STEVE HOWE

"Chris and Jon didn't get on. I said, 'OK, I'll run the band then.'"
2018 Prog God's most revealing interview yet

WIN! NICK MASON DELUXE BOX SET

PROG

ASTOUNDING SOUNDS
AMAZING MUSIC

CAMEL

How *Moonmadness* became their most successful record ever, *and* there's a new Camel album on the way...

JEFF WAYNE
"I put my life savings into making *The War Of The Worlds*!"

CONNY PLANK
The real story of the man who invented krautrock

BLODWYN PIG
"They called us avant-garde. 'Aven't a clue would have been better!"

"It was a great time and, I suppose, it was a simpler time."

Andy Latimer

+

Spiritualized
Michael Romeo
Heather Findlay
Mystery
Robert Berry
Dead Letter Circus

genesis

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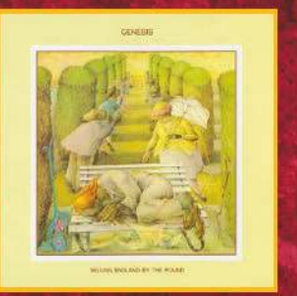

SELLING ENGLAND BY THE POUND
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THE LAMB LIES DOWN ON BROADWAY
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A TRICK OF THE TAIL
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WIND AND WUTHERING
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...AND THEN THERE WERE THREE
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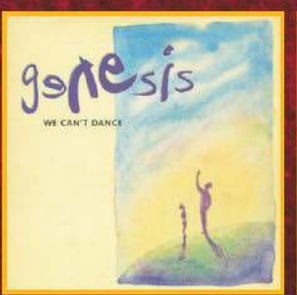

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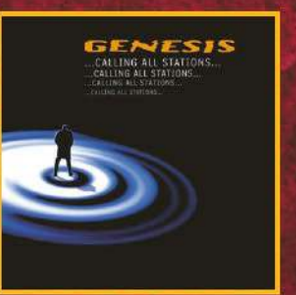

CALLING ALL STATIONS
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Virgin

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UMC

ISSUE 90 23.08.18

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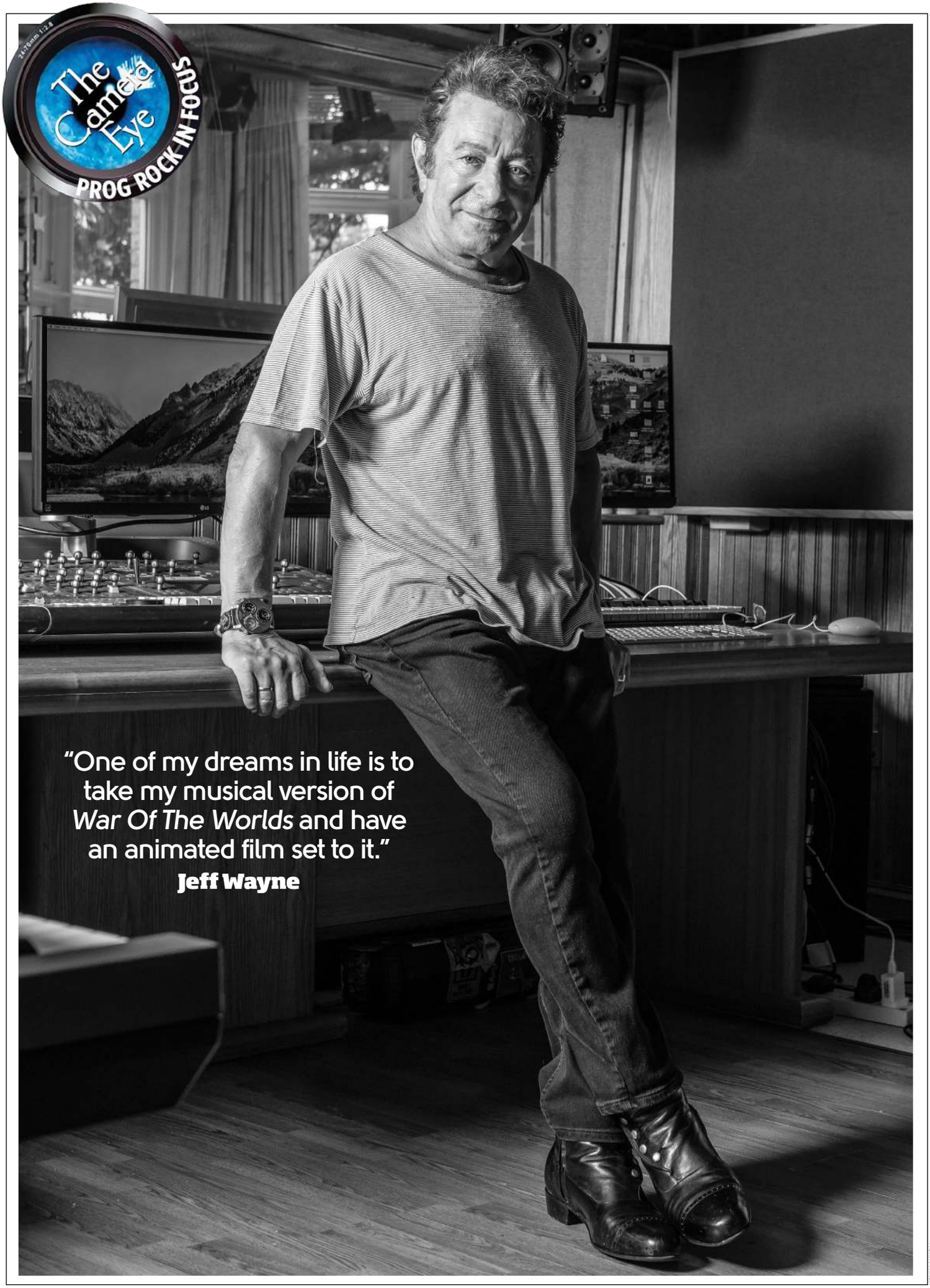
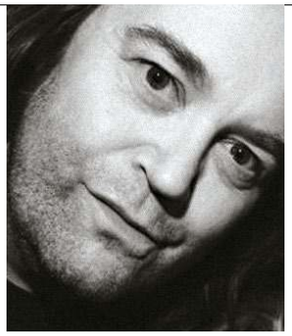

The Camera Eye
PROG ROCK IN FOCUS
"One of my dreams in life is to take my musical version of *War Of The Worlds* and have an animated film set to it."
Jeff Wayne

KEVIN NIXON

Ed's Letter



Hello and welcome to the new issue of *Prog* magazine. As you're reading this, the biggest night of the prog calendar is only three weeks away. Unless of course, you wait several weeks to pick up your copy of the magazine, in which case it may have already passed. Either way, the 2018 Progressive Music Awards promises to be our finest yet. How exciting it is to honour the great Steve Howe with the top accolade this year. As I write this, I've just received confirmation of the musician who'll be presenting the award to Steve. The word 'excited' doesn't even come close. I'd also like to welcome Al Murray as our host for the first time. "I knew I was amongst my people," said Al of last year's event when he was a guest. I think that says everything as to why we asked Al to join us as host this year.

In the weeks before and after the Awards, cover stars Camel take to British concert halls to perform 1976's excellent *Moonmadness* in full. I have to say what a delight it is just to see Andy Latimer once again on stage performing live. But our cover story doesn't just tell the story of the band's biggest selling album. It also brings with it the news that the current line-up are working on new material. A new Camel album for 2019? Everything is well and truly crossed for that one.

And so back to the voting figures for this year's Awards. It is a record-breaking number – for which I thank you all. As usual every category is a close-run affair. One or two votes often swing it every year. We'll be bringing you all the coverage of the Awards next issue. Don't forget you'll also be able to watch the event live on *Prog*'s Facebook page on September 13. Join us, please...

Jerry Ewing - Editor

NEXT ISSUE Sep 27 ON SALE

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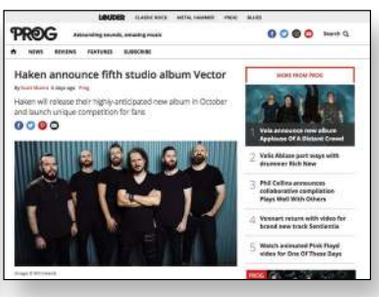

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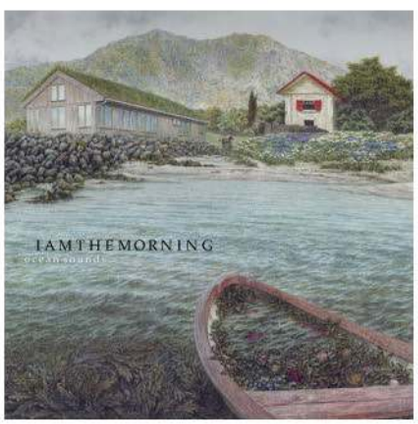

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PROG IS PROG!

I read your magazine with great interest. Being reminded of old stuff I haven't listened to in a while and being introduced to bands I haven't heard of is brilliant. However, one aspect does bug me and that is the question: "Is it prog?"

When you ask the question, the answers from your experts range from yes to no and various shades in between. I think the problem lies with using the word 'prog'. To old-timers like me, prog is the classic Yes, Pink Floyd, Genesis etc, and newer stuff like Big Big Train, Steven Wilson, Neal Morse – and, of course, all the great music in between. Most prog, to me at least, is long songs, heavily keyboard-orientated, weird lyrics, odd time signatures and melodic. None of this precludes excellence on other instruments – indeed, such excellence is almost mandatory. None of this is a hard and fast requirement, more an outline, but I'm sure you get the idea.

A division between prog and progressive gives a meaningful way of classifying the music without detracting from either side. A lot of the music you cover doesn't fit into prog but can be classed as progressive.

I suggest that you can find progressive music in all genres, but only prog is prog!

David Ackroyd

THE MADDING CROWD

I find it fascinating to see the number of letters – for example, from Graham Smith (*Prog* 88) – about the quality of venues and the behaviour of people at concerts. I have to agree with his comments about The O2 with their disgraceful pricing. I was recently there for the Stone Free Festival and wondered why the people in front of me believed that I wished to view the day through their mobile phone. Holding it up to take a quick snap is one thing; recording the whole of *Fool's Overture* is another thing completely. I have to say I agree with the efforts made at King Crimson's concerts to have no recording at all.

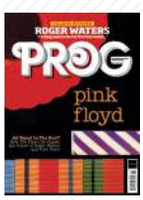
A few months ago I attended the Opeth concert at The O2 Academy in Bristol and couldn't believe the number of people talking loudly at the bar throughout. Let's face it, if you can hear people talking at an Opeth concert, they aren't whispering.

The other thing I must comment on is the attendance at some concerts. I saw Mostly Autumn at The Fleece in Bristol a couple of weeks ago. We were delighted that we made the 100-mile round trip to see them as they were excellent. However, the total audience probably just made 100. It's difficult to believe that there aren't 10 times that number in Bristol alone who would have loved that concert.

Neil Mason

Pretty Proggy In Pink: the Floyd are classic, old school prog rock.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Prog 88: full of Floyd and much, much more.

A CUT ABOVE

As one of your few (?) readers from across the pond, I just wanted to send you a quick note to tell you how much I appreciate your magazine. Good writing about music is hard to find these days, and I love how well-written your articles – and even your blurbs – are. I'm something of an Anglophile too, so I also love the Englishness of your writing.

Anyway, as a somewhat new prog-head, your magazine has been a source of endless discoveries for me over

TWEET TALK

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@NICKBEGGS
@NickBeggs
Thanx everyone for a great seven months.

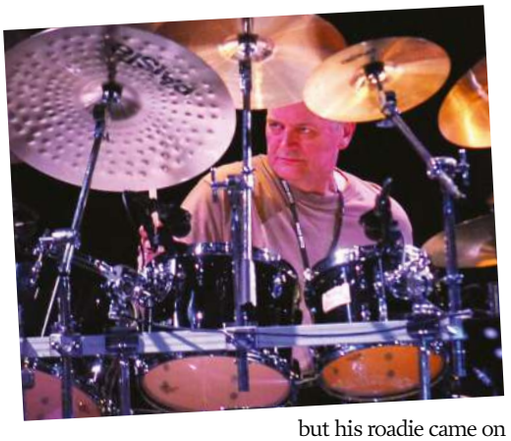
OLIVER WAKEMAN
@OliverWakeman
Session time! Having a lot of fun with my old friend the Moog Little Phatty. This keyboard has been all around the world with me. I used to have two but one was stolen on route to a show in 2010...

MATT STEVENS
@mattstevensloop
More rain please

LETTER

I was gutted to hear about the death of Jon Hiseman. Colosseum were one of the most underrated bands who did not achieve the accolades they so richly deserved. If any readers are not familiar with their music then I would thoroughly recommend their 1971 live album – the track *Lost Angeles* for example is absolute genius. They had it all – excellent musicians, excellent singer in Chris Farlowe, and in Jon Hiseman, one of the greatest rock drummers of all time.

I had the opportunity to see them live a few years ago in Abertillery and during *Valentyne Suite*, Mark Clarke broke a string (very unusual for a bass player)



but his roadie came on and changed it while Mark just kept on playing – incredible!

On another point, your cover CD is excellent. It's vital that new bands have an outlet for their music and your CD offers that opportunity.

Keep up the good work.

Nigel Richards

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

the past year of my subscription. My favourite section by far is The Musical Box. I can't thank you enough for all the new bands I've found thanks to you.

What caused me to reach out to you now, however, was your cover story about *The Final Cut*. I think you're right that I'm in the minority, but as a big fan of Roger Waters, it's definitely up there as one of my favourite Floyd albums – it may even be my favourite. I felt like your article – finally! – gave me a deep dive into one of the most memorable albums from my formative years.

Sadly for me, it's an album that seems to be lost to history, with not much ever said or written about it. Imagine my surprise when *that's* what greeted me in my mailbox a couple of weeks ago.

"Good enough" indeed.

Adam, San Diego, CA

Our in-depth look at Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut* album in *Prog* 88.

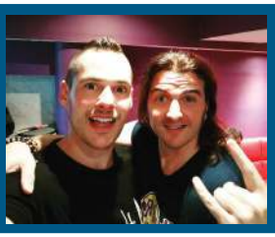
iWANT...

I too have lamented the demise of the iPod Classic [covered in issue 89's Paper Late column]. I love listening to my favourite albums on the go in lossless format. Apple were hugely premature with their decision. It's clear with the vinyl revival that people still want quality over quantity and the Classic was a way of maintaining quality formats.

I admit to using streaming services as a way of checking new music, but if I really want something, I buy the physical product. I don't want to be a slave to WiFi or mobile data sources. With memory availability becoming cheaper, smaller, etc, there must be a huge market out there for another Classic. Here's hoping!

Gwyn William

THAT JOE PAYNE
@thatjoepayne
Sound-checked, and ready to rock! @FranckCarducci #LondonMusic #TufnellPark #BostonMusicRoom – at Boston Arms



MATT COHEN
@MattCohenBass
The sun is over the yardarm therefore it's officially Gin and Titonic time. Cheers me hearties xx #GinAndTitonic #LongDay #AndRelax #Cheers

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HAKEN GO HEAVY ON THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL NEW ALBUM

Brits team up with Devin Townsend producer on "darker" fifth full-lengther.

Jesus Christ Superstar, Dream Theater and Hermann Rorschach are among the unexpected ingredients for Haken's dark new album *Vector*, which will be released via InsideOut on October 26.

"We started writing it in November 2017 when [two thirds of the band] were on tour with Mike Portnoy's Shattered Fortress," reveals guitarist Charlie Griffiths. "Playing those Dream Theater songs makes you feel a certain way and we wanted to recapture some of that energy we were feeling. I think the song *Veil* came out of [that] tour – it's one of our epics at 13 minutes long. It's got tons of different sections: moments with Lamb Of God-style riffs and heavy grooves, and a chilled Radiohead section in the middle. It's kind of a centrepiece."

The seven-track recording is set around a patient/doctor relationship that isn't quite as it seems and unravels through the 80s-inspired lead track *The Good Doctor*. The video, featuring *Hollyoaks* actor Elliot James Langridge, is to be premiered shortly.

"It's told in a kind of rock opera style, with characters speaking lines. I was always a big fan of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and classic concept albums like [Queensrÿche's] *Operation: Mindcrime* and King Diamond's *Them*, but it's the only song we've done that's like this lyrically," says Griffiths. "The rest of the album happens from the point of view of the patient, who's in a coma but his mind is alive with maybe memories or delusions brought on by the treatment he's receiving. It's inspired by early 20th-century psychological experiments like [BF] Skinner's electric shock experiments that looked at obedience, and Hermann Rorschach's ink blot tests. We explored the idea of seeing faces in things on *Pareidolia* [from 2013 album *The Mountain*], so this feeds into something we've been interested in for a while. We've turned it into the album cover, which is our own Rorschach ink blot [created by long-term design collaborators Blacklake].

"Musically, *The Good Doctor* kind of feels like a natural progression from [2016's] *Affinity*, but the rest of the album is much heavier and darker in sound. It's still got odd time signatures, crazy riffs and strange chord progressions but we've drawn upon more metal influences this time around. Part of the sound is definitely down to the guy who mixed the album."

> **"We wanted to do something new and I think we have. It feels like the correct way to move forward."**

Never Compromise: Haken take their own Rorschach Test.

The producer in question is former Periphery bassist Adam 'Nolly' Getgood, who has also worked with Animals As Leaders and Devin Townsend. It was his expertise that led to Haken approaching him for the album. "We wanted to learn from him and see where we could take the music, and take it somewhere different," says Griffiths. "We've pretty much always worked with overseas producers and we'd just communicate via email. This time, because Adam is based in the UK, we were able to bring him into the studio for the drum recordings. It was a much closer and more personal relationship with the mixing this time around. We wanted to do something new and I think we have on this album. It feels like the correct way to move forward."

The musician-turned-producer also contributes a heavily disguised voice-over on the album finale, *A Cell Divides*. He's one of a handful of special guests, alongside Headspace's Pete Rinaldi, brass and woodwind musician Miguel Gorodi, and original Haken keyboard player Pete Jones (not to be confused with the Tiger Moth Tales musician of the same name).

Haken are currently celebrating their 10-year anniversary with the release of their first live album, *L-1VE*. They will tour North America this autumn, with a European tour planned for next spring. For all the confirmed dates so far, visit www.hakenmusic.com. **NRS**

PRESS/WILL IRELAND

This month, Intro was compiled by
Mike Ainscoe
Chris Cope
Malcolm Dome
Jerry Ewing
Jo Kendall
Martin Kielty
Hannah May Kilroy
Alex Lynham
Rhodri Marsden
Natasha Scharf
Sid Smith
Rick Wakeman
Phil Weller

SOFT MACHINE ARE BACK IN THE STUDIO

Legacy musicians regroup for official follow-up to 1981's *Land Of Cockayne*.

Well-oiled: Soft Machine

PRESS/GD CORPORATE PHOTOGRAPHY

Soft Machine release the first album under their own name in 37 years. *Hidden Details* is out on September 7 via John Etheridge's Dyan Records in the UK and Europe, and via MoonJune in North America. The new release coincides with the 50th anniversary of the original band's 1968 debut *The Soft Machine*.

"We're all very excited by the new album," saxophonist Theo Travis tells *Prog*. "Everyone played amazingly well and sounded on the top of their game; the [Roy] Babbington and [John] Marshall rhythm section is something really special. The new tracks are really strong and one of the great things about the new recordings is that they bring together the fiery jazz rock of the *Bundles* and *Softs* era [from 1975-1976], the experimental improvisational music of the 'classic' period and even some of the psychedelia of the early line-up of the band. At the same time it all sounds very contemporary."

The album was recorded at the late Jon Hiseman's Temple Studio in Surrey at the end of last year and will be followed by 11 live shows in the UK in November. These include gigs at the Borderline in London (November 16) and Fletching's Trading Boundaries (22).

The quartet, previously known as Soft Machine Legacy, features three of the band's 1970s-era musicians: John Etheridge on guitar, bassist Roy Babbington and John Marshall on drums. They're joined by sax, flute and piano player Theo Travis, who joined back in 2015.

For the full list of live dates, visit www.theotravis.com. **NRS**

ANATHEMA AT THEIR BEST

Liverpool band celebrate their musical rebirth on a new compilation, with shows planned for the autumn.

"The last 10 years have easily been our most productive and most artistically accomplished period," says Daniel Cavanagh of *Internal Landscapes*, which celebrates Anathema's past decade with Kscope. "Basically, it's when we were dead good and hopefully we'll carry on being dead good!"

The 13-track, out on October 26, collates material from the band's four Kscope studio albums, along with the two interim releases, *Hindsight* and *Falling Deeper*.

"There are certain songs that pick themselves, like *Untouchable* parts one and two, and *Distant Satellites*. Thereafter it's a combination of what might balance it out. It's been fun," he says.

Anathema will follow the release with an ambient tour that explores more expansive electronic and synth-based reinterpretations of their songs. They're also working on the follow-up to last year's *The Optimist* with Cavanagh confirming they already have "maybe 30 or 40 song ideas".

For more, visit www.anathemamusic.com. **NRS**

Back To The Start: Anathema.

IAMTHEMORNING'S NORDIC ADVENTURE

Russian duo reveal intimate studio film and a very British theme for their next album.

Sounds Of The Sea: iamthemorning.

ALEXANDER KUZNETCOV/PRESS

iamthemorning are releasing a live performance with a difference through Kscope on October 19. The *Ocean Sounds* studio film was shot on the remote Norwegian island of Giske and captures the duo at their intimate best with their live chamber band.

"I saw pictures of the Ocean Sound studio for the first time around 2011 and I thought, 'Wow!'" says singer Marjana Semkina. "It's such a dream destination and you can see the Norwegian mountains in the distance. It's super pretty and looks like it's from *The Hobbit*. I knew instantly that it would be the best place for us.

"I love the way that the imagery keeps changing and blends with our music. This is something we've tried to translate into our music. I would love to play in front of people in a setting like that but since it's a very distant location and difficult to get to, it's not really possible at this point. So we decided to capture this as well as possible and show it to people."

The 12-track, released on double CD, Blu-ray and vinyl, collates material from the pair's three studio albums. The Blu-ray also contains an exclusive acoustic preview of brand new track *Blue Sea*.

"We were working on this song around the same time. It was just a sketch that I wrote on guitar and we tried to play it together with Gleb [Kolyadin, pianist] for the first time in the studio. We liked the way it sounded stripped-down just with just the guitar, vocals and the grand piano so we decided to record it. It's probably my favourite part of the footage and I'm looking forward to recording it for the next album."

And Semkina confirms that work is already underway on the follow-up to the *Prog*-award winning album *Lighthouse*. The untitled release is inspired by 19th- and early 20th-century British history and the singer says it should be ready next year.

"I've got all sorts of songs in the works about Victorian freak shows, premature burials, flowers growing through dead bodies, anatomical Venuses," she says, laughing. "It's going to be so cheery and jolly!"

> **"It's super pretty and looks like it's from *The Hobbit*."**

iamthemorning's next live show will be at London's Union Chapel on October 2, where they'll be performing at Kscope's 10th-anniversary event. They'll be joined by Paul Draper and Anathema, with more guests to be announced including a special solo performance from Gleb Kolyadin. **NRS**

For more, visit, www.iamthemorning.com.

INTRO extras

PHIL COLLINS COLLECTION UNVEILED

Phil Collins releases a four-disc box set of collaborations on September 28 via Warner Music. The 59-track collection, titled *Plays Well With Others*, includes studio recordings with Brand X, Brian Eno, Robert Fripp and John Cale, and spans Collins' musical career from 1969 until 2011. The final disc focuses on live material collected between 1981 and 2002, and includes an early performance of *In The Air Tonight* from The Secret Policeman's Other Ball at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1981.

Nosound: breaking through the barrier.

CAROLINE TRATTLER/PRESS

NOSOUND: HEADING IN A NEW DIRECTION

"Don't expect, just listen," says band leader and composer of their latest album.

Nosound mainman Giancarlo Erra hopes *Allow Yourself* will prove to be his breakthrough recording because he believes it's the most unique work he's done to date. The title of the follow-up to 2016's *Scintilla* refers to his mantra to break down self-imposed creative barriers and explore a space beyond his comfort zone.

"*Scintilla* was a revolution, but *Allow Yourself* is on a different path altogether," Erra tells *Prog*. "I wanted to get different results with the piano and with my voice. I forced myself to use completely different instrumentation."

That included laying-off guitar tracks, which he says he often found "limiting." He adds, "I didn't use any digital instrumentation or any software. I re-did the whole studio with analogue stuff from 1972."

He says some fans have been surprised by lead track *Don't You Dare*, which he describes as "melodic, but in a weird way". He counters, "I think sometimes we suffer in a way because people expect something from our music. I really want people to not expect anything. I want people to just listen."

Erra admits that some might not follow him down his new path, but believes others will take their place as his experimentation continues. "There are a couple of songs I'm waiting to complete for a potential next album, and again, they are quite, quite different. I actually found a way to express myself more freely."

Allow Yourself is released on September 21 via Kscope. Turn to page 102 for our review and see www.nosound.net for more. **MK**

GRYPHON MAKE A RETURN TRIP TO ALICE'S WONDERLAND

First album in 41 years to be launched at London show.

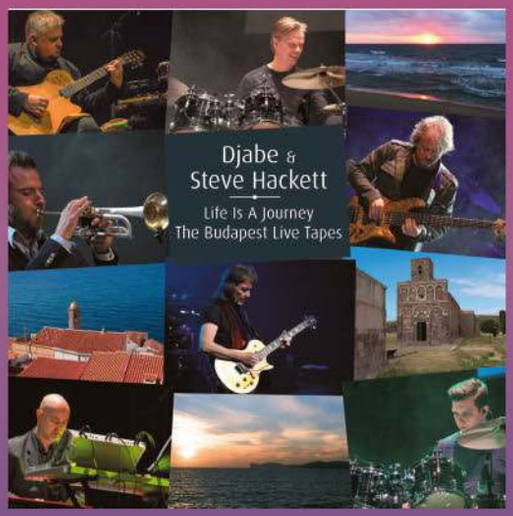
Gryphon are *reinventing* themselves on a new 11-track album.

"It was a case of, better get on with it before somebody dies!" says co-founding vocalist and instrumentalist Brian Gulland, who's joined by original members, guitarist Graeme Taylor and percussionist Dave Oberlé. *ReInvention* sees the quirksters revisit the books from which they took their name.

"Graeme has written an 11-minute magnum opus. He's set the White Knight's song [*Haddocks' Eyes*] from *Alice Through The Looking Glass* to music and it's quite magnificent," says Gulland. "And one of our more recent recruits, [multi-instrumentalist] Graham Preskett, has come up with some marvellous pieces that are so Gryphonical it's as if he's been with us ever since we founded the group!"

Gryphon will be launching the album at London's Union Chapel on September 14 with more shows announced via their official website www.thegryphonpages.com. Now turn to page 101 for our review of *ReInvention*. **NRS**

Looking For Butterflies: Gryphon with studio bassist Rory McFarlane.



DJABE & STEVE HACKETT

'LIFE IS A JOURNEY: THE BUDAPEST LIVE TAPES' (2CD/1DVD SET)

- "The Budapest Live Tapes" captures on two CDs and a DVD Djabe & Steve Hackett performing selections from that album on the concert stage for the first time, along with classic Genesis material such as 'Fly On A Windshield', 'Los Endos' and 'Firth of Fifth' and Steve Hackett material such as 'Please Don't Touch', 'The Steppes' and 'Last Train To Istanbul'. The DVD in this set also includes the bonus features "Life is a Journey" (screen film), 'Beams Over the Nulvi Mountains' (music video) and the short documentary "The Journey Continued in 2018".

Release Date 28th September 2018
EANTCD31071

SKY

'CARILLION: THE SINGLES COLLECTION 1979-1987' (2CD REMASTERED SET)

- "Carillon – The Singles Collection" is the first ever compilation to focus on the A & B-sides of every single released by the band and includes rare seven-inch single edits of 'Dies Irae', 'Desperate For Your Love' and 'The Great Balloon Race' which appear on CD for the very first time. It serves as a fine celebration of the singles by one of the most original musical forces of the late 1970s and 1980s.
- Includes three single versions previously unreleased on CD.
- Remastered from the original master tapes.

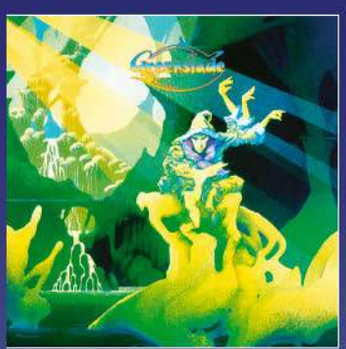
Release Date 28th September 2018
ECLEC22641

RENAISSANCE

'PROLOGUE' (REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of a newly re-mastered and expanded edition of the classic 1972 album by Renaissance, "Prologue". Re-mastered from the original Sovereign Records master tapes and adds the rare single version of 'Spare Some Love' as a bonus track (appearing on CD for the very first time). The booklet features a new essay and exclusive interviews with Annie Haslam and Terry Sullivan and fully restores the original album artwork.

Release Date 28th September 2018
ECLEC2644



GREENSLADE

'GREENSLADE' (REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- Esoteric Recordings is proud to announce the release of a newly re-mastered and expanded 2 CD edition of the classic self-titled debut album by Greenslade.
- Includes a bonus CD of recordings made for BBC Radio One between January and April 1973, offering a glimpse of the excellence of the band in a live environment and released for the very first time. Newly re-mastered from the original master tapes and features an illustrated booklet with many rare cuttings and includes an essay by Malcolm Dome and exclusive interviews with Dave Greenslade and Dave Lawson.

Release Date 28th September 2018
PECLEC22645

TANGERINE DREAM

'THE PINK YEARS ALBUMS 1970-1973' (4CD REMASTERED CLAMSHELL BOX SET)

- Esoteric Recordings' Reactive label is pleased to announce the release of a newly re-mastered 4 CD clamshell boxed set which gathers together the first four legendary albums by Tangerine Dream, originally released on the Ohr label in Germany between 1970 and 1973, known by fans as "The Pink Years" albums. Features "Electronic Meditation", "Alpha Centauri", "Zeit" and "Atem" packaged in replica card sleeves and also includes a poster.

Release Date 28th September 2018
EREACD41037

GRYPHON

'RAINDANCES: THE TRANSATLANTIC RECORD-INGS 1973-1975' (2CD REMASTERED EDITION)'

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the release of "Raindances", a 2 CD anthology featuring every track from the four albums released by Gryphon on the Transatlantic label between 1973 and 1975. "Raindances" gathers together all the material from Gryphon's four albums recorded for Transatlantic Records and has been newly re-mastered from the original master tapes. This anthology features an illustrated booklet with an essay by Malcolm Dome and includes exclusive interviews with Richard Harvey, Brian Gulland, Graeme Taylor and Dave Oberle.

Release Date 24th August 2018
ECLEC22639

HUDSON FORD

'DAYLIGHT' (REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)'

- Esoteric Recordings are pleased to announce the official CD debut release of the 1977 album "Daylight" by Hudson-Ford. Previously unreleased officially on CD, "Daylight" has now been re-mastered from the CBS master tapes and includes four bonus tracks previously unreleased on CD, drawn from singles released in 1976 and 1977. This edition of "Daylight" restores the original album artwork and features an essay by Malcolm Dome and exclusive interviews with Richard Hudson and John Ford.

Release Date 24th August 2018
ECLEC2640

Esoteric Recordings Remastering and Expanding the Classics

ESOTERIC RECORDINGS CHERRY RED RECORDS
www.esotericrecordings.com

Future Vision: BirdPen's Mike Bird and Dave Pen.

BIRDPEN EXPLORE THE DARK SIDE OF THE TUNE ON LATEST

Archive side project *meddle* with Pink Floyd vibes on their fifth studio album.

BirdPen take inspiration from psychedelia and dystopian sci-fi literature for their latest release, *There's Something Wrong With Everything*, out independently on October 12.

"The idea is how modern times are frighteningly like the future we had imagined in the past," explains Archive's Dave Pen, who forms one half of the duo with Mike Bird. "Years ago, you'd see images of people sat around television sets but now TV is completely controlling people. The song *The End Is On TV* is about how if the end of the world happened, people would be watching it on TV and that was a key theme."

Musically, it moves away from the modern electronics of the pair's former albums and towards a more guitar-based sound, enhanced by the equipment they had access to.

"We recorded it at Hirondelle [a studio co-owned by Archive] and it's got a beautiful analogue desk so we put everything into that, with the natural valves and compressors," says Pen. "I think that inspired us a bit. *Easy Life* was written the day after we went to the Pink Floyd: Their Mortal Remains exhibition. I've loved Floyd since I was 10 years old and then seeing that, I felt so inspired, so that played a little part in it as well."

BirdPen will tour the album this autumn with a five-piece live band. The dates include shows in London and Southampton in October, with more to be announced. For the full list of upcoming gigs, visit www.birdpen.com. **NRS**

INTRO extras

NATIONAL ALBUM DAY ANNOUNCED

The magic of the long-player is celebrated on the first National Album Day on October 13. Prog fans are being encouraged to play their favourite album at 3.33pm in tribute. The inaugural event coincides with the 70th anniversary of the album and will be supported with a series of special events around the UK, including a live rendition of *Everyone Is Everybody Else* by John Lees' Barclay James Harvest at London's Islington Assembly Hall. For more, see nationalalbumday.co.uk.

The Waiting Game: Phideaux Xavier

PHIDEAUX XAVIER'S FIERY NEW RELEASE

US TV director and composer announces the finale to his "eco terror tale" trilogy.

Phideaux Xavier admits *Infernal*, out on September 9 via Bloodfish, has become the *Chinese Democracy* of prog. It's six years late – but he argues that the delay, in part caused by his day job in TV, has made it a much better contender as the record that completes his "eco terror tale" trilogy after *Doomsday Afternoon* (2007) and *The Great Leap* (2006). "Having those six years allowed me to think about the album in a deeper way, go further into what I wanted to do and refine it," he tells *Prog*.

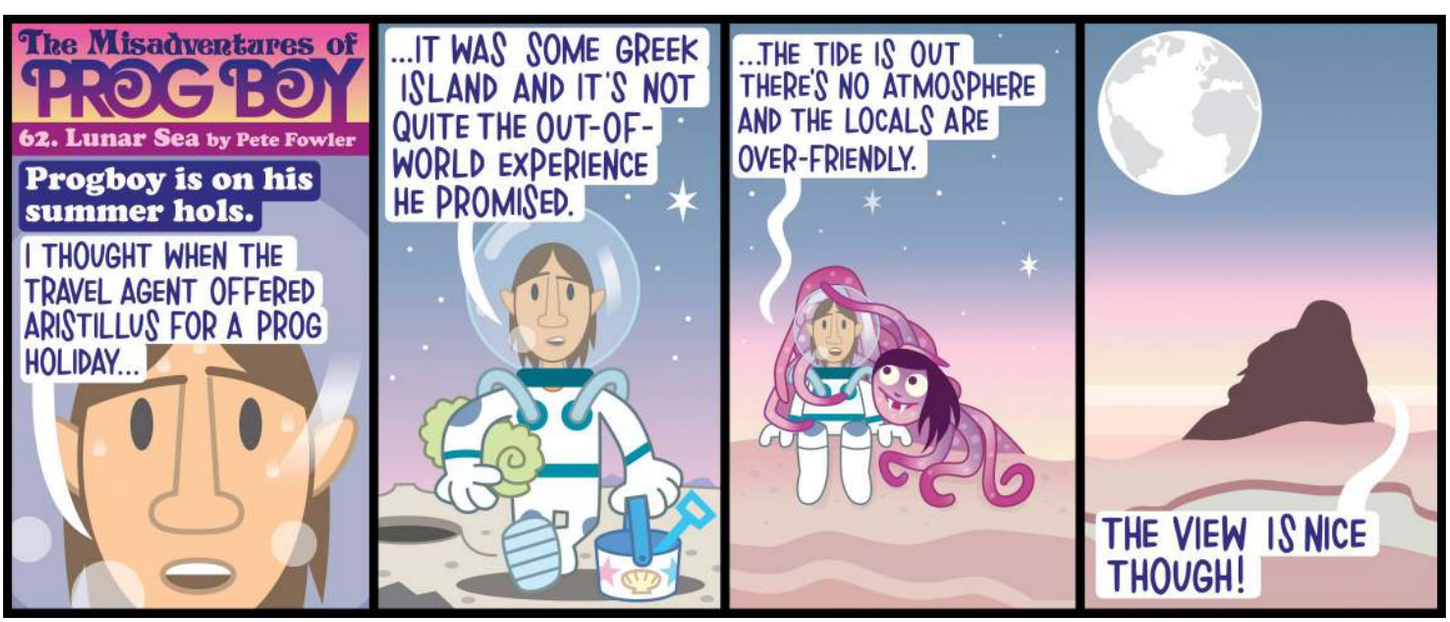
Noting that the theme is "way more in focus" than it was in 2012, the Ayreon guest vocalist and director of US soap opera *General Hospital* adds, "I rewrote portions and I got back band members to re-record sections. What people should know is we'd also record other music. I actually have five albums I'm working on. I'm a bit of a music hoarder. I'm going to get serious help!"

The longevity of *Doomsday Afternoon* gave him cause to re-examine it, offering the chance to make sure *Infernal* was a fitting conclusion, while not being just a copy.

"I could have written any old thing and said, 'This is the third part.' It took me a while to understand what it would be," he reveals.

Xavier promises "a ray of hope" at the story's end, although one earlier version did contain an "expected problem solved" conclusion. He adds, "Because there's more focus on the subject, I got clearer information on what I was trying to say."

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



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FAD GADGETS

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

KNOPS

This column normally presents you with devices that produce some kind of noise, but in a rare break with tradition here's one that reduces it. Knops is billed as

an "analogue adjustable hearing solution", which in normal language means a pair of earplugs with a volume control. If the gig you're attending is painfully shrill, just rotate the rings on the earplugs to block out more of the sound. If the band segues into an acoustic number, simply rotate it the other way. "Adaptable to every situation," says the blurb, although no mention is made of nuclear war.
www.knops.co

STAR SHEPHERD

When I was a boy, my grandparents owned a Casio 403 keyboard. Whenever I visited, they would haul this magnificent piece of early 80s engineering out of the cupboard, and I would entertain them with tinny

renditions of *King Of The Road* or *You Are The Sunshine Of My Life*. Dutch producer Legowelt has soiled those cherished memories by rewiring the 403 to some old guitar pedals and an AM radio to create this monster. Legowelt describes it as "some sentient synthesiser being". My grandparents, rest their souls, would find its sonic belches rather alarming.
www.legowelt.org

MERCURY MODULAR GUITAR

Travelling musicians will be aware of those nervous moments spent in the baggage reclaim area of international

airports, waiting patiently for a prized Rickenbacker or Stratocaster to emerge onto the carousel, only to find that it's been broken into several pieces by careless baggage handlers. Designer Ian Reddick has the answer: a modular guitar that can be taken apart and reassembled at your destination, no tools required. It's very clever, very beautiful, and very expensive.
www.reddickdesign.com

RICK WAKEMAN'S CAPED CRUSADES

TAPE SONG

Never mind the DeLorean, it's Rick's vintage Jaguar that's made him nostalgic about the cassette.

A few years ago, I bought a 30-year-old convertible Jag and it had the original radio cassette player built in. I remember thinking, 'How quaint'. It remained untouched right up until a few weeks ago when I decided to give the car a run out to the The Old Granary Studios where I've been doing some recording.

Coincidentally, a few days earlier I was sorting out some old boxes and came across hundreds of cassette tapes. Again I thought, 'How quaint'. For fun I took a couple of them with me in the Jag to see if the old cassette player worked and *Led Zeppelin II* was duly inserted. To be honest, I never expected to see it again but not only did the cassette player work but the sound was fabulous. I took the long route to the studio and played both sides (and, yes, I remembered to turn it over). Then it was the turn of *In The Court Of The Crimson King*. I arrived at the studio with a big grin on my face and couldn't wait for the return journey so I could do it all over again!

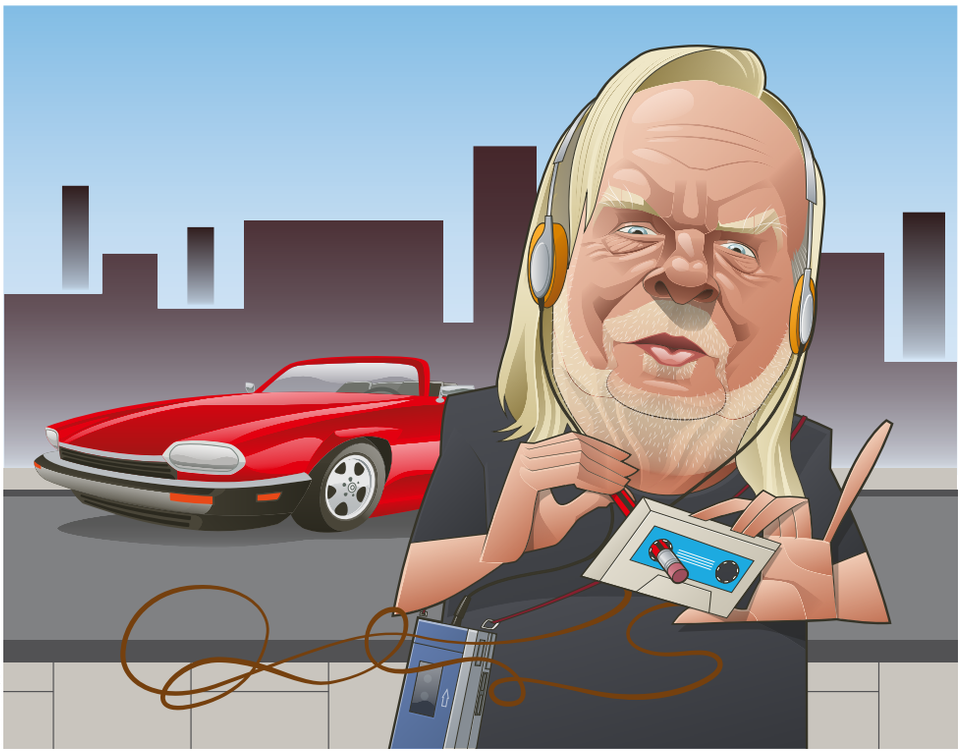
> **"I inserted *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and was in second heaven."**

By the time I got home, I was completely besotted with all things appertaining to the long lamented cassette so I set about searching for my Sony Walkman. I eventually found it the following morning; thank heavens I'm a hoarder. With new batteries inserted and headphones plugged in, I made a cup of tea, sat down and inserted *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. I was in heaven yet again.

We've rediscovered vinyl and music lovers of all ages are revelling in it so surely it's the cassette's turn? It's fantastic: great sound, simple to operate, and on the Walkman you can actually see the tape going round. How cool is that?

It set me wondering what else I had lying around in old boxes and so far I have found a 'brick phone' complete with charger, a Trimphone, three teddies (not that I can remember wearing them), a letter from Prince Charles, an unused packet of Durex and some 8-track cartridges. All I need now is an 8-track player to try them out on. The rarest finds were some quadraphonic albums and a couple of quadraphonic 8-tracks. I'm guessing there's little chance of ever hearing them but they're great fun to have.

I now spend a lot of time in the Jag listening to cassettes and am scouring eBay for a nice vintage cassette player for my home. It's time to go back to the future, I think.



KEVIN FEBRUARY

SPLASHGIRL

Self-described 'drone jazz'-playing trio carve out a post-rock, prog-leaning niche.

"WE'VE BEEN PLAYING together more than half our lives," says bassist Jo Berger Myhre, talking about keyboardist Andreas Løwe and drummer Andreas Knudsrød, who together make up Norwegian trio Splashgirl. "We met each other in 2000 where we attended a music academy in south-west Oslo. We began playing together even before we formed the trio in 2003."

Hovering somewhere between jazz, electronica, and haunting post-rock landscapes, Splashgirl have distinguished themselves as one the most inventive groups to have emerged from the already abundant and fertile Norwegian music scene. Their latest, sixth album *Sixth Sense* continues their use of dramatic themes, first-take synth solos and the bracing processed sounds shadowing what is essentially acoustic music at its core.

"We use a lot of tricks from jazz, like we improvise a lot," says Myhre, "but we are very conscious about sound and how our instruments can be treated to expand beyond their normal range."

Helping them achieve such arresting results is Seattle-based producer Randall Dunn, known for his work with Six Organs Of Admittance, Sunn O))) and Anna von Hausswolff, among others. "We got in touch with him after releasing *Pressure*, our third album, in 2011," says Myhre. "That record had been inspired partly by me listening to albums by Earth, which Randall produced. We trust his aesthetics and perspectives. Sometimes musicians don't want to give up control over the music but it's interesting when you expose it to others and let them influence it. That was very much a conscious choice for us."

The basic tracks for *Sixth Sense* were actually completed after the formal recording of their fifth album, *Hibernation*, had finished in 2016. "We had the studio booked and so we used it to record some ideas," explains Myhre. "We then forgot about them and last winter I was clearing some hard drives in our studio and rediscovered them and thought we had to do something with them.

"So, we used that rough material, decomposed and recomposed it. I think that the dialogue between the intimate and the larger, open sound was something we were really trying to achieve so listeners could experience that contrast as much as possible. We are keen to get a really three-dimensional sound. The title of the record came pretty early in the process and it felt natural to use it because obviously it's the sixth album we've made and it's based on intuition and improvisation and our shared history of playing together for so long."

Myhre admits they don't get to play live as much as they'd like to because of projects outside of the band, but he's especially pleased the group will be appearing in the UK in November. And the origin of that unusual, cryptic band name? "It was a joke name before we began releasing records. We started playing concerts and just kept it," he laughs. "We have discussed changing it a few times because it's really, really silly and doesn't make any sense, but now we're stuck with it." **SS**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Jo Berger Myhre *(double bass, bass),* **Andreas Løwe** *(keyboards),* **Andreas Knudsrød** *(drums, percussion, drum machines)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Jazzy flourishes merge with spacey drones, thunderous drums and cinematic sound design

CURRENT RELEASE

Sixth Sense is out now via Hubro

WEBSITE

www.splashgirlband.com

"We are very conscious about sound and how our instruments can be treated to expand beyond their normal range."

Making A Splash: Norway's new prog exports.

SUPPER'S READY! HOW TO DINE IN 7/4 TIME

YOUR PROG CHEF:
CLIVE NOLAN, ARENA, PENDRAGON

On the menu: Prawn Hearts (Gambas a la Plancha)

ANDY SEARS

"When I was at university and renting a flat, I had to learn to cook or I'd be surviving on beans on toast for the duration. I teamed up with a flatmate and we learnt to cook together. It became a very enjoyable evening ritual and we became more adventurous as time went on. Years later I found cooking a very good therapy for all the music I was doing – the more complex the preparation of a meal, the longer I could be out of the studio! 'A la plancha' is Spanish, meaning 'grilled on a metal plate' and is traditionally cooked on a round, flat metal surface. Since I don't have that, I use a large paella dish."

Ingredients (serves 6)

2kg uncooked prawns, 3 tbsp olive oil, 250g unsalted butter, 4 lemons (juice only), fresh parsley, thyme and rosemary (chopped), 2 large garlic bulbs (finely chopped), white wine, pimento powder or paprika, salt and pepper, 2 baguettes (sliced).

Preparation

"Once all the ingredients are prepared, heat up your surface or dish, add the oil, and we're ready to (prog) rock! Throw the prawns onto the surface and spread them out, turning them constantly. This is a feel thing, time-wise. You will watch them gradually turn from grey to pink. As they cook, add all the garlic and two-thirds of the lemon juice. Sprinkle pimento or paprika to taste – I like to take it *close to the edge*!

"Slosh in about half a bottle of wine and build the prawns into a pile like a volcano, adding the thyme and rosemary. Cook for a minute or two, then spread out again. Add more wine if it feels right. When the prawns are cooked, the shells should brown slightly. Put the prawns in a bowl with two-thirds of the butter. Return to the pan and mix with all the juices, the rest of the lemon, and more wine if needed. Decant into a bowl, top with parsley and serve with the sliced bread and remaining butter.

"This dish is something a good friend showed me a few years ago. (Thank you Dominique Bordas!) Make sure you have a pile of serviettes as it gets messy, but generally *it's a kind of magic* with no *drama*!" **JK**

MY PROG HERO
Inspiring the wider music world...

No *Overreaction*: Voivod are a big inspiration for Aaron Aedy (inset).

AARON AEDY:DANNY PAYNE

AARON AEDY

Paradise Lost's rhythm guitarist takes *one second* to recount his love for **Voivod**.

"The very first rock album I ever got was Rush's *A Farewell To Kings* in 1982 and it's still one of my top five records of all time. I'm a massive Rush fan, but Voivod were the definition of progressive metal for me in the late 80s.

I was 17 and into thrash when *Killing Technology* came out and they were doing something new. Every single song is great and the flow of the album is really good. I heard their music through going to rock nightclubs and they stood out because they were very unique in their approach to riffs and song structure. Their guitarist Piggy was quite unlike anybody else and more like a prog player with his bizarre use of chords and time changes. I was quite upset when he died in 2005 because he was an inspiration for me.

By the time of *Dimension Hatröss*, I was quite precious about Voivod. In your head you build up this idea of what the new album's going to be and this wasn't quite there but I still really like it, especially side one. After that, they completely changed. Paradise Lost started in '89, which is when they did *Nothingface*, which was quite light, whereas we were doing a lot of heavy stuff. So, we parted ways until about 2011. It was Greg [Mackintosh, Paradise Lost's lead guitarist] who told me about their live album *Warriors Of Ice*. I bought it and I was like, 'God, that sounds ace!' Then they released *Target Earth* in 2013 and I fell back in love with them.

I've seen them live a few times now. The first time was in 1993. We'd just finished recording *Icon* and we got taken out to see Voivod at the Marquee in London. It was ace and they played loads of songs I loved, but I haven't actually met any of the band yet.

I'm actually finding a lot of new music at the moment, which is very exciting. God Is An Astronaut have been one of my favourite bands for years and my wife is slowly getting me into more and more old prog stuff like Camel. It wasn't until long after we were married that I realised she was into prog!" **NRS**

"I was quite upset when Piggy died. He was an inspiration for me."

The remastered edition of Believe In Nothing is out now via Nuclear Blast. Paradise Lost are now on tour, for the dates, visit www.paradiselost.co.uk.

PROG IN BRIEF

TINA KORHONEN

Geoff Downes and Chris Braide will make their live debut as **DBA** at Trading Boundaries in Sussex on September 28. Roger Dean's original painting for the *Skyscraper Souls* cover will also be on display at the *Prog*-sponsored show.

Steve Hackett (left) releases two CD collections this autumn. InsideOut issue *Broken Skies – Outspread Wings (1984-2006)* on October 5 and his collaboration with Djabe, *Life Is A Journey – The Budapest Live Tapes*, is out the week before via Esoteric.

