're a bit more experimental, and their song *Three Libras*, I really love that.

At that point I was listening to a lot less frantic music, things to have a sit down and have a cup of cocoa to ha ha! When you're young you listen to everyone else cos you don't want to seem uncool. When you get older and more confident you can take some risks — "I'm allowed to like this!", that kind of thing!

One band that demand proper listening to are Deftones. They have melody, then heaviness and a lot of beauty. *Around The Fur* started it for me, but they transcended the nu-metal genre easily with how they've used their influences — Cure, Radiohead, ambient music. Another is **Coheed And Cambria**. I got into Coheed quite late, on the *Good Apollo, I'm Burning Star IV, Volume One* album. I was looking for things to really listen to and it appealed to me because of the string work. Coheed was my way in to things with bigger arrangements and after I'd heard *Keeping The Blade*, they led me to the Finnish metal classical band Apocalyptica. Great stuff!

I'm a big Biffy Clyro fan. My friends were much cooler than I was and I would go round their houses and we'd share everything on our iPods, ending up with huge collections. So I heard Biffy right from the heavy early stuff. *Puzzle* emerged and they got really massive, and for all the right reasons. They've never played it straight. I find them really exciting and like Muse, or System Of A Down, there's something really noble about an artist that keeps trying to switch it up. It's very inspiring, bands that have aspired to do something different but have retained a level of things that were interesting to you in the first place. Biffy achieve that, and so do **Cave In**. I've never got into Rush, who they're supposed to be influenced by, but Cave In started as a metalcore act, but never stood still. *Antenna* is the album they did with the big songs, big melodies, totally epic.

Listening to these artists and how they push the envelope is how I've learned to approach stand-up on tour; what was I doing before, let's push it further and surprise the audience. It's also such a big love of mine I can't ignore it. So for my Edinburgh shows this year, I have an idea to go back to my music roots — it'll be called Finding Emo, and I'm gonna try and reunite the band…"

Catch Joel on tour now, or on BBC Three's Impractical Jokers. See www.joeldommett.com for more info.

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Q&A

JOHN WESLEY

Porcupine Tree's tour guitarist taught Steven Wilson how to shoot a gun. In turn, Wilson showed him how to make records, and what it means to be an artist.

Words: Stephen Humphries

John Wesley has carved out a solo career between stints as a guitar sideman for Fish, Porcupine Tree and Steven Wilson. But soon after joining Sound Of Contact as a touring member last year, Wesley had an epiphany: he needed to once again prioritise his own creative impulses.

"By the end of the European tour, I realised I needed to bring my own vision to life and I left," he recalls from his home in Tampa, Florida.

The result? Wesley's sixth solo album, titled *Disconnect*. The guitar-heavy record, which includes a cameo appearance by Rush's Alex Lifeson, boasts Wesley's strongest melodies to date. The lanky songwriter credits his artistic growth spurt to his many hours in the studio with Wilson. "Tracking him as his engineer, all the recording techniques were there for me to learn from," he says.

In the early 1990s, you were discovered by Marillion. How did that happen?
I was a broke, single father looking for work. A friend of mine said, "I've got this position as a guitar tech for an English band." On the first day of rehearsal, the first thing I ever heard them play was *Splintering Heart* and my jaw hit the floor. We all went out to a club that night. I got a little hammered and got up on stage with the band and started ripping out Led Zeppelin. It grew from there. They listened to some of my songs and four shows later, I was the opening act. At one point or another, all of the band members have been on one of my records. I will be eternally grateful.

"As I played, I thought, 'Alex Lifeson is going to know I robbed him blind!'"

You then became Fish's guitarist and co-wrote his *Fellini Days* album. I take it there was never a dull moment?
I have more Fish stories than the law allows! There was a nightly wrestling match on the tour bus. I would always brush my teeth at my bunk and then go spit in the sink. Fish and tour manager Yatta [aka Kelvin Boys-Yates] were determined that they would wrestle me down and get me to swallow my toothpaste. I would always try and brush my teeth when they weren't looking, but they'd come at me from both sides of the bus and jump me in the aisle. I was a double black belt in Taekwondo at the time and had spent many years wrestling, so I always ended up climbing out from underneath them and making it successfully to the bathroom. That happened probably 50 times!

During your tenure in Porcupine Tree, how did you help Steven Wilson wage his campaign against the iPod?
It's in his *Insurgentes* movie. He was filming himself killing iPods and I'm quite the gun aficionado, so we decided to shoot some iPods. Steve wasn't comfortable with guns, but we made him look great. We had a lot of fun shooting those little iPods to pieces. He got to weld one and it blew up. We chopped up an iPod in a wood chipper. Then we went to Disney World. There was a Carousel of Progress and he stood in front so it read as the Carousel of Prog!

What are the lyrical themes running through *Disconnect*?
I had some life changes in the middle of making it. My son was born exactly the same week as I lost my mother. One of the things we discover in life is that nothing stays the same, whether you want it to or not. There were several instances in my life where I had to disconnect, whether it be from certain individuals or certain phases of my life that I had to let go of. At the same time, I have a lot of friends in the military. Watching them come back from tours of engagement, they came back very disconnected. Watching them struggle with their daily lives led to an encapsulation of a theme. We all have our little battles of disconnection and every single song on the record highlights that.

How did you rope in Alex Lifeson to play a guitar solo on the song *Once A Warrior*?
When Alex came to see Porcupine Tree play for the first time, I had to play his solo in *Anesthetize* live. As I was in soundcheck that day, it occurred to me how much of my style as a young player came from him. I thought, "He's going to see me play – he's going to know I robbed him blind!" I'd never had a chance to meet him before. What a great night! We hung out and he was the last person to leave. Later, we were discussing the fact I was doing a record and he said, "Hey man, if you've got any room on there..." He actually approached me! They'd just finished touring and I approached him a few weeks later and said, "Can you do this now?" Within a week, he sent me a beautiful solo. There's a Rush vibe on the album.

Speaking of Rush, you regularly go on lengthy motorcycle rides with Neil Peart. What's that like?
He is one of the most skilled riders I've ever ridden with. You're up and on the road by eight in the morning. Pack a candy bar, because that's going to be your lunch. You're not off the bike until dusk. That's hardcore. He has a small circle of people he trusts as riders. But you have to be on your game to ride with Neil. He's one of the wittiest and most caring people I've ever met.

Are you excited to step to the fore once again with *Disconnect*?
Steven Wilson really showed me the true meaning of the word 'artist'. At some point, you have to stop looking around you and truly look inside yourself and create music that makes you happy.

Disconnect is out on March 31 via InsideOut. See www.john-wesley.com.

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CEREBRUM ERUPTUS!

Now rebooted and re-released, with *Brain Salad Surgery*, **Emerson Lake & Palmer** served up a unique blend of thinking man's rock that swept the globe. Here's how it all came together...

Words: Mike Barnes

"*Brain Salad Surgery* is the group at the pinnacle of its powers," says drummer Carl Palmer of Emerson Lake & Palmer's fifth album. "It's very well recorded and it was definitely one of our most creative periods. If I had to choose one of our albums, that would be the one."

It's a viewpoint echoed by his erstwhile bandmates. Keyboard player Keith Emerson sees it as a "step forward from the past", which "represented the camaraderie of the band at the time". Bass player and vocalist Greg Lake reckons that it was "the last original, unique ELP album".

The album was released in late 1973, by which time the group were, in Lake's words, "already huge". One of the first so-called supergroups, formed from members of The Nice, King Crimson and Atomic Rooster, Emerson Lake & Palmer's rapid rise to fame swept aside the old notion of 'paying your dues'. Although all three musicians had endured times of schlepping up and down motorways in a transit van, the newly formed trio's first gig was at the Plymouth Guildhall, followed by a second at the 1970 Isle Of Wight Festival. From then on, superficially at least, it all seemed so easy. "It looked to some like we were the sons of famous fathers and didn't have to work to get there," quips Lake.

Their fourth album, 1972's *Trilogy*,

Benchmark: the trio take a break while they can, London 1974.

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SONY MUSIC PRESS

had reached Number Two in the UK and Number Five the USA, but in rehearsing and arranging the music for *Brain Salad Surgery*, ELP made a decision to pursue a quite different approach. "Music technology was really expanding," Lake explains. "Tape recorders were going from 8-track to 24-track. We took advantage of the new possibilities and did a lot of overdubbing. But being a three-piece band, when we played it live on tour, it didn't really sound as good as the record, so we made sure we could perform the next album live before we had even recorded it."

The group had bought a cinema in Fulham, which they renamed the Manticore Cinema, and they rented it out as storage and rehearsal space to groups. But in the rehearsals for *Brain Salad Surgery*, they left their gear set up on stage and rehearsed it as if playing a live show.

The album was recorded in Advision and Olympic Studios, with Lake on production duties. None of the musicians remembers much about the studio sessions due to the fact that, because the band were well rehearsed and ready to go, they were over relatively quickly. "It's probably the most inventive album we made," Palmer says. "But you don't realise that at the time you're making it as you're so wrapped up in it. And you never know quite how it will turn out."

Compared to the brighter, more open sound, of *Trilogy* and *Tarkus* from 1971, *Brain Salad Surgery* is tougher and darker, or at least more shadowy. Lake agrees and thinks this could be down to a couple of factors. Eddy Offord, who had engineered their previous albums, was absent, and so that task fell to Chris Kimsey and Jeff Young.

"Firstly, every engineer has a palette," says Lake, "and it's amazing how different a group can sound in different studios. Secondly, unlike the previous albums, *Brain Salad Surgery* is almost a live recording done in a studio. The sound was quite raw and quite ambient."

It opens in a blaze of light, though, with a flamboyant version of William Blake and Hubert Parry's *Jerusalem*, with Palmer playing gongs and timpani, and executing lavish multiple tom-tom rolls around his stainless steel kit. Emerson garnishes proceedings with exultant Moog clarion calls, while Lake's magisterial voice holds the middle ground.

In the early 70s, the BBC were far more censorious than they are today, their rather matronly guardianship of the nation's morals earning them the nickname of 'Auntie'. From the 60s, the institution was on the lookout for music with overt sexual or drug references, which they would then

"PETE SINFIELD AND I GOT ONTO THE IDEA OF A WORLD WHERE COMPUTERS ACTUALLY TAKE OVER FROM PEOPLE... IT WAS PROPHETIC."

Greg Lake

ELP ARCHIVE/TONY ORTIZ

banned on grounds of taste. It was joyously bombastic, but surely not a danger to the nation's youth?

"I can only assume that the motive for banning it would be that it was patriotic and that we were somehow blaspheming something cherished by the nation," says Lake. "We did it as well as we could and there was no mockery about it."

Emerson Lake & Palmer were well known for their classical adaptations. Emerson had pioneered rock and classical fusions with The Nice, arranging classical repertoire for the three-piece group and playing with orchestras. Palmer had made his name with The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown and Atomic Rooster, but his love of classical music was in his genes.

"My grandfather was a professor of music at the Royal Academy, his brother was a classical percussionist, their mother – my great-great grandmother – was a classical guitar player, so I've always been interested in that sort of music," he explains. "One of my first jazz albums was one of Jacques Loussier's *Play Bach* series. I always thought [playing classical material] was a great way to go."

The press added to the hype behind the album's 1973 release.

Despite the usual slew of mixed reviews, the album earned ELP gold and platinum discs from the US to Japan. It was enough to make Carl's hair curl.

Lake recalls, though, that their attitude to compositional credit was a bit "naïve" in the early days. Emerson had presented the dramatic music for *The Barbarian* on their self-titled 1970 debut album to his bandmates, neglecting to mention that it was lifted from *Allegro Barbaro*, a piano piece by Hungarian 20th-century composer Béla Bartók, and it ended up being credited to the group.

A rather embarrassing incident followed. Bartók's widow phoned EG Records, who, thinking it was a hoax call, told her in no uncertain terms to go away. Music publishers Boosey & Hawkes called the next day confirming her identity. "We put it right," says Lake, "and made sure that she was paid fairly, and on all future copies of the record it was properly credited."

SONY MUSIC PRESS/F.GOLCHAN, SONY MUSIC PRESS, ELP ARCHIVE/TONY ORTIZ

"BRAIN SALAD SURGERY IS ALMOST A LIVE RECORDING DONE IN A STUDIO. THE SOUND WAS QUITE RAW AND QUITE AMBIENT."

Greg Lake

For *Brain Salad Surgery*'s *Toccata*, Emerson made sure everything was done by the book. He takes up the story of how he first heard the piece, the fourth movement, the *Toccata Concertata*, of Alberto Ginastera's *Piano Concerto No.1*.

"I was at Burbank, California in 1970 with The Nice, just before I formed ELP. NBC grabbed onto the idea that it would be great to get rock bands together like Jethro Tull and The Nice and mix it with Ray Charles, [pianist] Daniel Barenboim and [cellist] Jacqueline du Pré, [violinist] Jerry Goodman [later] of Mahavishnu Orchestra, all to be conducted by Zubin Mehta in a TV movie called *The Switched-On Symphony*. I remember waiting to do my stuff and I heard this storming piano, and the pianist's name was João Carlos Martins from Argentina. I went, 'My God, this is the most incredible work I've ever heard.' He came down in the dressing room and had the score, which looked like someone had splurged ink all over it.

"I said, very timid-like, 'Hi my name's Keith. What was that you played?' and he said, 'It's a piece by Alberto Ginastera; he is my teacher.' I got back to England and found the recording of him playing it, and I went down Bond Street, into Chappell's, where they had a sheet music copy."

Emerson went to visit the composer in Geneva, got his seal of approval and struck up a long-lasting friendship. Ginastera's piece is more angular and modernist than the group's reworkings of Bach, Copland, Janácek and Mussorgsky, but it put Emerson in mind of his music teacher's advice when he admitted a desire to learn Tchaikovsky's first Piano Concerto. "She said, 'Don't play all the stuff that people know; play something different.' And I thought, 'Well, this really is completely different.'"

Emerson Lake & Palmer's version of the composition takes huge liberties, but echoes the extensive use of percussion in the original, with the inclusion of Palmer's synthesised drum solo. This was a unique, custom-built set-up that involved two mics on each drum, one of which picked up the acoustic sound, the other acting as a trigger for pre-set synth sounds. Palmer cites this piece as an example of the group's experimental spirit, but wasn't sure the audience really 'got' it, though: many thought the electronic bleeps and note patterns were produced by Emerson's keyboards.

Lake's *Still... You Turn Me On* is one of his dreamiest acoustic songs. These had always provided dynamic contrast to ELP's power play, both live and on record, and here Emerson joins in on harpsichord. Was the idea that the song was addressed to a certain person in the audience?

"Only nominally," Lake replies. "When I think about the lyric, I'd think about a face in the audience looking up at me. When the audience looks up on the stage they see a star, but a star is just a perception, so it was a concept that I was trying to voice,

BRIAN GREGORY WILSON

C'est La Vie: Keith Emerson Today

High Voltage, conducting, and that musical spark.

In 2010, when ELP played the High Voltage Festival, they ruled out using the flying piano for health and safety reasons. "I had the designs of how to make this work," Emerson complains, "but we were allowed the cannons for some reason!!"

High Voltage looks like it might have been the band's last ever show, but Emerson is still a busy man. "I am learning to conduct," he reveals. "Don't ask me to conduct Wagner, but I can conduct my own pieces. And all that I can tell you from my own recent experience is that some young, budding orchestral musicians are unbelievably brilliant and they are desperate to learn and play new music.

"I can't say that my playing is as good as it used to be way back in the 70s – I'm reaching 70 now – but my compositional skills and my playing, to some extent, are way up to par. And I can only thank God for that." **MB**

TINA KORHONEN

Keith Emerson: Still... he turns it on... tweaks the oscillators... adjusts the low-pass filter...

Salad Daze

"It *was* an X-ray of a penis. Not mine, I hasten to add…" Greg Lake on *that* title and *Brain Salad Surgery*'s iconic artwork.

SONY MUSIC PRESS/HR GIGER

"The title of the record was retro-fitted," says Greg Lake of *Brain Salad Surgery*. "It's got nothing to do with the content of the record. As is the album cover, but it just somehow held together well. Of course, when you retro-fit something – the artwork of *Tarkus* was also a case of retro-fitting – it sort of automatically gets some of the record's genetic imprint. Even if it wasn't connected, it is now and it represents the music. People have their own way of interpreting visual art and lyrics – it's not what it is, it's what you think it is, and that's one of the wonderful things about it."

But isn't it true that the phrase 'Brain Salad Surgery' is black American slang for fellatio? "Yes, We had a record company called Manticore Records and the guy who was running it in America was a black guy called Mario Medious," Lake explains. "We said, 'We've got to think of a name for the album,' and he came up with the name, *Brain Salad Surgery*. We asked, 'What is that?' It sounded so intriguing.

"The guy who ran Manticore in England was a Swiss guy called Peter Zumsteak. We said we'd recorded the album and were looking for someone good to do the album cover and he said, 'There's a great artist in Zurich called HR Giger. Maybe he would be interesting?' I think we must have seen some of his work in a book and so we said, 'Let's go and meet him.' So we flew over to Zurich to his house and it was the most bizarre experience.

"It was like a nightclub. He just had UV lights, so it's dark, and Giger's house is full of horror, with sinister-looking sculptures and terrible pictures of rows of burnt babies. The dining table and chairs look like they're thrones, and are made of black ebony. The backs of the chairs are all made up of skulls. He himself, of course, is just a sweet, gentle person. It's a beautiful example of where the artist's vision is not actually him.

"We looked at some artwork in its formative state. It certainly wasn't like the album cover – there wasn't the logo on the skull painting and the portrait of the woman's face didn't have the penis below it."

There has been some speculation as to whether or not the shape beneath the woman's mouth, which on the cover was virtually airbrushed out, was actually a penis.

"It *was* an X-ray of a penis," Lake confirms. "Not mine, I hasten to add. Giger's. I can't remember how much of that was coincidental, but it hung together really well."

"With all the albums, that frontage was important," adds Emerson. "I think the unique work of HR Giger put the final stamp on *Brain Salad Surgery*. It was the amalgamation of the artwork and the music that really made it. And quite honestly, I think if *Love Beach* had a different cover, we wouldn't have been referred to as some sort of new Bee Gees!" **MB**

but in a romantic way."

Benny The Bouncer is the one aberration on the album, a couple of minutes of knockabout light relief – one of the group's "nonsense songs", as Emerson puts it.

"When I was very young I used to sometimes play shows with The Gods at Salisbury City Hall," says Lake. "There was a bouncer there and he was fucking huge! He must have been six foot three; he was a massive guy. He never did anything because no one would ever dare say anything to him. But he is Benny The Bouncer and the Palais De Danse is Salisbury City Hall."

The bulk of *Brain Salad Surgery*, though, is the three-part suite *Karn Evil 9*, which ranks as their most ambitious and original half hour of music, largely written by Emerson. "In between going back home from tour, mowing the lawn and saying 'Hi' to the wife and kids, I'm not sure how I managed to write all this down," he laughs.

"But I wrote it on manuscript paper and presented it to Greg and Carl. The first part of *First Impression* [as the constituent parts are titled] used a lot of counterpoint and that worked well. Occasionally we used to make music up from blues jams, which could be fun, but I didn't always think that it was satisfactory."

Lake still sounds delighted about how Emerson's music was "a perfect platform" for the lyrical concept he had been hatching up with his old King Crimson buddy, lyricist Pete Sinfield, whose family had connections with the circus.

The first section of *First Impression* is full of warnings and ominous portents, visions of a future dystopia. But right from the rehearsals in the cinema, Lake had in mind the idea of theatre, a unique performance, something happening in real time.

"There's a character, like a ringmaster, who says, *'Welcome back my friends to the show that never ends,'* Lake recites. "It's slightly cold. *'We're so glad you could attend, come inside, come inside…'* There's a wry smile that goes with it."

Once we have accepted this rather sinister invitation, we are presented with a surreal parade of 'rows of bishops', 'heads in jars', 'a real blade of grass', 'a bomb inside a car', and alongside these peculiarities, 'seven virgins and a mule', a combination which promises some particularly transgressive entertainment.

The music is fittingly spectacular, and charged with characteristic energy. It evokes Bach, Bernstein and futuristic R&B, woven through with Emerson's serpentine synth lines. Palmer navigates these currents with a single-minded intensity, while Lake reminds us of his roots before his bass-playing days with some nifty, melodic lead guitar motifs.

The instrumental *Second Impression* begins as a hyperactive piano trio – somewhat akin to Palmer's beloved Jacques Loussier – before hitting

"THE JOURNALISTS WOULD SLAG US BUT THE PEOPLE DECIDED WHO THEY LIKED."

Greg Lake

Poster boys: Keith, Greg and Carl in portraits included with the original album.

SONY MUSIC PRESS

a Latinate groove, like music heard wafting from some sci-fi barrio.

"I had been on holiday in Trinidad and I got this crazy sound on the Moog, which sounded quite like steel pans," says Emerson. "Carl really got into the rhythm of that one and it was a little more light-hearted than the serious mood of the other *Impressions*."

A strange, sparse section, a nocturne redolent of empty streets, leads us back into the initial piano theme.

There's no let up into the *Third Impression*, with its synth fanfares ushering in anthemic verses. Lake describes how the lyrics follow on from the *First Impression*. "I really can't tell you quite what the connection was, but the next thing to pass by was this concept of the future."

His co-lyricist, Pete Sinfield, had also been a computer programmer, but in the 1970s, few people had even come across such a device: "There weren't even fax machines," Lake explains.

And to many they represented the unknown and also the unnatural and impersonal in a potentially threatening way. One only needs to think of HAL 9000, the spaceship's computer in Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, who, becoming sentient, turns against his masters.

The sections with the protagonist arguing his existential case with the spaceship's bridge computer might seem a bit dated now, but Lake is unabashed.

"Pete and I got onto the idea of a world where computers actually take over from people, and the more we thought about it, the more sense it made. It was prophetic. The line in the song was, *'Load your programme, I am yourself'*, and I predict that it won't be so long before computers will have almost a genetic capacity for knowing their owners, and the more control it would take, the more of your life it would consume. As the first step along the way, we have already become cellphone dependent."

Brain Salad Surgery reached Number Two in the UK chart and Number 16 in the US. Reactions to the album were mixed, but by this time Emerson Lake & Palmer had largely given up on press support. It was a smaller world in the 70s and the music press ostensibly had more power than they do now, but then ELP had more power than the press.

Lake says, "The interesting thing is it made absolutely no difference – the journalists would slag us and the people decided who they liked. I think it was at the Royal Festival Hall where we decided to put in our concert programme a scathing review by John Peel, who said we were 'a waste of talent and electricity'. It had become almost de rigueur to knock ELP."

SONY MUSIC PRESS

Carl Palmer: when you're drum kit's this awesome, damn right you can wear leather dungarees.

WILL IRELAND

C'est La Vie: Carl Palmer Today

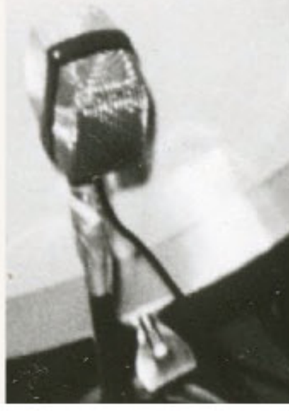
Keyboards vs guitars, fleet feet and the ELP Legacy.

"ELP's music was highbrow, quintessentially English and top-end," says Carl Palmer.

He's still a member of that other supergroup, Asia, and his own ELP Legacy band play material from that back catalogue, together with covers like Bernstein's *America*, and King Crimson's *21st Century Schizoid Man*. With ELP, Palmer played with a lead keyboard player; with ELP Legacy, he plays with two guitarists.

"I'm not big on blues," he says. "I do like jazz, but classical adaptations played in a rock format with superb musicians are fantastic. Keyboards did it at the time, but I've now gone the complete circle and I've taken to only using virtuoso guitarists to play this music.

"I have a very simple philosophy," he concludes. "I'll carry on playing as long as I am improving or maintaining a standard. And my feet are getting better. I'm going to spend a couple of hours this afternoon with some new bass drum pedals." **MB**



THE END OF THE ROAD?

Brain Salad Surgery left **ELP** on top of the world, but that world's musical tastes were changing and the era of 70s excess would take its toll on the trio.

Words: Mike Barnes

In spring 1974, Emerson Lake & Palmer embarked upon a lengthy world tour, titled *Someone Get Me A Ladder*, which yielded a triple live album with an aptly elongated title, *Welcome Back My Friends To The Show That Never Ends... Ladies And Gentlemen, Emerson Lake & Palmer.*

The album was recorded at the Anaheim Convention Center in California, and Palmer feels that this was the brief period when Emerson Lake & Palmer were in the Big League, alongside the likes of Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin.

Emerson recalls that his pre-gig recreational activities rather jeopardised the project. "We had the recording trucks outside about two or three days. Before the first night I went out and waterskied off Long Beach. The boat towing me broke down. I'm freezing to death, my arms are strained from skiing and hanging onto the tow rope in an attempt to pull me out of the water. God knows how I got through that concert. It was amazing that we got something out of it."

On the tour, ELP headlined a one-day rock festival, the California Jam, held on a speedway track in Ontario, California. "That would have been the highlight of that era," says Lake. "That was where we staged the flying piano. I believe there were about 600,000 there. The audience stretched as far as the eye could see. It was biblical."

The piano and stool, with Emerson (hopefully) secured, were raised on a hydraulic stand and spun round, taking Emerson's famed knife-wielding, Hammond-humping showmanship onto another level. "Well, by that time I'd achieved my pilot's licence and I was pretty efficient in doing aerobatics," Emerson quips. "Originally it was a five-foot drop. I can handle that, although probably not if I've got a 400-pound piano landing on me, but it's rock'n'roll. When I looked at where I was going to be, which was right over the heads of the audience, there was a drop of a further 20 feet and I thought, 'Well, if I go out and people don't remember my music, they'll fucking remember this!'"

One peculiarly 1970s term used to describe the group at the time, especially in concert, was the self-explanatory 'Technoflash'. Lester Bangs, writing in *Creem* in 1974, voiced what some saw as the dehumanising effect of technology in rock music, which took it further into the realms of spectacle. He wrote: "What really makes ELP a dinosaur potentate is the sheer scale of the noise they emit... This is robot music mixmastered by human modules who deserve purple hearts for managing to keep the gadgets reined at all."

NME reprinted Bangs' article under the headline *Crazed Power Demons Of The Energy Crisis*, as if ELP had sucked so much from the National Grid to fuel their hi-tech schemes, the entire country suffered as a result.

All of the group are adamant that the stage show was more than just showbiz flash and that the lights, flashpods, cannons and the flying piano were not gratuitous but actually added to the music. Emerson is keen to emphasise that in the final analysis, the music was what mattered.

"We worked damned hard at what we did because we loved the music. What was important was getting it played right," he says. "We didn't do drugs, we were very sensible in that regard. If we had three weeks off, then I probably did dabble with something up the nose just as a bit of fun, but I don't do that any more. You've probably seen me with a bottle of cognac on top of the Moog, but that was mostly full of water; it was a spoof. Try playing *Brain Salad Surgery* when you're out of your fucking box!"

Listening to the live album, one is left gasping by the sheer speed of it all. On *Hoedown*, for example, they come out of the blocks at a furious pace. Lake agrees: "I've long since realised the

SONY MUSIC PRESS

Backstage and briefly in the 'Big League' in 1974.

Their music inspired much opining in the papers, notably Lester Bangs' famous 'Power Demons' article.

ELP ARCHIVE/TONY ORTIZ

“IF I CAN’T GO ONSTAGE CONFIDENT I’M DOING WHAT I KNOW I SHOULD BE DOING, I’VE GOT NO REASON TO BE HERE ANY MORE.”

Greg Lake

over-speeding issue about ELP. But in some ways that frenetic energy was one of the good things about the band, because when we came onstage and opened up, people used to almost fall over because of the intensity, and part of that is the speed it’s coming at you: so fast and hard your brain can’t handle it. We made as much of the three people as we possibly could. But it’s often things you leave out that increase the dimension of the sound. Just thrashing away can sound very small.”

After the group came back from the tour, one only wondered what they could produce next. Creatively at their peak and a huge live draw, they then went and withdrew from activities for three years.

“It wasn’t a logical period,” says Palmer. “One of the members didn’t like what was being written about us in the English press, calling us ‘sabre-rattling’ and ‘over the top’. We ended up deserting England and went to America. It was the biggest mistake of our lives; a very foolish thing to do.

ELP ARCHIVE/TONY ORTIZ

The trio headlined the California Jam in ‘74..

“One member talked about taking a year off. We had been going for three or four years and just managed to crack it globally, so why would you want to take a year off? I could imagine a month, a couple of months. No logic at all, no true understanding. But that was why the group was never a really big group.”

SONY MUSIC PRESS

Lake sees it quite differently: “I think that we had begun to run out of steam in the sense of there is only so much a three-piece band can do — at least you think that at the time. We were playing about 200 shows a year and we never had time off and we were burnt out, I think. You do feel that there is a limit to what you can keep creating with three people and keep it different every time.”

Does Lake think, then, that *Brain Salad Surgery* was the album that both defined and ultimately destroyed Emerson Lake & Palmer as a group? “Neither,” he replies. “I think a lot of albums made the band successful, but equally the live performances made it successful. I think it was the last true ELP album and so in that sense you could say that it was the end. But the breaking of the band was *Works Volume 1*.

“WHAT WE WERE DOING WAS DILUTING THE VERY THING THAT MADE ELP POPULAR.”

Greg Lake

Palmer shaking things up at San Francisco’s Civic Center, February ’74.

LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

C’est La Vie: Greg Lake Today

A lifetime of songs, and *still* not in the Hall Of Fame...

In recent years, Greg Lake has been touring a solo show, *Songs Of A Lifetime*, which dips into his back catalogue, including songs from King Crimson, ELP and his solo albums. He also covers influential tunes like Elvis Presley’s *Heartbreak Hotel*. “If you look at the song, there’s almost nothing in it,” he says.

Lake finds these solo shows particularly fulfilling. “Performing to people, communicating with people, seeing if they are moved by something, that’s the ultimate reward for any artist,” he says.

One thing that continues to irk him, though, is that ELP have yet to be inducted into The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. “Most progressive bands haven’t,” he complains, “and it’s because Americans don’t think of it as American. It’s more European, but then ELP had a big influence on many bands. And you don’t have a museum and then leave out the Romans because you don’t fucking like them!” **MB**

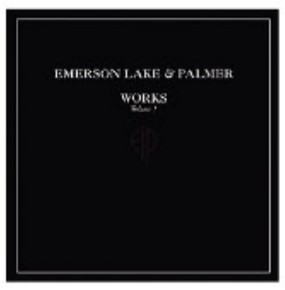
KEN RAKE/CAMERA PRESS

Emerson Lake & Palmer’s signature had always been a mix of classical reworkings, self-penned band pieces and Lake’s concise, melodic songs. But if *Works Volume 1*, released in 1977, seemed by its portentous title to distance itself from the listener, it was also a fragmented affair, with each member chipping in a side, plus a final side of them playing as a group.

“Keith wanted to follow a classical path,” Lake recalls. “I understood that, but I could also see that we weren’t really classical — we were rock. Doing interpretations of classical was one thing but to actually become a classical form of music, I just didn’t feel comfortable about it. And we came to the point that either the band was going to break up or Keith insisted that we went down that path.

“It became the voice of ELP through an orchestra. Previously when we made records ourselves I produced them and it was the band itself that decided everything, so it was a handmade record. With *Works Volume 1* there were all kinds of fucking people involved with it: orchestras in Switzerland and Paris, conductors coming out of the woodwork. It cost us over a million pounds to record. Although there are things I like about it, it only sold well on the reputation of previous albums. If you ask someone what’s their favourite ELP album, maybe one in 50, maybe one in 100 will say *Works Volume 1*. That was the beginning of the end. I didn’t produce ELP albums after that. It wasn’t the ELP that I wanted.”

Works Volume 1. Greg Lake - nil.



With memories of the group finding it hard to play some of the pieces from *Trilogy* as a trio fresh in his mind, Keith Emerson was keen to do things properly this time.

“Basically we’d spent all of the advance that we got from our new deal with Atlantic on that tour,” Emerson says. “I’ve always felt it necessary that if a band goes out on the road, the fans deserve to hear it as it is on the album. If there’s an orchestra on the album, they should be able to see it live.”

ELP’s 1977 tour has become notorious for being synonymous with rock excess, with three artics — each bearing the name of a group member — the portable stages, the orchestra and Greg Lake’s ‘Persian carpet’ roadie — all in all a grand folly. They had to cancel three weeks’ worth of dates and pay off the orchestra, and they were almost bankrupted.

Palmer doesn’t feel that this is strictly accurate. “It was not a case of being ‘bankrupt’. I know it’s a word you will have read somewhere, but it’s just we couldn’t afford to have an empty seat in the house. We needed to put the books in order by going out for six weeks as a trio. The problem with it is that the whole concept was wrong. We should have gone out first as a trio, then added the orchestra as a bonus.”

Looking back, it’s clear that suddenly the band’s identity was in question. *Works Volume Two* (1978) also had its moments, but it was basically a compilation of odds and ends.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

Taking a backseat: Seeing they were running out of road, ELP split in 1979.

As the 70s drew to a close, ELP seemed to have lost the plot. Their final album before their initial split was 1978’s *Love Beach*, whose cover featured the grinning, suntanned trio surrounded by palms. It was exactly the wrong thing to put out at the time. The group appeared to be fatally compromised, and were the subject of some derision.

“We were called into Ahmet Ertegun’s office in Atlantic Records in New York and he pointed out that the whole music world was changing and quite dramatically,” Emerson recounts. “Yes had successfully made the crossover from doing lengthy pieces of music to making short pieces which were radio playable, and Genesis made a successful crossover. ELP tried to do that. I didn’t feel comfortable about it, but I thought, ‘Well, let’s give it a try.’ My dear fans who had bought all the ELP albums were saying, ‘What are you doing?’ It saddened me and didn’t suit me. If I can’t go onstage confident I’m doing what I know I should be doing, I‘ve got no reason to be here any more.”

“*Love Beach* was a version of ELP,” says Lake, “but it didn’t have the soul of ELP. What we were doing was diluting the very thing that made it popular. It didn’t have that handmade, innovative spark that those earlier albums had, and neither did our comeback albums, *Black Moon* (1992) or *In The Hot Seat* (1994). They both had top-class producers, but was an ELP by deferment and also another person’s vision of what ELP could be commercially.”

Palmer got himself another big gig, joining Asia in 1981, one of the most successful groups that sprang up as the great wave that took progressive rock into the 70s had all but petered out.

“Punk had been all over the radio,” recalls Palmer, “and prog rock music was not going to last. Then MTV was coming along, VH1 was coming along and it needed a different approach. Asia came up with [their self-titled 1982 debut], a semi-prog pop album and did incredibly well.

“ELP didn’t have that sustaining power and I think that’s because we never really had any hard times – from the second concert we were an international success. It went from nothing to something overnight and of course when the times got really tough, it wasn’t there for us as a band to say, ‘Let’s get through this.’ Instead we just thought, ‘Okay, let’s stop.’”

Brain Salad Surgery’s ultimate, expanded, super-deluxe 40th anniversary edition is out May 6 via Sony Music/Legacy. For full details go to ELP’s official website, www.emersonlakepalmer.com. It will be reviewed in the next issue of Prog.

What’s In The Box?

Your guide to the new editions of *Brain Salad Surgery* - more Moog for your moolah!

The Limited Edition Super Deluxe boxset comes with original release die-cut poster and digitally restored artwork; 20-page booklet with new liners, photos and memorabilia; hardcover 12” slipcase with artwork and internal gatefold. Five discs plus vinyl:
CD1: Original album, remastered.
CD2: Alternative version: *Karn Evil 9 3rd Impression* (Original Backing Track); *Jerusalem* (First Mix); *Still... You Turn Me On* (First Mix); with previously unreleased versions of *Toccata*; *Karn Evil 9 1st Impression (Pt.1)*; *Karn Evil 9 1st Impression (Pt.2)*; *Karn Evil 9 2nd Impression*; *Karn Evil 9 3rd Impression*; *Brain Salad Surgery* NME Flexi Disc (excerpts); *When The Apple Blossoms Bloom* (b-side single); *Brain Salad Surgery* (b-side single); *Brain Salad Surgery* (Instrumental); *Karn Evil 9 3rd Impression* (alternate version); *Karn Evil 9 3rd Impression* (Instrumental)
CD3: New stereo version of album.
DVD-A: Original album in new 5.1 mix and also @24bit; the new high resolution stereo mixes @ 24bit.
DVD: Feature-length documentary featuring highlights of the 1973 World Tour.
LP: 180gsm heavyweight vinyl of the original album, remastered.

The Deluxe boxset comes with 16-page booklet with new liners, photos and memorabilia and includes the following three discs:
CD1: Original album, remastered.
CD2: Alternative version (as per the Super Deluxe set).
DVD-A: New 5.1 mix of the original album. **GRM**

DESCENT OF MAN

Never one to rest on his laurels, our Prog God of 2013 **Ian Anderson** is already leading 2014 with new album *Homo Erraticus* – and he's brought an old pal with him…

Words: Paul Sexton

For a product of Ian Anderson's fertile imagination, Gerald Bostock has come a long way. At the age of eight he was the lyrical wellspring for the whimsical milestone of early 70s prog that was Jethro Tull's Thick As A Brick. Forty years on, we learned of the five multifarious fates that may have befallen the child prodigy on Thick As A Brick 2. Two more years later, Bostock is back, and this time it's for real. Sort of.

"I suppose TAAB 2 examined all of our lives," says Anderson, as he sets the scene to his new opus, Homo Erraticus. "How did we get to be where we are now? Did we end up where we imagined we might have done? Or were there twists and turns and interventions of fate along the way?

"That was the subject there, but I decided that Gerald should come back, not just as a subject, a couple of years further down the line, but as the writer of the lyrics for the new album.

"So we have a back story about how Gerald, in his retirement years as an ex-Labour politician, took up writing, and discovered some wordy tome written by a country gentleman [one Ernest T Parritt] who, in his rambling state of delirium following contracting malaria back in the 1920s, wrote all this stuff down. Gerald pored over it and decided it would be the basis of some suitably absurd and actually very factual lyrics." That old plotline.

Anderson's inventiveness as a creator of expansive and imposing musical landscapes is as fecund as ever on *Homo Erraticus*. The album sets out to address the complex "hot topic," as he describes it, of the time-honoured (and sometimes dishonoured) subject of the human diaspora. But, fear not, it does it with intricately Andersonesque tunes, expressive flutes and the other tools of his unique trade.

"It's all based on history," he declares. "It starts in 8000 BC — or BCE [Before Common Era] as we have to call it these days — just after the last Ice Age, and it ends up some 40-odd years into the future from now. So it's a potted history, primarily about the UK and Europe. It is, essentially,

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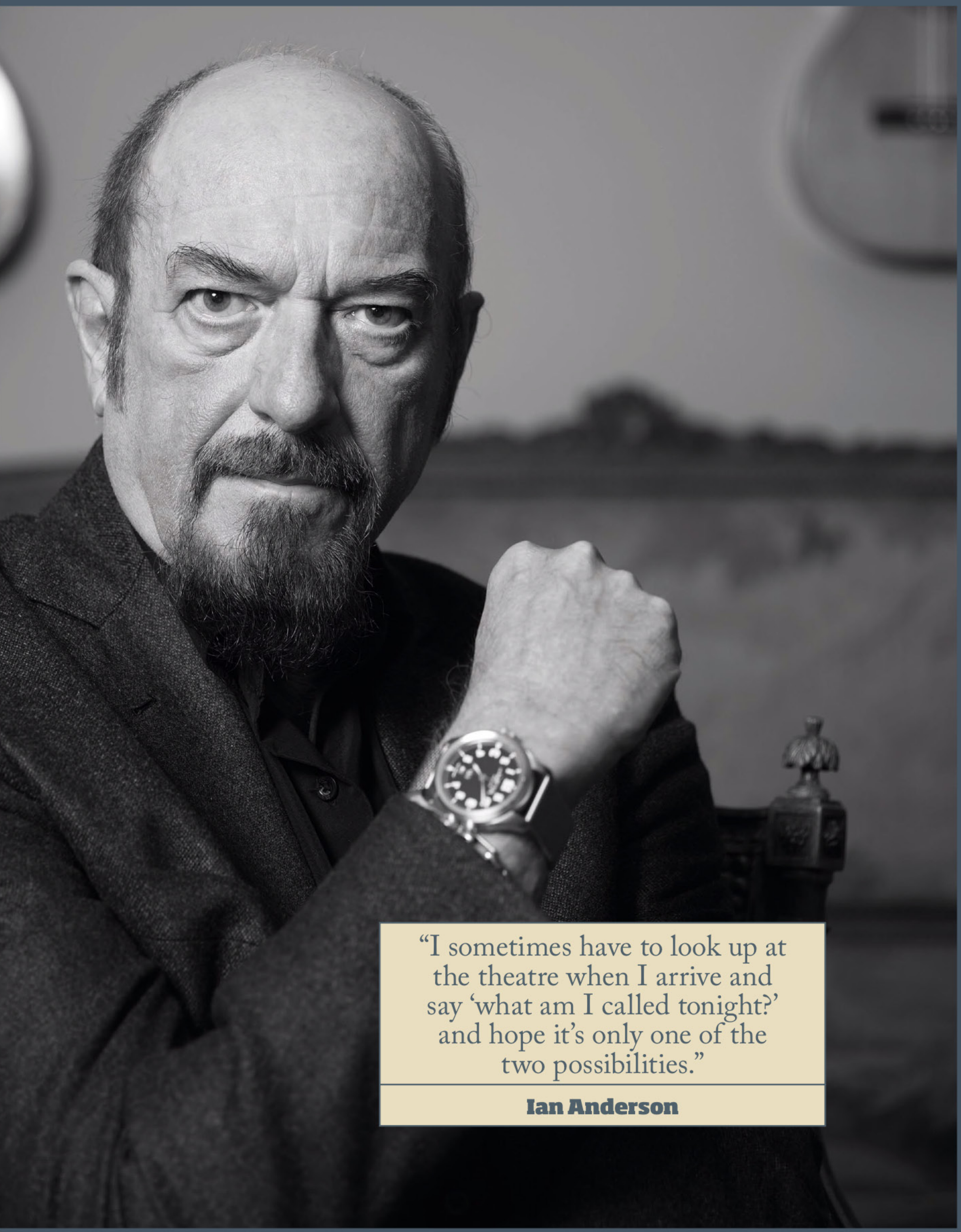


"I sometimes have to look up at the theatre when I arrive and say 'what am I called tonight?' and hope it's only one of the two possibilities."

Ian Anderson

the story of migration, the movement of people, in each and every direction, and as Gerald says, 'We're all from somewhere. Somewhere else. Get over it.'"