EXPLORING BIRDSONG

Detailed, diverse and devilishly catchy, this is piano-fuelled prog with a twist.

WHEN EXPLORING BIRDSONG opened for Anneke van Giersbergen's Vuur in Manchester in February, an eerie silence fell upon the venue as the final notes of each song faded out. For a moment, it felt like they were going down like a lead balloon, then it became clear why the venue was so quiet. The crowd, there for a night of burly music, were spellbound by a left-field support act that had caught them completely by surprise. Comprising the Kate Bush-meets-Genesis vocals and piano work of Lynsey Ward, the gritty bass tones and counterpoint keyboards of Jonny Knight — two instruments he often plays at the same time — and the brazen yet intelligent drumming of Matt Harrison, their instrumentation isn't typical of a band who are quick to cite TesseracT, Leprous and Caligula's Horse as influences.

"Our lack of guitars is something that's been brought up before," says Harrison, "but we like to surprise people."

Knight, who's spent much of his musical life playing in pop bands, adds, "We're trying for a really unique sound and vibe. We've loved getting around the technicalities of not having a guitar and still making it sound big and heavy."

There's a great deal of familiarity in their musical vocabulary, but their timbre is more unusual as there are crackles of metallic thunder and djent breakdowns. Debut single *The Baptism* thrashes and rattles like Mastodon halfway between *Leviathan* and *Blood Mountain*, except it's pianos and not guitars that come roaring through. Their attack is intertwined with intricate and imaginative interludes, velvety vocals and massive choruses that complement their individual and collective voices. The Liverpool band dare to think outside the box and deviate from the heavy acts where much of their inspiration comes from.

"When Matt and I first started writing together [before Jonny had joined the band] there was only ever a piano and a drum kit in the room," reflects their Tamworth-born vocalist. "It wasn't a calculated move to not have a guitarist, it was just that I liked what Matt played and Matt liked what I played."

"We happened to sit on those instruments and thought they sounded cool," Harrison returns. "It just became a thing where we'd play guitar riffs on piano and loved how it sounded. We're all big prog metal fans and even though a lot of our music is derived from those bands, we want to do something different with that rather than recreate what they're doing."

Exploring Birdsong have given the world a taste of their inventive sound with their first two singles. Where the aforementioned *The Baptism* rolls with off-kilter piano punches and bold bass lines which thrive in moments of space, *The Downpour* is softer and more pained, vulnerable and chilling. Both are treasure troves of infectious melodies and flirt with an abundance of flavours. Here, prog metal, chamber music and glistening pop music embrace and lock together with an almost tangible magic, ready to silence plenty more crowds yet. **POW**

"We're trying for a really unique sound and vibe."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Lynsey Ward *(piano, vocals)*, **Jonny Knight** *(bass, keyboard, backing vocals)*, **Matt Harrison** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

If Beatrix Players were possessed by the devil or Kate Bush got really into Mastodon...

CURRENT RELEASE

The Downpour is available now and is self-released

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/ExploringBirdsong

Exploring Birdsong, L-R: Jonny Knight, Lynsey Ward, Matt Harrison.

THEE HYPNOTICS

COME DOWN HEAVY

(SITUATION TWO, 1990)

There's a story that, shortly after the release of this album, Thee Hypnotics had a meeting with a major American manager, who was very keen to represent them. He had just one immoveable stipulation: that a certain member of the band had to give up his passion for heroin. That person refused point blank, and so ended the High Wycombe band's best chance of making a significant global impact.

True or not, what this tale does highlight is the way that Thee Hypnotics never conformed. After starting in 1985, they were quickly locked with Gaye Bykers On Acid and Crazyhead as part of a new, grebo-inspired, psychedelic explosion in the UK. They were also seen as garage rock, punks and even a precursor for what happened in Seattle during the early 90s. All of which was accurate, but in an inaccurate manner.

Thee Hypnotics proved on this debut studio album (it was preceded in 1989 by the live *Liv'er Than God!*) that they were attracting influences from different corners of the musical universe. *Unearthed* has all the hallmarks of Pink Floyd during the *Obscured By Clouds*-era, with some deftly disturbing guitar plunges from Ray Hanson. *Release The Feeling* sees them channelling Quicksilver Messenger Service and Jefferson Airplane in a frenzied assault that's both edgy yet vulnerable, with vocalist James 'Jim' Jones proving he has something of Jim Morrison about his manner. And *Resurrection Joe* has a bluesy platform, from which the band launch into an apocalyptic, elliptical distorted epic that draws from Syd Barrett, The Beatles and krautrock. This is inventive and unsettling.

Sonic Lament is a two-minute instrumental that could easily have fitted on an early Hawkwind album, such is its orchestral eeriness. And *Revolution Stone* is undoubtedly one of the great pieces of music from the start of the 90s. It's here the band's brilliance swings into focus. This begins with a lazy piano-led refrain that's bright and fresh, and slowly it morphs into something far more sinister. The band open up, allowing all manner of artistic styles – from jazz to Latin – to impose themselves on a multi-layered exercise that gives all four members – including drummer Phil Smith and bassist Will Pepper – ample room in which to explore their own virtuosity, without ever losing sight of the overall picture. It's stunningly progressive and even now sounds avant garde.

Come Down Heavy stands as a remarkable testimony to a uniquely gifted and unfathomable band. Even now, nearly three decades on, it's fascinatingly impossible to define.

MALCOLM DOME

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Marching Men: Go March, L-R: Antoni Foscez, Philipp Weies and Hans De Prins.

ROB WALBERS

GO MARCH

They've been described as Mogwai meets Kraftwerk, but don't call this Belgium trio krautrock, says Philipp Weies...

The most exciting music often emerges by accident and Antwerp's Go March freely admit that's exactly how they began. It was back in 2011 when transplanted German guitarist Philipp Weies began jamming with drummer Antoni Foscez. A year later, the pair had roped in keyboard player Hans De Prins and realised they were onto something special.

"We didn't have a direction so the songs just emerged either from mistakes or coincidences," says Weies. "We'd jam everything from post-punk to these huge, almost techno-esque tracks. We wanted to avoid clichés and I didn't want the guitar to sound like a real guitar, but to be as minimal as possible."

This abstract approach is apparent on *Chop Chop*, taken from their second album *II*, which is out in September. The nine-minute instrumental builds on controlled repetition until it explodes into an electronic frenzy, placing them on a similar page to 65daysofstatic and Nordic Giants. Occasionally they dabble in more conventional post-rock rhythms too (see *Morris More*), and then there's *Meristem*, packed with Tangerine Dream-isms and a nod to Jean-Michel Jarre's *Oxygene Part IV*.

"Tangerine Dream are killer. I love them and they're obviously a huge influence," Weies admits when asked about Go March's inspiration. "Neu! are as well, but we didn't want to be a krautrock band. There are influences, of course, because we've been listening to this kind of music over the years, but we wanted to have more of a modern, electronic sound."

Although *II* builds on the more simplistic approach of the band's 2015 self-titled debut, it's surprising to learn that the trio began working on it a week before *Go March* came out.

"We went into a nearby studio for five days and jammed," says the guitarist. "A lot of the things we came up with landed on that second album. Soundwise, we were already a step further than the first album. I think what we did really refined the different branches of our music and I think we made a good record, so what we need to do now is get people dancing."

Go March tour Europe later this year. Don't forget your dancing shoes! **NRS**

See www.gomarch.com.

"We didn't want to be a krautrock band, but there are influences."

PROG IN BRIEF

Dee Palmer (formerly known as David Palmer) is set to release her long-awaited album of original songs called *Through Darkened Glass*. Palmer was an arranger and later keyboard player with Jethro Tull from 1968 until 1980.

Blackfield (left) release their 'best of' compilation on September 28. *Open Mind* is out through KScope and spans all five of the duo's studio albums, including last year's *V*. The 15-track release has been curated by Steven Wilson and Aviv Geffen themselves.

"I didn't actually know much about instrumental music..." Coldbones are carving their own niche.

COLDBONES

Instrumental post-rock that throws in a few curveballs.

COLDBONES ARE A cut above the majority of the post-rock rabble, incorporating technical and progressive elements into the well-trodden ground of instrumental post-rock.

When asked about influences, bassist Nick Suchak shrugs. "I think a lot of people expect us to have a lot of instrumental influences, but I didn't actually know about instrumental music until I joined the band, or until the guys came to me with the music," he explains. "I think it's the same for them: they just wanted to write music and were instrumental because none of them could sing, and from that we discovered this whole world of instrumental bands. So the influences that have grown on us would be bands like Russian Circles, Mogwai, God Is An Astronaut, which are all quite heavy."

A key element of Coldbones' sound is their emphasis on strong hooks and dynamic breaks that keep the songs flowing. On record, at least part of this is due to their collaboration with producer Ian Sadler.

"With all our previous bands, we've always gone to him, so we've got a good relationship," says Suchak. "We definitely see him as kind of a fourth member. Not because he writes a lot, but because the kind of ideas that he brings to the production help us create something we've got in our heads that we might not be able to express just by writing something."

The band got started when guitarist Jordan Gilbert and drummer Max Parr began working together, and initially Suchak was brought in to help with their videos – like first single *Maeve*. When a shuffle in band members resulted in a vacant bass position, Suchak was asked to come out from behind the camera and get involved.

"When the band first started, I wasn't actually in the band," he explains. "Max and Jordie met up one day and were like, 'Let's just write some songs,' and that's pretty much where the first EP came from: a few practises of playing about. Max and I have been in bands for as long as I can remember – probably from our first ever band when we were about 10."

Debut album *Where It All Began* was very much Gilbert's baby, as Suchak explains: "He had quite a lot of ideas that he'd built up over time."

This meant Gilbert taking the lead on song ideas before bringing them to the rest of the band. "He wrote a lot of the album, but it wouldn't be what it is now without all of us," Suchak muses.

On newer material, this dynamic has begun to change. "We've all got full time jobs, apart from myself, as I freelance as a videographer now," Suchak says. "I've got a bit more time, and I think moving forward Jordie's had a bit less time to write stuff, so I've kind of taken that on board. Same as the last album, it takes one riff to then get everyone bringing ideas and creating stuff from it. It's definitely a team effort, not a single-man writing process." **AL**

"It's definitely a team effort, not a single-man writing process."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Jordan Gilbert *(guitar)*, **Max Parr** *(drums)*, **Nick Suchak** *(bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Dramatic, hook-heavy post-rock

CURRENT RELEASE

Where It All Began is out now via Crooked Noise

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/coldbonesuk

NOWT AS QUEER AS FOLK

A *Prog* reader wonders if a dalliance with folk has changed prog's genetic coding.

After enjoying the contents of *Prog* 88, including the familiar features and interviews, with Rosanna pouting out from the IO Earth feature and good old Rog having a dig, the question suddenly struck me: is folk the new prog?

Consider the evidence. With Paul Sexton's progressive folk column ('there's nowt so prog as folk') now a semi-regular feature, this issue also contained a full column Fairport Convention album review, a John Renbourn album review (where his guitar skills, albeit in a different field, were mentioned up there with Page, Beck and Clapton), a review of Maddy Prior's album with Giles Lewin and Hannah James (check out Hannah's JigDoll work – well prog) and Ashley Hutchings featuring (not for the first time) in a little snippet. It also prompted a few thoughts which without having to dig too deeply, reveal prog and folk to be strange bedfellows.

Both genres at their most exciting have bands who sit outside the mainstream, existing on the edge. Compare Emerson, Lake & Palmer's groundbreaking experimentation to that of folk trio Lau, where Martin Green creates very un-folk soundscapes on the sort of electronic contraption (incidentally named Morag) that Keith Emerson used to stab knives into. On the subject of instrumental virtuosity, for prog's Wakeman and Gilmour, simply substitute Richard Thompson or Jim Moray.

While you'll find our beloved Marillion writing songs about death and water – try finding a folk song that's not about death – you'll have folk icon Jon Boden releasing *Songs From The Floodplain* and *Afterglow* which explore very prog, post-apocalyptic and dystopian visions. Then there's current *Prog* favourites, Big Big Train whose recent work (in particular *Folklore* and *Wassail*) is strongly rooted within the realms of the folk world – and that's before going into things like *Swan Hunter* and the links with the industry in England's north-east, one farmed richly by BBC 2 Folk Award winners The Young'uns.

There are crossover musicians from the folk field such as iamthemorning live percussionist Evan Carson who also plies his trade in the folk world with The Willows and as part of Sam Kelly & The Lost Boys, plus the likes of Eliza Carthy (daughter of Martin), who challenges by changing musical direction almost as often as she changes the colour of her hair. Currently on the trail with her Wayward Band of blue-faced brigands and adding to the increasing number of links between folk and prog, how long before Outer Limits will ask, "How prog is Martin Carthy?"

What more proof do you need other than to note that South Yorkshire songstress Kate Rusby has taken to using a Moog on her most recent work. I rest my case – folk *is* the new prog.

MIKE AINSCOE

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

HAVE A CIGAR

Saluting the scene's supporting crew

Mike Moran (centre) with his Grey & Pink colleagues: come to take your money!

GREY & PINK RECORDS

Bringing Canterbury vibes to the north-west of England, here's **Mike Moran's** proggy treasure trove in Chester.

The name catches the eye instantly, and, digging deeper, it doesn't disappoint. After over 30 years in existence, business is booming for the two-storey Grey & Pink shop in Brook Street, Chester. Run by enthusiasts for enthusiasts, it's a new and second-hand record haven worth exploring.

"I've always been into my music and from the age of 15 I was playing in bands," 68-year-old founder Mike Moran tells us. "When that fizzled out in the early 80s I got a job with Chrysalis Records as a rep for the north-west, doing shops in Liverpool and Manchester selling things like Blondie, The Beat and Ultravox. It was a brilliant time."

But after 12 years, and with rep visits abandoned in favour of telephone sales, Moran was made redundant. Initially, he bought a record collection that he sold at car boot fairs. His investment continued and eventually the car was continually full of stuff. "I thought, 'I've got to do something'... then I was offered this shop."

Thirty-three years on, Moran has seen formats and fads come and go but he always stuck with vinyl. "When CDs came along, everyone got rid of vinyl. I didn't. Now it's gone crazy again."

Among the regular customers and younger buyers – "they're picking up things their parents listened to" – a few famous faces have also dropped by. "Captain Sensible comes in, he's a big prog collector and seems to have everything in the store. Deke Leonard from Man used to come in, a lovely man and a great storyteller... and we also see Mike Peters from The Alarm."

The shop name, of course, comes from Moran's favourite genre. "We had a great club in Chester called Quaintways. If you read *Melody Maker* from cover to cover in 1968, all the bands that played the Marquee on a Thursday night we got on a Monday. Jethro Tull, Keef Hartley Band, all the great progressive blues stuff... and then one day I saw Caravan. They were very special."

Grey & Pink is pretty special too, looking out for any customer's needs with the help of long-term cohorts Paul and Neil. "We cater for everyone, selling ABBA and The Carpenters, indie, punk, reggae," he says, "but I prefer the proggy stuff." **JK**

"Captain Sensible comes in, he's a big prog collector."

Find Mike and co at www.greynpinkrecords.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

Riverside (right) have announced more details about their seventh studio album. The post-apocalyptic-themed *Wasteland* is out via InsideOut on September 29 and formats will include coloured vinyl.

Gösta Berling's Saga have signed to InsideOut for the release of their fifth studio album *Et Ex*, which is out on October 12. It's the Swedish instrumentalists' first release with new guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Rasmus Booberg.

Shining are heading in a new musical direction with *Animal*, out on October 19 on Spinefarm. It's the *Blackjazz* outfit's first album without saxophone. Main man Jørgen Munkeby describes it as "more Muse than Meshuggah".

Tacoma Narrows Bridge Disaster have announced they're working on the follow-up to 2015's *Wires/Dream\Wires*, due for release in early 2019. The band recently showcased their new sound with the teaser track *Truth Escapes*.

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Official Progressive Albums Chart

the prog top 30 albums

July 2018

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1	**ROGER WATERS**	Is This The Life We Really Want? *(COLUMBIA)*
2	**TAME IMPALA**	Currents *(FICTION)*
3	**A PERFECT CIRCLE**	Eat The Elephant *(BMG)*
4	**ORB**	No Sounds Are Out Of Bounds *(COOKING VINYL)*
5	**GRATEFUL DEAD**	Anthem Of The Sun *(RHINO)*
6	**EPICA**	Vs Attack On Titan Songs *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
7	**WIRE**	Pink Flag *(PINK FLAG)*
8	**BETWEEN THE BURIED & ME**	Automata II *(SUMERIAN)*
9	**FAIRPORT CONVENTION**	What We Did On Our Saturday *(MATTY GROOVES)*
10	**YES**	The Steven Wilson Remixes *(RHINO)*
11	**WOODEN SHJIPS**	V *(THRILL JOCKEY)*
12	**WIRE**	Chairs Missing *(PINK FLAG)*
13	**BIG BIG TRAIN**	Swanhunter *(BIG BIG TRAIN)*
14	**WIRE**	154 *(PINK FLAG)*
15	**FLAMING LIPS**	Greatest Hits – Vol I *(RHINO)*
16	**JUDY DYBLE**	Earth Is Sleeping *(ACID JAZZ)*
17	**KING CRIMSON**	The Elements – 2018 tour Box *(PANEGYRIC)*
18	**MASTODON**	Emperor Of Sand *(REPRISE)*
19	**JEFF LYNNE'S ELO**	Wembley Or Bust *(RCA)*
20	**PROCOL HARUM**	Grand Hotel *(CHERRY RED/ESOTERIC)*
21	**KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD**	Gumboot Soup *(HEAVENLY)*
22	**TESSERACT**	Sonder *(KSCOPE)*
23	**PROCOL HARUM**	Exotic Birds And Fruit *(CHERRY RED/ESOTERIC)*
24	**MARILLION**	Misplaced Childhood *(PARLOPHONE)*
25	**DAVID GILMOUR**	Live At Pompeii *(COLUMBIA)*
26	**MOGWAI**	Every Country's Sun *(ROCK ACTION)*
27	**AMORPHIS**	Queen Of Time *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
28	**PROCOL HARUM**	Prodigal Stranger *(CHERRY RED/ESOTERIC)*
29	**MARILLION**	Brave *(RHINO)*
30	**STEVEN WILSON**	To The Bone *(CAROLINE)*

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

WIN! NICK MASON'S *UNATTENDED LUGGAGE* VINYL SET

For the first time in over 20 years, Nick Mason's solo albums *Nick Mason's Fictitious Sports*, *Profiles* and *White Of The Eye* will be available in both CD and vinyl three-disc boxsets, and we have one vinyl box set to give away.

Released on August 31 through Warner Music, these limited edition box sets will be available shortly before Nick tours Europe with his new band Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets. The band debuted with four intimate London shows in May.

Mason says, "These recordings hold a very special place for me in my musical life. *Fictitious Sports* developed initially from working with Mike Mantler, Carla Bley and Robert Wyatt on a couple of their projects, and benefited enormously from a whole crew of great musicians that I was introduced to by them at Grog Kill Studios in Woodstock. *Profiles* and *White Of The Eye* were an extension of working with Rick Fenn on some advertising and short documentary film soundtracks, which then developed into something more. Listening back after 30 odd years, I'm delighted they are getting the reissue treatment. I'm rather hoping that sales will be sufficient to damage the market in the original rare vinyl versions!"

For your chance to win, just answer the following question:

How is Nick Mason credited on the back cover of Pink Floyd's debut album *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*?

a) Nicholas

b) Nicky

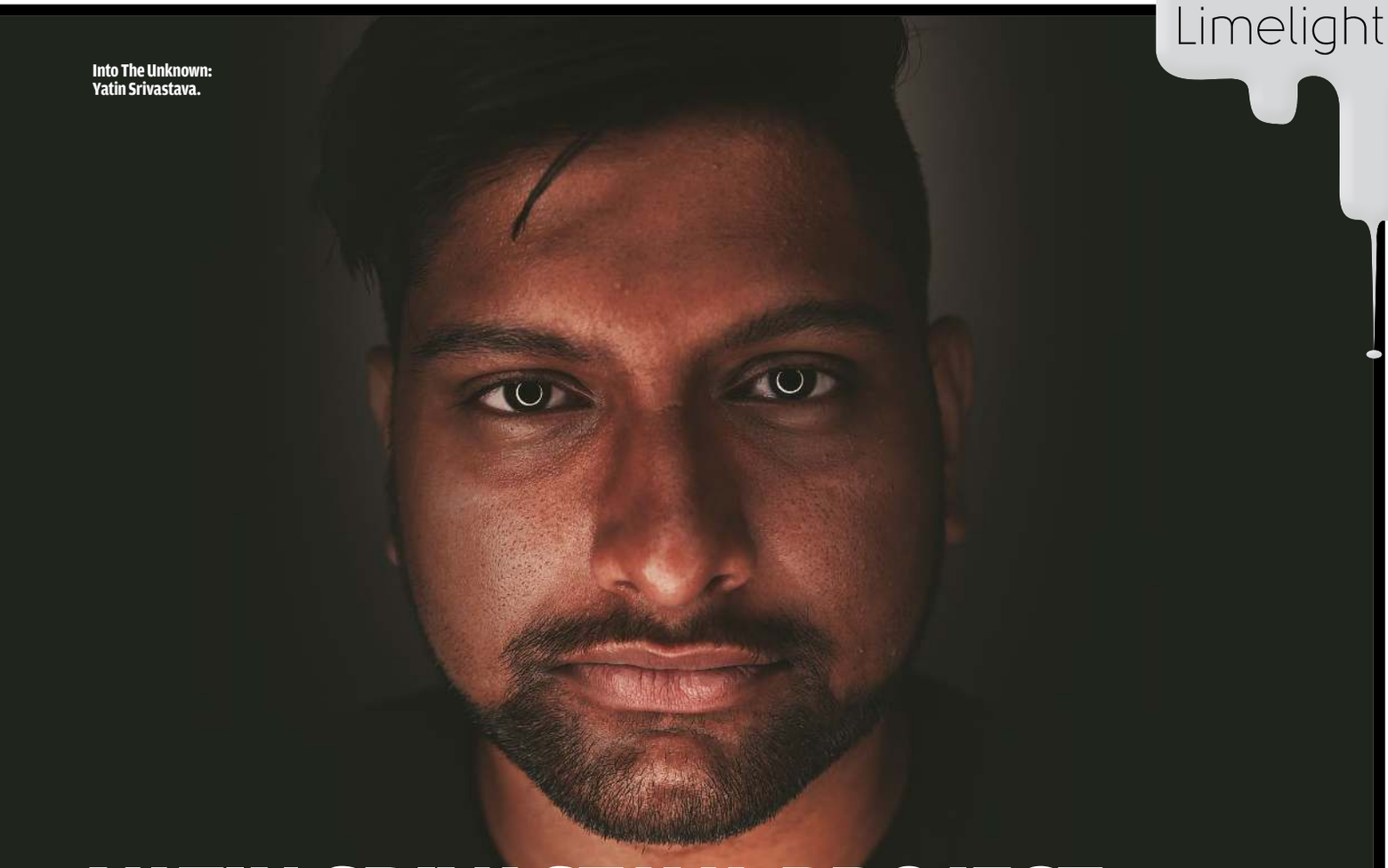
c) Nick

Email your answer to prog@futurenet.com with the subject 'Mason comp'. Pre-orders are available from https://lnk.to/NickMasonULMP.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This online comp will be open from August 23 to September 27. Postal entries can be sent to: *Prog*, Future Publishing, 1-10 Praed Mews, London W2 1QY. By entering online you agree to our competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing and carefully selected third parties. The winner will be drawn at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition.

Now our turn...

The Editor	The Art Guy	The Lone Office Lady	The Musician	The Writer	The Reader
Jerry Ewing	Russell Fairbrother	Hannah May Kilroy	Daniel Gildenlöw	Alex Burrows	Pat Kent
NOSOUND	**RIVERSIDE**	**EMMA RUTH RUNDLE**	**THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT**	**SUNN O)))**	**THE MENTULLS**
Allow Yourself	**Wasteland**	**On Dark Horses**	**Eye In The Sky**	**White 1/White 2**	**Reflections**
KSCOPE	INSIDEOUT	SARGENT HOUSE	ARISTA	SOUTHERN LORD	PROGBLUES MUSIC



Into The Unknown: Yatin Srivastava.

YATIN SRIVASTAVA PROJECT

Indian prog mastermind serves up his debut album.

IF YOU HADN'T heard, the Devin Townsend Project went on hiatus earlier this year — but don't worry, the Yatin Srivastava Project are waiting in the wings.

In a similar vein, Yatin Srivastava not only shares a parallel title to the effervescent Canadian ringleader, but he is a guitar-yielding, prolific prog-toting whiz too.

The New Delhi band's debut full-length effort, *Chaos // Despair*, juggles inspiration from the likes of tech metal, left-leaning alt-rock and classic prog to form a multi-textured aural cauldron.

The six-track record also enjoys status-boosting cameos from The Pineapple Thief mainman Bruce Soord and drummer Craig Blundell, as well as a slew of contributions from Indian musicians, giving the album a thoroughly cultured feel.

"The main part of the process I would say happened in the summer of 2015," Srivastava reflects. "That was soon after I had just finished with university and I had three months completely off. I just sat down every day and started working on all the various ideas of songs that I had in my head over the past couple of years and finalised all of them."

It seems getting the likes of Steven Wilson drummer Blundell on board wasn't too difficult for the Indian progger, whose speculative emails quickly led to sessions being secured.

"I think Steven Wilson was on tour at that time in India, and I'd just recently come back from London. I just had this inkling that maybe I should send a message and worst case scenario he doesn't reply and nothing happens," Srivastava says.

"I sent it to Craig as well because I knew he was more of a session player. But I never imagined that he would reply back. He replied next morning and said he'd love to have a listen to the songs. I sent him two options of songs, and thought it would be great if he could play on one. He heard them and he said he'd like to play on both."

The first half of *Chaos // Despair* channels a more modern sound, with the metallic *Ozone* showing off nods to the likes of Porcupine Tree and Periphery, while the later tracks — such as *Forgotten* — are more keen on melodic soundscapes.

Srivastava first picked up the guitar around 10 years ago and Delhi's culture of having schools compete against each other in battle of the bands competitions helped to hone his stagecraft.

For now, however, music continues to provide a creative outlet on the side for a man who is hurtling towards a career in law.

"I did a double major in history and political science at university, and I'm currently studying law," Srivastava says.

"Realistically speaking it's hard to sustain a career in the music industry, in any form, unless you are the big, big bands. I think me always wanting to do law lined in perfectly with that idea of me having something that can secure me financially to then eventually put the money into making more music." **CC**

"It's hard to sustain a career in the music industry, in any form, unless you are the big, big bands."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Yatin Srivastava *(writer, guitarist, producer, engineer)*, **Rishabh Sanghi** *(keyboards, synthesiser)*, **Archie Farrer** *(bass)*, **Arjun Mathur** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

The musical offspring of Devin Townsend, Porcupine Tree and Dead Letter Circus

CURRENT RELEASE

Chaos // Despair is out now and is self-released

WEBSITE

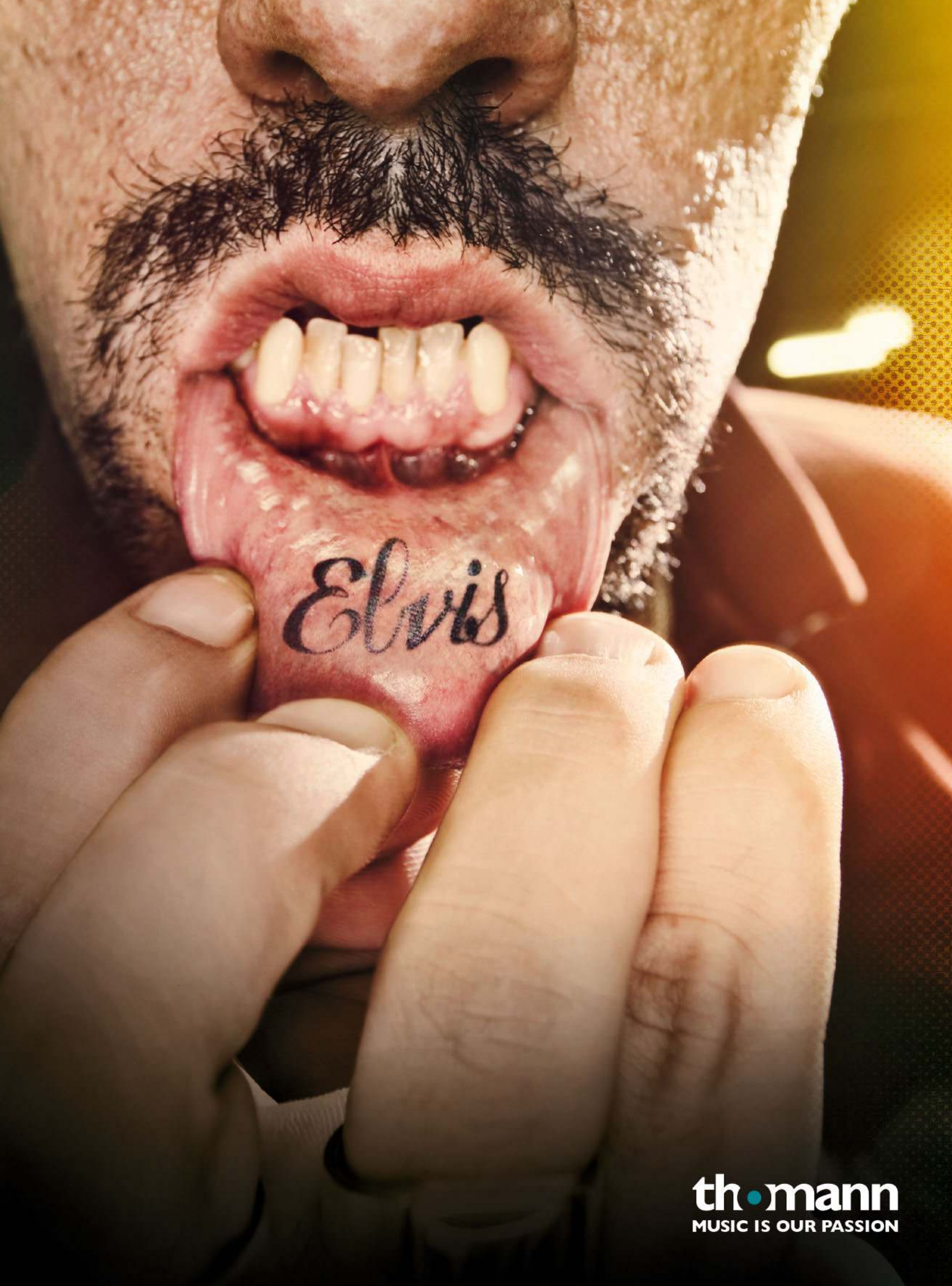
www.yatinsproject.com

DEATH 0:1 ELVIS

Probably the most useless debate in the world: Is Elvis alive?

No question. He'll still live on long after everyone who now claims he is alive has died.

It is his music that made him immortal - along with Janis, Jimi, Wolfgang Amadeus, Freddie and all the others. Many of them lost the battle against drugs, alcohol and their inner demons far too soon. But they all had vanquished death long before.



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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

My Record Collection

BILL MORRISON

With his *Yellow Submarine* graphic novel hitting the shops, it's all aboard for a fantastic voyage around the *MAD Magazine* editor and *Simpsons* artist's best-loved records.

Words: Jo Kendall **Portrait:** Stephanie Cabral

"When I was very young, in the late 60s, my older brother and I shared a bedroom and we had an AM/FM radio that sat on a unit between our beds. I tuned into AM stations that were loud, excitable and Top 40-based, like a party all the time. My brother would switch it to FM, when rock stations such as WABX were starting to pop up. I remember the contrast in the DJs — quiet, subdued, serious. The music was transitioning from jazz and classical to Black Sabbath, Cream, Iron Butterfly — long-form records that took 20 minutes to play. I remember thinking, 'They're putting on this long one to smoke a joint!'.

We grew up in Detroit, Michigan and it was a hotbed of what was happening in the 60s. We lived near Lincoln Park, where there was a mini Hollywood Bowl stage and the MC5 played there. The MC5 even went to my high school, although I didn't know until much later. They should have had a plaque up.

Before prog, I was into glam. My interest in **Todd Rundgren** came from that, with his multicoloured hair and turkey feathers sewn into his clothes. When he did his *Todd Rundgren's Utopia* album, that blew me away as I was already listening to *A Wizard, A True Star* and *Something/Anything?*. *Utopia* came out and I remember putting headphones on and lying back and loving it. It was very different, with its synthesisers and a jazz fusion element.

I already knew **Jethro Tull** and loved *Aqualung* and *Thick As A Brick*. My best friend got *A Passion Play* when it came out. I remember listening to it at his house and it grabbed me. I love the flute and the storytelling on that album, and I'm a sucker for theatrical elements in music.

"I don't think prog would exist if The Beatles hadn't done what they did."

Next I found *Eldorado* by **ELO**. The hits drew me in before I heard the deeper tracks. What attracted me was the fusion of rock and classical. I hadn't grown up with classical music, so this — and cartoons such as *Bugs Bunny* — introduced me to opera and classical. I was 12 or 13 and starting to look for something different. That was exciting.

Prog became more important for me at art school. I went to the Centre For Creative Studies in Detroit and got a whole new group of friends who were into Genesis and Yes. There was a small record shop in town but we'd go to Kmart and a chain store called Korvette that had a big record department. I haunted different places. Not everybody had everything so you'd get on your bike and roam around. It was the same with comic books. They didn't have any comic book retail shops back then so you had to go around newsstands and little mom-and-pop shops. It was inconvenient but fun — it added an element of the hunt.

The sleeve graphics would always jump out at me. I was a comics and illustration fan so the ones that really smacked me between the eyes were lavish, such as Roger Dean's stuff for **Yes**. Yes had captured my ear early. They had little breakout hits such as *Roundabout* that would show up on the AM stations. That was the way in for me: the organ, the guitar, a hybrid pop song.

With **Genesis** I remember seeing pictures of Peter Gabriel onstage in *Creem* and *Circus* magazines, but I hadn't heard the music. At art school I got *Foxtrot* and *Nursery Cryme*. My taste was maturing: glam was gone and disco was king — and I hated disco. The whole of *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* is my favourite, but I love *Supper's Ready* — I could play that over and over. There's something really enchanting about it.

I listened to **Queen** from *Sheer Heart Attack* up to the late 70s. The first two albums escaped me until art school, then I heard them via a friend. *Queen II* was pre-pop, when they weren't sure what they were going for. There's art rock, blues, glam... At the time I was getting into *The Lord Of The Rings* and other fantasy films and books. This fitted really well.

Kansas had a lot of hits on the radio but I didn't get into them until I was in my 30s. At the time I was working on *The Simpsons*, doing the art for the merchandise. I was also helping [*Simpsons* creator] Matt Groening set up Bongo Comics, which did all the *Simpsons* comics and books. Matt had a huge record collection. One building we worked in, he had a room next to his office that was all records, with one wall for Zappa alone. I was finding less music to be interested in but I started exploring Kansas, and I picked up *Song For America* and went, 'Oh wow, this is really different.' I then bought every album and for a period Kansas were my favourite band. I love a lot of *Leftoverture* but *Song For America*'s title track is wonderful: it tells such a story and gives you the visions of the sweeping plains and the Native American people. One song, *Lamplight Symphony*, still brings me to tears — it's a ghost story, a love story and it's very emotional.

My first memories of pop music in my house are around **The Beatles** because of my older siblings. I was about two years too young to be a Beatles fan, but I remember seeing them on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Then there was the US cartoon series and as I got older and into the psychedelic period, my brother had *Sgt Pepper's*... and he schooled me on the 'Paul is dead' myth. When I started to draw in junior high, I'd do portraits of The Beatles and other rock stars. I saw *Yellow Submarine* on TV in the early 70s. I loved it — it's got a great message that love conquers hate, and I love how the Blue Meanies become good at the end. There's redemption.

I don't think prog would exist if The Beatles hadn't done what they did. Their experimentation totally changed what was acceptable for a rock album. Long before my *Yellow Submarine* graphic novel, I got to do a *Simpsons* parody of *Sgt Pepper's*. It was a follow up of the album *The Simpsons Sing The Blues*, to be called 'The Simpsons' Yellow Album', but it never came out. It sat unused for years and then Fox had an animation art programme where they produced prints and it got turned into that. After that it was the basis for a couch gag.

Most comic work I've done is humour, but I have an amateur work based on prog that I never finished. On Utopia's *Ra* album they had a song called *Singring And The Glass Guitar*, a lengthy number about a quest. It's very Tolkien-esque so I set about illustrating it in comic book form. I got a few pages in and had to give it up, my first and only attempt at a prog comic. Maybe when the *MAD* phase is over, that might be my next project."

Yellow Submarine is out now via Titan Comics. See bit.ly/yellowsubmarinebook. A limited edition box set is also available.

BUNCO SQUAD
Utopia
MAD
BEATLES
MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR
The Beatles
Yellow Submarine
GENESIS
Genesis

Q&A

JUDY DYBLE

As Fairport Convention's first female singer, Judy Dyble played an important role in the band's early sound. Now a solo artist in her own right, she talks to *Prog* about her past, present and future.

Words: Mike Barnes **Portrait:** Duncan Everson

"I just keep saying yes to stuff and hope it works out. And usually it does," says Judy Dyble about her remarkable career rejuvenation which began in 2004, after a 34-year hiatus, with her *Enchanted Garden* album. In 1967 she was a founder member of Fairport Convention and was briefly in a proto version of King Crimson with Michael and Peter Giles, Robert Fripp and Ian McDonald. From 1969 until 1970 she was in Trader Horne, an acclaimed – if short-lived – duo with Jackie McAuley. Her new album *Earth Is Sleeping* includes contributions from long-time musical collaborator Alistair Murphy, Matt Malley from Counting Crows and Matt Stevens from The Fierce And The Dead.

How do you go about writing your material?
What usually happens is that someone will say, "Let's do a collaboration," and I'll say, "Okay, I'll send you some words." Sometimes they'll send me a piece of music and I'll listen to that and find a tune within it and words that will fit. I did write the music for one of these tracks, *See What Your Words*.

Your singing on the album has a great deal of presence.
It was recorded by Michael Smith at RYP Recordings and he's got a nice studio with lots of brilliant equipment. Neal Hoffmann, who wrote *Marianna*, and I recorded all the vocals in his room in north London. He's another one who really understands microphones and singing.

The harmonies on *Marianna* work really well.
It's lovely to sing with another singer. Neal Hoffmann has an amazing voice.

"I'm very fortunate that people who are so talented want to work with me."

Your voice remains amazing too. How do you keep it in shape?
When we're recording I run through the songs a couple of times, but I need to be doing it before it works properly. It's like with gigs: I keep thinking, "I must rehearse this," but I never do until I'm in the car on the way there. But because I don't get together with my band very often, we always do a run-through of everything and that always warms my voice up enough for me to sing well live. I really should do more rehearsing. I should look after my voice better, but it's really a case of opening my mouth and hoping that something comes out of it that sounds okay. It's not that I don't take my singing seriously, I'm just a bit scared of overdoing it and it just going hoarse.

Your lyrics seem to locate something magic beyond the everyday, such as on *I Found A Rainbow*.
It's there when I look for it and it also kind of hits you when you're not expecting it. Some scientists *did* trap a rainbow in a piece of glass – you can google that and see all about it. I thought, "Ah, that's really sad. What would happen if you opened it up again?" [Laughs] But yes, there's a huge amount of magic in everyday stuff.

What's the story behind *Faded Elvis*?
A friend of mine went on holiday to the Isle of Wight to what was supposed to be a two-star hotel. The entertainment in the evening was an Elvis impersonator and she said it was just dreadful. She sent me a photograph of him and I thought of this backstory, which is made up completely. I've had a beautiful video made for it by an Italian film director, Francesco Paladino, which will be put out when the album is released. It's so sad. Most of the songs I write are a bit melancholy.

The album *Summer Dancing* that you made last year with Andy Lewis sounds modern, but it also owes a lot to psychedelia. Does that remain an important era for you?
No, not really, because we didn't know it was the psychedelic era when it was happening. The album with Andy was wonderful to make. It was organised and recorded within two weeks, then Andy took it all away and added his psychedelic blibs and blobs, and different instruments. Again, I only do the vocals to these things and then people take them away and do something magnificent, and most of the joy is actually waiting for what people do with them.

Does it bother you that you're still being referred to as the ex-Fairport Convention singer?
I don't mind. I'm happier when it's put that I was the first female singer in Fairport. My contribution to Fairport was part of the beginning and without me being in it, they wouldn't have gone on to do what they did. And if I'd stayed it would have been a different band.

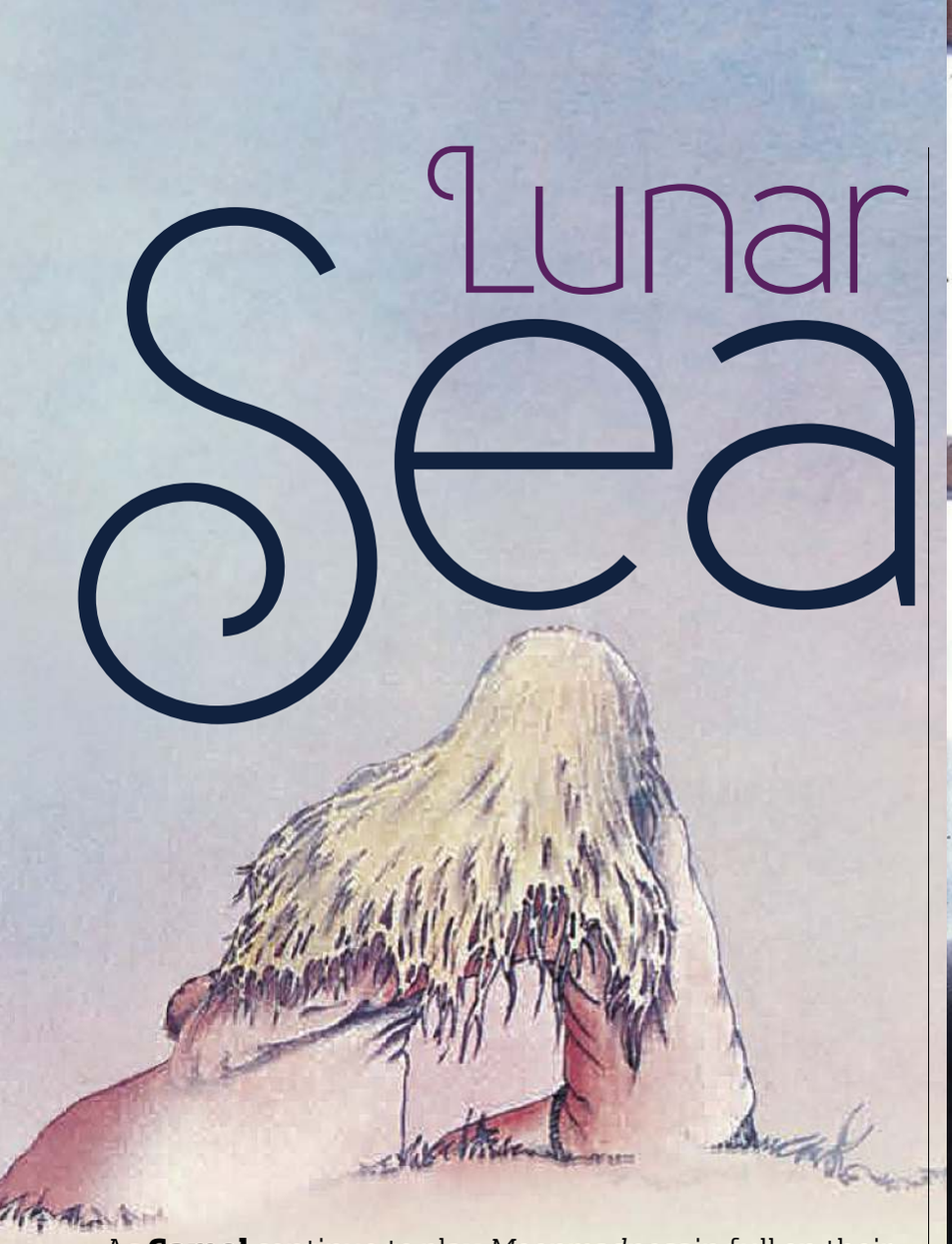
King Crimson might also have been a very different band if you'd stuck around...
It's all pie in the sky but it would be interesting to revisit some of the songs that I did with Giles, Giles And Fripp, and Ian. It would be really nice to do that again with them but it's never going to happen. I don't know who isn't talking to who these days.

You were at the King Crimson concert at Aylesbury Friars in 2016. What did you think of it?
I thought they were just magnificent and I loved the fact that they had three drummers. It was wonderful to hear those songs like *Starless*. I was entranced by the whole thing. And I'm pleased that they are forever moving forward. Yes and some of those other bands who try to do new stuff have problems in getting it across to their old audiences it seems.

Your revived musical career seems to be going from strength to strength now.
I'm very fortunate that people who are so talented want to work with me. I'm continually amazed that the musicians I have worked with have all been absolutely brilliant. I expect to work with brilliant people and I do! The most wonderful thing I've done in recent years is singing with David Longdon on the Big Big Train track *The Ivy Gate*. I'm currently working on an album with David and it's going to be huge fun, because he has a fabulous voice.

Earth Is Sleeping is out now via Acid Jazz. See www.judydyble.com for more information.

Lunar Sea



As **Camel** continue to play *Moonmadness* in full on their latest tour, guitarist **Andy Latimer** looks back at the creation of one of the all-time classic prog albums.

Words: Dom Lawson

The last time the UK had a summer as hot as this one, Camel were one of the biggest bands in the country. Riding high after the huge success of the preceding year's conceptual extravaganza *The Snow Goose*, the band formed by guitarist Andy Latimer in 1971 had passed steadily through the progressive rock ranks and were now, seemingly, on the cusp of even greater success. Their next move would eventually turn out to be their smartest of all: 42 years later, the band's fourth album is widely regarded as their finest work, not to mention their most enduringly popular.

Released in March 1976, just in time for that year's now legendarily drought-ravaged summer, *Moonmadness* was the ultimate showcase for the classic Camel line-up of Latimer, keyboard player Peter Bardens, bassist Doug Ferguson and drummer Andy Ward. Fast forward to 2018 and the current Camel line-up are out on the road again, revisiting *Moonmadness* in its entirety onstage. As a result, Latimer and his present-day comrades have spent a lot of time thinking about and dissecting the album that, for many fans, best defines the Camel sound. Thinking back to those heady post-*Snow Goose* days, Latimer admits to *Prog* that there was no clear plan to follow as the band embarked on the follow-up to their breakthrough album.

"Oh yes, we were all in a bit of a quandary about it," he chuckles. "Because of the success of *The Snow Goose*, it was a bit like, 'Oh God, what are we going to do next?' Probably because none of us were that sensible, we just said, 'We want to do something totally different!' We should've really just done the *Son Of Snow Goose*, but instead we decided to do something completely different."

MOONMADNESS COVER ARTWORK: UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP/JOHN FIELD

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Camel in 1972, L-R: Peter Bardens, Andy Ward, Andy Latimer, Doug Ferguson.

In truth, the pressure was mounting on the band to produce another hit. Camel's record label Decca had been pleasantly surprised by the huge success of *The Snow Goose*, an album they had been distinctly concerned about prior to its release.

"We were always under a lot of pressure from the management and the record company to do something they could sell," Latimer recalls. "When we actually gave the record company *The Snow Goose*, especially in America but in England too, they were quite horrified that it was one piece of music with no breaks, because how could they get it played on the radio? So we were getting pressure to do more commercial stuff and we resisted, really. We were pretty arrogant. We just thought, 'No! Sod 'em!' But they weren't *too* bad, Decca. They left us alone to do our stuff to a degree, but there was always that element of 'How are we gonna sell this?'"

Admirably resistant to the notion of repeating themselves, chief composers Latimer and Bardens began to pool their ideas for the next album. Wistfully recalling a very satisfying time for the whole band, Latimer notes the enormous rush of creative fervour Camel were enjoying at that point, buoyed by their recent success.

Doing their best to ignore pressure to conjure another chart-conquering masterpiece, Latimer and Bardens disappeared into deepest, darkest Surrey to get the compositional ball rolling. But all was not as it seemed.

ELLEN POPPINGA - K & K/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"We were writing in this place out near Dorking somewhere. It was a really nice barn, a great place to write, but it was a bit strange," Latimer recalls. "The people there were a bit strange. You wouldn't sense they were in there, they just suddenly appeared. Pete and I had these awful visions in the night where we'd wake up and think there were ghosts in the room. There was rustling and scraping at the window. It was all getting a bit funny!

"It seemed to be that every time there was a full moon it was happening. So we started thinking about the moon and the madness of the full moon, and that's how the title came about. There were some very strange things going on at that place."

Supernatural interference aside, Latimer fondly recalls what he regards as a major pinnacle in his writing partnership with Bardens. At a time when successful bands were given a decent amount of freedom to pursue their most ludicrous ideas, the duo's confidence in each other led to an almost unassailable confidence in the band as a whole. Consequently, the group itself would become the focus of the new material.

"In those days the situation was idyllic, really. We'd go off to some cottage in the wild somewhere, so it was a lot of fun," Latimer enthuses. "Pete and I, from my point of view at least, we had this great writing relationship. That's not an easy thing to find. In the past I've often tried to find somebody else like Pete and it's really difficult. It's just something that clicks, when you're a team like that.

"But back then there was a lot of talking and then eventually me and Pete came up with this idea of basing the next album on the four individuals in the band. It was lot of fun, really.

"Our producer Dave Williams, bless him, he was a lovely guy but not very tactful! We were doing the album and he said, 'So who's singing? Because none of you can sing!'"

Nights At The Circus: Camel sink some beers at a circus in Germany.

We looked at each of us and, of course, Andy Ward and Doug Ferguson were the easiest. Doug was so solid and straightforward in some ways, and Andy was definitely a free spirit! Then there was Pete and I. It's always hard writing about yourself, but after a lot of talking, I think we got the essence of what each individual was all about."

Two major decisions were made in the Camel camp as they started to piece together new music for their then untitled fourth record. Firstly, Latimer and Bardens would write one song for each member of the band, focusing on their personality, musical identity and strengths within the band. Secondly, in keeping with their desire to do something different from the instrumental sprawl of *The Snow Goose*, *Moonmadness* was to be an album with lots of vocals and vocal melodies.

"We definitely wanted to get more into singing," Latimer notes. "It was a challenge for us because none of us in the band were really great singers. We'd never felt really confident about it after making the first album [*Camel*, 1973]. Our producer Dave Williams, bless him, he was a lovely guy but not very tactful! We were doing the album and he said, 'So who's singing? Because none of you can sing!' We all felt a bit like, 'Er… what?' [Laughs] So we took a break in recording and held an audition for about 40 would-be vocalists, thinking, 'Okay, we'd better get a singer in.' All these 40 guys that thought they were great singers were *awful*, and we figured we could sing better than them anyway, so we'll do it and sod 'em, you know? But that gave us a little bit of paranoia for the future.