At the same time, the flipside of the modern argument is also represented. "I wanted to make it a little crazy, a little fantastic, while delivering something of a message that I think we all need to take to heart," says Anderson. "It's not to say that I'm one of those people, or Mr Bostock is, that necessarily think 'Everybody come on in here, let's have absolutely free access.' There comes a point where our children, or our grandchildren, will be facing the awful dilemma of having to put up that sign saying 'No room at the inn, no vacancies.' "I'm not the guy that has to face that awful moral dilemma, I can merely talk about it and postulate the frightening reality of years to come, which is that we're going to become very selfish people. [But] perhaps no more selfish than those who came here in the first place, to cross the landbridge from Europe after the last Ice Age and got here first. Those who came second had a fight on their hands."

Musically as well as historically, *Homo Erraticus* charts an epic path, with plenty of ingredients familiar from Anderson's 46-year recording catalogue in Tull's name and his own, but perhaps never quite in this iteration. The artist himself smiles at all of its stylistic subdivisions.

"It's folk-prog-metal, which wraps it up apart from the church music influences, the classical music influences and a certain amount of Latin, which you've got to get your tongue around in terms of some of the titles [which include *Puer Ferox Adventus* and *Tripudium Ad Bellum*]. But yes, prog excess, in the extreme."

TAAB 2 had Anderson postulating on whatever might have happened to Bostock in adult years, in a range of possible outcomes from evangelist preacher to fat-cat banker. But Gerald, it turns out, answered some very different callings. In semi-retirement after his political career, it turns out that he then spent an incongruous and ultimately ill-starred sabbatical on Ian's payroll.

"That's right," he confirms. "Gerald was a tour manager [for Anderson's solo tour] for much of 2012, before I had to fire him. You know," he adds darkly, "once a Labour politician, always a Labour politician." The ever-eloquent frontman proceeds to expound his political ideology which, while "a bit left of centre," disapproves of dyed-in-the-wool Tory-hating for its own sake. "A good Tory is a pragmatic socialist," he says.

"I did think of asking Tony Blair if he'd like to become tour manager," adds Anderson mischievously. "There are lots of Labour party folks that have actually been fans." He recalls former Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon as one that fell at his feet. "The great thing about being a rock musician, especially after all these years, is that you've touched the hearts of lots of people.

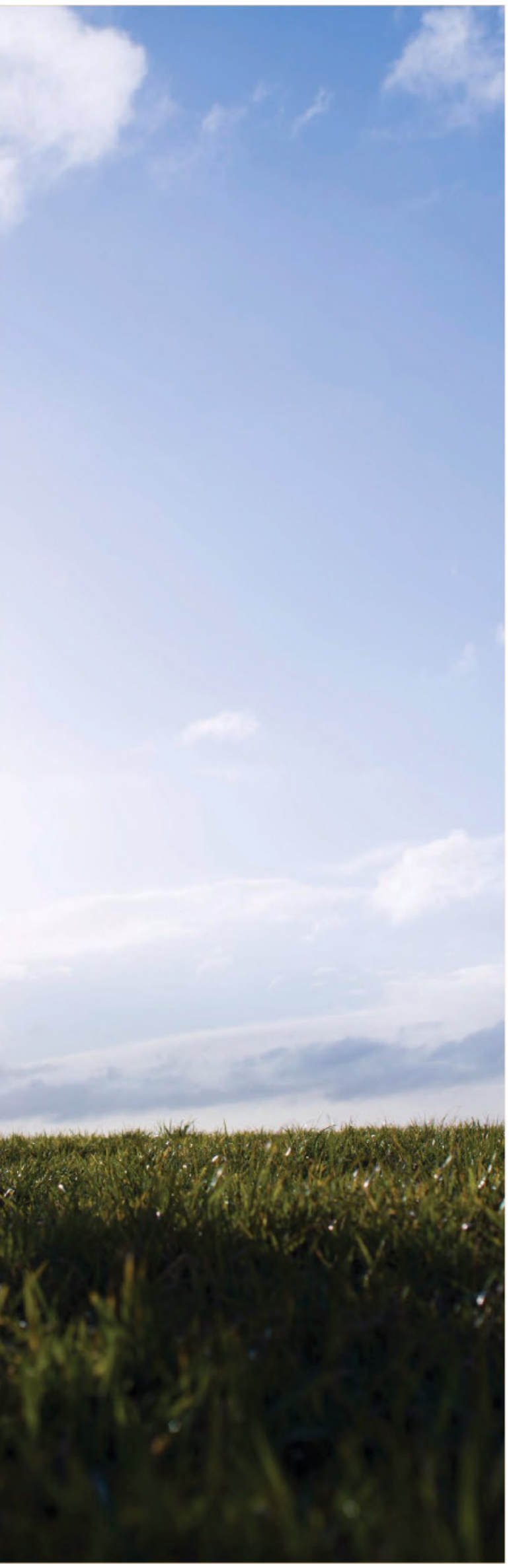
"But you've got to remember that you're not the only girl in town. If they're a Jethro Tull fan, the chances are they're probably a fan of at least 10 other or 20 other bands of that era that they grew up with, that they take possession of, and that's what fans do."

A field in England: Anderson erectus.

Back with the *Homo Erraticus* plot, Bostock — once again semi-retired in St Cleve, in the west country with his wife, warmly referred to as The Old Bag — revisits the authorial muse first hinted at in the poetry of his pre-puberty. This time, the addled historian Parritt is his source. If it all sounds Pythonesque, that was very much in Anderson's mind, just as was the case when Tull pricked the prog bubble with the original *Thick As A Brick*.

"It's quite important to me that you come up with some [lyrical content] that's never been done before,

***Homo Erraticus*: prog-folk-metal with church, classical and Latin influences...**



not in the context of rock music. So I've got a few things in there that we touch upon that are words that make me smile a lot, because I know that some fan in some far-off land will be immediately turning to Mr Google to find out, 'Watney's Red Barrel, what's that?'

"That's one of many, and of course one that's harkening back to the Monty Python sketch of some time ago." Remember? ("There's an excursion to the local Roman ruins where you can buy cherryade and melted ice cream and bleedin' Watney's Red Barrel.")

The extensive *Homo Erraticus* tour that will start winding its way across the UK at the end of April promises to be an audio-visual adventure, and another link to Tull's oft-misunderstood satirical edge. "It's something we did quite a bit back in the 1972-73-74 period," says Anderson. "But this was long before high-tech production, it was very low-tech, am-dram kind of silliness. A bit Pythonesque, in its schoolboyish humour, and the colourful nature of the presentation.

"But it's something that, back then, marked Jethro Tull as being really quite different to most of the other bands, particularly our British peers. I mean, Zeppelin didn't do comedy. Well, not intentionally. And sometimes ours wasn't intentional either, in the sense that, as always, you can't get it right in every country."

But the shows will have some familiar friends in the setlist. "The second half of the show is the best of Jethro Tull, it's repertoire that's mostly fairly familiar to most fans, and one or two things we'll slip in that they may remember, but probably haven't seen us play live on stage before. On this occasion, we will decorate it with a bit more video content and theatricality.

"But the first half of the show is indeed the new album. That's the bit that I suppose is the bigger challenge, certainly musically and delivery-wise because you've got to conceive of the way to make it work live on stage. And it shouldn't be rocket science, or an almighty leap, because we did rehearse and record the album as much in a live performance way as we could.

"It's done in the traditional way, we all get in the studio at the same time and we learn all of the lines and we move and change things around, and then once we've got it right, we record it. It's done really as live as it can be. Even guitar solos, played live in the studio, which is terribly exciting and quite nerve-racking for the guitar player."

This leads to a question that's not exactly the elephant in the room, maybe more of a modest zebra, because Anderson has acknowledged it before. But, as he knows, it will seem strange to some devotees that he's doing the entire *Homo Erraticus* project under his own umbrella, not Tull's.

"Primarily, it's about repertoire," he explains. "I think if it's going to be a 'Best of Jethro Tull' tour, and it's all repertoire that people are familiar with, then that might reasonably be called a Jethro Tull concert. If, on the other hand, it's more of a project thing, a tour or a concert with a symphony orchestra or a string quartet, or an acoustic show, or a concept production tour like this one coming, then I think I'd rather use my own name, only in as much as it's a point of difference.

"We're sort of branded on the supermarket shelf under different titles, and I think that's probably quite a good idea. You have a box that says Ian Anderson, and another box that says Jethro Tull, but inside both boxes it's the same old cornflakes.

"We have to remember that concerts that have been just Jethro Tull shows have included a total of 28 different band members. So it's a huge extended family of musicians who've been in and out, sometimes back in then out again, over the years. The only common factor is me. I'm the guy that writes the music and stands at the front and dodges the bullets.

"It doesn't matter whether it's Jethro Tull or Ian Anderson on the marquee in front of the theatre, nothing changes for me. In fact, all the guys in the band — with the exception of one who's not a musician but a singer/mime artist that joins me on stage — the four other musicians have all been members of

> "You have a box that says Ian Anderson, and another box that says Jethro Tull, but inside both boxes it's the same old cornflakes."
>
> **Ian Anderson**

I DUNNO WHY I CALL HIM GERALD...

Anderson's alter ego strikes again!

"Gerald is very useful to me, he's an alter ego," says Ian Anderson. "He can afford to have views and express things that perhaps I wouldn't do. But this is the point of writing. I think there's a terrible assumption people make that everything you write is autobiographical, that it's heart on sleeve. Quite clearly, it's not. I mean, the writers of [the film] *Gravity*, none of them had been closer to space than the top flight of stairs in the office. You've got to use a bit of imagination, but it's got to be informed imagination. Writing lyrics is just that experience, it's me expressing things that sometimes I know a bit about, I may know a lot about them, I may have only found out something about it this morning. But it doesn't stop me using it as lyrical material. As a performer, you have to step into character a little bit. If I'm singing a song that's maybe some tough kind of words and stern views, I *mean* it, I'm not faking it, but it's not necessarily my views. So I can use Gerald Bostock in his civilian context as a convenient tool to express things that are not quite the way I would express them myself. It's sometimes nice to have two identities." **PS**

[Tull] concerts and tours in the past. I just sometimes have to look up at the theatre when I arrive and say 'What am I called tonight?' and hope it's only one of the two possibilities."

Homo Erraticus features ample helpings of Anderson's flute trademark, but not to the point of repeated scene-stealing. "There was supposed to be a lot of me playing the flute, but I have to say that as always, once I start working on arrangements, I'm thinking very much of trying to feature different musicians in different places, and give them the opportunity to come up with some of their own thoughts about their parts.

"I don't want to overly direct them, and I don't want to take away all the moments that could be given over to somebody else. There's an awful lot of words, and melodically it's quite tricky music, there's a lot of intervals and constructions that make it quite a challenge to get all the words together without tripping over yourself."

Does such a word-packed challenge ever result in drying on stage? "I've occasionally not exactly dried, but gone into gobbledegook," he says. "I suppose if suddenly in that flash of a second, you think 'I don't know what's coming next,' you just become Stanley Unwin with attitude.

"The times this most often happens to me, because it *will* happen a couple of times a year, it's because I'm watching somebody in the front row who's mouthing all the lyrics, who knows every word, along with me. I become transfixed, and of course if they suddenly stop or do the wrong thing, I'm thrown. So absolutely don't watch the person who thinks they know all the lyrics."

Thus, a few years shy of half a century since he started along a very individual road, Ian Anderson continues to hoover up new information and influences as greedily as ever. "My whole belief is that as a musician, there's always something you can learn, every time you pick up your instrument. I've really got to feel that today I did something I couldn't have done yesterday, and I'm positive that that is the case.

"It's why I do it for me. I don't necessarily think all of this translates into pleasing all of the people all of the time, which it certainly can't. I'm very happy to have an audience there and people to smile at me or applaud, but that's not the main reason for doing what I do. My profession in life, if it's not too much of an irony, is to be an amateur. I have a passion about musical expression, and so that's got to be the main reason for anybody to do it, whether they're getting paid for it or not.

"If you're a lowly flute student learning to play your first little bits of grade one flute or whatever, you may go onto become a professional musician, but the chances are almost overwhelmingly large that you're not going to. But that's no reason not to start, and it's no reason not to carry on and push yourself to the limit. Do it because you love it.

"For roughly 150 days of the year, I am an unpaid amateur flute player, and I have a lot of fun doing it, because I can go and make lots of mistakes and play wrong notes in my learning about something new to play. That's terribly important, I think."

> "My whole belief is that as a musician, there's always something you can learn, every time you pick up your instrument.'
>
> **Ian Anderson**

Homo Erraticus is released by Calliandra/Kscope on April 14. Ian Anderson begins his 22-date UK tour on April 28. For more info see jethrotull.com.

Mr Anderson presents... The Erraticus band, from left: David Goodier, John O'Hara, Scott Hammond and Florian Opahle.

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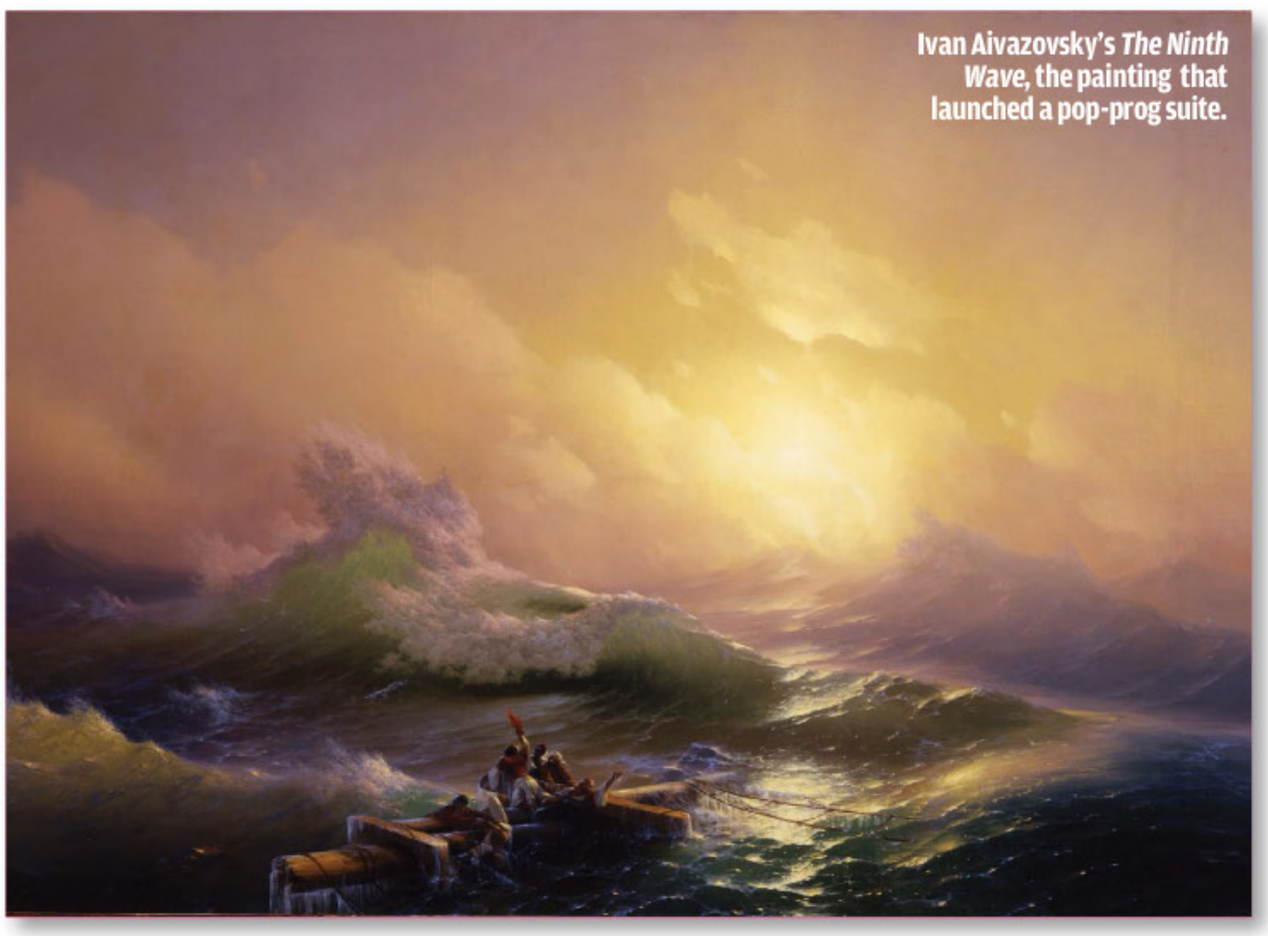
Hounds Of Love

After a nightmare reception to *The Dreaming*, who knew three years in a barn in Kent would yield a singular, unrepeatable landmark in pop music. "I was surrounded by elemental forces," says **Kate Bush**, of the record that made her a bone fide superstar.

Barking up the right tree: Dave Everley

HOUNDS OF LOVE	
RELEASE DATE	September 16, 1985
CHART POSITION	Number One
BAND MEMBERS	Kate Bush, Stuart Elliott, Del Palmer, Alan Murphy, Paddy Bush, Charlie Morgan
TRACKLISTING	*Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God), Hounds Of Love, The Big Sky, Mother Stands For Comfort, Cloudbusting, And Dream Of Sheep, Under Ice, Waking The Witch, Watching You Without Me, Jig Of Life, Hello Earth, The Morning Fog*
STAND-OUT TRACKS	*Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God), Hounds Of Love, Cloudbusting, The Ninth Wave*


Ivan Aivazovsky's *The Ninth Wave*, the painting that launched a pop-prog suite.

On August 5 1985, Kate Bush made an appearance on Terry Wogan's early evening BBC1 chat show. Introduced by the avuncular host, the singer lip-synced her way through her new single, *Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)*. Standing at a wooden podium while clad in what looked like a monk's cowl, and backed by a group of similarly-attired musicians, she looked like a cross between a politician and a 16th century religious leader.

Her presence on prime time TV was something of a surprise. Just a few days earlier, the *NME* had mentioned Bush in a piece headlined 'Where Are They Now?'. Unfortunate timing aside, you could see their point. It had been three years since the singer had last released an album, and she'd been largely absent from the spotlight since then — a lifetime away in those pre-internet days. Rumours swirled that she'd ballooned to 18 stone, or was living as a recluse in the French countryside, or both.

As the *Wogan* appearance proved, the rumour about her weight wasn't true. And while she had retreated from public view, it was to Kent rather than France, and she certainly hadn't been idle. What she had been doing was working on her fifth album, away from the eyes of the media and her own record label.

That record, which would hit the shelves a month after her TV reappearance, was *Hounds Of Love*. Her fifth album, it retained the progressive spirit of her earlier career while bringing both a new maturity and a wild sense of anything-goes abandon to her work. It would be a watershed for Bush, ushering in the second act of her career, and influencing such disparate talents as Within Temptation, Bjork, and The Futureheads. At the time, it sounded like nothing else around. Today, almost 30 years on, it stands as one of the most visionary records ever made.

"I love the fact that she's very happy to explore her world without worrying about compromise or what's commercial for the record company," says her long-time friend and occasional collaborator Peter Gabriel, who would be credited for 'opening windows' on the album. "I think that's part of what people have loved about her over the years."

Ironically, it was that desire to hold the music business at arm's length that indirectly prompted Bush's self-enforced three-year break. Her previous album, 1982's experimental and occasionally baffling *The Dreaming*, had seen her take full creative control of her music. But the record had been a commercial failure, selling only 60,000 copies in the UK. Worse, the pressures of recording it had reportedly pushed the singer to the brink of nervous exhaustion. Having foresworn life on the road following her sole 1979 tour, there were no commitments hanging over her head. She was free to step back and fade into the background.

"There was some re-evaluation, yes," she said in 1985. "Taking so long a break made me realise what was important — which was my work, much more than being famous."

Bush and bassist (and then-boyfriend) Del Palmer retreated to the farm they shared in East Wickham, on the south east fringes of London. They began constructing a 48-track home studio in a barn, and it was there, in the summer of 1983, that they began working on what would become *Hounds Of Love*. The surroundings, and the absence of pressure, began to feed into the music she was creating.

"I was surrounded by elemental forces," she said. "And I was feeling really happy and positive, and considering mankind to be much better than on the last album."

The freedom of not having to answer to anyone was both a blessing and a curse. The writing and recording process was long and often tortuous. More than once Bush described what she was doing, and how she was doing it, as "mad".

"Work obsesses me and everyone around is dragged into it," she later said. "It's terrible... I sometimes think I might as well

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Purple patch: Kate has paws for thought in 1985.

> Taking so long a break made me realise what was important – which was my work, much more than being famous.

just be a brain and a big pair of ears on legs, stuck in front of a mixing desk."

But being in total control had more upsides to it than it did downsides. Crucially, it allowed her to get away with things that a record company would have blocked in the past – or at least attempted to block. Here, she was free to indulge her ambitions to their fullest. And *Hounds Of Love* was hugely ambitious on every level.

For starters, the album's structure was far from conventional. It was clearly divided into two distinct halves – one for each side of the original vinyl album.

Side one was relatively conventional: a set of five songs that ostensibly stood alone but were in reality held together by thin conceptual thread. "All the songs are linked by the fact that they're about relationships of some kind," Bush explained. "They're all love songs, really."

Of course, a Kate Bush love song is unlike anyone else's love song. *Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)* took a unique view of the male-female relationship. "It's the two people in the song, a man and a woman, that want to make a deal with God in order to swap places with each other," she explained. "That if the man could be the woman, and vice-versa, they would understand what it's like from that other person's point of view and that perhaps there'd be less problems in the relationship."

Musically, Bush had always drawn her inspiration from outside of the pop sphere ("I have never seen a Madonna video," she said of the era's other defining female star. "I'd rather listen to Delius, Bach or Satie.") Her early folk and prog leanings had gradually been subsumed into a bigger, more baroque whole, and *Hounds Of Love* knitted together all the strands. Where the darkly atmospheric opening track *Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)* beat with a Fairlight heart, the title song, with its sawing cellos and relentless percussive spine, evoked a wild chase through tangled woodland. Elsewhere, double bass and didgeridoos drifted into the mix, and Greek and Irish rhythms danced cheek to cheek. Tellingly, she cited New Age record label Windham Hill and ECM, the home of acclaimed jazz guitarist Pat Metheny and German double bass maestro Eberhard Weber, as influences (Weber would feature on three of the album's tracks, including the stately *Mother Stands For Comfort*).

The Reich stuff: Kate's vid for *Cloudbusting* featuring Donald Sutherland, and uncredited wig.

> **I have never seen a Madonna video. I'd rather listen to Delius, Bach or Satie.**

Her influences weren't just musical. *Hounds Of Love* itself started with a sample ("It's in the trees! It's coming!") from cult 1957 horror film *Night Of The Demon*, lending the song an unlikely mix of foreboding and kitsch. The album's second single, *Cloudbusting*, was even more audacious. Inspired by *Book Of Dreams*, a memoir of controversial 20th century psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich by his son Peter, it brought together psychology, familial relationships and rain-making machines in four exhilarating minutes (in the memorable video for the song, Bush played Peter Reich as a child, complete with boy's wig, while Hollywood star Donald Sutherland played Wilhem Reich). On *The Big Sky*, she treated her music like a vast painting daubed with blue and white, broken only by the presence of a plane in one of the corners ('*We pause for the jet...*')

***'It's in the trees! It's coming!'* Familiar lines from *Night Of The Demon*.**

If the album's first half at least paid lip service to the traditional idea of an 'album', then the second was something else entirely. An interlinked, seven-song suited titled *The Ninth Wave* – named after, though confusingly not inspired by, a line from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem *The Coming Of Arthur*, as well as Aivazovsky's painting – it was Bush's grandest piece of music yet. A vivid, hallucinatory song-cycle, it related the tale of a woman swept out to sea in a storm and spends the night fighting against the waves and the elements. Its seeds lay in a trip Bush made to Ireland as she was writing the album.

"I was writing lyrics and we were right by the sea," she said. "I love the sea. It's the energy that's so attractive – the fact that it's so huge. And war films, where people would come off the ship and be stuck in the water with no sense of where they were, or of time, like sensory deprivation. It's got to be ultimately terrifying."

The Ninth Wave extended the watery metaphor across its seven tracks, charting the progress of its helpless protagonist, from the woozy *And Dream Of Sheep*, in which the woman is

"She speaks volumes about the power of feminine identity."

Rachel Cohen from The Reasoning on why Kate is the dog's proverbial.

"*The Kick Inside* was the first album I asked my parents to buy for me, and I listened to it obsessively. I used to impersonate Kate by performing renditions of *Wuthering Heights*, complete with long white dress and crimped hair – it drove my family nuts!

Hounds Of Love is my next favourite of Kate's albums and I think it emphasises her strengths as a truly innovative female artist. The album was a significant influence for me in terms of the way Bush uses her voice to articulate the nuances of human emotion, as well as her physical expression of the melodies and lyrics. These are techniques that I have always sought to use in my own songwriting, as is the beauty of her skill with vocal harmonies – the vocal textures of each track on this album are absolutely exquisite.

My favourite track on the album is *Cloudbusting*, with its poignant story that is brought to life in the cinematic video for the song – conceived in part by one of my favourite film directors, Terry Gilliam! – via some darkly powerful visual imagery.

Bush's ability to mesmerise me so completely as a listener has been the inspiration for much of my own musical work, and each track on this particular album speaks volumes about the power and complexity of feminine identity." **JK**

drawn into the sea, through to the redemptive *The Morning Fog*, which ended both the suite and the album on an optimistic note. The result was one part cinematic extravaganza, one part moving piece of art, all loaded with metaphors for what she described as “a very deep inner experience.”

While she touched subjects she’d covered before — the male perception of the female psyche on *Waking The Witch*, the closeness and distance of family on *Watching You Without Me*, environmental concerns on *Hello Earth* — nowhere did it feel like she was re-treading old ground. She also dug deep into her Rolodex, enlisting the talents of ex-Pentangle bassist Danny Thompson, Comic Strip actor Robbie Coltrane (who provided one of the many voices on *Waking The Witch*), and, on the exuberant *Jig Of Life*, respected Irish folk musicians Dónal Lunny, Liam Flynn and John Sheahan, plus her own brother poet John Carder Bush, who lent weighty narration to the track. *The Ninth Wave*, like *Hounds Of Love* as a whole, was typical Bush — worldly-wise and childlike at the same time.

“Maybe bits of me don’t want to grow up,” she said in 1985, shortly after the album’s release. “Maybe I am an escapist, a romantic. I dislike cynicism. It’s bad energy. Does that make me childlike?”

Hounds Of Love was released on September 16, 1985. It entered the UK charts at Number One, displacing Madonna’s *Like A Virgin* and putting Bush squarely back in the public eye. In an era where MTV-fuelled pop ruled,

Waving, not drowning: John Carder Bush’s back cover photo for *HOL*.

the success of such an unashamedly progressive, unarguably intelligent album felt like a momentous achievement.

The length of time between Kate Bush albums lengthened — it would be four years before her next record, 1989’s *The Sensual World*, and 12 between 1993’s *The Red Shoes* and her 2005 comeback *Aerial*. Neither the gaps between records nor the records themselves would have been possible without *Hounds Of Love*. Nearly three decades on, it remains Kate Bush’s defining artistic statement, and one of the most visionary albums ever recorded.

“She’s a great artist and *Hounds Of Love* showed that she’s capable of making wonderful things,” says Peter Gabriel. “It’s still sounds timeless.”

"We're a rock'n'roll band. There just happens to be a drummer in the band that thinks a lot about God and Satan."

Dave Nuss

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MASS ATTACK

Having made their name reworking ancient hymns, occult proggers **Sabbath Assembly** are breaking new ground with original songs and orchestral arrangements on their divine third album, *Quaternity*.

Words: Louise Brown

Popular music has forever been steeped in religious themes and melodies, and never as overtly as today. Occult rock is now a sub-genre in itself, and over the past few years a new generation of progressive bands has grown with the gods in their sights. Some sing in praise of the other-worldly (Hexvessel), some delve into darker territories (The Devil's Blood). Then you have Sabbath Assembly. Taking in the teachings of 60s cult The Process Church Of The Final Judgement, they've walked the fine line between light and shadow.

Formed in 2009, the band's first two albums — *Restored To One* (2010) and *Ye Are Gods* (2012) — focused mainly on that cult's own hymns. But on their new, third album *Quaternity*, Sabbath Assembly's percussionist and band leader Dave Nuss is finally starting to find his own voice. "I'm at the point where the music I'm interested in making follows my own particular passion," he tells *Prog*. "It crosses into a lot of different territories and I feel very free as a songwriter to just follow my imagination."

Having founded the band in New York, Nuss has found himself living 'literally in the body of Christ', having relocated to his hometown of Corpus Christi, Texas. It's this that has inspired his passion for pairing rock with religion. "It's an incredibly evangelical, Protestant town, imbued with magical thinking. Everyone here is saying the apocalypse is right around the corner and people are doing prayer visuals all the time. I drove past a restaurant that had a drive-through prayer window yesterday, but in a way I almost prefer that to New York. It's so secular, everyone is almost too smart for all this, but here it's exciting in its own way."

Despite this, he's collaborating with musicians who don't share his views on spirituality, notably vocalist and bassist Jamie Myers, now on her second album with Sabbath Assembly. This factor has imbued *Quaternity* with a more prog rock and less liturgical bent. "I don't think she has the same intrigue," says Nuss. "She's much more dedicated to rock'n'roll and that's really inspiring to me, because sometimes I give up on rock'n'roll as a medium. But then I also give up on church because that seems so full of holes, and then I give up on academia. Working with someone like Jamie, who is always saying, 'Yes, we've got to keep doing gigs, we've gotta keep recording' is very inspiring. I also think that if I said, 'Hey Jamie, we're going to stop finally singing about God!' she would be more than happy. Everybody who has come through the door has been moderately interested but had no personal investment in God or Satan one way or the other. That, in some way, has made it easier, because it ensures we don't become one of these evangelical bands. We're a rock'n'roll band, but there just happens to be a drummer in the band that thinks a lot about this stuff."

Mat McNerney, vocalist for Finnish occult prog newcomers Hexvessel, adds vocals and spoken-word passages to *Quaternity*. "When Jex [Thoth, original singer] left the band I was looking around for singers," says Nuss, "and Mat was one of the first people to get in touch. He's an interesting person. He still has a lot of faith in the mechanism of rock'n'roll whereas I'm more inside my own head. Having his voice on the record is a real honour."

Sabbath Assembly toured with the much more orchestral Hexvessel in 2012. While this may have partly inspired the use of classical musicians on *Quaternity*, it was also thanks in part to a stroke of luck during Nuss's New York days. "My apartment was right across the street from the Mannes School of Music, and all those kids sat on my stoop and smoked cigarettes all day. Eventually we started talking and I told them, 'Hey, I'm a musician and I'm doing some recording in my basement. Do you want to come down and check it out?' I thought, 'These kids have to be crazy but they're 18 or 19, they're footloose and fancy-free.'

"It was so great, because I would play the part and they would listen and say, 'Dude, I can play something ten times more interesting than that.' I'm not a classical musician so I wasn't writing parts to sound like Bach. For a song like *Jehovah On Death*, the cellist was playing such beautiful parts and, my God, I was practically falling in love with her. That was one of the unexpected delights of the process."

And it wasn't only classical musicians adding inspiration to Nuss's newest work — it was classical music itself. By shedding the Process hymns and working on his own compositions, he was able to explore the link between folk song and contemporary music. "I always liked what someone like Béla Bartók did with Hungarian folk song," he says. "I've always been inspired by how you can use folk melodies or traditional church melodies but create this whole other world around them. Berlioz had this symphony called *Dream Of A Witches' Sabbath*. He uses these melodies related to these Pagan traditions — it's meant to sound like witches dancing around the pole, but he doesn't present it that way. He builds this incredible orchestration around it, but the base of it is this Pagan melody. Part of the reason we're moving away from the Process hymns is there's 63 of them and they get a bit samey. As musicians, we want to do something a little bit different or satisfying to our interests."

This is very much in keeping with the current trend for taking spiritual or folk music and weaving it into modern rock music. It's not too far removed from what bands like Fairport Convention were doing in the late 60s.

"I'll live and die for that band," says an excited Nuss. "That's what I'll listen to when I'm at home. I'm really the wrong person to ask about this occult rock phenomenon though, because I'm woefully unaware of contemporary music. The inspiration for me is still coming from Pentangle and Metallica.

"But I think all music is intrinsically spiritual," he adds. "What would be a non-spiritual band? Motörhead? That's like the most spiritual music out there. I think we have to find our own spirituality through music and that's what I'm doing. I feel like in some way that rock 'n' roll will always be that outlet for people and I'm very happy those themes are coming back."

Quaternity is out on March 28 via Svart. See sabbathassembly.com for details.

(Left) Jamie Myers and Dave Nuss mix the licks with the liturgy on new album, *Quaternity*.

What happens on tour usually stays on tour. However with *Paradise Filter* **Caravan** reveal how crowdfunding gave them a new lease of life – and the real stories behind what they tell the WAGs!

Grubby little smelly oik: Malcolm Dome **Images:** Rob Monk

HONEST,

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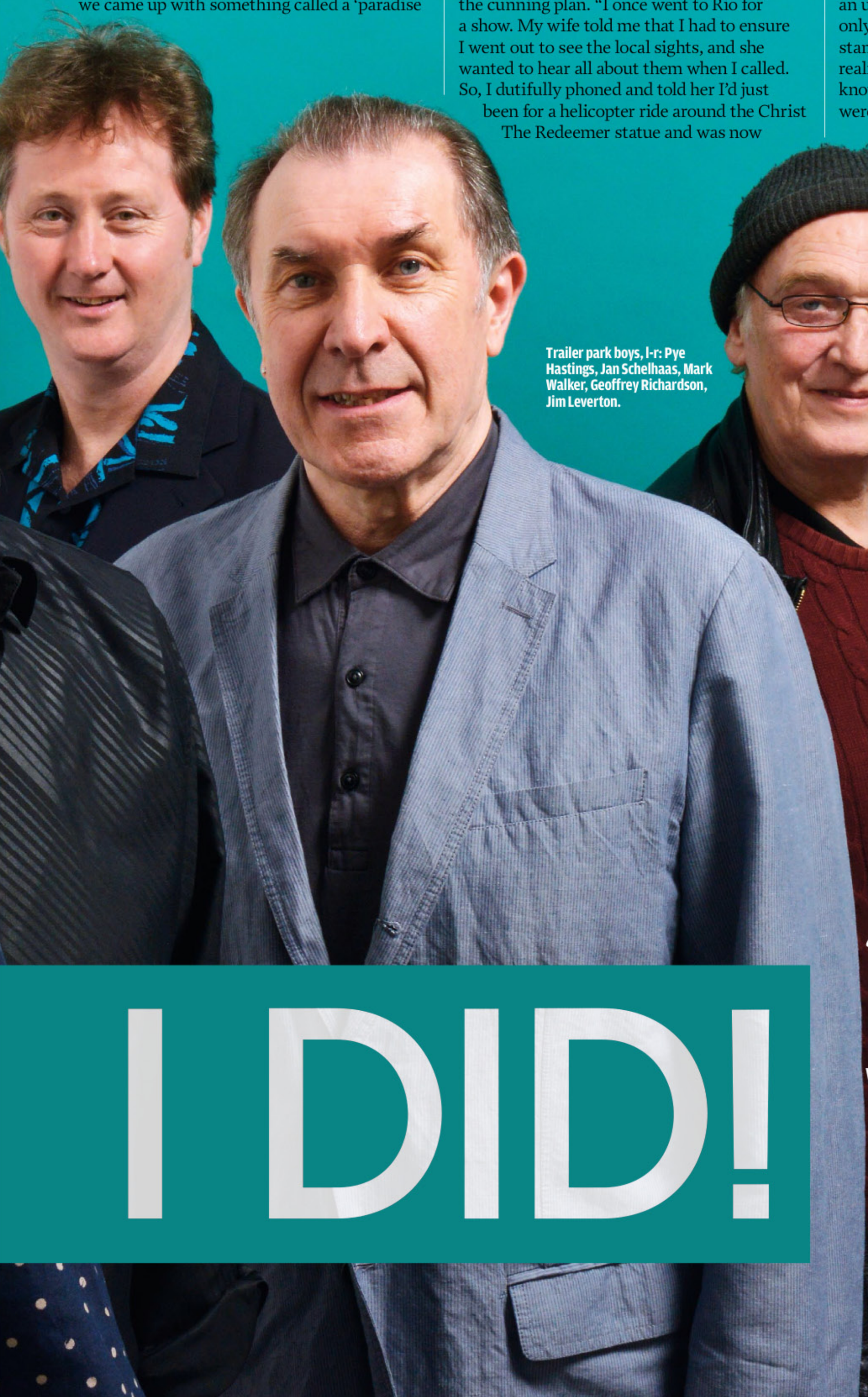
It may come as a shock, but Caravan have never shirked from misleading their loved ones while they're on the road. "When you're touring and you call home, the last thing you want to do is give your wife or girlfriend the impression that you're having a great time while they're stuck in the usual humdrum existence," explains multi-instrumentalist Geoffrey Richardson. "So, we came up with something called a 'paradise filter'. You attach it to your mobile, or in the old days to the hotel room phone, and when you call, it cuts out all the sounds of a party happening around you, and instead substitutes the noise of building works or similar. That way, people back home don't realise you're enjoying yourself!"

However, as guitarist/vocalist Pye Hastings ruefully confesses, things can go wrong with the cunning plan. "I once went to Rio for a show. My wife told me that I had to ensure I went out to see the local sights, and she wanted to hear all about them when I called. So, I dutifully phoned and told her I'd just been for a helicopter ride around the Christ The Redeemer statue and was now sitting on gorgeous white sand in the blazing sunshine. She hung up on me! It turns out she'd had a bad day at the office – my wife's a criminal solicitor – and wasn't amused by my honesty. Sometimes you can't win!"

Paradise Filter is the title of the new Caravan album. It's their first all-new studio release in a decade, and the exposition of the title's meaning isn't the sole surprise here. This is an unusual record for the band because not only is every track rather short by their own standards, but the lyricism has an edge of reality too. In the past, Caravan have been known for a rather whimsical approach. They were reminiscent of the eccentric Englishness in 1950s Ealing Studios movies, and their capacity for satire was often overlooked. But the songs on the new album suggest a shift in approach. "It might be due to the fact that a couple of years ago, I moved back to the north of Scotland, and that affected the way I thought of my lyrics," says Hastings, who was born in Tamnavulin in Banffshire. "I wanted to introduce a sense of realism in what I was writing about."

This is clear on *Fingers In The Till*, which is a barely disguised dig at the way the music industry has always treated musicians. "The business people – whether record companies or managers – take their percentages and what's left goes to the artist, and usually they get the smallest cut. But without the musicians and songwriters,



Trailer park boys, l-r: Pye Hastings, Jan Schelhaas, Mark Walker, Geoffrey Richardson, Jim Leverton.

"The last thing you want to do when you phone home is give your wife the impression that you're having a great time."

Geoffrey Richardson

I DID!

there would be no record industry. It's always annoyed me, so I decided it was time to put into words the way I feel about it."

It would be logical to assume that *Farewell My Old Friend* was written about late Caravan drummer Richard Coughlan, who died in December 2013, but this isn't the case, as Hastings explains: "Because I live in a small Scottish village, I experience interesting things. For instance, everyone goes to every funeral in the area, and there was one week where I went to three of them. The third was for a friend of mine, and I was amazed to see a few hundred people gathering for her funeral. Of course, funerals there are social occasions, and the wakes tend to be very boozy!"

> "I can't tell you how fortunate we are to inspire such fan loyalty."
>
> **Pye Hastings**

Coughlan's lengthy illness contributed to the 10-year gap between *The Unauthorised Breakfast Item* in 2003 and the new album. "Richard started to have health problems just after we finished the last album," says Hastings. "But he was so determined to carry on, and we thought taking a brief break would help him recover. But this hiatus got longer and longer, until it was obvious to everyone that he just couldn't carry on. That's when we brought in Mark Walker on drums. However, Richard still played percussion with us, until even that proved impossible."

There's no doubt that the band – completed by bassist Jim Leverton and keyboardist Jan Schelhaas – miss founder member Coughlan, but they refuse to live in the past, and proved this by embracing the concept of PledgeMusic to finance the new album. "When it was suggested to us that we raise the money for the new album through Pledge, I was very dubious. But in end we were convinced to give it a try. And it astonished me when we got to 50 per cent of our target in just five days! But then the guy who runs our website told me that he wasn't at all surprised, and that Caravan fans are so committed to the band that they will back us to the hilt, no matter what. And he's right. I can't tell you how fortunate we are to inspire such loyalty."

In the end, 149 per cent of the money needed was raised. However, the extra funds haven't been squandered. "We found that the costs involved with making the album were greater than expected," reveals Hastings.

The band were also under something of a time constraint, despite having no label putting any pressure on them for the album to be finished. "We were due in the studio [Canterbury Sound] in September," says Walker, "but had to delay this because they were already booked up. And the way Pledge works, you have to commit to getting copies of the finished album to people by a certain date, so we had to get it completed in a hurry."

There were various packages offered through Pledge, one of which was an edition of *Paradise Filter* with a bonus CD called *The Back Catalogue Songs*. But this hasn't been done to boost sales of the band's older material. "We thought it would be a good thing to re-record a few songs with the current line-up," says Hastings. "That way we could offer some fans the opportunity of hearing some of their favourite tracks being reinterpreted. It was fun to do, and we did it in just one day. The songs were recorded live in the studio."

However, don't expect lots of older tracks to be revisited. "As far as I'm concerned, this was a one-off, just to offer something special to diehard fans," insists Hastings.

And Hastings is also rather ambivalent about celebrating Caravan's 50th anniversary, which is now just four years away. "Do you have to remind me how old we are? Ha! To be honest, something like that doesn't really take up much of my time. I'm not one for living in the past and looking backwards. I'd rather see this band as having a future and get excited about all we want to do."

The future for Caravan is more exciting than it has been for a long time, not least because they're taking control of the business side of things. "We now have our own label," says Hastings. "It's called Caravan Records, and not only have we put out *Paradise Filter* through this company, but we've also got back the rights for *The Unauthorised Breakfast Item*."

The band would also like to bring the rest of their catalogue into the fold, but they face a problem. "A lot of our albums are owned by Universal," explains Hastings. "These are Caravan albums in that all the music and performances on them are from us, so you could say we have a moral right to own them. But legally they're under the Universal umbrella. We've talked to them about getting the rights back, but the money they want is just silly, and way beyond what we can afford."

In the meantime, Caravan are pressing on with plans to make the most of their new-found freedom. "We have had meetings with various distributors about doing a deal with Caravan Records," sighs Hastings, "but the deals they have offered us are totally unacceptable. If we signed with any of them, we'd be earning hardly anything. So for the time being, we are going it alone. We will sell albums at our gigs and online."

All of which suggests Caravan have now become business-minded, as well as being artists. However, Hastings disputes this claim. "We're now more aware than ever of our potential earnings, but the last thing any of us want to be are business-heads. I leave all of that side of things to my wife. She's better at it than me!"

"She gets to stay at home and count the money while we swan off the world," laughs Richardson. "It's a tough life being a musician!"

Paradise Filter is out now via Caravan Records. Caravan's UK tour runs until April 20. For more information and dates, see www.officialcaravan.co.uk.

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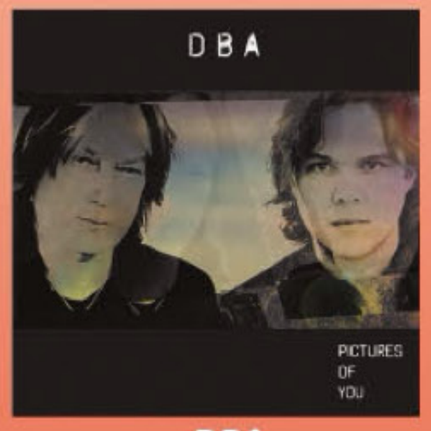

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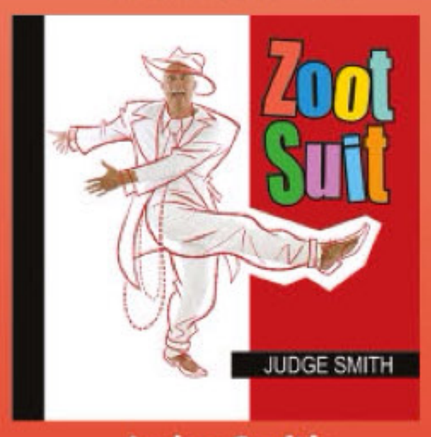

Judge Smith
Zoot Suit

Thieves' Kitchen
One for Sorrow, Two for Joy

Big Big Train
English Electric Part Two

Magenta
The Twenty Seven Club

Tom Brislin
Hurry Up and Smell the Roses

Francis Dunnery
Frankenstein Monster

Also Eden
[REDACTED]

Judy Dyble
Flow and Change

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"I think each song has probably been recorded a couple of hundred times."

Jeff Green

Songs from The Elder

After spending more than a decade recording his debut album, **Jeff Green** has rush-released the follow-up, *Elder Creek*, which was only five years in the making. Now he tells *Prog* all about positivity, perfectionism and hitting the road with his Project.

Words: Rich Wilson **Portrait:** Carsten Krieger

The potential for plunging into self-inflicted madness after working on an album for a decade is one that Jeff Green appreciates. His debut album, *Jessica*, took around 11 years to complete, and he's been tinkering away on the newly released *Elder Creek* for a mere five years. Aside from any creative frustrations, does he not get sick of hearing the songs?

"Oh absolutely, and that's not only me but the whole family who had to listen to it all the time," he chuckles candidly. "At some point you have to realise that it's not going to get any better. I think each song has probably been recorded a couple of hundred times. I'm overly meticulous about it, to the point where people would say, 'Look Jeff, it sounds fine, leave it and move on.' I did need to hear that from time to time or I would probably still be doing it now.

"I think a lot of that stems from insecurity – you know, 'Have I done my best? Can I do it better?' Some of it is because you have the time, so why not? Plus there was a psychological aspect – I enjoy the creative process so much, I didn't want it to end."

There is, of course, a reason why writing *Jessica* was quite so prolonged, given that the album's subject matter was effectively a eulogy to his stillborn daughter. With Green's natural creative leaning, he was able to channel that sadness into a powerful recording and use his music as a form of public catharsis.

Elder Creek: Jeff Green's ambitious new album is a personal look at the subject of memory.

"I honestly think that one of the ways I was able to get though this was because of my music," he considers carefully. "I don't know how I would have coped with it if I had a nine-to-five office job. Every time I was feeling a bit down or got a bit melancholy about it, rather than just sit there and grab a beer or something, I'd pick up the guitar and write a bit more. There were times when it would get too much and a bit close emotionally, so I'd have to put it aside for a while. That's one of the reasons it took so long. It was kind of inspirational though, as it made me look at who I am. If I wasn't a musician, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to deal with it in that way."

Aside from his ability to deal with such a tragic loss through music, what was even more remarkable was that *Jessica* was far from the downbeat, unsettling piece many expected.

"A lot of people did expect it to be a bit maudlin given the context," he says. "But I wanted to try and turn a negative into a positive, and I wanted that to come through in the music. The closer I got to completion, the songs started to come on a roll to me and the whole thing became a lot more uplifting. I just hope that came across as I didn't want it to be depressing, or a 'woe is me' kind of thing. I also wanted to get across that it made me a better and deeper person."

His latest release, the equally powerful *Elder Creek*, is partially inspired by his grandmother's gradual loss of memory due to Alzheimer's disease. Green has again managed to avoid that potentially cheerless subject from becoming overbearing and has instead used it as a base on which he's built a loose concept album. Green explains that it's a desire to make such grand albums that has always been central to his thinking.

"I've never been able to write just individual songs about fast women and fast cars," he confesses. "I mean, I admire people who can as I think there's a real art to that, but I tend to like to have a thematic focus and then the songs can fit into that concept.

"This one is all about memory. I was in the States visiting my father and he was telling me how there were things from my grandmother's past that she just couldn't remember. So that started me thinking about the way memory plays a part in our lives, and led me to the question of if a person doesn't have their memory, are they the same person? That kind of became a philosophical question along the lines of John Locke's Socks, as in, 'If a sock is patched up many times, is it the same sock?' The message is to take stock of these memories – either pass them on or write them down because it's a very important thing."

Green has now obtained a core of solid musicians and intends to take both albums on the road. With his love of Pink Floyd, Genesis and Yes, he's also planning a live tribute to some of the songs that have helped shape his own musical style.

"Well, the reason behind the name The Jeff Green Project is that it will be very much like an Alan Parsons thing where there will be different musicians involved, depending on who is available at the time," he explains.

"There are so many layers on the albums that it would take a lot of rehearsing but we are planning on doing a handful of dates. We'll do the highlights of both albums as well as some selected prog covers as well – Kansas, Floyd, Rush, Genesis. We really can't wait to do that."

Elder Creek is out now. For more information, see www.jeffgreen.org.uk.

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THE CHANG

> Real progressive music, the sort that was around when I started in the late 60s and early 70s, was amazing!

GING MAN

Whether he's exploring virgin territory on prog masterpieces, recording classical movements or simply going pop, **Mike Oldfield** continually pushes the boundaries. With his new, unashamedly commercial rock'n'roll album, he's still doing the unexpected after more than 40 years in music.

Words: Paul Lester **Portraits:** Ian Witlen

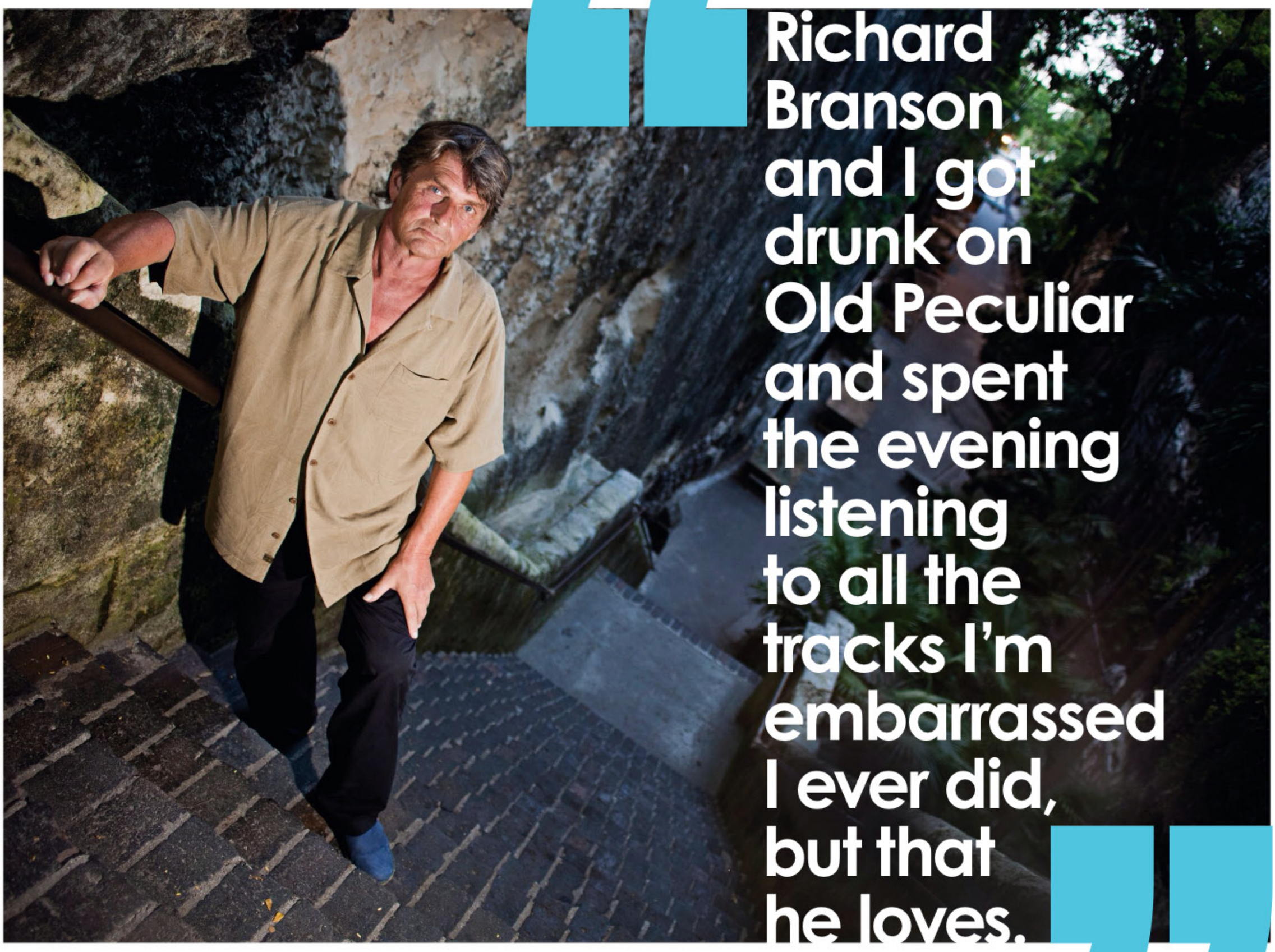
He might be forever etched in the minds of many as the precocious virtuoso barely out of his teens for the release of his seminal debut album *Tubular Bells*, but the fact is that Mike Oldfield, the quintessential prog-hippie longhair, is about to become Papa Michael, thanks to one of his nine children.

"I have to keep checking my iPhone," he warns, talking to *Prog* all the way from Nassau, where he has lived for five years, "because my daughter, who is in Norway, is about to make me a grandfather. She has just gone to hospital. By the end of today I will be Grandpa Oldfield. I'm looking forward to it. I adore children – before they become polluted and distorted by living in the modern world."

Mike Oldfield: expect the unexpected from the prog rock veteran.

Oldfield is a mass of contradictions. He's the grandad who tears around the Bahamas on his Ducati motorbike; the self-described sociophobe who enjoys peace and tranquility but likes to surround himself with kids; the traditionalist who simultaneously longs for genteel 1950s Britain yet is known for experimental, technotronic, progressive rock.

He's also synonymous with lengthy musical extrapolations yet has just made an album of a dozen concise (-ish) rock songs, all between four and seven minutes long. Titled *Man On The Rocks*, it's not just Oldfield's first album since 2008's *Music Of The Spheres*, it's also his first collection of conventional pop-rock tunes arguably since 1991's *Heaven's Open*. And it's being issued on a Virgin-branded imprint, a label whose boss Oldfield had a fairly notorious and public split with. This culminated in a "hidden" message for Richard Branson on 1990's *Amarok* album, in which he



said, via Morse code, "Fuck Off RB". He ended the contract with audible laughter and a verbal "Fuck off" at the end of *Heaven's Open*.

"It felt like the right thing to do — I'm a musician," is Oldfield's simple response to the enquiry as to why he decided to make another album now, following what appeared to be a period of semi-retirement, interrupted only by his performance during the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics and the remastering of his back catalogue.

He adds, cryptically, when asked what the impetus for *Man On The Rocks* might have been: "Loads of different things. Everything happened in my life... But I can't go into those, unfortunately, for legal reasons."

He acknowledges that he tends to "swing from one extreme to the other, and the album before this one was all classical". Unexpectedly, he also reveals that for inspiration, he listened to a lot of early Rolling Stones records in the run-up to recording *Man On The Rocks*. "I grew up with that kind of music," he says.

Oldfield prefers roughness and rawness to the hygienic sound of today. "More and more music is becoming almost clinically sterilised due to computerisation and quantisation. People are desperate to sound good on the radio or on iPads and iPhones, and so everything is squashed in the mastering phase — what I'd describe as a sausage machine. There are no dynamics; everything is flat out the entire time. If you look at the waveform on a computer monitor, it looks like a sausage. Whereas if you look at the wave form of a Rolling Stones track, there are peaks and troughs from all the faults, which *Tubular Bells* had: it had breathing sounds, mistakes, squeaks from strings, bits of it were out of tune, there was distortion on the bell... We're aiming for perfection these days but all we're ending up with is a uniformity of sound.

"So I've been studying the rawness of old Stones records," he confirms. "That made me want to rewind [on *Man On The Rocks*] rather than try to make the next thing that's going to be the future of music. I went backwards."

Clearly, he's trying to outdo Rick Wakeman for the coveted status of Grumpiest Old Progger.

"All musical ideas were explored pretty well in the 60s and 70s," he declares, doing a great impression of a curmudgeon. "The musical scale is finite — there are only 13 notes, so the number of combinations is limited. We've been rehashing old songs for 30 years. There's nothing new to be done."

Nevertheless, he was gratified to have been given the opportunity by artistic director Danny Boyle to reassert his primacy at the Olympics, and to help publicly rehabilitate the genre of music he loves and represents.

"Of course I was gratified," he says. "But it was more than that. You're writing this article for *Prog*, right? My appearance validated that whole movement and stopped it being something that only belonged to the 60s and 70s. Then, progressive was the only way to go for young people. Later, during punk, they destroyed everything and made a mockery of progressive music. It became old-fashioned and boring. But it only got a bad name when people started to make awful orchestral versions — bands would play a riff, then an

Island records: today, Oldfield prefers to do his recording from his home in the Bahamas.

orchestra would play the same riff. That was pathetic.

"But real progressive music, the sort that was around when I started in the late 60s and early 70s, was amazing. People were experimenting with guitars and keyboards, and the emphasis was on playing and composing and making new things, not on being posey and stupid. That only came later."

He considers today's generation – which includes Luke Spiller of Virgin EMI signees The Struts, and who is the singer on *Man On The Rocks*, – to be more open to prog than the previous one.

"Luke listens to the music of the progressive era and he's, like, 'Wow!' I'd like to see a progressive renaissance, to rekindle that flame of inspiration and experimentation, musicianship and composition."

Oldfield admits that he doesn't "have a clue" about new music – contemporary exponents of prog or otherwise – and when prompted to provide a hot new band, he suggests one from 1978.

"Once I became a professional musician, I was making music 24 hours a day, almost in my sleep, so for relaxation the last thing I wanted to do was listen to music," he argues. "I think the last band who came along were The Police."

Then again, as Oldfield muses, it's conceivably his very isolation and distance from the so-called centre of things that has helped him endure.

Man On The Rocks is his 25th studio album in 41 years. Is there an overarching theme or is it just a collection of individual tracks?

"Well, it's not a concept album if that's what you're asking," he parries. "I haven't got a clue what it is. It's what came out of my head, my studio, my fingers. I didn't sit down and think, 'I'm going to do this or that.' It's spontaneous when you're writing. All I knew was, it was going to be a rock album, although it might be different to what you consider a rock album."

What was the intention for Oldfield's version of a rock album? That it should be hard-hitting and emotionally impactful? "I suppose 'emotionally impactful' is what it turned out to be," he replies.

There is a song on it called *Irene*, about the hurricane that hit the Bahamas (and elsewhere) in 2011, although Oldfield reveals that he wasn't too adversely affected. "My house is pretty hurricane-proof," he confirms. "We're very well prepared for disasters for some reason. We've got a generator, our own water supply and hurricane shutters. And we're high enough off sea level not to be affected by a storm surge. We had plenty of supplies when it came to radio batteries and food. A week before the hurricane comes, you watch the path where it's projected to go, and then two or three days before, you go into turbo mode."

Does his area have a history of atrocious weather or is he a closet survivalist? "Ha!" he laughs for the first time today. "The Bahamas gets hit every three or four years. But Irene wasn't a terrible disaster."

Of the other tracks on the album, *Following The Angels* was inspired by the Olympics' opening ceremony and the way, as Oldfield perceived it, everybody – from the Queen in her helicopter to the gaggle of Mary Poppins – fell to the stage with an aura of the angelic. The title track and *Castaway* were, he explains, "to do with personal situations and childhood memories".

"From the age of six or seven, I had a very unhappy and dysfunctional family," he says, alluding to the period when his mother lost a baby in childbirth, then became an alcoholic and manic depressive. She committed suicide a few months after the release of *Tubular Bells*.

"The childhood memories are still in there that have caused me serious psychological problems for many years. I had years of psychotherapy to get past them. And I am past them and I don't have any insecurities now, but the memories are still there. They are a source that I can tap for writing songs. I can remember what it was like. More than that, I can *feel* what it was like."

He says he "exorcised a lot of his demons" with his 2008 autobiography *Changeling*. But he's essentially the same as he was in 1973.

"I've always been a bit of a loner. I'm not sociable at all. I like peace and quiet and my own company, although I like to have children around," he adds – which is just as well considering how many he's got. "I don't go to cocktail parties and talk about football; I don't do social niceties; I'm allergic to all that. But I actually have more visitors out here than I did when I was living in England."

One such guest, a couple of months back, was Richard Branson. "We spent the evening listening to all the tracks I'm embarrassed I ever did, but that he loves," he laughs again. "We came back from the pub after too many Old Peculiar beers and put on things like *Don Alfonso* and the thing I did with his sister [Vanessa Branson], *Froggy Went A-Courting*. All the outtakes, the silly stuff..."

It's amazing to think back to those early days and realise how those odd little records helped propel them both into a strange future where they are both household names.

"Yes," he replies. "It is amazing. Astonishing, actually."

Oldfield is more interested in looking forward than back though. His list of future projects includes a "prequel" to *Tubular Bells*, featuring only electric organs and guitars.

"No one's ever done a prequel before," he ponders. "I'm toying with the idea. Once the touchpaper is lit and the fuse is burning, I'll go off and start working on it."

If he does embark on such a project, he'll do it from the Bahamas. *Man On The Rocks* was all put together from his home base, via Los Angeles and London, using Skype and assorted streaming devices, and that's just how he likes it.

"I never left my chair in the Bahamas the whole time," he says. "I don't like travelling. I don't have to any more. Being a grandpa, that's my excuse."

Man On The Rocks is available now via Virgin EMI. For more information, see www.mikeoldfieldofficial.com.

Rocks Off!

How Oldfield's 25th album was made.

Remote working: Oldfield in his home studio.

"It was great working with Steve Lipson, a music-engineer-producer like me, who doesn't need an assistant and can do it all himself. The vocals were all done in Steve's studio in London, the musicians were in LA, and I was present via Skype and streaming.

"I knew about Luke [Spiller] because he was signed to my record company. I really liked his voice – it's spectacular. I discussed various other options with Steve, including known singers – although I won't tell you their names – and we even mentioned the prospect of several singers, male and female. But once I heard Luke's voice, I realised he could do all of the songs.

"I knew drummer John Robinson from the early 90s when I was working on *Tubular Bells II* in Los Angeles with Trevor Horn. John put together his ideal live band and so chose the musicians: guitarist Michael Thompson from Animal Logic, bassist Leland Sklar from Phil Collins' band, and keyboard player Mark Rollings.

"They produced a sound that you'd expect and I wanted, and brought in a whole new other perspective. They were very fastidious – they wanted to get the beginnings and endings right. Those beautiful endings are almost entirely to do with the session musicians.

"They gave the album a West Coast sound. On a few tracks they swung too much in that direction – I didn't use 100 per cent of everything that they played because I wanted it to be recognisably 'me'. I hope it's succeeded and has got my stamp on it." **PL**

New album *Man On The Rocks* sees Mike Oldfield embracing traditional rock'n'roll.

RAVE ON

Eight albums and 20 years into their career, **Mogwai** have finally hit the UK Top 10 with *Rave Tapes*. But with a French zombie drama score, the campaign for Scottish independence and production of a 57 per cent proof whisky under their belts, they're still treading a ferociously autonomous path…

Words: Rob Hughes

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Barry entered with his cape and staff!" Much laughter. "Stuart was on fire, yet seemed surprisingly nonchalant!" Even more laughter. In keeping with the Floydian reference to *Wish You Were Here*, it doesn't take long for Mogwai to warm to today's audience with *Prog*.

Backstage in Manchester, the band's multi-instrumentalist Barry Burns and leader-guitarist Stuart Braithwaite are in frisky mood. And for good reason. Latest album *Rave Tapes*, their eighth in total, has just landed the Glaswegian quintet a Top 10 placing for the first time in their near 20-year lifespan. "It's unreal," admits Braithwaite, "because we'd never been in a position where we were that big a deal. We won't pretend we're not thrilled."

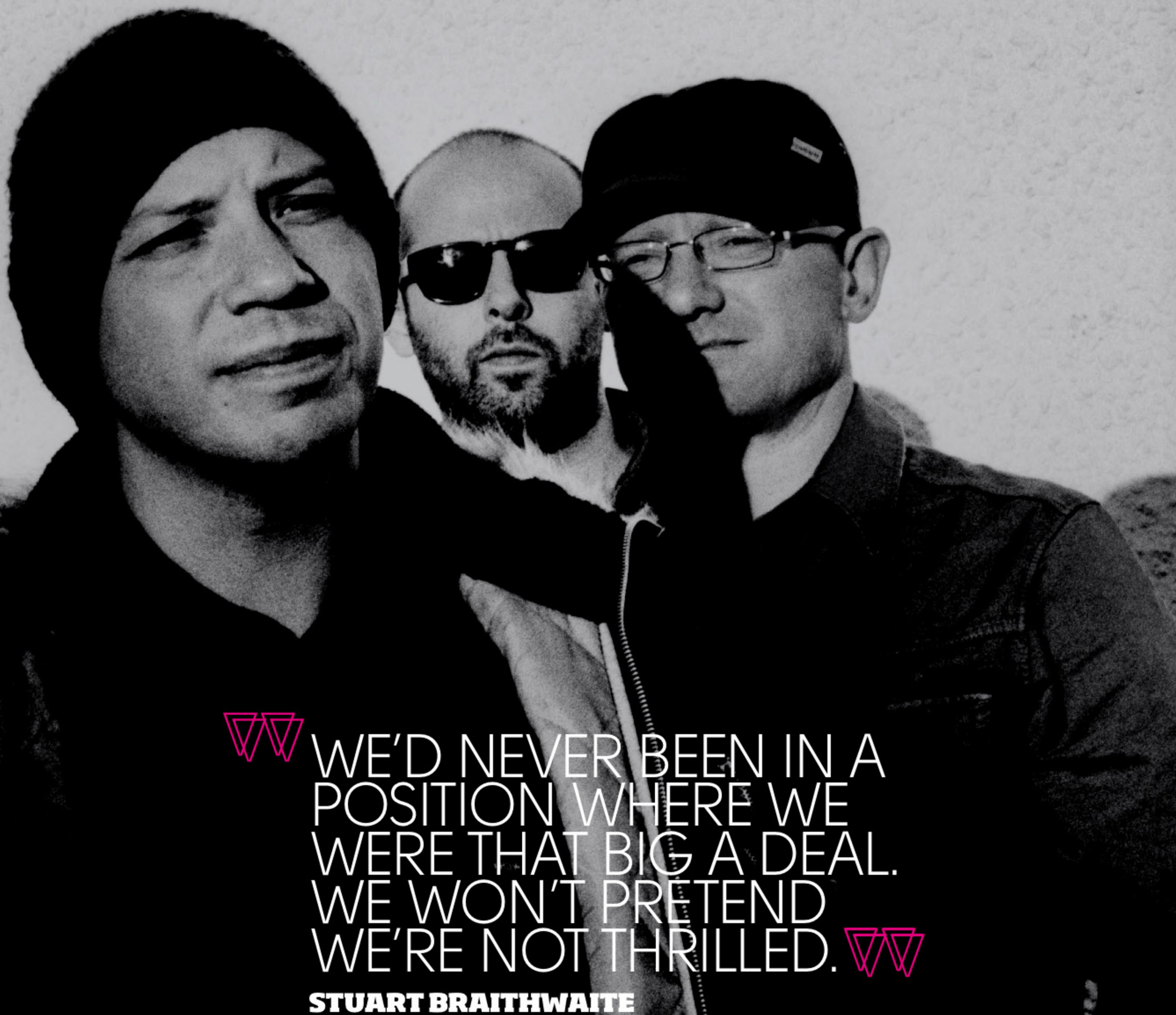
It's a validation of sorts for a singular career spent following their own creative impulses, impervious to the fads and fancies that surround them. Mogwai have nudged various points on the compass since they began in 1995, foraging into the realms of ambient, metal, electronica and soundtracks to create a self-contained world that long ago outgrew the cosy notion of a post-rock band.

The key factor, it seems, has been their willingness to evolve, to keep fresh. *Rave Tapes*, which follows on from their TV soundtrack to last year's compelling French zombie series *The Returned*, was inspired by a shared love of music from cult horror flicks. In particular, the work of Fabio Frizzi, John Carpenter, the Goblin-scored films of Dario Argento and Ennio Morricone's outre 70s output. "We were listening to a lot of that," says Burns. "Death Waltz had just re-released all the John Carpenter stuff and other things that we were always talking about it in rehearsal – soundtracks like *Zombie Flesh Eaters*. That probably had a big influence on the sound of *Rave Tapes*."

A particular favourite, adds Braithwaite, was Morricone's *Magic And Ecstasy*: "It's the theme from *The Exorcist II* and probably the proggiest song we like." Adds Burns: "I remember thinking, 'What the hell is this?' I still haven't seen *The Exorcist II*, because it's a right stinker apparently, but when I heard that I thought it was amazing."

Rave Tapes is more restrained than 2011's predecessor *Hardcore Will Never Die, But You Will*. The latter found Mogwai unusually upbeat, tempering their more pastoral passages with krautrock grooves and, as with *George Square Thatcher Death Party*, almost conventional rock songs. Or at least as conventional as Mogwai have ever dared to be. It wasn't quite up to Burns' pre-billing as a bunch of "happy, fast sounding songs", but it did at least suggest the band had an added spring in their stride.

On the surface, *Hardcore...* had little in



> WE'D NEVER BEEN IN A POSITION WHERE WE WERE THAT BIG A DEAL. WE WON'T PRETEND WE'RE NOT THRILLED.
>
> **STUART BRAITHWAITE**

As thrilled as they're gonna get. From left: John Cummings, Barry Burns, Stuart Braithwaite, Dominic Aitchison and Martin Bulloch.

common with the sombre majesty of their instrumental washes for *The Returned*. And perhaps even less with the more reflective tone of *Rave Tapes*. As Braithwaite explains, "we were conscious of making sure it didn't sound like *Hardcore*... and it's certainly far less upbeat. That one was layered and layered, whereas there's a lot less going on with *Rave Tapes*. It's kind of the opposite, really."

Yet for all their differences, those three records together represent a tangible, albeit slight, softening of the Mogwai sound. On stage they're still formidable, veering from sinus-rattling volume to hushed ambience with all the steady poise of the master structuralists that they are. But on vinyl they're more attuned to the esoteric. Braithwaite, in keeping with his convivial mood, puts it down to "old age. It'll all be banjos and accordions in a few years. We'll be like a psychedelic Mumford & Sons!" Lord help us.

Mogwai aren't unrecognisable from the band that first made their name in indie circles with late 90s efforts *Young Team* and *Come On Die Young*. The former laid down the blueprint of the quiet/loud dynamic that gave them a reputation as spiritual heirs to My Bloody Valentine, while the latter, recorded in upstate New York with producer and Mercury Rev/Flaming Lips associate Dave Fridmann, saw them experiment with the bleaker, more forbidding moodscapes of Joy Division and early 80s Cure.

"There were a lot of bands doing sprawly, droney guitar songs," recalls Braithwaite. "But we wanted to try different things, mainly just for ourselves. It's always been quite natural. In the early days, the sound we were known for became quite popular and we didn't really want to sound the same as everyone else. Then before we did [2006's] *Mr Beast*, we noticed we were playing a lot of old songs, because we realised we didn't have any loud ones. So we started writing some loud ones again. These aren't committee decisions, they're just whims." Adds Burns: "And whims that we occasionally listen to. Sometimes we've made decisions, then completely failed to act on them."

The one constant has been the desire to change. In this regard, though Braithwaite cites albums by Iggy, Bowie and Slint among his most treasured, Mogwai are perhaps more aligned to the fluid precepts of prog than they realise. Or maybe they do. "Actually, I think we all used to be prog fans, but especially Dominic [Aitchison, bassist]," offers Braithwaite. Burns is keen to give credit where it's due too. "Growing up, King Crimson and Yes were big ones for me," he says. "I probably have every Yes album. I haven't listened to them for a while, but I still get a special feeling whenever I hear them. At the time I was just in awe of the musicianship, the idea that anyone would be able to play instruments like that. But King Crimson were so good. I think they may be the best band of the whole prog thing."

> "GROWING UP, KING CRIMSON AND YES WERE BIG ONES FOR ME. I STILL GET A SPECIAL FEELING WHENEVER I HEAR THEM."
> **BARRY BURNS**

It's at this point where the subject takes an unexpected turn. Says Burns: "[Artist/director] Douglas Gordon, who we did the Zidane record with and also the German art project [2010's *Monument For A Forgotten Future*], wanted to do a vinyl version of that and tried to find Roger Dean, so we could do a cover with him. But he hasn't been able to." Adds Braithwaite, ever conscious of present company: "You can help us get a contact. If anyone can help, it'll be *Prog*!"

The Zidane film Burns refers to is *A 21st Century Portrait*. Directed by Turner Prize-winner Gordon and Philippe Parreno in 2006, it's a 90-minute portrait that follows legendary French footballer Zinédine Zidane during a game for Real Madrid. Mogwai provided the soundtrack, which echoes the poetic grace of the player in action, before the mood erupts into something altogether more tumultuous when he's sent off towards the match end.

The band had never performed the piece live until last summer, when they accompanied a screening of the film at the Manchester International Festival. "It was really tense," concedes Braithwaite, "because we just didn't know what it was going to be like. I wasn't even sure that some people even realised what we were doing. But we enjoyed it in the end."

If Zidane was a distinctly arthouse venture, *The Returned* was much nearer to the mainstream. Broadcast on primetime Channel 4 over eight weeks, it proved to be a huge hit with the viewing public. The disturbing nature of the slowly uncoiling plot (dead people return from nowhere to their grieving families in a tiny French village) was heightened by Mogwai's suitably spooked soundtrack. "We had the script of the first two episodes and the general story," Braithwaite explains of the working process. "Plus we already had loads of reference things that we were inspired by — *Twin Peaks*, *The Shining*, *Let The Right One In*. I was surprised at the reaction over here. I thought people would like it, but didn't realise it would be so mainstream and would get such a great slot. It shows that people are open to less obvious things if they're given an opportunity. It gives you a bit of faith actually, because so much stuff is sanitised and contrived."

You could certainly never accuse Mogwai of being sanitised or contrived. And while they may not sound remotely like Radiohead or Muse, they share the same ability to take base elements from prog and alchemise them into something daring and distinctly theirs.

They're about as far removed from the conventional trappings of music biz protocol as it's possible to be. And having their own label, Rock Action, brings a level of autonomy that allows them to commit to whatever artistic endeavour captures their imagination. Braithwaite is a keen advocate of Scottish Independence too, urging those concerned to vote 'yes' come September's ballot and making his case eloquently with numerous TV appearances this past year.

As for current projects, Mogwai have just brought out their own whiskey, brewed in the Glenallachie Distillery under the watchful eye of guitarist, and spirit buff, John Cummings. It'll set you back £55 mind, though chances are you won't even be in a state to care given that it's 57 per cent proof.

Meanwhile their next musical project, aside from a second series of *The Returned*, is a documentary score for the band's video director Antony Cook.

"He's making a film about his friend building a boat from all the rubbish he finds in Manhattan," explains Braithwaite, "then sailing it 300 miles down the Hudson River."

Now come on. How prog is that?

Rave Tapes is out now via Rock Action. See www.mogwai.co.uk for info.

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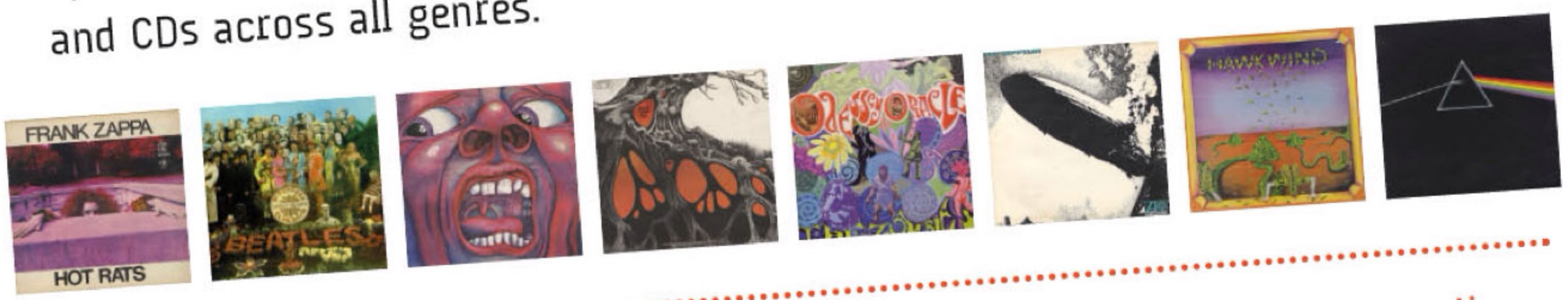

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Vanilla Fudge

They made their name recording cover versions – albeit ones that were warped to the nth degree – and they released an album that some hail as a progressive masterpiece, and others condemn as sub-Spinal Tap nonsense. All that begs the question: **How prog are Vanilla Fudge? Words:** Ian Gittins

Whenever people ask how it all started for me," says Jon Anderson, thinking back over his 50-year music career, "I always say it was when I heard Vanilla Fudge."

It was June 1967. On the New York progressive rock radio station WOR-FM, legendary DJs Murray The K and Scott Muni were blasting out a mutant, mutilated version of *You Keep Me Hangin' On*. At the end of the previous year, the original version of the song, a piquant Holland-Dozier-Holland-penned lament from inside a love gone wrong, had been a Billboard No.1 for The Supremes. This, though, was something entirely different.

New York rockers Vanilla Fudge had taken Diana Ross's sweet, soulful Tamla Motown classic and eviscerated it. La Ross' dainty trill was supplanted by vocalist and organist Mark Stein's guttural yowl. Guitarist Vinny Martell and bassist Tim Bogert unfurled echoing swathes of expansive, swampy, psychedelic sound. Carmine Appice's seismic, titanic drumming threatened to burst out of the speakers.

What had compelled them to commit this act of wanton sacrilege? "Mark and Tim were sitting in a car outside a Manhattan club called Cheetah one night, smoking a joint," explains Appice. "They had the car radio on, and when the Supremes song came on, a light bulb came on over their heads: 'Shit, we should rearrange this song and give it some drama!'

"They came back to the studio and told Vinny and me their idea and we loved it straight away. We always felt that a song's music should match its lyrics, and the Supremes song didn't – the music was real happy, but if you listen to the words of somebody begging to be set free, they came from a real dark place. So we started fucking around with the music.

> **"Vanilla Fudge was a breath of fresh air for progressive musicians."**
> ***Jon Anderson***

"Shadow Morton, who had been producing The Shangri-Las, came to the studio to produce it and we nailed it in one take. Nowadays I call it the seven and a half minutes that changed my life, but of course I didn't know that then. I was just blown away by how big and powerful it all sounded."

Jon Anderson concurs. "When I heard it pounding out of the radio – *'Set me free, why don't you, babe?'* – I just thought, 'Oh. My. God!'" he marvels. "It was a door opening for me. It showed me that you could take a song that you loved and change the whole structure. Vanilla Fudge had altered the tempo and everything.

"It was an absolute breath of fresh air for progressive musicians who were trying to get away from playing the same old rock'n'roll. It was so brazen, and straight away Yes started doing the same thing in rehearsals. We started to mangle and modify all these songs we liked, from *America* by Paul Simon to Richie Havens' *No Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed* to *Every Little Thing* by The Beatles."

You Keep Me Hangin' On was far from a one-off for Vanilla Fudge. The whole of their eponymous debut album, released in August '67, was composed of hypnotic, slowed-down reimaginings of pop hits. Curtis Mayfield's *People Get Ready*, The Zombies' *She's Not There*, The Beatles' *Ticket to Ride* and *Eleanor Rigby*, and even Cher's *Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)* were rendered as bizarre, half-speed symphonies.

"We never wanted to do regular, down-the-line 2/4 beats," says Appice. "We'd normally try to do weird time signatures, like going from 6/8 to 3/4."

"Their whole first album was so radical," enthuses Anderson, close to half a century on. "And the great thing was, it was all about the progression of music."

Yet were Vanilla Fudge really progressive rockers? They came together from a slew of New York and Long Island blues-based bar bands such as The Pigeons and Thursday's Children, before uniting under the management of Phil Basile, who was later to be indicted by the FBI for Mafia activities.

"When we started out, our whole thing was taking existing songs we liked and fucking around with them to bring out more of the emotion that was in there," says Appice. "We would move the bridge chords around, we would write new melodies, but most of all we would put in these huge, dramatic build-ups and crescendos and slow the songs down to a crawl. We threw the kitchen sink at them."

Above: 1967's debut album. Below: Vanilla Fudge in '67, l-r: Carmine Appice, Tim Bogert, Mark Stein and Vince Martell.

DEZO HOFFMANN/REX

GUNTER ZINT/K & K ULF KRUGER OHG/REDFERNS/GETTY

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Shore thing: the band pose by Alster Lake in Hamburg, Germany, in 1968.

Bringing the beat: live on stage circa 1968.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

And what was it like being managed by a Mafia man? "You know what? Phil was good for us because we always felt looked after and we knew we were going to get paid for our gigs. No promoter was going to cross the Mob! Henry Hill, who was played by Ray Liotta in *Goodfellas*, often used to hang out in our rehearsals…"

Yet despite its quasi-epic, progressive leanings, the *Vanilla Fudge* album polarised opinion in the Summer of Love. The band were heavily criticised for recording cover versions rather than their own material, with some critics opining that they were one-trick ponies with few real progressive leanings.

"That complaint made no sense," argues Anderson. "It didn't matter that the original was not their song because they were dreaming up an entirely different production. What they were doing was progressive and it was brilliant and so precise."

In any case, this nitpicking was soon rendered irrelevant. Vanilla Fudge were about to stymie their critics – and, to a large degree, themselves – by releasing one of the most bizarre, baroque, psychedelic and unarguably progressive albums in the history of recorded music.

It remains impossible to overstate just how overwhelmingly the zeitgeist of popular music in the late 60s was defined by The Beatles. In 1967, they had released not one but two masterful, experimental, psychedelic and exquisitely realised concept albums in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Magical Mystery Tour*.

In 1968, Vanilla Fudge had a Billboard Top 10 album and single behind them, but they were also still wet-behind-the-ears New York street kids. When their charismatic producer Shadow Morton decreed they should record their own *Sgt. Pepper*-style psychedelic epic, *The Beat Goes On*, they went along with it.

"The recording sessions were weird from the start," recalls a rueful Appice. "We didn't write any music. We just had an array of rented instruments and when we got to the studio each day, Shadow would give us these peculiar instructions. He would tell us, 'I need you to play something from the 13th century!' or 'I need a death march!' Or he would get a little trippy music going, start the tapes rolling and ask us questions: 'What does God think of *Eleanor Rigby*?' 'What does poetry say?' 'Do you like ice cream?'

"We would just blurt out stupid answers – the first thing that came into our heads. We had no idea how all of this shit was going to hold together, so we just tried to follow Shadow's directions as best we could to keep him happy."

Progressive or not, there's no doubt that *The Beat Goes On* was not a Vanilla Fudge concept but a Shadow Morton one. On hearing the final record, the band members were dumbfounded to find Morton had bizarrely laced historical newsreel and audio clips throughout the album.

"There were John F Kennedy speeches, Hitler addressing a rally at Nuremberg, Nazis yelling out 'Sieg Heil!' and people shouting 'Black Power!'" groans Appice. "We had snatches of Beethoven and Mozart on there. A couple of the band quite liked the album, but I hated it as soon as I heard it. Today it sounds to me like an album that Spinal Tap might make, but Shadow and [Atlantic Records founder] Ahmet Ertegun loved it and kept telling us that it was going to be bigger than The Beatles! I just thought, 'What the fuck are they smoking?'"

The classic album *The Beat Goes On*, released in 1968, confused listeners at the time of its release thanks to its surreal concept.

Sweet sensations: Vanilla Fudge in '67.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY

"It probably sounded incredibly cool if you were listening to it on acid, with some great visuals going on. Unfortunately, I was 10 years old." *Menno Gootjes*

London calling: The Fudge were regulars at The Speakeasy, The Saville Theatre – and possibly this little boozer.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY

"Well, maybe that is what happens when you let somebody else take care of business!" laughs Jon Anderson. "Although using Mozart and Beethoven was not a bad idea. That music is forever..."

Where the *Vanilla Fudge* album had divided listeners, *The Beat Goes On* thoroughly perplexed them. Menno Gootjes, of Dutch prog rock veterans Focus, was a hard-rock-obsessed schoolboy when he stumbled across this difficult second album. "I was really into Deep Purple and kept reading Jon Lord in interviews talking about how great Vanilla Fudge were, so I thought that I should check them out," he says. "I bought *The Beat Goes On* and it was a massive shock for me. It is totally psychedelic and of its time, and it probably sounded incredibly cool if you were listening to it on acid, with some great visuals going on. Unfortunately, I was 10 years old."

Vanilla Fudge's critical reputation never totally recovered from the debacle of *The Beat Goes On*, even though the group went on to produce some tremendous prog-hued material. Their second album of 1968, *Renaissance*, rush-released to attempt to repair the damage wreaked by its predecessor, saw them writing their own material for the first time.

They made a good fist of it. Cosmic, spaced-out tracks such as *The Sky Cried — When I Was A Boy* and *Thoughts* could sit easily on albums by the likes of Uriah Heep, Iron Butterfly or even Emerson Lake & Palmer. They even managed to locate previously unsuspected musical splendours in Donovan's *Season Of The Witch*.