"When it came to *Moonmadness*, we didn't have that much confidence about any of our vocals so we had to be really inventive about it," he continues. "We'd disguise them in lots of ways, putting Leslie speaker effects on vocals and phasers and all those kinds of things, and then also not mixing them too loud. I think that gave the album a certain mood. A lot of people like the treatment we did on the vocals and we only really did it to cover them up!"

Moonmadness was recorded at London's Basing Street Studios in January and February 1976, with esteemed engineer Rhett Davies (Genesis, Brian Eno, Roxy Music) manning the controls. Armed with a batch of new material that they instinctively felt was the best possible forward step, Camel were a very focused and united unit.

Living together, playing together and dedicating every waking moment to the band, Latimer and his three friends may not have been overly confident about their collective vocal abilities, but extensive touring had honed the band's shared chemistry to a state of near-perfection — something they were eager to capture on the new album.

"Absolutely — the band at that stage were really solid," Latimer agrees. "The relationships were really good at that point. No rot had set in yet. It was later that things started to unravel, but when we were doing *Moonmadness*, everything was great. We were a band that really liked to rehearse, so we'd rehearse every day we weren't actually gigging, and we gigged a lot in those days. We were just consumed by it.

"I don't think many of us had relationships outside the band. Everybody was living together and it was very productive. We were thinking about the band all the time. It was a great time and, I suppose, it was a simpler time."

Latimer goes on to pointedly praise Rhett Davies' contribution to Camel's classic fourth album. Having engineered Genesis' *Selling England By The Pound*, the producer hardly had anything to prove at that point, but his freewheeling approach to making records clearly had a profound effect on *Moonmadness*' unique vibe.

"The whole thing was recorded very fast and I have to give credit to Rhett Davies," says Latimer. "He did a bit of engineering on *The Snow Goose* too, I think. He was a lovely man and a fantastic engineer. The sound of

BARRY PLUMMER

that album is really down to him. He was such a great guy to work with. He was great fun and encouraged us to be silly and to explore all these daft ideas. Andy Ward would be blowing a pipe into buckets of water to simulate sounds on the moon. On the song *Air Born*, Andy was smoking a joint, and in the middle section you can hear all this inhaling going on. It was all very hippie, I suppose, but very funny."

It's hard to deny that the four songs dedicated to the four members of Camel in 1976 are among the band's greatest pieces. As Andy Latimer recalls, the process of encapsulating each member of the group in musical form was hugely enjoyable. It also enabled Camel to venture into territories that they hadn't previously considered, particularly with regard to drummer Andy Ward, for whom Latimer and Bardens wrote the album's wild and dynamic instrumental closer, *Lunar Sea*.

"Let's just say that Andy, at that stage, had an excessive personality, so he was always being silly," Latimer chuckles. "He was an incredibly talented drummer. Because he'd worked with us from the beginning, he always knew what we wanted. He was incredibly inventive, very funny,

STUART WOOD

Mad Men: the classic Camel line-up (top).

Above: the 2018 band, L-R: Andy Latimer, Denis Clement, Colin Bass, Peter Jones.

but was always the quiet guy of the band, in an odd kind of way, and that's somewhat against what you might think!

"But Andy was into a lot of things, especially jazz. So when we started writing stuff, we knew that his song was going to be fairly jazzy and fairly complicated. Not jazz in the proper sense, because none of us were proper jazzers, but it was what we considered jazz, I suppose!"

Nine minutes long and, by any sane reckoning, one of the most exhilarating prog epics of all time, *Lunar Sea* exudes a euphoria that speaks volumes about the unity and shared enthusiasm that drove Camel forward in the mid-70s. As Latimer remembers, it was a piece of music that stretched the band to the edge of their abilities.

"It had some complexities in it, absolutely. We'd just been on a tour supporting Soft Machine for a week and that had made quite a big impression on Andy and I. We used to sit at the side of the stage because they had John Marshall on drums, who Andy really liked, and Allan Holdsworth on guitar. Obviously I was just thinking, 'Oh my God, what is he *doing*?' [Laughs]

"I think at that stage I thought that to be a good guitar player, you had to play a lot of notes. So I was trying to play a lot of notes on *Lunar Sea*. A couple of albums after that, I felt, 'Hang on a minute, I'm never gonna be that fast, my brain doesn't work that fast!' so I started to just be me and play melodic stuff. But that was where *Lunar Sea* came from.

"It was a lot of fun, with a lot of energy from Andy, because it wasn't easy to play as a drummer. He loved it because it was such a challenge."

For bassist Doug Ferguson, Latimer and Bardens wrote the strident and punchy *Another Night*. The most straightforward song on *Moonmadness*

by some distance, it was a direct and affectionate tribute to Camel's resident safe pair of hands.

"Doug was the organiser and was the peacemaker too, when Pete and I were going at it!" grins Latimer. "Because Doug is very solid as an individual, very organised and a bit Sergeant Major-ish, he was the one that picked up the money and drove and got us organised. We were a bit of a handful for him, if I'm honest. But he was also very solid as a bass player and he always had an amazing amount of stories. I couldn't tell you many of them because they're a bit risqué, to say the least! But he was always disappearing at night and walking the streets, doing silly things, so we came up with *Another Night*."

Significantly, today's Camel line-up are currently performing a version of *Another Night* that, while still relatively true to the original, packs more of a straight-ahead punch than the revered recorded version. As Latimer explains, the new version is an attempt to play the song as the guitarist originally intended it to sound.

"I wanted it to be heavier and more straight-ahead rock'n'roll, but when we got together with the band, Andy and Doug put this little skip beat in there, which sort of took the power away from it," he remembers. "It wasn't what I wanted but you compromise in a band. As a writer, sometimes that's a challenge because you see a picture in your head when you write something, but you respect what the rest of the band bring to the table too, so it worked out fine. We had fun doing it.

"Pete and I put in this middle section that's a little bit sideways, but mainly it's meant to be solid, simple rock'n'roll. It didn't come out like that, but that was the intention. We never did quite get it right!"

Having successfully summed up their rhythm section, Latimer and Bardens' next task was to write about themselves. For Bardens, they wrote the intricate and mischievous *Chord Change*, one of the most overtly complex songs in the Camel canon and one that Latimer feels neatly sums up his late, great friend.

"I always found Pete could be very changeable, so I thought we needed a piece with a lot of changes in it," he explains. "Writing our songs was very loose for Pete and I because it was really difficult. We just decided to do something like that, with the complexities in Pete's writing coming through.

"Although we were writing together," Latimer continues, "each one of us was stronger in different areas, if that makes sense. So the beginning part of *Chord Change* is mainly Pete, and I wrote the more melodic stuff, the guitar breaks and things, but it was still a very good joint effort."

One of the most beautifully mellow of Camel's songs, *Air Born* is a shimmering, hazy affair that almost casually sums up Latimer's famously laid-back and humble demeanour. In fact, the song was meant to portray its subject as the prog rock equivalent of a Vaughan Williams symphony: windswept, rain-bothered and English to the core.

"Looking back it was all a bit pretentious, but at that stage I wanted to be *incredibly* English because I thought that made sense to me," Latimer laughs ruefully. "So I wrote the beginning of *Air Born* and I thought, 'Okay, this is what I feel is really English!' I was imagining woods and fields and all that stuff, just trying to capture more of an English feel. We were trying to write about ourselves and that was hard, because it's difficult to look at yourself and think, 'Who am I? How do I come across to people?'"

The remaining songs on *Moonmadness* may not have fit into their neighbours' vague concept, but they all exude that same sense of a band hitting their artistic stride with great aplomb. In particular, *Song Within A Song* is a fairly safe bet for Camel's most popular track of all, its mellifluous drift a definitive snapshot of what the band were all about in 1976. Written while Latimer and Bardens were still mulling over ideas for the follow-up to *The Snow Goose*, it's a song the guitarist attributes to one of those precious moments of magic, when great ideas collide.

"It was something that Pete and I just wrote, at a time when we

> "Before we started rehearsing for this tour, I was listening to *Lunar Sea*, listening to my solo and I thought, 'I can't play that! What was I doing?'"

SECRETS OF THE MOON

Andy Latimer tells us about *Moonmadness*' unique artwork.

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP/JOHN FIELD

How did this piece become the *Moonmadness* cover?

Andy Latimer: "Our record company asked several designers to come up with an album sleeve. The instructions were that it would be called *Moonmadness* and, as it was in those days – and I can remember Pink Floyd talking about *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and it was the same thing – they just had a title and the designers came in with various ideas. The band looked at them and we all agreed that we liked this one by [John] Field. It was pretty rare that we all agreed on anything, but it was such a great cover. We didn't work directly with Field as his design was so good – why change it?"

What's going on in the artwork? What's your interpretation of it?

"Everybody has their own ideas and conclusions about it. I liked to think of it as two lovers gazing at the moon and madly in love. *Moonmadness* has a certain feeling of intimacy, which was a lot to do with Rhett Davies' sound. Somehow Field captured that in the cover, which is probably why all four of us loved it immediately."

Is it your favourite Camel album cover? And if not, which one is?

"It's really difficult to say which is my favourite as each holds a different space of time for Camel. For our first album we were just chuffed to get an album out! We loved the softness of the camel blended with the strong rock image of a train – and I like trains anyway! *Nude* was really good too, and *Dust And Dreams*. Each album contains a lot of emotions and the cover should capture the same well of feeling." **DL**

worked really well together," Latimer states. "When he had a great idea I'd just let him go with it, like, 'Go on, more of that! Keep that bit! No, not that bit!' [laughs] and then if I'd got the bit between my teeth, he'd let me go. So it was very much a give and take sort of relationship.

"That's how *Song Within A Song* came together. We jointly wrote it, so it was a mixture of both our writing skills, so that was great. It wasn't about anybody so it's just another song, really."

Similarly, the album's gentlest moment, *Spirit Of The Water*, was simply a piece of music that Peter Bardens had written and that Latimer loved so much, he demanded that it was included on *Moonmadness*.

"The only thing I contributed to that was the title. I'd just read a book by Henry Williamson called *Salar The Salmon* and there was a line in it, something about 'the spirit of the water'. I told Pete and said it would make a good title. So he went away and wrote this song and it was fantastic – he didn't need to change anything. I suggested we put recorders in between the verses, but that was it.

"Also, Pete wanted to sing it. His voice was a bit like Mick Jagger's really, not really very proggy, so we thought, 'Let's stick his voice through a Leslie,' which you hoped would disguise the voice, and in the end the effect was like the sound of a river. It was very atmospheric and redolent of water and gave something extra to it, a bit of mystique. It was just a small interlude, but it was so good I said to Pete, 'Come on, we've got to do this!'"

Finally, or perhaps firstly, there's *Aristillus*. Arguably one of the most recognisable album openers of all time, the eccentric Wurlitzer intro provides *Moonmadness* with a suitably perverse and mischievous starting point. Written and performed by Latimer, with some slightly unorthodox assistance from Andy Ward, it fit perfectly with the album's title.

"I'd just written that piece at home and I didn't have a title at the time. I took it to the band and Andy came up with *Aristillus*. I said, 'What's Aristillus?' and he said, 'Well, it's a crater on the moon.' I said, 'Really? What a great title!'

"Then Andy found another crater, right next to Aristillus, called Autolycus. So he said, 'Let me try to say the words really quickly all the way through the track,' which was incredibly difficult to do! He kept on laughing. He was going, 'Aristillus, Autolycus, Aristillus, Autolycus,' all the way through the track. It comes and goes and you can hear it. But we were in absolute hysterics!"

Camel in London, October 29, 1972.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

"It was a great time and, I suppose, it was a simpler time."

Moonmadness was released on March 26, 1976. In the UK and Europe it arrived adorned with its iconic, subtly psychedelic sleeve, designed by artist John Field. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, the record emerged with a complete different cover, its cartoonish artwork depicting a camel wearing a spacesuit. On the moon. Luckily, the band saw the funny side.

"We had a lot of trouble with the sleeve in America. We had a sleeve that we were happy with in England, and it was a gatefold too, which is something the record companies put a stop to eventually because it gets expensive after a while!" Latimer laughs. "But we were really happy with it. Then we heard back from America: 'Oh no, it's too subtle, we don't like it!' so they came up with this camel in a spacesuit, which we thought was incredibly funny. We used it on a lot of merchandise later on!"

Although its initial sales were a little disappointing in light of *The Snow Goose*'s success, *Moonmadness* eventually reached No.15 in the UK album charts, seven places higher than *The Snow Goose* had achieved, and has since gone on to become Camel's bestselling album. At the time, the

Astral Ungulate: the iconic American cover of *Moonmadness* showing a camel in a space suit.

critical response was distinctly mixed, with some claiming Camel had lost their way and others hailing the band's ongoing evolution. For Andy Latimer, the process of making *Moonmadness* had been so enjoyable, and the results so satisfying, that any criticism or murmurs of record company disquiet were easy to shrug off.

"From what I can remember, the response was okay, although it didn't do exactly what *The Snow Goose* did, but you know what it's like. You're Fleetwood Mac and you make *Rumours* and sell 20 million and then you make *Tusk* and it only sells five million, and that's not as good as 20, but it's hardly a failure, is it? So it was a bit like that.

"*Moonmadness* didn't really do as well initially, but we didn't care if we had flops or if things didn't work out the way we wanted. We just went, 'Oh well, let's move on and do something else!' you know? It wasn't really a major blow to us if something didn't sell.

"On reflection, it's easy to look back and think, 'Well, *that* was a mistake.' When you critique your own albums, you look back and go, 'Hmmm, that wasn't as good as I thought.' But it's all part of growing up, I think, and I don't feel that way about *Moonmadness*."

Back to 2018, and Andy Latimer has been demonstrating his love of *Moonmadness* by performing the album end to end, just as he did with *The Snow Goose* five years ago. Although several songs from *Moonmadness* have been staples of the band's set for a long time, Camel have never performed the album in its entirety before. Consequently, Latimer cheerfully admits to having gained a renewed appreciation for the record and the musicians that made it — himself included.

"It's over quite quickly when you play it onstage because it's a fairly short record, but the moods change quite drastically between numbers," he says. "We do something like *Spirit Of The Water* and then into *Another Day*, back down for *Air Born* and then up again for *Lunar Sea*. So there are a lot of ups and downs when we play it live. We don't have any announcements in between the tracks — we try to play it as faithfully as we can so it's one piece, if you like, and it all runs together quite well. But it has been a challenge.

"Before we started rehearsing for this tour, I was listening to *Lunar Sea*, listening to my solo, and I thought, 'I can't play that! What was I doing?' [Laughs] I just can't play some of those things any more. But you do your best, of course."

Now 42 years old and still fresh as a daisy, *Moonmadness* has never lost its magical appeal, and Camel's current touring exploits seem to be further enhancing its reputation. Reluctant to pinpoint exactly what made the album such an ageless prog milestone, Andy Latimer simply notes that there is something inherently uplifting in the sound and feel of *Moonmadness*, both for the musicians playing it and for those listening.

"The band were in a great place at that stage. We were still getting on, moving in the right direction and playing bigger gigs, getting more recognition, so it was a nice time. It's an uplifting sound, I think. People really seem to love it. We must have done something right!"

Camel tour the UK from September 7–17. See www.camelproductions.com for full dates and more information.

Bactrian In Black: Camel mainman Andy Latimer.

"I didn't really stop writing, but right now I have a real urge to do something new, so fingers crossed we'll make it happen, finally."
Andy Latimer

Chord change

Camel are winning a new generation of fans, playing better than ever and even have plans for a new album. The new-look band reveal what makes this revitalised line-up so special.

Words: Dom Lawson **Portraits:** Stuart Wood

The reviews have been ecstatic, the response from fans even more so, and yet it seems like a small miracle that Camel have managed to fulfil the vast majority of their touring obligations in 2018. Having thrilled generations of fans by performing *The Snow Goose* in full during 2013, Andy Latimer's legendary crew hit the road earlier this year to take the seminal *Moonmadness*, also in full, to the masses for the first time.

Unfortunately, the guitarist's health has once again proved to be a major obstacle. Just over a decade ago, Andy Latimer nearly died when he was struck down with a rare blood disorder that then mutated into myelofibrosis, an extremely painful condition that made playing the guitar virtually impossible. It also meant he had to undergo chemotherapy, which ravaged his immune system.

Today, Latimer is in a much better state of overall health, but his band's recent dates proved to be a major challenge for the 69-year-old, who had to first contend with a small hernia that forced him to play shows sitting down, and then an unexpected dose of pneumonia, which caused the cancelling of a gig in Utrecht, Holland. Nevertheless, all but one of the shows went ahead and, with his characteristic humility, Latimer admits that he's having to face up to some uncomfortable truths.

"As you get older, you don't recognise certain things about yourself. You still think, 'Oh yeah, I can still go out and tour!' but your body isn't as strong as it used to be," he says. "So I need to start working out and getting fit because touring is a challenge. I was lifting a lot of gear before the start of this tour and that's what gave me the hernia. That's something I don't think about. I just think, 'Oh yeah, I can shift that cabinet, don't worry!' and then I get a hernia. Then I got a terrible cold in Turkey, I think, and that turned into pneumonia in Holland. I had to cancel a show and I think I've only ever cancelled one before that.

"So I'm not getting any younger and my immune system is not so good. I think you have to get into an acceptance of your age otherwise you're going to lead an unhappy life. But I need to get fitter because we're having such a fantastic time at the moment."

Colin Bass has been a regular fixture in Camel since 1979 and has arguably been the glue that has held the band together over the last three decades. Today he concurs with Latimer's assessment that the band are back on top form and loving every minute, while also hailing his bandmate's ability to grind out a result in the toughest of circumstances.

"Andy really is quite the trooper. It took all four of us to persuade him to take the night off in Utrecht!" the bassist laughs. "At the soundcheck he started feeling very shaky and he was aching and having trouble with his hands. In the end, he had to lie down in a darkened dressing room. We finally got him to go and see somebody, and they told him he had the first stages of pneumonia. If we hadn't ganged up on him, he would've played on, I'm sure. In the end we cancelled one show and managed to do the last three gigs. The only thing the audiences would've noticed that was different was that he was sitting down. He still plays like a bastard! [Laughs] He looks as vigorous as ever. In fact, to my mind, the band are playing with more energy than we've ever done."

Plucked from relative obscurity when a mutual friend recommended him to a then drummerless Andy Latimer, Denis Clement has been behind the kit with Camel since 2000 and shares Bass' view on the current state of the band. On this latest tour, Clement notes with enthusiasm, the crowds have been more passionate than ever before, with a visible influx of younger fans bringing the average age of the audience down and the energy levels up. The band's recent dates in Istanbul, Turkey, seem to have been particularly euphoric affairs that reinforced the notion that Camel's music is crossing over to younger generations of music fans in a way that few could have predicted.

"I don't know what it is or why, but perhaps they listened to what their parents were listening to, or perhaps it's something else," shrugs Clement. "But it's great to see it happening on this tour, to have younger people there, and also to have a female audience, which Camel never had before!

"Andy always talks about the 70s and how it was mainly men in the audience. But since I joined in 2000," Clement adds with a laugh, "well, not that I'm saying it was down to me, of course, but..."

Is that what happened? Did you make Camel appealing to women?

"No, of course not! I wish it was that! But there are definitely more young people and more women at the shows. It's been great. We'd never been to Turkey before and I can tell you that they knew every song, and the response was overwhelming. I think everybody in the band feels blessed by people's reaction."

The revitalised Camel, L-R: Andy Latimer, Denis Clement, Colin Bass, Peter Jones.

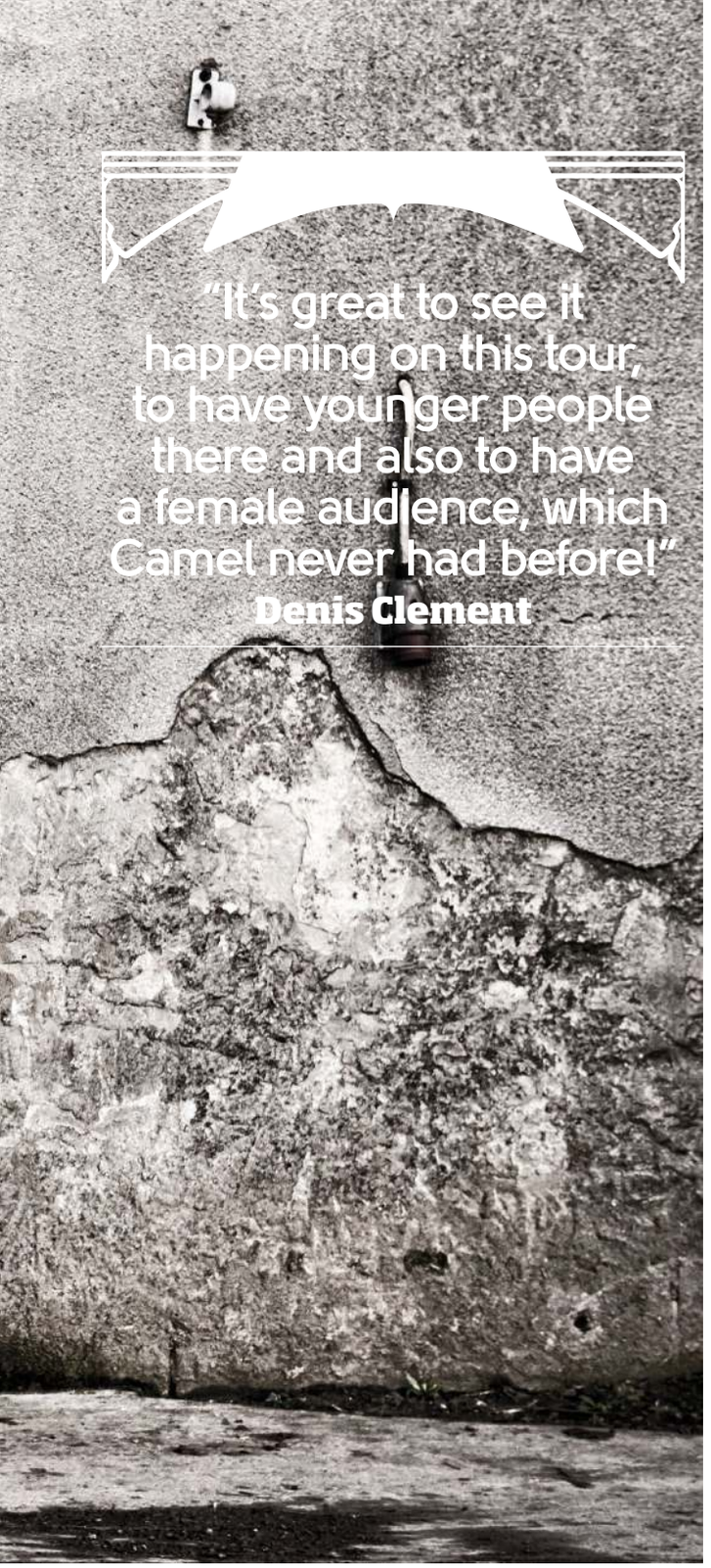
"Both nights were sold out in Istanbul, in this lovely, big theatre," adds Bass. "Some of these people were coming in to meet us in tears or completely lost for words because they were finally going to meet Andy, so it was quite an extraordinary experience. There was one young Iranian lady who came backstage and said, 'I've loved you ever since I was young, because my father loved you. He recently died of an illness and one of the last things I did with him was sit and listen to [1979 track] *Ice*…'

"Andy was very touched by those stories. He doesn't really like to have praise bestowed on him and he gets a bit embarrassed by it, but he was very nice and he dedicated *Ice* to her father that night."

As they approach their 50th anniversary, all four members of the current Camel line-up make regular references to the absurd amount of fun that they arere having right now. With the seemingly indestructible Latimer standing alongside loyal mainstays Clement and Bass, plus latest recruit, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Peter Jones (best known as the man behind cult UK proggers Tiger Moth Tales), Camel are once again a united and harmonious unit. As Bass points out, a bit of fresh blood can make a huge difference.

"It's the galvanising influence of Peter Jones, I tell you!" the bassist laughs. "This is the first time in ages that we've really thought, 'This sounds like a real band!' He's a great keyboard player and a great sax player and he's also very capable of playing several parts at once, so we thought, 'Oh great, a four-piece again!' There's something about the nature of a four piece that's more *live*. So it's great that Pete can handle all those parts. And he has a fantastic voice, so we've started offloading more vocal bits onto him, which he does really well!"

"Yeah, on this particular tour it does feel like I've gone up a bit in the vocal ranks," says Jones. "On the first tour I did in 2016, we opened up with *Never Let Go* and I got the job of



singing that one, which I thought was a pretty bold move, as someone who's just joined the band! But it was really flattering and I'm very flattered that they want me to do more. The audience seem to have accepted it as well, which is good because Colin and Andy have been singing some of these things for 30 or 40 years and people might not like it if it looks like I'm muscling in!"

A relative whippersnapper at the tender age of 37, Jones seems genuinely startled by the idea that he's become the final piece of the contemporary Camel puzzle.

"It's tremendously gratifying and satisfying for me because this is the kind of thing I've always wanted to do," Jones grins. "I have always wanted to be in a band, standing and playing quality music to the kind of audiences we're playing to. It's a really fantastic feeling, to go out there and play songs from *The Snow Goose* and *Moonmadness* and *Mirage* and just feel that energy of the audience and be a part of something that's been around for 40 years."

Speaking to the four members of Camel, it's pretty obvious that a new studio album is looming on the horizon: their first since *A Nod And A Wink* in 2002. It hardly needs explaining that the band have been denied several opportunities to reconvene in the studio due to Latimer's health difficulties. However, with the mood in the group as positive and creative as it's ever been, and with a couple of purposefully nostalgic tours under their belt, the time has surely come for Camel to get back in the saddle.

"We're all enjoying it because we like each other's company so much," says Bass. "At the moment, with Pete there, it's so much fun to actually play. There's this great telepathic camaraderie between us, so that's something to enjoy while it's there. I can't possibly project into the future. It does pretty much depend on Andy, but I'm not sure how much longer we can go on doing it without a new album!"

The good news is that Latimer and Jones have been collaborating on new material. Diehard fans will already know that the first few shows on the current tour featured two brand new songs, *Mystic Dreams* and *Dingley Dell*. Unfortunately, due to Latimer's poor state of health, the set was subsequently shortened and the new tracks were the first to go. Nevertheless, there's no doubt that a new album is beginning to take shape, albeit slightly more slowly than the rest of the band might like.

"I sent Andy an email the other day about one of the new songs that nobody's heard but that's circulating among us," Bass states. "I just said to him, 'This song's just going round in my head! This could be such a killer album, we've got to do it!' I say it to him at fairly regularly intervals, to be honest. Andy and Pete have been doing some great things together and I think that's galvanising the process, as it were. Not to become a bore about it, and everybody's pushing Andy to do it and I'm sure that's what we'll do, but it's about time!"

Simultaneously amused and energised by his bandmates' mounting enthusiasm for a new record, Andy Latimer is cautiously optimistic about hitting the studio in the near future. Endearingly, he's almost apologetic about the delay, attributing his failure to truly get stuck into the process to the long road to recovery he faced after his battle with myelofibrosis a decade ago.

"From my point of view, I was very ill at one stage and went through a period of seven years when I couldn't play because my hands were just so painful," he recalls. "It took me a long time to get back into it and then, of course, the longer you stay away from it, the less motivated you are to do anything. So I've been writing, on and off, and I didn't really stop writing, but right now I have a real urge to do something new, so fingers crossed we'll make it happen, finally.

"We've got about five pieces that Pete and I have been working on and they show a lot of promise. There are a lot of organisational challenges but nothing that can't be overcome, so hopefully it won't be long. We've done the *Snow Goose* tour and that was fantastic. Now we're doing *Moonmadness* and that's been great too, but now I want to move on a bit and do something new."

So the countdown starts here. There are new songs in the works, strong harmony within the band and an almost chewable sense that Camel are about to enter one of their most fervently creative periods yet. Ultimately, you can't keep a legendary guitarist down, even if he still doesn't understand what all the fuss is about.

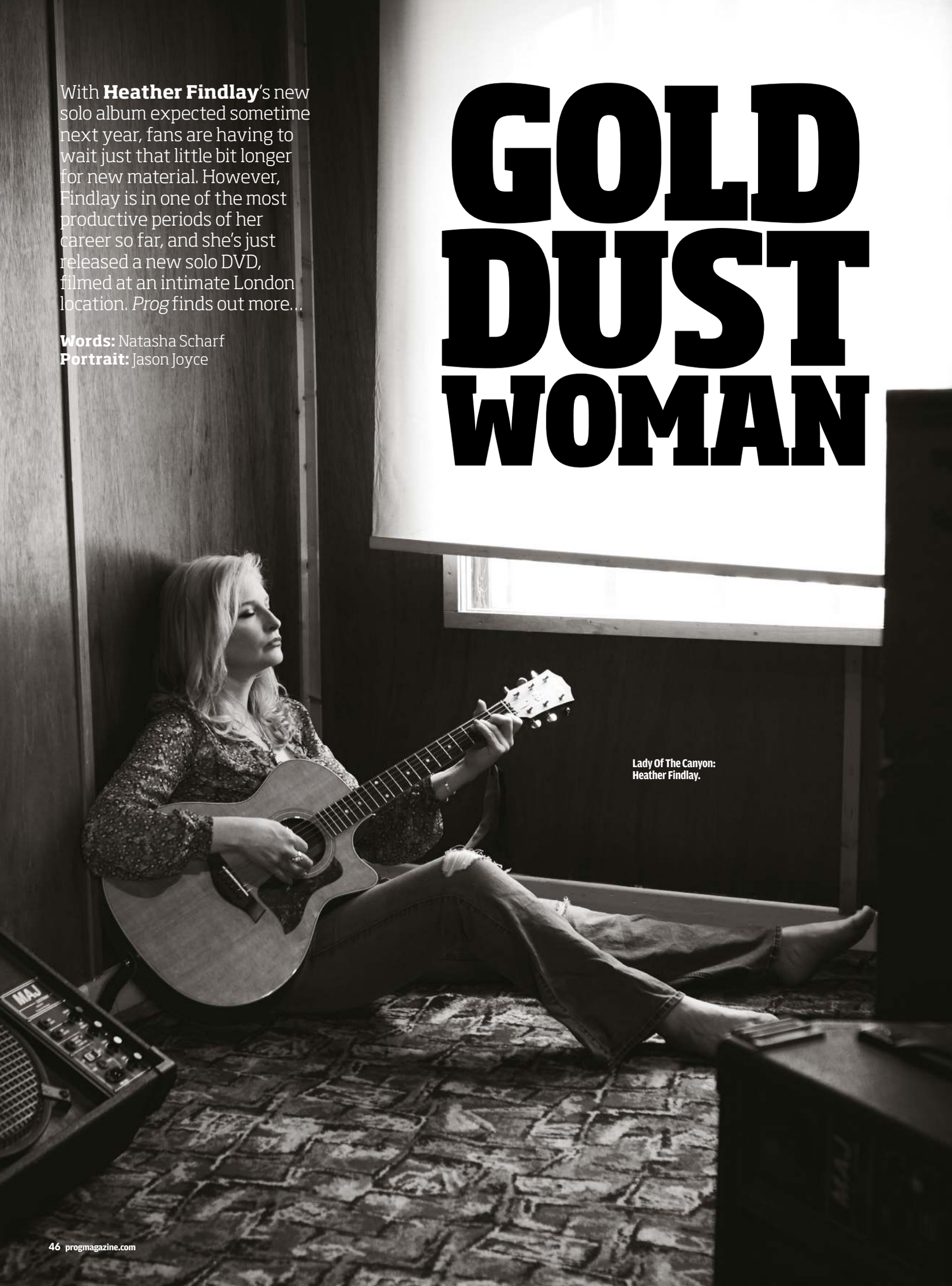
"People like what I do but I don't know why!" Latimer concludes with a hearty chuckle. "I always liked that BB King quote, that there are a lot of people out there who can play better than I can, but they're just not me! That's a great line. There are so many great players out there and it's quite bewildering, how many great guitarists there are, but they're not me.

"I honestly don't know what I do that works, but it does," he adds with a laugh. "Best not to question it!"

GOLD DUST WOMAN

With **Heather Findlay**'s new solo album expected sometime next year, fans are having to wait just that little bit longer for new material. However, Findlay is in one of the most productive periods of her career so far, and she's just released a new solo DVD, filmed at an intimate London location. *Prog* finds out more...

Words: Natasha Scharf
Portrait: Jason Joyce



Lady Of The Canyon: Heather Findlay.

"Perseverance is my middle name!" laughs Heather Findlay down the phone from her home studio in York. The UK is in the middle of a heatwave and the singer-songwriter is camped out in her hottest room with the vintage floral curtains firmly closed. She's been signing limited edition copies of her first live DVD as the Heather Findlay Trio for The Merch Desk, entitled *Aces And Eights — A Night In The Saloon Bar*, and is now taking a break to chat to *Prog* about the intimate show.

"A friend showed me pictures of this amazing place with a red lamp at the back of the stage and a gramophone, and I thought, 'Wow! It looks like the coolest little hang-out in LA.' I never dreamed it would come out so well on DVD: the atmosphere of that night is completely captured."

Filmed in London last year, the DVD is advertised with the slogan "barefoot, brave and boho". The brave part refers to the challenges of rearranging a full band set for a trio and hints at technical issues that emerged during the production process.

She admits, "It was a more complicated project than I was hoping it would be and [harpist] Sarah Dean said to me afterwards, 'Well done you for persevering.' I like to take on ridiculously challenging tasks and see if I can not die by the end of it!"

Findlay is currently enjoying one of the most productive periods of her career so far, and by her own admission, she's spent the last few years "juggling and plate spinning". There have been live albums and solo EPs, including 2016's festive *I Am Snow*, the Mantra Vega side project with Dave Kerzner, and a role in Arjen Lucassen's live rock opera *The Theater Equation*. It was this latter adventure that inspired her debut solo album, which is due out next spring.

"There was some lovely camaraderie between us girls — Anneke van Giersbergen, Irene Jansen [sister of Nightwish singer Floor] and Marcela Bovio — we got on really well," says Findlay with an audible smile. "On the last night, I was saying goodbye to Irene and Floor and we were joking about working together again. The two of them, with our voices, the sort of cocktail that we would end up coming up with would definitely be harder rock/metal. I said, 'I love the idea of it. Let's do a metal Abba project!'"

She stayed in touch with Irene Jansen and also invited songwriter Luke Morley to help out. She'd been itching to work with the Thunder guitarist since they first met during the recording sessions for Mostly Autumn's *Storms Over Still Water* and he was the perfect fit for the project. Ideas were exchanged and Jansen even contributed vocals to Mantra Vega, but the "metal Abba" project fell apart when the Dutch singer announced she was pregnant. The news forced a rethink, and Findlay and Morley decided to work towards a different endgame.

"I thought it was high time I recorded a solo album and, two years later, we have a complete album. About half are songs I've written and half are collaborations with Luke," she says, adding that Morley has also produced the album. "We get on brilliantly so it was almost a no-brainer for us to say, 'Yes, let's do that.' On the outside, people must be thinking, 'Really?!' but I think when they hear it, it'll make perfect sense. I can't say too much about it at this stage but it's not quite the metal Abba that was first intended!"

WILL IRELAND

The band live at Aces And Eights, L-R: Martin Ledger, Heather Findlay, Sarah Dean.

The pair recorded the album at Wales' legendary Rockfield Studios in May while Findlay was putting the finishing touches to her live DVD. Although she remains tight-lipped over the details, she does let slip that she played a few notes on the grand piano Queen used on *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Findlay's uncompromising creativity extends to the vibrant snapshots of her life on social media. Alongside photos of her on stage and in the studio are inspirational images of her boho chic home, reflecting the spirituality that's carried through her folk-tinged music.

This seemingly relaxed environment contrasts with what she describes as "a stressful time" in the past which led to her visiting a Reiki healer and eventually becoming a practitioner herself. Four years ago she went one step further and took up Kriya Yoga — a more spiritual approach to the discipline also explored by George Harrison and Jon Anderson.

"I can see how much more focused I've become since yoga has become a bigger part of my life. I probably sweat the small stuff a lot less," she admits. "Quietening the mind helps to remove some of the weird, self-sabotage blockages that can stop you creatively. It's been quite a learning curve of getting to know myself and as a result it seems there's a stockpile of stuff to come out in the next year or two. It feels like exciting times."

That stockpile includes the second Odin Dragonfly album with long-term collaborator Angela Gordon.

Heather Findlay's creative journey so far has pursued many paths. From her beautiful artwork and elegant debut solo EP *The Phoenix Suite* in 2011, to performing guest vocals on albums as diverse as Lonely Robot's *Please Come Home* and Thunder's *Rip It Up*, she believes in taking different and often unexpected routes. Yet as she embraces her fourth decade, it feels like she's only just beginning her self-discovery and she's looking forward to what the future brings. She's open to more recordings with Mantra Vega and there are further live shows on the horizon too, but the artist-singer-healer is now more mindful of not saying yes to everything at once.

"I often take on too much and I'm starting to notice my limitations of what I can't do, which is a great thing," she admits. "The *Aces And Eights...* DVD documents everything I've done so far and it feels like a new chapter is about to begin."

Aces And Eights — A Night In The Saloon Bar is out now via Black Sand. For more, see www.heatherfindlay.co.uk.

The Butterfly Effect

Four years since the arrival of vocalist Jean Pageau and three years after *Delusion Rain*, **Mystery** return with their most accomplished album yet.

Words: Nick Shilton **Images:** Claude Dufresne

"We just try to make the best music we can at that moment. We don't set goals to achieve any particular new sound. We just keep going the way we've always been and make sure we do the best we can when we're writing and recording."

That's the Mystery manifesto enunciated by founder and driving force Michel St-Père. And while it may sound simple in theory, the execution of that manifesto has historically proved considerably harder in practice.

Happily, 2018 finds the veteran Canadian progressive rock band – St-Père founded Mystery way back in 1986 – on a roll with an apparently stable line-up and a splendid new studio album, *Lies And Butterflies*.

"It's hard for me to say right now," St-Père cautiously parries when invited to confirm the view that *Lies And Butterflies* is Mystery's magnum opus, "but we're certainly very proud of what we've done with this album."

It transpires that *Lies And Butterflies* is the first album to which the whole band have contributed. Its predecessor, *Delusion Rain*, marked vocalist Jean Pageau's recorded debut with Mystery, and some of the Mystery live band members played on it too.

"It was a completely different line-up from the album before it, *The World Is A Game*," St-Père notes.

LOCATION: CARRIERE MATHERS - QUEBEC CANADA

Float Like A Butterfly: Mystery look set to reach new heights with *Lies And Butterflies*.

Similarly, while primary responsibility for writing *Lies And Butterflies* fell to St-Père, the album sees contributions from other members, with the music for *Dare To Dream* and *Where Dreams Come Alive* penned by Pageau and guitarist Sylvain Moineau respectively. St- Père doesn't regard himself as holding a monopoly over the writing for Mystery.

"When we start compiling new music for an album, everybody sends ideas in if they have songs to submit. We just go with the best songs. *Dare To Dream* is actually a very old song Jean wrote," St- Père reveals, adding that the vocalist sent it to him more than five years ago before auditioning to join the band. "I kept it in mind all the time, thinking that it could be a very good song for a future album. Now was the right time to do it."

Following the recent influx of talent to the band, St- Père can begin to imagine not being the main writer in Mystery. "I can't write on demand and it could happen in future that my inspiration is low for a while and other members have a lot of ideas."

St- Père isn't afraid to raid his songwriting vaults for material and explains that some of the tracks on the album date back to the 1990s.

"We're certainly very proud of what we've done with this album."

"I keep writing all the time and put everything aside until the timing is right. I wrote the beginning and main part of *Chrysalis* maybe 25 years ago," he says of one of the album's two lengthier tracks. "I've always had it in the back of my mind but was waiting for the moment to be able to do it the way I could hear it in my mind."

Equally, St-Père is at pains to ensure that a Mystery album contains complementary material. As such, Pageau's *Dare To Dream* was considered for the *Delusion Rain* album but ultimately failed to make the cut.

"It just wasn't the right time to do it. We make sure all the songs fit together as an album. If I write two songs that are similar, I might put one aside for a future album, even if it's a good song."

Unusually for a studio album, *Lies And Butterflies* opens with the sound of a live audience, though there's some logic behind the apparent incongruity.

"The last album we released was our live album and DVD *Second Home*, recorded at the Boerderij in Holland. The audience sound on *Lies And Butterflies* is to achieve a continuation — if you play the albums back-to-back, the crowd you hear at the beginning is the crowd you hear at the end of *Second Home*."

Lies And Butterflies was about a year in the making, with the centre of operations being St-Père's own Studio Illusion III in Mirabel near Montreal, while the band's other members recorded remotely. "I do the demos of the songs here in my studio," St-Père says. "Then everyone has the structure of each song and they can record in their home studios."

Working on this basis resulted in all six members of the band, bar drummer Jean-Sébastien Goyette, playing keyboards on the album.

While previously Mystery have employed assorted well-known guests — Big Big Train and former Spock's Beard drummer Nick D'Virgilio, Genesis sideman Daryl Stuermer and keyboardist Oliver Wakeman to name but three — on this occasion St-Père eschewed guest musicians.

"I decided to make it more like a band. Previously Mystery was more of a studio project and we didn't play live much. For *Lies And Butterflies* everyone was capable of doing everything."

The band's new album, *Lies And Butterflies*.

However, he doesn't rule out using guests again for subsequent albums. "It's always fun to play with people you respect or who were some of your inspirations, like Daryl Stuermer. I wanted to work with Nick D'Virgilio for a long time and it was great to work with him."

While *Lies And Butterflies* benefits from an abundance of strong material and shows Mystery firing on all musical cylinders, it's perhaps Pageau's powerful vocals that make the strongest impression. "We're very happy with him and I'm very fortunate to have found Jean after Benoît David left the band," St-Père enthuses.

David had first sung on Mystery's third album, 2007's *Beneath The Veil Of Winter's Face*, appearing on two further studio releases, 2010's *One Among The Living* and 2012's *The World Is A Game*. Latterly, of course, he replaced vocalist Jon Anderson in Yes between 2008 and 2012.

"Benoît was singing with Yes at the same time as Mystery and everything was booming," St-Père recalls.

But then came the bombshell: David told St-Père he was leaving Yes and that after honouring existing live commitments, he would also be stepping down from Mystery. "We'd done *The World Is A Game* with Nick D'Virgilio on drums, and Benoît was at the top of his game. The future looked very bright, but all of a sudden we had to start everything again."

Given that Mystery were coping with David fronting Yes, and arguably raising the Canadian band's profile in the process, it was disappointing to see Mystery's progress arrested dramatically shortly afterwards.

"It was a complete shock," St-Père says. "I decided to give Benoît more time to think everything over and see if his voice would come back."

By mixing the live album *Tales From The Netherlands*, ultimately released a year after David left the band, Mystery bought themselves some breathing space to find the right singer. Having seen Mystery's momentum suddenly halted, St-Père was faced with what he thought for some time was an insurmountable problem. "After Benoît left, we went through a period where I thought Mystery was finished."

St-Père recalls sending instrumental versions of songs from *The World Is A Game* and being decidedly underwhelmed by what he received in return. "All the demos from other singers sounded like a bad karaoke night. It took 18 months to find Jean."

The interregnum between singers was masked by Mystery deliberately publicising David's departure a significant period after the vocalist had resigned from the band.

Aside from the challenge presented and ultimately overcome in replacing David with Pageau, like so many other progressive bands of assorted eras, Mystery have endured plenty of other line-up changes, with St-Père being the only constant. But to put personnel changes into context, no fewer than three suicides have afflicted Mystery over the years. The cumulative effect of numerous departures and deaths brought St-Père close to bringing the final curtain down on the band. The day was saved by Pageau's arrival.

Aside from his voice, Pageau has great stage presence, which benefits the group. "He's an incredible frontman, which has changed the dynamics of the band," St-Père says.

It's no coincidence that Mystery have considerably increased their live activity in the years since Pageau's arrival. Now they have two studio albums with Pageau under their belt and they're back on an upwards curve, playing live across Europe.

"We could see the interest was there in Europe so we decided to keep going and see where it could take us," St-Père reveals.

Mystery have at last become a proper touring band. This year, in addition to four UK dates, the band have also gigged in France, Norway, Spain and Germany, where they made their debut in July at the prestigious Night Of The Prog festival in Loreley. An appearance at Progstock in America is also in the diary for October. The band hope to play a couple of Canadian shows too, before returning to Europe, most likely in 2019.

"We're starting to turn down gigs, which isn't something we've ever been able to do before," St-Père explains.

However, the band's principal market remains Europe. "We get plenty of offers but the challenge is that we need to travel from Canada, especially if it's just for one gig."

So are Mystery in their rudest health ever? "Definitely, because we all share the same goal and have been playing live constantly for the last five years," replies St-Père without hesitation. "Overall it's the easiest time right now; everyone knows what they have to do. It's not easy all the time — going on tour can be rough sometimes — but the team is very solid."

Lies And Butterflies is out now via Unicorn Digital. For more information, see www.therealmystery.com.

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING ELSE?
Michel St-Père's extracurricular activities.

Outside Mystery, St-Père plays in another progressive band, Huis (pronounced 'house'), and runs the Unicorn Digital label which sports more than 80 releases in its catalogue. That said, St-Père volunteers that the label is currently quieter.

"Two or three years ago, I slowed down signing new bands and decided to focus more on Mystery."

In part that's down to Mystery's increasing success, but also, according to St-Père, it's due to the industry-wide decline in CD sales. This has made developing new bands increasingly difficult.

"New bands often have the impression that the label does nothing and they want to keep control of digital downloads themselves. It makes it very hard to deal with new bands, especially if they don't have a proper website, just stay at home and don't take care of their fans."

Rock, star: Michel St-Père.

While he's currently wary of developing Unicorn Digital further than using it primarily as an ongoing platform for Mystery, St-Père doesn't exclude Mystery themselves from signing with a bigger label if they attract the right offer and are confident their sales would increase significantly. "But I've never received that offer," he admits. "Most of the offers so far have been essentially to do what I do already. And then I'd lose much of the revenue I use to get the band over to Europe."

As for Huis, St-Père joined them when Benoît David announced that he would be departing from Mystery. "I realised that I had put all my eggs in one basket and at that time I saw no future with Mystery, so I thought I should play with other bands."

Huis' first album was almost complete when St-Père joined the band to fill a vacant guitar slot. "I have a lot of fun playing other people's music and they're a great bunch of guys too."

A third Huis album, featuring one song written by St-Père, is expected by the end of this year.

St-Père relishes not being the centre of gravity in Huis. "I can just concentrate on playing guitar," he says. "When we travel to Europe, I give my advice to Michel Joncas, who leads Huis, but he organises everything!" **NS**

"Benoît David was at the top of his game, but all of a sudden we had to start everything again."

Mystery Men: the new-look band , featuring singer Jean Pageau (front centre).

"I didn't want *War Of The Worlds* to be a retelling of the story, so we've done something a little bit deeper."

Brave New World: Michael Romeo is taking things into his own hands.

Close Encounters

His main band might be on an extended break, but that hasn't stopped Symphony X guitarist **Michael Romeo** from getting creative with a familiar story on his first official solo album, *War Of The Worlds Pt 1*.

Words: Rich Wilson **Images:** Danny Sanchez

There's a certain irony that even those who claim to be progressive-minded and musically prejudice-free will no doubt have preconceptions about a solo album from Symphony X guitarist Michael Romeo. There will be an expectation of shredding guitars, bombastic, operatic vocals and perhaps, as with many solo albums and side projects, an album quickly thrown together in a brief sojourn from the day job.

Although such attitudes may prevail with those who find progressive metal a touch predictable, critics will be making merry fools of themselves if such negativity is transferred into the public domains of internet forums and Facebook pages. That's because *War Of The Worlds Pt 1* is a varied recording that may surprise even Romeo's more ardent fans.

The timing of the solo album is strongly linked to the appalling events of July 14, 2017. Symphony X singer Russell Allen was touring with his other band, Adrenaline Mob, when their bus was involved a collision that took the lives of that band's bassist and their tour manager. Although Symphony X had decided to go on a hiatus prior to that incident, it's clear that this has now been extended.

"We did a lot of touring in 2016 and then Russ had said that he wanted to put a lot more time and effort into his other band Adrenaline Mob," he says. "The other guys in the band were working on other things, so I had started to think about writing a solo album. Unfortunately, those guys had that accident and Russ has been through a lot with that whole thing. I spoke to him a couple of weeks ago and I think he's just trying to sort things out, so there are no plans for Symphony X. I just told him to take some time out, sort everything out in his head and let us know. Whatever he decides to do, it's cool with me.

"I think if you go through such a tragic time, it puts your life into perspective. We all have families and kids. It probably changes your whole outlook on things. So, we're still on hiatus but we're all talking and just trying to figure out the next move."

The break has allowed Romeo to spend around 18 months writing and recording an album that's far removed from his previous work. Seemingly, this was a deliberate attempt for him to move into fresh musical areas and, quite simply, enjoy the freedom that a solo album can offer an artist.

"When I first decided to do it, I knew that I really wanted it to be a little different from the band," he explains. "Of course, I still wanted it to sound like me. With a solo record, you can get outside of the box a little bit, experiment and have fun. I was just being creative and trying different stuff.

"I knew I wanted to have orchestral and cinematic elements added to the guitar, but of course retain the heavy and prog elements. So I was just trying to do some different things. There's even some electronic music in there."

The "electronic" element that Romeo proudly mentions appears on a track called *F*cking Robots* (sic) and although not overbearing, might cause some alarm with his usual fanbase.

"It might take a few people by surprise and I think it's cool," he laughs. "It's something that the band would never do. I like some of that electronic stuff. I wouldn't say that I'm an über fan but when I hear some of it, it's clear there are some talented guys in that area and some of that stuff is cool."

Wisely, Romeo has added a certain grandeur to the album by including orchestral sections which enhance its flow. A self-confessed sci-fi and movie nut, the guitarist has added elements that call to mind the works of film composer John Williams. Given that Williams has composed the scores for numerous science fiction movies, that influence is a natural fit for the album.

"I love all that stuff," he enthuses. "I'm a big *Star Wars* and John Williams fan, and I knew I wanted to have a little bit of that flavour in there. I had a direction and a goal, and it was just a case of moving towards it.

"I'm also always writing anyway, even if it is just orchestral stuff or something different. You never know when you might use it. You might go back and listen to it and say, 'Shit, that's kind of cool,' and it starts something off. Maybe it was the melody and you can then build upon it. I always keep everything because you never know when it will come in handy. But the final track *Constellations* was tricky to write. That one took a while because with a lot of the orchestral stuff, you have to do it instrument by instrument. That means a lot of programming to make it as realistic as you can.