"After I got over the shock of *The Beat Goes On*, I loved the later Vanilla Fudge albums like *Renaissance* [1968], *Rock & Roll* and *Near The Beginning* [both 1969]," says Gootjes. "They were much closer to their first one. For me, those albums bridged psychedelic music and hard rock. They always had interesting progressive chord changes.

"What was great about Vanilla Fudge was that they were experimental, but never in an intellectual way. They were all about power and they were very influential. I mean, John Bonham stole a lot from Carmine's drumming and took it into Led Zeppelin, far more than Ian Paice did in Deep Purple, who was much more jazz-influenced. They deserve to be celebrated a lot more than they are."

"When I listen to Vanilla Fudge's first album even now, it is just so damn good," concludes Anderson. "I never met them, or even saw them live — they were always just a huge mystery to me. And sometimes, that's a great way for a band to be."

See www.carmineappice.com for more info.

1968's *Renaissance* album, rush-released to win back the fans lost by *The Beat Goes On*, included the band's own material for the first time.

YOUR SHOUT!

Sweet inspiration or sickly psychedelic overload?

"Too many covers to be regarded prog, in my book." **Peter Brouwer**

"I thought of them as psychedelic rock. The genre progressive rock had not been mentioned yet to my knowledge. Today I'd say they were a prog band of that era." **Ed Webb**

"Psychedelic, soul, pop, rock. I'd say they were at least proto-prog." **Joshua Creasey**

"They have a fart of prog." **Jose Trivino**

"One of my neighbours dated Carmen Appice 35 years ago, so I daren't say anything against them." **Mark Pearce**

"A covers band with psychedelic leanings so NO!!!!" **Daniel Black**

"Very much so with a small dollop of soul! Iron Butterfly next please!" **Lee Haynes**

"They definitely had the early/proto-prog thing down (a la Moody Blues, Procol Harum, the Nice). But they were also, and this is a subtle thing here, they were also a terrible band." **Barefoot Danger**

"They were loud, they were psychedelic, they were a great band, but none of that makes them prog. Their biggest hit was a Supremes cover and their biggest influence was the Beatles. Nothing wrong with that, but it really wasn't progressive." **Stephen Bowden**

"The best band ever who didn't write their own songs.... Hands down." **Lennaert van Mierlo**

"Not really my definition of prog, but I can sort of see why you asked." **Ian Hall**

"At the time, crossing genres was uncommon, and Vanilla Fudge were one of those bands who fused more than two genres, which was the essence of prog then. The arrangements made who wrote the songs irrelevant." **Mark Pearce**

"A load of crap." **Stephen Edwardson**

"Proto-prog or neo-metal..." **Tony McCabe**

"I counted this as my first prog-related album purchase, although at the time it was considered a psychedelic rock album - and there were few original songs featured but their treatment, and the structure of side two, pointed to the future of prog. The album sits nicely on my shelf between *Piper At the Gates Of Dawn, The Thoughts Of Emerlist Davjack, Sgt Pepper* and *Days Of Future Passed*." **Brian Dawson**

"Mark Stein had a lot of prog leanings/instincts... rest of band didn't. Probably broke them up more than anything else." **Dan Ceallach**

"Ahead of their time!" **Giovanni Profeta**

"They were almost proto-prog, stretching out songs, excellent musicianship." **Paul Shone**

LUCID DREAMER

Over the past decade, guitarist **Matt Stevens** has earned himself a reputation for taking his acoustic to new places. As he releases his first album for a major label, one of prog's good guys reflects on how his tireless approach to social networking, gigging and being on "the funny music end of things" is finally starting to pay off.

Words: Grant Moon
Image: Rob Monk

Six-string supremo Matt Stevens: at *Prog* HQ in February 2014 surrounded by his guitars, happy to be in the "asshole-free zone" of the prog community.

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He's a six-feet-five mountain of a man, but when Matt Stevens gets into his breathless stride talking about music, you can see the kid in him. "Sonic Youth and King Crimson are the same type of band! There's a link between Voivod and Cardiacs – it's unconventional, but it's not traditional prog. The '81 line-up of Crimson, that's where math-rock came from – one guitar doing 7/8, one doing 6. There's this progressive line that keeps going through music and it just gets different names."

If you're a regular UK gig-goer, it's entirely possible you've seen him play, setting upon his battered Ibanez Artisan acoustic guitar with alacrity and wringing melodic, Frippish layers of sound from it via his loop pedals. It's a sight and sound to behold. He's become a go-to guy for big prog acts, with Fish, Barclay James Harvest, Panic Room, Magenta and many more calling on him to weave his six-string spell at their shows. He's also shared the bill with Knifeworld, Trojan Horse and notable acoustic players such as Jon Gomm, Thomas Leeb and RM Hubbert.

Maybe he's popped up on your Facebook sidebar. He's been notably adept at harnessing social media to forge his name in the community and build grass-roots support. But most importantly, as a solo act and with his band The Fierce And The Dead, he's developed musically. His formative recordings were quirkily melodic, but his output has evolved into something altogether more complex, and his challenging fourth album will be his first for a major prog label.

Released on Esoteric, *Lucid* features contributions from a host of artists he's befriended over the past decade. "It's been a massive fluke," laughs Stevens. "It's not like I had grand plan. Jem [Godfrey]'s a mate, I mentioned I was doing this sort of Mahavishnu track, and he was up for doing the keyboards straight away. Lorenzo [Feliciati] played bass on it, and at the time he said, 'Yeah I'm here with Pat Mastelotto and he'll play some drums.' What?! *Thrak* was a huge album for me, and I never thought 20 years later that'd happen!"

> "Noodling is just rubbish composition, but instrumentals can tell a story. That's what I'm trying to do."

Stevens grew up in Rushden, Northampton, playing guitar and living on a diet of metal and thrash – Megadeth, Celtic Frost, Kreator, Voivod – until a local guitar teacher took him under his wing. "He was into Mahavishnu Orchestra and he got me to learn their stuff," says Stevens, who's 38 now. "He introduced me to Crimson, Allan Holdsworth... I only wanted to learn Guns N' Roses! Eventually it sank in about funny chords, the avant-garde element of things, and now you play stuff in 13/8 and it's fine. I'm at the funny music end of things. The logical place for me is post-rock."

Passing through a succession of small, local bands, he moved to That London wide-eyed and hopeful in the mid-2000s. "It was when The Libertines were massive. I was going to the Barfly and thinking, 'Fucking hell, is this it?' I could see why kids would find it exciting but it didn't interest me at all. I've got *Marquee Moon*, I don't need this!"

Undeterred, he earned his bones hauling his guitar to open-mic nights, building up his confidence and calluses over time. He began posting his own instrumental music on Bandcamp and Myspace, and discovered the tangible opportunities the internet affords for building relationships with an audience. "My thing was to build it up, to get email addresses. There's so much music out there, why should anyone give a toss what I do? You have to interact. And you have to do something interesting."

His 2008 debut *Echo* was certainly that, and the folk and post-rock crowd took notice. Two years later, the follow up *Ghost* earned him attention in the reinvigorated progressive sphere. Gradually he was making friends, shaking hands, getting known, and gig offers came from promoters and big prog acts.

A guitarist he may be, but Stevens is no noodler. "If you're noodling, that's just rubbish composition. Instrumentals and melodies can tell a story, can give you chills. That's what I'm trying to do."

While the one-man, cottage industry model is appealing, it's also a relentless slog: a blizzard of emails, tweets and Facebooking, with artwork to make, gigs to book and CDs to post across the world. But Stevens is married, a dad to a two-year-old boy, and by day he works as a social trainer to adults with learning difficulties and autism – a noble calling that's testament to the integrity of the man. Understandably then, 2011's *Relic* was his last self-release for a while.

He was introduced to Mark and Vicky Powell of Esoteric by *Prog*'s own Sid Smith. "I like Mark and Vicky very much," says Stevens. "They work with interesting people, and they were up for doing it. Outside the UK I don't know what I'm doing, but they do – Esoteric give you a bit of clout internationally."

His first album for the label, *Lucid* sees him upping his game. By turns epic and pithy, his loop-swathed soundscapes channel everything from Celtic Frost to Crimson, with some ethnic instrumental colour here, a John Barry reference there and, of course, those guest contributions. Along with Jem Godfrey, Lorenzo Feliciati and Pat Mastelotto, you'll hear violinist Chrissie Caulfield (Crippled Black Phoenix), Knifeworld bassist Charlie Cawood and his Fierce And The Dead bandmate, drummer Stuart Marshall.

Stevens' debut on Esoteric, *Lucid*, is out this month – there's a full review in this issue.

Stevens' live work continues apace, with imminent support shows for The Enid and Oliver Wakeman, and he's eyeing dates in Europe and the US. He's recorded parts for Cosmograf's new record, has a project on the boil with Feliciati and there's even talk of him finally trying some vocal music with both Tim Bowness and Andy Tillison. But for now, this big man with a big heart just considers himself lucky to be embraced by the prog scene.

"The scene found *me*, really, and the people are lovely. Prog's pretty much an asshole-free zone! If you make music with integrity and honesty and don't give a toss what people think, people will like it. Once you realise that you can do what you like and people will listen to it, that's a bloody amazing thing."

Lucid is out on Esoteric on March 31. For details, see www.mattstevensguitar.com.

PHOENIX RISING

Crippled Black Phoenix are back with a double-sided slab of progressive brilliance. Just don't ask what inspired it.

Words: Amit Sharma **Portraits:** Will Ireland

"There's always a message somewhere in the music – it just depends on whether people pick it up or not," muses Crippled Black Phoenix founder Justin Greaves, above the distant crackle of his living-room fire in the Lincolnshire countryside. "Sometimes it can be a bit subliminal and sometimes we just spell it out."

He's talking to us about his band's eighth album, *White Light Generator* – a double-sided seance of curious indie anthems, jangly guitars ringing clear in the dusty moonlight of progressive introspection, all erupting through swirling clouds of reverbs and delays.

"But the whole *White Light*... thing comes from the perception that CBP is all about doom and gloom, and I suppose our music can be quite pessimistic and cynical... but we're all very nice people and actually quite jovial. *White Light Generator* points out the amount of hope and optimism in our music, which is something most people seem to miss."

It's a fair point. The constant driving rhythms and perpetually murky ambiences within CBP's brand of dream rock all play a part in their hypnotic charm, but – at least at face value – it's serious music for serious people.

"This record feels quite uplifting to us," offers bandmate Christian Heilmann. "To be honest it always seemed likely because of our new singer, Daniel Änghede, who's working really well for us. So now everyone's starting to feel quite settled. It's a good moment."

"There's no story to the record though," Greaves continues. "I've never sat down and worked out a concept for any of the albums, but we've found that there always tends to be a running thread which I suppose could be perceived as a concept. We're showing two sides of the same coin and focusing more on the positive... hence naming it after the white side. It's more or less about human nature, maybe a bit of politics here and there! "

Ah, politics. That old chestnut. It was bound to come up. The band have made no secret of their criticisms of the powers that be. "This country is run by a bunch of useless twats, did you know that?" is just one of several posts on the band's Facebook page that tackles issues far beyond their music.

"Ah, they [the government] have been quite annoying recently," deadpans Greaves. "You know what they say, 'In the hardest times comes the best art...' It's that kinda thing."

"Without wanting to get on the soapbox or anything, we'd be making music no matter what anyway; just occasionally you have to comment," Heilmann reasons.

And with tracks like *Let's Have An Apocalypse Now!* and the cheerfully titled *You'll Be Murdered*, there's little guesswork required to figure out what exactly the band are getting at. Like Greaves said, sometimes you just need to spell it out.

"It's one of the running themes across the album. Obviously you've got to be realistic, but in a perfect fantasy world we'd be supporting a common-sense revolution, which speaks for itself really. *Let's Have An Apocalypse Now!* is about getting rid of them and starting again because we don't have much choice nowadays."

It's telling how Greaves shifts his frustration from the UK's current coalition government to a complete lack of faith in all parties. Clearly it's a pain born from a mind that contemplates a better world because it *is* actually attainable, should we wake from the slumber enough to start sailing the winds of change.

"We're definitely anti-Tory," confesses Greaves. "But we're pretty much anti-Labour, Lib Dem, UKIP and everything else. They're all a bunch of useless tossers, you know? Careerist politicians. We just need common sense: lose these shitehawks in control and make a new start. Simple."

Though there's not a huge contrast between the album opening *Black Light Side* and concluding *White Light Side* ("It's more about moods than the sonic difference," Heilmann explains), CBP's latest offering is still in many ways their most expansive to date. While retaining an indie sensibility more in line with Radiohead and Mogwai (whose Dominic Aitchison was once a member of CBP), the cinematic horizons driven by keyboards, samples and atmospheres often overtake, yielding great and surprising results. The brooding post-rock of *Caring Breeds The Horror* builds into a haunting Middle Eastern incantation that wouldn't sound out of place in a war film, almost reminiscent of legendary composer Hans Zimmer's spine-tingling score for *Black Hawk Down*. Having worked on the soundtrack for British independent movie *The Devil's Business* a few years back, the comparison is something Greaves is glad to hear.

"It's funny you mention Hans 'cos we've been using his music as our intro on the last few tours. It wasn't a conscious decision to make a Hans Zimmer-style song – I couldn't if I tried! But it's nice to hear that because we chose that song to lead the album. I think it really encapsulates what we're about, at least more than anything we've done before."

"What you're hearing is actually Bulgarian folk singers," adds Heilmann. "We sourced a random old recording. We've subtly used similar samples before. You could go one of two ways about it – record yourself or find something out there that really fits. And I kid you not, this fit perfectly – the notes, the timing, everything! It was one of those freaky coincidences. Press play and the piece finished the moment the song finished, which was ridiculous!"

And as for film scoring, it seems *The Devil's Business* won't just be a one-off.

"There's a couple of things in the pipeline," he hints. "It's weird with

White Light Generator: a new album that gives CBP wings.

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"We're showing two sides of the same coin but focusing more on the positive."

Justin Greaves

Birds of a feather, from left: Mark Furnevall, Ben Wilsker, Daisy Chapman, Daniel Änghede, Karl Demata, Justin Greaves, Christian Heilmann.

No-one guards their rider like this lot. CBP, Bedford Esquires, February 2014.

films, there's a lot of waiting around. Film companies are worse than record companies for that! But there is one big thing I'm potentially lined up for. Some of the movies I'd loved to have composed for are *Mad Max*, *Rollerball*, *Blade Runner* and *THX 1138*."

Having formed Crippled Black Phoenix a decade ago after years of cutting his teeth playing in highly influential yet perhaps commercially restricted underground metal bands, Greaves has fairly grounded expectations from the music industry. His attitude is one that involves persevering, sacrificing and suffering for his art because that's just his nature. Making a living from it almost comes secondary, which is refreshing to hear in today's world of instant gratification and overnight sensations.

"I would say this to any band: you can go to Europe and break even or do well financially, but when you go further afield, the money may not be there, but sometimes it doesn't have to be about that. We can play big venues in Germany, which is like our meat and potatoes, to a very interested crowd, but sometimes there can be no atmosphere. Then once we played a venue in Serbia that was basically the shell of a house that got bombed in the war. Some guy stuck in a stage and a small PA so we went and played! There were about 30-40 people there and it was the best night of the tour because of the passion. There were grown men crying."

As for his home country, however, Greaves remains unconvinced on just how big an experimental art-rock band can become.

"Without wanting to sound too cynical, England is a very fickle place when it comes to music. You know all that 'next big thing' stuff... it's very cliquey. In Europe, if they like the music, they will support you regardless of trends or fashion. And we're not the most fashionable band... not underground enough to be cool but not mainstream enough to sell records!"

Keeping together a band of this nature comes with its own difficulties too. Sure, there are always going to be other like-minded souls if you look hard enough, but Greaves is more than familiar with how the pressures of modern life can make it increasingly difficult for members to fully commit.

"People have come and gone, all for different reasons. CBP started as me by myself and I had no intention of even making an album. Then I put a band together to play some gigs and it went from there. I'm probably not the best person to be in charge of anything as I'd have had a more stable band from the start! Getting seven people to think the same is impossible."

"There are moments people have different things going on in their lives and contribute more or less – that's just the way life is," agrees Heilmann. "It's not so much an open-door policy, but more like an evolution over time."

"We'll just have to see how long they all put up with me," Greaves concludes, with a cheeky laugh.

Something tells us they'll be okay.

White Light Generator is out on March 17 via Mascot. For more info see www.crippledblackphoenix.co.uk.

> "We just need common sense: lose these shitehawks in control and make a new start."
>
> **Justin Greaves**

The Big Score

Arnie, creepy synths and Polynesian choirs: **Justin Greaves** picks his favourite soundtracks.

MAD MAX, 1979

Composed by Brian May

"This might be an obvious one but I'm not going to use obscure films just for the point of it. A good score is a good score! The Brian May score for *Mad Max* is a perfect example of something that fits with the film. It's a funny one because it doesn't distract you at all, but when you take notice of it, you realise how clever it is. That's the sign of a good score! It also helps that this is one of my favourite films ever made as well!"

JOHN CARPENTER'S THE THING, 1982

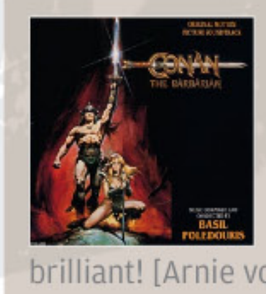
Composed by Ennio Morricone and John Carpenter

"To be honest, I could have chosen any John Carpenter movie for this. I love his stuff and the fact that when he makes a film, he tends to work on the score himself. He's a man who knows what he wants and is the master of that weird, analogue keyboard creepiness. I really admire that."

THE THIN RED LINE, 1998

Composed by Hans Zimmer

"Another obvious one, but there's so many he's done that I could choose here. He's very well known but I'd say his work in this film in particular was really amazing. He used this Polynesian choir - in fact, that's what we used as our intro - and in the context of a war film, that's mind-blowing. He creates an amazing atmosphere with whatever he does."



CONAN THE BARBARIAN, 1982

Composed by Basil Poledouris

"I can't remember the name of the guy that did it, but *Conan* had an amazing soundtrack! I'm talking about the original *Conan The Barbarian* with Arnold Schwarzenegger. It was brilliant! [Arnie voice] 'CROMMMM!'"

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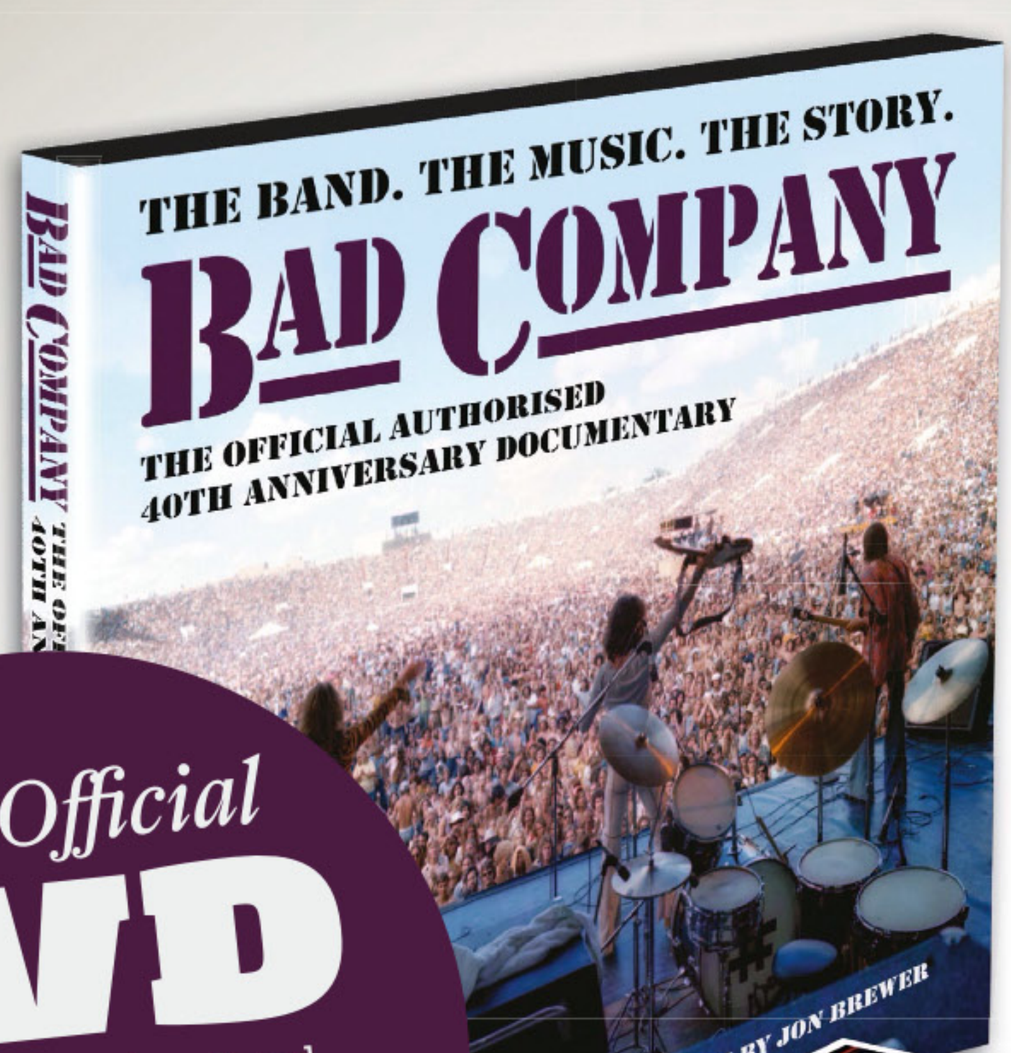

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Tales From The Dark Side

Norwegian prog pioneers **Gazpacho** explore a creepy other-world on new album *Demon*, returning to regale *Prog* with tales of terror, devils and, erm, Justin Bieber.

Words: Polly Glass **Portraits:** Jaak Geebelen

Gazpacho, 2014. From left: Mikael Krømer, Thomas Andersen, Kristian Torp, Jan Henrik Ohme, Lars Erik Asp, Jon-Arne Vilbo.

Today, it all started with pop jingles. You don't associate Gazpacho with jingles, being Norway's expert crafters of twisting progressive concepts, currently on the cusp of releasing an incredibly dark, pensive new album. Yet that's precisely what founding member and keyboardist/songwriter/producer Thomas Andersen writes for a living. In fact, he's just returned from knocking up the soundtrack for a Norwegian version of Boots pharmacy.

This is a weird thought; even more so as singer/founding member Jan-Henrik Ohme's day job at Sony Universal is brought to light. "He's Mr Pop, he knows all the pop stars," Andersen says, cheerily. "He can listen to a single and say, 'This is going to be a hit; this won't be.' He knows what'll work on radio. And, of course, we've completely avoided that in Gazpacho!"

Seemingly, this has never been more so the case than now – latest LP *Demon* is Gazpacho's "most complicated, strangest" work to date. But even as they've grown in boundary-shaking, sometimes gnarly ambition, Gazpacho records aren't difficult to like for one simple reason: the band write excellent tunes. The pop-seasoned Andersen and Ohme haven't stopped prioritising, and honing, their melodic standards.

"Without melody, without a good tune, you have nothing," Andersen says. "So we always work on the tune first."

Crafted over two years, *Demon* is an intense piece. Engaging, yes, but strange and atmospheric, not to mention crammed with interesting edges (including exquisite strings) and prog rock weight. Sparked off by Thomas's father's recollections of a manuscript found in a Prague apartment, over four long tracks the album ignites the notions of an 'evil presence' explored in that manuscript.

The bizarre text itself is now in Prague's Strahov Library, but the uncertainty surrounding its writer (visionary or lunatic? Still alive, or dead?) gave Gazpacho scope to imagine what perspective these ramblings may have come from. Or what this 'demon', supposedly the source of the world's badness, might have been like.

"With this album, because it has a lot of dissonance – some of it's like modern classical music – we were scared it would be too much 'art for art's sake'," he concedes. "Trying to show off or be intellectuals, which we're not. We're telling a story."

Storytelling or not, it's easy to imagine such a band being meticulous academics; a suggestion royally stamped upon with previous LP *March Of Ghosts*, which largely stemmed from one 12-hour, beer-fuelled jam session… and which still became a beautiful, brooding oeuvre. How did *Demon*'s slower-burning, two-year approach fare by contrast?

"It makes you second-guess a hell of a lot more, which is a bad thing and a good thing," Andersen says thoughtfully. "I always go with gut instinct. It's never a good idea to bring your brain into anything. When you involve your brain, that's when it all falls apart, and I think that applies to music as well.

"And I know this is going to sound strange, but I think there is 'something else' at work. I'm not talking about God or anything, but the soul is somehow involved. And music is very close, I think, to magic. I mean, it is magic. It's magic spells – you put certain words and melodies together and you can make things happen to other people."

Not that entrancement with music's subliminal power stops them fearing expectations. As they started showing *Demon* demos to the wider world, life became scarier. "People were saying, 'Jesus Christ, you can't do this, you're gonna destroy your career!'" Andersen remembers. "Our manager said, 'Well this is nice, but where the hell are the singles?' There are no singles! And what a challenge it is for Kscope, and us, to promote this. If you play it to someone, the first time they're going to be a little overwhelmed. I think it needs a few listens."

As, indeed, is true with so much traditional prog, which Gazpacho grew up absorbing. Even if Andersen's first Yes encounter wasn't love at first sight… "I bought *Close To The Edge* and I listened to that intro which is five minutes of birdsong and strange sounds," he remembers. "And I thought, 'Oh my God, that was my allowance, wasted on birdsong for God's sake!'"

Still, he eventually forged a happier relationship with prog. This seemingly struck a chord with Marillion, who snapped up Gazpacho to join them on tour in 2004 – jerking this introspective but tune-focused 'nu-prog' band from Norway into bigger spotlights.

"There is still something which needs to be done in prog rock. Classic prog is fantastic with people like Jethro Tull, Yes and Genesis," he muses. "These are great bands, but prog rock needs to evolve. This is why I always think whenever anyone makes an album, there'd better be a damn good excuse for making that album. If you're going to make a record, do something new, if possible. I'm not saying we've solved that completely, but this is what we're aiming for."

Retro with their long-playing values and appreciation of prog greats, but not old-fashioned stylistically, it's difficult to guess what Gazpacho draw from. Andersen heartily sings the praises of Kate Bush, and the *Hounds Of Love*'s conceptual B-side *The Ninth Wave* especially.

"I think it's mind-bogglingly perfect," he enthuses. "It takes you on a journey. Escapism is extremely important in big prog or concept albums. Because, well, modern life is interesting and great, but we need something to take us away from it."

And take you away *Demon* certainly does. Some of their inspiration, following the manuscript stimulus, was pretty highbrow. Compelled by the idea of diaries, Andersen and Ohme ingested various accounts and manifestos, including the *Unabomber Manifesto* from which lyrical ideas were carved.

Some inspiration, however, was less highbrow. Remember the US horror film *Insidious*? Rose Byrne's son gets possessed? Almost quite good until it gets really silly? One scene from this Hollywood spook-fest stuck with Thomas.

"There's a demon sharpening his nails in his little 'demon office', and he's smiling. I thought, 'He's a demon and he's doing all this bad stuff, and he looks so happy! So immensely happy!' The fact that evil can be feeling joy is an interesting thought. And of course I thought that over an album we'd be able to solve the question of the banality of evil, which philosophers have been trying to do for thousands of years…"

He breaks off, before adding

> "We were scared it would be too much 'art for art's sake' – trying to show off or be intellectuals, which we're not. We're just telling a story."
>
> **Thomas Andersen**

Out, *Demon*, out! The new album takes root.

wryly: "But that was a bit too big of a bite, so we haven't quite managed to solve the problem, but we've at least looked at it from a different angle."

Intrinsically, Gazpacho work from a 'different angle' that, on some level, draws from their evocative surroundings. The simple fact of their dark Norwegian climate ebbs into dark themes. Living in a peninsula outside Oslo, Thomas revels in the nearby woods – skiing at night through the trees, with a head torch, when the snow allows. But for the Scandinavian, who met guitarist Jon-Arne Vilbo growing up in Kuwait – where they absorbed pirate copies of Iranian folk music – striking surroundings may actually be music's enemy.

"I had an interesting conversation with Steve Hogarth – we were talking about how writing in front of a great view would be nice. But Marillion work in this place called the Racket Club, which I don't think has any windows, and my studio is in a basement," he tells us. "And that's actually a great thing, because if you're writing music and you've got a great view, you could then listen to that music thinking you're enjoying it, when in fact you're enjoying the view. If you've got walls in front of you, all you have is the music you're working on. So you know if something's moving you, it's not the white wall, it's whatever's going on musically."

Intentionally sticking out (thematically, and in its tricksy musical edge), *Demon*'s second track *The Wizard Of Altai Mountains* investigates childlike attitudes to evil – a child's fantasy of a creepy wizard in the Russian/Asian mountain range – inspired partly by the Swedish film *Let The Right One In*, about a boy with a little girl vampire pal.

"I talked to Jan about wanting to do something about how kids tackle being in the world which is so damn scary," Andersen explains. "The world in real life is a dangerous and scary place. They create a fantasy world, and it's the ultimate act of escapism; it's a microcosm of what we're doing as adults."

With all this exploration of death, fantasy and fears, we do wonder what such a musician fears the most himself? "That's an interesting question. I don't know. I'm really scared of heights, but that's not really what you're asking. What I fear most, I think, is wasting my time. The only limited resource we have is time. We can always go out and make more money, or get stuff we need, but time is running out."

Has exploring ghosts and the like through music shaped Thomas's outlook on mortality? Proved cathartic even? "Yes it's cathartic – we're really happy guys in real life. We are, seriously!" he insists. "It's the child in us, because these are dark, scary places we go to, but it's completely safe; it's just a song, it's not real."

Nonetheless, we challenge you to listen to *Demon* and not wonder, just a bit, if you're being sucked into some other-worldly parallel. At once jarring, odd, atmospheric and melodically rocking, it's a compelling experience – though Andersen's six-year-old daughter doesn't quite agree yet.

"I caught her singing to a Justin Bieber song on the radio. So I say, 'No! You must listen to this!' and I play some Gazpacho, which she thought was really boring," he says, smilingly. "She bought me one of those Justin Bieber dolls, and we got a Justin Bieber pillow as well. I might bring the doll on tour..."

Gazpacho play Leamington Spa Assembly on April 14, and London's O2 Islington Academy on April 15. See gazpachoworld.com for details.

Taking it in their stride, the boys start the long walk to the UK for live dates.

"I thought that over an album we'd be able to solve the question of the banality of evil, which philosophers have been trying to do for thousands of years... But that was a bit too big of a bite."

Thomas Andersen

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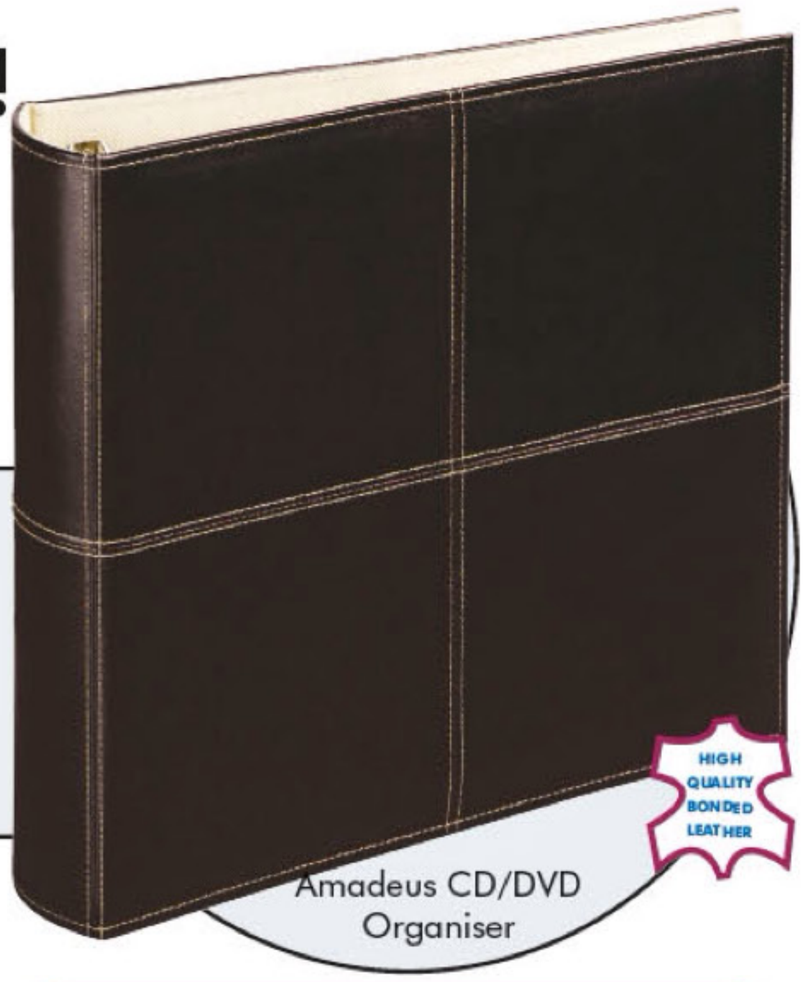

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DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

Former Galahad bass player **Lee Abraham** returns with an accomplished new solo album *Distant Days*, featuring quite a guest list...

Words: Nick Shilton
Image: Ross Jennings

The epitome of unassuming, Lee Abraham peppers his conversation with *Prog* with references to his musical endeavours being "at this level". True, Abraham doesn't bestride the prog scene as a musical colossus. Equally, however, during a career within the lower leagues, he has chalked up some notable successes, most notably a four-year stint playing bass for Galahad and producing former Big Big Train vocalist Sean Filkins' *War And Peace...* solo album.

Abraham sees his fourth solo album, *Distant Days*, as an extension of his previous efforts. "I've always been positioned slap bang in the middle between prog and rock – rock-tinged prog or prog-tinged rock or whatever you want to call it."

As such there's arguably a danger that he falls between two stools into a certain musical no man's land. "I like to think that you can appeal to two different audiences," he counters. "Over the last decade or so rock, heavy rock and metal have gone more into prog than back in prog's heyday. Look at Porcupine Tree – they went from being an ambient band almost to metal."

While ostensibly a solo album, *Distant Days* features a lengthy guest list. Most notably, former Darwin's Radio frontman Dec Burke sings opening track *Closing The Door*. Abraham first crossed paths with Burke at the renowned RoSfest in the States back in 2007 when they were playing with their respective bands at the time. "We really hit it off and have kept in touch, throwing ideas back and forth. When it came to *Closing The Door*, I needed a really good 'rock delivery' vocalist. It's sung in quite a high register as well and Dec's name was all over it."

Another album highlight is *The Flame*, sung by John Young. Abraham had long been familiar with Young but the latter came to the forefront of his mind as a vocalist as a result of last year's celebrated *Lifesigns* album. "He has a very English-sounding voice with a little bit of Gabriel. I thought that *The Flame* was the sort of song which John would write himself and would be right up his street."

In addition to *The Flame* – which has significant crossover potential – Young also ended up singing on a second track on the album, *Walk Away*.

Abraham enlisted two other vocalists for the album: Steve Thorne and Riversea's Marc Atkinson. Like Abraham, Thorne is based in Southampton and the two are long-standing friends. "We're always meeting up and putting the prog world to rights," Abraham laughs.

Having sung two songs on *Black & White*, Thorne sings what Abraham regards as the centrepiece of the album, *Tomorrow Will Be Yesterday*. However, Abraham reluctantly ended up singing the title track himself.

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"When I write, I sing all the guide vocals," he explains. "With regard to *Distant Days*, I played it to a couple of people who said I had to sing it on the album."

While professing not to be a great fan of his own voice, Abraham was ultimately cajoled into singing the track. "I sing live and get away with it because live is in the moment. But when you're recording, it's for evermore and you're always going to hear it. You have to be 100 per cent sure and I never am with my voice. I must have sung about 30 takes and right up to the final mix, I was tempted to ask Steve Thorne to sing it!"

Abraham concedes with some trepidation that he may have to sing everything live himself. "But at this level, it's not as if you get asked to do a full tour – it's more the odd festival."

Equally, as a multi-instrumentalist, Abraham could have played the vast majority of the instruments on the album himself but instead chose to use the live band whom he had assembled for a handful of gigs following the release of *Black & White*.

With a relationship dating back 20 years, new Credo drummer Gerald Mulligan is a long-time ally of Abraham. However, Abraham's greatest challenge was to relinquish playing bass in favour of Alistair Begg. "That was the biggest thing for me to let go of because I'm primarily a bass player."

Abraham initially took some convincing when Begg appeared with a Chapman Stick for the recording sessions, but he was soon converted. "It adds a new dimension. When he came into the studio I was sceptical to start with. But he'd worked out some stuff on the Stick which sounded brilliant."

Live outings are unlikely to be integral to Abraham's short-term plans but he does hope to play some shows to support the new album. "What tends to happen for artists at my level is you release the album in one year and then get asked in the next year to play the odd festival here and there."

Abraham played three shows in support of *Black & White*. "Playing shows is a lot of work and holding down a full-time job while trying to do the music stuff means you've only got limited time."

The challenges of co-ordinating band meetings and rehearsals, while not insuperable, are a burden. "It all sounds like it should be easy but it doesn't ever really turn out like that! And when you're playing festivals you have to compromise with a lot of other people. It can turn into an utter headache. I must admit that a couple of times in the past, both with the *Black & White* shows and some of the stuff I've done with Galahad, the whole logistical thing has burnt me out," he laughs.

"It's flattering to be asked and I really hope that all the people who put on and go to festivals continue to do so. But I just don't think that at our level you can do it on a regular basis."

Lee Abraham's Distant Days is available now via Edge Of Life Records. For more information, see www.leeabraham.co.uk.

"I've always been positioned slap bang in the middle between prog and rock."

CADENCE AND CASCADE

Two guitars. Two basses. Two drummers. It can only be the Fripp-approved **Crimson ProjeKCt** coming to a town near you soon...

Words: Mike Barnes

It's been really great – it's like the King Crimson oasis," says Pat Mastelotto of The Crimson ProjeKCt's live shows. "I remember the first time we played in the States, a lot of people thought that they'd never ever see or hear that music performed. When they hear some of those songs, they go nuts!"

The drummer is referring to the latest in a long line of so-called 'ProjeKCts' that sprang up once the double trio version of King Crimson had "fractalised", as he puts it, in 1997, after a three-year lifespan. Various configurations of group members would play and sometimes record with each other, a tradition that had continued sporadically up to 2011 with *A Scarcity Of Miracles* by Jakko Jakszyk, Robert Fripp & Mel Collins.

The Crimson ProjeKCt is a rather different and much bigger beast. It grew out of a King Crimson-themed music camp held in New York State in late summer 2011 and features Crimson alumni Tony Levin on bass and Chapman Stick, and Pat Mastelotto on drums (with touch guitarist Markus Reuter from their trio, The Stick Men), and guitarist and vocalist Adrian Belew (with drummer Tobias Ralph and Julie Slick on bass guitar from The Adrian Belew Power Trio). All three new recruits are versed in Crimson material, and Reuter studied guitar with Fripp.

The camp culminated in a concert with all six playing material that had been previously performed by the double trio. They were offered some live dates, with an agent keen to put them out as King Crimson. They refused, calling it instead the Two Of A Perfect Trio tour. "Which did not roll off the tongue," says Mastelotto.

Guitarist and Crimson founder Robert Fripp was ostensibly in permanent retirement at the time, but was happy to endorse the group and suggested its rather snappier name.

"As well as giving us his support, I remember Robert said, 'I don't care how much touring you guys do as long as I don't have to go,'" Belew laughs. "I think he's quite happy to have people who are very careful of the legacy to go out and play this music."

Ever since the group's inception in 1969, musicians in King Crimson have been given the freedom to improvise – especially live – and Belew is impressed by how the younger musicians have taken to this ideology, which is helping to keep the music fresh and giving it a different kind of edge. The results can be heard on the album *Live In Tokyo*, recorded in 2012, which is incontestably powerful stuff.

"That's the beauty of Crimson – everyone can interpret it in their own way as long as you are playing what has to be played," Belew affirms. "I like that about the Crimson ProjeKCt – it has its own personality now, but it still sounds exactly like something that belongs there in the Crimson lexicon."

"Everyone's got a pretty big musical brain and vocabulary, and we've got our ears on all the time for when detours happen," says Mastelotto.

"A LOT OF PEOPLE THOUGHT THAT THEY'D NEVER EVER SEE OR HEAR THIS MUSIC PERFORMED. WHEN THEY DO, THEY GO NUTS!"

Pat Mastelotto

From left: Tobias Ralph, Marcus Reuter, Adrian Belew, Julie Slick, Pat Mastelotto, Tony Levin.

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"Improvisation is the whole principle behind the piece called *Thrak*. It has an intro and an outro that's specifically designed for the trios — one trio plays in 5/4; the other plays in 7/4 — and then we join up and it's completely open before the main theme returns.

But with the acceptance of this freedom comes the responsibility of breaking habits and avoiding doing things by rote. Mastelotto explains, "Tobias and I may have a conversation offstage and say, 'Let's just chill tonight and let the other guys have the space to start,' or maybe, 'Let's dive in right away, let's really go forcefully.'

"Adrian might say, 'Can this be a funny improvisation? Can this be a scary one?' There will be a general outline so you don't have people going in completely the opposite direction. And that's partly due to the monitoring situation onstage: you can't always hear the other players as well as you'd like to and sometimes you hear the sound bouncing back off the walls."

Most audience members wouldn't even stop to think about the physical problems of playing onstage with a group as dense and complex as the Crimson double trio, but Belew agrees with his bandmate that clear monitoring is crucial.

"I probably could write a book about it as I am right in the centre of the maelstrom," he observes. "I have one drummer on one side playing the off beats in one time signature while on the other side I've got a drummer playing a whole different time signature, so it can get a bit loopy sometimes. It's such a big, powerful sound. When you're playing there is still an enormous amount of tightness and orchestration that goes into it and everyone has to be on the same page at all times."

To complicate the picture, since the Crimson ProjeKCt started up, after telling all and sundry over and over again that he was no longer a musician, Fripp reformed Crimson in autumn 2013, after achieving some success in his legal action against Universal Music Group for unpaid royalties. Mastelotto

Wave upon wave: *Live In Tokyo* is out now. Above: Belew does the funny improvs...

...while Mastelotto does the scary ones.

and Levin are in the new version of the group, together with drummer Gavin Harrison, drummer and keyboard player Bill Rieflin, guitarist and vocalist Jakko Jakszyk and Mel Collins on sax.

Was Mastelotto surprised at the news? "I was dude, totally!" he exclaims. "The phone rang and it had a +44, and it was Robert, and what the hell? I did not see it coming."

The new Crimson will commence rehearsals in June. Mastelotto is keen not to divulge what they are working on, but they have 10 core pieces from the 60s, 70s and 90s and beyond, but then this is all subject to change. So how does he feel about simultaneously being in two different versions of the same group, who might conceivably be playing some of the same material? He sounds quite unfazed.

"I can't think of an experience for either of us that has been like that before," he says. "But it's just a different chemistry, a different interaction between each group of people. Both Tony and I and all the members of the band do so many projects and they overlap a lot."

So, one has to ask, why is Belew not in the new version of King Crimson? "There's a pretty simple answer for that," he replies. Robert emailed me his plan and told me that basically I wasn't right for it and it wasn't right for me. And he didn't say that in a bad way. He

"ROBERT EMAILED ME HIS PLAN AND TOLD ME THAT BASICALLY I WASN'T RIGHT FOR IT AND IT WASN'T RIGHT FOR ME."

Adrian Belew

told me that it would be more like a 70s band with three drummers in the front line and the rest of the musicians playing behind them. Already that sounded not like something I would be right for. So I was not in the least bit offended, and I support it totally."

"When Crimson stops, which it does periodically, you have to go on with your life and the last time that happened I made a promise to myself to resurrect my solo career and go forward with all the things that I had put on the back burner. I'm in the thick of that now, so it's worked out fine — we're still great friends and I'm quite relieved in a way. And there's two versions of King Crimson now, if one wasn't enough!"

Mastelotto finds himself playing alongside other drummers in both groups. Does he see this a compromise or something he positively embraces?

"I love it man," he enthuses. "Way back in the 80s when I was with Mister Mister, I had [electronic] Linn Drums and my drum parts were always augmented by a sequencer. My head always wants the arrangement with something more than I can provide as one guy — like a third arm or leg — and that's augmented by a little bit of extra percussion, usually coming from my electronics. To play with another human being, it's kind of an extension of that. When I work with another drummer we try to get a lot of clarity. We try to pan the drums out, we don't play in unison, we find arrangements where we ricochet off each other."

Neither drummer nor guitarist has any specific long-term plan for the Crimson ProjeKCt, although Belew would like to maybe add some material from *ConstruKction Of Light* (2000) and *Power To Believe* (2003), which wasn't played by the double trio, but a later version of King Crimson that didn't tour much outside the States.

"I call this the Fun Crimson," Belew concludes. "And I don't mean that directed towards Robert, as if it wasn't fun with him in the band. The reason it's so fun now is we aren't trying to go out and reinvent the wheel with everything we do. In the King Crimson days, these were brand new pieces of music we were struggling through right there in front of the audience, but now it's not as difficult as it was. All those expectations and pressures have gone and it's just about playing the music."

Live In Tokyo is out now via InsideOut. See www.thecrimsonprojekct.com.

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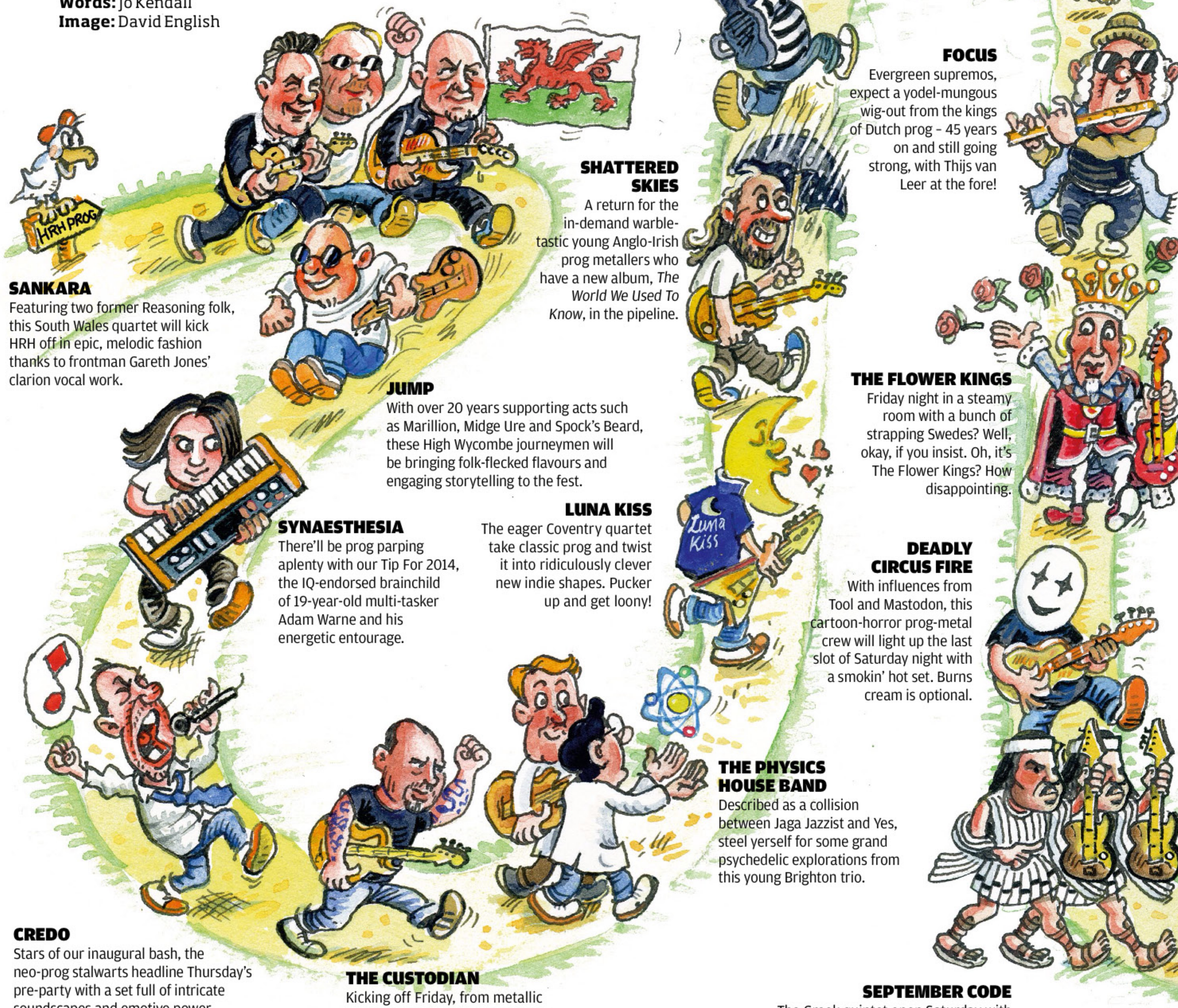
The Road to HRH PROG 2

Last year's **HRH: Prog** festival was such a hit that we thought we'd do it all over again – by the seaside (in Wales), over March 20-22! Pack a suitcase, a sense of humour and a bucket and spade, and let's meet the bands about to prog on…

Words: Jo Kendall
Image: David English



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Multi-instrumentalist Paul Ortiz likes to monkey around with awe-inspiring polyrhythmic riffs and atmospheric workouts. Get ready to go ape.

FOCUS
Evergreen supremos, expect a yodel-mungous wig-out from the kings of Dutch prog – 45 years on and still going strong, with Thijs van Leer at the fore!

SHATTERED SKIES
A return for the in-demand warble-tastic young Anglo-Irish prog metallers who have a new album, *The World We Used To Know*, in the pipeline.

SANKARA
Featuring two former Reasoning folk, this South Wales quartet will kick HRH off in epic, melodic fashion thanks to frontman Gareth Jones' clarion vocal work.

JUMP
With over 20 years supporting acts such as Marillion, Midge Ure and Spock's Beard, these High Wycombe journeymen will be bringing folk-flecked flavours and engaging storytelling to the fest.

THE FLOWER KINGS
Friday night in a steamy room with a bunch of strapping Swedes? Well, okay, if you insist. Oh, it's The Flower Kings? How disappointing.

LUNA KISS
The eager Coventry quartet take classic prog and twist it into ridiculously clever new indie shapes. Pucker up and get loony!

SYNAESTHESIA
There'll be prog parping aplenty with our Tip For 2014, the IQ-endorsed brainchild of 19-year-old multi-tasker Adam Warne and his energetic entourage.

DEADLY CIRCUS FIRE
With influences from Tool and Mastodon, this cartoon-horror prog-metal crew will light up the last slot of Saturday night with a smokin' hot set. Burns cream is optional.

THE PHYSICS HOUSE BAND
Described as a collision between Jaga Jazzist and Yes, steel yerself for some grand psychedelic explorations from this young Brighton trio.

CREDO
Stars of our inaugural bash, the neo-prog stalwarts headline Thursday's pre-party with a set full of intricate soundscapes and emotive power.

THE CUSTODIAN
Kicking off Friday, from metallic roots, a reflective new Brit outfit is born, with muscle, introspection *and* tattooed-up sensitivity.

SEPTEMBER CODE
The Greek quintet open Saturday with a slick set of grandiose balladry. Earnest, earthy and well worth catching.

Wish You Were There?

The what, when and where of the weekend.

This year, HRH: Prog takes place at one of HRH's favourite locations: Hafan y Môr Holiday Park in Pwllheli, North Wales. With Mount Snowdon in the background and the sea just a five-minute frolic away, the chalet and caravan accommodation is as convenient as it is cosy, with eateries, shops and – most importantly – live music never too distant.

Check-in is from 4pm and progtivities start at 5pm on Thursday March 20, finishing late on Saturday 22. As a bonus, your ticket will also get you into neighbouring HRH: AOR and HRH: Blues arenas too! But don't forget, check-out is 10am the next morning.

HOW TO GET THERE:
The nearest train and bus station is Pwllheli, about four miles from the Park, although a quicker route is to go to Bangor and get a shuttle bus to Hafan y Môr.

For directions by car, see www.hrhprog.com/information/directions.html.

Fancy getting the coach? Haven Holiday Parks have negotiated a 10 per cent discount with National Express (correct at the time of going to press). Call 0871 781 8181, seven days a week, 8am-8pm, for details (allow four working days for tickets to arrive).

HRH: Prog is a ticketless event. When you book online, you will receive a booking confirmation with a unique booking reference. You will need to print out this information and bring it to the event. You will also need ID for check-in – this can be either your driving licence, passport or bank card.

ACCOMMODATION:
Chalets and caravans come equipped with all mod cons, from fitted kitchens to colour TV (no Sky, though), free utilities, pillows and duvets. Do bring: food, toiletries, towels, extra pillows and extra blankets if you require them. The Park reception will be able to help with any enquiries, and provide hairdryers for those blessed with prog locks to die for. There's free parking on site and let's hope for sunny spring weather – the Park has direct access to the beach!

Hafan y Môr is wheelchair friendly.
But some parts of the park are described as 'hilly'. Local company Living Life is at your service to hire out mobility aids, so give them a buzz on 01286 830 101.

Need more info? Call HRH: Prog on 0203 287 6684 or email info@hrhprog.com.

And finally: We'll see you all down the front!

FISH
The formidable Mr Dick kicks off his Moveable Feast spectacle by headlining here. There will be giggles, sniffles and hair-raising tales.

SOLSTICE
With Steven Wilson as their champion and new album *Prophecy* gathering acclaim, the Milton Keynes neo crew see out the weekend in rejuvenated, cosmic style.

ARCANE ROOTS
On the rise after being handpicked to tour with Muse, the hirsute Kingston trio will bring a supercharged alt-prog eruption to the Snowdonian foothills. Beware avalanches!

THE ENID
HRH: Prog veterans, Robert John Godfrey's revitalised collective will once again surprise and delight with their mix of dramatic composition and symphonic whimsy and naughty T-shirts.

PANIC ROOM
The Swansea-bred aces will have us captivated with a wealth of songs from new album *Incarnate*, as well as favoured classics from their seven-year career.

HAWKLORDS
Former Hawkwinders Harvey, Ron, Adrian and Jerry (with Bevis Frond tub-thumper Dave) take this 10-legged groove machine in search of space-rock – and find it in Pwllheli!

DEEEXPUS
Andy Ditchfield's Marillion-approved North Easterners feature Touchstone's Henry Rogers in their line-up and promise a hugely popular catalogue of modern prog ditties.

CRIMSON SKY
Leading the charge in a femme-fronted triple, Jane Setter's expressive troupe will show off their engagingly honest brand of neo.

PURSON
Rosie Cunningham's eccentric psych rockers add a touch of Vertigo groove and 60s panache to the HRH celebrations.

Edited by Grant Moon
grant.moon@weareteamrock.com

A.K.A

New spins...

BIGELF

Tragedy and disharmony sucked Damon Fox's band into a maelstrom of their own, but now Bigelf are back with a revamped line-up and they're whipping up a storm on their new album (thanks in part to that Mike Portnoy...)

Words: Chris Roberts **Illustration:** Stephen Kelly

A maelstrom is a very powerful whirlpool. In Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 story *A Descent Into The Maelstrom*, a shipwreck survivor sees at first only hideous terror within it, then comes over all Zen and reckons it a beautiful, awesome creation. There's something akin to that revelation happening in the return of the mighty Bigelf, whose fifth album, one hell of a comeback, is at the same time overwhelming yet dazzling. Bigelf are a magical, mysterious, mad-hatter's fusion of prog, doom-rock, goth, glam, and melodic pop. They are late-period Beatles with the amps turned up to 11. They have in their armoury some of the wit and invention of Queen, 10CC, Tears For Fears, ELO and Sparks; the shrill energy and euphoria of Jane's Addiction, Mercury Rev or Flaming Lips; the raw groin-grinding riffage of Black Sabbath or Killing Joke; ELP keyboard surges and the deceptively bucolic left-turns of Pink Floyd. As they blend and stir all these elements with increasing restlessness yet perfect poise, you realise that Bigelf are like nobody else on Earth. *Into The Maelstrom* will spin you far, far away.

'Head's in the sky and I ain't coming down,' sings main man Damon Fox as this epic journey accelerates. He sounds, understandably, as thrilled at what's taking place around him as you will be. In recent years Fox has had to pretty much rebuild a broken Bigelf from scratch. The LA quartet released three albums between 2000 and 2010, surviving the tragic death of a founder member. Across *Money Machine*, *Hex* and *Cheat The Gallows* they impressed and improved. The last, on Linda Perry's label (she co-wrote a song here), seemed to be taking them to the next level of international acclaim. They supported Dream Theater and Porcupine Tree on tour. But vocalist/keyboardist/guitarist Fox called for a hiatus,

Into The Maelstrom

INSIDEOUT

> **Bigelf are like nobody else on Earth. This will spin you far, far away...**

and that incarnation of the band ended. He found encouragement to forge ahead from ex-Dream Theater drummer Mike Portnoy, as the two bonded over their respective bands hitting 'their *Let It Be* phase'. Fox wrote the new album himself, and Portnoy stepped in as drummer. Bassist Duffy Snowhill returned, and Into The Presence guitarist Luis Maldonado brought lead guitar. Fox handles everything else, from crunching guitar riffs to inspired keyboard curveballs to velveteen layers of vocals, and creates a world of wow-factor. 'Psychedelically cinematic,' he calls it, 'with a Mad Max post-apocalyptic feel.' The album achieves that, then constructs rockets from the debris.

The loose concept's about travelling back and forth in time to probe your troubles and fears, but really *Into The Maelstrom* just puts its foot down, engages its fan-of-popular-music-history brain, and flies. *Incredible Time Machine* screeches in with what sounds like an elevator ascending, an alarm call, before choppy dramatic riffs announce this will rock as much as roam. Sabbath are the first obvious reference point, but then the dynamic judders and shudders of the aforementioned art-proggers come in, and Bigelf keep moving the ground every time you get your footing. '*Welcome to the world of dreams,*' sings Fox, over a hubbub of heavy that's filled with light. *Hypersleep* drops in sci-fi dialogue and the meatiest of riffs, and nods to Major Tom, *Horace Wimp* and *Logan's Run*. Exhilarating histrionics and Thin Lizzy guitar sounds '*wake the dead*'. There is so much happening in every track that it's bewildering: the Beatles vibe of *Already Gone*, the cracking laser-licks of *Vertigod* and *Control Freak*; the big is-there-a-God questions of *Alien Frequency* (where Portnoy gets busy).

Throw in the sumptuous vocal arrangements of *The Professor And The Madman* and the playful, fuzzy *Meddle*-inspired section of *High*, and you've got kitchen-sink crescendos as created by HG Wells and *Sheer Heart Attack*-era Roy Thomas Baker. *Edge Of Oblivion* is another epic, flitting between the mischief of 10cc's *How Dare You* and real, dark angst about genocide. *Theater Of Dreams* is McCartney after 19 pints; the three-part finale title suite, with eerie keyboards and end-of-days grandeur, is *Star Trek* meets *MacArthur Park*. Fox sings of the world ending ('*no more seas, no more trees*'), finding solace in memories. The limitless, liberating world of Bigelf is beginning afresh. Roll up, roll up for a wild interstellar ride that will blow your top hat clean off.

BACK TO CONTENTS

ASIA

Gravitas FRONTIERS

Even without Steve Howe, they remain a serious proposition.

Asia watchers can be forgiven for approaching *Gravitas* with caution. The band return after the disintegration of a reunion of their original line-up, and introduces Sam Coulson, a largely unknown Englishman, in the place of Steve Howe. The 27 year-old Midlander might have played with Paul Gilbert, Tony MacAlpine and Guthrie Govan (the John Payne-era Asia/now Steven Wilson Band incumbent), but can he mix it with a unit of world-class musicians? And how will his apparent proclivity towards hard rock and metal affect this group's notoriously delicate internal chemistry?

> **A stripped-down sound that sacrifices none of their pomp.**

Asia's post-reunion music grew incrementally in terms of both confidence and stature, from their 2008 comeback *Phoenix* – the first to reconvene the dream team of bassist/vocalist John Wetton, Howe, drummer Carl Palmer and keyboard wizard Geoffrey Downes – and up to 2012's sorely under-rated 30th anniversary set *XXX*, which offered one of their most exquisite compositions in *Face On The Bridge*.

Gravitas was produced by Wetton and Downes and mixed by their former Wetton-Downes bandmate John Mitchell (who away from his work with It Bites, Arena and Frost* is carving a growing reputation as a sculptor of sound across various genres). The album steps back from the flamboyance of the Howe era to present a more stripped-down sound. However, Asia 2014 have sacrificed none of their Downes-fuelled symphonic extravagance, nor the immediacy of those melodies concocted by the reliable ol' parpmeister in cahoots with the golden-voiced Wetton.

Once intended as the album's title cut, the fragrant *Valkyrie* allows Coulson to introduce himself with a measured and unflashy solo to suit the dignified mood. The title track is a deliciously commercial hard rock tune that provides a better showcase for the newcomer's skills, with *The Closer I Get* an eloquent, slower paced tune with some absorbing lyrics. The sumptuous *Nyctophobia* (fear of the dark) is an ambitious piece with Wetton repeating the song's title over and over again, backed by Asia in their full-on pomp-rock splendour.

Russian Dolls delays too long in revealing its hand perhaps, though once past its own over-long intro *Heaven Help Me* avoids emerges as an uplifting highlight. Elsewhere, *I Would Die For You* is perhaps a little too weightless, but the band rediscover their A-game with *Joe DiMaggio's Glove* before signing off with the tepid *Till We Meet Again*. It's far from perfect and detractors will rightly mourn Howe's more flowery approach, but *Gravitas* could well mark a fascinating new start for Asia.

DAVE LING

ALCEST

Shelter PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

The French duo's baleful, beautiful fourth album.

Listening to *Shelter* it's almost impossible to believe that France's Alcest were originally lumped in with the black metal genre. The duo is led by mainman Neige, who writes and arranges the music and plays everything except drums (the responsibility of the mysteriously-monikered Winterhalter). *Shelter* is their fourth full-length album, and while Neige's black metal roots have been detectable in previous releases there's not the slightest trace of them here. The eight-track offering might be full of gauzy, shoegazey guitar textures it somehow manages to be at once dreamy and nightmarish. Conceptually, the title says it all: the recurring themes are of self-abandonment and isolation, nowhere more evident than on *Away* (unusually for Alcest, sung in English instead of French). The spectral chant *'To the gleaming shelters/Hidden somewhere in the sun/Far away from this world/Far away'* will have you battening down the hatches and sitting in by yourself in a gloomy coalbunker until July at the earliest. And then along comes closer *Délivrance* to extend that deadline 'til Christmas. It's a deeply affecting album, a work of mournful, baleful beauty. **GB**

JOHN BASSETT

Unearth STEREOHEAD

Solid, low-key debut from the KingBathmat linchpin.

With KingBathmat, singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and producer Bassett has made a dent on our reviews pages twice in the past 12 months with two striking psych records, *Truth Button* and *Overcoming The Monster*. On this, his debut solo album, there are elements of that band's multi-faceted grasp of psych, rock and pop, but there's a more sober, introspective tone to this music. The acoustic strummers *Stay Away From The Dark* and *Survival Rate* are coloured with Kinks-like piano figures, electric pianos, with Bassett's plangent vocals doubled up nicely. His trick is to keep this all just leftfield enough – a Syd Barrett-esque chord caprice here, a *Space Oddity* melodic loan there (*Nothing Sacred*). There's plenty of prog meat on the bones of *Pantomime* and *Kylerhea* (Floyd, Steven Wilson and Marillion come to mind) and the interesting melodies and harmonic shifts are skilfully handled, each popping despite the songs' overwhelmingly acoustic arrangements. Some of Bassett's lyrical polemic might be a little well-worn (*TV Is God*) and there's an earnestness here that the 'Bathmat keep in check, but right up to tear-inducing coda *Comedian* there is much to dig here. **GRM**

BLACK MARE

Field Of The Host HUMAN JIGSAW

Spacey post-rock solo venture from the psych-doom lady.

Stepping out from the echelons of now-defunct psych-doom brigade Black Math Horseman, Sera Timms now performs vocals/bass duties with the similarly inclined Ides Of Gemini. She's also formulated a different kind of trippy bleakness with *Field Of The Host* – proclaimed as more 'solemn whisper' material than the 'deafening roar of inevitability' encompassed by those two other acts. As such, her ethereal vocals expand into dreamy prominence with the ambient doom of *Saturn's Grave*, with alt-indie hints in the guitars and melody of *Fighting Birds* (think 'doom mindset' in a delicate framework, minus the 'slow-motion Cookie Monster' roar). It's pensive post-rock for late nights and atmospheric escapism, hypnotically oozing into your ever more spaced-out face, but it doesn't really go anywhere. True, that may be beside the point with a saturated, doom-laden slice like this, but if Timms were to take Black Mare any further she may benefit from more dramatic extremes, or heightening the intensity already here. As it is, if you're after darkly ambient, hypnotic and disorientating music to see you through the small hours, *Field Of The Host* will do nicely. **PG**

COLLIBUS

The False Awakening COLLIBUS

Have these British prog metallers made the debut album of the year?

Every week, it seems, there's a plethora of emerging bands who claim to be prog metal. It's an easy tag to hijack, isn't it? Just play metal with a vague idea of technique and dynamics, and voilà! Thankfully though, their debut album proves there's so much more to Collibus. Firstly, this British four-piece have Gemma Fox, who has a stunning voice, capable of soaring yet also with an edge. She handles delicacy and punch with equal assurety. Guitarist Stephen Platt offers a vision reminiscent in places of Dream Theater's John Petrucci, but also delves into late 70s moments, inspired by Alex Lifeson and metal's die-hard masters. The real clincher here is that, despite their relative inexperience, the band already know how to marry instant tunefulness to their elaborate, sophisticated arrangements, and all with a mighty clout. *Leave It All Behind*, *Break The Silence* and *The Hunted* show what the band are truly capable of, and highlight Collibus' fast-emerging promise. In fact, *The False Awakening* will be seen as one of the year's best debut albums. It's a work that points the way to a future where they're regarded as one of the master prog metal bands of the era. **MD**

COSHISH

Firdous UNIVERSAL MUSIC INDIA

Young Mumbai band's opener comes full of Eastern promise.

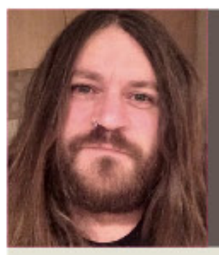
It is perhaps testament to the quality of the music on this Mumbai band's major-label debut that minutes into the tricksy, infectious opening track I'd become oblivious to the fact that the lyrics on *Firdous* are all in Hindi. Please, please do not let that deter you from checking this four-piece out. Theirs is intelligent rock music just on the cusp of progressive, with its eyes on the arenas of the world, some hints of yer Mansuns and none of cultural co-opting types like yer Kula Shakers. Mangesh Gandhi is the guiding presence throughout, his vocals crisp, clear and vibrant, with a nicely judged, natural balance between Indian melismas, Western rock tropes and big, big harmonies. Shrikant Sreenivasan proves himself more Rothery-melodic than Petrucci-widdly, and the epic song that gives the band its name is as anthemic as they come. Of the many influences they cite (Tool, Porcupine Tree, Opeth et al) it is Karnivool they'd nestle next to most comfortably on a bill. Swedish mastering boffin Jens Bogren has given *Firdous* an excellent, radio-friendly sheen, and Coshish's love for what they're doing simply radiates off the disc. Catchy, whole-hearted music. **GRM**

D'ACCORD

D'Accord III KARISMA

Vintage, Norwegian prog rockers go rock'n'roll on their third LP.

Well, sort of. Having been decidedly conceptual for their sophomore effort, here D'AccorD have plumped for nine shorter, largely more rock-roughened tunes. Their sense of grandeur has not totally left them. Roving 10-minute opuses open and close the record (only one track clocks in at under five minutes) and melodic, spectacularly 'classic prog rock' hooks shape this into a beguiling, retro bolt hole. Vocal delivery and rockier guitar capture a *Wall*-era Pink Floyd/The Who vibe in the likes of *These Last Todays*. Quality rocker *Ibliss In Bliss* is laced with early Genesis intrigue and Ian Anderson flute-tooting. The crowning glory, though, is the gorgeous guitar work; capturing, as it does, a beautiful early-70s tone and distorted, blues-rooted style in numbers like *Lady Fabulous* and lovely olde prog rocker tune *Mon-Sat Part I*. If they'd just iron out those passages that currently feel more like 'classic prog rock-by-numbers', this emboldened rock n' roll side could carry them to edgier heights. For now, though, this offers the 70s prog/rock lover's musical equivalent of a first-rate hot chocolate; warming, familiar and enough of an indulgent treat without massively rebuilding perceptions. **PG**



PROG METAL

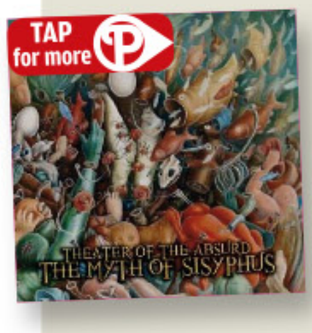
Dom Lawson takes you to the dark and heavy hinterlands of prog.

While many modern prog-metal bands today seem content to peddle variations on well-worn themes, New England's **Barishi** demonstrate a fervent devotion to going against the grain on their stunning, self-released and self-titled debut. Part windswept psychedelic riot, part avant-garde cosmic trip, songs like *Holy Mountain*, *The Rider* and the superbly-titled *Jaguar Scarification Ritual* combine Voivod-esque dissonant riffing, squealing sax, meandering jazz-tinged freakouts and a dash of extreme metal oomph: a brave and potent cocktail that thrills, intoxicates and confounds in equal measure.

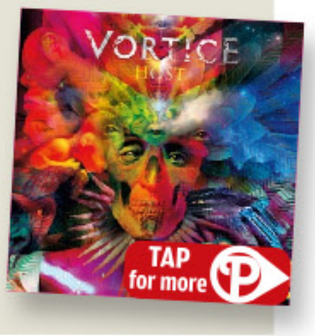
Although their roots are firmly in the metal world, **Ethersens**' sound has morphed into something far more in keeping with a post-Porcupine Tree mindset on the Frenchmen's long-awaited second album *Your Wandering Ghost* (Scarlet Records). A wall of clangorous guitars dominates the likes of *Mourning Light* and *Two For One Mind*, but abstruse melodic sensibilities ensure that there is also a Godsticks-like oddness to both the songs' structures and arrangements. Aggression still lurks in Ethersens' collective psyche, however, and it emerges with devastating intensity on the fiery and feral *Reflect*, a song that gleefully blurs the lines between black metal scree and modern prog melancholy.

While legions of fans eagerly await a new Tool album – and, let's face it, being a Tool fan involves more waiting than anything else – Montreal quintet **Mire**'s self-released album *Inward/Outward* amounts to a vigorous and vital stopgap measure, the band's obvious debt to Maynard Keenan and co adding a dash of welcome familiarity to what is an intermittently distinctive slab of exploratory heaviness. The best moments on this album – the playful, riff-driven *Tyrannicide*, the muscular grooves of *Catalan Atlas* – offer a more direct and soulful take on the aforementioned Californians' revered template, with plenty of hooks poking through a carapace of dense art-rock atmospherics.

Living up to their name with swivel-eyed glee, **Theater Of The Absurd** deal in prog metal at its most mischievous and carefree. *The Myth Of Sisyphus* (Graviton Music Services) eschews the genre's usual obsession with technicality in favour of an ever-changing landscape of theatrical quirks and symphonic trickery as a bewildering number of ideas jostle for space. At times it sounds like Haken have run away to join a circus; at others, it sounds like Dream Theater having an acid-fuelled meltdown. Either way, the band's madness should be cherished.



Perhaps a little too extreme for fans of traditional prog, Spanish djentlemen **Vortice** are a welcome addition to the tech-metal ranks, their post-Meshuggah riff assault and penchant for disorientating ambience reaching an apex of efficacy on *Host* (Alone Records). At their best when they're aiming for the jugular, as on the syncopated savagery of *Before The Blast*, they also exhibit a gift for cinematic electro-elegance on shimmering curveball *The Spaceship Destroyer Of Mankind*.



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Presagio

GOLDRAY

Goldray AKASHIC

Stylish debut EP from Reef guitarist's psych-rock project.

Who'd have thought the guitarist behind *Place Your Hands* could turn his hand to something this cool? With the Kate Bush-tinged vocals of Leah Rasmussen and lashings of chic, Doors-esque classic rock riffery and appealing freaky touches, former Reef man Kenwyn House is onto something seriously satisfying. The debut full-length, due out this spring, will be the real test of Goldray's musical arsenal, but the omens thus far are looking good. *Outloud* is an inviting blend of swaggering, bluesy, alt-rock soul and 90s-evoking melodic grunge drive. House's Reef past comes through in this respect, suggesting that catchy lightness of touch has continued to serve him well. Darker, weirder psych tones feed in through *Calling Your Name*, while Rasmussen's dulcet tones add an other-worldly innocence to the contemplative, uptempo *Indigo Sky*. But it's the hazy yet driving *Diamond Road* that reflects real prog promise, all vintage rock hooks and spiralling layers, with a pleasingly smokey, retro sheen. Sensual without being sleazy, characterful but not 'kooky', *Goldray* is a stylishly composed, thoroughly enjoyable progressive rock record. **PG**

GALAHAD

Seize The Day AVALON

The enduring proggers taking 2014 by the scruff of the neck.

There's a real sense of momentum building up in the Galahad camp. They're currently remixing 2007's *Empires Never Last*, their concert list includes Celebr8.3 in June and they're also releasing three EPs over the year. The first of these, *Seize The Day* is the first of these, and it's a life-affirming slice of their soundworld. Originally appearing on 2012's *Battle Scars*, that title track comes in two flavours here: the original full version, (buffed and polished nicely by mixmeister Karl Groom) and a full-on single mix that fillets out the more ponderous elements, ramps up the electro and heads for the dance floor to celebrate life, fragile life. Re-working one of their mid-80s tunes, *21st Century Painted Lady* is a sweeping, beautifully produced power ballad, and they've even put an instrumental version on here so you can sing or solo along. *Bug Eye* from ('99s *Following Ghosts)* is revisited and revamped here too, its machine-like rhythms working well on a great marriage of old-school neo brains and nu-skool production smarts (treading that fine line well). The 12-minute live version here gets rousing applause and closes a quality release. Seizing the day, indeed. **GRM**

JEFF GREEN PROJECT

Elder Creek F2/FESTIVAL

Impressive solo work from an enduring guitar talent.

Now resident in Ireland, Californian-born guitarist Jeff Green spent many years playing and working in bands in the UK, and his music certainly hints at this mixed background. Green's second solo project album has many conventional prog elements, but its smoothly muscular, American pop-rock/AOR vibe suggests his primary intention here is to establish catchy tunes and strong vocal hooks. It also reflects his love of bands like the Eagles, a detectable inspiration in places. *Theseus Falls* marries these influences to neo-prog stylings, and the title track (featuring ex-Big Big Train vocalist Sean Filkins) has a bittersweet yet funky pulse, and delicate radio friendly ballad *Loops And Threads* gives us subtlety and sadness. The album closes with *A Long Time From Now*, a 20-minuter with Yes-tinged opening and a stylistically diverse, multi-part suite approach. Abetted by a high-class band of British session players (the bass and drums pairing of Andy Staples and Pete Riley rarely fails to impress) Green can certainly play guitar – his soloing and playing throughout instrumental *Point Blunt Light* is simply beautiful. A slick and consistently strong collection of songs. **GMM**

CARAVAN

Paradise Filter CARAVAN RECORDS

Heavenly sounds from the Canterbury veterans.

With a new Best Of album scheduled in addition to this strong new release, maybe 2014 will be just the right time for the much-undervalued, long-overdue Caravan revival. Too often overshadowed by their 70s contemporaries, the Canterbury band produced at least two classic albums (*If I Could Do It All Over Again, I'd Do It All Over You* and *In The Land Of Grey And Pink*) back in the day. While *Paradise Filter* isn't quite in that league, there are enough moments on this compact collection to remind long-time fans of former glories.

> **This is a quietly compelling addition to Caravan's canon.**

The album is so compact, in fact, that I found myself wondering if *Paradise Filter* should be reviewed in these hallowed pages at all – its running time is a mere 50 minutes, and this coming from a band whose best-loved material often occupied an entire vinyl side! So does this mean there has been a dip in standards? Mercifully, no. Under the watchful eye of the band's chief songwriter and singer, Pye Hastings, the band have delivered a quietly compelling addition to the Caravan canon.

The album opens with the spritely *All This Could Be Yours*, with Hastings' vocals sounding as distinctive as they did on *As I Feel I Die* all those years ago. Rather ironically, the title track (a gentle recollection of '*an old cathedral town*') is sung – and written – by multi-instrumentalist and long-time member Geoffrey Richardson.

It was Caravan's unwillingness to be pigeonholed which led to the richness in their sound, and that's continued on *Paradise Filter*. Jan Schelhaas's keyboards act as a perfect backdrop, while Jim Leverton's bass and Mark Walker's drums form the ideal foundation for Pye Hastings to float on.

As well as Pye's distinctive vocal style, *Paradise Filter* contains all the Caravan hallmarks you'd expect, which make it sound ethereal and very English. Indeed, there are times (*Fingers In The Till*) when the Caravan sound edges eerily close to Pink Floyd. The comparison is particularly noticeable on *Dead Man Walking*, which could stand comfortably alongside *Division Bell*-era Floyd.

Otherwise, it's business as usual: the wry and beguiling *Trust Me I'm A Doctor* recalls days spent in a land of grey, and pink; *Farewell My Old Friend* is, as its title suggests, a poignant ballad, crying out to be an *X Factor* cover. Ultimately though, it's the song *I'll Be There For You* that is quintessential Caravan. It's another touching ballad that's sentimental without coming across as cloying. There's something about hearing these distinguished gentlemen still hard at it going into the 21st century, and to such great effect too.

PATRICK HUMPHRIES

CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX

White Light Generator COOL GREEN/MASCOT

CBP embrace delicious despair on their seventh album.

As red herrings go, the opening track on Crippled Black Phoenix's latest studio splurge takes some beating. A delicate two-minute acoustic love song, *Sweeter Than You* may be delivered deadpan, but its warmth and air of dewy-eyed serenity is irresistible. But these eccentric Brits aren't a band prone to such sustained bouts of loveliness, and *White Light Generator* takes them ever deeper into the realm of world-weary distress and quiet horror that they have expertly nurtured over the last decade or so.

"The album goes ever deeper into the realm of quiet horror."

With typical contrariness, the two-part *No!* swiftly pulls the rug from under our feet, that trademark CBP blend of melancholy and menace fizzing and hissing within the band's unmistakably organic, spontaneous and darkly melodic framework. When the grinding riff that drives *Let's Have An Apocalypse Now!* kicks in, it exudes the same slack-jawed swagger propagated by Nick Cave's Bad Seeds, but with an almost psych-rock underbelly twitching and churning beneath: further proof that although they wear their ingenuity lightly, CBP have a progressive streak a mile wide and are fearless in their pursuit of compositional nirvana.

The thwarted rage that has frequently blazed at the heart of the band's music is more evident than ever on the impossibly grim and threatening *Parasites*, a song that owes plenty to Swans' primal no-wave mantras while still thrumming with idiosyncratic fervour. In contrast, *Northern Comfort* begins with barrelling, propulsive energy, before descending into a twinkling haze of plaintive piano, as gently heartbreaking lines like *'Always leaving a light on/Waiting for me to come back home...'* brilliantly evoke the muted misery of small lives lived just beyond the peripheral vision of an indifferent world.

Superficially, Crippled Black Phoenix occupy similar musical ground to fellow countrymen Anathema, but while the Liverpudlians' melancholy is tempered by misty-eyed optimism and a sense that the human spirit will always prevail in the end, songs like *Caring Breeds The Horror* and the chilling *You'll Be Murdered* offer no such hope or respite from the creeping shadow of oblivion. Even when channelling their unashamed Floyd obsession, as on *No! Part 2* and the wonderfully languorous *We Remember You*, *White Light Generator* paints the Phoenix crew as dogged pessimists, desperately trying to claw some relief from the healing power of music. The realisation that escape from mortality's downward crawl is little more than a transient fantasy makes these subtly grandiose missives all the more affecting. Only the closing track, *A Brighter Tomorrow*, offers any comfort, but who needs hope when despair sounds this beautiful?

DOM LAWSON

TUOMAS HOLOPAINEN

The Life And Times Of Scrooge NUCLEAR BLAST

Nightwish maestro goes the full Disney.

You've got to hand it to Tuomas Holopainen. As the guiding light of Finnish symphonic prog-metal titans Nightwish, he always thinks big – just double the number you first thought of and add a few zeroes. "I know – let's spend a million making our new conceptual album into a film, and if nobody but us likes it then who really cares?!" Holopainen writes just about all of the music and lyrics for Nightwish but *The Life And Times Of Scrooge* is a labour of love for the self-confessed Walt Disney nut. Its contents, based upon a novel of the same name by Don Rosa (who provides the artwork), have been quietly stewing for the last 14 years. Nightwish recently awarded full-time membership to Troy Donockley of uilleann pipes, tin whistle and backing vocals fame, but the album's desolate, defiantly understated strains might yet surprise.

Enya and Clannad fans will surely appreciate its richness of tone and the lavish swathes of pastel colour, concocted with regular associate Pip Williams in the arranger's chair. In truth, though, there's little to hook in fans of progressive music, nor indeed of heavy metal. Yeah, this is less of a duck and more a bit of a turkey. **DML**

HUIS

Despite Guardian Angels UNICORN DIGITAL

Canadian prog veterans launch their new project.

Although *Despite Guardian Angels* is a debut release for this band, its five members have been involved in the Canadian rock and prog scene for many years. Most familiar to *Prog* readers is probably guitarist Michel St-Père, who's involved with fellow Canadians Mystery. Primarily piano, synth and Hammond led, and frequently punctuated and enhanced by St-Père's often Gilmour-like playing, the music combines both classic symphonic rock and neo-prog elements. Opener *Beyond The Amstel* and *Lights And Bridges* are reminiscent of IQ in places, for instance. Elsewhere there are strains of a mellower, less intense Dream Theater or Pain Of Salvation, as evidenced by tracks such as *If By Morning* and *Salvation*. Vocally, Sylvain Descôteaux's voice is warm and expressive, but more catchy vocal hooks would improve his impact.

Influenced by the time the band spent in Holland, many of the tracks have Dutch-related themes – the terrific instrumentals *Oude Kerk 1* and *2*, take inspiration from one of Holland's oldest churches, and *Little Anne* deals with Amsterdam's most famous and tragic daughter. Mature playing, strong material and lyrical food for thought make Huis a band to watch. **GMM**

LOREENA MCKENNITT

The Journey So Far: The Best Of QUINLANROAD.COM

The perfect introduction to the McKennitt oeuvre.

Fans of Clannad may disagree, but Loreena McKennitt is surely the queen of mystical folk prog. This compilation draws together highlights from her stellar career and is nothing less than an invitation into a world more beautiful and mysterious than we usually allow. It's a perfect introduction for the McKennitt newbie, full of classics from every juncture. These range from the Celtic pipe-driven *Bonny Portmore* through to the trancey *The Mummers' Dance* and onto world-music styled *Marco Polo*. *The Bonny Swans* demonstrates her effortless ability to combine fuzz guitar and folk vibes, while her setting of Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* transports you to a place of pure Arthurian legend. Established fans will be a little frustrated that some of the more sprawling original tracks have been edited, but the intelligent choices make this album feel like an essential playlist. This is music for heart and soul, a doorway to escape the tawdry vicissitudes of modern life as McKennitt sings of the mysteries of the earth and sea. As entry-level McKennitt, there's little missing, although it's hard not to wish that *Dark Night Of The Soul* had been included. **RM**

REBEKKA KARIJORD

Music For Film And Theatre CONTROL FREAK KITTEN

Nordic soundtracks of wonder and awe.

Hollywood movie music is notoriously conservative, so thank God for composers like Rebekka Karijord, who remind us of the elegant, post-rock possibilities that lie beyond the purview of a Hans Zimmer or a John Williams. An established solo artist, this collection showcases Karijord's contributions to other people's theatrical and cinematic art over the past half-dozen years. Opener *Prologue* – one of several offerings from the movie *Nowhere Home* – balances Glass-like repetitions with extended string notes to conjure alienation and loss. By contrast, voice-driven *Madrigal* is balanced between the soothing and the menacing. Like most movie music, Karijord's work is discrete, but it offers scope for the listener to summon their own images. The twin influences of Eno and Arvo Pärt are close to the surface, but Karijord has a voice of her own. The counterpoint on *Snö* between synth repetitions and simple guitar riffs is part post-rock, part Pat Metheny, all Norwegian ice and fire. This is no mere ambient doodling, but fully formed music. From the menace of *Jag Ser Dig* through to the melancholy of *Anchor Boy*, it's Nordic cool at its most sublime. **RM**

INCURA

INCURA INSIDEOUT

An epic debut packed with drama and theatre.