'JD' DeServio is an old school friend of the guitarist, and drummer John Macaluso has also been a close friend for a number of years.

"They're all friends of mine and I've known them for years," he explains. "With JD, we've always said we should do something together, but I've been busy with Symphony X and he's been out with Zakk Wylde and Black Label Society, so we never really hooked up. The new guy is our singer Rick Castellano. Every so often, I'll get together with some of my old friends from high school. We'll just hang out, have fun and jam for the whole day and drink a couple of beers. One of the guys said that his buddy Rick Castellano was going to come down and that he was a great singer. I remember that he was really good, that he was a cool guy and we stayed in touch and that was how it worked out. They're all guys that I knew and felt were great players. It was a pretty easy thing for me to set up."

Then there's the rather sizeable elephant in the room. Depending on your age, the title *War Of The Worlds* will either call to mind Jeff Wayne's 1978 progressive masterpiece of the same name, or the movie featuring Tom Cruise being pursued around New Jersey by otherworldly tripods. Does Romeo believe that this concept album may attract criticism for the lyrical direction?

"Not really," he argues. "If I remember rightly, that Jeff Wayne album was pretty much the exact story of the book. I didn't want to do that as I knew it had been done. I also felt it might get cheesy if there was singing about ray guns, spaceships and Martians. I didn't want it to be a retelling of the story, so we've done something a little bit deeper with this. The music on the Jeff Wayne album was pretty much straight rock, and this is rock, but there's some metal stuff going on as well. I was looking for titles and a concept for the album and saw a copy of *The War Of The Worlds*. I thought that it would be cool, especially as there are many meanings to the phrase. It could be a war of worlds in politics, religion or so many other areas of conflict. That's the thrust of the lyrics, so at least they had a little variety and every song was a little different."

With Symphony X's future uncertain, there's an opportunity for Romeo to develop his solo career. He has already partially recorded *War Of The Worlds Part 2* and is even thinking about the possibility of touring. All of it, as you might expect, depends on how this new album is received, and whether there is the public demand to see *War Of The Worlds* in a live setting.

"Going into this solo record, I wasn't thinking about any kind of live thing at all. It was all about fun and making it sound the way I wanted," he says. "I will see how the album is received, though: maybe it's a possibility. If it did happen, getting a pretty large orchestra and a choir isn't cheap. It would have to be done on a reasonable budget and not off the chart. But it's all about how the record does and with the music industry these days, who the hell knows..."

Romeo is "being creative" with his new solo album.

"With a solo record, you can get outside of the box a little bit, experiment and have fun."

"The technology now with some of these libraries for these classical instruments is pretty high-tech," he continues. "They've really got some great-sounding stuff. That was what ate up most of the time. It might take a week to do the guitar solos, but on a song like that, it really took an age because of the orchestration. I even had to get the pen and paper out to work out how things would fit."

Deliberately avoiding using any Symphony X musicians for his solo album, Romeo selected a band who were both musically adept but also already known to him. Bassist John

War Of The Worlds is out now via Music Theories. Visit www.michaelromeomusic.com for more information.

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"GOOD, HON

With **Blodwyn Pig**, guitarist/singer **Mick Abrahams** played with rock and prog's biggest names and turned the group into festival stars who had the world at their feet – and then the frontman got fired from his own band. *Prog* gets the inside story behind the highs and lows of Abrahams' career in music.

Words: Malcolm Dome

There's a moment during this meeting when Mick Abrahams gets rather emotional and has to choke back the tears. It's understandable, because we're talking about his poor health.

"I had two heart attacks and a stroke almost at the same time [in November 2009]. Those have left their mark on me. I'm using a mobility scooter today because sometimes I find it hard to walk. And my speech can be a little slow. But I'm not paralysed, thank goodness. I'm still a rock'n'roller, I love a Jack Daniel's [he even has a glass in his hand to prove the point] and I can appreciate an attractive woman. So, it could be worse.

"But it has affected my guitar playing. I doubt I'll ever play live again," he adds. "I watched a DVD recently of me onstage with Blodwyn Pig. I found myself saying, 'Blimey, that guy can play a bit!' Because it seemed as if I was watching a different person. These days, I can join in a bit on guitar with others, but nowhere near the level I was once able to achieve. That upsets me."

Abrahams first got into the spotlight in 1967 as a co-founder of Jethro Tull. He was the guitarist on the band's 1968 debut *This Was* before being... well, was he fired or did he quit?

"Listen, this is what happened. I got very pissed off with Ian Anderson, who saw Tull as his band, and he wasn't prepared to let anyone else voice their opinion on what was going on," he explains. "So I left. But what I told them at the time was that I'd stay on until they found a replacement for me, because there was no way I wanted to leave them in the shit. A short while later, I was called to a meeting at the office of Terry Ellis, the band's manager. You know what he said to me? 'Ian and the boys don't want you in the band any more so you've been fired.' I just replied to Terry, 'How can you fire me when I quit three weeks ago? Just go fuck yourself!'"

Thankfully, relations between Abrahams and Anderson are a lot more amicable these days. "I even get on well now with Terry," he says. "Actually, Ian's manager, his son James, has been helping me out a lot recently. What a great bloke. I told Ian that I thought James was a credit to him, and that not only was he a very nice person, but thoroughly honest and truthful. You might have thought Ian would be happy to hear such praise for his own flesh and blood. Instead he said, 'So what? That's the least I would expect from him.' Typical Ian!"

After leaving Tull, Abrahams put together his own band, featuring Jack Lancaster (saxophone/flute), Andy Pyle (bass) and Ron Berg (drums). Abrahams himself handled vocals. Taking the name Blodwyn Pig, they released debut album *Ahead Rings Out* in 1969, which reached No.9 in the UK chart, underlining the feeling that this band could be a force in their own right.

"From the beginning of Blodwyn Pig I had a vision for what I wanted," Abrahams explains. "Essentially I've always thought of myself as a blues player, but with a little country, jazz and other styles thrown in for good measure. I never wanted us to be seen as performing one type of music or another. However, we inevitably began to get lumped in with certain other

> "The band were introduced as being 'avant-garde'. It would have been closer to the point to call us ''aven't a fucking clue'!"

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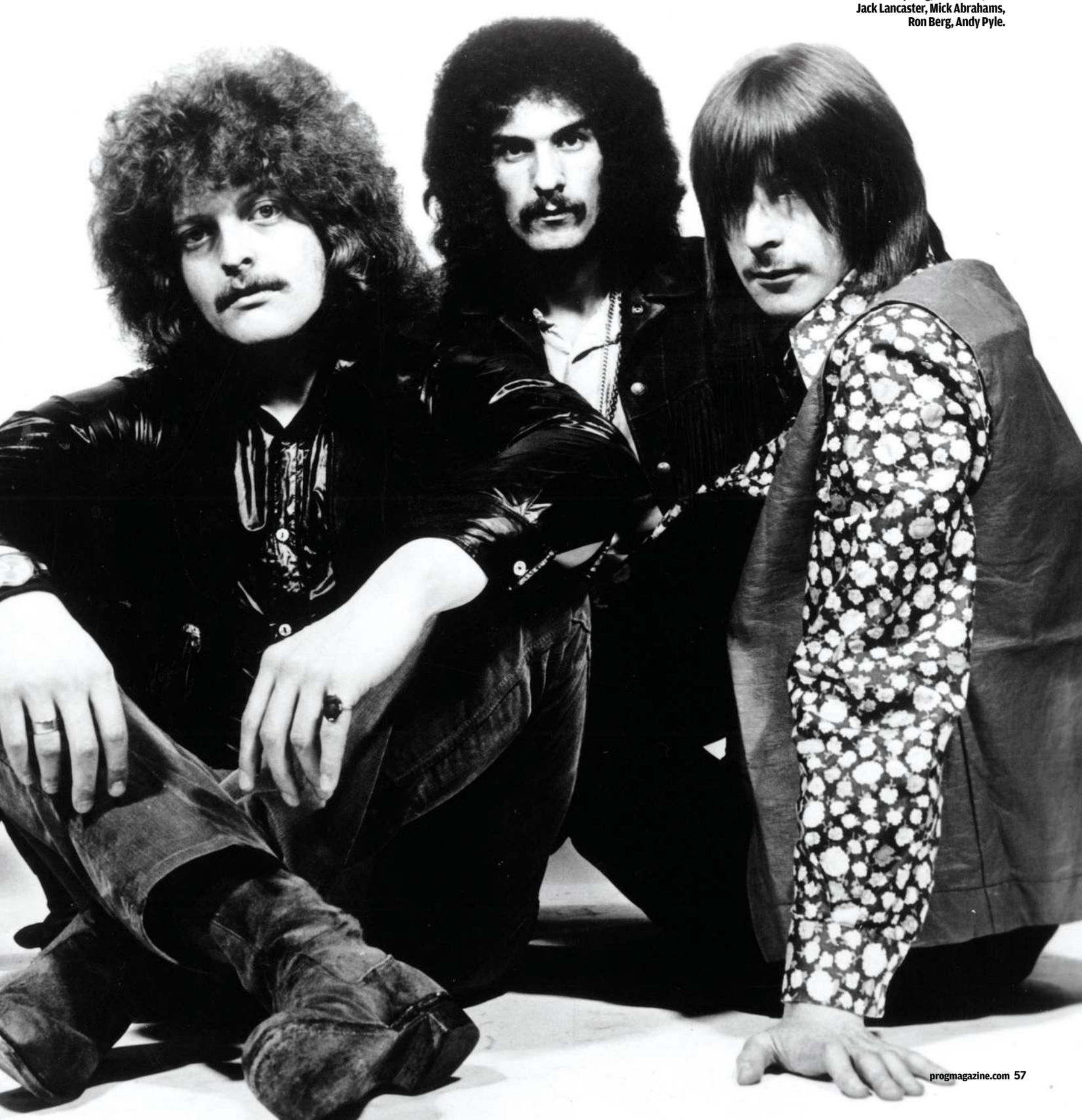


Blodwyn Pig, circa 1970, L-R: Jack Lancaster, Mick Abrahams, Ron Berg, Andy Pyle.

The Boar Four: Blodwyn Pig when they were set to be prog's next big thing...

bands of the era. Some called us blues while there were those who insisted we were progressive. And when we did *Top Of The Pops* [playing the single *Same Old Story* on the episode that aired on January 29, 1970], the band were introduced as being 'avant-garde'. It would have been closer to the point to call us ''aven't a fucking clue'!"

In 1969, Blodwyn Pig featured at such major events as the Bath Festival Of Blues, the Isle Of Wight Festival and the Reading Festival. They got to play live with the likes of Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Fleetwood Mac, King Crimson, Soft Machine, The Nice and Colosseum. It's an eclectic mix of names, but it underlines how this foursome could fit in with anyone.

"Oh, that's totally true. We could hold our own with any company. It didn't bother us if we were put on the bill with Crimson or Zeppelin. Nothing changed for us, and nothing phased us."

1970's Same Old Story single.

But by the time second album *Getting To This* was released in 1970, making it to No.8 in the UK chart, Abrahams admits there had been a change in attitude within the band.

"I have to say that maybe I allowed my input on this album to be reduced too much when compared to what went on with the previous album. So, it wasn't as coherent as it should have been. Jack's influence was obvious, in that he wanted the sound to be more orchestral, and to a large extent he pulled this off. But then he was a very talented musician.

"It's just that what I loved about *Ahead Rings Out* was that it sounded as if we were playing live in the studio. Yes, we added some overdubs when required, but there was a flow to the music that really caught what I felt the band were all about. That's missing to some extent with the second one."

Abrahams also reveals there was a certain friction between himself and Pyle, something that would surface in a more pronounced fashion later, to the serious detriment of Blodwyn Pig.

"One day Andy said to me that he felt he should have more songwriting credits on the second album. I told him he already had a couple, and that was because he'd only contributed to those songs and no others on the writing front. His response was, 'Oh yeah, I guess so.'

"But he left the whole subject hanging in the air, and wouldn't accept the reality that you can only get credit for what you do. So I did something insane, and I've never told anyone this before. I had written a great song called *Worry* on my own, but decided to give the full writing credit to Andy, just to keep him happy! Yes, it was a stupid

ALAMY

thing to do, and I regret it now. But I just wanted to make sure everybody in the band was satisfied with what was going on, and if that meant giving *Worry* to Andy then so be it.

"Andy was someone who was only in it for the money," he continues. "When he joined the band, one of the first things he said to me was, 'Okay, so can I now go out and buy a flash car on what you'll pay me?' I had to explain it didn't work like that. And he was seriously pissed off that I wasn't going to be his ticket to making a fortune!"

One interesting song on *Getting To This* is *Variations On Nainos*. Not because of the music, but due to that title — was there a veiled nod to Ian Anderson in the word 'Nainos'? Rearranged, it could read 'Ian Son'...

Abrahams laughs. "Yes, that's definitely supposed to make you think of Ian. Not in any nasty way, but... well, I'm not sure in what way we meant it. Jack had done a great solo for the song and I then did one that was quite good. We were both stoned in the studio and the title just came to us. I have no clue what we were thinking of, but we were certainly consciously referencing Ian."

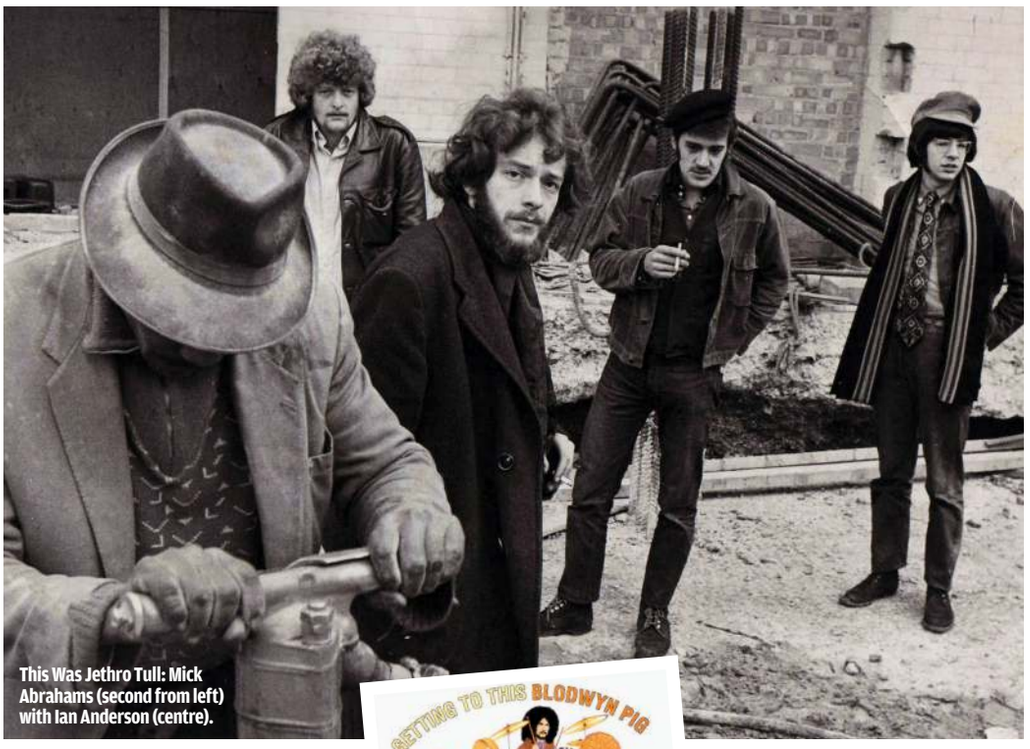
While things were looking good for Blodwyn Pig, in September 1970, something astonishing happened — Abrahams left his own band. What on earth was going on?

"We were preparing for an American tour and I called Andy to ask what was going on with rehearsals. He said, 'Well, Ron, me and Jack are going to rehearse, but without you. We don't want you involved because you hate flying, and to tour over there properly you have to fly.' That was it.

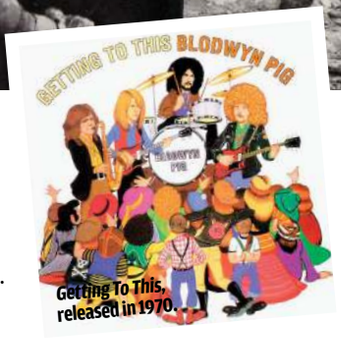
"I'm convinced this all came from Andy. He was a real shit-stirrer and would have talked the others into following his lead on this. So they got in two guitarists [former Yes man Peter Banks, plus Barry Reynolds] to take over from me, went out and toured. However, it didn't work at all without me and the band soon split up."

What's amazing is that Abrahams had not only started Blodwyn Pig and was the leader, but he also owned the name. So why on earth did he allow his bandmates not just to sack him but also carry on playing live as Blodwyn Pig? He simply shrugs his shoulders.

"I couldn't be bothered to get into a legal fight with them over it. I thought it was easier to allow it to happen. And it soon fell apart anyway."



This Was Jethro Tull: Mick Abrahams (second from left) with Ian Anderson (centre).



Getting To This, released in 1970.

But the guitarist does think that this unexpected twist in the Pig tail so soon after the release of the second album left things unfulfilled.

"I do feel that had we stayed together, this band would have been huge. There was a lot of potential we never got to explore, and we had a unique magic, which you can hear on our albums. I did try to revive the band a few times with different line-ups, but they all failed, and that's because they never had the creative connection the four of us had in the original era."

The impact of Blodwyn Pig has been enormous, especially in America where bands such as Aerosmith cite them as a huge inspiration. Punk icon Joey Ramone even covered *See My Way*, a track from *Ahead Rings Out*. And the band have infiltrated the silver screen too. *Dear Jill*, also from their first album, can be heard in the celebrated 2000 Cameron Crowe movie *Almost Famous*.

"That took me by surprise, but it's meant there's been some money coming in, which helps. We also get a namecheck in the British film *Still Crazy* [1998]. That's about a fictitious band called Strange Fruit. And one member of that band does have a line that Strange Fruit will not go onstage following Blodwyn Pig! I loved that."

One question is left to be answered: is the original Blodwyn Pig male or female? It's something that has never been fully stated. Time for Abrahams to clear up the confusion... or not!

"I've no idea!" he says. "It was Graham Waller, a maniac friend of mine, who came up with the name. He was off his head at the time and just came out with it. People have always assumed the name was inspired by the Dylan Thomas play *Under Milk Wood*, but that's not at all true. I can tell you for a fact that Graham wasn't thinking of anything literary when he blurted this out — he was too stoned for that.

"The word 'blodwyn' is Welsh and loosely translates as 'love', which is a nice thought. But we have never seen our pig as being male or female. Maybe that fits in nicely with the current climate, because Blodwyn Pig could be seen as a pioneer for the LGBT movement. That would be a cool way to see the creature.

"One thing I can tell you," Abrahams adds, "is that unlike Pink Floyd, who were once asked which one was Pink, nobody in the band was ever asked what happened to our female singer Blodwyn!"

So, what would Abrahams like the band to be remembered for?

"Making good, honest music," he says, "without any prejudice."

"I genuinely do feel that had we stayed together, this band would have been huge. There was a lot of potential we never got to explore. We had a unique magic."

Ahead Rings Out and Getting To This have been reissued via Chrysalis and are out now. See www.squirrelmusic.com.

Progressive Music Awards 2018

STEVE HOWE

Prog God 2018

As *Prog* prepares to bestow the ultimate accolade on **Steve Howe**, the veteran guitarist talks us through the highs and lows of his incredible career, from the UFO underground to world domination with Yes and Asia.

Words: Chris Roberts

Stranger Strings: Steve Howe, Prog God.

VICTOR WATTS/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

"It's always nice to get an award, to get commemorated," says Steve Howe. "Particularly ones that you can only get once, like the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame – and this! Prog God... I mean, it's a funny title, it kind of makes me smile. It's a nice moment – thank you so much. I'm going to be in London so I'll be attending to accept, yes."

Statistically, Howe must have said the word Yes as often as any of us. As the long-time guitarist with the enduring giants of cosmic rock, Howe has surely merited his place on the Mount Rushmore of prog. He joined the band in 1970, instantly galvanising their sound on the breakthrough *The Yes Album* and playing a key role throughout their inspired run of music across that decade.

> "How hilarious is it that Bill Bruford left Yes after *Close To The Edge* because he thought it was too commercial?"

When they briefly dissolved in 1981 after *Drama*, he enjoyed further success with supergroup Asia, whose 1982 debut was America's biggest-selling album that year. He moved on to GTR with Steve Hackett, then Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe, which he describes today as "a red-hot band". In 1990 they were swallowed up by Yes ("a bloody nightmare!").

After that unwieldy incarnation blew up, he picked up his parallel career of solo and extracurricular work before finding himself again unable to say no to Yes in 1995. He's been a mainstay with them whenever they've been active since, and in this year of their 50th anniversary, he now stands as their longest-serving member. Along the way there have been return visits to Asia, outings with the Steve Howe Trio and multiple other projects.

Howe has always been hungrily busy, from his youthful 60s days with The Syndicats (produced by Joe Meek), psychedelic ravers Tomorrow and Bodast. Even his occasional guest sessions with others reads like a wish list of era-defining music: Lou Reed's solo debut, Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Welcome To The Pleasuredome*, Queen's *Innuendo*. So it's been a stellar career, and one that continues to move forward apace. He's presently on a US tour with Yes where, the night before we speak, he'd enjoyed the setting at their Westbury, New York gig.

"It was nice for Yes to be back on a round stage after all these years," he says. "The one in Phoenix also moves round. We're blessed with these shows that are reminiscent of some of the best gigs Yes did in the round back in the 70s."

Does it ever get dizzy for the band on that roundabout?

"Er, not really – it's down to the mechanics. If it ever jerks, it puts everybody off, so it's important it's perfect. There was a very slight buzzing sound last night, but it was only noticeable to us. It was a fantastic gig."

It's been a jam-packed year for Howe, Alan White, Geoff Downes, Jon Davison and Billy Sherwood as they've marked the Yes half-century with shows and events on both sides of the Atlantic. With the Anderson-Rabin-Wakeman chapter also touring, Yes fans have been spoiled for choice – or, more probably, imploding in an endless grumpy debate as to which outfit is better.

Wisely, Howe swerves any conflict, happier to talk about the music his branch of Yes are making, and reflecting on the band's past and present of pioneering sounds and roller-coaster regime changes.

"We're very proud that we have the ability to root through our music and select different sets for consecutive tours, from *Close To The Edge* to *...Topographic Oceans* to *Drama* to you name it. We work pretty hard as we like to cover a lot of Yes' music and

Steve Howe (left) and Jon Anderson recording Yes' *Fragile* at Advision Studios in London, August 20, 1971.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

reach those pockets. And we like to keep doing things that might not have been predicted. That's how we've been celebrating the anniversary.

"On this tour we've had Tony Kaye on encores, Patrick Moraz is playing with us in Philadelphia [both on keyboards] and [bassist] Trevor Horn's an occasional onstage visitor. He'll be performing part of *Fly From Here* with us, which as you know we've reinvented. We always felt it was empowering for us to get Trevor involved again: his presence, in his multiple roles, was important. He has a great history with the band, and it continues."

Howe recalls his own highly significant history with the band, and early on it involved diplomatically stepping in between Mr Squire and Mr Anderson.

"Most people join a band so they can wear tight trousers and wiggle about. I did it because I wanted to know if I could be a constructive part of a team. When I joined Yes, Chris and Jon… it's got to be said, they often didn't get on. They both wanted to run the band. Then I came in, and in a way I said, 'Well, okay, *I'll* run the band then!' Now none of that went down in that kind of sentence, but I saw two guys squabbling, so I'd say, 'This guy is right on this.' And they'd be surprised, but take it. Then another time I'd go, 'But today that guy is right on that.' I'd side with the idea, not the person.

"I helped to make the group strong by bringing a balance. It needed it. I didn't want to be the leader, but to be a strong voice on the team, brave enough to speak up. I wanted to be in the forefront, with enjoyable, serviceable ideas. I didn't want to rule the world — I just wanted to be part of the story! To be useful, basically…"

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

CLAYTON CALL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Top: Yes' Alan White, Steve Howe, Jon Anderson, Chris Squire and Rick Wakeman rocking the 80s look.

Above: Steve Howe and Geoff Downes live with Asia at the Warfield Theater in San Francisco, May 22, 1982.

Useful he was, as *The Yes Album*, the first in his golden run with the group, catapulted them to success.

"I mean, Chris and Jon had seen me in other bands. And when I was asked to join, we got along very well… the guys were great. I was amazed by Bill Bruford's drumming: I'd always seen the drummer as a central figure in any band, and he knocked me out. And so we delivered *The Yes Album*, and started to collaborate with Eddy Offord, which was a great thing. And they encouraged me to put *Clap* [Howe's solo acoustic guitar track] on the album, so I couldn't have been happier.

"I wouldn't say it was a piece of cake — we were dependent on income from live shows for a long time. There were periods of struggle. Those first two albums were highly creative and musical, but they hadn't sold. Fortunately *The Yes Album* did, and we established ourselves. I think we put the stamp on there that this band was going somewhere and had a story to tell. We had our own sound, which was quirky and risky as hell. We stood out because we were kind of weird… which is a very good thing!"

From there, Yes soared through the 70s with a work ethic that saw them committed to a relentless touring and recording schedule.

"We were self-driven. We had a musical desire to be successful first, but let's not beat around the bush — we wanted to have nice houses and nice cars too. I mean, it's not illegal to want those things! And the fact it was an album era and we were an album band gave us a lot of comfort.

"We didn't need a hit single. Okay, the edited *Roundabout* set us off well in America — that helped *Fragile* immensely. But we were trying to be obscure! We were trying to be less commercial, not more. We actually sat down and discussed 'de-commercialising' our music, so it didn't repeat the same old fodder to get on the radio. We just weren't into that. We were *our* band, so we did what we did."

There were those, of course, who reckoned that when Yes started relaying *Tales From Topographic Oceans*, they took their "de-commercialising" tendencies too far. Yet for many loyal fans, this is when they really got going.

"Obviously if you make a piece of music like *The Gates Of Delirium*, you're not kidding yourself that you're going to be on Radio 1! But this was the joy, the empowerment, that Yes had. It was an anti-establishment idea. We were both of the times and ahead of the times. *Relayer* was full of our creative impulses, which were something to reckon with. Jon and I had developed such a close, beautiful writing relationship.

"Then that continuous workload for 10 years was partly created by managers and agents who wanted their buck. It got a bit out of control. But I can't complain — you're rarely going to be successful without people like that in your career, so you'd better get used to it!

"To our credit, we were capable of living up to the expectations of this fast-moving schedule — and to the artistic ones. We carried on, kept building. I mean, how hilarious is it that Bill [Bruford] left after *Close*

Guitar Heroes: GTR's Steve Howe and Steve Hackett in Chicago, June 15, 1986.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

"I helped to make Yes strong, by bringing a balance. It needed it. I didn't want to be the leader, but to be a strong voice on the team, brave enough to speak up."

To The Edge because he thought it was too commercial? [Laughs] We put the music first. Kept pushing on to the next story, the next era. The next album was always the most exciting one to us."

Howe muses over *Tormato* getting "tonally difficult" and clarifies that the band had got "differing needs" by that point. "To me, it signalled problems. It became a bumpy road."

But then Yes "discovered Trevor Horn and Geoff Downes, and developed Yes to go on again. *Drama* sits awfully well with me. I love that album, I'll admit it, even if I'm not always sure who's playing what on it…"

He later expresses his fondness for the studio tracks on 1996's *Keys To Ascension*, which marked his third time of joining Yes. After the 1981 split, though, which he partly puts down to British audiences "undermining us" by showing unkindness to Horn, he'd moved out to conquer separate terrain. He teamed up with Downes, Carl Palmer and John Wetton for Asia, which swiftly grew to be almost as big as the continent. "John and Geoff started writing all these great songs together, and Geoff and I had musical chemistry, sparring off each other. That first album was bloody great."

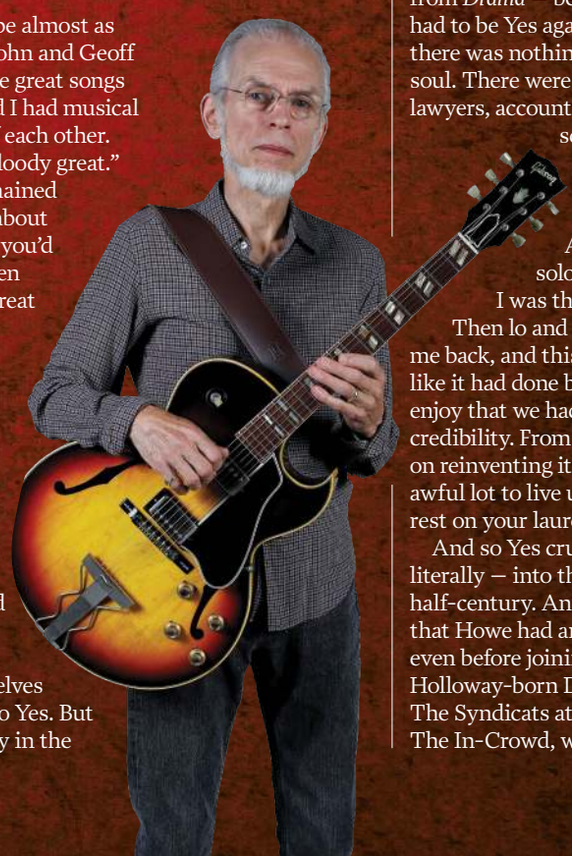
The bumpy road remained bumpy. "The 80s was about a loss of continuity. So you'd do something great, then not. Then something great again, then something not great. A win-lose-win-lose time. The second Asia album was… a mixed bag. GTR came together, did a nice tour, but became fragmented. And then Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe comes along, and the one album we do is pretty amazing. Great, we've established ourselves as a whole new entity to Yes. But no! Suddenly somebody in the band, or their manager, reckons it'll be better to call it Yes. And that was the beginning of the end.

"We were just a great little band called ABWH — we could take on anybody! It felt like being in Tomorrow again! But it was all sacrificed, all taken to the slaughter — to quote a Yes song from *Drama* — because apparently we had to be Yes again. And at that time there was nothing there. No heart and soul. There were too many people, lawyers, accountants, drivers, pension schemes. It was a bloody nightmare!

"After that I popped back to Asia, and did more solo shows, and thought I was the new Chet Atkins…

Then lo and behold, '95, Yes invite me back, and this time it feels nice, like it had done before. I started to enjoy that we had years and years of credibility. From there Yes just kept on reinventing itself… We've got an awful lot to live up to now — you can't rest on your laurels."

And so Yes cruise — sometimes literally — into their second half-century. And let's not forget that Howe had an intriguing career even before joining that journey. The Holloway-born Devon resident joined The Syndicats at 17, then moved on to The In-Crowd, whose singer Keith



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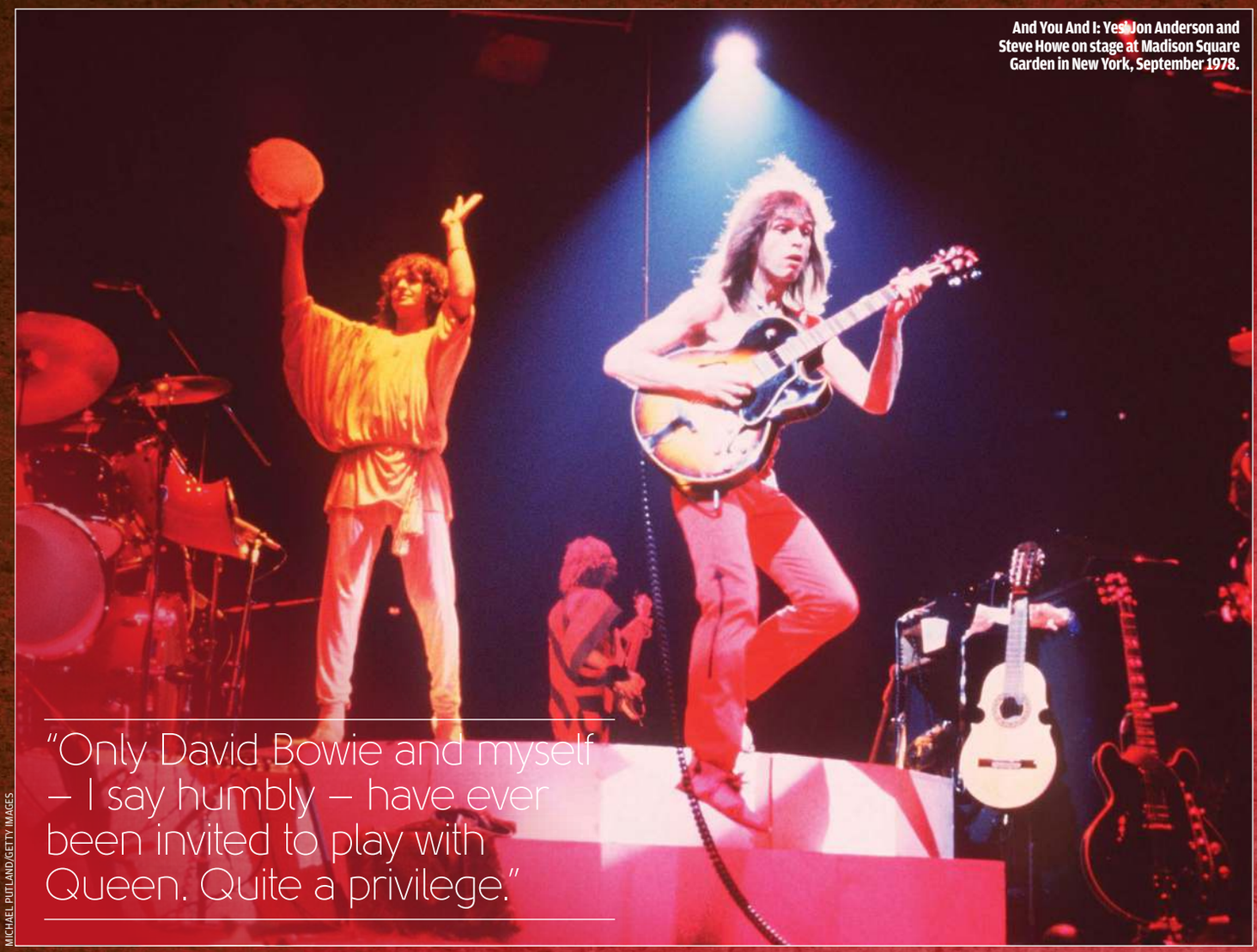

And You And I: Yes' Jon Anderson and Steve Howe on stage at Madison Square Garden in New York, September 1978.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

"Only David Bowie and myself – I say humbly – have ever been invited to play with Queen. Quite a privilege."

West made the cult classic *Excerpt From A Teenage Opera*. Morphing into Tomorrow, they had a hit with *My White Bicycle* and were hepcats on the UFO underground scene, playing with Pink Floyd, Soft Machine and Hendrix before splitting in 1968. Howe then joined Bodast, who appeared set up with a US record deal and an album produced by Keith West, but the record got shelved (until Howe excavated it years later). Some of Howe's music and riffs for Bodast songs turned up in reimagined forms with Yes.

"America were chomping at the bit for Bodast, but the label closed and the album got buried, which was so depressing. When I joined Yes I figured that music, which I'd worked hard on, was never going to come out. So yes, there are at least three references to it in Yes music, most notably *Würm* in *Starship Trooper*, and if you listen closely, there are bits in *Close To The Edge*. I won't hide good stuff away – it served us well and had another life. A twist of fate."

And is it true that as part of Tomorrow, you did the first ever John Peel session? "I believe so. He took a shine to us – that psychedelic scene was really happening at the UFO. People were tuning in to that. Tomorrow was the first band where I felt we had a powerful, confident ego, where we believed in ourselves. We felt we could stand up to more or less anyone – Hendrix, Floyd, we'll do it!

"We weren't shy. It was very enjoyable. And great training. We even appeared in that film *Smashing Time* [a 1967 British comedy], where we're in, of all things, a cream pie fight. I think my one line was, 'Get him!' That didn't do us much good though!"

GEMS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Tomorrow in 1967, clockwise from back left: John 'Junior' Wood, Steve Howe, John 'Twink' Alder, Keith West.

Howe's other work across the decades, documented on the two consummately curated *Anthology* collections, ranges from solo albums (from 1975's near-classic *Beginnings* to 2011's *Time*) to music with the Steve Howe Trio, featuring son Dylan (who's also played with Yes) on drums. Of course, there's also last year's *Nexus* album, which documented a collaboration with his son Virgil, who tragically died shortly before its release. "He wrote most of it, and I coloured it," Steve says. "Basically I'm going to love that record forever. Bless his dear heart."

As for those fruitful guest sessions with Queen, Lou Reed et al, Howe is "proud to have been versatile. That's why I loved Chet Atkins – he cut across. I always wanted to mix up Chet, Wes Montgomery, flamenco, [Andrés] Segovia... which was a big ask, and somehow I morphed into a cross-bred guitarist. If you can't do sessions, you're not a very good musician. You should revel in the challenge.

"I have no idea how Rick [Wakeman] and I got asked to do Lou [Reed]'s debut solo album, except that we were in the

same studio, at Morgan in Willesden. Thing is, he did it right: played us the demos and said: 'Go out there and do them better than this.'

"As for Queen's *Innuendo*, only David Bowie and myself — I say humbly — have ever been invited to play with Queen. Quite a privilege. And some people think it's amazing that I'm on Frankie Goes To Hollywood. It means people's expectations of me shift. Anything that surprises people and brings them in is great. It hopefully leads to them exploring the whole landscape of Yes and all my music."

There's no doubt it's been a curveball career as dazzling and unpredictable as a Howe guitar line. What keeps him going strong at 71? His schedule with Yes and others would be enough to exhaust a man half that age. Is there a secret to surviving and thriving?

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

High Drama: Yes live in November 1980, L-R: Geoff Downes, Steve Howe, Trevor Horn, Chris Squire.

"Well, it'd take a long time to fully explain. One thing which surprises me is how much I still dearly love the guitar. But the fact that I've got energy and determination and some clarity, and I'm still prepared to make sacrifices, that's got more to do with learning to make better decisions.

"When I went vegetarian in 1972, and then when I started meditating [Transcendental Meditation] in 1983, those two points have made a far more profound difference to my life than, y'know, what car I drive or what clothes I wear or how my haircut is!

"I allowed those decisions to make change. I wasn't bothered if people sneered or joked back then. I called bullshit. Basically, me, [wife] Jan and my family decided we were going to live our lives the way *we* wanted to, while hopefully not upsetting anybody else.

"We're not radicals, we're not extremists. All we want is to pick a healthy, loving life. Now, certainly I can be pleased that I'm fit and slim and healthy and fairly sensible, but I don't like to take anything for granted. Every day you need to take steps to make your life good.

"It's not a case of you do one thing and you're the luckiest guy in the world. You have to not let yourself down. My regular patterns and routines, my concern about the food I eat and the non-pharmaceutical things I prefer — these choices empower me, giving me energy and clarity. If I hadn't made those decisions, I wouldn't be here…

"Oh, I don't mean I wouldn't be on the Earth! I mean, you wouldn't be talking to me as the long-term guitarist of Yes. I wouldn't have done that so well. Maybe I wouldn't have been able to bounce back so many times, or I'd have taken greater offence at things people connected to me have done, all that stuff.

"So very generally — look after yourself. Doctors and hospitals look after you when you're sick, but it's much better to avoid getting sick in the first place. Keep yourself on that plane, that level, every day. That's what I've learned. Not long before he died, my dad, who was a master chef, told me he loved his routines. Said they were his channel, his route through life. So that taught me: don't knock routine if it makes your life run smoother.

"Same with music, though I'm not an arduous practiser — I don't need to like you do in your first 10 years. What I do is play, not practise. Find new things, improvise, muck about. And I explore an array of textures, a family of guitars — steel, acoustic, electric, Spanish, 12-string. I wasn't just hearing Hank or Duane when I started, or any one style: I was happier with a multifaceted approach. I was hearing a different drumbeat… except on guitar!"

Steve Howe, Prog God: forever marching to his own guitar sounds.

Steve Howe's Anthology is out now on Rhino. For more see www.stevehowe.com and www.yesworld.com.

10 OF THE BEST

Our pick of Steve Howe's classic tracks.

True To Me

(The Syndicats, *single*, 1964)

60s guitar-driven pop band The Syndicats were Steve Howe's first ever band. The jaunty, upbeat *True To Me*, penned by Howe, was a Joe Meek-produced B-side to their first single, *Maybellene*.

Revolution

(Tomorrow, *Tomorrow*, 1968)

There's a distinctly psychedelic vibe here from Tomorrow. Penned by Howe and singer Keith West, this preceded The Beatles' song of the same name by a year, and it's thought to have inspired Lennon's tune.

Excerpt From A Teenage Opera

(Keith West, *A Teenage Opera*, 1967)

Almost everyone has heard this 60s pop classic, but few knew that Howe played guitar on it, alongside former Tomorrow singer Keith West.

Yours Is No Disgrace

(Yes, *The Yes Album*, 1971)

The first time Yes fans heard Steve Howe on guitar was with the bold opener on *The Yes Album*. All big, bouncy riffs and chords, it was immediately evident that Yes were a very different prospect with Howe.

Clap

(Yes, *The Yes Album*, 1971)

Influenced by Howe's hero Chet Atkins, and written to celebrate the birth of his son Dylan, this solo tune highlights Howe's dexterity with the acoustic guitar. It was recorded live at London's Lyceum in 1970.

Starship Trooper

(Yes, *The Yes Album*, 1971)

The other really big musical statement from *The Yes Album*, the closing *Würm* section of this track was developed from a song called *Nether Street* by Howe's pre-Yes band Bodast, whose sole album hadn't then been released.

Going For The One

(Yes, *Going For The One*, 1977)

The title track from the band's 1977 album *Going For The One* is an all-out guitar attack from Howe. He played steel guitar throughout the entire song, which was a first during his time in the band.

Time Again

(Asia, *Asia*, 1982)

Although the writing partnership of Geoff Downes and John Wetton tended to overshadow all else in Asia, this track from their debut was written by all four members and remains one of the debut's finest tunes.

When The Heart Rules The Mind

(GTR, *GTR*, 1986)

Howe's partnership with former Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett might have been too commercial for some, but this energetic single stood out on their sole album.

Innuendo

(Queen, *Innuendo*, 1991)

As Howe proudly states, only he and David Bowie were ever invited to perform on a Queen song. Here his delicate flamenco playing is a real highlight on one of Queen's proggiest songs. **JE**

It's The Music That Matters

They've been picked up by a major label for their fourth album, but it hasn't been an easy ride for Australian proggers **Dead Letter Circus**. From geographical restrictions to money troubles and creative pressures, *Prog* discovers how they got here.

Words: Rod Whitfield **Images:** Ian Laidlaw

Australia's Dead Letter Circus have reached a very interesting stage in their career as a band. For the uninitiated *Prog* magazine reader, the group formed in Brisbane back in 2004-2005 from the remains of a well-regarded local act called Ochre. DLC released an iconic debut EP in 2007 that launched their career, catapulting them into the collective consciousness of Australian prog music aficionados already captivated by the likes of Cog, The Butterfly

Effect and Karnivool. 2010 saw the release of their debut long-player *This Is The Warning*, which led them to international attention.

Two further extremely well-received albums – 2013's *The Catalyst Fire* and 2015's *Aesthesis* – saw them building significantly on that momentum, spending more time touring abroad and generally cementing their place among the luminaries of modern alternative progressive rock across the globe.

Mid-2018 finds them on the eve of releasing their self-titled fourth record, and the band's dynamic and affable frontman Kim Benzie could not be happier with the group's collective headspace and the status of their profile, while remaining completely level-headed about the fact that their musical endeavours are never going to make them rich.

"We've always done it only for the music, not for grandeur or riches," he says, "and in this day and age, especially being in a five-piece band and not being solo artists, it's not about money. It's all about the music. At our level in 2018 and being a five-piece band with an equal split, as a listener you're listening to music that's created by people who you're leading a more luxurious life than!"

Benzie feels that this is the way it simply has to be in the modern era if you want to make music like this – music that's ignored in the most part by the mainstream and commercial radio – and that they've hit a point in their career where they no longer question what they're doing and carry on purely for the love of creating and playing.

"It's become a very dedicated process where we're in it for strictly the right intentions," he continues. "We're here to please ourselves musically and we have to keep ourselves interested to actually want to continue to do it. I feel like we've passed the point where it was make or break and questioning if we'd do another album."

Benzie reveals that the band still feel a little pressure from certain quarters to contrive their music to cater to certain audiences, markets, radio stations and so on, but ultimately he thinks that even attempting to do so is simply not a part of their make-up as musicians or as a band. It's more about going where the muse takes them.

"The amount of times we've heard that whole thing [in mock American accent], 'You've gotta write songs for American rock radio, man,' is unreal," he says. "And it's like, 'Dudes, we're incapable of writing with a concept in mind, or a marketing directive. It's just whatever the universe gives us.'"

He has recently been discussing the concept of the band now being a 'brotherhood', as

On Top Down Under: Dead Letter Circus have conquered Australia and have their sights set on the rest of the world.

"In this day and age, especially being in a five-piece band and not being solo artists, it's not about money. It's all about the music."

Band Of Brothers: "It's a privilege to be in the same room as these dudes," reckons frontman Kim Benzie.

opposed to a bunch of mates coming to play music together, and he's happy to expand on that idea. "In the early incarnations of the band, writing and recording was a really stressful time for us," he recalls. "Without going into too many details, it was just hard for us. I don't even know why, it just was. But this group of people, when we got to *Aesthesis*, the five of us, everyone has a special quality that they add to the team and no one's trying to do everything. We're all such good friends — in our personal time, we hang out on the weekends together. Our full circle is the circle of DLC!

"I'm just always like, 'Fuck, it's just such a privilege to be in the same room with these dudes. I'm just lucky to be the guy who gets to stand back and watch these guys free-form jamming.'"

"I feel like we've passed the point where it was make or break and questioning if we'd do another album."

That brotherhood and sense of kinship and open-mindedness extends to their creativity and how people's ideas are treated during the songwriting process, which helps facilitate the group's longevity too. "There are no stylistic barriers in the band — we're willing to try anything," Benzie says. "There's no negative feedback, everyone's just so open and fluid, whereas in the past we were a lot more rigid."

The band released an album called *The Endless Mile* last year, which featured reimagined acoustic/unplugged versions of some of their classic tunes. Apparently many of the seeds of the new self-titled release were planted during those sessions, some especially springing from the sometimes frustrating nature of revisiting older material in such a way. "At the start of last year, I didn't have a single idea," Benzie admits. "Within the last two weeks of doing the reimagined album, I was doing the harmonies for it. We'd gone a little bit over time with it, and I was casually doing it during the day at my own pace.

"At night, because I was sleeping on the floor in the studio, I think I was just in this reflex state where I was feeling that reinventing ourselves in a really stripped-back format was really hard, as was telling the same story again in a different version. I was just feeling really heavy in the evenings.

"It just left me in a strange mood, and I was like, 'I don't feel like doing anything for this bloody violin album!'" He laughs again. "One night, it was about three in the morning, I was in this semi-frustrated state and I ended up writing a whole new song called *The Real You*. The producer came by in the morning and said, 'Did you get all the harmony stuff done that I left you to do?' and I said, 'Mate, I didn't do any of it. But I did this.' And I showed him what I'd written."

It's important for people around the world, and especially those in the northern hemisphere, to be educated about just what a daunting situation it is for a non-mainstream, DIY band to even sustain a career in Australia — a country that's massive in area but relatively tiny in population — let alone attempt to expand their operations internationally from such an isolated base. It's an issue that bands such as Dead Letter Circus wrestle with on an ongoing basis, but it's one that DLC are determined to persist with.

"Obviously with Australia being our territory, where we get the base of our income, I think we've done six tours of America and I think it took six tours for it to not be a loss of tens of thousands of dollars," he reveals. "Because Australia is just a big island on the other side of the world, to tour America you're dropping 25 or 30 grand just to get there. So we have all of our Australian tours fund our international tours. It's just a huge thing.

"When you live in Australia, you know that there's been some amazing bands from here that never got out of Australia. And it's not because it didn't work for them over there — they just chose not to do it for that very reason. You really are rolling the dice with your income. But for us, it's all about the experience. We just want to get over there and make those connections with people.

"When you get people, especially in places like Germany or India, places that don't speak our language, screaming your lyrics back to you louder than you are, it's the biggest thrill. That's the pay dirt right there, that's us getting paid in kudos."

Despite the financial trials and tribulations involved, the band only intend to ramp up their international touring endeavours for this coming cycle supporting their new record — especially after the major step forward they took in their career earlier this year.

"We had a really awesome moment a few months ago — we actually got picked up by BMG internationally," Benzie says, "so this will be the first time we'll be touring internationally while on a major label. So obviously that means we've got a little bit more support, a bit more reach. So we'll be ramping things up a little more this time."

As far as the longer term future of the band is concerned, these days the members of DLC actually prefer not to look too far ahead. "We're more about what sits directly in front of us," Benzie says. "We're on an album by album emotional contract with each other."

Dead Letter Circus is out on September 21 via BMG. See www.deadlettercircus.com for more.

"THIS ELECTRIFYING AND HUGELY SIGNIFICANT DEBUT ALBUM HAS SONGWRITING AND MUSICIANSHIP AT ITS HEART AND THE SPIRIT OF RUSH COURSING THROUGH ITS VEINS..." ★★★★★

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Conny Plank

He was the avant-garde German producer who helped to create krautrock, and his legacy has influenced and inspired many, from Brian Eno to Radiohead. So now we have to ask: **how prog was Conny Plank?**

Words: Dave Everley

Pop quiz: who's the greatest prog rock producer of them all? Is it Eddy Offord, the man who helped construct the groundbreaking sound of ELP and Yes, or John Anthony, who shepherded Genesis, Van der Graaf Generator and Roxy Music to some of their early peaks? Or maybe it's Terry Brown, Rush's unofficial fourth member during their 70s imperial phase? Is it a game-changing auteur like Robert Fripp or Brian Eno? Or is it the daddy of them all: the late, great Sir George Martin, without whom the world would sound very different?

But there's another, more left-field contender to consider, one who never worked with any of the genre's big names but whose collaborations with a generation of experimental German bands would change the course of mainstream music: Conny Plank.

Between 1969 and his premature death in 1987, Plank helped instigate an underground revolution whose aftershocks can still be felt today. Working with such far-seeing bands as Neu!, Kraftwerk, Cluster, La Düsseldorf and Guru Guru, he helped draw up the boundaries of what came to be known as krautrock. His radical approach to recording rubbed off on sometime collaborator Brian Eno, who in turn spun it into commercial gold via the albums he made with David Bowie, Talking Heads and U2.

> **"You can't separate Conny from the bands he recorded because they belong together. – *Michael Rother***

"Conny was all about using the mind – taking the available technology and doing something special with it, changing it around," says Neu! guitarist Michael Rother, who recorded several albums with Plank between the early 70s and the mid-80s. "He wasn't like a mad scientist with all these live wires hanging around in the studio. The live wires were all in his mind."

Plank himself put it more succinctly in a rare interview when he said: "Craziness is something holy."

Ultravox's *Vienna* was Plank's biggest commercial success.

COURTESY OF STEPHAN PLANK

Mix Master: Plank behind the desk.

He was a creature of the studio, whether that was the commercial units he used at first or the recording space he later set up himself outside Cologne. Like George Martin and dub reggae pioneer Lee 'Scratch' Perry, he saw the studio as an integral part of the music that was being made. Sounds were warped and treated, tapes and instruments were manipulated, notes were sampled, replayed and twisted, physical space itself would become part of the music he helped create.

"There are two types of production," says The Fierce And The Dead's Matt Stevens. "There's the one where you capture what you hear, whereas someone like Conny Plank created a world in sound using the studio as an instrument. It's a way of designing the sound in the studio."

Konrad Plank was a child of the Second World War. He was born in the town of Hütschenhausen, South West Germany, in 1940, where his father played the organ in his local church. "I remember him telling me that his father was very strict and unrelenting in his musical ideas," says Michael Rother. "Conny wasn't like that. He loved to experiment."

One of Plank's first jobs was as engineer on a big band album made by German movie star Marlene Dietrich. By the late 60s, he was immersed in his homeland's burgeoning underground music scene, producing albums by proto-krautrock bands Kluster and The Organisation, the latter featuring future Kraftwerk members Florian Schneider and Ralf Hütter.

"It was a time of big changes in Germany," says Rother. "There was a post-World War II generation who were reacting against the past. It was a time of unrest and struggling to find your own identity – just to enjoy being different in every possible way. That was a motivation for Conny too."

CONNY PLANK - THE POTENTIAL OF NOISE PRESS

Visionary producer
Conny Plank.

THE OUTER LIMITS

Studio Guru: Plank working his magic.

CONNY PLANK - THE POTENTIAL OF NOISE PRESS

Conny Plank with Holger Czukay and Phew.

COURTESY OF STEPHAN PLANK

Rother met Plank in 1971 when the guitarist was briefly a member of Kraftwerk, whose first four albums the producer worked on. When Rother and drummer/vocalist Klaus Dinger put together Neu!, their first and only choice of collaborator was Plank.

"If we had approached another engineer or producer and said, 'We don't have any money but we have these ideas in our minds,' they would have laughed at us," says Rother. "But because Conny had a musical mind, he saw the qualities that were coming. He was someone who was willing to do crazy things. He was equally interested in doing new stuff and doing innovative sound as we were."

The sound Rother, Dinger and Plank created across the three albums that Neu! released between 1972 and 1975 – *Neu*, *Neu! 2* and *Neu! '75* – were instrumental in defining the shape this new musical form would take. Rother's heady washes of guitar and Dinger's instantly iconic 'motorik' drumbeat was a revolutionary new sound that still resonates today. But Plank's contribution was no less crucial to what was being created, pushing what the two musicians were doing even further out. Rother remembers recording *Hallogallo*, the first track on Neu!'s debut album and one of krautrock's foundation stones.

"I was doing overdubs in the recording room and he turned around the tapes so they played backwards," says Rother. "So I played along to that, and that was turned around again. I don't know where that idea came from, but it was inspirational. We were all producers, Klaus, I and Conny. But we owe him so much. We would not have been able to put the materials together the way he did. We needed his experience."

Plank was an imposing figure, tall and red-haired. He could be opinionated when necessary, though that wasn't his default setting. "He was very modest and he listened and maybe nudged you along sometimes, but in a very careful way," says Rother. "Conny had this ability to pick up where you were going and what you wanted to express and help you get there."

> **"Conny Plank created a world in sound using the studio as an instrument. It's a way of designing the sound in the studio." – Matt Stevens**

Plank's collaborations with Neu! remain his most resonant work, but he was more than just a one-band wonder. Through the 70s, he became the go-to producer for a host of German bands twisting 'rock' music into new shapes: Neu!, Kluster/Cluster, Can, krautrock 'supergroup' Harmonia, Dinger's post-Neu! group La Düsseldorf, Guru Guru (with whom Plank also played keyboards and guitar). None of these bands sounded anything like each other, but Plank's production was the connective tissue that linked them. As Rother, who continued to work with the producer after Neu!'s initial split in 1975, puts it: "You can't separate Conny from the bands he recorded because they belong together."

Brian Eno's 1977 album *Before And After Science*, engineered by Conny Plank.

By the late 70s, Plank's influence was beginning to bleed beyond the boundaries of the German avant-garde scene. Brian Eno, a man whose antennae were perpetually fine-tuned to radical new sounds, would take inspiration from Plank's methods when he united with David Bowie on the singer's celebrated 'Berlin Trilogy' of albums, 1977's *Low*, '78's *"Heroes"* and '79's *Lodger*.

"You can trace the Berlin-era albums back to Conny Plank," says Matt Stevens. "Even though at the time, people never made that step back to

Brian Eno, Dieter Moebius, Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Conny Plank in Plank's studio in Cologne, Germany, 1977.

COURTESY OF STEPHAN PLANK

COURTESY OF STEPHAN PLANK

him. The thing about Conny Plank is that a lot of the bands he was working with and the music he was making was so obscure that it was hard to even read about, let alone find before the internet. It was only when Julian Cope put out his *Krautrocksampler* book [in 1995] that a lot of people suddenly became aware of him."

Inevitably, Eno and Plank came into each other's orbit. The German engineered Eno's 1977 solo album *Before And After Science*, and co-produced the collaborative album Cluster & Eno the same year. Eno later recalled Plank setting up an innovative camera system to take photos of the mixing desk after every session so he could replicate the positions of the faders should he need to in future.

As Plank's influence grew, he became a magnet for bands outside of the German underground. He wasn't averse to working with more mainstream groups — as far back as 1972, he had produced the debut album from German rockers the Scorpions, and by the early 80s he had added Devo, Eurythmics, A Flock Of Seagulls and Ultravox to his CV. It was the latter's 1982 album *Vienna*, with its gothic synth-pop title track, that would give Plank his biggest commercial success. A mooted collaboration with U2 on what would become their 1987 album *The Joshua Tree* could have been even more successful had it not fallen apart after Plank met the band. "I cannot work with that singer," he reportedly said of Bono.

Dave Stewart and Annie Lennox with Plank, working on music by pre-Eurythmics band The Tourists in 1979.

Krautrock King: Neu!'s first three albums – *Neu, Neu! 2* and *Neu! '75* – which were all produced by Plank.

In truth, Plank thrived in the cracks between the paving slabs of the music industry. In the 80s, he continued to collaborate with Michael Rother, former Cluster members Dieter Moebius and Hans-Joachim Roedelius, ex-Can bassist Holger Czukay, Brian Eno and others in various permutations as both producer and musician.

It was while Plank was on tour with Dieter Moebius in South America that he became ill. Returning to Germany, he was diagnosed with laryngeal cancer. On December 18, 1987, Conny Plank died. He was just 47.

More than 30 years after his death, numerous bands and producers still draw inspiration from what Plank created in the 70s. Some of it is direct — Steven Wilson covered Neu!'s *Hallogallo* with Porcupine Tree, while Radiohead's 2016 track *Full Stop* sounds like a vintage krautrock jam retooled for the 21st century. Some of it is less so: the likes of producer Nigel Godrich, King Gizzard And The Lizard Wizard mastermind Stu Mackenzie and The Fierce And The Dead's Matt Stevens have all been shaped in some respect by Plank's holistic MO.

"Conny Plank used to record epic jams and then edit them down to tunes," says Stevens. "That's an approach we took on our first EP, which was one 19-minute song. His influence is so consistent through a lot of incredibly interesting music over the last 40 years."

For all his innovations, Plank never swamped the music he was helping to create. Michael Rother recalls the producer being interviewed in the 1980s, a time when all but a few experimental music aficionados knew of his great sonic upheavals.

"He was asked in an interview, 'What is your role? What do you see yourself as?'" says Rother. "And he said, 'I'm a midwife — I help the musicians give birth to their ideas.' That's a good picture. He knew these ideas were our babies, but he made it possible, in a humble but talented way. He showed us in our best light."

Conny Plank: The Potential Of Noise is in UK cinemas from August 26. For more information, see bit.ly/plank-facebook.

YOUR SHOUT!

He created a pioneering sound with the motorik rhythms of krautrock, but also worked with some of pop and rock's finest. So how prog was Conny Plank?

"Never heard any of his music but he produced Ultravox so that's prog enough for me."
Andy Wyatt

"He is a legend in Germany, and I have many albums that he produced."
John Pieroni

"He produced *Lonesome Crow* by the Scorpions, which is not really prog, but it's pretty psychedelic. Didn't he do the first Devo record also? [*No, that was Brian Eno, with some help from David Bowie – Ed.*] There was definitely a wide variety of music that he was responsible for. None of it was prog, though."
Scott Hermansen

"I'd put him in progressive electronic/space."
Yserbius G

"Not prog. He's the King of Kosmische production, but progressive in the true sense."
Jim McKeown

"Conny Plank's influence on prog/krautrock/art rock cannot be denied. He was there as a producer, or involved as an artist, on some of the most pioneering records of all time. Kluster/Cluster, Kraftwerk, Eloy, Neu!, LA Düsseldorf, Brian Eno, Can, Guru Guru, as well as Ultravox, Killing Joke and Holger Czukay. My only question: why is he on the Outer Limits? He should be right in the middle of prog central. There cannot be many people with such a right to claim they are prog than Conny Plank."
Paul Leader

"An excellent iconic producer who did era-defining albums of Kraftwerk, Ultravox – the epic *Vienna* album – and Eurythmics, a band definately worthy of an Outer Limits of prog slot one day!"
Les Moyes

"Bigger than Eno."
Tony Burton

"Absolutely prog. He engineered one the greatest prog albums of all time: *Rockpommel's Land* by Grobschnitt."
Robert McMillan

"The fact that he produced *Autobahn* and then 'progressed' to acts like prog-influenced Ultarvox cements his lineage."
Andrew Halley

"A bit wooden!" [*We see what you did there Gary... Ed.*]
Gary Wardlow

"A progger with a soft spot for charming amateurishness."
Remy Strauli

"Very prog. Krautrock wouldn't exist without him."
Ken Forrest

"I have no idea who this is, *but* one of the joys of *Prog* magazine is that I learn of some excellent artists and hear some fantastic music. Off to do some research..."
Paul Swanton

"Maybe not prog but a very influencial producer and a pioneer of electronic music."
Aiden Robert Campbell

SPACE SYMPHONIES

Back with a new album after five years, **Spiritualized**'s latest sees them ruminating on getting older. From turning down £2m to resurrect his old band Spaceman 3 to dismissing the idea of 'heritage acts', frontman **Jason Pierce** has plenty to say about taking music forward...

Words: Rob Hughes **Images:** Juliette Larthe

Floating In Space: Spiritualized mainman Jason Pierce.

If a job's worth doing at all, then it's worth doing properly. At least according to Jason Pierce, the creative nexus of Spiritualized, the space rock visionaries he founded 28 years ago. Pierce has a reputation for being something of a serious-minded perfectionist, though his latest album took him to new extremes.

"There ended up being a kind of madness involved," he says of *And Nothing Hurt*, the long-overdue follow-up to 2012's *Sweet Heart Sweet Light*. "Every time I do this I fall into the same trap. I forget everything I've ever learned about how to make a record and I get obsessed in the same way. Even the nature of obsessing deeply over nine pieces of music is crazy in itself. It starts to become like, 'What is the point of all this?'"

There is also the challenge that every artist faces in the modern era: how to make a valid musical statement when it's all more or less been done before?

> "I feel like everything's been said so beautifully and eloquently and played so well in the past, so what's the point of adding to that?"

The weight of history is something that Pierce is acutely aware of. "When I was younger, it felt like I could play the music I loved — other people's music — and be totally inspired," he explains. "It would open up these worlds of opportunity. But it floors me as I get older. I feel like everything's been said so beautifully and eloquently and played so well in the past, so what's the point of adding to that? And with that comes a kind of great responsibility, that I shouldn't be entering into this lightly, I shouldn't just be throwing songs out as a means to get back on stage or on the road. It *has* to be right."

Thankfully, the painstaking three-year process behind *And Nothing Hurt* — yes, the title is meant to be ironic — was worth the sweat and toil. The album is a consummate triumph: a rich, deep exploration of sound, melody and harmonics that buzzes with a vivid intensity. Layers of ambient bliss ebb and flow between thunderous breakers of guitar and symphonic noise, caught in the rolling tides of Pierce's imagination. It's a place where prog, rock'n'roll, minimalism and elements of free jazz share a common dialogue. It's all the more remarkable for the fact that it was mostly put together by Pierce in the bedroom of his East London home.

It wasn't supposed to be that way. "The original idea was for it to be a big studio session, like Ray Charles or Gil Evans recording at Columbia Studios," he says. "I spoke to a few people about collaborating with me, including [producer] Tony Visconti. And I'd approached others to play on it, like Dr. John and Spooner Oldham, but things didn't come together in the way I'd wanted them to. It felt like my reaction to that was to hole up somewhere and make sure it worked, to allow myself the time to do it right.

"There was also some kind of safety and security in being able to piece it together over a longer period of time," he continues. "Suddenly I had 260-odd tracks to throw ideas at and it had become an obsession. I find it becomes like an exercise in dealing with my OCD or something. There are no complaints — making music is the most amazing thing to be involved in — but the process of doing it almost gets to the point where I can't even listen to the music I love any more because I start hearing it like a production.

"Once it's done, playing the songs live never really gets to be a problem. You put these simple, funny little ideas on stage and then it feels like somebody else is stirring it. It feels like the music's coming through the roof."

One of the main lyrical themes of *And Nothing Hurt*, which takes its title from Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, concerns growing older. It's something that 52-year-old Pierce is especially mindful of, given that rock'n'roll is essentially a young person's game. "When music is full of that stupidity and arrogance of

Back To Earth: Pierce returns with another slice of soulful, genre-blending, space-age prog.

youth, it just works," he posits. "But I see too many people of my age using the same language that they would've done in their 20s. You should try instead to astound yourself and work harder to get something that's more exciting. That's why I dislike the use of the phrase 'heritage act' — the idea that people don't want new material from older acts, they just want them to stand on stage and play their old stuff. And it's very prevalent in music: you don't find that in painting or writing.

"So I'm not just going to throw out some of the shapes I was doing 20 or 30 years ago. That's part of my reason for not wanting to go anywhere near my first band again, because why would you even want that?"

The band Pierce is referring to is Spacemen 3, the indie darlings he and fellow guitarist Pete 'Sonic Boom' Kember founded as teenagers at Rugby Art College in 1982. They became known for their distinct brand of trancey psychedelia, their distorted riffs creating hypnotic drones from the most rudimentary chord progressions. It was all wrapped up in a reputation for being drug fiends, with Kember in particular freely discussing his use of every stimulant under the sun to the attendant music press. Not for nothing did they release an album called *Taking Drugs To Make Music To Take Drugs To*.

Yet Spacemen 3 also proved highly influential, their assimilation of The Stooges, Sun Ra, Suicide and others pre-empting shoegaze and the development of post-rock in the early 90s. Pierce and Kember split in 1991 and wasted little time in setting up Spiritualized and Spectrum respectively. Pierce has said that one reason for forming a new band was because Spacemen 3 had become too safe and unrelentingly loud. As the captain of Spiritualized, he could start to create a wider palette of sounds.

A few years ago it was reported that he and Kember had been offered £2m to reunite as Spacemen 3. "That's true," Pierce confirms, "and it continues. But you wouldn't ask that of a painter or somebody in a different art form. Of course I'm not going to do it — times change and I've changed. I'm certainly not in the catering industry, like a musical jukebox where you put your money in and get a song. Maybe

it's a massive conceit on my part, but because I feel like I've been working on improvised music and other forms, it feels like I operate slightly outside of that anyway."

Pierce's passion for outsider music has played a major role in his musical development. The Cramps, The Gun Club and Tav Falco's Panther Burns fed directly into Spacemen 3, but other influences were of a more progressive nature, particularly the sounds of early 70s Germany. It wasn't always a smooth journey though.

"Sometimes you need certain music to make a link between things," he says. "For instance, if you listened to Peter Brötzmann [German free jazz saxophonist] from nothing, it would sound almost impenetrable. But if you heard it after discovering Iggy And The Stooges and then Sun Ra and John Coltrane, then you start to get some kind of reference for it.

"The same thing applied to me with Can. I loved Kraftwerk when I was younger and I still think what they were doing was essentially doo-wop music. If you listen to *Radioactivity*, it's all doo-wop and simple harmonics. Then that led to Can, but it took a while to get there. Because it was all quite drum-based, it felt like a kind of anchor, like it was always held down. So it took a while for their music to really make sense."

At the same time, Pierce denies that Hawkwind helped point the way for Spacemen 3, despite critics routinely comparing the two bands.

"Within the band, there was some annoyance about that at the time," he recalls, "because we weren't listening to Hawkwind. I've heard their music since, though, and I like some of the earlier stuff, like *Space Ritual*."

If Spiritualized have a defining moment, it's probably 1997's *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*, a vast concept piece that drew from drone-rock, ambient music, avant-jazz and gospel to express a wealth of private emotions. Guests included the Balanescu Quartet and the London Community Gospel Choir. Amid the reductive clamour of Britpop, it stood out as something daringly different, more akin to prog in its scale and ambition.

Even the packaging was meticulously devised. Pierce spoofed his public image by teaming up with designer Mark Farrow and housing the entire thing as prescription drugs, complete with warnings about side effects: "delirium, a sense of intoxication, visual and auditory hallucinations… changes in the level of sexual desire".

Spiritualized have revisited *Ladies And Gentlemen…* as a full live spectacle on several occasions, most recently in honour of its 20th anniversary. Pierce says that those latest gigs, in which he and the band were joined by a gospel choir and 15-piece orchestra, had a bearing on the songs he was working on for *And Nothing Hurt*.

"I like the way *Ladies And Gentlemen…* was able to present stuff that was quite testing for an audience, but it had the right steps to make that palatable," he explains. "When we play it live, well over two-thirds of it is a quite ferocious, free-form kind of squall. And yet it seems more operatic than that, and that's because of the way it was put together. Maybe that was an accident or whatever, but initially that informed *this* record. I just needed to remember what it was like to sing with a choir behind me and that sense of how different it can be."

Four more studio albums followed *Ladies And Gentlemen…*, among them the orchestral wonder *Let It Come Down* and 2008's *Songs In A&E*, recorded after Pierce nearly died from double pneumonia (his heart actually stopped twice and his girlfriend was offered grief counselling). *Sweet Heart Sweet Light* was recorded in trying circumstances too, while he was undergoing chemotherapy treatment for long-term liver disease.

And Nothing Hurt is the first Spiritualized album in some time that wasn't made in the shadow of a major health scare. Pierce says he's in decent shape these days, with the only source of discomfort being the protracted gestation period of the record.

"There were times when I was secretly hoping that something might go wrong, just so I could get out of that little room," he laughs. "But be careful what you wish for, I guess!"

Indeed, the frustration with the process has led Pierce to think this might be the last Spiritualized release.

"I can't see me making many more albums," he reveals. "They always seem like this huge undertaking for an audience that doesn't necessarily seem to be there any more. It's not like I'm suffering for art — it's just part of this thing where I feel like I've been there and done that, and that there must be some other way of putting some of these ideas across without the spread of it being so wide. That's the pattern that needs to change.

"Having said that," he adds, "I'm not going to be doing anything drastic. I was just so pleased to let *And Nothing Hurt* go, but it threw up some loose ends and a couple of ideas that are worth pursuing. I've got no intention of stopping making music."

"I dislike the use of the phrase 'heritage act' – the idea that people don't want new material from older acts, they just want them to stand on stage and play their old stuff. And it's very prevalent in music: you don't find that in painting or writing."

And Nothing Hurt is out on September 7 via Bella Union. For more information, see www.spiritualized.com.

"You can have the twiddly bits, but you need the song."

Sean Timms

Thinking BIG

Southern Empire, L-R: Jez Martin, Cam Blokland, Danny Lopresto, Sean Timms, Brody Green.

Southern Empire's second album *Civilisation* is short on tracks but big on adventure, as the Australians tell *Prog*.

Words: Chris Cope **Images:** Angelo Granozio

It feels a little peculiar to hear Southern Empire describe themselves as "prog on a diet", considering their new album sprawls on for more than an hour despite featuring just four songs.

The jewel in *Civilisation*'s crown is found firmly in the meaty *Crossroads*, a 29-minute romp through melodic rock, symphonic prog, a dash of Porcupine Tree edge and a brief appearance of saxophone-led Latin jazz. On the face of it, SlimFast prog this ain't.

But it's the Australians' desire to focus on the nuts and bolts of songwriting rather than any overblown, fretboard braggadocio that draws the diet description, with the group keen to avoid their music feeling bloated or pompous. Sometimes less can indeed be more.

"You can have the twiddly bits, but you need the song," says keyboardist, vocalist and saxophonist Sean Timms on the phone from home city Adelaide. "The backbone of any piece of what we do has got to be the song."

"We don't want to disappear up our own arses on stage," chips in lead singer Danny Lopresto. "We're all there to have a good time and enjoy the music, so we want to entertain and have fun in what we do, and not be like we're giving a serious lecture. 'Hey, I can play 40,000 notes in six bars.' It's not about that."

It's a policy that's served the five-piece well, not only on the impressive *Civilisation* but also on their 2016 self-titled debut album too.

Adelaide may be more than 10,000 miles away from the UK, on the south coast of Australia, but Southern Empire feel close to home. There's a warmth emanating from Lopresto's on-point and theatrical vocals, and it's allied with a stream of comforting melodies and lush instrumentation.

It's a formula that was swirling in Timms' mind when he founded the band following the dissolution of his group Unitopia in 2013 after nearly two decades together. A clutch of the Australian proggers, including vocalist Mark Trueack, instigated new collective United Progressive Fraternity out of Unitopia's ashes. Timms however decided to headhunt high-calibre musicians for his own project, recruiting guitarist Cam Blokland, drummer Brody Green and bassist Jez Martin alongside Lopresto.

The singer had known Timms for 25 years, and was the first choice on a shortlist featuring just two names. "I didn't want a Peter Gabriel soundalike or a Jon Anderson soundalike," reflects Timms. "I wanted something a bit different to that — a singer with a great voice, and a distinctive voice.

"On the first album I was the dictator. I'd already had all the songs written for the first one, so the guys just came in and learnt the tunes, rehearsed and we played them. But for this album, it's definitely more of a team effort, which is what I've wanted to work towards since the band started.

"I don't need to call all the shots — I don't need to be the head honcho, I'm quite happy to be part of the team. If it needs some leading here and there then I'm happy to do that, but to let everyone have a say and have a contribution, I think that way things

become a lot more exciting, a lot more organic, and you've got the benefit of five people's minds rather than one."

It's the pooling of the five minds' diverse musical influences that gives them such a multicoloured palette to create from.

"Everything that we've ever been influenced by just comes out in everything we do. And we're influenced by everything from Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra up to Meshuggah and Dimmu Borgir," Lopresto says. "I can speak for all of us and say that we take something out of everything that we listen to. You can grab something out of pop, you can grab something out of reggae and you can grab something out of swing."

Timms and Lopresto bring classic prog and hard rock influences to Southern Empire — the latter proudly sports a Gene Simmons T-shirt as he speaks — but the younger trio of Blokland, Green and Martin inject more contemporary inspiration. This mix of old and new helps Southern Empire feel rooted in bygone decades without sounding out of place in the 21st century.

"I grew up with a lot of metal, so the heavier side of prog is where my roots are, like Dream Theater and Opeth," Green says. "I'm big a fan of Porcupine Tree and Leprous, and the more sort of not quite as metal but still edgy kind of progressive bands. I listen to symphonic black metal and symphonic death metal probably more than prog at the moment. And then there's Michael Jackson and Stevie Wonder…"

Civilisation was recorded at Timms' home studio because "it costs a fortune when you record at somebody else's studio," he laughs. All members were encouraged to put their own personality into the tracks. It's a confident, uplifting evolution from a band who seem to have just about everything going for them.

The four songs just about cover the whole lyrical gamut, from opener *Goliath's Moon*, a track about the "elusive thing you want that's just out of reach", to the more political *Cries For The Lonely*, which is no doubt a by-product of the Trump era.

"I guess that's my protest piece," Timms says about the latter. "I just see the way we're treating other people as nations against other nations. I believe the gospel according to Sean: is 'be cool, dude' and in four words, 'don't be a dick'. And I think that a lot of countries and individuals, the way they're treating the impoverished, the poor, the refugees, the people who don't have anything that come out of horrific situations… things like building walls and kicking people out out of fear."

You can shoot from those political ills to *Innocence & Fortune*, for example, which dips into Timms' love of British TV show *Doctor Who*. "There's some lyrical timey wimey themes in there if you care to look hard enough," he says, somewhat bashfully.

Southern Empire find themselves within a prodigious prog scene in Australia, with the band pointing to Karnivool, Caligula's Horse, Anubis and Toehider as some of their peers doing big things down under.

"There's some really talented people here," Timms says. "I guess we don't have the population, so it is difficult to do many gigs over here, and because it's such a huge country, it's quite difficult to tour. The nearest capital city to Adelaide is Melbourne, which is 800 kilometres [just under 500 miles] away. And then you've got Sydney, which is another day away. It's not an easy task to gain ground here."

But where they are set to boost their reach is in Europe, with a string of shows booked in the UK and beyond in November and December. These include a slot at the HRH Prog festival in Wales alongside the likes of Hawkwind, Pendragon and Martin Barre. It'll be another entry in the scrapbook for Southern Empire, who started life without knowing if they would even release an album or tour. What Timms did promise his new colleagues, however, was that they would at least *record* an album — and the rest would hopefully fall into place. Every stride Southern Empire make forward, it seems, is truly treasured.

"When I asked the guys if they wanted to be part of it, Unitopia had disbanded and I wanted to put something together that was as different to that as I possibly could," he reflects. "Whereas Unitopia was driven mainly just by Mark [Trueack] and myself, I wanted to get bunch of guys where it was a democracy and we all contributed.

"I said to the guys that I can't promise anything apart from the fact that we will record an album, whether it gets released or not. If it does get released, whether it gets released through a record company or independently, I don't know. I didn't know if we would do any gigs or tour, although that was the aim. I guess what I'm trying to say is that we don't take it for granted. Everything we do is a bonus, everything is a step forward, and everything is appreciated. If we get five people or 50 or 500 to a show, we're blessed."

Lopresto adds, "At the risk of sounding clichéd, it's just about the music. We just love playing live so we don't care. We just want to make music. We don't care how we're doing it, we just love playing and making music, whether it's in a covers band or doing this or doing a fill-in gig."

"It's a beautiful thing," Timms smiles. "It's just about the music, man."

Civilisation is out now via GEP. See www.unitopiamusic.com for more info.

"We don't want to disappear up our own arses on stage."

Danny Lopresto

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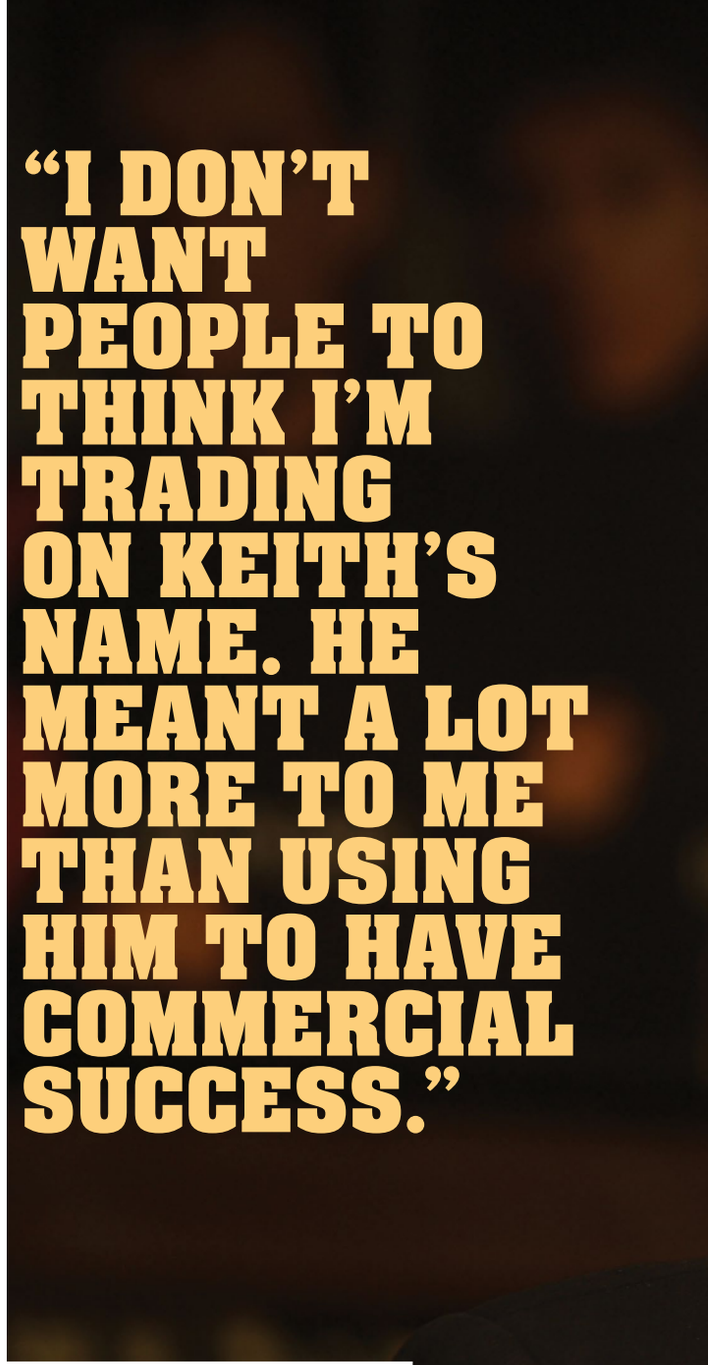
AND THEN THERE WAS ONE

Robert Berry and **Keith Emerson** were working on a follow-up to the album their band 3 made in the 80s when Emerson committed suicide. Berry tells *Prog* why he decided to forge ahead with the material on his own.

Words: Nick Shilton **Portraits:** Dave Lepori



"I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO THINK I'M TRADING ON KEITH'S NAME. HE MEANT A LOT MORE TO ME THAN USING HIM TO HAVE COMMERCIAL SUCCESS."

At 10am on a sunny Monday, Robert Berry enters a hotel meeting room in central London for the first interview of a press tour to promote *The Rules Have Changed*, released under the banner of 3.2. Although Berry stepped off a plane from his northern California home just over 24 hours ago, he's an affable bundle of energy.

While he's enjoyed a lengthy career as a musician and a producer, covering a variety of styles, he's acutely conscious that *The Rules Have Changed* may simultaneously be the most important album of his career and the one that attracts negative criticism.

"I'm worried about what people are going to think," he admits. "This is my vision of what Keith Emerson and I could do, according to what he and I talked about."

But first let's contextualise *The Rules Have Changed*. A classically trained pianist, Berry's musical career began in the mid-1970s. His first band Hush played prog covers before graduating to originals. "Progressive rock is in my blood," he proclaims.

In the mid-1980s Berry had a couple of brushes with prog fame. "Carl Palmer called me in 1986 to replace John Wetton in Asia. That opened the floodgates and set my career up for the most successful guy you've never heard of!"

After Steve Hackett left GTR, Berry played alongside Yes/Asia guitarist Steve Howe as GTR explored recording a second album. While that follow-up album never materialised, Berry was now on the radar of prog's heavyweights. He formed 3 in 1987 with keyboardist Emerson and drummer Carl Palmer following the demise of Emerson, Lake & Powell.

Fusing prog with pop rock, the resulting album *...To The Power Of Three* met with a mixed reception on its release in March 1988. It's a curate's egg of an album but where it's good — the exhilarating *Desde La Vida* or *On My Way Home*, Emerson's emotional memorial to former Nice manager Tony Stratton-Smith — it's very good.

Elsewhere, and despite Emerson's embellishments, some of the pop rock jarred. "*Runaway* was one of my favourite songs but it wasn't right for 3," Berry agrees. "It's palatable but there's no beauty in it. John Kalodner at Geffen found me through that song and saw me as Bryan Adams meets Sting. But where does that enter ELP? It doesn't."

Similarly, Berry has mixed feelings about the overtly commercial *Chains*, originally co-written by Sue Shifrin for Tina Turner. Indeed, Shifrin was at one stage mooted as a possible fourth member of 3. "I loved singing *Chains*," Berry admits, "but of all the songs on that album, I dislike it the most as far as what 3 should've been."

He adds, "Keith was looking for some of that success which Carl had enjoyed with Asia where there was musicality for progressive fans but songs that your Journey fan liked

3 in 1988, L-R: Keith Emerson, Carl Palmer, Robert Berry.

3 PRESS SHOT/GEFFEN/RANDI ST NICHOLAS. SUPPLIED BY ROLF REMLINGER WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/3EMERSONBERRYPALMER

"I WAS AT MY KEYBOARD ASKING MYSELF ALL THE TIME, 'WHAT WOULD KEITH DO?'"

too. We would have found that in a second 3 album."

But there would be no second 3 album. Following a tour, the band reconvened in London. Berry was keen to continue but found himself pushing water uphill.

"I brought *Last Ride Into The Sun* to the last band meeting in London. The band were sitting with our attorney and accountant. They were planning to break up the band because Keith didn't want to do it any more. I played *Last Ride*... and Carl thought it was pretty good. Keith said, 'That sounds like me playing.' It was me doing the tracks."

Berry explained how he felt Emerson could enhance his basic tracks. "But Keith was so done because of the criticism of 3 — he just wanted out."

The band were finished and the song ended up on Berry's 1993 album *Pilgrimage To A Point*.

Emerson and Berry remained in contact, with Emerson also living in southern California for many years and guesting on various projects that Berry produced. On and off, Berry encouraged Emerson to revisit 3 but with limited expectations. The band seemed destined to be a footnote in ELP's history.

"Keith had put 3 totally out of his mind. He didn't try to downplay it as much as just ignore it."

But then Emerson's interest in 3 was rekindled a few years ago following the release of *Live In Boston '88*, recorded on the band's tour that year.

"Keith called me after it was released saying he couldn't believe how good we were," Berry recalls. "He was hearing all the jamming where he could let loose. And he had forgotten that *Desde La Vida* and *On My Way Home* were great songs."

Berry revealed to Emerson that the Italian label Frontiers, through whom Berry had released solo work, had been cajoling him to do another 3 album.

3's *To The Power Of Three* album, 1988.

On eliciting Emerson's interest, Berry agreed a deal with Frontiers, including a meaningful advance, the size of which surprised Emerson.

"He told me he couldn't get that sort of money usually, that nobody cared any more. That broke my heart, because to me Keith is one of a kind, a Jimi Hendrix. There's nobody who does what he does."

Frontiers wanted Emerson and Berry to play live to promote the proposed album. Emerson was less enamoured about the idea of taking 3 on tour.

"I thought down the road we could work this out and maybe just play one big showcase. But it didn't really matter — the point of least resistance was that we would do the album. We had a good budget and artistic control. Keith was happy."

Emerson and Berry then discussed the style of the proposed album. "We would send files backwards and forwards. It was rewarding and Keith was very on it. My idea for the album was to get these fiery, great Emerson parts and stick them into the songs I was writing, instead of me giving him songs and him putting his parts into the songs. I wanted to build from his connecting pieces. It was really fun."

They spent three months working on this basis, with Berry also visiting Emerson when he was in Los Angeles. "The last photo I took of Keith was at

Changing The Rules: 3.2's Robert Berry.

the NAAM [instrument trade] show. He was a little quiet and didn't have any of his usual bad jokes but seemed fine otherwise."

Subsequently, Berry called Emerson and found the keyboardist considerably less content. Emerson was nervous about forthcoming solo shows in Japan while also suffering from dystonia and a sore arm following an operation.

"Keith loves Japan and the Japanese, and they love him. More than any other fan base, they're his biggest fans. He was really upset about it."

Berry suggested that Emerson cancel the Japanese shows. According to Berry, Emerson demurred, intending to honour his live commitments before visiting the UK to see his grandchildren and then returning to California to continue work on the 3 album. However, on March 11, 2016, Emerson committed suicide at his home in Santa Monica. Berry was stunned.

"The day Keith died, I lost a friendship with a sweet guy who was so warm and unguarded despite being a genius, and the best player I've ever seen in my life. And I lost my dream — I thought I could never do the album without him."

ROBERT BERRY
Berry's final meeting with Emerson, at the NAMM trade show in February 2016.

In reaction to Emerson's death, Berry wrote *Our Bond* and posted it on YouTube the following month.

"*Our Bond* dripped out of me, not so much as my own personal response, but rather what I thought was a worldwide response. Keith was my friend and my music partner, but the whole world felt a certain way."

Nine months later, Berry was in touch with Emerson's keyboardist son Aaron. "I was thinking it would be quite a tribute and fun if I did the album with Aaron."

Aaron's initial reaction was positive, but on hearing a proposed song, he opted out on the grounds of being a different kind of player to his father.

Undeterred, Berry forged ahead on a purely solo basis, having established that Carl Palmer wished to focus on his ELP Legacy endeavours.

"I decided that a lot of the sound and songs of 3 were me. The only guy that cared initially to do a second 3 album was me. I had an idea of what I thought we should be doing — and not pop songs. Keith and I had had extensive conversations about what the sound and style were going to be."

Berry estimates that 20 per cent of the material on *The Rules Have Changed* originates from the three months when he and Emerson worked together. Indeed, five of the album's eight tracks (there's an additional instrumental track for Japan) are Emerson/Berry co-writes. But the music on *The Rules Have Changed* is all played by Berry.

"I was at my keyboard asking myself all the time, 'What would Keith do?' With certain chord structures I knew what Keith would do. But solo wise, I don't play at all like him — he's got this reckless abandonment. But as I would do solos, they came out of me in one take."

The result is a far more satisfying album than *...To The Power Of Three*. "It took me a year to make the songs cohesive and feel like what Keith and I would have done if we had completed them in the same room. I set out to do an album with Keith that was more adventurous than anything he had done since *Desde La Vida*."

Berry has been deliberately very explicit that he alone plays on the album but realises 3.2 may yet have detractors. "I don't want people to think I'm trading on Keith's name. He meant a lot more to me than using him to have commercial success. It's why I'm saying this is just me. There's going to be some negative stuff and I'm ready for it. But the love that the music has received so far has brought tears to my eyes."

The Rules Have Changed is out now via Frontiers Music. See www.robertberry.com for more information.

A Time And A Place

Robert Berry remembers 3's time on the road in the late 80s.

In 1988, 3 toured the USA and Canada. On the Canadian border Berry disembarked a tour bus to stretch his legs... and the bus departed without him. Well before the advent of mobile phones, Berry was stranded, wondering whether his absence would only be discovered at the next venue. He was relieved 90 minutes later when the bus returned. "Keith was leaning out of the door with a video camera, laughing up a storm!" he says.

More seriously, Berry recalls a fan writing to Emerson about "how disgusting and embarrassing it was that we had girl background singers. We had fun with 3, recording music and videos and playing live. It was looser than ELP, every night was different. The girls weren't there for looks but because they were on our album. Keith loved it – he arranged and conducted their parts. But Keith called the guy and from there, things started to go south. Keith wasn't happy because he was getting criticised for playing songs and having girls in the band."

By the time 3's tour reached Los Angeles, several songs from the 3 album had been dropped from the set, despite the single *Talkin' Bout* making strong chart progress and the band playing to a younger, more diverse audience in cities like New York. "Most other places we had bald heads and glasses as far as you could see!"

SHAWN PERRY/VINTAGEROCK.COM
3 at the Atlantic Records 40th-anniversary show in New York City, May 1988.

Berry was treated as an equal partner by Emerson and Palmer. "They always said, 'We don't want you to be Greg Lake. We want you to be you.' I felt empowered."

3 played the Atlantic Records 40th-anniversary concert in New York in May 1988. "Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be playing Madison Square Garden and using John Paul Jones' bass amp."

When the band were introduced on stage as 'Emerson & Palmer', Emerson added 'Robert Berry'. "ELP were on Atlantic, 3 were on Geffen and I was the Geffen guy. Keith wasn't about to let that slip by. He realised they didn't say my name and he really cared – that's the sort of guy he was." **NS**

3.2's The Rules Have Changed, featuring Keith Emerson's final musical ideas.

Distorted Harmony, L-R: Yoel Genin, Iggy Cohen, Yoav Efron, Michael Rose, Yogev Gabay, Amit Plaschkes.

EXPOSED

For **Distorted Harmony**'s third album, Israeli keyboardist and producer **Yoav Efron** chose to dig up feelings he had long since buried deep within himself to create a more painfully personal record. As a result, *A Way Out* stands as the band's most emotionally complex and compelling release to date.

Words: Phil Weller

"One thing I can say about the new album is that it's very personal," says Distorted Harmony's chief songwriter Yoav Efron. "It wasn't easy for me to expose my thoughts and feelings, the things I'm used to keeping inside, so this album was actually more of a process of being in the right place, mentally, to write, more than anything else."

Speaking to *Prog* from his home in Tel Aviv, Israel, he keeps his cards close to his chest when asked about what emotions and issues were plaguing him so much that, for the first time in his career, he turned to music for an outlet to exorcise such personal troubles. However, the way his voice cracks a little when prised for more information, and the way he sheepishly tries to avoid giving an answer that would leave him in too vulnerable a light, speaks volumes. Yet engaging here with the darker side of his life on a deeper level than Distorted Harmony ever got close to on their previous two records — 2012's *Utopia* and 2014's *Chain Reaction* — has helped humanise their technical, technicolour thump.

A Way Out arrives with a deeper, more detailed and more relatable personality. Lurking beneath dense forests of downtuned guitars, below rampant drumming and chaotically arpeggiated keyboards, is a sensitive, aching soul.

As difficult as the creative process may have been — "I wrote three songs in a week, then didn't write anything for months because I wasn't in the right place," Efron tells us — it has made their music so much easier to connect with. For a musician who defines his band as "a living being", that is hugely important. As such, their first release in four years gifts the listener an entirely new experience.

"For me, this album was all about me figuring out how I wanted to write," he says, elaborating between sighs and pauses that betray the side of him he doesn't want this interviewer to see. "The way we work is that I write the music and then I send demos to the band to get their feedback. But because I was opening myself up so much with these songs, it took me a long while to get to the point where I even had anything to show them."

However, opening up to his bandmates about each song's meaning allowed an emotional integrity to be threaded throughout. Everyone's playing became sympathetic to

Efron's subject matter, and the resulting performances are more intimate and magnetic.

"It was so much more exposing doing it this way," he continues. "Being so open with my bandmates was really scary. The whole process was actually pretty rough because of where I was emotionally. With the song *Awaken*, Michael [Rose, vocalist] and I sat down together in the studio before we recorded and I explained what I was feeling when I wrote those lyrics, and in the end his performance was just amazing. I actually cried after he'd finished recording. Michael is a fantastic singer and he really managed to bring the emotions I was feeling to life. I knew I had to expose myself with the true meaning of the songs so that we could deliver the lyrics with the right emotions.

"But for most songs," he adds, turning the tide of the conversation towards why he's had this change of lyrical heart, "it's not so much about me and my problems than it is 'why did I expose myself in such a way' and 'how did I allow myself to do that?'"

Here, it's not the destination that matters most to Efron — it's being able to make the journey in the first place.

Awaken, a song which begins with gentle, cascading clean guitar chords and dark, defeated lyrics builds gracefully through rising dynamics into a staggeringly powerful song, marked with electronic drums and Rose's increasingly determined and triumphant vocal performance. Hanging on an uneasy, discordant note at the midway point, it soars from its epic, inspired sound into a Dream

"Michael is a fantastic singer and he really managed to bring the emotions I was feeling to life. I knew I had to expose myself with the true meaning of the songs so that we could deliver the lyrics with the right emotions."

Bandleader Yoav Efron: offering *A Way Out*.

"*Chain Reaction* spoke about broader, less personal topics like world hunger or dictators. This time I wrote from inside myself and if I liked it, it stayed."

Theater-flavoured barrage of intense riffs bubbling with keyboards. It grows angrier and more cinematic, where Devin Townsend-sized orchestrations characterise its summit, before a heartfelt vocal refrain, which nods its head to Periphery, stirs your heart. For a song without any real chorus to speak of — instead it has an "emotional peak", Efron says — it's incredibly addictive, progressive in its unpredictability but natural in the way its emotions blossom and burn. It's the record's crowning moment.

"*Time And Time Again*, which is probably the most personal to me, was the hardest song to write," he reflects. "It's always hard for me to know that the lyrics I have are the right lyrics for that song and that I'm 100 per cent behind them. I had to think about how to expose my feelings, how do I feel about sharing such emotions and experiences — because in real life I never do — so songs like that, where I was so emotionally involved, were extremely difficult to write."

The track is laced with an *In Absentia*-era Porcupine Tree storytelling presence which works hard to craft vivid, chilling images in your head. Efron's words float atop rippling synth textures, which also take in elements of bands such as Shattered Skies and Voyager. This is the one song he gives a little background on.

"It's basically me telling the world that I'm lonely and I'm tired of being lonely," he says. "It was a big moment for me where I really began to be more direct and blunt with my lyrics."

Indeed, you can almost hear his discomfort at opening up like this during this conversation, but such internal bravery has helped make *A Way Out* so much more accomplished than its predecessors.

"*Chain Reaction* spoke about broader, less personal topics like world hunger or dictators. This time I wrote from inside myself and if I liked it, it stayed. I didn't want to overthink it."

While Efron is very much the leader of the band, the one who always has the final say, his emotions and subconscious almost became *his* leader, and his decision to allow this to happen has proven to be an inspired one.

Another big turning point with this record is the addition of a new guitarist, and this idea of adding an extra musician was born from Efron's growing passion — now bordering on obsession — with production.

Efron explains, "I also produced our first two albums but I was still experimenting and learning. This time we did it in my studio. I orchestrated everything and was in control. This made it cheaper to record and I could use all my tricks to chop down production time too, but there was also the feeling that maybe I could have produced it better. So that's part of the reason the album took so long to finish.

"I listen to a lot of [Polish death metal band] Decapitated," he continues. "In fact, apart from Haken, Earthside and Karnivool, I don't listen to any prog metal, and so even though we're not trying to sound like Decapitated, they definitely influenced how we produced the album. They are exactly the reason we added another guitar player. I hated the fact that every time there's a guitar solo, the rhythm guitar disappears. With only one guitar player I felt we were missing that extra heaviness. I wanted to move further down the heavy music route — I want this band to be more heavy than progressive."

That increased aggression, which builds off the thick layering of guitars while eschewing the tones with which the band strived to strike a balance between light and darkness, has provided them with an extra impetus. It has propelled them forwards. *Room 11* hinges on spinning, dizzying yet hypnotic Meshuggah grooves while *Severed* lavishes an energetic metal track with palpable doses of pop. *We Are Free* boasts a manic, purposefully scattershot and glitching breakdown. Meanwhile, *Puppet On Strings* is full of entertaining, gouging vocal hooks.

There's a vigorous intensity to these tracks, even during its dynamically reserved moments — of which there are far more than on previous albums — which Efron was eager to bring out in his production. He wanted to surround the listener with sound.

"I like to sit very close to the screen in the cinema," he explains. "So if you want to see something in the upper right-hand corner you have to concentrate on it so everything else is just a blur. It's the same with music, when you focus on one guitar player you can still hear that someone else is doing something different on the other side and that really excites me."

So sit tight, get up close and immerse yourself in an album of cinematic proportions. Musically, it's driven by Dream Theater-eqsue bombastic forays and a modern metal approach. Emotionally, its transparent and engaging personality sees you vicariously exorcising Yoav Efron's personal turmoil alongside him on each and every track. With *A Way Out*, Distorted Harmony will find a way into your head and your heart.

A Way Out is out now and is self-released. See www.distortedharmony.com for more information.

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CLUTCHING AT Claws

After a four-year absence, Brit post-rockers **Talons** tell *Prog* why they decided to strip things back on their third album, *We All Know*.

Words: Alex Lynham **Images:** Stan Platford

Since forming 10 years ago in Hereford, a town not known for churning out rock bands, Talons have steadily put out a string of releases that challenge what it means to be a post-rock group. With *Hollow Realm*, their debut, they fused folk influences with a frenetic approach to song structure, and stood out from the crowd by having two violinists in the band. As guitarist Sam Jarvis recalls, "[Reuben Brunt and Sam Little] were in a folk band, they were both classically trained and very good. Oli [Steels], the guitarist who started Talons, brought them in for one studio session to play some violins on a particular section. We liked the sound of it so we asked them to come back and carry on playing with us."

Having formed from the ashes of several other bands in their hometown – "Not really post-rock bands... folk bands, electronic bands, completely different genres that kind of came together to work on this project that eventually became Talons" – they set about making their mark on the scene, releasing a split single with upstarts And So I Watch You From Afar and signing with the now legendary Big Scary Monsters label.

Their second LP, *New Topographics*, marked a dramatic shift in their sound to something darker and heavier, yet every bit as cinematic. Now, four years later, the band are back with a new record, *We All Know*, on Holy Roar, which expands the brooding feel of *New Topographics*, taking an even more introspective tack.

"When we were writing this album, we thought about the imagery that's often associated with post-rock – huge mountains, epic landscapes, big buildings – and we wanted to kind of turn it on its head. We wanted to think about what it would be like to write a post-rock album that's much more internal and closed," explains Jarvis.

The heavier parts of the band's music now approach Black Sabbath-like doom metal territory at times, and *We All Know* is an uncompromising beast, melodic and brutal in equal measure.

The atmosphere isn't just conveyed via the sonics, either. "Titling it *We All Know* is slightly ambiguous and vague, but I guess for us it was about exploring ideas of collective self-confidence and internalising those ideas," says Jarvis, reflecting on the record's themes.

Anchoring *We All Know* in their discography sees it taking its place as a development from *New Topographics*, which contrasted strongly with *Hollow Realm*. "*Hollow Realm* is a very fast record, it's quite intense, and if you listen to that and compare it to the new album now, I think you'll see quite a shift in tempo, in dynamics, I guess, in our whole approach to writing an album."

Sonically, Jarvis explains, *We All Know* is all about "stripping things back, having fewer instruments. Obviously, with the six of us, there can be a tendency for us all to want to play at the same time and make this huge sound, but in many ways what we found interesting was cutting instruments out at different points and kind of really working on layering different sounds together and cutting things back, having really basic rhythm sections that run throughout a whole song."

There were practical differences that informed the sound of the record too. For one, there was the addition of a baritone guitar. "Oli plays it on every song on the record, which is a change. We've never used a baritone before. Once he brought that into the practice room, it changed the sound quite a lot."

The tracking was once again undertaken at Greenmount Studios in Leeds, but this time things were done a little bit differently. Lee Smith and Jamie Lockhart handled the recording, while collaborator Tom Woodhead, formerly of ¡Forward, Russia!, mastered the album. The band also opted to use the physical space in the studio completely differently as well.