The first major release from this young quintet is a constantly intriguing exercise in classic rock riffs, shuddering metal rhythms and operatic concepts. While the Vancouver natives' debut album rocks hard with theatrical style in abundance, they make sure the small matter of writing excellent songs is never neglected. There are 10 of those right here and Incura look to lead by example. While the album begins with the chugging guitars of *Get The Gun*, detailing a dramatic tale told even more dramatically, leading onto the driving riffs and huge, soaring chorus in *I Breathe This*, the arpeggios of *I'm Here Waiting* recede to showcase another side of Kyle Gruninger's vocal range – one that's slightly farther away from the histrionics seen in the opening brace. The vaudeville cabaret style he adopts in *Who You Are* runs closer to Gerard Way's on My Chemical Romance's rock opera *The Black Parade* than other cited influences such as Queen or Dream Theater. If you like your prog rock filled with drama, quality arrangements and lofty ambition then Incura have written as powerfully unique a debut as you're likely to hear in 2014. This is fantastic in every sense. **RR**

MESSENGER

Illusory Blues SVART

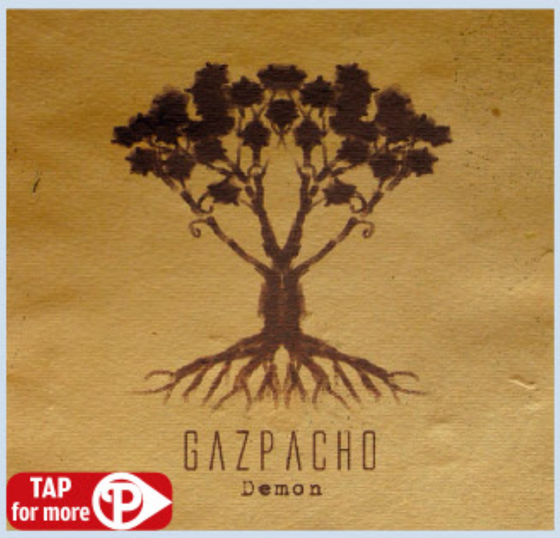
Quietly rapturous debut from London quintet.

Don't be put off by the slightly ponderous blurb that accompanies this record ('a cosmic ode to the forces of nature and the inevitable cycle of life'): *Illusory Blues* is in fact one of the freshest debuts you'll chance upon this year. Formed two years ago by city boys Khaled Lowe and Barnaby Maddick, the band have pooled disparate backgrounds in punk, metal and ambient music into a wonderfully cohesive whole. Messenger take bucolic folk as a starting point, then happily roam into more cosmic territory. Nothing encapsulates them better than nine-minute epic *Midnight*, which begins discreetly (strings, acoustic passages and the like) before breaking into a fair gallop and winding down to a soft canter. It's all beautifully paced and skilfully delivered. There are broad swathes of Pink Floyd here (cf: the lunar oddness of *Dear Departure*) and echoes of modern-day experimenters like Riverside and Ulver (the latter's Kristoffer Rygg is already a big fan). These are songs that invariably build slowly and deliberately, marked by arpeggioed guitars and woodwinds, creating a surreal realm that hovers somewhere between an English meadow and a Thorgerson dream. **RH**

GAZPACHO

Demon KSCOPE

Theatrical experimentalism from a band chilled to perfection.



The Norwegian art-proggers have described this, their eighth full-length release, as the 'most complicated and strange' album they've ever made, and to be fair to them, it is pretty damn peculiar. A concept piece based on 'mad ramblings left behind by an unknown tenant in an apartment in Prague' that were apparently found in real life, it seeks to explore the dark corners of the human psyche. Coming, as it does, after 2011's *Missa Atropos*, which was all about death, fear and loneliness, and 2012's literary *March Of Ghosts*, a Poe-like collection of tales from beyond the grave, they're clearly not afraid to get their goth on, and *Demon* has a similarly inky hue to its pale-faced siblings.

> **This queasy, chilly drama is offset with a sense of true beauty.**

There's a real theatrical feel to the record – it doesn't take much of a leap to imagine it reworked as a Victorian gothic stageplay. Comprised of just four tracks (although they make up such a twisted and intangible whole, it should only really be listened to as a single, uninterrupted piece of work), stretching themselves indulgently out over five, 10, even 18.30 minutes at a time, *Demon* is surely as defiantly prog as it's possible to get today.

But for all the fear, loathing and beasties lurking in the corners, this queasy, chilly drama is offset with a sense of true beauty. Frontman Jan-Henrik Ohme's vocals are gorgeous, keeping things subtle and clear but soaked with palpable, tragic emotion in the Jeff Buckley vein. His mournful voice floats over delicate piano and weaves around strange, subtle programmed sounds. Bursts of European folk, Middle Eastern violins and heavy waves of post-rock collide beautifully.

Ghostly choirs haunt opener *I've Been Walking Part 1*, as it skips from classical flourishes to tougher rock outbursts as deftly as a mountain goat. The epic closer *Death Room*, meanwhile, seems to wander through a kaleidoscope of despair and insanity, every moment of calm followed by violently stormy thunderclouds gathering overhead.

Demon is certainly not a casual listen and it won't be bothering the mainstream airwaves any time soon. It greedily demands your full attention, and you'll notice something new – an otherworldly voice in the distance, a subtle violin pattern, a minimalist splash of percussion – every time you come back to it, as the protagonist's decent into madness pulls you further under each time you return to it.

Goodness knows what they're putting in the soup out there in Oslo, but it's worth a taste just to see what wonderful nightmares it'll give you.

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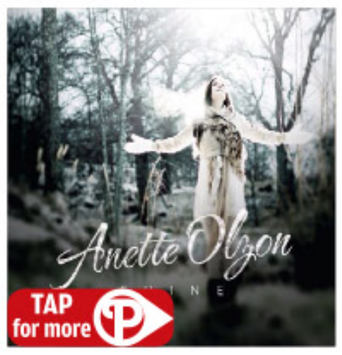
ANETTE OLZON

Shine EARMUSIC

Majestic symphonic rock from the ex-Nightwish frontlady.

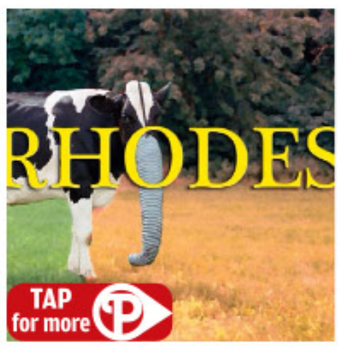


There will be many waiting for Anette Olzon to fail here. Most believe the former Nightwish singer is no more than a mouthpiece with little creative talent, and so *Shine* will come as a pleasant shock. It offers sedate, superior pop-rock, but leans on symphonic arrangements to give the songs an epic quality. At times, such as on *Like A Show* and *Watching Me From Afar*, there are traces of Kate Bush in her approach. And there are inevitable comparisons to Nightwish on the title track and *Moving Away*. But the main impression is of an artist making her own mark, and determined not to be pigeonholed. Under the guidance of producers Stefan Örn, Johan Glössner and Johan Kronlund, she is encouraged to open her horizons and get beyond what she might have achieved with Nightwish. This becomes clear on *Falling* and *Hear Me*, both of which have a misleading simplicity that belies their sophisticated musicality. *Shine* is an album that pays rich dividends on successive plays because what appears to be obvious melodic rock then manifests itself as having far more to interest *Prog* readers. It'll be intriguing to witness these songs live. **MD**

RHODES

Rhodes BURNING SHED

Warm progressive pop from Peter Gabriel's guitarist.



As a renowned session guitarist – notably working with Peter Gabriel for the last 20-odd years – David Rhodes has a reputation that's tough to match. Yet as with most session men, there's clearly been a desire to record and release his own material away from his day job. His debut solo album, *Bittersweet*, may have partially sated that craving but with *Rhodes* he's further sharpened his approach, disregarding any superfluity and producing a punchy recording that's rich in texture and energy. Indeed, it's surprising, given the depth of the songs, that Rhodes the band is only a three-piece, with the guitarist being joined by the equally adept bassist Charlie Jones and drummer Ged Lynch. The tracks are similar to Gabriel in their approach, having a quirky pop frame with progressive elements blending in to enhance the sound. *If I Could Open My Head* and *Monkey On My Back* are typical of Rhodes' compositional style, both being upbeat with catchy choruses. Crucially, *Rhodes* become more gratifying with every listen and although there are some who will deem the material too mainstream, this is a shrewdly constructed album containing some fine songs. **RW**

RPWL

Wanted GENTLE ART OF MUSIC

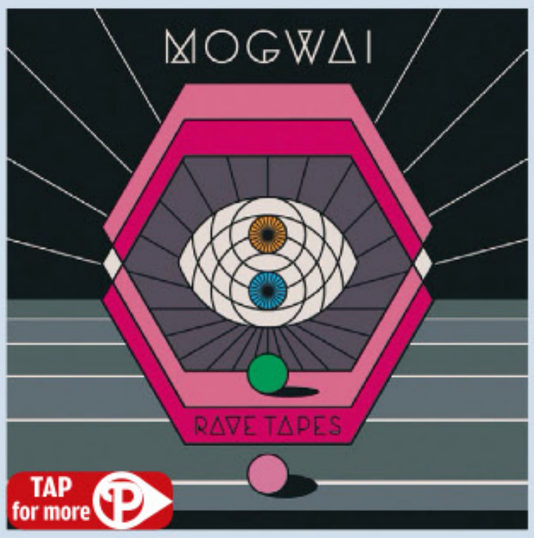
Career-defining release from the former Pink Floyd tribute band.

RPWL seem to have been continually trying to escape their past. Originally a Pink Floyd tribute band, the Germans have suffered the fate of simply being rejected as a 'second-rate Floyd' throughout their career. It's an unforgiving and inaccurate dismissal that disregards such inspired and distinctive albums as *Beyond Man* And *Time*. There may be flashes of Floyd in Yogi Lang's vocal inflection and the odd guitar solo, but the breathless originality they've shown here on *Wanted* will finally cut them free from the comparisons that have dogged their career. It's also their bravest release because by adding contemporary flashes, they risk alienating some of their more traditionally-minded fans. However, it's a gamble that has produced a penetrating and focused album. Their talent is being able to generate a cohesive whole from disparate influences. These range from the forceful metal of *Revelation* to *Perfect Day*'s pop, through to the grandeur of *Misguided Thought*. Critically, the album is without a hint of filler, each track perfectly weighted and performed with aplomb. *Wanted* is a gripping album that will propel the band towards a far wider and more appreciative audience. **RW**

MOGWAI

Rave Tapes ROCK ACTION

Glaswegian veterans return with subliminal surprises.



When a band has sustained a 19-year career of remarkable consistency and focus, they run the risk of being taken for granted. Such is the case with Glasgow's Mogwai, who have ploughed their mostly instrumental furrow since 1995, making only the most incremental of adjustments to a distinctive and influential sound. It's as much a curse as a blessing that, setting personal preference aside, the band have never put out a bad album.

> **The first half contains some of the band's finest compositions.**

And yet certain developments in such a career can have the effect of reminding the public how good it is to have you around. Last year, Mogwai's stunning soundtrack for the French TV thriller *Les Revenants* nudged them back into the limelight and helped to generate anticipation for their next album proper, the brilliant *Rave Tapes*.

The first half of the album comprises some of the band's finest compositions to date. *Heard About You Last Night* is a typically deliberate, mournful piece of mid-paced melancholy, but *Simon Ferocious* is built around a rolling rhythm and an addictive synth pulse, shifting mood from reflective to defiant, as though the band are steeling themselves against an oncoming storm. *Remurdered* rides the kind of synthesizer sequence Pittsburgh duo Zombi have made a career from, introducing clipped guitar phrases and an earth-shaking drum pattern along the way.

The piano-assisted *Hexon Bogon* kicks in with a Bonham-esque rhythm and at two and a half minutes, is over before the listener knows what's hit them. The Zep theme continues with *Repelish*, whose lengthy sample of one Reverend Lee Cohen discussing the subliminal Satanism of *Stairway To Heaven* both amuses and unnerves.

Initial listens suggest the album settles into a comfortable stride midway through. In fact, the likes of *Master Card*, *Deesh* and *The Lord Is Out Of Control* are simply less instant in their appeal, and take a little longer to lodge themselves in the consciousness (the exception to this is the vocal-led, almost hymnal *Blues Hour*). Here we observe a pattern common to all of Mogwai's releases: a handful of tracks immediately grab the ear, giving the impression that the remainder are merely business as usual. It's only through repeated exposure that the full picture becomes visible.

Mogwai should be commended for maintaining a tight grip on their sonic identity. Their insistence on subtle evolution continues to serve them well, and their attention to detail – audible, for example, in the variety of drum sounds used across these 10 tracks – should not be underestimated nor undervalued. Rave on.

JOSEPH STANNARD

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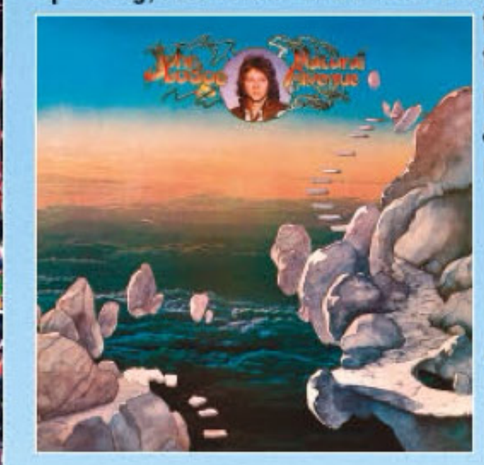
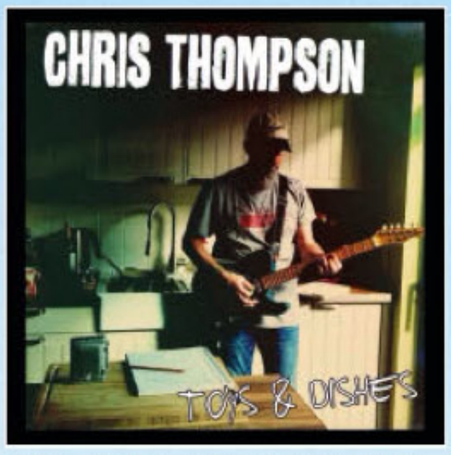
JOHN LODGE 'Natural Avenue'

Newly remastered edition of the 1977 solo album by the MOODY BLUES' bass player, vocalist and writer JOHN LODGE. Guest musicians include Kenney Jones, Chris Spedding, Mel Collins and Mick Weaver. "Natural Avenue" has been remastered from the original master tapes and includes 2 bonus tracks, "Street Café" and "Threw it All Away", originally released as a single in 1980. *Also available as a limited edition gatefold 180 gram vinyl LP with a bonus 12" EP.*



KEITH EMERSON 'Changing States'

Newly Remastered release of Keith's 1995 album, unavailable for many years. The album features "Another Frontier" (originally recorded by Emerson, Lake & Palmer as "Changing States") plus possibly the definitive version of "Abaddon's Bolero" recorded with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.



CHRIS THOMPSON 'Toys and Dishes'

The new album by Chris Thompson, known for his work on vocals and guitar with Manfred Mann's Earthband, as well as featuring on Jeff Wayne's "War of the Worlds". This new studio album, "Toys and Dishes", is his first in over 10 years and draws on all the musical elements that make his songs and voice so instantly recognisable.

RICK WAKEMAN 'Out There'

Remastered edition of Rick's 2003 conceptual album with The New English Rock Ensemble. Inspired by Space Exploration and dedicated to the crew who lost their lives in the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster. This album is one of Rick's most "progressive", featuring expansive pieces.

MATT STEVENS 'Lucid'

The new album by acclaimed guitarist Matt Stevens, noted for his work as a solo artist and as a member of Fierce and The Dead. Featured guest musicians: Pat Mastelotto (drums, King Crimson), Lorenzo Feliciati (bass, Naked Truth), Charlie Cawood (Knifeworld) and Kev Feazey, keyboard players Jem Godfrey (Frost) and Emmett Elvin (Chrome Hoof and Guapo), Chrissie Caulfield (violin, Helicopter Quartet and Crippled Black Phoenix), vibe player Jon Hart and Nicholas Wyatt Duke (Trojan Horse).

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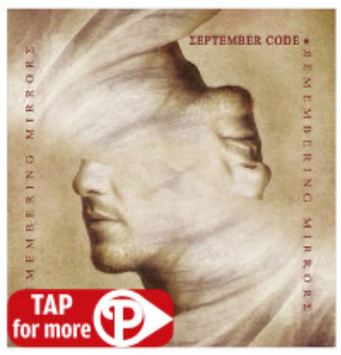


This rising Greek band's second album by mixes tasteful technicality and atmospherics. Occupying the musical spaces between Porcupine Tree, Red Hot Chilli Peppers and Korn, this makes occasional interesting forays into other territory, while vocalist Dim Koskinas successfully shimmies between Kroeger and Hetfield-esque performances. *Humanize* sets the pace, its dark, floaty piano and keys morphing into crunchy, percussive guitars and precise bass and drums. A highlight, *Before You (Be For You)* is in a similar yet more dramatic vein: moody verses punctuated by clever, classy drumming from John Dimoulas (also the band's main lyricist) open up to heavyweight catchy choruses. Notable departures from the basic template demonstrate the band's potential reach. Whimsical acoustic guitar-based *Ordinary Orbit* is particularly reminiscent of The Moody Blues, and *Sub-Care* is just beautiful, multi-layered choral singing. The majestic title track add real depth by female vocals and a blistering guitar solo (not enough of them here). A few tracks may border on filler, but this is an impressive offering for fans of sombre, melancholic funk metal with some lovely twists. **GMM**

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE

Old Fears MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Half of Field Music directs disco, electro and funk through the prog prism.

Resolutely independent, restlessly inventive and with their collective fingers in plenty of pop pies, Field Music's Brewis brothers are approaching national treasure status. They are fliers of the prog flag without ever being mired in the aesthetics or ideologies of the past. David Brewis' second solo album as School Of Language produces plenty of delicious curveballs, taking in clipped funk, tremulous falsetto, twisted disco and much more. No longer hiding behind the veil of abstraction occasionally worn by Field Music, *Old Fears* is an emotional record about the anxieties of modern living, as well as love and relationships. Brewis crafts avant-pop that has much in common with cultural outliers such as Robert Wyatt, Brian Eno and Peter Gabriel, though he's no snob: he happily cites Shalamar and the precision production on N*E*R*D and Justin Timberlake albums as an influence. The instrumental title track is a beguiling piece of Goblin-esque electro while *A Smile Cracks* charms like David Byrne. An album highlight, *Between The Suburbs* offers a wonderful slice of electro-poetry and repeat listening reveals new layers. It's a Russian doll of a record, and quite special. **BM**

SABBATH ASSEMBLY

Quaternity SVART

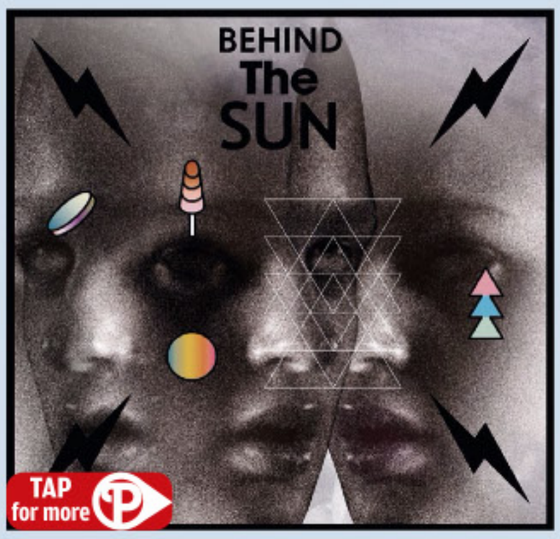
Deities, divinity and doom with US psych folk-rockers.

If you thought that religious music was all cringeworthy Christian pop, *Kumbaya* and beaming Bible-bashers, think again. Sabbath Assembly, musical interpreters of the Process Church Of The Final Judgment (a short-lived movement in the 60s, preaching the unity of Christ and Satan), have something altogether darker and more twisty in mind. Working from classical acoustic foundations, *Quaternity* evocatively channels the four deities worshipped by 'the Process' – Christ, Jehovah, Lucifer and Satan – through gothically psychedelic tones. Revelation's apocalyptic runners and riders also get involved in the hauntingly layered, 20-minute epic *The Four Horsemen*; Eastern notes, bursts of liturgical chants and 'Process' recitals are present enough to be haunting and original. Shit gets heavier in *I Satan* – discordant psych-doom distortion with wide-eyed vocals from frontwoman Jamie Myers. Rich, organic strings in *The Burning Cross Of Christ* make for a dark folk vibe, while *Jehovah On Death* intrigues and unnerves. Whether you find the beliefs revolutionary, dumb or bizarre, the authenticity here makes for a dynamic piece of musical culture. **PG**

MOTORPSYCHO

Behind The Sun RUNE GRAMMOFON

Norwegian hairies crank up the throttle. Mostly.



For a while there it looked like Motorpsycho may have forsaken volume for an altogether noodlier take on Scandinavian psychedelia. 2012's collaboration with composer Ståle Storløkken and the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra – the ever so proggily-titled *The Death Defying Unicorn* – suggested they were ready to reinvent themselves as jazz-rock buffs. Then along came *Still Life With Eggplant*, an album of offcuts and strays that saw a semi-return to the immediacy of their earlier output.

> **A fine addition to an already handsome catalogue.**

The fact that *Behind The Sun* finds the Trondheim trio rocking like the proverbial primate again shouldn't come as too much of a surprise for a band who've made a career out of second-guessing the second guessers. Metal, punk, electronica and even spaghetti western (2004's *The Tussler* was the soundtrack to a cowboy movie that didn't exist) have all figured in their repertoire since they started making records in the early 90s. Retaining the services of guitarist Reine Fiske, who played on the band's live shows with Storløkken, was clearly a smart move. His ascending riffs are a key feature of the pumped-up *On A Plate*, which finds Motorpsycho in full roar. As does the seven-minute instrumental *Kvaestor*, all bruising bombast and fluid time signatures. *Hell Part 7: The Victim Of Rock*, the heaviest thing on here, strafes everything in sight with sheer noise.

At the core of everything though, and one of the reasons why they're so damn worthwhile, is good old-fashioned songcraft. Chief writers Hans Magnus Ryan and Bent Sæther have a gift for sniffing out a melody. *Cloudwalker (A Darker Blue)*, for instance, could be a West Coast descendant of Jefferson Airplane or Moby Grape. It's a motif that recurs on *The Magic & The Wonder (A Love Theme)*, with its gliding Mellotron and deft mix of acoustic and electric guitars.

For all the bluster, there's still plenty of space within the grooves. The brittle ambience of *Ghost* finds Sæther whispering over piano and the artful tones of guest violinist Kari Rønnekleiv, in a song that recalls the dreamy pastorale of Mercury Rev or the Radar Brothers.

But top marks go to the album's 12-minute centrepiece, an unwieldy-named suite called *Hell, Part 4-6: Traitor/The Tapestry/Swiss Cheese Mountain*. Here they seem to strike an ideal compromise between their love of all things ambient and their more brusque impulses. It starts off all watcher-of-the-skies delicate – you half expect a Roger Dean island to come floating by – before gearing up for the mighty rumble that inevitably follows. *Behind The Sun* isn't perfect, but it's a fine addition to what is already a very handsome catalogue.

ROB HUGHES

MATT STEVENS

Lucid ESOTERIC ANTENNA

The guitar virtuoso's ambitious new solo effort.

Since first gaining attention for his solo, loop-based acoustic guitar playing, Matt Stevens has continued to push himself forward as an artist. Most notably, his *Prog*-approved outfit The Fierce And The Dead have seen him taking on the role of a rock guitar player, and this dynamic, presumably combined with the experience of touring with bands such as Knifeworld and Trojan Horse, has surely affected his approach on this new record.

> **The record offers gentle, even playful experimentation.**

Indeed, *Lucid* more often than not feels like a debut album rather than the fourth record of an established artist. The obvious reason is that this is new ground for Stevens – at least under his own moniker – though it's also due to the gentle, even playful experimentation found on the record. Across its 11 tracks, Stevens and his cast of guest musicians – including members of King Crimson, Frost*, Knifeworld, Chrome Hoof and Trojan Horse – dabble in post-rock on *Street And Circus*, expansive prog on *The Bridge*, krautrock on the title track and percussive, almost industrial rock in the vein of Nine Inch Nails on *Oxymoron*.

On that opening track a searing, ethereal melody enters above a churning, metallic guitar accompaniment. The guitar backing is remarkable enough as a first introduction to *Lucid*. Even considering TFATD's post-rock inclinations, such an all-out, Mogwai-bothering assault is startling. *Flow*, meanwhile, flirts at the genre affectations of math-rock without fully committing to them, and there are also some echoes of Stevens' previous work on *The Other Side* and *KEA*, delicate, finger-picked constructions of unusual arpeggios and chords.

The centrepiece of the record is 12-minute piece *The Bridge*, which also features an echo of *Oxymoron*'s main melodic motif. In thrall perhaps to recent Sonic Youth or *The Century Of Self*-era And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead, its furious guitars are another shock to the system.

Coulrophobia, however, is the song on which all the record's disparate elements come together. Strands of electronics and chiming guitars vie for attention as the layers gradually build before a sudden ebb away. Though one of the shorter tracks here, it's also the most evocative, and wouldn't be out of place on Porcupine Tree's classic *In Absentia*.

In making this album, Stevens wanted to push himself, stating, "If you're not going to take risks and try and do something interesting, what's the point?" Surely he has succeeded. Confounding listeners' expectations can be jarring, but when done well, it can turn the unexpected into something even more special. Hopefully fans of his previous work will laud *Lucid* for the artistic boldness it represents. **ALEX LYNHAM**

SUPERDRAMA

The Promise PROGRESSIVE PROMOTION

The adventurous Germans promise 'universal creative streams'...

Superdrama apparently have a mission to give shape to the 'creative stream of the universe' with their music. It's an intrepid undertaking but also one that does somewhat reduce your expectations. Yet *The Promise* is far from the cosmic bollocks such a proclamation would indicate. Instead, this German band have produced an album that's at times captivating, even if it ultimately falls short of true brilliance. Musically, songs such as *Chance Of A Lifetime* and *Turn the Stone* are reminiscent of King Crimson or Twelfth Night, and although that naturally gives their creations a retrospective air, they're performed so well that it makes such a criticism irrelevant. The lyrics investigate a familiar theme of mortality without ever succumbing to clichés, and while they're not as vague as some of Jon Anderson's cosmic mutterings, there's enough ambiguity to allow varied interpretations. The vocals are occasionally overly dramatic and distracting, most notably on *Turn The Stone* where they veer towards Brian Blessed-style parody. However, that's an easily rectifiable and minor flaw that, once removed, will solidify the band's bright future. **RW**

TALANAS

Asylum EULOGY

Stripped-back gothic splendour from an unexpected source.

There are bands where it's possible to precisely locate the time in their career when their creativity is spent, happy to churn out albums that are feeble replicas of their greatest works. With *Asylum*, Talanas have demonstrated that they still possess a raft of fresh ideas. The band have already established a solid reputation for producing riveting, progressive death metal in the mould of Opeth and Akercocke, yet with this 'unplugged' album, they've demonstrated a flair for the unexpected. Their sound here may be stripped back and without the distinctive juddering riffs and gruff vocals, yet they've lost none of the intensity or dark supremacy that is their hallmark. Instead, tracks such as *Sister Damnable* and *Nothing Gained* have a gothic intensity that's reminiscent of Fields Of The Nephilim and Wayne Hussey-era Sisters Of Mercy. Crucially, the use of clean vocals throughout will also appeal to those who find their usual growling vocals either unpalatable or a touch passé. Indeed, the only palpable flaw is that this is only a five-track EP, as Talanas have shown a side to their music that demands to be examined further in future releases. **RW**

THE WAR ON DRUGS

Lost In The Dream SECRETLY CANADIAN

Philadelphian dreamers bringing it all back home.

Since 2005, Philly's TWOD have worn their hearts on their sleeves as their Bob Dylan-esque indie Americana crossed ley lines with Arcade Fire's breathless moxie. But gradually the dreamier post-rock and atmospheric textures have crept in, especially on 2011's *Slave Ambient*, where elements of Low, My Bloody Valentine and the Elephant 6 collective simmered away in the quintet's melting pot. Shortly after, a natural split saw co-founder Kurt Vile pursue a righteous solo career in lo-fi indie folk, leaving guitarist/vocalist Adam Granduciel at the tiller. *Lost In The Dream* adorns an hour of exuberant noise with a wealth of analogue and synth effects, harvesting a meld of *Avalon* sashaying (*Under The Pressure*), Flock Of Seagulls uplift (*Red Eyes*) and Elbow introspection (*Suffering*) along the way. Although the vocals evoke Tom Petty, tracks like the beautiful, poignant *Disappearing* could easily fit alongside the bruised romanticism of Marillion's *Sounds That Can't Be Made*. There's a definite 'side two' to this album, as *Eyes To The Wind* and *Burning* return to the Dylan/Hold Steady blueprint. But even on closer *In Reverse*, there's enough wistful spirit to keep listeners tuned in. **JK**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Just some of the many other records passing under the *Prog* portcullis recently...

The sheer diversity of the music in the *Prog* mailbag is heartening, and at times just a little mind-boggling. Graham Dunnington is a classically-trained musician, and trading under his nom de prog **Looking-Glass Lantern** he offers up an evocative, lovingly-rendered set with his debut, *A Tapestry Of Tales* (lookingglasslantern.co.uk). Taking inspiration from the Sherlock Holmes canon, the Lantern go big on literal storytelling, vintage prog rock and neo stylings, from synths to harpsichord to some excellent, Hackett-flavoured electric guitar lines. Perhaps the production doesn't always match the ambition of the work (this album cover tells a tale) but there's clearly a deep musical intelligence and much to savour here. Besides, anyone who makes a quarter-hour opus based on *A Scandal In Bohemia* is welcome in these parts.

We get our share of guitar heroes too. *Tone Poet* is the third, self-released album from experienced LA player **Adrian Galysh**. He's been lauded by Zappa-approved axe-wrangler Mike Keneally no less, cites influences from Van Halen to Vangelis and brings a forward-minded compositional approach to his raft of fretboard skills. Then there's **Hans Platz**, whose guitar schtick owes much to the school of Vai, yet his latest release *Timestamps* (Piazza/Cargo) features prog drum presence Marco Minneman, the superb bassist TM Stevens and it's replete with some prog/fusion moments that elevate the whole above widdle.

> **The diverse nature of the music we get sent is heartening and mind-boggling.**

And in that same bulging post bag we have **Polska Radio One**, a psychedelic four-piece from Russia who forge a path between kraut, and 21st century psych. Their debut album *Cosmos Inside* (Trail) is hugely promising. Singer/guitarist Dmitry Kutnyakov is a real presence on an album coloured with chants, sitar and a spacey-yet-rooted aesthetic.

Portland, Oregon is home to **Tara Jane O'Neil**, who made her name as a hip visual artist and is now adding music to her portfolio. *Where Shine New Lights* (Kranky) is a strikingly beautiful, languid selection combining folk, reverberant atmospherics and a maverick, feminine cool. The press blurb goes so far as to call her work 'deeply syncretic'. (Note to self: must use the word 'syncretic' more in reviews.)

Making music to watch snow melt off the pines to, Norway's own **Hanne Kolstø** apparently recorded her latest, third album *Stillness And Panic* (Jansen Plate) with old marching band instruments in her childhood home and hometown chapel. She's a worthy addition to the welcome recent phalanx of enigmatic female musicians whose laconic, idiosyncratic vocals (Kolstø's range tends towards the lower, husky, less ethereal end) are set to cascading pianos, and shimmering atmospherics. It's gorgeous — sync deals for US TV dramas can be but a mailshot away.

And another, deeper rummage in our bag unearths music from a galaxy far, far away. *Stoner Rock* (Ritual) is the new intercepted signal from those dons of drone, **Bong**. Here you get two, one-note pieces, *Polaris* and *Out Of The Aeons*, which sound pretty much the same and yet are completely effective at taking you where Bong listeners clearly like to go. Fans of B-natural and 'the herb' are in for a real treat.

Back on earth, **Tycho** is the musical moniker of San Francisco designer Scott Hansen Montana. *Awake* (Ghostly International) is an album of high-class instrumental pop/post-rock. Smart and likeable stuff, its modern electronic/dance-era production is shot through with the sounds and sensibilities of the synth pioneers of yore.

Peterborough trio **Pet Slimmers Of The Year** have a more straight-ahead post-rock approach on their debut, *Fragments Of Uniforms* (Candlelight). Scott Gowan, Steve McKenna and Dale Vinten conjure intelligent, hefty textures for these after-Radiohead days. The same could be said of **My Sad Captains**. It's a lighter affair, but *Best Of Times* is a beautifully precise, modern, left-of-centre recording on the excellent Bella Union label. It's always a bonus when their releases fall anywhere near our patch.

Last and anything but least, London/Brighton classical ensemble **Collectress** open their account with *Mondegreen* (Peeler), a sophisticated, mesmerising set of experimental chamber pieces channelling everyone from Philip Glass to The Penguin Café Orchestra. For those of an orchestral bent, this is pure delight.

As ever, ours is a mixed postbag, dear progger. Long may it remain so.

GRANT MOON

25 YARD SCREAMER

Something That Serves To Warn Or Remind WHITE KNIGHT

Third in an excellent trilogy from the Welsh prog outfit.

South Wales' 25 Yard Screamer continue to display their concept album prowess with their latest offering, which completes satisfyingly a trilogy of excellence that began with the brooding, atmospheric *Cassandra* (2007) and continued with its darker, more aggressive follow-up, 2011's *Until All Are One*. Part three tells the deeply introverted story of Jennifer, a writer 'locked in her own world of expectation and lost words'. Set free from her self-imposed isolation by a visitor from her childhood, she embarks on a perilous and often disturbing journey to rediscover her past. Nick James' sombre, heavily vibrato'd vocals give an atmosphere of simmering remorse to songs such as *Wilderness* and *The Empty Ship*; *Always There* is charged with almost overbearing amounts of emotion; *Just Myself And My Keys* provides a bleak but satisfying climax to proceedings. A lyric sheet might have enhanced the album's appeal, but such is the sense of there being something *so* disturbing afoot here you may not *really* have wanted to read it. It may not quite topple *Cassandra* – 25YS's crowning glory – but *Something That Serves* is still an engrossing achievement. **GB**

ZUFFANTI

La Quarta Vittima AMS

Exceptional concept piece from this Italian artist.

The fourth solo album from Italian prog stalwart Fabio Zuffanti is a dark, audacious and truly remarkable collection. Based on Michael Ende's book *The Mirror In The Mirror*, it questions human perceptions of reality and while it may take time to digest, it's worth it. Yes, there are tunes, guitar and keyboard hooks, and lovely vocal sections, but you sense Zuffanti eschews mainstream acceptance or songwriting conventions: each track goes wherever he feels it should. Floyd-like crescendos merge into jazzy Soft Machine sax workouts in crazy odd times, with keyboard and vocal distractions too. Sparse ambience presages PFM style riffing, leading to flashes of Zappa-like woodwind, and spiky Crimson-guitar resolves to gentle flute and clarinet. In less able hands this could verge on messy pastiche, but there is vision, integrity and honesty to the album, infusing it with a strong identity. With numerous virtuoso Italian musicians involved, terrific performances abound (notably the visceral guitar solos on *La Certezza Impossible* and album closer *Una Sera D'inverno*). Zuffanti embodies the true spirit of progressive rock, and sets the bar high here. **GMM**

BIGELF

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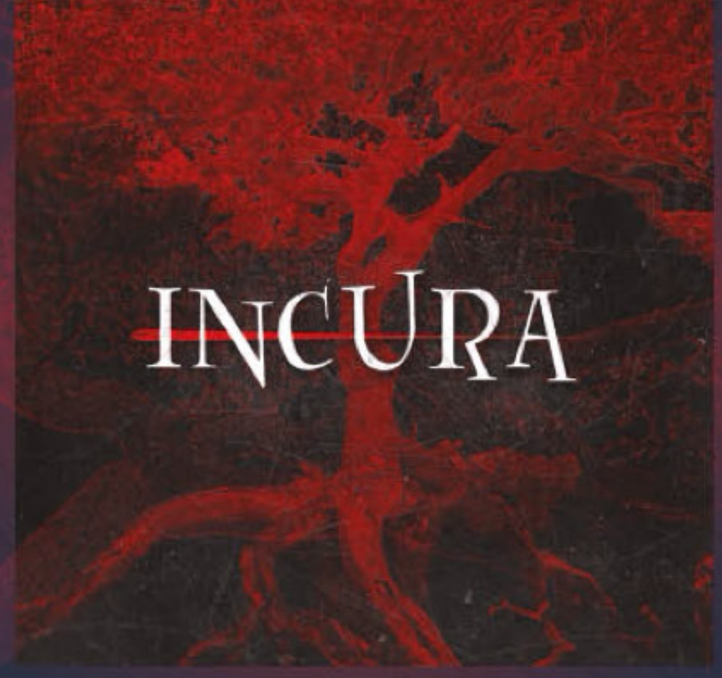

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INSIDE OUT MUSIC

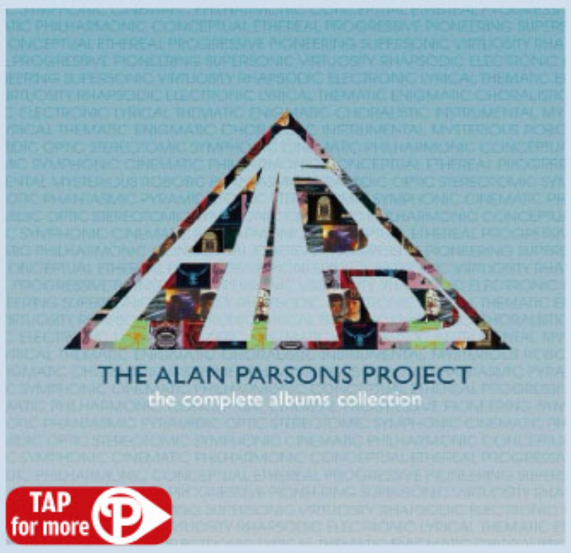
CENTURY MEDIA

ALAN PARSONS

The Complete Albums Collection ARISTA/LEGACY

All the projects gathered together for the first time – conceptual brilliance in a box.

June, 1976. As punk bubbles up from the London sewers, singles buyers tra-la-la to Wings and the Wurzels. Peter Frampton is coming alive and the Stones are turning black and blue. Out of nowhere, and to little fanfare, the Alan Parsons Project landed among us. Suddenly, here was a studio collective, steered by Beatles and Floyd graduate Parsons and his wily foil Eric Woolfson, with the depth of experience to scale the mountainous challenge of bringing Edgar Allan Poe into art rock.



Tales Of Mystery And Imagination became one of the most unfashionable but most-played albums in my collection, the brilliance of its rendition complemented by an enticing gatefold sleeve detailing the back stories of the principal musicians and tantalising details of the ill-starred life that led Poe to create their literary inspiration. With ingenious casting, cameo appearances yanked the stories off the page and onto the rudimentary hi-fi, from Arthur Brown on *The Tell-Tale Heart* to John Miles' *(The System of) Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether* – impossibly, a top 40 single in the US – to the dream-like closer *To One In Paradise*, with Terry Sylvester of the Hollies. I was not exactly among friends. With the three-chord tricksters soon to take over the asylum, *Tales* flickered onto the lower rungs of the bestsellers for precisely a week. In America, it charted for nearly a year, foretelling a run of seven consecutive gold or platinum albums and 50 million career sales worldwide.

> **Tales was a bestseller in the UK for precisely a week; in America, for nearly a year.**

Such an extended set-up to Legacy's first-ever CD box of the APP's 11-year heyday feels important, to establish how simultaneously innovative and uncool the projects were on initial UK appearance. Sensibly, *The Complete Studio Albums* offers no outtakes, no cast-offs, just the meat of their formidable 10-album catalogue, plus a long-sought unreleased set, of which more in a moment. All ten lay out their audacious, wide-ranging thematic principles and bring them home within 35-40 minutes, not an ounce of fat to be chewed. Every one is full of complex but accessible expositions and, ironically given that initial indifference, umpteen should-have-been hit singles.

I Robot (reviewed in these pages as an individual deluxe reissue some months ago) relocated Parsons and Woolfson at the modern end of the sci-fi spectrum, amid the short stories of Isaac Asimov. But it's vital now, as it was then, to know that, much as the vast sweep of the group's narratives made the projects conceptual masterworks, you could always just hum the tunes and admire the instrumentation if you preferred.

The expertise of top vocal technicians from Colin Blunstone to Allan Clarke was strongly complemented in each changing cast list by lesser-known, equally skilled singers like Lenny Zakatek and Chris Rainbow, not to mention Woolfson himself and even, on occasion, Parsons. Listening to them all again in sequence, there's a practised sense of continuity in the combined ambience of orchestral arrangement, choirs and traditional soft-rock keyboards and guitars. *'I wouldn't want to be like you,'* muses Pilot's David Paton on *I'd Rather Be A Man*, from 1979's *Eve*, echoing the title of a track from two albums earlier. Among all the complexities of such works as *Pyramid, Ammonia Avenue* and even 1987's last official project, *Gaudi*, lies a trove of catchy tunes. From Blunstone's now better-known *Old And Wise* to Miles' incisively sad *Shadow of a Lonely Man*, and from the Spectoresque *Don't Answer Me*, to Gary Brooker's moist-eyed *Limelight* and the perfect 45 rpm vignette that was Woolfson's *Eye In The Sky*, this is rich bounty.

The filling dessert is the newly-available *The Sicilian Defence*, planned as the eleventh release in 1981, but shelved during a period of advanced acrimony between artist and label. In an entirely wordless set, perhaps to be deliberately difficult for the beancounters, beautifully refined piano instrumentals alternate with synthesised polyrhythms. It adds one more chapter to the endless mystery and imagination of a historic body of work.

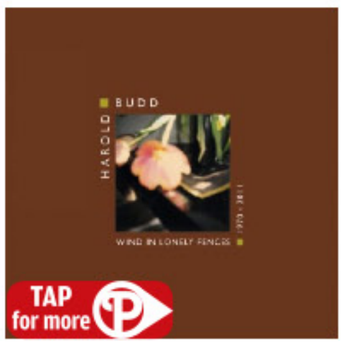
PAUL SEXTON

HAROLD BUDD

Wind In Lonely Fences - 1970-2011 ALL SAINTS

The composer's first, lovingly-curated retrospective.