"Upstairs is a big church hall and that's where we did some of the guitar sounds on *New Topographics*, and all the violins," Jarvis says. "Instead of recording the violins in the huge church upstairs, we recorded in a really

Talons: scratching our itch for innovative post-rock sounds.

> "We thought about the imagery that's often associated with post-rock and we wanted to kind of turn it on its head."

small room. We recorded most of it pretty much in one take, or two takes, and very few overdubs. We wanted to get that atmosphere of a really small, closed room. It's still big sounding, but it's not got that kind of epic sound that perhaps we associate more with post-rock. Certainly the doomy guitars are something new that we were exploring, that kind of creepy sound. On this album, especially the violin sound, we did a lot of things through amps as well, to try to get this raw sound for the violins, instead of this big, orchestral sound we'd previously had."

Songwriting is difficult for Talons as they live in different locations and rely on the internet to share ideas and collaborate.

"We've always lived in different cities, so the writing process has always been about sharing and sending ideas through the internet," explains Jarvis. "We all meet back in Hereford, so we'll practise and write music in this one practice space that we've always written everything in. On this album we tried experimenting a bit more. I don't like to use the term 'jamming', but we weren't as worried about taking an idea and going with it, seeing what we liked and what we didn't like, and then sending ideas back around once we'd left."

The band have always been a force to be reckoned with live, but their circumstances mean that touring isn't always practical. Nevertheless, they've racked up their fair share of impressive shows, becoming "nearly the house band" at the ArcTanGent experimental rock festival, and have a number of dates confirmed around their appearance there this summer. Don't tell them to break a leg before they go on stage though.

"We were on tour, playing in Bristol, and our bassist Chris [Hicks] managed to dislocate his leg within the first song, and that was the end of the gig," Jarvis laughs. "Sold-out show, the crowd were really up for it, and it was going really well. He just was rocking out too much and his knee completely went from underneath him. Coincidentally, it was the same night there was a riot in Bristol. For ages the ambulance couldn't come to the venue because of the riots outside. It was one of those weird, chaotic nights."

We All Know is out now via Holy Roar. See www.gotalons.com for more information.

THE PROG INTERVIEW

JEFF WAYNE

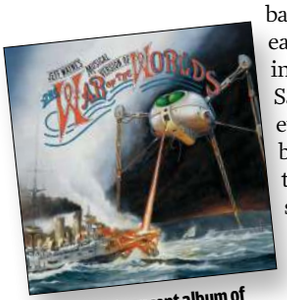
The *Prog* Interview is just that: every month we're going to get inside the minds of some of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Jeff Wayne**. The composer, conductor and producer created what is arguably prog's most well-known conceptual album – certainly the one that had the most mainstream appeal. 2018 marks the 40th year of *The Musical Version Of The War Of The Worlds*, and while he prepared for a new UK tour, we spoke to Jeff to discuss the album's incredible longevity and enduring appeal.

Words: Alex Burrows **Portrait:** Kevin Nixon

Mild-mannered Martian-fighting maestro and occasional tennis ace Jeff Wayne's symphonic conceptual prog masterpiece may be 40 years old, but it's still going strong. Reinvented as a live experience in 2006 when Jeff took inspiration from his dad Jerry Wayne – easy-listening crooner and musical star of stage and screen – to transfer the 95-minute double album to a stage show, it's now on its seventh UK tour. The show has also invaded European territories and its tentacles have stretched as far as the Antipodes. Jeff has never missed a concert, having conducted his massed orchestra at every single one.

Because of his dad's peripatetic career, Jeff travelled widely in his youth, and it's this sense of upheaval that fed his talent. Born in Manhattan, he spent his early years in the suburb of Forest Hills, Queens. He relocated to London when his dad played Sky Masterson in the original stage musical of *Guys And Dolls*, following its transfer from Broadway to the West End. Back in New York four years later, Jeff honed his precocious teenage musical chops before moving out west to study journalism in Los Angeles, paying his way through college by moonlighting as a tennis coach – another skill inherited from Jerry.

The lure of music was too great and he abandoned a promising career in investigative news journalism. Forming a couple of bands before joining an early pre-*Guantanamera* incarnation of The Sandpipers, he eventually moved back to London in time to catch the swinging 60s.



The greatest concept album of all time: The War Of The Worlds.

The high-water mark of all conceptual prog rock albums, *The War Of The Worlds* has now reached sales of 15 million. It remained in the album chart for a remarkable six years following its original release. In 2012, on the back of 88 shows over 11 weeks at London's Dominion Theatre, *The War Of The Worlds – The New Generation* was released, with electronic music and synthesisers playing a greater role.

> The unscrewing of the Martian cylinder? I nicked my wife's kitchen pans, took them to the studio and scraped them together in time to the bass riff.

Reinvention of musical themes, genres and instruments themselves is in Jeff's blood. He was an early adopter of the synthesiser in the late 60s and still pushes the envelope both on record and on stage. Appropriately, he was awarded Showman Of The Year at *Classic Rock*'s 2007 Roll of Honour Awards. Even on this year's tour, he's still pushing the boundaries by refreshing the stage show with some interesting new developments.

PRESS/JEFF WAYNE MUSIC PUBLISHING

Actor Richard Burton (left) and Jeff Wayne with platinum albums for *The War Of The Worlds*.

Congratulations on turning 75 years young this week. Did you do anything special?
Thank you, that's very kind of you. I had a large family visit!

And presumably in June you celebrated the 40th anniversary of *The War Of The Worlds*?
Yes, the release of the original double album was Father's Day, 1978. I'm amazed I'm here

Jeff Wayne: fighting Martians for 40 years.

talking to you about it. It's been a thrill to see its life and all the changes that it's gone through over the many years.

It's an album that subsequent generations are still buying their dads for Father's Day now!
I guess it's a good marker of a date when people grow up, and if their dads have been loving, it's something children remember.

How did you first get into music?
I started taking piano lessons at the age of five when I was still in New York. I took about 16 years of lessons consecutively, including the first four years of living here in England. When we moved back to New York, I later moved on to jazz. My teacher was John McKeegan, who taught at Juilliard.

What was the first record you ever bought?
It was the theme from the TV series *Robin Hood*! [*Robin Hood* with the B-side *The Ballad Of Davy Crockett* reached No.14 on the UK singles chart in 1956].

> Robert Moog helped install my new Moog 3C. He couldn't figure out a UK plug! I remember him on the floor with a screwdriver, wondering what the green wire represented.

Recording audio for the album, L-R: Doreen Wayne, David Essex, Jeff Wayne, Charles Dubin, Jerry Wayne.

PRESS/JEFF WAYNE MUSIC PUBLISHING

It was sung by Dick James who went on to become the publisher and owner of his own label [DJM].

Was it your dad's idea for you to do *The War Of The Worlds* as an album?
It was. During that period in the early 70s, I was producing, arranging and touring with David Essex, as his musical director. I was also doing tons of music for advertising, TV themes and film scores. But he knew I had always hoped to find a story that I would fall in love with.

We started reading a range of books. It wasn't just science fiction – it was any genre with a story that was potentially great. My dad found *The War Of The Worlds* by HG Wells. I was going out on another tour with David and he came over and wished me luck for the tour and handed me the book. It was an easy read. Not very long – only about 150 pages – but it hit me in one read. It just struck me in a range of ways.

When I finished the tour, it took us about three months to actually locate Frank Wells, who was the son of HG Wells. [HG Wells had both a son and a brother of the same name.] He had dedicated the book to his brother Frank for "this rendering of his idea". That impressed me so much that when my musical version was released, I dedicated my work to my dad: "to my father Jerry, this rendering of his idea".

You mentioned that you wrote music for advertising and TV. What were some of your most well-known scores?
Well, including movies and TV and film and radio scores, I've done over 3,000 productions and probably the A-Z of every product that's ever existed! That's a big ask. But a few stand out. In around 1969 I did an ad for Gordon's Gin. It was a combination of synths – the Moog 3C – and a small band, a string quartet. I had to match images to the commercial. But it really resonated and became a well-known piece. In fact, some of the guys who were among the first in pop to start working with synths, The Human League, covered it on their album *Travelogue*. Their following album *Dare* was produced by Martin Rushent who happened to be my recording engineer at the time of the advert. For some reason, their cover became a disco hit in Spain!

1977 movie *Golden Rendezvous* featured a Wayne soundtrack.

Didn't you have the first Moog synthesiser in the UK?
It wasn't the first and only, but one of the first shipment. I believe the late Sir George Martin had one too. Possibly the Stones. It was some heavyweight musicians at the time who took delivery. I think there were only five or six that came over at the time and they were very expensive.

The Moog 3C was one of the breakthrough synthesisers. I remember Robert Moog coming over to help install my new Moog 3C system. The most vivid memory I have was that he couldn't figure out a UK plug! Particularly the green wire among the three. I remember him, bum in the air, on the floor with a screwdriver – stuck in space, so to speak – wondering what this green wire represented.

As well as the ads, you also scored a film – 1977 Alistair MacLean action thriller *Golden Rendezvous* starring Richard Harris. Was scoring movies not an area that interested you?
I've done around 16 films, including documentaries and features. *Golden Rendezvous* was an okay film. What I remember the most is being thanked by the producer for a great film score, being given a print of a Lowry and then he proceeded to bad debt me and a number of the stars from the movie. Then he disappeared.

I should have remembered the best advice I had when I was starting out in the UK from the head of A&R at CBS Records, who was Dan Loggins [brother of Kenny Loggins]. He said, "Don't ever forget, the music business is two things: it's music and it's business." If I'd remembered that before doing that film score, I would have been in a better position because by then I was a well-established musician and producer and owned a production

Chris Spedding (back) and Jeff Wayne recording *The War Of The Worlds* at Advision Studios.

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company. We paid for everything in advance and then collected it back. But it was at that point that they 'relocated', which is the politest way I can describe it.

At that time in the 70s, did you go to see many prog bands?
Yes, I did go and see a fair amount of live work. I can't say I had any one favourite artist. I had quite a catholic taste; I judged music and artists by whether they really moved me. I knew a couple of members of Yes, and Emerson Lake & Palmer who also happened to record at the main studio that I recorded at, which was Advision.

Some of the sounds throughout *TWOTW* seem unconventional and left-field now, let alone for the late 70s. What exactly inspired them and how did you come up with those discordant and surreal musical ideas?
It was going back to the story. HG Wells wrote a compelling story — certainly one that excited me. He wrote a word: 'Alloo!' when the Martians are terrorising Earth. At the end when they're dying, he turned that word around to become 'Ulla!' I thought, "That's got to be some form of composition." It was such an exciting challenge. But I chose to only use the word 'ulla' and hoped that my music — the composition, the arrangement — would convey two extreme emotions: one terrifying humanity, and the other dying on Earth. So, the end part is more like a death wail and the earlier moments of 'ulla' are that of an alien force taking over our world.

But it's the arrangement: when they're terrorising the earth, there are more harmonies; it's more open. The tempos are driving. When they're dying at the end, there are only a couple of harmonies, it's a much slower tempo and it allowed the performance to sound more like a death wail.

That's the background. How it came out was a combination of how I scored those harmonies, which give either a dissonance or more openness. Other than the notation itself, which was scored out, the production and the performance by the musician who performed the 'ullas', it was a collaboration from composition to performance that just seemed to work. I was

proud of it and it didn't sound earthly, which was the object.

How were the 'ullas' made?
The first attempt was a complete failure. The idea was to build a dedicated synthesiser which would then be played through a keyboard — in the way vocoders came about — by mouthing the words as you're playing. It got to the point where you could hear the 'ull…' but not the '…la'. So I abandoned it. Jo Partridge (guitarist) had a voicebox with a tube — like Peter Frampton. The word was mouthed into the tube while the notes of the tune and the harmonies were played.

Was the sound of the unscrewing of the Martian cylinder an effect?
Yes, but there was no glamour to the way we did it! Essentially, I nicked my wife's two best kitchen pans and took them to the studio. I set up two microphones to create a stereo image. The bass was already recorded, so I just scraped the pans together in time to the bass riff. The stereo amplification and the mixing turned it into a very giant-sounding cylinder unscrewing!

How did you choose the singers for the specific *The War Of The Worlds* parts? Phil Lynott was of course an incredible vocalist, but not someone you would normally consider as a clergyman…
[Laughs] I don't know why you're saying that! Phil was a delight. His management company liked the idea because it was so different to anything he had done as a musician. I liked the sound of his singing voice with Thin Lizzy in a major way. But I heard a song called *Fools Gold* [on Thin Lizzy's 1976 album *Johnny The Fox*]. It starts with Phil speaking, acting dramatically. I thought, "Crumbs, that's not something you'd associate with Phil Lynott."

Parson Nathaniel was a man of the cloth who you'd think would be the comfort to his local community, but he's the first one who goes bonkers. He thinks the Martians are the devil and only he can save the world — or not.

And Julie Covington as Beth is the opposite to his character: she's the face of humanity and its ability to overcome.
Absolutely! And it was polar opposites that I wanted: you had fire and brimstone with Phil, and love and belief with Julie; things worth living for that she's trying to instil in him and not to lose all control of his belief and thought processes, and that's what *The Spirit Of Man* is all about.

The core of that duet is really the core of HG Wells' story. The heart of the story is about faith and religion, invasion and hope. And that's what I fell in love with. It's written with exceedingly unusual imagination from HG Wells who puts the Martians in the visual context as the invaders; those who destroy faith.

For a 40-year-old album, that description is very topical in the current climate.
I couldn't agree more. It's been a major contributing factor why I've stayed with it all these years. I just keep developing it and seeing the life it has had. That's it — spot on.

Have you ever considered putting your musical version of *The War Of The Worlds* to film or creating an animation?
I'm on record for many years now saying that one of my dreams in life is to take my musical version and have an animated film set to it. Today's world of animation is also combining reality and fiction into a blend of the two where you're not even aware which is real. As a medium it's grown and gives you greater scope.

Since we started touring arenas in 2006, we've worked with pretty much the same animation company and we're always delving into CGI or immersive animation. I still have that dream and anyone who comes to see the next tour will see five screens — a giant one in the back and four in the audience, which is a first for us. Essentially it will be a film along with the live action. It's become a living work and so many styles of technology have become more and more combined.

When you finished the album, did you know you'd created something special?
I would like to say I could have foreseen its popularity, but the truth is that at the time, I didn't even have a record contract that guaranteed its release! I handed it in as a finished piece, including

The chances of anything coming from Mars to a venue near you are pretty good as Wayne prepares to hit the road.

KEVIN NIXON

the artwork and all the things that made up the total package, and CBS had a 30-day period to come back to me and say, "Yep, we like it, we're going to release it," and give it support — or not. I waited very nervously for 30 days and they did come back to me, but they weren't sure! So they asked for another 30 days.

So it was a gamble because you put your life savings into it?
Yep, that's true. But it's not that CBS didn't back me. They backed me, but only for a single album cost of £70,000. And after everything, the album cost £240,000. So the difference between the two figures was my life savings.

In 1992, you followed up *TWOTW* with a musical album about the story of Spartacus. Were you disappointed that it wasn't as successful?
Yes, absolutely. It had quite a tale of twisting and turning. There were fallouts with the record company. I left and signed with Universal, then I went back to Sony when it all worked out with them. It's a different story to *The War Of The Worlds*. It's historic and a story of truth. I spent three years just researching it, going back to my journalism degree.

The one thing I really enjoyed and took hold of was getting detail accurate — don't presume what you're learning from one person is correct. I had those disciplines and enjoyed it. But I did put three years into it before the first note was written. I had a great cast but it had some creative flaws that were a result of these conflicts between moving from one record company to another and back.

Jeff Wayne's 1992 musical version of the Spartacus story.

It's all down to me — nobody forced me to keep going with it. But it has sold surprisingly more than people might think. But was it *The War Of The Worlds*? No. I might revisit it, but fighting Martians has become a lifestyle for me since we started touring in 2006! *Spartacus* might have a life in live form because it's a natural story.

You might do *Spartacus* live?
Absolutely. I've been approached over the years to consider that

Wayne with his Old English Sheepdog Ollie, whom he'd walk at Primrose Hill – where the Martians met their end in *The War Of The Worlds* – while recording the album.

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but I never imagined in my wildest dreams that the life of *The War Of The Worlds* was going to be what it has become. If I've not been on the road, I've always known that I've had another tour or other extensions to resume after finishing. So the non-Martian things I've done are few and far between simply because all I ever do now is fight Martians.

Fish, who played the part of Crixus on the *Spartacus* album, is planning to retire after his upcoming solo album. What was he like to work with?
He was great fun. I have a proud moment in association with the *Classic Rock* Awards in that I was surprised with an award for Showman Of The Year for the 2007 *War Of The Worlds* tour and the surprise award presenter was Fish. Working with him on *Spartacus*, he's just his own person. He's a unique character. His passion was there right from the start.

Are you still working on a musical adaptation of *The Call Of The Wild*?
I haven't gone back to it for a few years. It still remains a story that I think would work — visually as well as musically. It's simply the same thing about *The War Of The Worlds* dominating my life.

> I would like to say that I could have foreseen the album's popularity, but the truth is that at the time I didn't even have a record contract that guaranteed its release!

From the time that *The War Of The Worlds* was released in 1978 and the time I started preparing the tour in 2005, I hardly ever returned to it. I was proud of it. It spent six years in the charts — you couldn't avoid it. But every week and every month I was doing something new. Whereas now, it's the complete opposite. I still love *The Call Of The Wild*. Interestingly, it was published in the USA at almost the same time as *The War Of The Worlds* and its author, Jack London, knew HG Wells!

How many more tours do you think you'll do?
Who knows? Personally, I'd like to keep going until I fall off the podium. Some musicians who conduct have a very great career and great longevity. Whether it's the same thrill of conducting live music as it is for playing and singing, there's something about live music that really keeps you going. It's my favourite form. I have no end in sight.

40 years on, has *The War Of The Worlds* become a millstone or do you still embrace it?
I would extend millstone to milestone. In my life, it certainly was. Why would I even want to think of it as a millstone? I feel privileged that I've got a work I hope I will be remembered for. And it's still going strong, it's remarkable. I would have never known that at the time.

The 40th anniversary UK tour of The War Of The Worlds starts on November 30 in Glasgow and travels the UK until December 17. For full dates and tickets, see www.thewaroftheworlds.com.

New spins...

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF

2016's *Your Wilderness* was quite the indie smash. So, nearly 20 years into a career and on album number 12, where do Bruce Soord's men – once again joined by drummer Gavin Harrison – go next?

Words: Natasha Scharf **Illustration:** Stephen Kelly

Yielding more than four million album streams and reaching No.7 in the UK's Independent Album Chart, when The Pineapple Thief released *Your Wilderness* in 2016, it was lauded as their finest recording to date. The band followed it with two extensive European headline tours, including a show at London's Islington Assembly Hall where they filmed their first live DVD, the acclaimed *Where We Stood*. Their stock had never been higher. But the big question was always going to be: how would they top it? *Dissolution* is the answer.

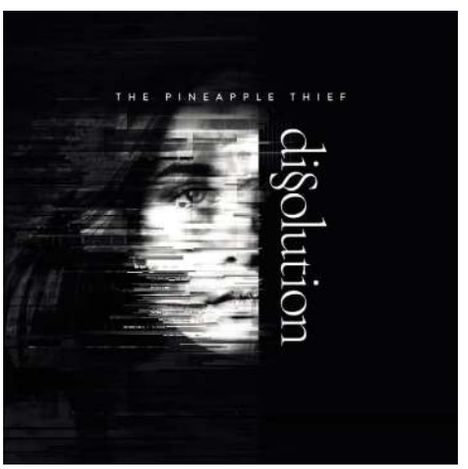
Their 12th studio album pushes The Pineapple Thief's melodic sound not so much into new corners but to higher levels of technicality. It's richer and more diverse than both *Your Wilderness* and 2014's anthemic predecessor *Magnolia*, much of which is down to the chemistry between Gavin Harrison (King Crimson/Porcupine Tree) and mainman Bruce Soord. Harrison returns for his second album with TPT not only as drummer but also as Soord's songwriting partner. His influence is apparent in the curious web of complex rhythms and subtle time-shifts woven into Soord's classic song structures.

"We found ourselves pushing each other so much further, both technically and artistically," Soord says. "There were times in the depths of the writing and recording process, which took six months, that I felt so exhilarated but at the same time exhausted and overwhelmed that I couldn't imagine us ever finishing the record."

But finish it they did, with signifiers of this white-hot collaboration evident in tracks such as the uptempo lead, *Far Below*, which the pair developed from a jam session. Packed with blissful harmonies, Soord's cascading guitars, Steve Kitch's twinkling keys and Harrison's 6/8 rhythms, it's the kind of clarion style found on *Magnolia*, but grander and more cinematic than anything the band have done before. In just four-and-a-half minutes, it weaves its way through multiple shades and crams in more than some songs twice its length. The equally brief *All That You've Got* journeys through dark corridors of scratchy post-punk guitars and hopscotch rhythms to a goosebump-inducing refrain that masks the accusatory lyrics of, *'Only if you knew what you put us through.'*

Dissolution

INSIDEOUT



> **Intimate and cohesive, each note here is polished.**

Thematically, the album explores the breakdown of social fabric and, as Soord revealed in *Prog* 86, "how the wonderful new things we have in our lives, like Facebook, have done the opposite to what they set out to do. Dissolution – it's not a solution, and it's dissolving."

Such bleak lyrics are offset against the stark opener *Not Naming Any Names*, a dramatic piano ballad that sets the album's tone with Soord's impassioned vocals. There is a whisper of Kscope labelmates Anathema's powerful *The Optimist* – an album that Soord also mixed – and it immediately grabs the listener's attention, despite running at just a little over two minutes. But it's not the shortest track on here: that's the one-minute, 25-second *Pillar Of Salt*, a Radiohead-like musing that proves that size isn't always everything.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the 11-minute *White Mist*, described by Harrison as almost three songs in one. The soaring Floydian soundscapes courtesy of guest guitarist David Torn (David Bowie, Bill Bruford, Tony Levin) bring an otherworldly feel to the hypnotic track, contrasting beautifully with Soord's mournful vocals, and the throb and rumble of Jon Sykes' bass.

There are more soaring solos on the melodic *Uncovering Your Tracks*, but these aren't the only Floydian elements on the album – the cover artwork was created by Stylorouge, the design team behind the imagery for *The Endless River*. It could just be a coincidence, or it could be an acknowledgement of the inspirational role Gilmour et al have had on their sound.

Although *Dissolution* carries all the hallmarks of The Pineapple Thief's sound, it's never predictable. By Soord's own admission, this is a varied album that pulls together the band's diverse styles into nine cerebral but very accessible songs. Like so many modern groups, they recorded it remotely at their own respective studios, with Harrison in London, Sykes in Leicester, Kitch in Exeter and Soord in Yeovil, yet the finished result is both intimate and cohesive – each note is polished and each harmony beautifully rounded, even more so than on previous releases.

Credit goes to Soord and Harrison for the dynamic final mix, and it's easy to hear how the former has become such a sought-after producer and remixer in recent years, with Gong's *Rejoice! I'm Dead!* and the most recent reissue of Opeth's *Deliverance* on his ever-growing list of notable projects.

CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX

Great Escape SEASON OF MIST

No let-up in theme or quality from Justin Greaves' elemental rock team.

Out of the icy synth strings of *You Brought It Upon Yourselves* comes a snatch of spoken word from philosopher Alan Watts that defines the theme of this and just about every other CBP album: *'Every sane society allows a certain number of people to deviate.'* A band of perpetual outsiders, the plight of the individual in an often hostile world

> **It surges along like the proverbial unstoppable force.**

has been central to the CBP project from the start — as Watts also states, pressure to conform creates an insane society.

Musically, *Great Escape* also cleaves to a well-established CBP template: mid-paced maximalist rock with a nervy thread of vulnerability running inside it. Given the general vibe and sheer existential weight of the music (plus previous cover versions), the Pink Floyd comparison is pretty much inevitable. In fact, it's tempting to regard CBP as the band that Floyd might have become post-*The Wall* if Roger Waters' monomania hadn't ultimately derailed them.

Of course, CBP are in no way mere copyists, and have a sound and compositional approach all of their own, summed up perfectly by early highlight *To You I Give*, its pulsing mechanical riff counterpointed by bluesy guitar and Daniel Änghede's soulful, Gilmour-esque vocal. This isn't music that's driven by sudden peaks and drops, but surges along like the proverbial unstoppable force, intuitively negotiating the balance between portent and bombast. CBP don't deal in instant gratification, but gradually build towards establishing contact with the listener at an essential level.

Times, They Are A'Raging is a dark and similarly extended ballad, initially piano-led before switching up a gear, producing great gusts of soaring guitar against a hammering rhythm. The elemental nature of this track also nods towards a long-standing comparison with Godspeed You! Black Emperor, though ironically, given CBP's relative lack of acclaim in their own country, it feels like a very English take on the Canadians' apocalyptic post-rock.

It's not all a black fountain of gloom though. *Madman* is a heavy electro stomp with a curled-lip lyric, synths wailing and mocking in equal measure. The propulsive *Nebulas* is the most traditionally melodic track here, while *Las Diabolicas* moves into goth metal territory, both songs bringing an effective change of pace. But it's the two-part, 20-minute-plus title track that brings the album to an epic, none-more-prog conclusion, a gloriously mournful duet between Änghede and Belinda Kordic that flirts with the stoner funk of *Echoes* before delivering a big, redemptive climax.

It misses the occasional gallows swagger of earlier albums, but *Great Escape* is an undeniably powerful work.

JOE BANKS

ANNIE BARBAZZA & MAX REPETTI

Moonchild MANTICORE

The greatest hits of Greg Lake, chamber style.

Originally planned as a collaboration between Greg Lake and pianist Max Repetti, this stripped-down journey through the prog legend's greatest moments has reluctantly become a posthumous tribute, Lake's parts taken by singer Annie Barbazza. Too ill to participate when the album was recorded in 2016, Lake described *Moonchild* as "a wonderful and touching tribute to the music I have made during my lifetime", and it would be mean-spirited to view this project in any other way. Fortunately, the majority of these reworkings hit the target: Barbazza's sweetly passionate delivery works wonders on *Take A Pebble*, *Lucky Man* and *In The Wake Of Poseidon*. Prog fans hardly need reminding that Greg Lake was a superb songwriter and lyricist, but when something like *C'est La Vie* is reimagined as an ephemeral torch song, the effect is gently revelatory. In a perfect world, the gorgeous version of *In The Court Of The Crimson King* that opens the album wouldn't mutate into a shouty, jarring *Schizoid Man* three minutes in, and *Karn Evil 9* would have been respectfully left alone, but the rest of *Moonchild* will definitely result in Lake diehards discovering they have something in their eye. **DL**

BIG BIG TRAIN

Merchants Of Light ENGLISH ELECTRIC

Supreme live set captures last year's high spot.

Last autumn Big Big Train played three shows at London's Cadogan Hall, where those of us present witnessed today's most majestic prog ensemble hitting their finest stride. As their mountainous set came out of the sky, offering melody, post-rock, folk, theatricality and above all emotion, everybody in the house silently mused, "I very much hope this comes out on record next year." Lo and behold, here it is, on a triple-vinyl boxed set or a two-CD digibook. It's a document of an unqualified triumph. With 13 people onstage (when the brass quintet are involved), including guitar guile from Rikard Sjöblom and Dave Gregory, Rachel Hall's violin made of heartstrings, Nick D'Virgilio's deft drumming and David Longdon's stoic yet beseeching voice, BBT are almost ludicrously ambitious yet reach their goals with grace to spare. If forced to trace their heritage to one of prog's big six you'd have to plump for Genesis, but they bring their own beauty and bravado to that elegant, English sense of nostalgia. The showstoppers are *The Transit Of Venus*, *Victorian Brickwork* and the euphoric centrepiece *East Coast Racer*, but this sublime show goes onwards and upwards. Glorious. **CR**

BLUE OCTOBER

I Hope You're Happy UP/DOWN-BRANDO

Texas post-grungers take an invigorating creative left turn.

They have 20 years of post-grunge radio hits under their belt in the US, and this Texan quintet have regularly popped up in *Prog*. On this ninth album they offer an intriguingly unorthodox journey from warped, dark-shadowed R'n'B pop through arena rock, abrasive metal, delicate balladry and evocative instrumentals, and it works a treat. *Daylight* emerges from a swirling maelstrom of claustrophobic, slightly gothy synth-rock despondency before a booming chorus, but then *Your Love Is Like A Car Crash* sounds like Sam Smith after a nervous breakdown, and not just in the title – *'You're a sexy glass of lemonade,'* Justin Furstenfeld groans. He's only saying what we all think, right? *I Want To Come Back Home* is a slice of yearning freeway rock redolent of The War On Drugs. Things get even more erratic as they follow *Colors Collide*, an almost nu-metal-style blast of aggression, with a piano instrumental and the gorgeous, Postal Service-style vocoder balladry of *How To Dance In Time*. Twist your ears a little and *King* sounds like a lost Peter Gabriel showstopper from the late 80s. Existing fans might respond with bafflement, but newcomers will welcome this midlife crisis. **JS**

MATT CALVERT

Typewritten TRUANT

Untrapped Tiger explores sonic freedom.

A decade into the career of London math rock trio Three Trapped Tigers, Matt Calvert – nominally their guitarist, though he seems increasingly interested in electronica and synths – makes a solo instrumental foray. It's an intriguing showcase for his diverse talents as he largely eschews gadgetry for acoustic instruments, which then aspire to emulate electronic sounds. Thus strings and woodwind arrive in disguise as drones and glitches: an approach which may sound cerebral on paper, but sounds more engaging among the teases and twists of *Typewritten*. As musical director for Goldie's live band, as well as a Heritage Orchestra regular, Calvert can draw on a range of impulses, and the album flits from the classical flavours of *Nothing To Envy* to *Mute Heart*'s duel between alt-jazz-funk rhythms, with guitars you might find on a 70s John Martyn album. Harmonics feature heavily, but the overall flow never gets complacent. In fact, the finale of *Ghost Ship* almost comes as a welcome respite from all the busy work, at last allowing the musician to relax into a breathe-easy, post-hip-hop groove of what was briefly called chillwave or vaporwave. It's a cool, cool river. **CR**

CAMEMBERT

Negative Toe ALTROCK

More songs about human-squid hybrids, Strasbourg Zappa style.

If you've ever wondered about the process of extracting rabbit sexual energy or pondered upon the existential threat to the planet from a weapon of mass destruction known as Negative Toe, then the second album by this Strasbourg ensemble has the answers. Away from the dotty sci-fi narrative, a largely instrumental album is peppered with supple brass, sinuous woodwind, flutterings of harp, trickling tuned percussion and shards of cracking skronk-hued guitars that all rub up against shifting tempo and tottering bar lengths. The soloing that squeezes out from within the structured setting is engaging, but it's the scale of the writing that's the star. With over 40 individual instruments at his disposal, writing convincingly for a large-scale outfit isn't easy, but Pierre Wawrzyniak, Camembert's bassist and principal composer, succeeds brilliantly. Comparing favourably to Zappa's *Waka/Jawaka* and *Grand Wazoo* period, or Gentle Giant's robust yet intricate constructions, the restless energy of this album doesn't sit still in one camp, be it prog, jazz, rock or quasi-classical. Instead, it exuberantly embraces them all with an open-minded eclecticism that's bold, brave and refreshing. **SS**

CIRCLES

The Last One SEASON OF MIST

A giant leap for Antipodean djentertainment.

Here in the post-djent era, it takes great resolve to continue down that well-worn prog metal path with originality. But even on their 2011 debut EP *The Compass*, Melbourne's Circles had a subtly unique vibe and exuded a sense that they were trying to nudge their chosen medium sideways. But it's *The Last One* that should enable the Aussies to get close enough to TesseracT and Periphery to bounce a few empty pint pots off the back of their heads. As with their peers, Circles are songwriters first: here, those familiar wonky riffs are employed in service of the greater good, rather than as a weapon of box-ticking ubiquity. The vocal harmonies and melodies that pop through cracks in *Breaker*'s taut, loping façade are more Spock's Beard than Sikth, and it's those subtle indications of greater maturity that make *The Last One* far more than the sum of its parts. Frontman Ben Rechter is fortunate to have a dash of soulful grit in his voice, but it's during *Resolution*'s tech metal hall of mirrors that he shows his real versatility, switching effortlessly from whisper to vein-popping howl, but always in command of the song's insidious melody. Superior stuff all round. **DL**

GRYPHON

Reinvention SELF-RELEASED

Folk, medieval and Renaissance maestros' first album in 41 years.

Reinvention opens with the recorder and piccolo arpeggios of *Pipeup Downsland DerryDellDanko*. This evocation of winds player Brian Gulland's youth on the North Kent Downs then journeys through intricate guitar figures, drum and keyboard punctuations, and themes on sax, harpsichord and violin, finishing with a kind of courtly dance.

That kaleidoscopic composition is so full of ideas that it will take a few listens to unravel, but as soon as the group start up into *Rhubarb Crumhorn*, with its spacious bassoon and harpsichord melodies, you know you're back in good hands.

> **A cerebral combo, they're fantastical, odd and at times endearingly daft.**

It's not like a return to the good old days of the 70s, though, as Gryphon's combination of folk, medieval and Renaissance music – with the occasional nod to the likes of Genesis and Yes – was out of time even then. On *Reinvention* they seem to have landed, stylistically speaking, somewhere between *Midnight Mushrumps* (1973) and *Red Queen To Gryphon Three* (1974) and have then gone about their merry way.

There are certain melodic elements and instrumental combinations on *Reinvention* that are group trademarks, but with founder members Gulland, guitarist Graeme Taylor and drummer and vocalist David Oberlé joined by Graham Preskett on violin and keyboards, Andy Findon on wind instruments and Rory MacFarlane on bass, half of the band is new and this is a remarkably fresh collection.

The lengthy, episodic *Haddock's Eyes* finds Lewis Carroll's poem *An Aged Aged Man* set to music by Taylor and sung by Oberlé. But then as well as Gryphon being a cerebral combo, from their earliest days there was something fantastical, odd and at times endearingly daft about them, as befitted a band sharing their name with the composite creature from *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*.

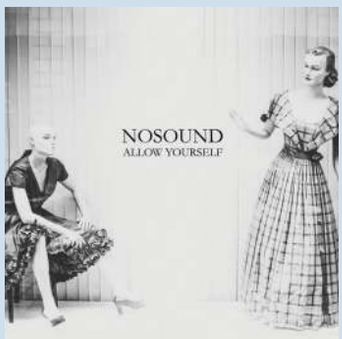
Reinvention is an album of shifting moods. Preskett's *Sailor V* is something of a jig-fest: "Slightly nautical slightly Irish, but with a Scandinavian/Hollywood modal twist," is how the composer describes it. *Hospitality At A Price... (Dennis) Anyone For?* carries a whiff of the 1920s about it, of soirées in strange and faded parlours.

The Euphrates Connection closes proceedings. A single verse, ending with *'Nature's magic carpet glides into town'*, ushers in a short, powerful ensemble section of ecclesiastical organ, electric guitar and saxophones, which then slowly, enigmatically fades to nothing. Welcome back, guys, and thanks for bringing us what is, on sober reflection, your best album — although we can all argue about that later. **MIKE BARNES**

NOSOUND

Allow Yourself KSCOPE

Sorrowful sixth album sees Nosound strive to change sound.



Nosound are effectively musical polymath Giancarlo Erra, a man so dedicated to his musical career that he emigrated from Italy to Norfolk. He sees this sixth album as a radical shift in direction, purportedly towards electronica and minimalism. While it has moved him out of his comfort zone in terms of instrumentation and structure, it's still very recognisably working in Nosound's traditional field of atmospheric angst. The dynamics may wriggle more restlessly, but the feel remains forlorn and inconsolable.

Erra has previously collaborated with Tim Bowness (as Memories Of Machines) and Nosound's influences have

> **The dynamics may wriggle more, but the feel remains forlorn.**

generally been pinned as Radiohead, Sigur Rós, Pink Floyd and Arvo Part. We're very much parked on the lawns of the first two here, and *Allow Yourself* is in undeniable debt to the Radiohead of the last decade, most notably *The King Of Limbs* and *A Moon-Shaped Pool*, while channelling a touch of the Icelanders' wailing mournfulness. Yes, there are flirtations with electronica in spurts of rhythm or brittle jags of energy, but they feel secondary, with Nosound's slow-burning washes of misery still dominant. This is not a cheerful or particularly changeable record.

Of course, some of history's finest albums, from Lou Reed's *Berlin* to Talk Talk's *Laughing Stock*, have exuded grandiose despondency, and Erra's heroes No-Man have never been the Chuckle Brothers. Yet there's a tiring, unremitting pleading to this, a sense that it wants to drag you down with it, rather than find the crack that lets the light in.

For believers, this may be the very characteristic that makes it special. Lead track *Don't You Dare* follows a wilfully unnerving melody while chopping from busy rhythmic ructions to windswept acoustics and cello. The voice is swathed in echo, repeating lines and half-phrases to emphasise drama. Through the album's middle phase of *Miracle*, *This Night* and *At Peace*, the intensity is almost overbearing, the sound of a man wrestling with inner demons and past caring whether any listeners fancy journeying with him. As most songs clock in at around three or four minutes, you're discouraged from settling: the fits of fidgety, itchy dissatisfaction keep on coming. *Weights*, the penultimate passion play, divides itself between plangent ballad and rabid roller coaster of hyperactive synths.

Another muse Erra has cited is David Bowie's *Blackstar* album, and you can faintly hear that influence in a few of the arrangements, if not the quality of writing. While this is a curiously hard to love work, the transition involved may lead to Nosound finding a more focused, fulfilling sound in future. **CHRIS ROBERTS**

DAVID CROSS

Crossing The Tracks PURPLE PYRAMID

Crimson alumnus goes goth-raga crazy.

Just as his recent collaboration with David Jackson brimmed with vitality, so *Crossing The Tracks* provides more evidence that David Cross is enjoying a prolonged creative hot streak. With his violin a constant thing of wonder, these 12 songs cover a lot of ground while somehow seeming like a coherent whole. Half instrumental, half accompanied by some intriguing guest vocalists, not least the legendary Ofra Haza, it's an album that owes more than a little to the shimmering gothic splendour of late-period Siouxsie And The Banshees, or perhaps more pertinently, art-goth ensemble The Eden House. On the twinkling raga rampage of *Hero Of Kingdom* in particular, Cross appears to be lost in a psychedelic reverie, Marion Küchenmeister's vocals swirling around the warped textures sparking from the marauding strings. The vocal tracks are the obvious highlights first time around, Haza's two songs being as blissfully otherworldly as you might expect, but on further listens, the voiceless likes of *Into The Oblique* and *Shifting Sands* pack an evocative punch. Ignoring the fact that no one needs another version of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*, this is a joy. **DL**

DISTORTED HARMONY

A Way Out SELF-RELEASED

Israeli prog metallers lead by example on third album.

"This time it's personal," Distorted Harmony keyboard player Yoav Efron previously told *Prog* about the Israelis' third album *A Way Out*. "It's about the 'we', the 'us' and the 'I', and how they manage to intertwine inside my head." It's a good thing, then, that such a hefty subject matter has such a grand musical foundation. Four years after the release of their last record *Chain Reaction*, Distorted Harmony explore the crunching, polyrhythmic tones of djent for the album's heavier moments – *Room 11* is a booming thundercloud that would fit snugly on a Periphery record – but it's the moments of deviation when *A Way Out* truly takes off. *Awoken* is a highlight, introducing clean guitars and heart-tugging chord progressions, later evoking Haken with swooping, cinematic plunges, while the instrumental *For Ester* slathers over stirring string sounds. There's little filler – even the more sterile moments can still stimulate – and as the band's name suggests, there's always calm in the ferocity. *'Here, the sun and moon will sing, you are free,'* vocalist Michael Rose soars as the impressive record nears its end. *'Here, the light and dark can see, we are free.'* **CC**

FOXING

Nearer My God TRIPLE CROWN

St Louis art rock quartet's prickly, unpredictable third outing.

When a band announce that their new single has been re-recorded in five different languages, you know you're not dealing with a conventional rock'n'roll outfit. And for all the urban stylings and indie-pop grit on this Missouri mob's second album, there's something very prog about their determination to bend traditional pop templates. As Conor Murphy's R'n'B-gone-rogue falsetto rubs up against post-punk angularity on *Grand Paradise*, you're reminded of abstruse art rock oddballs like MGMT. *'I walk around with a hangover, shrugging my shoulders, fucking up everything,'* he grumps agreeably on *Slapstick*, and this theme continues on *Lich Prince* as he admits he's *'thinking of new ways to fuck with old friends'*, before a snarling guitar solo throws a tantrum and then collapses into despairing yelps of ennui. And yet the former track has a stirring emotional swell to its melodies that draws you in as effectively as any arena rock chorus-merchants would. At times it resembles traditional power pop made by the musically dyslexic: the chords don't go in the correct order and the songwriting formula seem to have been misread. But what's not to like about that? **JS**

GET THE BLESSING

Bristopia GET THE BLESSING

Heavy metal brass meets jazzy trip hop beats from the Portishead offshoot.

Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* still casts a long shadow almost 50 years after it was recorded. Get The Blessing's sixth album continues to explore the territory where jazz meets rock that *Bitches Brew* helped introduce to the world. The difference here is that there's a greater emphasis on songs, rather than Davis' somewhat rambling extended jams. Drummer Clive Deamer is all about the grooves, locking in with bassist Jim Barr to create hypnotic beats that provide the platform from which saxophonist Jake McMurchie and trumpeter Pete Judge can launch salvos back and forth at each other. McMurchie has a huge, honking sound that contrasts against the brighter tones of Judge, although the trumpeter isn't shy about blasting his brass through effects pedals to create strange new noises. *Cellophant* has a heavy, sassy stomp, while *Sunwise* is lighter on its feet. *Not With Standing* makes a passing nod to the blues, while the excellent *Recorded For Training And Quality Purposes* has a catchy hook that sets up a bold solo from Judge, who teeters on the brink of stepping right outside the melody. It's a testament to the boundary-busting character of the entire band. **DW**

GULP

All Good Wishes E.L.K

Super Furry Animals' husband-and-wife side project spawns a second long-player.

There are few concepts more woolly and frustrating than the 'indefinite hiatus'. Like a trial separation, you never know quite where you stand. But nine years' break from Super Furry Animals has clearly been beneficial to bassist Guto Pryce. He and vocalist wife Lindsey Leven have now made two albums as Gulp, either side of welcoming their first child to their world. And this follow-up to 2014's *Season Sun* suggests parenthood hasn't dulled their creative synapses. If anything, it's sharpened them up, as *All Good Wishes* sounds like a more polished effort than their likeably trial-and-error debut. *Claudia* is a beguilingly infectious left-footed pop song, all backsliding chord changes and gracefully aloof vocals. *Spend Time Right Here With You* is lazily sprinkled with shimmering, psychedelic guitar as Leven muses despondently, then *Morning Velvet Sky* has synth dust sprinkled over it as Leven muses dreamily over a shimmying techno pulse. There are echoes of Ladytron in that tune, and the primitive electronica of Silver Apples in *Silver Tides*' binary bassline throb, but what they retain throughout is a gentle tinge of the unusual that keeps your ears pricked up throughout. **JS**

HAIKU SALUT

There Is No Elsewhere PRAH

Derbyshire trio take their electric life study to new depth.

It might not be that unusual to expect an instrumental trio who specialise in nature electronica to fly somewhat under the radar, yet Haiku Salut's previous records have received near universal praise, with their crystalline compositions garnering comparisons to the likes of Four Tet and Múm. If there was a criticism of those first albums, it was that the Derbyshire band's multiple talents (between them they play an array of eight instruments) resulted in a graceful yet occasionally uncoordinated amalgam across a collection. Third album *There Is No Elsewhere* feels like a record with direction. While pleasant surprises – the Glastonbury Brass Band and NASA recordings present on *Cold To Crack The Stones*, for example – still pop and crackle throughout the intimate arrangements, there's a sense that it's part of a whole. There's something political at work in the record's artwork and title, not to mention a sound that frames nature and technology as a positive interrelationship, and perhaps this explains the through line. The masterful effect of all this is the stimulating sense, as in nature, that there's depth and detail beyond initial perception. **MP**

ART ROCK

Chris Roberts samples the new releases on the prog/rock boundary.

An electrifying live performer, **Anna Calvi** has always sought to fully translate that personality onto an album, to convey that she's better than good. Five years since her last (four since her David Byrne collaboration), *Hunter* (Domino) is where she lands it, her vocal and guitar gifts fused with charisma. Acclaimed by everyone from Eno to Nick Cave, we knew she could wail like Callas and shred like Ziggy, but now there's a candid urgency to her songs. She wants *'to go beyond gender'*, to feel *'strong and vulnerable'*. So she's both hunter and hunted in these strident, twitchy tracks, wherein our ears get captivated by the dame. There are some modern production tropes, but she still throws in a blazing Hendrix-Bolan solo when the mood hits. Few catch fire like Calvi.

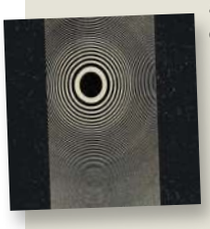
Equally distinctive is **Stella Sommer**, whose solo debut *13 Kinds Of Happiness* (Affairs Of The Heart) sees the Die Heiterkeit singer channelling Nico and Dagmar Krause but bringing her own aghast double-take on numbed dystopian angst. Her band meld with Messer behind her, creating stark soundscapes, yet her tones frame the experience: challenging, but oddly comforting.

As is the latest in **Richard Barbieri**'s series of disparate detours, *Variants 4* (Orange Asylum). New piece *Broken Codes* (partly derived from a stalled project with Tool's Danny Carey) evokes hiding under the duvet with a radio, while a live take on Japan's *The Experience Of Swimming* features thrilling sax and trumpet from Lisen Rylander Love and Luca Calabrese.

If Barbieri's cinematic music is balm for the soul, the abrasion of **Gazelle Twin** on the inappropriately named *Pastoral* (Anti-Ghost Moon Ray), her first in four years, is a drill to the cranium. With warped stabs, jarring electronica and a Ballardian taste for everyday horrors, it's a compulsive chiller for our times.

Far more relaxed and relaxing are **The Sound Of Pop Art**, a Cambridge combo whose *The Beat, The Beautiful And The Loaded* (England In June) is the very distillation of a long, hot summer. Uplifting psych pop with soul undertones, its relentless sunshine would persuade even Nick Drake to get happy and hook up with The Isley Brothers. It defies you not to smile.

Blighty may soon be winter-swept again, but **Fröst** have that covered on *Matters* (Lost Room). Equally pop-enamoured in their own way, Brighton's Anglo-French-Swedish duo of Johanna Bramli and Steve Lewis blend motorik and 80s angles with cool, wry, witty Gallic twists.



Finally, **Geniuser** feature the stentorian voice(s) of Mick Allen (ex Wolfgang Press). The brooding, fevered *I Am* (Ahh Ohh), produced by Einstürzende's Boris Wilsdorf, is post-Suicide blues, post-industrial, post-most-things. Brainy.

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HAWKWIND

Road To Utopia CHERRY RED

Mike Batt and Clapton-assisted makeover of selected hits is curiously appealing.

There are few certainties in this world, but you'd imagine one of them is that Mariachi trumpets and Hawkwind songs don't mix. Mike Batt would beg to differ. On this new collab with Dave Brock, Batt – the producer, songwriter and arranger of The Wombles, Katie Melua and Steeleye Span fame – has applied a new dressing to a clutch of vintage Hawkwind tunes. And in its own slightly WTF way, it works. Lemmy's 1972 track *The Watcher* has long since been beefed up from a stoned, brooding meditation to a bass-driven juggernaut on stage, and it's this version that forms the platform for Batt's muscular treatment. Some typically lithe, blues-soaked guitar licks from guest star Eric Clapton certainly help, while harmonica stabs and honky-tonk piano add to the sense of hurtling into rising chaos. The proto-punk boogie of 1977's *Quark, Strangeness And Charm* is redrawn with brass in the chorus, and alongside a comfortingly Hawkwind-esque sonic swirl in the background, they add extra punch to an oddball anthem. It doesn't always work – *PSI Power* with ritzy horns? – but touches like the timpani and Floydian sax on *The Age Of The Micro Man* lend it an extra sense of weary unease. **JS**

SHARRON KRAUS

Joy's Reflection Is Sorrow SUNSTONE

Sheffield-based folk songwriter's stunning meditation on loss.

This US-born, British-raised songwriter's work hasn't always got the attention it deserves outside the folk world, which may be why each album she releases seems to be on a new label, but this debut for Sunstone is a fine showcase for Kraus. Performing under her own name as a change from her occasional project Rusalnaia and frequent collaborations, this time she benefits from some subtly graceful arrangements that really bring her delicate compositions and feather-light voice to life. The recorder on the six-minute, Vashti Bunyan-esque *Figs And Flowers* is offset by the hypnotic keyboard riff underneath it, lulling us into blissful submission. *When Darkness Falls* and *Sorrow's Arrow* coagulate around some beautifully haunting harmonies over trickles of background noise, adding similar atmospherics to those that Jon Hopkins used with King Creosote. But they only serve to enhance the raw materials, as on *The Man Who Says Goodbye*. This affecting song is seemingly about Kraus' late father (to whom she dedicates the album), and it has the most breathtaking emotional pull, graced by fluttering flute, slide guitar and delicate electric piano. **JS**

METAQUORUM

Witchcraft Jazz SELF-RELEASED

Loopy jazz madness for the heatwave hordes.

Now that we Brits appear to be living in a tropical climate, it must be time for music like this to become a more regular soundtrack. MetaQuorum is the brainchild of Russian-born, UK-based keys wizard Dmitry Ermakov and, superficially at least, they are purveyors of swivel-hipped jazz funk jams that will have Weather Report fans drooling and even a few prog fans dancing. Stranger things have happened. In fact, lots of strange things happen on *Witchcraft Jazz*, which sneaked out earlier this year. Fuelled by a mischievous ethos descended from Frank Zappa, George Clinton and Sun Ra, coupled with a fascination for oddball sounds that echoes Bill Nelson's more esoteric experiments, it's both a trip back in time to the mid-70s and a modern take on those same revered ingredients. From priapic struts like *Crimson Dreams* and *Seven Dwarfs Rock* through to the more mellifluous, RIO-tinged fare of *The Bartender*, Ermakov's playing is wonderfully nimble and unpredictable. But it's the ensemble performances, especially on the wayward fusion feast of *Parallax*, that make this such an absorbing exercise in groovacious, sunshine-friendly voodoo. **DL**

SKYHARBOR

Sunshine Dust EONE MUSIC

Powerful, direct third album justifies four-year wait.

Skyharbor burst onto the djent prog metal scene in 2010, hot on the heels of the first wave of bands. For their first two albums, the powerhouse of the group was the international collaboration between guitarist Keshav Dhar in India and Daniel Tompkins of Tesseract in the UK. Now with a newly stable line-up featuring American vocalist Eric Emery and Aditya Ashok on drums, they've changed up their sound in a dramatic reset.

After opener *Signal, Dim* is very much the Skyharbor we know: if you squint, it's a bit like early TesseracT, albeit with a more straightforward groove. After that, however, the record quickly changes. Skyharbor have simplified a lot of parts down to almost the point of straight-up alt-rock, with a few experimental flourishes to keep things interesting. When things return to proggier turf, such as on *Ethos*, it sounds like there's a strong influence from touring partners and new labelmates The Contortionist. *Out Of Time*, meanwhile, recalls that same spirit of melodramatic vocals over muscular modern crossover prog that made every album by Australian proggers The Butterfly Effect so essential. *Ugly Heart* ticks a lot of the same boxes, while also having a pleasant surprise in its middle eight solo, which comes off as part Guthrie Govan moonlighting in Steven Wilson's band, and part Misha Mansoor.

> **Memorable, catchy and heavy, with proggy surprises.**

The only major criticism one can level is that the album has a couple of filler tracks. At just over an hour, it lacks the powerful brevity of the last TesseracT LP, and losing a couple of weaker songs would have helped its flow. That said, there are some serious highlights in the second half, most notably *The Reckoning*. It's almost like a prog metal take on *Fragile*-era Nine Inch Nails, and it shares a healthy dose of dark, industrial atmospherics with the track *Menace*.

The other concern for some will be the production. After initially recording *Sunshine Dust* themselves, their label had them re-record it under the master fader of Forrester Savell. The results are slick and sharp, but they tend to accentuate the more 'pop' side of the record, and some fans no doubt will be turned off by this.

All in all, however, it's hard to see *Sunshine Dust* as anything but a career highlight for the band. When it's at its best, the songs are memorable, catchy and heavy, with a decent bag of proggy surprises on the side. There are a couple of more forgettable tracks, but taking a more direct approach has improved Skyharbor's sound. They're more confident, and fundamentally more different from their 'djent' peers than ever before.

ALEX LYNHAM

SOFT MACHINE

Hidden Details MOONJUNE/DYAN

Under new management: prog jazz's greatest brand reclaimed.

Obviously, when faced with a band celebrating their 50th year as a recording entity with not one original member in situ, it's hard not to ponder upon that existential conundrum known throughout rock's philosophical community as Trigger's Broom theory. Clearly something significant has occurred on planet Soft Machine lately, because since 2004, this line-up has been trading as Soft Machine Legacy. Yet for *Hidden Details*, drummer John Marshall, bassist Roy Babbington, guitarist John Etheridge (all off-and-on Softs alumni since the 70s), with three-year veteran Theo Travis on keys, flute and sax, have decided

> **A Soft Machine truly relevant to the 21st century. Remarkable.**

they're not simply *a* Soft Machine, but *the* Soft Machine — the first incarnation of the band entirely worthy of releasing a brand new studio album under the moniker since 1981.

If you haven't been paying close attention since Kevin Ayers' appropriately trippy *Feelin' Reelin' Squeelin'* grooved UFO, or Holdsworth and Ratledge dazzled Montreux with their insistent digital dexterity, it's safe to say you'll notice a difference, but not in the band's ambition to artistically progress and technically astound.

Hidden Details' opening title track serves as a scene-setting statement of intent. The expectation-jarring Frippiness of Etheridge's introductory ejaculations rapidly engage with an ensemble interplay that's confident and robust but never predictable, with Travis' sax recalling the mournful bite of Morphine's Dana Colley. While a couple of Mike Ratledge-composed back catalogue classics are sparkily reinterpreted (*Third*'s *Out-Bloody-Rageous* and *Bundles*' *The Man Who Waved At Trains*), today's Soft Machine sound fiercely contemporary. They're reclaiming the SM brand as a licence to explore sonic possibilities, to mirror the original band's ambitions, rather than simply service their existing catalogue.

If you're looking for the comforting blues scales and four-to-the-floor time signatures of trad rock, look elsewhere — the balance of the Softs' jazz rock is markedly in favour of the former discipline. *Life On Bridges* blazes in all directions, percussion splashes colour rather than dictates time, and as Etheridge throttles forth Faust-like howls of atonality, Babbington and Travis spatter a post-*Bitches Brew* canvas with the casual evocative dexterity of free jazz Jackson Pollocks.

That said, there are periods of tranquility to balance the cerebral thrill rides. Travis' flute fulfils a dual role whenever calm's restored, selling the sweetest melodies (*Fourteen Hour Dream*) and accentuating ambient moods (*Breathe*). Ultimately, *Hidden Details* offers an incarnation of Soft Machine truly relevant to the 21st century. A remarkable achievement.

IAN FORTNAM

MOGWAI

KIN: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack ROCK ACTION

Post-rock masters impress with their first movie soundtrack proper.

When Mogwai's Stuart Braithwaite said the band's soundtrack to new sci-fi/crime drama *KIN* features some of his favourite music the Scots have ever made, you know this isn't a regurgitation from the usual pre-release hype machine. The post-rockers have fine form for soundtracking for the screen – try 2016's *Atomic*, or the 2006 documentary *Zidane* – but this nine-track album is their first for a full feature film. Taking dabs of the haunting minimalism likely to bolt out of Trent Reznor's wizardly fingers, the soundtrack is ghostly yet elevating, and it's a juxtaposition that conjures up something special. Opener *Eli's Theme* is emotive, with rudimental keys pitter-pattering over sweeping soundscapes, while *Flee* has more atmospheric turbulence as beats swell. Meanwhile, the gloom of *Funeral Pyre* evokes Steven Wilson before he went all Bollywood dancing on us. Only one song on the album has vocals – the sprightly finale *We're Not Done (End Title)*, which veers into hazy indie pop – but the real charm here is in the primitive, stripped-back moments of majestic melancholy, which you just know will soundtrack the silver screen superbly. **CC**

MYSTERY

Lies And Butterflies UNICORN DIGITAL

Lucky number seven for Michel St-Père's Canadian mob.

In 2014, guitarist and songwriter Michel St-Père essentially had to rebuild Mystery from scratch, recruiting a new line-up to record and tour their album *Delusion Rain*. The roster seems to have settled down now as that group of musicians return intact on Mystery's seventh album, *Lies And Butterflies*. Musically, St-Père's band stick to what they do best: AOR-inflected progressive rock that's big on grand drama and lighter on technical excess or daredevil chops-busting flights of fancy. Vocalist Jean Pageau displays a theatrical intensity worthy of the finest 80s power ballad in *How Do You Feel?* and *Come To Me*. Similarly, *Something To Believe In* sounds handcrafted to get lighters in the air, yet there's an impressive symphonic scale and sweep to the instrumental passages that feature strong melodic guitar work from St-Père and Sylvain Moineau. The production is so shiny you can almost see your face in it – there are no rough edges, even in the rockiest sections of the excellent *Chrysalis*, an unashamedly ambitious piece that incorporates classically infused guitar and crunchy riffage with powerful playing from the whole ensemble. Welcome back, Mystery. **DW**

OSADA VIDA

Variomatic METAL MIND

Polish prog that travels the melodic, classic path.

You certainly can't fault Osada Vida for giving it their all on their latest album *Variomatic*. Perhaps a nod to its title, the Polish prog rockers' sixth studio effort is a fair melange of genres and styles, and like the best kaleidoscopic records, it doesn't feel forced. Slap bang in the middle of it all is *The Crossing*, one and a half minutes of pure, smoothed-out lounge jazz, saxophone running loose. Despite its tight length it happens to be one of the best cuts on the album, and shows that Osada Vida should contemplate indulging in their jazz blow-outs more often. Elsewhere, *Fire Up* has all the hazy groove and melody of Umphrey's McGee, *Melt* jolts, jigs and jags with angular riffs and *In Circles* manages to chuck in a flash of fist-thumping metal. *Variomatic* is the band's first with new vocalist Marcel Lisiak, and his higher range ushers in a welcome nod back to more classic prog, although the languid ballad *Catastrophic* is left feeling a little forlorn. The album finishes up with *Nocturnal*, which pivots in some chunky progged-up rock, but its middle-of-the-road flavour leaves the mind dreamily wandering back to the more unexpected deviances that came before. **CC**

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE

On Dark Horses SARGENT HOUSE

Red Sparowes member and LA songwriter finds some pain relief.

Rundle's last solo album, 2016's *Marked For Death*, paradoxically gave the US songwriter a new lease of life. A waypoint after a bleak period struggling with alcohol, anxiety and substance abuse, it was an exorcism of sorts, finding catharsis in its red raw writing. Follow-up *On Dark Horses* dares to find hope in the title's metaphor, stripping out a few layers of the Lynchian gothic claustrophobia and stepping into a more open, reverberating space – Louisville, Kentucky, to be precise. The move from LA, sparked by a relationship with Evan Patterson of labelmates Jaye Jayles, means we find Rundle channelling a little more country than on her last outing, not least on the reverb-laden ballad *You Don't Have To Cry*. The collection still doesn't sing with positivity, but compared to the boozy isolation of Rundle's last outing, the warmth of these more communal sessions is palpable. Patterson's baritone vocal on *Light Song*, for instance, forms a fine and suitably subtle counterfoil to Rundle's own throaty murmur as the record's earthy centrepiece hypnotically chants to a frenzy. A light in darkness. **MP**

SPIRITUALIZED

And Nothing Hurt BELLA UNION

Now down to a one-piece, could this really be the gospel space ace's last album?

Recorded on a laptop in an upstairs room in Jason Pierce's East London home, *And Nothing Hurt* is a reduced take on the Spiritualized spectacle. Pierce plays "almost" everything on the album himself, but the removal of the band's natural bombast and budget haven't diluted his ambition or noticeably withered the sonics. It's clearly a work of enormous, labour-intensive obsession, from the free jazz tumult of *The Morning After* to *The Prize*, which is as sorrowful as it is exultant. *A Perfect Miracle* is a very close cousin to 1997's *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*, even kicking off with a hat-tip to Elvis' *Can't Help Falling in Love*, and the tender *I'm Your Man* basks in a golden, hazy warmth. It all sounds very familiar. Since Spaceman 3's *Walkin' With Jesus* came out three decades ago, Pierce hasn't strayed too far from his template, mixing rocks both garage and Kraut with righteous blues and soul, then swaddling it all in woozy washes of sound. And if this really is how he chooses to wave Spiritualized off into the ether, with quiet dignity and a knowing wink to his past, then so be it. **FL**

SHADOW MERCHANT

Tomorrow MERCHANT MUSIC

Solid musical chops beset by dull wordplay.

The Philadelphia prog band originally founded by two radiologists return with their second album. You'll be forgiven for thinking you've put on the wrong record when the first track *Invisible Energy* begins, as that opening riff sounds almost identical to the beginning of Magenta's *The Lizard King*. Fortunately, the song swiftly moves into less familiar territory and there's a tasty organ solo from Michael LaBuono. Shadow Merchant stand comfortably under the neo-prog umbrella, with a clean, polished production that allows both Sean Reiter's guitar and LaBuono's keys to take the lead in different sections. The vocals are shared between Howard Whitman and Yvonne Blackwell, although it's the lyrics that are the weakest element, tracks such as *Stars* and *Empty Space* suffering from banality. *'I've tried to be patient, I've tried to relate, but I can't spend more time in this empty space,'* is just too passionless. Stronger tracks include *Moving Standing Still*, where Whitman and Blackwell harmonise to pleasing effect, and the strident album closer *Tomorrow*. A decent second effort from Shadow Merchant. Now they just need to brush up on their lyric writing. **DW**

POST-ROCK

Alex Lynham guides us through the peaks and valleys of essential post-rock.

The post-rock scene is just recovering from its annual blowout party at Bristol's ArcTanGent Festival, and a few fantastic releases have come out of the woodwork in advance.

Firstly, there's the first album in three years from UK math stalwarts **Delta Sleep**. *Ghost City* (Big Scary Monsters) is mellow and summery while retaining the emo melancholy of their previous releases. There are guitar hooks, vocal hooks, gang vocals and more great melodies than you can shake a stick at. For a mid-tempo introduction with catchy riffs, try *Single File*, or for something even more mellow and atmospheric, check out opener *Sultans Of Ping*.

Another band in the ATG line-up this year worth checking out are **Death And The Penguin**, who released their debut *Anomie* (self-released) at the end of July. Hot on the heels of the angular, acrobatic single *The Calving Shuffle*, they dropped another advance track, *Colour In Me*, a mathematic yet unashamedly pop cut that recalls classic first-wave math rock bands such as Faraquet as well as modern guitar-pop oddballs Everything Everything.

LA duo **El Ten Eleven** specialise in complex, loop-based post-rock with a lot of nods to their math cousins, and like many of the bands here, they have also graced an ArcTanGent stage. Their new album *Banker's Hill* (Topshelf) is full of their trademark blend of electronic and guitar virtuosity; their guitarist Kristian Dunn is well known for using a double neck with a guitar and bass so he can more effectively multitask. Opener *Three And A Half Feet High And Rising* is stunning, while the kinetic second track *Phenomenal Problems* is equally as great an introduction — once you've listened to these opening tracks, you'll definitely want to hear the rest of the record.

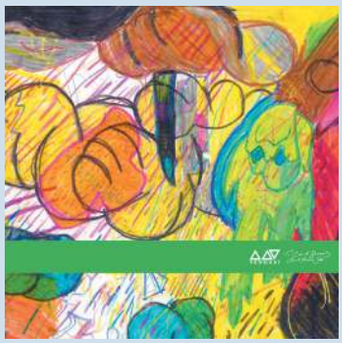
US band **Tides Of Man** are back with a new album, *Every Nothing* (self-released), that's been three years in the making. Dark and brooding post-rock in the vein of bands such as Long Distance Calling, the quality of this second instrumental record since they parted ways with their singer is surely a final vindication of the dramatic change in sound that this decision entailed. For an introduction, listen to *Mercury Fields*, with its fantastic slide guitar crescendo, or the slightly more immediate riff and power chord-based drive of *Everything Is Fine, Everyone Is Happy*.

Finally, for something completely different, try out the gloriously psychedelic new album from Londoners **Szun Waves**, *New Hymn To Freedom* (Leaf), which flits between cascading arpeggios, modern jazz rhythms and oddball synthesiser soloing. It was recorded live, with no overdubs. Given the quality of musicians, with drummer Laurence Pike from electronic wizards PVT, Jack Wyllie from Portico Quartet and electronic experimentalist Luke Abbott making up the group, it should be no surprise that it sounds so confident. The six tracks are dense, a little unhinged, and utterly, utterly gorgeous. For a taste, check out the glorious *Constellation*.

VENNART

To Cure A Blizzard Upon A Plastic Sea MEDIUM FORMAT

Former Oceansizer progs up.



Mike Vennart, aka 'im from Oceansize, is in the throes of a reinvention. His debut solo album *The Demon Joke*, released in 2015, was heavy on the nods to the darker, more atmospheric side of grunge and post-punk and explored his use of humour as a coping mechanism. Back then he discussed a mellowing reaction to the prog tag. Three years on and his second solo outing, the grandly titled *To Cure A Blizzard Upon A Plastic Sea*, acknowledges that it's time "to unleash his inner *Trout Mask Replica*". And so, with a level of job security gigging with Biffy Clyro, and a well-received debut in his pocket, Vennart lets his freak flag fly.

"It's flawed and a little disjointed, but utterly beguiling in places."

Opener *Binary* forges a logical link between old and new, shuffling the off-kilter drums and swirling Radiohead-isms of his past output with a baggy tribute to his adopted Manchester that evidences the new album's playful ear. *Donkey Kong* pulls off a similar trick, reframing the game as a sort of psychoanalytical framework that seems to incorporate youth, nostalgia and the sense of something rotting all at once. It also proves that it's not just the scale of the compositions and the 'anything goes' songcraft that have evolved: Vennart sounds like he's put work into stretching his vocal abilities. The middle eight bursts with the sort of primal scream you may fantasise about releasing in public, and there's a touch of Chris Cornell at play here, albeit often buried to eye level in layers of filthy fat synth and distortion. Elsewhere, *Friends Don't Owe* is sort of like Mclusky but in a time signature we can't figure out with a calculator, and it's oddly earwormy as a result.

Robots In Disguise veers between Steven Wilson-esque mourn-pop and Beefheart grind, but comes across a little too sprawling and mid-paced to quite raise the hairs on the back of your neck. The closing saw-toothed solo cacophony reminds us why Vennart isn't short of paying gigs, though.

That aforementioned 'playful ear' may be attributed to the impact of parenthood on our protagonist, and the best moments on *...Plastic Sea* seem to stem from this place. *Immortal Soldiers*, in particular, analyses the lifespan of his son's disposable plastic playthings, concluding that they'll outlast us all. Here he hits on something essential, finding humour and horror in human folly, while channelling everything from *Sgt Pepper's...* to Soundgarden before a sort of pulverised Pink Floyd outro.

Vennart lets it all hang out on *...Plastic Sea*. It's flawed, a little disjointed and confusing, but in places it's utterly beguiling. We're not sure what will come next — and that's a very good thing.

MATT PARKER

THE LEMON TWIGS

Go To School 4AD

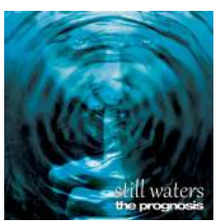
Wunderkind indie siblings' Rundgren-guesting, simian-themed 'musical'.

There are concept albums and there are rock operas, and it's not always clear which are which. But this startlingly camp, faintly crazy second album from Long Island brothers Brian and Michael D'Addario clearly fits the latter category, even though they prefer to call it a musical. The pair, aged 21 and 19 respectively, may be steeped in Big Star-style guitar glam and West Coast harmony rock, but they also have wild ambitions way beyond their station. So why not present us with an orchestra-enhanced, album-long tale of a married couple of bitter, failed actors/musicians who adopt a chimpanzee son? The brothers have the help of one of their heroes, Todd Rundgren, on the harmony-soaked chorus of *Rock Dreams*, and it succeeds largely through sheer chutzpah, as does the defiant show tune *Born Wrong/Heart Song*. Elsewhere, *The Lesson* starts off like a McCartney piano ballad outtake from *The White Album*, but it ends up a likeable, string-sloshed romp. Lord knows what theatre impresario in their right mind would dare try to sell tickets to this, but in a world of safe-playing career rockers, this kind of arrant insanity is more than welcome. **JS**

THE PROGNOSIS

Still Waters SELF-RELEASED

Surrey's prog waters run deep.



Dorking. A visit to the sleepy Surrey commuter belt town seldom sets pulses racing but – suspend your disbelief – it's actually an area with a rich progressive rock heritage, replete with links to Genesis and Camel. Previous winners of this magazine's best unsigned band competition way back in 2013, The Prognosis remain unsigned, whether by design or otherwise. Having evolved beyond playing classic prog covers, *Still Waters* is their debut album featuring all original material. Three of the five tracks take their lyrical inspiration from the band's locale, while musically the quintet wear their influences proudly on their collective sleeve. Camel and Gabriel-era Genesis are obvious touchstones for the band, whose songs are greatly enlivened by the saxophones of Chris and Annabelle South, along with Robert McEvoy's flute. The dull *In The Deep* aside, there's much to enjoy here, in particular wild card *Meander*, whose Steely Dan vibes make it considerably more engaging than its title might suggest. With the year end now in sight, *Still Waters* is unlikely to feature on any 'Best Of 2018' lists (the band's nearest and dearest aside), but this is a pleasant listen. **NS**

THE RESIDENTS

I Am A Resident! CHERRY RED

Fan cover versions of Residents material "mutated and collaged" by the group.

The Residents announced the concept of *I Am A Resident!* in 2013, and when they asked for submissions, they received 193 pieces of music. The idea is that as no one knows who The Residents are anyway, by reworking their music, you're as much a Resident as anyone else. The first CD is themed as an hour-long radio show on 'WREZ', introduced by a cheesy host. It features some inventive, if nightmarish, mash-up medleys, like *Hello Duck Stab*, a 10-minute fairground swirl based on covers of the *Duck Stab* EP. The second CD features 24 shorter tracks, which remind us that, by comparison, The Residents' later material is particularly well recorded, and for all their freakiness, they've produced some fairly simple songs. That said, whatever the fans throw at the group, they can throw back something bigger, as on a version of *Constantinople* that's buzzing with punishingly abrasive electronics. The Residents' approach is arch and mannered, and some of the vocal performances here are self-consciously wacko to draining effect, so a straightforward reading of *Loss: The Weatherman* stands out. A brilliant concept, then, but one that's surely for fans only. **MB**

ALEXANDER TUCKER

Don't Look Away THRILL JOCKEY

First solo album in six years from weird folk pioneer.

Alexander Tucker is perhaps best known today as one half of avant-pop duo Grumbling Fur, but since 2003, he's also released a series of beguiling solo albums that can be seen to have pioneered the folk psych end of the New Weird Britain scene. There's a feeling on *Don't Look Away* of an engagement with both the ancient and the everyday modern, as though viewing the world through some non-linear dimension. Tucker's music offers uplift, yet from an uncanny perspective. His acoustic skills and sound layering are present throughout, but it's Tucker's warm, Eno-like voice that anchors these songs in the ether. The cosmic hymn of *Objects* establishes the album's vibe, a campfire singalong on Mars with some lovely Fripp-esque guitar, while *Sisters And Me* evokes the quasi-pagan 70s. The minimal electronic percussion and droning viola of *Visiting Again* could be latter-day Radiohead, and the hallucinatory, piano-led amble of *Boys Names* recalls John Cale. *Gloops Void* provides dubby psychotronic contrast, but it's the final meditative chant of *ISHUONAWAYISHANAWA* that sums the album up, Tucker willing himself into the weft and weave of the music. **JB**

TUNNG

Songs You Make At Night FULL TIME HOBBY

Brit duo reunite for a folktronic delight.

The last Tunng album to feature founder members Sam Genders and Mike Lindsay was 2007's *Good Arrows*. The two have kept busy in the intervening 11 years – Genders with his outfit Diagrams; Mercury Prize winner Lindsay with Laura Marling and many more – but they felt the growing need to 'recapture the magic' of the early Tunng records. That desire and the pair's collective experiences outside the band have led to the most cohesive, melodic and irresistible record in the Tunng catalogue. *Songs You Make At Night* brims with characters, stories and moods set to a classy blend of folk and electronica. There's a greater accent on the electro here, as in the gentle mission statement *Sleepwalking* or the catchy single *Dark Heart*. But there's subtle experimentation too, the production is next level, and Genders' warm vocals remain a Tunng hallmark. On the stark *Battlefront*, he and co-vocalist Becky Jacobs pass gorgeous counter-melodies back and forth, and the album's glitch-poppy moments nestle cosily with the acid folk moments. This is an album that's oneiric and intimate, elegant yet complex, deeply musical and warmly human. A welcome reunion. **GRM**

KATE WESTBROOK

Granite WESTBROOK RECORDS

The beauty and the bleak from Devon-based jazz maven.

Kate and Mike Westbrook have been a formidable partnership on the jazz scene for over six decades. However, their wilful disregard for pigeonholing has seen them explore musical theatre, big bands, cabaret and even opera. With *Granite*, Mike has supplied arrangements via a powerful sextet whose direction is more rock than jazz for Kate's song cycle, inspired by her beloved Dartmoor and the Devon landscape where they live. Within a beautifully crafted production, the perspectives between land and sky deftly shift between a mythic quarry worker cutting stone and a curlew whose bird's-eye view quite literally sees the bigger picture. Now nearly 80, Kate's voice is imbued with a smoky timbre and patina from a life spent following her muse. Echoing the weather-tempered panorama, she pivots from half-whispered lyrics to something approaching a roar. In misty guitar pedal swells or amid stark, impassioned sax breaks, she paints the austere contours of the rock and gorse landscape, declaiming her words with a deep, heavy resignation hewn from the remorseless passage of time, or taking flight, swooping to a distant horizon and eventual silence. **SS**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

None other than Mike Portnoy steered us towards Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's **We Came From Space**. The band are led by Neal Morse's keyboardist Bill Hubauer and, as you might expect, their self-released LP *While You Were Away* offers slick, harmony-rich neo with a poppy gloss and some really imaginative melodies, somewhere between ELO and, well, Spock's Beard. Hubauer and co-vocalist/guitarist Dave Buzard are engaging hosts, the project has a fun alien spin, and the tunes and production are pretty stellar.

As their name wryly implies, US quartet **YYNot** began life as a Rush covers project. Their sound proudly bears many of that great group's hallmarks, but their self-released debut stands on its own merits. *YYNot* is packed with strong songs, virtuosic playing and the compelling vocals of Rocky Kuner, who really delivers on standout tracks *Invisible Heart* and *Kingdom Come*. This band are growing out of their tribute roots and into something much more substantial.

Wakefield's **Mike Kershaw** has several well-received albums under his belt, but – full disclosure – this writer has struggled with his clunkily lo-tech soundworld and dour, acquired taste of a voice. Happily, though, latest release *Arms Open Wide* (Bad Elephant) is a marked leap forward that brims with artistic confidence. Kershaw's intense, down-to-earth prog has deep furrows in its brow, and that voice and lo-fi production style actually suit and mould the heartfelt material. It's his most ambitious and complete work to date.

Australian guitar star **Plini** goes from strength to strength, with recent shows at the Download and Be Prog! My Friend festivals, and an upcoming tour with TesseracT. Over four tracks, his new self-released EP *Sunhead* showcases the hot collision of fusion, djent, prog and jazz that's winning him a loyal audience. The artist pours both brain and heart into these intricate, grand, frequently funky and occasionally widdly melodies.

On their new EP *Landslide* (Easy Life) **Arcane Roots** peel back the layers of three tunes from their acclaimed record *Melancholia Hymns*. Glacial, stripped-back reworkings of *Before Me*, *Matter* and *Off The Floor* will thrill fans, but the most exciting thing here by far is the title track *Landslide* itself. A sleek and beautiful slice of the epic, hypnotic music they do so well, it's done with new layers of conviction and expertise, and suggests they're about to take their art to a whole new level.

Finally, *Chocolat* novelist **Joanne Harris** has been regaling festivals with her *#Storytime* project, which she calls '*Jackanory* with drums'. Her Storytime Band accompany her as she tells and sings her fantastical tales, and the resulting CD (only available from her website at www.joanne-harris.co.uk) is brave, evocative and pretty proggy stuff. Harris plays a mean flute, her band supply accomplished folk prog textures, and surely there's a concept album bursting to emerge from each enchanting story, of dream flowers, camel herders and undersea queens...

BLODWYN PIG

Ahead Rings Out/Getting To This CHRYSALIS

First two LPs – and extras – from Mick Abrahams' post-Tull band.

Mick Abrahams has said that Blodwyn Pig was the band he always wanted Jethro Tull to be. With hindsight, you can hear the creative push and pull between the guitarist and Ian Anderson on Tull's debut *This Was*, Abrahams' only album with the group, and you can feel the tension as his powerful rhythm'n'blues impulses vie with Anderson's more fanciful, and ultimately prevailing, palette.

But Abrahams' own group gave Tull a run for their money at first. Released in 1969, Blodwyn Pig's debut *Ahead Rings Out* was a Top 10 hit in the UK, and justly so. A powerful vocalist as well as a highly gifted guitarist, Abrahams had proved his blues mettle. Now freed from any restraints, he could explore the form and his own style fully, be it through a straight-ahead strut (*It's Only Love, Sweet Caroline*), loose mid-tempo blues (*Up And Coming*) or some down-home thumbpicking (*The Change Song*).

> **Freed from restraints, Abrahams explored his own style fully.**

And he wasn't done with wind instrumentalists just yet. Redoubtable horn player Jack Lancaster adds musical depth and some Canterbury flavours, burning up the jazzy, free-form showcase *The Modern Alchemist* and lavishing Kirk-like flute over the rambling *Leave It With Me*. Psych rockers *See My Way* and *Walk On The Water* come from the same place bands such as The Move would survey thoroughly soon after, and Andy Johns' eight-track production job still glistens and gleams — single *Dear Jill* sounds like it was recorded this morning.

There's a reason the sole bonus track here was previously unreleased: *MacGregor Muckabout* is the band aping the Goons and doing their best Scots impressions through the mother of all reverb units. One listen's all you'll ever need.

They followed this in 1970 with *Getting To This*, another Top 10 LP. Second time out there was an even greater sense of simpatico among the players (future Wishbone Ash/Kinks bassist Andy Pyle and drum monster Ron Berg completing the core line-up). Big, angry acid anthems (*Same Old Story, Send Your Son To Die*) sit alongside trad rock'n'rollers (*Drive Me*), echoing psych (*Variations On Nainos*) and lone acoustic guitar/vox work *Long Bomb Blues*. Also, you can bet a young Brian May's ears pricked up at Abrahams' harmony lines on the irresistible jam *The Squirreling Must Go On*. Thankfully, the bonus track here, proto-glam rocker *One Thing Leads To Another*, is as good as anything on the original record.

Abrahams would quit the band and the biz soon after, and Blodwyn Pig never would fully capitalise on this imaginative and gutsy music when the moment was theirs for the taking. It's just the hindsight talking again, but what a bloody shame. **GRANT MOON**

CRACK THE SKY

Crackology LOUD & PROUD

West Virginians' anthology of re-recorded career highlights goes down a storm.

The American progressive rock scene presents a conundrum. Prog's biggest bands enjoyed enormous success Stateside in the 1970s and the pulling power of many endures to this day: just this summer saw the Steve Howe incarnation of Yes play over 30 dates nationwide from coast to coast. However, it's almost exclusively British prog bands that have drawn the US crowds. Sure, the USA can boast some notable progressive acts – Kansas, Echolyn and Spock's Beard to name just three – but none beyond the prog metal arena that have come anywhere close to enjoying the continuing global popularity of their British counterparts. For a country whose population dwarfs the UK's by a factor of five, it all seems a bit disproportionate.

There remain plenty of American prog bands toiling away largely under the radar. Foremost among them are West Virginians Crack The Sky, who have been plugging away since the mid-1970s. While their 1975 debut album earned high praise from *Rolling Stone* – who subsequently included it in their Greatest 50 Prog Rock Albums Of All Time list – and the band toured hard, supporting the likes of Styx, Rush, Yes and Kansas, breaking through into the big time somehow eluded them. That they continue today with this 12-track retrospective of re-recorded songs from throughout their career probably represents a victory for perseverance over commercial logic.

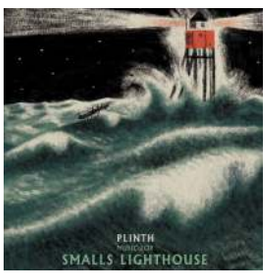
Crackology is an absolute triumph. In the main, CTS' material has aged pretty well and the re-recording here of *Hold On/Surf City* is positively incendiary. Musically, CTS cover numerous bases – one minute there's the meat-and-potatoes rock'n'roll of *She's A Dancer*, the next the acoustic honky tonk whimsy of *Robots For Ronnie*.

For the unacquainted, *Crackology* is a first-rate introduction to CTS. And as solid proof that they aren't soldiering on purely reliant on old material, the band have also released an adventurous new album, *Living In Reverse*, in parallel with this collection. **NS**

PLINTH

Music For Smalls Lighthouse CLAY PIPE

Water, water everywhere. And look! A dead fella hanging from the window!



Smalls Lighthouse is located 20 miles beyond Wales' most western tip, balanced atop a storm-swept rock. In 1801, one of the two men stationed there became ill and died, and the other – fearing he would be accused of murder should the body go missing – lashed his colleague's corpse to the outside of the building, where it was blasted by terrible winds. This generated a harrowing, hellish vista for the one man able to see it, and it's no surprise the BBC produced a film retelling the story in 2016.

Beating them to it was musician Michael Tanner, aka Plinth, whose *Music For Smalls Lighthouse* was released as a handmade, incredibly limited edition in 2010. Reissued by Clay Pipe in 2013, both versions have become wallet-rinsingly expensive, so now it's back again, this time on seafoam green vinyl.

Sometimes *Music For Smalls Lighthouse* doesn't feel like music at all, but even with field recordings of wind, rain and creaking timber providing much of the atmosphere, it's always *musical*. And for all the horror of the story, it's a surprisingly calm soundtrack, resisting the temptation to go full blockbuster and relying instead on mysterious, archaic sounds to conjure up the isolation of the island. There's no shrieking drama, just thoughtfully played piano, glockenspiel, cymbala, dulcitone and cello. Sometimes the sound is so ambient that you can play other music at the same time without either really being affected, and the album gently drifts from one title to the next without any clearly defined boundaries being crossed.

If this makes it all sound a little unfocused, fear not, for *Music For Smalls Lighthouse* is a wondrous composition and a beautiful production. It's part *Wicker Man*, part Conet Project, part North Sea Radio Orchestra, and all mystery and darkness and light. From the scene-setting *51°43'.23 N 05°40'.10 W* to the closing *Sirens*, it's the kind of thing that deserves rapt attention. Just don't listen to it with a full bladder. **FL**

SUNN O)))

White1/White2 SOUTHERN LORD

Low-flying drone warfare from the experimental US duo.

It's been 20 years since Greg Anderson and Stephen O'Malley collaboratively formed Southern Lord Records. Now recognised as the connoisseur's choice for progressive, experimental and avant-garde drone and doom metal, the label was at least partly established for the duo to showcase Sunn O))).

White1 opens with the monumental *My Wall* – track one of three – clocking in at just under half an hour and featuring Julian Cope's occultist poetry: *'Play your gloom axe, Stephen O'Malley/Sub bass ringing the sides of the valley.'* With a meter redolent of Auden, it's less the night train and more a diabolical locomotive.

Although both albums were captured at the same session, typically for Sunn O))), *White2* marks a definitive and dramatic departure. While *White1* leaves the aural doors open to create negative space, White2 conversely battens down all portals. Nothing is left to chance: the sonic maelstrom is comprehensive, undiluted and replete to the core. It's also their first album that featured ex-Mayhem throat Attila Csihar. The human operatic drone is now a long-time collaborator. The result is the auditory intensity that would eventually lead to their career-defining masterpiece, *Monoliths & Dimensions*.

Sunn O))) have been incorrectly described as uncompromising and impenetrable. Such claims do their sound a disservice. Where the psyche of space rock meets the drone of doom, Sunn O))) simply embody an artistic device – albeit devoid of unnecessary percussion – in extremis. The music bends and yields, which this reissue helps to conduct.

Reissued on appropriately weighty 180g vinyl and refined with an attentively sculpted broader frequency – most noticeably with a heavier bottom end – the audio is carved out to a fuller, more robust resonance. There's no use listening to this album pairing on a streaming device – it requires high fidelity to appreciate the nuance of chord progression, structure and composition. **AB**

TRAVIS & FRIPP

Between The Silence PANEGYRIC

An exquisite three-CD live set from before the Crimson renaissance.

The reformation of King Crimson in 2013 has been such a spectacular success, it's easy to forget that just before it took place, an understandably embittered Robert Fripp, still mired in a legal dispute over royalties with UMG, had officially retired from music. This meant that *Follow*, his duo album created the previous year with flautist and saxophonist Theo Travis, was effectively his last recorded utterance. Or so we were led to believe.

With his soundscape set-up – basically a combination of guitar synthesisers and digital loops – Fripp has produced some beautiful music, but with such a synthetic sheen that it was sometimes difficult to get any emotional traction on it. These recordings with Travis, made at performances in churches in Cheltenham and Broadchalke, and at the Bath Festival, are all the better for the interaction and empathy between the two players.

There's some duplication of compositions on these three sets, but each performance is essentially a loose template of themes and melodic elements that allows for some improvisational playing. The album that *Between The Silence* feels closest to in mood – at least in places – is *The Equatorial Stars, which* Fripp made with Brian Eno, and is a set he rates highly.

Rather than it being simply a kind of drifting ambience, there's much activity, albeit mostly at a slow pace. *Pastorale* is airy and open, with Travis' alto flute flurries and Fripp's sweet, muted guitar lines. Elsewhere, he plays his flute and sax lines in a more contemplative and melancholic manner, weaving his way through Fripp's delicate loop systems on *A Careful Distance*, and the duo play a fantasia of sorts on the main theme of King Crimson's *Moonchild*.

Apart from Fripp setting up his soundscapes, he gives us a fair helping of his distinctive guitar buzz, with some crunchy outbursts on the completely improvised *Route 23*, and he adds disruption and an abrasive edge to the versions of *Rotary Symmetrical*. **MB**

ENCHANT

A Dream Imagined INSIDEOUT

Bulging box set celebrates 25 years of San Fran soundmakers.

In 1991, Ted Leonard saw a local ad for a singer that said: "Steve Hogarth, where are you?" Leonard had no idea who Hogarth was, but took a punt. And two years after the first formative knockings of Enchant in the Bay Area, they were fully tooled up, with a vocalist who could bring the singalong factor — something they'd openly craved to spice up their stylings. These were loosely based on Rush, Kansas and Journey but open-eared to the accessible pop of Jellyfish or Tears For Fears.

> **They're never less than polished, but can deliver surprises.**

Leonard's crystal voice — also gilding Spock's Beard since 2011 — is what first hits you about Enchant as you traverse this marathon 10-disc set. He's the warm, welcoming guide who leads you through varying degrees of difficulty, whether the band are rocking, detouring into prog intricacies or just soothing you with a sappy AOR song. They're never less than polished, and while there are patches that feel somewhat too slick, their enduring career has emphasised their ability to keep delivering surprises and upgrades.

This bursting-at-the-seams box gathers their eight studio albums from 1993's debut *A Blueprint Of The World* right up to 2014's *The Great Divide*. Two bonus discs collect demos, live tracks and acoustic and instrumental versions. It's notable that 2004's *Live At Last*, generally deemed a success, isn't present in full: there's an argument that it might have made a more cohesive component than the odds'n'sods. Yet for every sceptic regarding box set logic, there's a diehard who'll subjectively adore one specific out-take.

That Hogarth reference became a psychic plea to the universe, as Steve Rothery came along to co-produce Enchant's debut, adding guitars on tracks such as the sweet, surging *Catharsis*. Second album *Wounded* plays radio-safe, but 1997's *Time Lost* shows more ambition, as on the 11-minute *Interact*. *Break* seems wary of pushing the boat out into experimental waters, but 2000's *Juggling 9 Or Dropping 10* crunches harder, guitar-wise, Doug A Ott playing hot.

Blink Of An Eye again sticks in the comfort zone between heavy and mainstream, and around this period there's a sense of risks shirked. On 2003's *Tug Of War*, the band focused on pop songs. You can't please everybody and, disenchanted, Enchant took a decade-long sabbatical until *The Great Divide*, the relatively grittier approach of which won back the love.

If Enchant never quite flew the way Marillion predicted, there's an abundance of magic moments arcing across this frequently resplendent retrospective.

CHRIS ROBERTS

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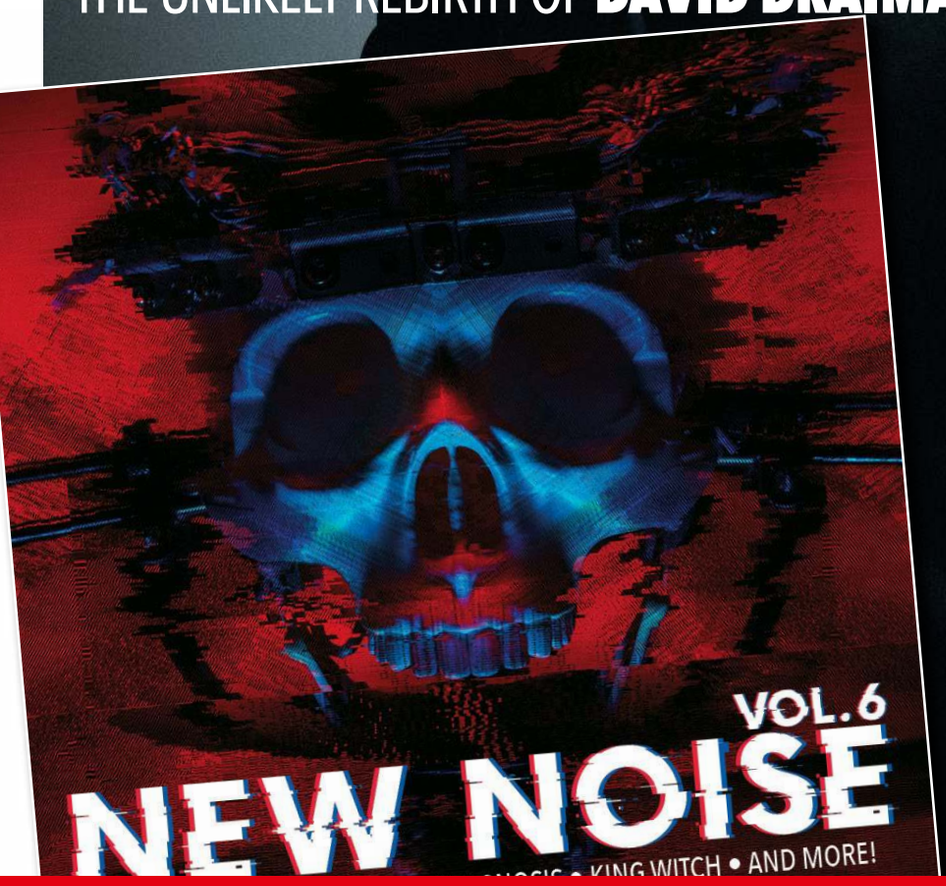

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WETTON/DOWNES

The iCon Trilogy EPICON/CHERRY RED

The bromance that brought the original Asia back together.

Although their rekindled relationship in iCon would eventually result in a reunion of the classic Asia line-up, bassist/vocalist John Wetton and keyboard wizard Geoffrey Downes were estranged for much of the 1990s, working with different artists and exchanging barbs of the type that only bitter divorcees will truly appreciate.

How fitting, then, that the press blurb for this long-overdue compendium sees Downes claiming to have felt like "blood brothers in the songwriting department" with the late, great Wetton, the "bromance made in heaven" of those shared years working under the handle of iCon allowing the pair to transcend Asia's perceived limitations.

The iCon Trilogy pools remastered versions of all three studio albums, complete with bonus tracks. Released in 2005 under the original moniker of Wetton Downes, *Icon* began on a sombre note with the instrumental *Paradox*, before *Let Me Go* delivered a radio-friendly reminder of why Asia dominated the charts in 1982. Backed by a troupe that included John Mitchell on guitar and cellist Hugh McDowell of ELO fame, and with Annie Haslam co-voicing the beautiful *In The End*, Wetton and Downes rekindled their connection with such ease that hearing them together almost felt like an intrusion on something private.

A year later, *Icon II: Rubicon* pored over the wreckage of the duo's shared midlife crises, cloaking them with events from Roman history. The album's honesty was every bit as gripping as selections such as *To Catch A Thief*, featuring Anneke van Giersbergen.

With Dave Kilminster replacing Mitchell, three more years passed before Icon's return. Asia had once again become a touring and recording unit, so it was no surprise that *Icon 3* suffered a little by comparison. That's not to diminish its quality, though.

Still want more? Start saving for next Christmas and a box set of iCon's entire canon, including the prequel, *Zero*, and various live add-ons. **DML**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

A Kaleidoscope Of Sounds (Psychedelic & Freakbeat Masterpieces) UMC

A box of seven of the UK's rarest and most expensive freakbeat and psych sevens.

One of the nice things the consolidation of the music industry has given us is projects like this. Fifty years after they were barely available on varying imprints, Universal Music can gather long-lost gems from Decca, Deram, Fontana et al, and turn them into a magical cardboard box with facsimile seven-inch paper sleeves and an informative booklet.

This artefact has been compiled by journalist, historian, designer and freakbeat aficionado (and former *Record Collection* subject in this very mag) Phil Smee, the man behind the Bam Caruso label, whose 20-volume *Rubbles* series covers similar ground. So similar, in fact, that nine of the 14 tracks on show here featured on *Rubbles*, while the other five have previously appeared on compilations such as *A Perfumed Garden*, *Chocolate Soup For Diabetics* and *Treacle Toffee World*.

It's a lovely package, and if you're into this sort of thing you'll have all these tracks already. But who cares? Not you! It's from an era when ambition frequently outstripped ability and it didn't matter a jot, lending much of this collection a bamboozling, demented charm. Take Jason Crest's *Black Mass*, which is almost entirely comprised of tape spools spun backwards, maniacal shrieks and chanting monks. It's great! Or The Fairytale's cobwebby *Guess I Was Dreaming*, which tells tales of one-eyed midgets and was later covered by The Kingsmen.

Then there's *Say Those Magic Words* by Birds Birds, a clattering chunk of primitive mod R&B featuring Ronnie Wood. Or *Listen To The Sky* by Sands, an ambitious arrangement that peaks with an extended instrumental section reminiscent of the Battle Of Britain.

That this was originally on the B-side of a song called *Mrs. Gillespie's Refrigerator* reveals much about the state of A&R in 1967, but that's *A Kaleidoscope...* for you: beguiling, mostly without precedent, occasionally hilarious and always entertaining. **FL**

NICK MASON

Unattended Luggage PARLOPHONE

Set the controls for the heart of the drum.

With Dave Gilmour and Roger Waters traditionally hogging the bulk of the Floyd-related spotlight, it's especially good to see Nick Mason getting some attention with his Saucerful Of Secrets Band and the reissue of his three albums originally released in the 1980s. Having languished in out-of-print limbo for far too long, that they come in a modestly priced package is the icing on the cake.

Thanks to Mason's affable nature and egoless spirit, we have the brilliant composer and pianist Carla Bley to thank for his 1981 debut solo album, *Fictitious Sports*. Though released under his name, it was Bley who gifted the entire collection of songs that comprise the record, as Mason looked to channel his creative energies into something more collaborative and positive after the making of *The Wall*.

> **"*Hot River* is possibly the best song Pink Floyd never recorded."**

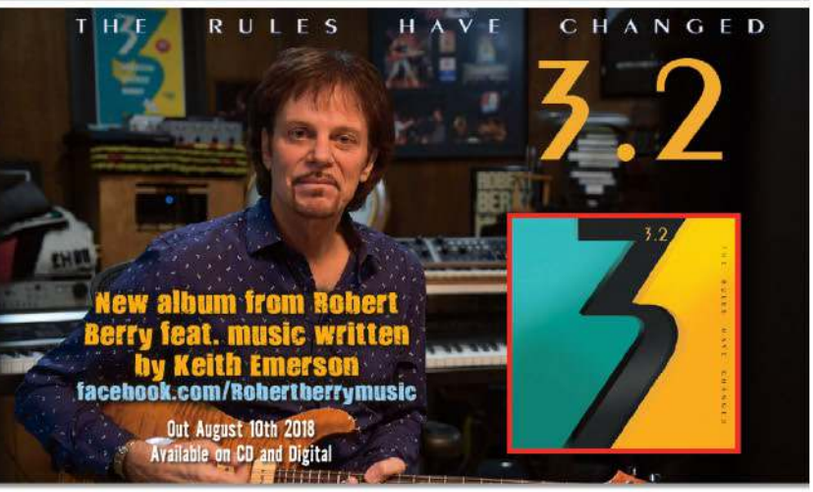
With Robert Wyatt providing most of the vocals, it's become something of a cult classic in disparate parts of the progressive music continuum. Largely recorded in 1979 in the bucolic surroundings of upstate New York, it resonates with a remarkably liberated atmosphere thanks to real-time performances and agile support.

Both songs and lyrics are often witty, a quality that Wyatt's lugubrious and deadpan delivery frequently amplifies. The brilliant *Hot River* remains a contender for the best song Pink Floyd never recorded. Punchy brass, with some highly charged sax from Gary Windo (best-known for his work on Wyatt's Mason-produced *Rock Bottom* and *Ruth Is Stranger Than Richard* albums), add a fiery urgency.

This is a commodity that's almost entirely missing from Mason's next venture. Teaming up with 10cc guitarist Rick Fenn, 1985's *Profiles* veers between a kind of library music version of breezy pop to momentary outbreaks of dramatic themes with crashing electronic drums and cascades of DX-7 synth. There's a Dave Gilmour cameo vocal and several solos from King Crimson veteran Mel Collins, but the album struggles to come to life due to the glossy 80s production.

1987's *White Of The Eye*, on CD for the first time, is similarly burdened. The soundtrack to director Donald Cammell's movie of the same name, the pieces feel more like provisional sketches. Moody, neon rain-soaked impressions, the occasional bluesy outing, exotic synth flowerings and Fenn's fine guitar playing hover in the thrall of Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms* zeitgeist. Nevertheless, despite its torpor, there's much that's agreeable, if not very exciting.

Though these latter two records possess a kind of innocuous charm, an overly fussy sound means they've dated in a way that *Fictitious Sports* most definitely has not. **SID SMITH**



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RICK WAKEMAN

Piano Odyssey Tour

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THU 27 SALISBURY CITY HALL
FRI 28 YEOVIL WESTLANDS
SAT 29 AYLESBURY WATERSIDE
SUN 30 YORK BARBICAN

OCTOBER 2018
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FRI 05 KINGS LYNN CORN EXCHANGE
THU 11 IPSWICH CORN EXCHANGE
FRI 12 NORTHAMPTON ROYAL & DERNGATE
SAT 13 SCUNTHORPE BATHS HALL
FRI 19 BATH FORUM
SAT 20 HIGH WYCOMBE THE SWAN
SUN 21 OXFORD SHELDONIAN THEATRE

NOVEMBER 2018
THU 01 WORTHING PAVILION THEATRE
SAT 03 GUILDFORD G LIVE
WED 07 PETERBOROUGH THE CRESSET
FRI 09 HALIFAX VICTORIA THEATRE
SUN 11 EVESHAM REGAL
THU 15 TUNBRIDGE WELLS ASSEMBLY HALL
SAT 17 DORKING DORKING HALLS

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CURVED AIR

Second Album DVD CHERRY RED

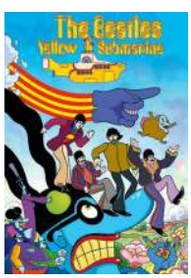
Live and promotional material from 1971 gets its first official release.

Curved Air's 1971 *Second Album* has been remastered, and it comes with this 75-minute DVD. In 1970 Warner Brothers were quick to invest in this new progressive thing, reputedly stumping up $90,000 to sign Curved Air, who went on to make a 16-minute promo film of songs from their debut *Air Conditioning*. It's fascinating and very much of its time, with *It Happened Today* accompanied by newspaper and magazine headlines and collages. At one point Francis Monkman looms dramatically over Sonja Kristina, engaged in guitar heroics, but then the camera pans back to reveal that he's standing on a chair. *Screw* is also literal in its visuals, featuring a skull being slowly hand-drilled in the foreground. They were a particularly eclectic band, going from pop melody on *Back Street Luv* (there's an excellent version here from the German TV show *Beat Club*) to *Vivaldi*, Darryl Way's classical/freakout violin showcase (of which there are three versions in total here) to Monkman's loopy electronics. The latter's super-speed keyboard solo in a live performance for French TV in Paris is a clear homage to composer Terry Riley, whose *Rainbow In Curved Air* gave the band their name. **MB**

YELLOW SUBMARINE

Bill Morrison TITAN COMICS

Full speed ahead for a comic reimagining of the film.