Perhaps the term avant-garde might set you up for Varèse-style percussion, insane time signatures and clanging dissonance, but keyboardist/composer Harold Budd is operating at the other end of the spectrum altogether. Tiring of the second Viennese school as a music student, he became fascinated by modern pioneers John Cage and Terry Riley, who informed his 1970 release *The Oak Of The Golden Dreams*. That droning, rather testing experimental 18-minute track opens this look at his stunning catalogue, but once you're past that you're into quite the most beautiful selection of ambient, minimal compositions this side of Brian Eno (who appears on the track that lends its name to the collection). *Bismillahi 'Rhaman 'Rrahim* is another 18-minuter, but you sink into this like some warm, rejuvenating pool. *Ooze Out And Away, Somehow* is his '86 collaboration with Cocteau Twins, the two parties chiming both aesthetically and tonally; the melodic, lone piano of *The Messenger* is at odds with the minimal, percussive insistence of *Hand 20* (from his album with XTC's Andy Partridge) and there isn't one of these 18 tracks that isn't thoughtful, nourishing and deeply moving. Add to this *The Ambient Century* author Mark Prendergast's informative liner notes, and this is further proof that All Saints *really* have their act together. **GRM**



KERRY LIVGREN

Seeds Of Change ROCK CANDY

Noteworthy 1980 solo shot from the man from Kansas.

The 1980 debut solo album from Kansas guitarist/songwriter Kerry Livgren was pieced together during moments of downtime away from his main band's recording sessions for *Audio-Visions*, their seventh studio album. Like Livgren's skimpy blond moustache, *Seeds Of Change* is small but perfectly formed, consisting of just seven tracks. There are a couple of choice cuts featuring Ronnie James Dio, who contributes his much-missed stentorian tones to *Mask Of The Great Deceiver* and *To Live For The King*, the latter being very much in the Rainbow/Dio vein. Elsewhere Kansas bandmate Steve Walsh lends his voice to the feelgood *How Can You Live*, while Ambrosia's David Pack sings – and excels himself – on *Ground Zero*, the melodramatic closer and perhaps most prog-friendly track here. Other guests include Jethro Tull drummer Barriemore Barlow and gospel singer Mylon LeFevre, who bolsters Livrgen's own vocals on cotton-field knees-up *Whiskey Seed*. In fact, *Seeds* was originally envisaged as a Christian album (Livgren having recently converted to the faith) and was primarily aimed at the 'contemporary gospel' circles. As such, it didn't receive much coverage in the mainstream rock media upon release – which perhaps accounts for its cult status. God knows, the album is ripe for rediscovery. **GB**

MIKE + THE MECHANICS

Living Years/The Singles 1985-2014 VIRGIN

25th anniversary reissue and a Best Of from Mr Rutherford's other band.

While most Genesis fans would eagerly purchase any solo album emanating from the band's members, the progressive worth of these was often questioned when mega success came anyone's way. Hence Phil Collins became everybody's whipping boy, and even the ever-affable Mike Rutherford's credentials were questioned when his own Mike + The Mechanics outfit hit big. In truth they were never prog, but for many they were far more palatable than Phil's soulful sound. Never more successful than on 1988's *Living Years*, thanks in no small part to the emotive title track being a huge hit. The album's as good as their 1985 debut, and with Paul Young hitting the right notes on *Nobody's Perfect*, it's now augmented with a new take on *The Living Years* with current Mechanics vocalist Andrew Roachford plus a rather good live album. As the title implies, *The Singles* is a pleasantly catchy romp through a set of songs you probably know a lot better than you thought. It gets a bit blander as time goes on, but there's an eloquent charm to *Silent Running*, *All I Need Is A Miracle* and *Beggar On A Beach of Gold*. Not prog perhaps, but enjoyable listening. **JE**

PRESENT

Triskaidekaphobie/Le Poison Qui Rend Fou CUNEIFORM

The RIO band's first two albums remastered and expanded.

Belgium's Univers Zero were RIO stalwarts, inherently defiant of the musical fashions of the mid-70s. Co-founder Roger Trigaux left the band after their landmark 1979 second album *Heresie* and founded Present, a unit whose music – a heavy, heady synthesis of classical, rock and jazz – was and remains a function of Trigaux's uncompromising vision. Time's been kind to 1980 debut *Triskaidekaphobie*. Long-form opener *Promenade Au Fond D'un Canal* sees the four-piece explore insistent lines drawing on minimalism and the avant-garde. Their chamber rock setting comprises piano, electric guitar, bass and razor-sharp drumming from Univers' own Daniel Denis. The multi-sectioned *Quatre-Vingt Douze* casts its own discomfiting hex, and the bonus tracks – live takes of Univers pieces *Dense* and *Vous Le Saurez En Temps Voulu* – prove Present could (and still do) cut it outside the studio. Follow-up *Le Poison Qui Rend Fou* - here with rare video extras – is just as tight and demanding, balancing primal and logical aspects with giddy aplomb. Lavishly packaged, both albums are enhanced by insightful liner notes and original engineer Udi Koomran's expert remastering job. **GRM**

65 DAYS OF STATIC

The Fall Of Math MONOTREME

Genre-defining modern classic gets long-overdue reissue.

In 2004 when *The Fall Of Math* was released, post-rock enjoyed a much smaller following, with breakthrough records by bands such as Sigur Ròs and Explosions In The Sky still forging a path. Though it remained a cult release, overshadowed by their own growing popularity, this is 65's defining record, the essential foundation upon which their sound was to be built. Their influence from hereon cannot be overstated. *Install A Beak in the Heart That Clucks Time in Arabic* and *I Swallowed Hard, Like I Understood*'s glitchy electronic textures and guitar-led walls of sound can be heard in contemporary rising bands like Maybeshewill, and the polyrhythms that underpin the licks traded between live drums and samples still resonate throughout the math and progressive rock scenes. *Retreat! Retreat!* constant crops up in any online discussion about the best post-rock songs ever, and it's the thrilling, bombastic high-point of the record. Its opening assertion – '*This band is unstoppable*' – is borne out in subsequent numbers: the thrashy title track and slow-build *This Cat is a Landmine*. If this reviewer had to name one essential post-rock release, then it would be this one. **AL**

JON ANDERSON

Olias Of Sunhillow AUDIO FIDELITY

Timeless 1976 solo debut needs no extras.

It would be the simplest thing in the world to fire cheap pot-shots at Jon Anderson for his cryptic, indecipherable lyrics and homespun hippie psychobabble. But at his very best, as a member of Yes or via a select group of prime-era solo releases, Anderson's work effortlessly deflects any such qualms, hoofing them into the long grass where they belong.

> **Olias is intoxicating, uplifting and wholly irresistible.**

A single-disc, eight-song tale of an alien race that's forced to flee to a new world in the wake of a volcanic catastrophe, *Olias Of Sunhillow* might sound utterly preposterous on paper though it's widely viewed as the singer's defining release away from the Yes mothership. Only Accrington's most famous cosmic pixie could get away with a song (*Moon Ra)* that uses of the lines: *'Worlds that lie between/Are simply seconds of words we do not mean/Cast a pastel sky/Or simply wonder until the day you die'*, but be prepared to leave such qualms at the door because *Olias Of Sunhillow* is beautiful, uplifting, intoxicating and wholly irresistible.

Conceived just after the sessions for Yes' *Relayer* and released in mid-1976 with Anderson handling all of the instrumentation as well as slipping into a variety of vocal characters, it's a surprisingly low-key but rewarding piece of work that gently warms the cockles of the coldest and most cynical heart. Besides the so-called traditional range of rock staples, he uses harp, sitar, flutes, mandolin and koto to stitch together an exotic-sounding tapestry of sounds.

Reflecting the new age direction that would bring Anderson such incredible success in tandem with Vangelis, *Ocean Song* is among the more commercial-flavoured moments, contrasted starkly by *Naon*, the closing part of a seven-minute, two-part suite *Qoquaq Ën Transic* which fuses Marumbi-style drumming with what sounds like a female church choir that's been on the communion wine.

But the best is yet to come. *Solid Space* begins with a fruity keyboard line that Anderson uses as a jumping-off point for some of the most wonderfully versatile vocals that you might ever hear. And at almost 13 minutes long, *Moon Ra, Chords* and *Song Of Search* are an interlinked trilogy that stands as the album's piece de resistance. Occasionally keyboard-dense and other times in the new age vein, the effect is never less than hypnotic.

Olias Of Sunhillow is Anderson at his bonkers best. If you don't already own it on CD then just overlook the dearth of usual outtakes and bonus tracks that we have now come to expect of our reissues because this new edition is an essential purchase.

DAVE LING

KEVIN AYERS

Original Album Series WARNER/PARLOPHONE

Affordable five-album retrospective of the English maverick.

While unlikely to appeal to the hardened fan, these five-album boxsets act as an almost perfect introduction for those simply curious about certain artists. At the no-frills end of the market – simple cardboard box, card CD sleeves, no sleeve notes or extra tracks – they're still an ideal way to discover new music, or at least fill holes cheaply in your collection.

> **The very best music from an artist who shunned fame.**

English maverick Kevin Ayers' back catalogue has been the subject of plenty of retrospection over the past few years. The box set *Songs For Insane Times* was repackaged in 2008, followed by *The Harvest Years 1969-1974* in 2012, along with a raft of albums reissued in physical and download formats over the past few years. However, the recent acquisition of parts of the EMI catalogue by Warners means a new deluge of reissues, of which this collection of Ayers' first five solo albums forms a part. From the delightful English whimsy of 1969 debut *Joy Of A Toy* to the darker, heavier progressivism of '74's *The Confessions Of Dr. Dream*, this is the very best music from the career of an artist who would frequently, infuriatingly spurn fame whenever its spotlight threatened to catch him in its glare.

Which it certainly did when he'd quit Soft Machine after their debut album. Most of his old band mates helped out with *Joy Of A Toy*, a whimsical set that highlighted Ayers' own sense of the absurd. For 1970's *Shooting At The Moon* he had his own band called The Whole World, featuring a youthful Mike Oldfield on guitar as well as David Bedford and Lol Coxhill, most of whom also appeared on 1971's *Whatevershebringswesing* – at that point the most realised set of material Ayers had produced, featuring *There Is Loving...* and long-time fan favourite, *Stranger In Blue Suede Shoes*.

1973's *Bananamour* featured Ayers' paean to fellow maverick Syd Barrett – the plaintive *Oh! Wot A Dream* – and although guitarist Steve Hillage appears in the album, Barrett didn't. (Though he did appear on *Religious Experience*, a bonus track on the 2003 version of *...Toy*).

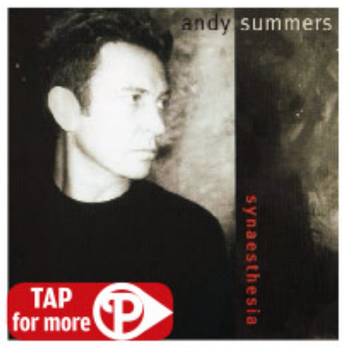
Best of all is 1974's hauntingly compelling *The Confessions Of Dr. Dream And Other Stories*. Produced by Quantum Jump's Rupert Hine and featuring guest spots from Nico and Patto's Ollie Halsall (who would become Ayers' musical foil for the next 18 years), it remains his finest and most progressive work. A similar set highlighting his later years would be most welcome, though the work got patchier until a creative resurgence in the 90s, which was halted only by his untimely death at the age of 68 last year.

JERRY EWING

ANDY SUMMERS

Synaesthesia ESOTERIC

The Police man's quality, world-infused solo work from '95.



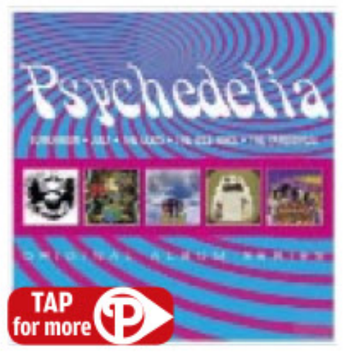
It's hard to believe that Summers celebrated his 71st birthday in December; but as long as that portrait stays out of sight in his attic he'll stay unnaturally youthful. Perhaps its his musical drive and curiosity that keeps him young too, certainly his career away from Sting and Stewart Copeland would back this up. His sophisticated chordal language was a defining aspect of The Police's sound, and albums such as *Synaesthesia* see him lean towards a fusion of rock, world music (*not* new age) and modern jazz. Opener *Cubano Rebop* marries Latin-flavoured rhythms and his thick, vocal-like guitar tone.

There are hints of the brain that gave us *Behind My Camel* on *Meshes Of The Afternoon*, and the tongue-in-cheek, Batman-referencing surf-pop/jazz hybrid *Monk Hangs Ten* pops any bubble of pretention. A world-class, ever-evolving guitarist, Summers style is accessible given the genre: no Di Meola wigouts, and the title track is, of all things, a minimal piano piece. Closing with enigmatic acoustic guitar work *I Remember*, the album (with Ginger Baker on bonus track *Triangles*) is almost 20 itself, but could have been made yesterday. Mark of the man, perhaps. **GRM**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Psychedelia: Original Album Series PARLOPHONE

A tenner buys five prog-related slabs of English psych.



This bargain set brings you not only five full albums but also offers fans the chance of hearing the early musical forays of some of prog's fledgling icons. Tomorrow were one of the earliest of England's psychedelic bands, featuring future Yes man Steve Howe, Pink Fairies founder Twink and singer Keith West (of *Excerpts From A Teenage Opera* fame), the band's 1968 debut is included here. July featured Tom Newman on guitar and vocals, and – as any Mike Oldfield fan will tell you – he went on to produce albums such as *Tubular Bells* and helped build Richard Branson's [then] Manor Studios in Oxfordshire. The Gods' 1968 debut *Genesis* is here too – they featured future Tull bassist John Glasscock and future Uriah Heep men Ken Hensley and Lee Kerslake. As for The Idle Race (their '68 debut, *The Birthday Party*, is in here), not only was the album produced by future Yes/ELP producer Eddy Offord, but the band were an early vehicle for the vision of future ELO leader Jeff Lynne. Released a year earlier than the other four discs here, The Yardbirds' *Little Games* has a prog connection of its own, with singer Keith Relf later fronting an early incarnation of Renaissance. **JE**

GARY WINDO

Steam Radio Tapes/Dogface GONZO

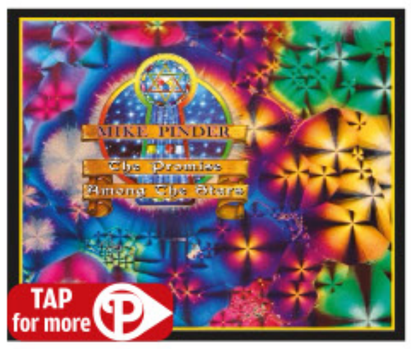
Two albums from the vaults of this late, great sax player.

English sax giant Gary Windo sadly died in 1992, but a listen back to two of his recorded works reminds us what a vital, challenging and multi-faceted player he was. Windo performed with, among others, Keith Tippett's Centipede and Robert Wyatt (he's on *Rock Bottom*), and Nick Mason no less offered him recording time at Floyd's Britannia Row studio. In 1976 he made *Steam Radio Tapes* there with a roster of guests including Mason, Wyatt, Steve Hillage and the Manfreds' Mike Hugg. Even now it's a joyous slice of brass-charged jazz rock. With Wyatt at the mic *Come Into My Garden* swings from Canterbury to disco and back, and Windo's equally adept at fluid melody, rhythmic, bluesy stabs and blasts of avant-garde noise. His first solo album proper, *Dogface* ('82) is a more demanding listen. Playing and composing on the fly with artists including his wife Pam and guitarist John Platania, here Windo's at his most playful. Yes the music's less immediate, but the frisson of creation is palpable, the zany *Puppy Kisses* shows his generosity as a player, and *Rex And Spot Meet The International Bitches* highlights his cheeky sense of mischief. Niche, skilled, and fun. **GRM**

MIKE PINDER

The Promise/Among The Stars ESOTERIC

Comprehensive CD/DVD set from the Moody keysman.



Lest we forget the essential contribution to vintage Moody Blues history of their original keyboard player and co-writer, Cherry Red's Esoteric label presents this compact box containing his two solo albums and a DVD of extensive, and quite recent, interview analysis. *The Promise* came out in 1976, during the band's solo ventures of the period before the *Octave* album, which itself proved to be his last work with them. Songs such as *Free As A Dove, Carry On* and the title piece have a simple, spiritual charm which has aged considerably better than the sadly dated production of 1994's *Among The Stars*. That now features three bonus tracks, two of them with his Moodies compadre Ray Thomas. Fans will seize the chance not only to have those albums on CD, but to watch Pinder dissect his past on the inexpensively produced DVD. Over two-plus hours of material filmed in 2008 and '12, he talks to American devotee Ross Meehan about his seminal Mellotron technique, hanging out with Jimi Hendrix and his split from the band. It's comprehensive enough to feature an appearance from his wife and his dog... **PS**

TODD RUNDGREN

Todd Rundgren's Johnson Live ESOTERIC ANTENNA

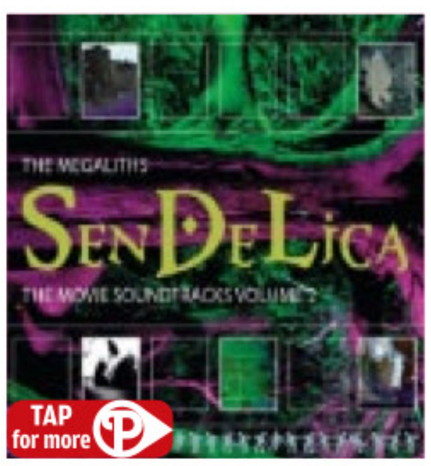
Wayward wizard going back to basics.

"Smile, you're on camera," Todd tells his moderate-sized Connecticut Ridgefield Playhouse audience. They sit politely awhile then jiggle like jumping jacks to burn off the blues. This CD/DVD set captures him in April 2010, fronting a punchy traditional quartet on the tour of his saucily-named album of Robert Johnson standards. Playing the bluesman is just another persona for the ever-mutating Todd, who enjoys flinging out old-school guitar licks and sings with a suitably weathered rasp about dusting his broom and that hellhound on his trail. It'd be a stretch to call this prog. The band is faithful to time-honoured structures, as Rundgren lives out some King-meets-Clapton fantasies. We're granted a few originals, from *Soul Brother* and *Black Maria* to a kiss-off of *I Saw The Light*. It's all solid rather than soaring – Todd the Plod rather than Todd The God – but at least it's more focused than the debacle of his recent hey-I-just-discovered-techno shows. Todd The Odd's always been as mercurial as they come, so to see him respectfully churning out dusty twelve-bars is noteworthy in itself. **CR**

SENDELICA

The Megaliths - The Movie Soundtrack FRG

Welsh psych warlords know how to do a boxset...

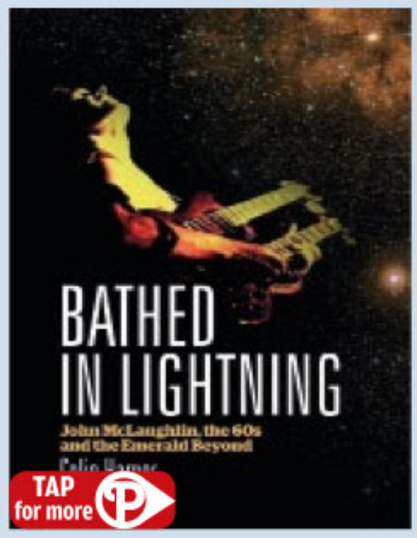


Sendelica are the undisputed masters of the lavish boxset. For the last year's acclaimed LP *The Kaleidoscopic Cat & It's Autoscopic Ego*, they bunged in goodies including a packet of Haribo Starmix, a mini kaleidoscope and a signed Doctor Locust art-print. Now they've upped the ante further with this new three-CD collection. It comes in a handpainted box (artwork done by a band member, or one of their children) that contains a – wait for it – Make Your Own Mini-Stonehenge Kit. *And* a packet of Milky Way Magic Stars! As for music, you get over two hours worth, collecting Sendelica's soundtrack work for obscure movies such as *Sleepwalker Fever*, *Trillian Eight*, *Ritual* and *When The Rising Apes Meet The Falling Angels*. Much like Tangerine Dream's cinematic scores, you don't have to have seen the films to appreciate these ambient, chilled-out compositions, which are both relaxing *and* subversive. *Rising Apes* is especially good, Hawkwindesque with its chunky guitar (a hybrid of Dave Brock and Hank Marvin) and juicy synth gloops. Be warned: these sets come in *very* limited numbers – more info at sendelica.bandcamp.com. **GB**

BATHED IN LIGHTNING

Colin Harper JAWBONE

Perceptive portrait of John McLaughlin and his legacy.



As much a phenomenological study of the deep impact McLaughlin's playing has had as a straightforward biography. Hardened members of the guitar glitterati, not usually prone to gushing admiration, line up to bear witness to being touched by that inner mounting flame. Throughout are tales of Damascene conversions dating from McLaughlin's late-50s entry onto the London music scene selling instruments through to selling out stadiums by 1975.

"Essential reading for fans of guitar great McLaughlin."

Irish journalist and writer Harper's treatment of McLaughlin's formative years leaps from the page, evoking the hard graft, sweat and smoke of long-lost dives and clubs that he passed though on his way to greater things. As a result, this also serves as a celebration of a dues-paying twilight world that was once a necessary adjunct to finding your individual voice, a world that is now on the verge of passing out of living memory.

McLaughlin was always been quiet-spoken but intensely driven, and Harper eloquently captures the soul-destroying ennui resulting from the guitarist being forced to deploy his formidable rhythm technique on numbers by Herman's Hermits, Petula Clark, Tom Jones and countless other session jobs in pop and light entertainment, in order to scratch a living. "To be a good musician you've got to cherish a beautiful dream," he says. "Secondly you've got to sacrifice your life to it."

Such mastery comes at a price, of course. His dalliance with drugs is expertly handled, and with some keen-eyed myth-busting along the way. Details of his failed marriages are sensitively recounted, their inclusion acting as an emotional echo to the young boy who subsumed himself in music after his father abandoned the family home. (One wonders to what extent McLaughlin's consuming and oft-stated desire to play with Miles Davis, and the spiritual quest that took him to guru Sri Chinmoy, might not also be the search for a father figure?)

McLaughlin declined to give a fresh interview for the book, and is occasionally a remote presence within the narrative. Nevertheless Harper provides a perceptive and authoritative impression of an innovative artist whose playing was both a product of, and influence upon, his generation. That we don't arrive at the formation of the Mahavishnu Orchestra proper until page 386 indicates the forensic detail lavished upon his subject. Dispatched in the book's remaining 89 pages, this most meteoric of bands receives nuanced and insightful assessment. Essential reading for fans of this guitar great.

SID SMITH

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TRANSATLANTIC

VENUE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, EL SEGUNDO, US **DATE** 31/01/14

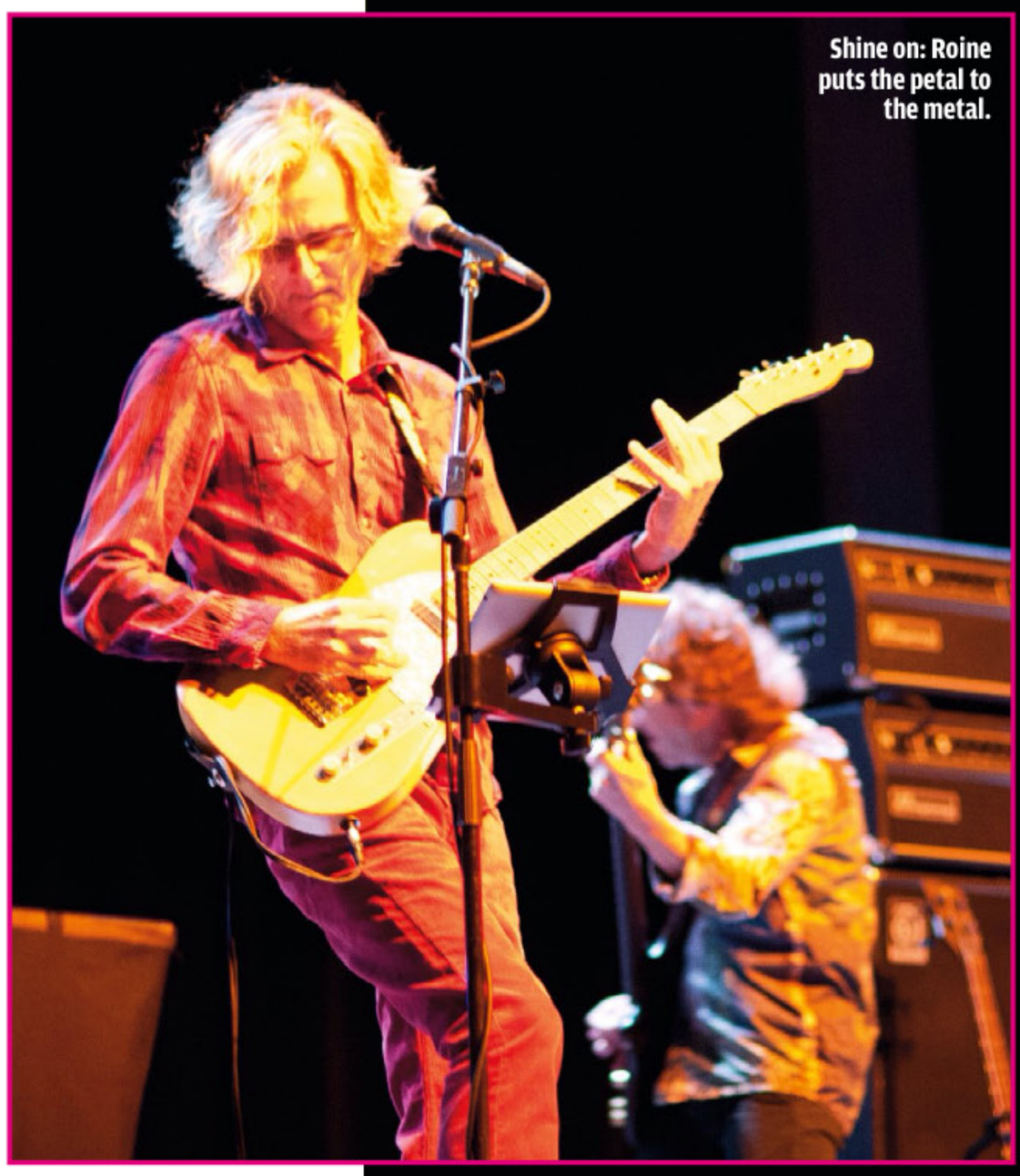
A high-school auditorium in a quiet, oceanside suburb near Los Angeles International Airport is an unusual venue choice for the kick-off of a six-week world tour, but Transatlantic have never exactly played by the rules. From the group's fondness for writing songs that frequently approach or exceed the half-hour mark, to their grandiose, symphonic musical arrangements (which, while rooted in the classics, have few peers in the modern prog landscape), to their unpredictable, periodic resurrections, the group unquestionably march to their own 7/4 beat.

With the recent release of fourth album *Kaleidoscope* and their first live performances in more than three years, Transatlantic naturally merit renewed consideration. Fifteen years ago, when Messrs Morse, Portnoy, Stolt and Trewavas issued their *SMPT:e* debut, it was all too easy to label Transatlantic a 'supergroup' and view the band as merely being the sum of the individual parts.

With each new record (and the resulting marathon live performances that follow), though, it becomes more apparent that Transatlantic are a band with an identity of their own. In other words, while tonight's audience members might have originally been Spock's Beard, Dream Theater, Flower Kings or Marillion fans, the standing ovation that greets the act before a single note is played indicates that the whole has clearly become greater.

At stage left, Portnoy's drum riser sees his kit turned 90 degrees to face his bandmates. It's a bigger set than he used during The Winery Dogs' recent tours, but it's still modest compared to the triple-bass behemoth featured on latter-year Dream Theater tours. As excitable as ever, he spends almost as much time out of his drum throne as he does seated, frequently engaging the crowd in a cheerleader capacity.

Stage right, meanwhile, sees Morse on a riser of his own. Wearing a blazer and a headset microphone, he projects a distinguished image, but it's belied by his expression of unabashed childlike joy. He seems genuinely thrilled to be playing live. If a more pure and earnest personality exists in the genre, prog's lofty and bookish reputation might be in danger.



Shine on: Roine puts the petal to the metal.

As does *Kaleidoscope*, tonight's concert begins with *Into The Blue*, one of four tracks from the album making their live premieres. The ambitious 25-minute suite features a surprisingly funky groove, with a few Zappa-like oddities and some distorted demonic vocals by Stolt thrown in for good measure.

From there, the group turn back the clock to *SMPT:e* favourite *My New World* – a short song by Transatlantic standards, but one that clocks in at 15 minutes nonetheless. Stolt's unique vocal inflections in the Beatles-esque verses give the song a regal vibe, and Trewavas anchors the midsection with bass playing that manages to be flashy without seeming showy. The highlights, however, are the lush five-part vocal harmonies – voice number five belonging to Spock's Beard singer Ted Leonard, Morse's later successor in that band, and a second guitarist, keyboardist and backing vocalist here.

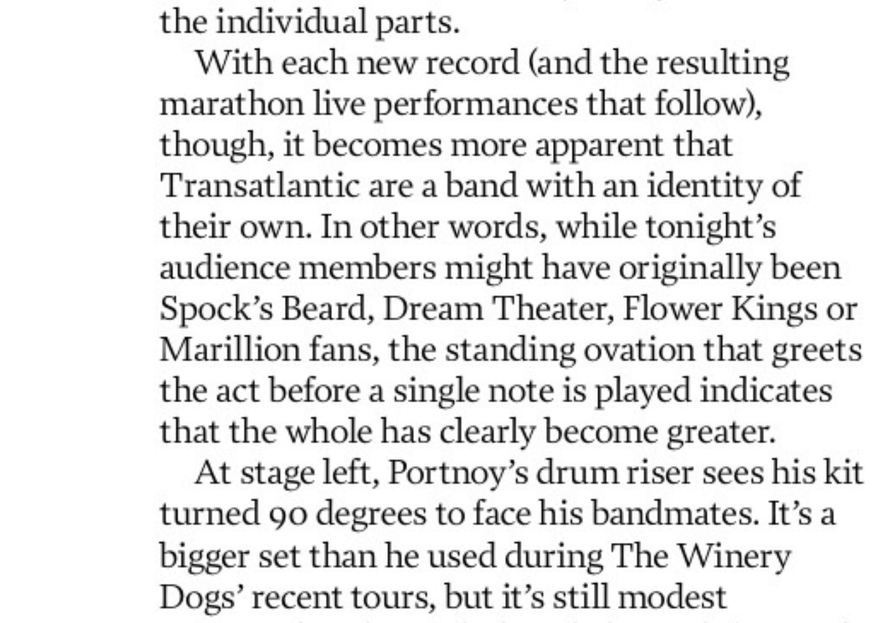
New track *Shine* begins with Morse on acoustic guitar, singing an instantly infectious vocal melody that would make the song a Number One pop hit in an alternate universe. Its positivity is reminiscent of *SMPT:e* ballad *We All Need Some Light*, a later highlight of this – and any – Transatlantic concert, and a song that might well be prog's prettiest.

The band's sprawling, dramatic epics earn the most cheers tonight, though. From a condensed, half-hour version of *The Whirlwind* – the album that kick-started Transatlantic's unexpected return in 2009 – to the title track of the group's new album (yet another cinematic half-hour magnum opus), it's clear why the group titled a recent live album *More Is Never Enough*.

Still, that's not to say Transatlantic emphasise quantity over quality. The encore medley featuring selections from *SMPT:e* opener *All Of The Above* and *Bridge Across Forever* finale *Stranger In Your Soul* features a transcendent melody that, like those of *Into The Blue*, *We All Need Some Light* and *Shine*, among others, continues to echo days later.

Clearly, Transatlantic's re-emergences might be fleeting, but their impact reverberates long after they're gone. Catch them while you can.

CLAY MARSHALL



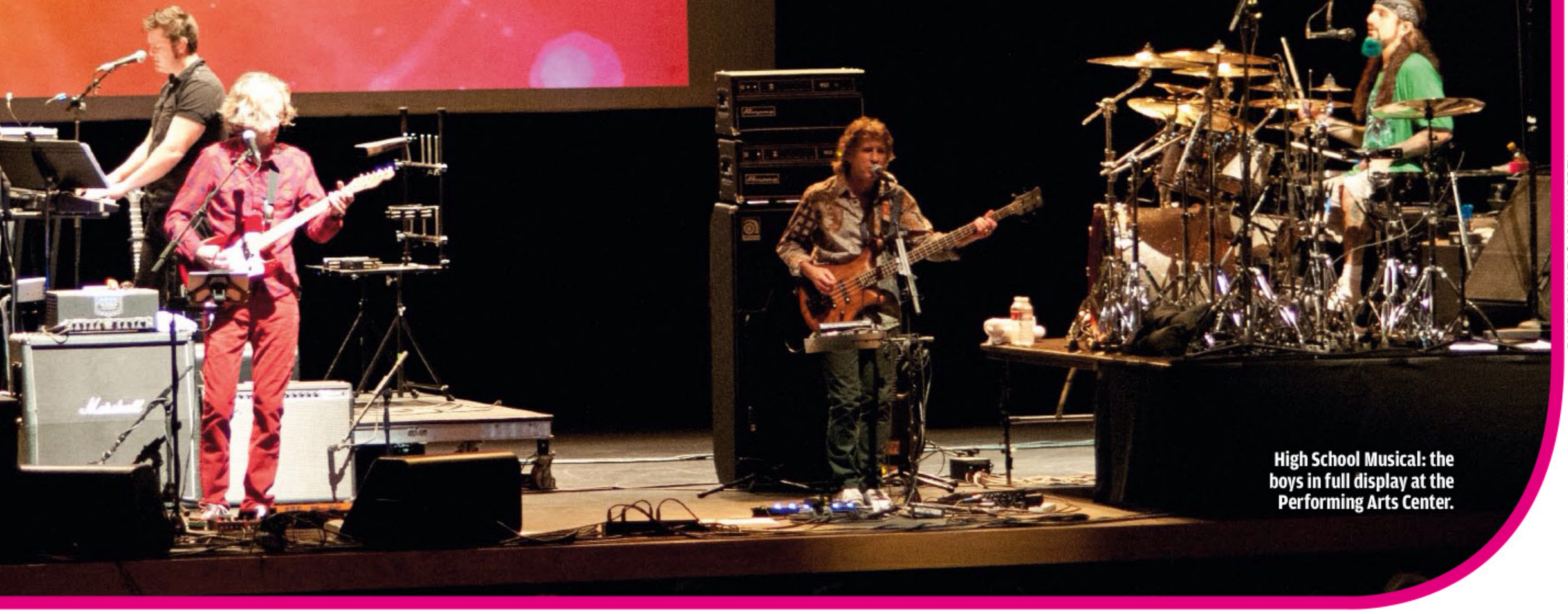
On the rise: Neal 'Before Zod' Morse surveys his underlings Ted and Roine.

"The standing ovation that greets the act before a single note is played indicates that the whole has clearly become greater than its parts."

Pete: hits all the right (low) notes.

He's a dreamer, he's a healer, he's gonna run into the crowd and feel ya!

Mike breaks off mid-paradiddle to direct a fan to the merch stand.



High School Musical: the boys in full display at the Performing Arts Center.

RANDY CHANEY & JOHN WARREN

Take a bow

AN EVENING WITH DREAM THEATER

VENUE	WEMBLEY ARENA, LONDON	DATE	14/02/14

The last time Dream Theater played Wembley Arena was in support of *A Dramatic Turn Of Events*, their first album without Mike Portnoy and one that garnered them with unexpected plaudits including a Top 10 Billboard album chart billing. Now, with the self-assurance of a band that feel wholeheartedly confident about their current line-up now completed by Mike Mangini, their eponymous twelfth album is a statement of intent and their Evening With... and its ensuing three hours' of live, unadulterated Dream Theater is a sure sign of harmony within in the camp.

While the prospect of watching a whole evening of LaBrie and co ploughing their back catalogue with no respite from support bands or other acts is a divisive proposition, tonight also proves that no matter how much Dream Theater you throw at someone, they can't fail to entertain. Yes, it would be nice to hear *Pull Me Under*, and deep down Portnoy's absence still smarts, but such points pale into irrelevance with the epic strains of *The Mirror* or *Illumination Theory*. And in truth, we always knew it was going to be a bloody good show.

Beginning promptly at 7.30pm the show fires up with a projected video montage of DT album covers throughout the years (they really do have some great artwork) to whet the appetites in the seated arena which retains bums in seats for a fraction of a second as *The Enemy Inside* cues a collective display of jubilation.

It's the new material from last year's self-titled record that pulls in the cheers tonight despite ample excerpts from *Awake* and *Scenes From A Memory* comprising the main building blocks of their set. *The Enemy Inside* is the first example of their return-to-form, elevating an already tantalising slab of new material into the ether by bringing it to life with relaxed but astounding proficiency. Jordan Rudess looks typically at-ease, Petrucci's first solo of the night is clean and tight and Mangini makes full use of his kit that extends above and beyond his eye-line.

A dip into *Black Clouds & Silver Linings* and *A Dramatic Turn Of Events* treats us to an eye-widening rendition of *The Shattered Fortress* and *On The Backs Of Angels* respectively, the latter delivering a shot of endorphins when LaBrie emphasises the words *'like a lamb to the slaughter'*. A lot of effort has gone into ensuring that tonight's show is a spectacle, boasting vivid laser light beams and a stream of videos — filmed and animated — that parade on a huge screen behind the band. Highlights include a cartoon version of the band as a mob of intrepid sleuths and a hilarious montage of YouTube-sourced DT spoof clips including a face-off between Petrucci and Joe Satriani played during the interval. Here the 21st century Dream Theater show that they are genuinely funny.

Act two loses nothing in majesty, urgency or sheer metallic gusto with a deep dive into the 1994 opus *Awake*. *Scarred* is sublime and LaBrie never falters, delivering every word with expert timing and clarity, even stopping for a cursory Valentine's message for all the ladies while

A wizard performance: Jordan is animated both onstage and off.

Mike: "It's looking a little sparse in here. I could do with some more drums..."

Mr Petrucci: we're sure there should be a red rose between those teeth.

> **"It's the new material from last year's self-titled record that pulls in cheers despite ample excerpts from *Awake* and *Scenes*..."**

Rudess' spot-lit piano solo on *Space-Dye Vest* is a perfect moment of classical respite.

A remarkable take from *Scenes From A Memory* is a final shot at seamless virtuosity, bringing together the jazzy trigger-finger zip of Petrucci and John Myung who play with such breathtaking attention to detail that we're left wondering if they could be any better. Green luminosity engulfs the arena, climaxing in a rousing push from *Finally Free* and a return to the bombastic ode of *Illumination Theory* as the band, imperious, take a well-deserved bow.

HOLLY WRIGHT

Prog's Valentine's Bass-o-gram arrives in the form of John Myung. How romantic.

LaBrie: "This one goes out to all the ladeeez..."

STRAWBS

VENUE	CHARING CROSS BORDERLINE, LONDON
DATE	05/02/14

Winter has been a fruitful, if not mellow, season for season prog-folk veterans Strawbs, who returned from touring New Zealand to a full punnet of UK dates, both electric and acoustic, the latter largely in a triple-header with Martin Turner's Wishbone Ash and Curved Air.

Tonight is billed 'Electric Strawbs' and The Borderline welcomes them in the plugged-in incarnation that clearly delights a stalwart audience, with long-timers Dave Cousins, Dave Lambert and Chas Cronk augmented by Tony Fernandez and Adam Wakeman, the latest in that family of keyboardists to do Strawbs time.

Very swiftly, we become aware that this latter-day intensity is no sentimental indulgence of a fond memory, but a serious 21st-century commitment to the heritage of an important band, properly road-hardened again and staunchly dedicated to an accurate rendition of their recorded glories.

The quintet divide their set in two, with a scene-setting collection led off by the Cousins/Cronk number *Turn Me Round*, from 1976's *Deep Cuts*. To start with a song from after the band's chart period delivers the message that they're about musical validity, not just playing the most obvious crowd-pleasers.

Nevertheless, for the next 90 minutes or so, there are plenty of fists in the air and community singing from an audience that is, as you'd expect, largely male and of a certain vintage. One particular five-belly at the bar roars his way through *Shine On Silver Sun*, but there are plenty of word-perfect renditions throughout a set that amply showcases all five singular talents.

The full eight-minute *Autumn*, for example, is as intricate and episodic as it was 40 years ago on *Hero And Heroine*. Cousins' familiar Dylanesque mewl often allows for other vocal cameos and instrumental excellence, with Wakeman in supple form on stirring pieces such as *Round And Round*, while Lambert's guitar textures are especially exemplary on *Lay A Little Light On Me* and others.

An almost complete absence of communication beyond the tuneage does foster something of a heads-down, earnest mood. They hardly need to remind a dedicated audience like this that Strawbs were always far more than the *Top Of The Pops* turn of 1972-73, so even a token reprise of rousing hit single *Part Of The Union* on the night of the London Tube strike would have been fun. Cousins does mention the situation with a line about how "We'll defy 'em."

But for sheer musicality, the night is unblemished, and the closing blast through *Lay Down* is nostalgic for all the right reasons.

PAUL SEXTON

Take a bow

FAMILY

VENUE	SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE , LONDON	DATE	02/02/14

"Progressive rock? Wouldn't know anything about it mate," was Family vocalist Roger Chapman's curt rebuttal of this writer's attempt to interview him on the subject last year. But although they lacked the grandstanding technical abilities and lofty conceptual ambitions of some of their early-70s peers, looked at another way, Family virtually epitomised the genre. They had grown out of rhythm and blues, passed through a brief psychedelic period with *Music From A Doll's House* (1968), and from 1969-73, their music was a subtle amalgam of rock, soul, jazz, folk and Eastern influences, which produced some striking hybrid forms.

Family's vibes player and multi-instrumentalist Poli Palmer has said of their reunion that they couldn't just play the material as they did 40 years ago, but needed to approach it in a way that reflected where they are now. There's a thin dividing line between refreshing the music and trying to give it a spurious sense of 'modernity', but the group sound so fresh, so dazzlingly good that one can't imagine they would have sounded better in their heyday.

They start off with *Hey Mr Policeman* from *Doll's House*, its simmering groove sounding funkier than back in the day, with Rob Townsend and John Lingwood on drums and percussion, and saxophonist Nick Payn tracking Roger Chapman's vocal lines.

At 71, Chapman no longer has that vibrato-heavy young-man's yell, but his voice is still a formidable instrument, as he demonstrates on a hair-raising *Drowned In Wine*. Payn's sax takes over Palmer's original flute lines, leaving him to add his cascading vibes over the convulsive staccato sections.

Top Of The Hill shows the new arrangements to be worked out with a richer weave of sound than the originals, but put together with the same spirit. Guitarist Jim Cregan, from the original group, and new boy Geoff Whitehorn lock together on the low-slung, funky *Burlesque*. Cut from a similar cloth, *Sweet Desiree* is breezier and lighter than the studio original, courtesy of Payn's flute lines.

Chapman refers to Family members both absent (Charlie Whitney) and deceased (Jim King and Ric Grech), dedicating the haunting *How-Hi-The-Li* to the latter. But the song that sticks most in the mind is *Sat'day Barfly*. The original is an oddity, with a New Orleans flavour and an instrumental refrain based on the unlikely pairing of synth and tuba. Here, led by tenor sax and keyboards, the group transform it into such a dramatic hookline that the crowd continue singing it after the song has finished. "I never knew Family wrote a fucking singalong song," Chapman exclaims. Well, apparently so.

MIKE BARNES

Sat'day Barfly: singalonga sax.

Roger Chapman leads his Family at the Empire.

KEVIN NIXON

> **"They sound so dazzlingly good that one can't imagine they would have sounded better in their heyday."**

KNIFEWORLD

VENUE	CAMDEN BARFLY, LONDON
DATE	02/02/14

It's a chilly Sunday evening but that hasn't dissuaded this audience from trekking to the Barfly for an evening of eclectic British progressive sounds, as part of the curiously titled Stabbing A Dead Horse: The Slight Return Tour. It's Salford's Trojan Horse who break the initial silence with a slick show of technical alt-rock that features a hefty chunk of doom, a sprinkling of reggae, a touch of punk and without a doubt the best beards in Camden. They call it 'prog nouveau' but whatever label you choose to slap on them, Trojan Horse set the bar very high tonight. As they finish with the full-on *Jurapsyche Park* from their forthcoming album *World Turned Upside Down*, it's clear they've won themselves some new fans.

Guitarist Matt Stevens is probably best known for his impressive live looping skills but tonight he's switched his sampler off to join the technical combo The Fierce And The Dead on electric rather than acoustic guitar. The four-piece's playful instrumentals are bold statements rather than atmospheric soundscapes as they wax their way through the sludgy math-metal of melodies such as *Let's Start A Cult* and *I Like It, I'm Into It* from their current album *Spooky Action*. But it's their grand finale that really explodes as they pour their hearts and souls into a spine-tingling exhibition of rhythm and bass.

The thing about Knifeworld is that with eight band members crammed onto the modest-sized stage, they've already made an impression before they've even begun to play their quirky tunes. Tonight, Kavus Torabi announces they'll be giving their current set one last airing before making room for tracks from their promised new album *The Unravelling*. At least one new song blasts out among a selection of old favourites and it's all wrapped up with some topical between-song banter from the enigmatic frontman. Waves of psychedelic surrealism splash over the crowd, each oscillation complemented by delicate vocal harmonies and those unnerving time signatures that make Knifeworld's uneasy listening as challenging as it is hypnotic.

Just like their tried and tested tunes, their intricate new material has that same uncanny knack of creeping right into your brain and using it like a padded cell. Tonight's outstanding performance is entertaining, engaging and quite frankly rather splendid; the perfect antidote to our rather disappointing British winter.

NATASHA SCHARF

ALCEST

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON		
DATE	01/02/14	SUPPORT	HEXVESSEL

Wyrd as folk: Neige weaves a truly unique spell with his dreamy sounds.

> **"Based around his dreams, frontman Neige's songs transport you to a fantasy land of wyrd folk."**

From the day the cacophonous, raucous, extreme music genre of black metal was born, it has remained almost exclusively shrouded in abyss-like rehearsal rooms and grotty basement clubs. But fortunately for fans of progressive, shimmering soundscapes, Alcest have walked towards the light, reaching eloquently beyond their dark past and shedding almost all of their once-metallic sheen. As such, the grandiose setting of the Islington Assembly Hall, with its proscenium arch and vaudeville splendour, is now the perfect backdrop for the renewed band to spread out and soar.

Setting up the resplendence perfectly are Finnish troubadours Hexvessel. Another band with roots in the metal world, the quintet have never walked in the shadows, instead creating Pagan psalms that summon the luminous. Sublimely ethereal, the band play as if performing a solemn rite. Bathed in the venue's soft green light, they turn into faerie folk, leading us with guitars, trumpet, violins and Mat McNerney's bewitching voice to some sacred place where Alcest now dwell.

Appearing to the twinkling opening duo of *Wings* and *Opale* from their newest album *Shelter*, Alcest are transcendent, and when the French band are performing songs that once had a heavier bent, like *Summer's Glory* and *Beings Of Light*, they do so with an almost peerless ferocity that only adds to the delicate beauty of their newer, more progressive tracks.

As they delve further into their back catalogue, you're reminded that although once classed as a metal band, they were always far from it and this concert, along with their new album, will cement their intent to be so much more than a band of just one genre. The crowd tonight prove this, as those with long hair and Opeth patches raise their hands in the air next to hip, young indie kids and those in faded Jethro Tull tour shirts.

Based around his dreams, frontman Neige's songs transport you to his imaginary fantasy land of wyrd folk through enchanting compositions that, although sung in his mother tongue, do not need words to be understood. This type of dream pop softens the hard edges of the outside world and all around the audience seem entranced.

As the band segue effortlessly into one of their oldest songs, 2007's *Souvenirs D'un Autre Monde* from the album of the same name (and the record that signposted their future sound), their most dedicated fans are lifted into the stratosphere, taking with them many a new convert.

LOUISE BROWN

WILL IRELAND

FUCK BUTTONS

VENUE	KENTISH TOWN FORUM, LONDON		
DATE	07/02/14		

From the moment you set foot in this large, sardine-crammed venue, you know this isn't your usual rock show. Maybe it's in the prevalence of the hipster beard and World War One haircuts, or the snatches of conversation overheard while pushing through a bubbling crowd to the bar about struggling with programming source code or ideas for app design. Film director Jim Jarmursch is here. Then a man who turns out to be a party DJ for Jade Jagger spots *Prog* inserting earplugs – we've experienced tonight's headline before – and a 10-minute chat about tinnitus follows (support band The Bug just blew everyone's eardrums out).

As we leave Mr DJ to slide up against the stage barrier, a chap here is effusively teaching his friend some Spanish phrases (what the hell is in this cola?) – perfecting the phrenic-but-decadent set-up that moments later will be plunged into the ominous creeping throb of a track even Steven Wilson would get chills from, *Stalker*. Yep, this is Bristol-bred duo Fuck Buttons, already using their eponymous, naughtily named pots to turn up the night, embrace electronica's weirdest demons and level this willing art-geek gathering.

Two T-shirted blokes and a load of hardware do not a great spectacle make so giant real-time silhouettes meld in a swathe of hypnotic LED animations at the back of the stage. As the adrenaline is ramped up with the propulsive *Brainfreeze* and the Suicide-like *Colours Move* – punctuated with Hung and Powers' jungle cries and a turn battering a snare drum – the soundtrack to the London 2012 Games, *Olympians*, is welcomed with raised arms and bobbing bodies. Things soon turn sinister again and last year's *Slow Focus* provides the unsettling robotrance of *Sentients* and the pimp-rolled swagger of *The Red Wing*. Pitched somewhere between John Carpenter, Throbbing Gristle and Goblin, the dense atmosphere is then punctured by *Surf Solar* and *Flight Of The Feathered Serpent*'s goofy happy hardcore pounding.

Prog has been truly trampled by this point, so we move back to admire things from a distance for *Hidden XS* and *Sweet Love For Planet Earth*'s gorgeously deep synth fizz as the evening's credits roll.

The first time we encountered Fuck Buttons was at 1.30am in a sticky-carpeted club room at Butlins in Minehead in 2007 (thanks ATP and your Portishead-curated Nightmare Before Christmas!). The duo blew us away with their scope and energy then, and we caught them wowing Glastonbury a year or so later. Now with their Pandora's Box of evil ideas thrown open and a horde of nu-raver imaginations awaiting capture how long before they pop up on a late slot on the Pyramid Stage?

Aside from throwing in a bit of avant-cultural dark stuff it would be interesting to see that slightly attention-grabbing name in massive lights...

JO KENDALL

Take a bow

TARJA

VENUE	02 ACADEMY ISLINGTON, LONDON	DATE	10/02/14

Smouldering symphonic rock artiste, opera-metal queen, ex-Nightwish diva… With such theatrical extremes (of varying degrees of truth) associated with her, you might have expected the Finnish soprano to descend upon the stage from a great height, on a wire, wailing a top-A at the pinnacle of her lungs, dolled up in some absurdly elaborate goth angel get-up. A grandiose classical-meets-heavy entrance, basically.

So it's with some pleasant surprise that we watch her practically skip out onstage with her 'proper rock' band, waving excitedly – slightly goofily, even – at whooping, adoring fans. Her acrimonious exit from symph-rockers Nightwish (amid very public, debatable accusations of diva-ish behaviour in 2005) left her image in a pretty contestable shape, but tonight's smiley vision in black lace – who will later tell us, in charmingly slightly broken English, how she's 'learned enormously' – is aeons more friendly and down-to-earth.

Not everyone warms to symphonic rock. Plenty of people wonder how opera mixed with metallic rock can be anything other than painful. Tonight, however, Tarja delivers a set that would be lapped up by a far wider rock listenership than the niche nature of her field might imply.

> **"Her set would be lapped up by a wider listenership than her symph-rock niche would imply."**

The show is led by songs from her latest album *Colours In The Dark* but spans all four solo works, and it's amazing how comfortably the show unites hard rock, progressive and operatic elements. As a performer, Tarja has the very 'real person' demeanour of one with a far less sparkly, classical voice. Not that said sparkly voice is compromised, mind you, as she whips up hefty crowd fist-pumps in hard-rocking newbies like *Neverlight*. Flanked by an ace, heavy-grooving band – uniting inventive classic/rock cello and beastly metallic guitar – the normally prettier likes of *500 Letters* gain a roughened rock quality, while Tarja's voice acquires a dreamy, almost Kate Bush feel in an entrancing *Mystique Voyage*.

Older numbers are rapturously received by rose-bearing onlookers. Tarja's fans love her, and she gives that love back, with unreserved thanks for all the 'beautiful years', 'beautiful people' and 'beautiful places' after the likes of *I Walk Alone*. Fawning? Gushing? Oh yes. But endearing also, given how bona fide her appreciation appears. And with the newer likes of *Medusa* on sizzling form, it seems she has plenty more in the cannon.

Her Nightwish years are echoed in the robustly satisfying encore number *Wish I Had An Angel*. And again in encore number two (yes, we winced a little initially, but it worked out well…) with a run of Gary Moore romp and popular Nightwish cover *Over The Hills And Far Away*.

We leave with the clear sense of having watched a rock show – complete with rock-band camaraderie – and not a concert by a diva. And you sense that's how Tarja would want it.

POLLY GLASS

Happy Finnish: Tarja's a 'smiley vision in black lace'.

Putting the rock into symph-rock, with guitarist Alex Scholpp and drummer Mike Terrana.

THE EDEN HOUSE

VENUE	02 ACADEMY ISLINGTON, LONDON
DATE	08/02/14
SUPPORT	AND ALSO THE TREES

There's a touch of the arcane about tonight. Somewhere between these smouldering gothic rhythms and Islington Academy's tendency to make notes disappear into thin air, a dark sense of the unexpected lingers in North London (though that could just be some of the more pungent dreadlocks parading around).

And Also the Trees are professional underwhelmists, staying aligned perfectly with the steady and weighty procession of their music. Here in the capital city, it's easy to forget the band's naturalistic routes, their every strand unravelling to some dark corner of the English countryside. Simon Huw Jones' cavernous voice gives no easy options for the crowd to latch onto, and his chin stays tucked surely against his chest when he's not singing, while the band grow towards an eternal anti-climax. They work heaps of simplicity and scope into songs like the ponderous *Rive Droite*, and it all makes for a mesmerising listen.

While they deal in similarly dark matter, The Eden House couldn't make a more different sound from their support. Instead, they are propelled by some evil allegiance to the New Romantic movement and the dancier strains of Euro-metal. They regard themselves as a collective (due to an open-door policy with members), and their current formation is particularly strong, with Laura Bennett and Jordan Reyne playing off each other's distinct but asymmetrical vocal styles. There's some murmuring that their mic levels are too low, but the subdued delivery keeps the band faithfully in line with the enrapt darkness of their songs, and the evening's overall feel.

Sadly, The Eden House don't quite carry the authority of their predecessors, and the crowd starts to dwindle towards the end of this short-ish set. It's a shame, as the tailend of the show is where the highlights finally arrive. Bob Loveday (also violinist with Bob Geldof and Van Morrison) is undoubtedly the evening's star turn, adding orchestral bulk to *Gods Pride* and the industrial simmer of *Iron In The Soul*. Additionally, The Eden House's relaxed mid-song patter is refreshingly out of kilter with Euro power-rock and gothic bands, which makes songs like *To Believe In Something* all the more staggering. These anthems carry huge dancey rhythms that could fill the likes of Helsinki's Hartwall Areena, and it's not a big leap to see this lot stepping up to such cavernous venues in years to come.

DAVID KEEVILL

BLACKFIELD

VENUE	CAMDEN KOKO, LONDON	DATE	05/02/14

They make an odd couple, do Steven Wilson and Aviv Geffen: the Home Counties prog boffin (sans shoes, as ever) and the goth-ish Israeli rock star. But it's a partnership that works, or rather, worked: this current tour is Blackfield's swansong, Wilson revealing that he intends to pursue other projects and attend to the demands of an increasingly successful solo career.

You get the impression that Geffen needs Blackfield more than Wilson does: it has been his passport to wider acceptance, beyond Western Asia. He has long wanted to be regarded as more than a big, kohl-eyed fish in a small pond, to be ranked in the pantheon alongside the Kurt Cobains and Thom Yorkes, as as serious spokesmen for a global generation. As for Wilson, well, he can't move for kudos. In this parish alone he is pretty much The Man.

And so tonight Blackfield strike a note of sad celebration. It is not a jubilant last stand but a dour demonstration of their solemn peaks. The music is warmly embracing, richly melodic but relentlessly downbeat, the band rarely daring to shift out of morosely anthemic gear. It is uniformly pleasant, unreconstructed, heartfelt rock: sensitive, soaring, with a dual sense of personal anguish and political engagement. Blackfield's songs express private grief and public sorrow. But you detect also regret that they didn't find a bigger audience, discover a way to broaden out their appeal behind the cosy confines of the cult.

Texturally, Blackfield hit the spot, and the dextrous interlocking bass and two guitars work their gentle magic tonight. Textually, however, they are prone to the jejune, with numerous lyrical allusions to 'pain' and Geffen in particular doing an impression of a Tel Aviv Kevin The Teenager on *Go To Hell*, which he tells us he wrote for my parents and hears him declaring, *'Fuck you all, fuck you, I don't care.'* And then on the encore *Cloudy Now* — much more a Geffen showcase than a Wilson one — he shouts, *'We are a fucked up generation!'* The contrast with *The Raven That Refused To Sing (And Other Stories)* couldn't be more stark.

Aviv Geffen: spokesman for his 'fucked up generation'?

Still, full marks for mournful majesty. It's wall-to-wall mature balladry here, with few if any crazed tempo changes. This is prog minus technoflash, with an emphasis on searingly emotional atmospherica. *Dissolving With The Night* builds and builds, achieving a rocky momentum with its chilling piano pattern and carousing guitar chords and some furious riffage towards the end, but the real leitmotif tonight is quiet yearning.

All credit to them for sustaining the mood of languid melancholia when they could just as easily have rocked out. Instead, they go for the plangent and poignant, bringing things to a close with *End Of The World*. Wilson and Geffen (plus three supporting musicians) take a bow, leaving you to share their sadness that Blackfield never became the stadium attraction of their dreams.

PAUL LESTER

> **"They strike a note of sad celebration, not a jubilant last stand but a demonstration of their solemn peaks."**

The odd couple: Wilson and Geffen take the Blackfield catalogue for one last languidly melancholic spin.

KEVIN NIXON

CARL PALMER'S ELP LEGACY

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	21/02/14

This venerable venue is hardly packed, and that's not lost on Carl Palmer. "If I'd known, you could have all come round to my house," he says with a slightly world-weary laugh. "I only live down the road!"

Thankfully, the sparse crowd is the only disappointment on a night of scintillating music, the spine of which is inevitably the drummer's own interpretation of classic tracks from Emerson Lake And Palmer LPs. But he also adds in some additional material, mostly to great impact.

The first of the two sets begins with a strident read of Wagner's *Ride Of The Valkyries* before opening out into the familiar *Karn Evil Evil 9: 1st Impression, Part 2*, which is beautifully developed. There's then a nod to Sky with *Toccata And Fugue In D Minor*, before a driving rendition of *Jerusalem* leads into *Mars, Bringer Of War*.

That evergreen Holst piece was recorded, of course, by Emerson, Lake & *Powell*, but Palmer says he always wanted to do it with ELP, so that's his excuse for its inclusion. Somewhat surprisingly, this morphs into *21st Century Schizoid Man*, although this does makes musical sense.

However, the first set ends on an odd note. Debussy's *Clair De Lune* is performed here as a guitar solo from Paul Bielatowicz. While it's enjoyable enough, bringing this part to an end with just one musician onstage is a little surreal.

However, this is no more than a taster of the tour-de-force to come. The second part explodes into life with *Trilogy*, and then bassist Simon Fitzpatrick shows his chops on a solo that recreates *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*. If their version of *America* is misguided – this can never sound right without Keith Emerson's signature organ stabs – then that becomes irrelevant as the trio launch into a full recital of *Pictures At An Exhibition*. This is stunning, charismatic and enthralling and, unlike the Bernstein piece it doesn't need the ELP cachet in order to stand up.

But we've been seen and heard nothing yet, because this is trumped by a monumental version of *Fanfare For The Common Man*, which features a solo from Palmer that is perpetual motion, and clearly acknowledges Buddy Rich in its ingenuity and texture. It is a breathtaking performance from the man that would surely fatigue drummers half his age.

After this crescendo of musicianship anything else would be anti-climactic, and that is certainly the case during the encore, as the band break into the trite *Peter Gunn*, with *Nutrocker* bringing up the rear. But after two hours of stellar peaks, this final flourish of two comfort-zone pieces is understandable.

MALCOLM DOME

Take a bow

PROTEST THE HERO

VENUE	ACADEMY, MANCHESTER	DATE	06/02/14
SUPPORT	TESSERACT, THE SAFETY FIRE, INTERVALS		

TesseracT's Ashe O'Hara: sing-ularity!

The Safety Fire: Concise, taut, angular. And that's just their trousers.

Though Intervals do an impressive job of warming up the early arrivals with an energetic set, it's The Safety Fire that really capture the audience's imagination. Blazing through a set of tracks primarily taken from latest — and greatest — effort *Mouth Of Swords*, the title track and *Red Hatchet* are explosive in the now-packed venue. From being a lesser-known progressive metal band prior to *Mouth Of Swords*, the album, and its attendant touring, have really seen the band take things up a notch. The songwriting is sharper, certainly, but it's their live show that commands the attention. They're a precise machine, drilling though technical riffs yet still acrobatic in their stage presence. They boast the intensity of hallowed names such as The Fall Of Troy, paired with less propensity toward over-eccentricity. The tunes are concise, the rhythms taut, the guitars angular yet expressive. As they wrap up their set in valiant fashion, the crowd set immediately to discussing exactly what it was they've just seen.

No let-up for Intervals...

The anticipation crackles by the time TesseracT take the stage, Ashe O'Hara's intro to *Of Matter — Proxy* soaring above Acle Kahney's delicate guitar figures. It's not long before the polyrhythms are flowing and the detuned guitars have heads banging, and the band segue expertly into *Of Matter — Retrospect*. With the better part of a year spent on the road in support of new album *Altered State*, TesseracT are sounding better than ever. Of all the progressive metal bands habitually grouped together under the 'djent' tag, TesseracT have long stood out as perhaps the most melodic, even during Dan Tompkins' tenure on *Concealing Fate* and *One*, where the vocals tended to be harsher. *Resist* and *Singularity* are stunning, and *Nocturne* is deliciously heavy, but it's a different track that takes the breath away. Old it may be, but *Concealing Fate Part II: Deception* is enough to make any jaded rocker grin like an imbecile. The rhythm is intoxicating, and the bass frequencies almost enough to snatch the air from the lungs.

To follow a set that good, Protest The Hero, well, do nothing special at all. Theirs is a refreshing no-nonsense attitude even to those partial to theatrics and concept albums, and from their die-hard fans it's clear why they were able to crowd-fund their latest record. *Volition* sets its heart on being fun as well as rocking hard, and from the first chord and shredding solo of *Underbite* through *Clarity* to *Tilting Against Windmills* the band definitely succeed in making it so. Singer Rody Walker even finds time to tell a comedy skit about his first Buckfast hangover — the band were in Glasgow the previous night — and bring a fan onstage to drink a beer with. Awesome.

ALEX LYNHAM

Protest The Hero's Rody Walker, proving there is life after Buckfast – just about.

SABRINA RAMDOYAL

> **"Old it may be but *Concealing Fate Part II* is enough to make any jaded rocker grin like an imbecile."**

CLAUDIO SIMONETTI'S GOBLIN

VENUE	CAMDEN ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON
DATE	23/02/14

Claudio Simonetti has an engaging sense of humour. Which is why the first thing he does onstage is get everyone in the audience to punch the air, while he takes a cheeky photo. This gets the crowd involved, and sets the tone for what's to come.

The Goblin keyboard mastermind, this is Simonetti's interpretation on the Italian band's extensive history, much of which is linked to horror master Dario Argento. But what Simonetti proves adept at doing is mixing the more obvious soundtrack music with self-contained tracks. In fact, the performance begins in a low key fashion, with *Snip-Snap* and *Roller* from the Goblin album *Roller*. However, this merely lures everyone into a false sense of comfort, before *Dawn Of The Dead* followed by *Zombi* open up the gates to hell.

Led by Simonetti's expansive, flamboyant yet claustrophobic keyboard swathes, the band are tight and inventive. Guitarist Bruno Previtali knows when to complement the keyboards, but is also capable of virtuoso moments in his own right. Bassist Federico Amorosi uses his instrument both for rhythmic impact, but also to provide leads breaks, and drummer Titta Tani has breathtaking control.

Inevitably, there are high points, crucial in the development of the set. And if the two tunes from the *Dawn Of The Dead* soundtrack get everyone agitated in the right manner, then *Suspiria* is the moment when it reaches a crescendo. Simonetti gets us to chant along, but it's a puzzle as to why this is effectively thrown away in the middle of the set. This is surely unmatched as a Goblin classic.

Inevitably, there's footage from all the movies, and even though there are times when it goes out of synch, the visuals are effective and traumatic. It all builds towards the climax of *Profondo Rosso*, augmented by an inventive solo from Simonetti. This comes after *Tenebre* has been performed against the backdrop of Goblin looking considerably younger onscreen. There's something intentionally nonsensical watching the band watching themselves.

Things almost come to an embarrassing end when someone inadvertently turns on the house lights. Thankfully, the mistake is quickly rectified, allowing the four to return for the encore of *Demoni*.

Now out on his own, Claudio Simonetti has brought a fresh dimension to Goblin's music. Welcome back.

MALCOLM DOME

HAWKWIND

VENUE	02 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE, LONDON	DATE	22/02/2014

This is the event that no-one thought would ever happen: the legendary Hawkwind playing their iconic *Space Ritual* live on stage in the 21st century. This evening's unique show is the first, and last time, since 1973 that the space rock pioneers will be performing the record in its entirety and unsurprisingly the historical venue is packed to the rafters with excited fans.

It was only a few months ago that Dave Brock and co toured their iconic 1975 album *Warrior On The Edge Of Time* to coincide with Atomhenge's reissue, but it was the promise of a gig to raise money and awareness for a host of animal charities, under the banner of Rock 4 Rescue, that convinced them to do the unthinkable. Flanked by support sets from AOR singer-songwriter Maria Daines and Warhorse guitarist John Etheridge, Hawkwind gently ease the audience in with an hour-long warm-up before steering their ship towards the behemoth that is *Space Ritual*. Or perhaps warm-up is the wrong word, for this set comprises such solid classics as *Steppenwolf, Reefer Madness* and *Spirit Of The Age*, making it incredulous to consider that there's still more to come.

Forty one years ago, the original *Space Ritual* was an LSD-soaked extravaganza with dancers, a lightshow with poetry recitals so it seems a challenge to even match it but Hawkwind surpass expectations. A performer wearing a catsuit and cape marks the beginning of this special evening by prowling the stage with an illuminated staff.

"It was alright when we were young!" pants a breathless Brock partway through all the updated psychedelic visuals, stilt-walking aliens and a pre-recorded contribution from the mighty Brian Blessed on *Sonic Attack*. Etheridge joins them for a handful of songs, Mr Dibs takes over Robert Calvert's spoken word and there's some top Theremin action expertly provided by Gong's Tim Blake. All 86-and-a-bit minutes are absolutely spot on, perfected during yesterday's dress rehearsal on home turf in Devon. Up in the balcony, TV presenter Matthew Wright dances with a Mohawked member of crew while leather-clad 70s actress and model Lorraine Chase grins from ear to ear – there isn't a single person here tonight who isn't having a fantastic time.

It's the ultimate evening out for all psych-prog fans.

"I've waited 34 years to play that on stage!" Mr Dibs exclaims after the bonus encore of *Silver Machine*, which was never part of the original set but provokes a standing ovation. In spite of last year's stresses that led to a cancelled tour of the US and Canada, Hawkwind pull off one of the most memorable shows of their career. It seems that the best things really do come to those who wait.

NATASHA SCHARF

"TV presenter Matthew Wright dances with a crew member while Lorraine Chase grins from ear to ear..."

Silver surfer: Mr Dibs realises the ambition of a lifetime.

TINA KORHONEN

THE ARISTOCRATS

VENUE	HIGHBURY GARAGE, LONDON
DATE	17/02/14

This must be the best use of a pig in prog since Pink Floyd's porcine balloon broke free from its Battersea moorings back in 1976. This trio of 21st century rockers have taken their extraordinary jam *Get It Like That* down from its knotty main riff and into near-silence. Whereupon drum maestro Marco Minnemann takes a squeaky toy pig and blasts it into his hi-hat mic, in time. The sell-out Garage audience laugh, sporadically at first, but a gleeful Minnemann keeps at it. Now bassist Bryan Beller gets in on the act, hand-pumping at a rubber chicken that duly squawks into his mic (generating more and more laughter in the room) and soon there's an oink/bwark-off between the two animals that's getting more and more complex and syncopated. Guthrie Govan's guitar bursts back in, the full drum and bass crank up and The Aristocrats are away again to enormous gales of appreciative cheers.

There are very few ultra-muso bands who manage to project such a genuine sense of Zappa-like humour and chatty fun, but as The Aristocrats tour their second album *Culture Clash* their musical and personal chemistry runs clear for all to see tonight. Govan and Minnemann, of course, are members of Steven Wilson's band, and Minnemann and Beller tour with Joe Satriani. Quite a pedigree then, but Beller – the band's smiling spokesman – insists that The Aristocrats is their 'baby'.

Their song titles – *Furtive Jack*, *Sweaty Knockers*, the brilliant genre deconstruction *Blues Fuckers* – add a hint of *Carry On* to their stunning, tight dynamic interplay and instrumental prowess. Within Wilson's cadre Govan, rightly, is a wingman. Here he's freer, Sideshow Bob channelling every great rock player from Hendrix to Holdsworth in a blizzard of technique and sensitivity (the rocketing rockabilly of *Louisville Stomp* has to be heard to be believed).

A maestro himself, Beller actually asks permission for them to play a ballad (previously one audience told them, 'okay but just the one') and they glide into the lovely *Flatlands*. As for drum animal Minnemann, he's a revelation. He tells us about the incident that inspired the dynamite tune *Ohhhh Noooo* (he knocked Govan's amp over onto the pavement once, and marvelled at the English guitarist's characteristically understated reaction), and his story about *Desert Tornado* is as sweet as the song is complex.

As for their in-jokes about *Father Ted*, you can tell they're chuffed to be in a room of people in on the gag.

Pork, chops and a whole load of sauce, then – The Aristocrats rule!

GRANT MOON

Take a bow

LONG DISTANCE CALLING

VENUE	CAMDEN BARFLY, LONDON		
DATE	08/02/14	SUPPORT	JUNIUS, WOLVES LIKE US

In the amorphous domain of progressive hard sounds, there are corners still available for a little exploration. Norway's Wolves Like Us showcase a brilliant and ear-splitting revision of post-hardcore, dipping light-footedly into doom and post-metal, yet with a sense of anarchic abandonment. It leaves whispers of sludge icons Corrosion Of Conformity, assisted unintentionally by the 'sawdust' that's stuck in their singer's throat. They are bracing, and bloody loud.

By contrast, Junius bristle hairs without the fear of tinnitus. Engulfing the Barfly with waves of post-rock loveliness, these Bostonians couldn't be more inviting, engineering the clarion tremolo of frosty post-rock to complement the richness of Joseph E Martinez's rock-noir voice and hitting us with a wall of sound that's both methodical and heart-wrenching. Theirs is a stylish approach, with a strictly black dress code, that's cemented by spine-tingling extracts from the newly released *Days Of The Fallen Sun* EP.

As exceptional as Junius are, the firm favourites tonight are Long Distance Calling. Since 2007's *Satellite Bay*, pinning down Münster's finest has never been simple. On one hand, their soothing ambles respect the blueprint of post-rock, yet their explosive riffs and brooding electronica attract audiences of bearded fashionistas, metallers and indie kids whose collective musical passions scale a spectrum of influences.

Into The Black Wide Open kicks things off with a jagged journey of pulsating beats and acerbic riffs, followed seamlessly by *I Know You, Stanley Milgram!*, exploring the band's knack for hypnotic ambience alongside Florian Füntmann's showy guitar licks. The tone of the show is more ambient than rock, with the fuzz, riffs and beats turning punters into a hulking mass of languid ravers, hypnotised by the ebb and flow of the band's trippy space beats and the hammer'n'smash of heavy-fisted drum crashes. In particular, *Black Paper Planes* gets the crowd moving, to the point where the euphoria is nearly tangible.

> **"The tone of the show is more ambient than rock, with the fuzz, riffs and beats turning us into a hulking mass of languid ravers..."**

LDC's Janosch Rathmer gives us some stick...

But tonight the hook is not in their devotion to undulating post-rock or leftfield artistry – it's in their maverick move to hire a singer. Tucked away behind his keyboard, a handsome Martin Fischer garnishes the set with vocal-led tunes, including a thumping rendition of *The Man Within* and the muscular *Inside The Flood*.

Long Distance Calling might not be the most capricious of bands live, but their ability to make a guitar-driven outfit sound like Röyksopp or 65daysofstatic is impressive, even if it means hitting the repeat button a bit too often. Closing with *Metulsky Curse Revisited*, they chance it one more time with a sprawling, rhythmic tide that resonates long after they step off stage.

HOLLY WRIGHT

As Florian and Jan do the Munster mash.

WILL IRELAND

CATE LE BON

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	07/02/14

The Grade II-listed Islington Assembly Hall, with its art deco interior, is a great space that has recently played host to cult wyrd folkies Comus and Brit psych legends Kaleidoscope, so it's fitting that Welsh songwriter Cate Le Bon should bring an inventive selection of songs that touch on both and a whole lot more.

This show is her biggest London headline gig yet, and initially the band seem a little restrained, not helped by their low-key appearance. There's no cape or signature silver frock for Le Bon tonight – everyone is dressed top-to-toe in black, and *No God* and *Cyrk* are both disappointingly underplayed. However, by the time we get to two of the catchier earworms on new album *Mug Museum, Are You With Me Now?* and *I Can't Help You*, the band are sufficiently warmed up and ready for more complex numbers.

Mirror Me takes a stately organ line and adds a Nico vocal delivery and outbreaks of fuzz guitar, building to Velvet Underground flurries of notes, before flying straight into the fairground organ-fuelled rocker *Sisters*. The band deftly follow Le Bon's every twist and turn and fellow native H Hawkline (whose Super Furry-approved solo material should be of interest to readers) produces an impressive array of vintage keyboard sounds and takes over lead guitar on several numbers, as well as contributing some backing vocals. With Cardiff boy Sweet Baboo (another band member with his own career) on bass and New Zealander Daniel Ward (Lawrence Arabia, The Sneaks) on drums, a particularly adept rhythm section is formed.

Then there's a change in pace, with both *The Man I Wanted* and *Cuckoo Through The Walls* like a funereal take on something from the first two Caravan albums. Afterwards, an extended *Wild* takes us on an Incredible String Band-like ride, before ending with a krautrock coda that could have come from Le Bon and Baboo's Meanz Heinz side-project.

The encore opens with a new number dominated by garage organ and pounding percussion, Le Bon's vocals pushing into higher, wilder ranges. This continues with crowd favourite *Fold The Cloth*, showing off Le Bon's often overlooked guitar playing.

As we leave, we notice a set of postcards for sale on the merch table, one of which is already stamped. We're asked to write down our thoughts and post to a friend. Cate, will this do instead?

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Take a bow

MOGWAI

VENUE	SOUTHBANK ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON		
DATE	25/01/14	SUPPORT	CLINIC

'Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face/Great chieftain o' the pudding race/ Aboon them a' ye tak your place/ Painch, tripe, or thairm/ Weel are ye worthy o' a grace/ As lang's my arm.'

It's worth the journey for the lengthy toast to a savoury pudding alone as Robert Burns' appreciation of the haggis is rendered as a rock'n'roll intro. But then this is Mogwai, their Scottish independence worn proudly, quite brazenly invading a Royal institute in the capital on the biggest day in the Caledonian calendar, Burns Night.

Decked out in their traditional surgical theatre-wear, moments earlier support band Clinic have stomped their way through a set of breathless, garagey Philicorda dischordia. They are duly thanked and *Heard About You Last Night* fires up. The lead track from *Rave Tapes*, the album that will get a Top 10 chart placing the next day, its subtle, chiming lullaby indicates that this show could be a disappointly sedate one. And true, as a seated event, there's a sense of restraint for band and fans alike. Some tracks, such as the low-key *May Nothing But Happiness Come Through Your Door/Blues Hour* double, don't quite get off the ground, whereas other tracks, such as new track *Remurdered*, are shown to have sublimely Eno-esque ambient slants.

But when it works, the sound conjured up by these dressed-down, contemplative types is explosive – and louder than you'd think for this classical concert hall, as the force of *Auto Rock*, *Master Card* and *Helicon 1* blow your eyebrows off and hair back, while the soaring resonance of *Hunted By A Freak* is their zombie apocalypse love theme incarnate.

> **"Reception is fervid, but the anticpation for this event to tip over into sonic expurgation is colossal."**

The reception to everything they do tonight is fervid, but the anticpation for this event to tip over into sonic expurgation is colossal.

Consequently, the start of each track is a tease. There's no pandering to those who expect *Hungry Face* from the soundtrack to *The Returned*, the Channel 4 TV show that's helped get Mogwai on Joe Public's iPods – and in this there's an admirable element to their bloody mindedness again.

Then they bring out *Mogwai Fear Satan*. An ear-bleeding epic, it's the dose of filth the we've itched for, with an overdriven, skull-crushing drop that pushes the breath out of us as the giant double eye of their *Rave Tapes* album art backdrop bores through the blinding strobeshow.

Pioneers of post-rock, steadfast Glasgow art terrorists, Mogwai the brave. In spite of their best efforts to remain below the radar this band's time is now. And as for the Sassenachs? Well, we can't get enough.

We'll paraphrase Scotland's favourite son to sum it up: *'Ye pow'rs, wha make mankind your care/And dish them out their bill o fare/Auld England wants nae skinking ware/That jaups in luggies/But, if ye wish her grateful prayer/Gie her a Haggis!'*

JO KENDALL

Eye eye: the *Rave Tapes* artwork is watching you...

Burns night: Barry, Dominic and Stuart make their sonic address.

WILL IRELAND

GUAPO

VENUE	WHITECHAPEL RHYTHM FACTORY, LONDON
DATE	13/02/14

As Pink Floyd's *Astronomy Domine* plays over the PA and facially hirsute artistic types mingle in the Whitechapel venue, one can't help but think of the days of the UFO Club and liquid-projected Soft Machine 'happenings'. The comparison is apt as tonight Guapo celebrate 20 years of sculpting avant-garde art-rock – their music as optically stimulating and tangential to today's mainstream as *Interstellar Overdrive* must have sounded in 1967.

The ominous shimmer of *The Pilman Radiant* gathers pace, its post-rock cymbal washes and atonal organ chords building tension before the jazzy main theme takes over. David Smith, drummer and only remaining founder member, pilots the ship through its continuously shifting course. His arms are never still – even in the calmest, least turbulent channels, he maps out the eddies in a circular motion with metronomic sense, ready to interject with a well-placed tom hit or crash.

As the long-form piece enters choppier waters, his coupling with bassist James Sedwards recalls the classic Magma rhythm section of Vander and Top. Add to this the funky keyboard work of Emmett Elvin and his Knifeworld bandmate Kavus Torabi's angular, interval-skipping lead-guitar work and it's impossible to keep still. Torabi shows off an impressive array of interpretive dance moves. Clearly this strange and powerful music is inhabiting him, and he's not the only one – one happy gigger traces their euphoria in the air with LED party fingers.

Three new, as-yet unnamed pieces make up the middle of the set. Their unfamiliarity is no obstruction – as with all of the outfit's material they sound through-composed, almost improvisational, masking their complexity in an organic and glacial flow.

Tremors From the Future, a second piece from 2013's *History Of The Visitation*, rounds off the evening. Sounding like *Red*-era Crimson extrapolating on Terry Riley's *A Rainbow In Curved Air*, it showcases Elvin's keys. As an accomplished visual artist, he clearly knows a thing or two about colour, light and shade, and booty-bothering Stevie Wonder clavinet riffs.

Guapo are not a band to adhere to convention. A 20th-anniversary show that consists entirely of new or as-yet unreleased music is just one facet of that tonight. With a newly stabilised line-up, we look forward to future visitations.

CHRIS MCGAREL

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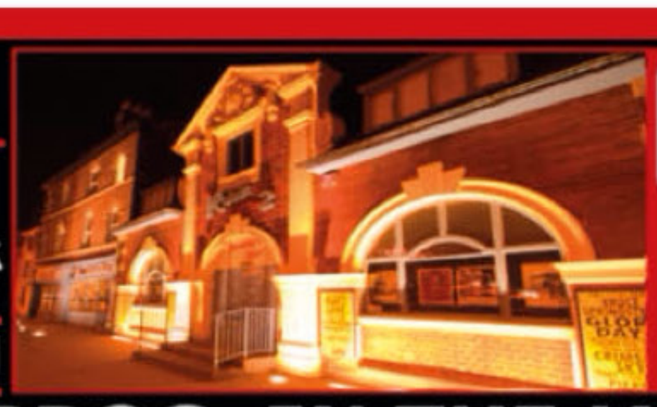

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BRAIN STORM

How well do prog stars know their prog - or themselves? This month we needle

MARK KELLY **Quizzard:** Grant Moon

Q1 In 1981, your band Chemical Alice released their one and only EP, *Curiouser And Curiouser*. Can you name all four songs on it?
MARK KELLY: *Lands Of Home, Henry The King* and... it was only 30-something years ago! Pass.
A: *Goodnight Vienna* and *The Judge*. ½

Q2 You joined Marillion that same year. Can you name the keyboardist you replaced, and the location of your first show with the band?
MK: The keyboardist was Brian Jelliman, and my first show was at The Great Northern in Cambridge.
A: Correct. ✓

Q3 Can you name two prog bands subtly referenced in *Lords Of The Backstage*, from *Script For A Jester's Tear*?
MK: Two prog bands? No idea...
A: It was Renaissance and Van der Graaf Generator.
MK: I should've guessed. Fish was definitely a big Van der Graaf fan. ✗

Q4 *'So if you want my address it's Number One at the end of the bar/Where I sit with the broken angels.'* Lyrics from which song on which album?
MK: *Sugar Mice*, from *Clutching At Straws*.
A: Correct. ✓

Q5 Where was H's audition for the band, and why?
MK: It was in Pete [Trewavas]'s garage, because Pete has cats and H is allergic to them.
A: Correct. ✓

Q6 When you were looking into doing your first crowdfunded album, how many people did you email on your database, and how many pre-orders did you get for *Anoraknophobia*?
MK: We emailed about 6,000 and we eventually got about 12,500 pre-orders.
A: Reassuringly correct! ✓

Q7 You performed on DeeExpus's 2011 album *King Of Number 33*...
MK: Did I?!
A: Yes, you did! The question is: how long is the epic title track?
MK: I remember Andy [Ditchfield] wanting it as long as possible... 18 minutes?
A: It was actually 26 minutes and 47 seconds. ✗

Curtain call: Marillion man Mark Kelly puts his prog credentials on the line.

Q8 The Japanese import edition of *Radiation* features a cover of which song by which band?
MK: *Fake Plastic Trees* by Radiohead?
A: Correct. ✓

Q9 You're a CEO for the Featured Artists' Coalition (thefac.org). Can you name any four other directors of the board?
MK: Nick Mason, [Radiohead's] Ed O'Brien, Sandie Shaw and Howard Jones.
A: And many more stars. Correct. ✓

Q10 How many categories were Marillion nominated in at last year's Prog Awards?
MK: Four: Live Event, Anthem, Album Of The Year and Band Of The Year.
A: Absolutely right. ✓

GENERAL PROG

Q11 At which venue did Camel play a concert in October last year?
MK: Was it the Hammersmith Apollo?
A: The Barbican. ✗

Q12 Which 'daring' electronic pop group did Gentle Giant engineer Martin Rushent go on to produce?
MK: Was it The Human League?
A: It was. ✓

Q13 Which Yes band member features on the cover of *Time And A Word*, but doesn't actually play on the record?
MK: Was it Peter Banks?
A: Steve Howe — he'd replaced Banks just after the album was recorded. ✗

Q14 Gentle Giant's song *Pantagruel's Nativity* was inspired by a pentalogy by which French Renaissance writer?
MK: Wow! It's always the general knowledge ones that let you down...
A: Blame our Dep Ed Jo for that one. It was François Rabelais. ✗

Q15 Yes' Chris Squire has been associated with a band led by his ex-wife, Nikki. What was it called?
MK: [Laughs] No idea!
A: Esquire. ✗

Q16 Which Genesis video stars late TV comedian Benny Hill?
MK: Really?! Clearly I *don't* know that one.
A: *Anything She Does*, from 1986. ✗

Q17 Which instrument did Tony Banks hire for *Trespass*, *Nursery Cryme* and *Foxtrot*, and from whom?
MK: Would it be a Mellotron, and did he get it from King Crimson?
A: It would be, and he did. ✓

Q18 As well as the guitar, which instrument is Allan Holdsworth famous for playing?
MK: [Laughing hopelessly] Harmonica?
A: The SynthAxe. ✗

Q19 Who connects Pendragon, Arena and Shadowland?
MK: Clive Nolan.
A: Correct. ✓

Q20 Which is the only Pink Floyd album that doesn't feature keyboardist Richard Wright?
MK: *The Final Cut?*
A: Correct. ✓

TOTAL: 11 ½/20
MK: Well, that was a bit painful — a few embarrassing ones I should've known. But it's okay, it was fun!

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