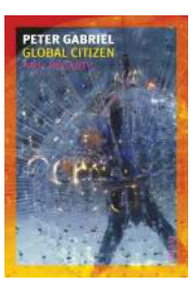


As the fantastical Beatles animation celebrates its 50th anniversary, it now emerges via the medium of graphic novel. Lovingly penned by cartoonist Bill Morrison (*MAD* magazine, *The Simpsons*), it began life two decades ago, commissioned by Dark Horse Comics, before their deal collapsed. Titan recently acquired the rights and the artist resumed work. He watched the film countless times with his wife, who collaborated on dialogue, but he's opted for a level of licence, rather than mere mimicry. What's strongly retained is that 60s feel of psychedelic innocence, which straddled a childlike glee in the possibilities of colours and shapes, with winking acknowledgement that loads of people were necking shedloads of drugs. Pepperland is a riot of big visual statements, with many full-page images. The submarine itself is downplayed, and Liverpool almost redacted, but The Sea Of Holes is milked for striking scenes. The likenesses of the Fab Four themselves? Not bad, but not terrific. Overall, there's a very impressive, almost shimmering wobbliness to the pictures that cleverly catches the film's phantasmagorical breeze. **CR**

PETER GABRIEL: GLOBAL CITIZEN

Paul Hegarty REAKTION BOOKS

Location, location, location: a unique perspective on Gabriel's career.

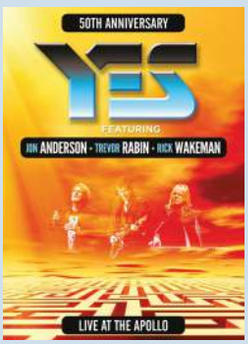


This isn't a standard biography: coming so soon on the back of the updated version of Daryl Easlea's fine *Without Frontiers* wouldn't have made much sense. Instead, author Hegarty, a professor of French and Francophone Studies, prefers to look at the mercurial and manifold career of Peter Gabriel from the perspective that much of it can be attributed to where he was when he created music – or 'locatedness', as Hegarty puts it. In other words, that Gabriel's physical and mental voyage is what defines him as a truly global artist. It's not the easiest of concepts to grasp until one starts to read *Global Citizen*, which begins with Gabriel's Genesis years in a chapter aptly entitled 'Albion', and moves all the way through to close around 2011's *New Blood* project. It's an interesting take on the usual biography format, aided by Hegarty's easy style, and is wholly accepting of the role progressive music continues to play in the Gabriel sound. But it's been 17 years since Gabriel's last album of original material, and there are no insights here as to where that new album might be coming from. Which, one suspects, is what fans really want to know. **JE**

YES FEATURING ANDERSON, RABIN AND WAKEMAN

50th Anniversary Live At The Apollo EAGLE VISION

ARW take the crown in the battle of the bands.



The Anderson, Rabin and Wakeman incarnation of Yes bill themselves as the definitive line-up of the band and this live set from 2017 shows exactly why. With Trevor Rabin on guitar, it's not surprising that the song selection favours material from their 80s and early 90s output, particularly *90125*, although *Big Generator* and *Union* both get a look in, alongside a handful of essential classics from the 70s. The rhythm section is composed of Lee Pomeroy on bass and Lou Molino III on drums. Neither are household names but both are more than capable session proggers. However, it's the three names at the top of the bill that really give this band its clout.

> **When Anderson harmonises with Rabin, it's magical.**

Now in his 70s, Jon Anderson sounds simply extraordinary. It's hard to think of another frontman in the rock world whose voice is this strong when celebrating the 50th anniversary of their band. He's unmistakable and, no offence to Jon Davison, irreplaceable. When he harmonises with Rabin, the result is magical. They open with *Cinema* and *Hold On*, both from *90125*, then hit the first peak of the evening with *I've Seen All Good People*.

Lift Me Up is the sole selection from *Union*, which Anderson says Wakeman calls the *Onion* album because listening to it makes him cry, but it features a corking guitar solo from Rabin. *Rhythm Of Love*, from *Big Generator*, shows Yes at their most AOR, but Wakeman gets to take the spotlight with some impressive soloing of his own.

Despite the slickness of some of the 80s material — the guitar lick of *Changes* recalls The Police — they redress the balance with the proper prog epics of *Heart Of The Sunrise*, *And You And I* and *Long Distance Runaround*. *Awaken* goes down a storm with the Manchester fans, although that might be the one instance in the evening where the players are guilty of indulging in a spot of excessive musical noodling.

They wrap the set up with a scintillating version of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*, which they expand with an extended coda that lets Wakeman and Rabin jam out. The encore of *Roundabout* might be inevitable, but it's superbly played and fairly obliterates the recording on the recent *Topographic Drama* live album by Steve Howe's version of Yes.

There's not much in the way of a fancy production in terms of the stage show, but with a performance as powerful and confident as this, they don't need special effects or lighting tricks. The music speaks very loud and clear. **DAVID WEST**

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Take a bow

BE PROG! MY FRIEND

VENUE	POBLE ESPANYOL, BARCELONA, SPAIN
DATE	29/06-01/07/2018

FRIDAY

Be Prog! My Friend takes place in Barcelona's charming Poble Espanyol square, and it's still baking hot at 5.15pm when Andorrans **Persefone** open up the main stage. But though the sun may be in their eyes, it doesn't stop them from pouring all of their energy into their highly technical yet blisteringly heavy progressive metal. While the words 'prog metal' may still irk the fervent classic prog fan, Persefone's impressively large crowd where young metalheads merrily mingle with the Genesis T-shirt brigade shows that the gap is closing, at least here.

On a surface level, **Baroness** are one of the bands on the bill that appear furthest out on the fringes of prog. However, the Georgia band's ability to seamlessly blend heavy, erratic grooves with some of the most gorgeous melodies in the metal scene into a sound that's now instantly recognisable and extremely difficult to categorise shows genuine innovation. Tonight's set is delivered with seething passion, frontman John Dyer Bailey a tattooed powerhouse of vitality, and the material from their most recent album *Purple* sounds particularly progressive, from *Morningstar*'s technical rumble to the psychedelic instrumental *Fugue*.

Captivating with sound: Gazpacho.

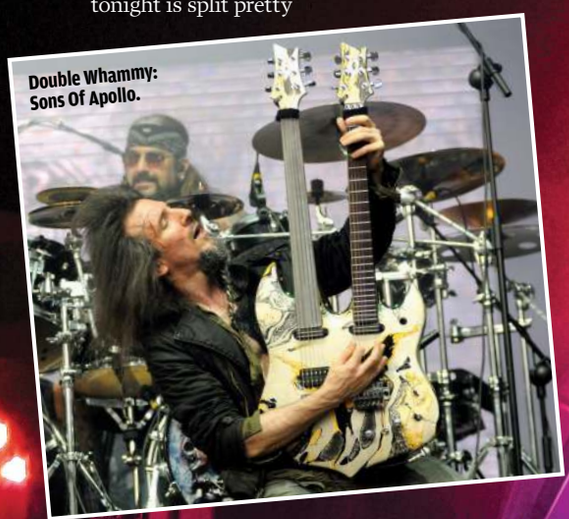
There aren't many musicians who could make tracksuit bottoms look good, but it's safe to say that **Pain Of Salvation**'s frontman Daniel Gildenlöw is one of them. Their most recent album, *In The Passing Light Of Day*, focused on the frontman's horrifying experience of contracting a flesh-eating disease in 2014. But he recovered, and looks in peak physical health today, ready to lead his Swedish crew through their dark and complex progressive sounds. Delivered with intense ferocity, songs like the opening throb of *Full Throttle Tribe* and the sprawling 10-minute *On A Tuesday* take on an extra emotional weight, but their performance also has a celebratory feel, seeing the band all guns blazing and Gildenlöw in such fine form.

Word on the street is that no one is allowed to take photos of **A Perfect Circle** tonight, and backstage the band create an enclave guarded by their own security, even barring access to the women's toilet, which unfortunately falls within their barriers. Yet there is Maynard James Keenan, happily chatting with all and sundry in catering, not exactly a man desperate to hide behind closed doors. Onstage, though, shrouded towards the back of the stage, he is a less dominant figure, yet vocally he carries A Perfect Circle's performance. Their set tonight is split pretty evenly between all four studio albums, from the evident King Crimson-isms of debut album *Mer de Noms* to the progressive pop of most recent release, *Eat The Elephant*. Their performance is a fascinating display where mainstream and progressive music exist happily side by side.

Taking to the stage well after midnight, **Oranssi Pazuzu**'s audience is understandably on the thinner side. Which is a real shame, as they miss a mesmerising psychedelic journey into the magical side of black metal. With flashing lights and intense walls of sound enhancing their swirling sounds, it's an all-encompassing experience of inventive music.

SATURDAY

Australian guitarist **Plini** and band kick things off on Saturday with *Salt + Charcoal* and it's immediately apparent that, as with Animals As Leaders last year, modern exponents of guitar-led instrumentals inject as much feeling into what they do as technique, something sadly lacking in the guitar virtuosos of the 80s and 90s.


Double Whammy: Sons Of Apollo.

Pain Of Salvation: in a celebratory mood.

Emotion and technicality: Plini.

Steve Hackett gives a triumphant performance.

ARANZAZU PEYROTAU

Norwegians **Gazpacho**'s sublime art rock sits perfectly with the slowly setting sun. Thomas Andersen's scene-setting keyboards are perfectly complimented by Jan Henrik Ohme's soulful vocal. While visually the band do very little beyond play their instruments, such is the power of their music that the audience remain captivated by sound, not sight. The disappointment that they only play two songs — *Soyuz One* and *Emperor Bespoke* — from the recent *Soyuz* is off-set by the epic strains of *Tick Tock, Part 3* and the whole of *The Walk* from 2009's *Tick Tock*.

Mike Portnoy returns for the second year on the trot, this time with his prog metal supergroup **Sons Of Apollo**. If Gazpacho let their music do the talking for them, Sons hit you square between the eyes with a sound that Deep Purple could have made had they been a more proggier affair, and a stagecraft that certifies the band members' individual pasts in the likes of Mr. Big, Guns N' Roses and Journey.

Even if they do cover Dream Theater with *Just Let Me Breathe* and *Lines In The Sand*, it's clear it's not just Portnoy's band, as much of the focus is on guitarist Bumblefoot and bassist Billy Sheehan, while singer Jeff Scott Soto is a visual whirlwind with pipes to match. Ditching the solos, even in front of a partisan prog crowd, works in their favour too, making them look and sound streamlined, but with songs and a show that packs a real punch.

"Supper's Ready stands tall and proud as the crowning moment of Be Prog! 2018."

Any fears that the elegant grace of **Steve Hackett** might suffer in the face of such an enjoyable prog metal blitz are overthrown as he and his band rip into *Please Don't Touch*. Hackett is on absolute fire as a performer tonight, ably backed by a water-tight band. It's a slightly truncated set, even though he plays for two hours, the solo material and a welcome, ripping take on GTR's *When The Heart Rules The Mind* give way to a run of 70s Genesis classics. As *Dancing With The Moonlit Knight* moves into a stunning *Fountain Of Salmacis* into an evergreen *Firth Of Fifth* (and *that* solo), Be Prog! stand entranced by the virtuosity and vigour on display. And then *The Musical Box* gives way to a well-known acoustic intro and *Supper's Ready* stands tall and proud as the crowning moment of Be Prog! 2018. True, Hackett's been taking this kind of set around the world for the last six years, and *Prog*'s seen a lot of those gigs. But few have carried the energy and emotion that were on display tonight.

It's left to Swedish prog metallers **Burst** to follow, which isn't an enviable position. They split in 2009 and reformed at the behest of the organisers for this event, and though their noisy, heavy sounds go down well for those who stay to watch, nothing was going to prevent Steve Hackett taking the honours. At 68-years old he remains at the very top of his game.

JERRY EWING/HANNAH MAY KILROY

A Perfect Circle's dazzling headline show.

Baroness: heavy yet beautiful.

RAMBLIN' MAN FAIR

VENUE	MOTE PARK, MAIDSTONE
DATE	01/07/2018

Prog has been moved at this year's Ramblin' Man, shifting from the outdoor stage at the top of the site to the tent at the foot of the field. And while this decision might reflect the strength of the blues stage line-up rather than any paucity on the progressive music front, there are a couple of advantages to the switch: the atmosphere under the canvas is celebratory from the off, and the tent provides a degree of protection from the searing heat that savages the fair-skinned fans elsewhere.

First to benefit from the shelter are Austrian five-piece **Second Relation**, who are playing their first UK show. The band's unlikely mix of Level 42 with Coheed And Cambria suffers throughout from an extremely thin sound, but there's enough crunch and funk on show to suggest they're worth keeping an eye on.

Up next are the impossibly glamorous **Goldray**, the weekend's best-dressed band. Kenywn House is wearing a pair of flesh-coloured trousers that, at first glance, suggest he's entirely naked beneath his glittering robe, while singer Leah Rasmussen is sporting a startling dayglo outfit straight out of a high-end hippie boutique. House is a guitarist of enormous ability, but some doubts remain about the band's ability to turn those trippy, psychedelic riffs into truly memorable songs. New number *The Forest* provides hope, though — it's more of the same, but with a definite commercial spin, and as Rasmussen fires a handheld glitter cannon into the crowd, it's clear the band have won over a new audience.

Aussie travellers **Voyager** attract a smaller number of punters to the tent as Tyler Bryant shakes things up on the main stage, and they're initially hobbled by similar sound problems as Second Relation. After a few minutes, Simone Dow's guitar kicks in to give the band some necessary va-va-voom, and the band's clever, stuttering riffs inject a healthy dose of ferocity into proceedings. "Some people say we're the INXS of progressive metal," says singer Daniel Estrin, "which I guess makes me Michael Hutchence."

This may be an odd thing to say before you play a song titled *Hyperventilating*, but the introduction of a keytar on *Lost* — half *Dr Who* theme, half bangin' trance anthem — rights the ship, and standout closer *Stare Into The Night* proves that the band are capable of much more than just those mathematically charged chord progressions.

Our world tour of prog continues with Finland's **Von Hertzen Brothers**, who seem to have learned over the course of multiple festivals that the quickest way to a curious crowd's heart is often via a fat, pumping riff and a chorus the postman might latch onto. They arrive onstage late but waste no time, whipping up a giddy froth with a triumphant *War Is Over*. *The Arsonist* and *Jerusalem* keep the pot on a rolling boil, and only an attempted singalong section in *You Don't Know My Name* falls flat.

The Brothers pull things back from the precipice with a truly rampant rendition of *New Day Rising*, and of all the bands on today's stage, they're the one whose trajectory is most clearly aimed upwards.

> **"Fish still spits lyrics with as much venom as he ever did, and any set that's heavy on Marillion's *Clutching At Straws* is going to be an emotional ride."**

Mostly Autumn's appearance means everyone gets to play the Mostly Awesome/Mostly Awful game, and it's not until third track *Simple Ways* that the music lifts itself out of the mundane. It all feels a little underwhelming after the rousing Von Hertzens, but after this rather flat opening, the band steadily build momentum, and penultimate song *Mother Nature* feels like a triumphant finale, even though it isn't. *Heroes Never Die* follows and essentially adheres to the same formula, slowly building fervour before an exultant finish.

Fish comes onstage shadow boxing, and he's not happy. Delays have accumulated, main stage headliners The Cult are insisting that everyone else finish before they start, and so Fish has to truncate his set. This cultivates a lively, us-against-them atmosphere, and galvanises an already devoted crowd into backing the singer even more feverishly.

The big man's voice might creak alarmingly from time to time, but he still spits lyrics with as much venom as he ever did, and any set that's heavy on Marillion's *Clutching At Straws* album is going to be an emotional ride. *Warm Wet Circles* sees grown men cry, *State Of Mind* is dedicated to Theresa May, and *White Russian* is a jubilant climax. It all ends with a riotous bounce through *Incommunicado* before Fish departs, middle finger firmly extended in the direction of the main stage, a huge ovation ringing in his ears.

FRASER LEWRY

KEVIN NIXON

RICK WAKEMAN

VENUE	RONNIE SCOTT'S, LONDON
DATE	30/07/2018

It's International Piano Trio week at Ronnie Scott's, and the great and good are lined up to play. There's the legendary composer and bandmate of Miles Davis, Chick Corea. There's the brilliant Cuban prodigy Roberto Fonseca. And there's Rick Wakeman, introduced as the only rock musician with the 'cojones' to say yes to the organisers. As Buddy Rich's *Milestones* fades, Wakeman makes his way on stage – no cape, just a baggy brown suit – clearly delighted to be playing.

It's a unique venue, this, with low-slung red lamps lending an air of ill repute to the occasion, with pretty girls and boys ferrying plates of Kentish lamb and Scottish lobster to the tables. "There'll be some songs you'll know," says Wakeman, "some songs you won't know, and some songs *we* won't know."

It's a night of Wakeman classics: excerpts from *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur...* start the show, highlights of *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII* are dotted throughout, and there's a section from *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*. As Wakeman points out, he's playing these stripped back, as they were originally written, rather than as they appeared on record.

There's a lovely version of 1979's *Sea Horses*, with delicate clusters of notes reflecting the creatures' darting movements. And there are covers: a snappy *Sweet Georgia Brown*, a magical *Life On Mars*, a tinkling sprint through *Eleanor Rigby*, and a sultry version of *Summertime*, with fluttering keys and a delicately plucked guitar solo from Dave Colquhoun.

And, of course, there are jokes. Jokes about curries, farting, sex, incontinence, infidelity, his prostate, his father, his band members and the profound nature of songtitles in country music. He shoehorns in the imaginary classic 'You Might Call My Willie Nelson Cos He's Only Got One Eye', and while some of these jokes may be as old as the hills (Wakeman made the Willie Nelson gag as he collected the Spirit Of Prog prize at the Classic Rock Awards in 2010), they're all greeted with universal uproar.

There's a rule of thumb at venues with respectful audiences like this: you might not see a mobile phone all night, but there'll always be one bellowing, gammon-faced oaf in the crowd who shouts just a little bit louder and quicker than anyone else, as if to demonstrate the special bond he has with the musician, oblivious to everyone's mental tutting and his long-suffering partner with her head buried in the celeriac. We have one of those, but even he can't ruin the evening, which is an absolute treat.

FRASER LEWRY

ROGER WATERS

VENUE	HYDE PARK, LONDON
DATE	06/07/2018

In The Pink: Waters is still full of ire and fury.

KEVIN NIXON

Roger Waters really doesn't like Donald Trump, who appears on the gigantic screens as a pig in drag. Our host himself also dons a pig's-head mask, holding up signs saying "Pigs rule the world!" and "Fuck the pigs!" While a London crowd is just fine with that, 74-year-old Waters' politics can still provoke. His pro-Palestine stance upsets some. The screens list things we should "resist": most are standard (pollution, neo-fascism), but "the persecution of Julian Assange" goes down like a lead pig.

It's laudable that a veteran rock star still summons energy to rail against 'the system' while younger pretenders are terrified of saying anything controversial. Equally, it's extraordinary that Waters is so popular. As hot summer evenings go, this is not an average feel-good night out. With images of torture victims, mass murder and protests, this is one version of British Summer Time the brochures didn't mention. And Waters' anti-authoritarian stance has an obvious flaw when Hyde Park has more layered VIP circles than Dante's *Inferno*.

"People want a Pink Floyd concert and he delivers, cherry-picking from the 70s albums in a visually stunning, emotionally savage spectacle."

Of course, this Us & Them tour has unnerved the world for a year now, and Waters' angst is one of rock's glorious anomalies. People want, effectively, a Pink Floyd concert, and he delivers, cherry-picking from the 70s albums in a visually stunning, emotionally savage spectacle. The first half drifts through such trauma-treats as *Time*, *The Great Gig In The Sky* (sung by versatile Lucius duo Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig) and *Wish You Were Here*. It then detours into a solo material phase before introducing a choir of multiracial children dressed as Guantanamo Bay prisoners to chant, *'We don't need no thought control.'* Subtle it ain't.

The second set, where the visuals really kick in, opens with *Dogs* and *Pigs* as a sledgehammer to Trump's head. The relentless LED barrage has you pining for 10 seconds free from a vision of Trump's face so you can just enjoy the music. This ceases to be a concern as most of the sublime Side Two of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* sweeps up, the laser-fuelled prism a sight of wonder. *Comfortably Numb* encores, and Laurel Canyon's Jonathan Wilson is impeccable, as he is all show.

Waters' gruff voice has held up okay. There's no mere "hanging on in quiet desperation" on this English day: this is infuriating and inspiring, folly and triumph, eccentric and epic. The song isn't over.

CHRIS ROBERTS

Holly Laessig and Jess Wolfe.

Park Live: Waters delivers a summer concert like no other.

FAUST

VENUE	UNDERGROUND ARTS, PHILADELPHIA
DATE	20/07/2018
SUPPORT	ONO, Zs

Largely credited with conceiving krautrock in the early 1970s, Hamburg's FaUSt are known for their impulsive, erudite and resourceful avant-garde rock stylings. Naturally, then, their show here is filled with socially conscious poeticisms and inventive instrumentation. That said, their cacophonies of mostly aimless arrangements and pontifications results in an evening that's simultaneously fascinating, creative and inharmonious, yet also unbearable.

Chicago troupe ONO start things off with four tracks – *Invocation*, *Snatch*, *I Dream Of Sodomy* and *Heroin* – that cumulatively feel like an experimental nightmare. Complemented by macabre black and white imagery, frontman Travis wears costumes including a red robe, a pink dress and an illuminated white wig while emitting repetitious spoken-word decrees amid shifting amalgamations of gospel, industrial, classical, noise, electronica and more. Their ostentatiously methodical madness rarely feels musical, but ONO nonetheless deserve respect for bestowing such impenetrable performance art with absolute conviction.

Pulling out an altered rendition of 2001's *Noth* LP, New York's Zs offer a more flamboyant undertaking. Sadly, their seemingly shapeless voyages into automated jazzy disorder yield little melodic immersion: imagine hearing only the most piercingly unruly moments of The Mars Volta's *Cassandra Gemini* for 35 minutes. However, there's undeniable organisation and skill to the chaos that warrants at least technical acclaim. In particular, drummer Greg Fox ceaselessly impresses with his imaginative syncopation around saxophonist Sam Hillmer's free-form outbursts, and the entire band move with laudable unity around countless stylistic shifts.

As for FaUSt, their 80-minute sequence consists of several drawn-out jams that usually include prophetic narration from founding frontman/bassist Jean-Hervé Péron. Although their set is thoroughly inviting, mixing patient daydreams and dissonant panic (in between Péron's endearing moments of humility and explanation), it all wears a bit thin before too long. Sure, the occasionally novel instruments – trumpet, cement mixer, thunder sheet and guitar bow – add some practical intrigue, and the visual hodgepodge of colours, road footage and bullfighting enhance the journey a tad, but for the most part, the pieces sound like simplistic starting points stretched out to epic lengths.

All three acts deserve credit for their idiosyncratic boldness, unshakable dedication and/or influential styles, but as far as providing an enjoyable concert-going experience with musical intrigue and variety, each comes up short in different ways. Perhaps if ONO, Zs and FaUSt worked together on a piece, they'd arrive at a reliably beguiling listen.

JORDAN BLUM

COHEED AND CAMBRIA

VENUE	HUNTINGTON BANK PAVILION, CHICAGO
DATE	26/07/2018

Thousands of fans pack the Huntington Bank Pavilion, the biggest outdoor venue in Chicago, Illinois, for a night of mythical lyrics and metal riffs from Coheed And Cambria. That should come as no surprise, considering the band have been around for more than two decades now and have gained a huge fan following in that time.

The show begins with the band's new single, *The Dark Sentencer*. The song jams and the musicians put on a full-on display, singer/guitarist Claudio Sanchez belting out the lyrics with his unmistakable tenor. Intricate guitar licks and thumping but grooving drums pour from the speakers, the raucous audience headbanging to the max.

The stage show is very Rush inspired, with a futuristic symbol decorating the backdrop. And the Rush comparisons don't stop there: drummer Josh Eppard's kit is on a riser in the middle of the stage, and although his kit isn't exactly huge, its placement is very Neal Peart-esque. However, as the performance unfolds, the punk elements of the band appear — their sound is as if Rush, The Mars Volta and Blink 182 got high together and decided to form a hybrid supergroup. This is punk progressive metal, but Coheed have their own category in the music lexicon.

It's not often that a band's new offerings live up to the hype, and it can often be an unwelcome distraction during a live performance, but *Unheavenly Creatures* is an interesting new song, with a strange synthesis of styles and a catchy chorus.

Coheed put on an old school prog extravaganza.

TAYLOR NETTIN

Sanchez has a strong and captivating stage presence, his long, bushy hair covering his face as he sings with strength, while also playing expressive guitar. If you close your eyes, his vocals sound every bit as good live as they do on the albums.

This show is a split bill with Taking Back Sunday, but that's no problem for Coheed And Cambria as they totally blow them away, winning the crowd over with an effortless charisma. However, it does mean that Coheed's set only lasts for a little over an hour, which means they have to cherry-pick tracks from their back catalogue. The undoubted highlight of these is their strongest song, *Welcome Home*, which is also their biggest hit to date. This is the track that still gives the best representation of what the band are about, lyrically, harmonically and technically.

> **"This is punk progressive metal, but Coheed have their own category in the music lexicon."**

By the time the big guitar part of the song fills the air, there's a clear tension in the venue. Sanchez and Travis Stever complement each other on duelling guitars, with the former going totally overboard. The result is a seriously impressive guitar interchange, one of the most memorable this writer has seen.

As usual, Coheed And Cambria do their own thing in their own way. More than enough.

TREVOR WOODS

Mane Man: Coheed And Cambria's Claudio Sanchez.

VOYAGER

VENUE	THE BORDERLINE, LONDON
DATE	04/07/2018
SUPPORT	SUMER, TEMPLES ON MARS

Armed with an uncanny ability to unite the soul and melody of traditional rock'n'roll with the intricacy of prog, Temples On Mars kick-start tonight's experimental triumvirate in a flurry of harmonic heroism. Frontman James Donaldson and co storm the stage with an energised vigour that lures in their ever-expanding crowd, quickly rallying through the grooving singles *When Gods Collide* and *So In Love With Your Own Drug*, both taken from the quartet's self-titled debut album. This pair — along with deeper cuts like *Suicide By Tiger* and *Black Mirror* — excel at condensing progressive, polyrhythmic adventurism into radio-friendly anthems, promising a bright and potentially arena-filling future for this flashy four-piece.

English juggernauts Sumer follow suit. The quintet, bolstered by their possession of three guitarists, provide a riff-driven explosion of a set that commences with the slow-building *Chisel* before hitting a cathartic high early on with the fiery *Pinch, Cut*. Two brand-new tracks, *Subversions* and *Coherence*, are debuted back-to-back: the lengthy, patient sophistication of the former soon finds itself gloriously juxtaposed by the steely savagery of the latter. The adrenaline rushes caused by Sumer's mighty metal are amplified by the band's stellar presence. Every ferocious breakdown only feels all the more spine-rattling as the venue witnesses everyone onstage indulging in enthusiastic bouts of deep, synchronised headbanging.

As a headline act, Voyager could not be more appropriate: their sumptuously heavy output seamlessly unites the avant-garde muscularity of Sumer with the unyielding infectiousness of Temples On Mars. The Australian mavens had to endure the throes of a 16-hour flight to make it to British shores, but their inalienable chemistry and charisma could fool anyone into thinking they were playing on home turf tonight.

Small details like witnessing vocalists Danny Estrin and Alex Canion steal one another's microphones, or an impromptu cover of the Darude dance hit *Sandstorm*, go a very long way, elevating the performance from an impressive display of pure talent to feeling like a true prog metal party. The strength of the power metal-inspired tunes on display is the perfect complement to the fun environment that's meticulously crafted: modern classic after modern classic is laid out with ease and a constant swagger.

> **"Their sumptuously heavy output seamlessly unites avant-garde muscularity with infectious tunes."**

Whether it's a decade-old powerhouse like the manic *I Am The Revolution* or a newer entry taken from the latest album *Ghost Mile*, every song in Voyager's packed setlist resonates with luscious singalongs, permeating percussion and rock-solid riffs. As a result, it's unsurprising to hear the crowd unabashedly beg for more as the evening apparently concludes to the titanic sound of *The Meaning Of I*. Of course, the thunderous technicians happily oblige, continuing their unique balance of wildness and professionalism long into the night.

MATT MILLS

KEVIN NIXON

Voyager: prog metal party people.

Voyager's riff machine, Simone Dow.

SNARKY PUPPY

VENUE	THE FILLMORE PHILLY, PHILADELPHIA
DATE	29/06/2018
SUPPORT	RAUL MIDÓN

Snarky Puppy defy classification. Led by bassist/composer Michael League and completed by nearly 20 other members, their self-described blend of jazz, world music, soul, pop and funk makes them a diverse act whose abilities are complemented by consistent humility. This show is a great testament to that, as they provide an elaborate and fun performance.

Singer/songwriter/guitarist Raul Midón opens tonight's show. He plays *Sound Shadow* and *Pedal To The Metal* from last year's *Bad Ass And Blind* album, and visits 2005's *State Of Mind* for *Suddenly*, *Sunshine (I Can Fly)* and the title track. Throughout the funk/Latin/jazz set, he evokes the mellow sophistication of Steely Dan, the vibrant friskiness of Stevie Wonder and the life-affirming smoothness of Jack Johnson. Such dexterity, coupled with several humorous and modest anecdotes, makes him an endearing performer whose every action, it seems, is met with uproarious applause.

Despite only having about half of their full line-up, Snarky Puppy still put on a full-bodied performance. Logically, they favour 2016's *Culcha Vulcha* by pulling out *Beep Box*, *GØ*, *Palermo* and *Big Ugly*. Elsewhere, they play older gems like *Flood*, *White Cap*, *Tio Macaco* and, for the encore, *Quarter Master*.

Each one is replicated immaculately, challenging the audience to follow every tempo, instrument and stylistic shift, without ever feeling inaccessible. On the contrary, the whole sequence is immensely inviting and colourful, yielding a simultaneously erudite and bouncy atmosphere.

There are several moments that reveal how playful Snarky Puppy can be. For instance, League encourages the crowd to clap along during *Tio Macaco*, which ends in a festive duel between percussionists Marcelo Woloski and Larnell Lewis. The group even include a snippet of Kool And The Gang's *Jungle Boogie* and The Isley Brothers' *Shout* during the encore.

Raul Midón and Snarky Puppy prove to be talented, original and entertaining. Their joyous mixture of genre-bending arrangements and heartfelt songwriting results in a truly special double bill.

JORDAN BLUM

BLUEDOT FESTIVAL

VENUE	JODRELL BANK, CHESHIRE
DATE	19-22/07/18

"What a perfect night to put a festival before a giant telescope! Don't you think?" It's impossible to argue with Wayne Coyne. His band, Oklahoma astronauts The Flaming Lips, are busy wowing us with a spectacle of truly psychedelic proportions, backlit by a waxing moon and the awesome curves of the Lovell Telescope. Now in its third year, Jodrell Bank's Bluedot Festival is thriving, drawing in the hordes with its intergalactic promise of music, science and the arts.

Earlier in the evening on the main stage, **Public Service Broadcasting** deliver the goods, dedicating *Theme From PSB* to Bernard Lovell and his famous landmark. Their set is equally weighted between songs from latest album *Every Valley* and the more site-friendly *The Race For Space*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the biggest crowd-pleasers come from the latter: the jubilant *Go!* and the brass-heavy pump of *Gagarin*.

But **The Flaming Lips** are something else altogether. Coyne and his companions shower the place with confetti, streamers and smoke, hoisting aloft a silver custom-made 'Fuck Yeah Bluedot' balloon, while flanked by two enormous red-and-white toadstools. It's a dayglo procession of inflatable robots, rainbows and dancing eyeballs as the Lips make psychotropic party food of *Race For The Prize*, *Fight Test*, *She Don't Use Jelly* and the like.

Coyne does his customary crowd-surf bit in his rolling transparent ball, though this is nothing compared to *There Should Be Unicorns*, which sees him mounted with wings on said mythic beast, festooned with LED lights.

If you can't afford a unicorn, get a cape. At least that's what Jyonson Tsu, singer/guitarist with Japanese quintet **Acid Mothers Temple**, has opted for. The psychedelic overlords offer a jaw-dropping set inside the stiflingly hot Orbit Tent. Lead guitarist and founder Kawabata Makoto unpacks strafing riffs from beneath a mass of flailing hair, drummer Satoshima Nani is the very definition of atomic, and silver-maned 'noodle god' Higashi Hiroshi holds centre stage behind keyboards. Moroder-ish rhythms bubble up into monstrous improvised jams, the smell of weed drifts through the air and the whole place is bouncing.

It's past midnight on Sunday when **The Orb** close things out in the same tent, providing a comedown after the punishing beats of The Chemical Brothers on the main stage. Alex Paterson directs his charges, including bassist Youth, through pieces that drift between spacey trance and ambient dub, hitting on grooves that emerge and subside into pools of blissful sound. They finish with a glorious version of *Little Fluffy Clouds*, a fitting climax to a thrillingly uplifting weekend.

ROB HUGHES

CARL PALMER'S ELP LEGACY

VENUE	UNDER THE BRIDGE, LONDON
DATE	02/08/2018

Following the deaths of Keith Emerson and Greg Lake in 2016, Carl Palmer sought to continue performing Emerson Lake & Palmer music, but as he revealed in a recent interview: "Hiring a Keith clone or even a vocalist really didn't appeal, so I went for something niche — a prog rock instrumental metal group. Compared to South America and Italy, England doesn't really get it yet, but I'm trying to take ELP's music to the next generation. You'll either like it or you won't, but I love it."

The Prog God drummer's counterparts in ELP Legacy are Paul Bielatowicz, an extraordinary guitarist who recreates — or more accurately 'reimagines' — Emerson's keyboard parts, and Simon Fitzpatrick, a skilled exponent of the six-string bass and Chapman Stick.

Palmer isn't kidding about the heavy foundations of the trio's sound. The set's centrepiece of *Tarkus* has five minutes trimmed from its original duration, yet it retains the song's best-loved themes. At its most energetic extremes, it's transformed into something that resembles a speed metal workout.

While the setlist is pleasingly familiar, the same cannot always be said for ELP Legacy's interpretation of the songs, though that isn't to say they're treated disrespectfully. Who needs a jukebox, right? A lot of noodling goes on, and to his credit, Palmer often takes a back seat in order to allow Bielatowicz and Fitzpatrick to shine. Together, their reconstruction of the introduction to *Trilogy* draws warm applause, and Fitzpatrick uses his stick to turn *From The Beginning* inside out, to joyous effect.

Prog God: Carl Palmer.

WILL IRELAND

Hearing these songs stripped of vocals can be unusual, and it's hard not to bellow out: *'See the show-w-w-w!'* during *Karn Evil 9 — 1st Impression, Part 2*, though the audience are respectful enough to refrain.

The show's undisputed star, Palmer talks warmly and honestly in between the tunes. His anecdote about Lake running down the fire escape when a man in a suit visited the band's office to complain about the 'borrowing' from classical composer Leoš Janáček in *Knife-Edge* is hilarious. It's no secret that ELP weren't friends away from the stage, and we laugh when Palmer remarks: "The band didn't break up — we just stopped working together and, er... talking!" though that doesn't stop him adding: "I still miss Keith and Greg madly."

Even at 68, Palmer's passion remains obvious. His dramatic, cymbal-tapping, gong-bashing solo during an encore of *Nutrocker* leaves the crowd spellbound.

As the drummer has already stated, his current activities are unashamedly niche. Don't scoff, but in their own crazy way, they could be regarded as being just as challenging and out-there as those of yesteryear from Emerson Lake & Palmer. Isn't that the whole point?

DAVE LING

> **"In their own crazy way, they could be regarded as being just as challenging and out-there as ELP."**

Continuing ELP's Legacy: Palmer marches on to his own beat.

Guitarist Paul Bielatowicz.

Bassist Simon Fitzpatrick.

A NEW DAY FESTIVAL

VENUE	MOUNT EPHRAIM GARDENS, FAVERSHAM
DATE	04/08/2018

This festival has built an enviable reputation for spanning the spectrum of progressive music, and 2018 underlines what A New Day is all about.

It commences with **The Far Meadow** serenading the Shindig! Stage. The five-piece stand as probably the most modern-sounding band of the day, their methodology combining the swanky technicality of Rush with the metallic bombast of newer names such as Devin Townsend and Anneke van Giersbergen.

The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown follow The Far Meadow and they enjoy a hero's welcome as they seize control of the Main Stage and go on to deliver what's undoubtedly the best performance of the day. An early, sizeable crowd lap up the multiple costume changes, as well as indomitable versions of classics like *Fire* and *Devil's Grip*.

Gong bring the "cosmic space rock".

The arrival of the **Peatbog Faeries** provides more uniqueness. Combining Gaelic folk music with prog, electronic and funk rock, the 25-year veterans are instant head-turners, the enthralled onlookers breaking into joyous dances.

Curved Air continue the folk-tinged eccentricity but feel much closer to conventional prog rock than the preceding magicians. Luckily, however, the group still pull through, thanks in no small part to the captivating power of frontwoman Sonja Kristina's magnificent clean singing.

Caravan creating tranquil vibes.

Still Crazy: Arthur Brown.

KEVIN NIXON

With two thirds of their members now sadly departed, **Carl Palmer's ELP Legacy** are the closest we can get to an Emerson Lake & Palmer concert in 2018. Flanked by guitarist Paul Bielatowicz and bassist Simon Fitzpatrick, Palmer provides an hour of flooring instrumental takes on classic powerhouses such as *Lucky Man* and *Knife-Edge*.

Given the unenviable spot of following Palmer are vintage rockers **Atomic Rooster**, whose blues-tinged hard rock doesn't impress on the same mathematical level. Be that as it may, a strong sense of grooving swagger is prevalent throughout.

The cosmic space rock of **Gong** unites operatic rock'n'roll with unconventionally alien sounds, all wrapped up in an energised visual element.

"We are honoured to be supporting characters in the films that are your lives," frontman Kavus Torabi tells Faversham, his words as enigmatic as his band's music.

Under the glow of green light, **Caravan** close the Shindig! Stage with a comparatively tranquil showcase. As violins and keyboards work in harmony with clean guitars and Pye Hastings' soft singing, the home-town veterans craft a dulcet and nostalgic atmosphere.

Hawkwind are the perfect choice for closing out such a long day of eclectic and charismatic performances on the Main Stage. Their genre-smashing psychedelia is complemented by an equally mind-melting light show, bright lasers shooting high into the skies above Kent. The multicoloured shimmer combines with smoke effects to create a befittingly iridescent mist descending from the dark skies at the end of a superb set.

MATT MILLS

Strangeness And Charm: Hawkwind melt minds and win hearts.

> **"Hawkwind are the perfect choice to close the festival."**

DAVE KERZNER BAND

VENUE	BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON
DATE	20/07/2018
SUPPORT	DAVE BAINBRIDGE & SALLY MINNEAR

Tonight is a potent reminder of why it's always worth showing up early to catch the support. Dave Bainbridge, from Lifesigns and Strawbs, and his Celestial Fire bandmate Sally Minnear, provide a beautiful start to the evening, performing songs from Bainbridge's back catalogue. It pulls in Celtic influences, folk and prog rock. Minnear's voice is gorgeous, lifting *My Lagan Love* up to the heavens, while Bainbridge impresses with a wonderful solo piano arrangement of *Machrie Moor*, channels *Guitar Shop*-era Jeff Beck on *Luke - The Calf*, and then rocks out on a balalaika on *Today*.

Some artists take a song or two to hit their stride onstage, but not the Dave Kerzner Band. They come barrelling out of the gate at full tilt, opening with *The Lie* from 2014's *New World*, and then plunging into the massive riff of *Hypocrites* from last year's *Static*.

The band are superb. Drummer Andy Mapp has a powerful sense of groove and dynamics, bringing the thunder when needed, but equally able to create space in the quieter moments. Bassist Stuart Fletcher has touches of Jack Bruce and John Entwistle in his fabulously knotty playing. And there's something very rock'n'roll about guitarist Fernando Perdomo. Shaking his shaggy mane while wrestling his instrument as though it's trying to escape his grasp, he's a perpetual motion machine.

On record, Kerzner's music can sound very melancholic and a little grey – there's definitely more than a dash of Roger Waters' chilly cynicism in his writing. Live, though, the songs burst with colour and power. *The Truth Behind* builds to a furious crescendo, while *Stranded* is a stomping behemoth during which Perdomo becomes so seized by the music that his hat and glasses fly off as he solos!

Joined by Bainbridge and Minnear for the encores, Kerzner revisits *Not Coming Down* from Sound Of Contact, before concluding with *Into The Sun*, which has an early Floyd, space rock vibe. In what might be a world's first at a prog show, the song inspires one couple to slow dance before the track reaches its huge, galaxy-exploding climax.

There's a *Static Live* album on the way. Here's hoping it can capture a performance as thrilling as this one.

DAVID WEST

JOHN HACKETT BAND

VENUE	THE WATER RATS, LONDON
DATE	15/07/2018

Sunday is definitely not the new Saturday. Pity the poor promoter trying to tempt punters out on the last night of the week. Tonight, the audience for the John Hackett Band remains stubbornly in single figures, which is a damn shame. John might not have the same name recognition as his more famous elder brother Steve, but when his band get cooking, they really generate some heat.

The music selection this evening draws extensively from 2017's *We Are Not Alone* album, which moves between BBC Radio 2-friendly AOR and balladry to some genuinely thrilling prog workouts, pulling in jazz-funk and fusion influences.

Hackett shares the singing with bassist Jeremy Richardson, although neither offers dazzling feats of vocal acrobatics, particularly Hackett, who has a very softly delivered, almost spoken delivery.

They start tonight's set strongly with *Whispers*, while *Take Control* ("Not a 27-minute prog epic about Brexit," jokes Hackett) has a touch of Supertramp in Hackett's keyboard riff. *Burnt Down Trees* is the first song to bring in the funk, with Richardson busting out some slap bass.

It's the instrumentals in the set that allow the players to really stretch out, the fusion-meets-prog of *Queenie And Elmo's Perfect Day Out* giving everyone a chance to take the spotlight. Taking a break from his day job as a classical guitarist, Nick Fletcher is consistently spectacular, cutting one thrilling solo after another. Drummer Duncan Parsons takes his own solo during *Mr. Magnolia*, his ostinato-led approach reminiscent of Simon Phillips as he sets up a phrase on the kit and then plays around it.

Ego & Id, the heaviest track, is a real showcase for Fletcher, concluding the first set with crunchy riffage and unabashed shredding from the guitarist's exceptionally fleet fingers, which at times approach John McLaughlin levels of velocity.

After a short break, set two commences with Parsons performing a little bit of stand-up comedy, reading the answers from a spoof pub quiz, before the music resumes with another instrumental workout in *Winds Of Change*.

In the second half, the lovely acoustic number *Overnight Snow* is a standout with Hackett on flute, although there's a lot of mid-tempo, middle-of-the-road material in this set. Both *Headlights* and *Never Gonna Make A Dime* amble by, but the band finish with a blast through *Red Hair*, which channels the manic energy of Focus as Hackett and Fletcher race each other for the finish line.

Hopefully, the next time the John Hackett Band come to town, they'll draw the numbers they deserve.

DAVID WEST

FRANCK CARDUCCI BAND

VENUE	BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON
DATE	25/07/2018
SUPPORT	THAT JOE PAYNE

Furry Freak Brother: Franck Carducci at full pelt (geddit?).

KEVIN NIXON

Joe Payne is not making things easy for himself on his debut tour. He's performing solo on electric piano and opening with two lengthy numbers, *One And The Many* and *Who Created Me?*, which made his name as the frontman of The Enid. The vocals are stunning, at the very upper end of his five-octave range. However, he admits, "This year I set myself the challenge of singing and playing the piano at the same time, for the first time," and there are several mistakes in the first familiar number, and these continue throughout the set.

He's performing under the name That Joe Payne, one reading of which implies exasperation, but this is an entertainer brimming with confidence. With the small but appreciative audience behind him, he pushes past the errors, covering material from his Methexis collaboration before moving on to new songs. *Moonlit Love* borrows from Beethoven, but as well as linking back to the neoclassical Enid, it shows serious crossover potential. *I Need A Change* may be very prophetic, and if he finds his way to the right audience, we may be seeing a lot more of Payne in the mainstream, where prog doesn't often reach.

The Franck Carducci Band operate like a well-oiled machine. Hitting the stage in a blur of costumes and props, *Slave To Rock'n'Roll* is a Meat Loaf video come to life, singer Mary Renaud as Rock Chick, keyboardist Olivier Castan as Disreputable Manager, and Carducci himself braving the heat as the Rocker in furs, a cowboy hat and carrying a double-necked guitar. It gets more sedate for *Closer To Irreversible*, which originally featured guitar from Steve Hackett, before ramping things up for new song *The After Effect*, which has a theremin solo played in a pole dance style.

> **"An old-style prog band untouched by post-rock, metal or djent, complete with double-neck guitars and song suites."**

The theremin sticks around for the first of the evening's concept pieces, *Achilles*, although guitarist Christophe Obadia takes over as Renaud switches to belly dancing. She remains a focus for *Angel*, a mid-set ballad that helps the band get their breath back. New song *On The Road To Nowhere* sees the group pay tribute to The Beatles completely unplugged. The set closes with another concept piece, *Alice's Eerie Dream*, a recasting of the Wonderland tale featuring Alice as a sex worker and involving a standoff with a didgeridoo.

Encore *Artificial Paradises* segues into a version of Pink Floyd's *Eclipse* and, with a few spare minutes left, we're treated to an unplanned rendition of Supertramp's *School* to bring the evening to a close.

Looking for a current but old-style prog band untouched by post-rock, metal or djent, complete with double-neck guitars, song suites and drum solos? This could be your new favourite group.

GAVIN HOBSON

Pleasure In Payne: former Enid man Joe goes solo.

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Cosmograf's Robin Armstrong

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's Home?
Home is Waterlooville in Hampshire, a sprawling suburb of anonymity. Michael Giles of King Crimson was born here, and that's as exciting as it gets.

Your first prog memory?
Watching Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* on *Top Of The Pops* in about 1976, and thinking it sounded much cooler than any of the other music on there.

First prog gig?
Steve Hackett at Summer's End in 2009. I was a late starter! My very first gig was Deep Purple at Wembley in '87...

The first prog record you bought?
Fragile by Yes, the gatefold vinyl of that in 1988, when I was 18. It was all heavy rock for me before that.

Favourite piece of technology?
That's easy, my MacBook Pro. I've had the same one for eight years, I've pimped it out so it does everything I want.

Any guilty pleasures in your music collection?
Yngwie Malmsteen's *Trilogy*. It's a bit embarrassing these days, but I love his guitar style, his technique is just bonkers.

What would be your *Mastermind* specialist subject?
TV comedy of the 1980s, especially *Only Fools And Horses* and *One Foot In The Grave*.

Your biggest prog extravagance?
I've just kitted out my studio with tons of new gear. Extravagant I suppose, but then I can't make music without it!

Your favourite venue?
Islington Assembly Hall has a special place in my heart – it's where I had my first experience of playing live as Cosmograf.

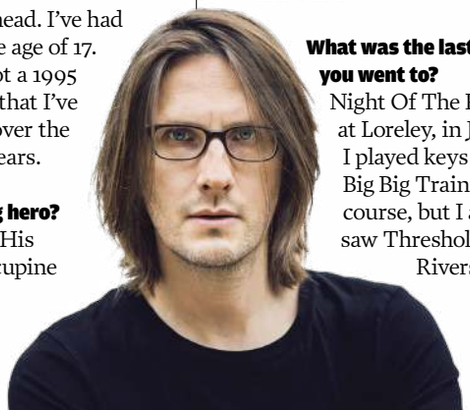
Outside of prog, what else are you into?
I'm a big petrolhead. I've had 26 cars since the age of 17. I've currently got a 1995 TVR Chimaera that I've been restoring over the past couple of years.

Who is your prog hero?
Steven Wilson. His music with Porcupine Tree was an inspiration for me to start Cosmograf. He's a producer of incredible depth, range and talent, and has a solid understanding of the whole scene. He's the essence of what we should be doing.

Are you a collector?
Yes. I'm a vintage watch dealer and repairer, so have a large collection of those. And I could easily start a car collection if I had a large enough bank account.

The last album you bought?
Roger Waters' *Is This The Life We Really Want?* has been my favourite record of the last few years. Nigel Godrich's production on it screams Radiohead, so it's like two bands I love influencing each other.

What was the last gig you went to?
Night Of The Prog at Loreley, in July. I played keys for Big Big Train of course, but I also saw Threshold and Riverside.



STEVE WILSON: HAJO MÜLLER/PRESS

Ever had a prog date?
In my youth most dates I went on ended up being a lot less than progressive! It's never a great opener to admit you're into strange music, and much less so to offer to show them your collection afterwards...

Who do you call in the prog community for a good night out?
Lee Abraham, currently of Galahad. We often go for a curry and have good old natter and a laugh about the prog world.

What's the most important prog song for you?
Easy, *Awaken* by Yes. It has a sacred status to me – I won't listen to it more than once every couple of years for fear of wearing out its magic. I've never heard anything to surpass it.

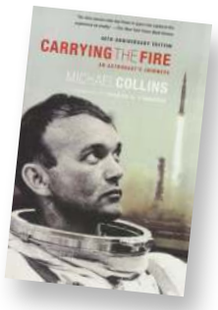
> I'm a vintage watch dealer and repairer.

Which prog muso would you love to work with?
Mikael Åkerfeldt. He's an amazing artist who'd be fantastic fun to work with. I met him at the Prog Awards and got a bit starstruck.

Which prog album always gets you in a good mood?
... And Then There Were Three... by Genesis takes me back to being a teenager with my friends, when we felt invincible and were looking forward to taking on the world. Good times.

Who's the best prog artist you've ever seen?
It's still Steve Hackett at Summer's End. Nick Beggs on bass, Gary O'Toole on drums – the playing was awesome.

Recommend us a good proggy read.
Michael Collins was number three on the Apollo 11 mission to the moon, and his autobiography *Carrying The Fire* is great. As is Bruce Dickinson's *What Does This Button Do?*, about his time in Iron Maiden and how he became a commercial airline pilot.



What is your favourite album cover?
Rainbow's *Rising* is my favourite album cover ever, and they're pretty proggy to me!

What are you up to at the moment?
Now the live shows with Big Big Train have finished I'll be working on the new Cosmograf album, hopefully that'll be out early next year. I'm also seeking out more mixing and producing projects and hoping to do some guest slots. I really enjoy those.

See www.cosmograf.com for more.

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