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ISSUE 337



50 YEARS OF IRON MAIDEN

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How often is it that a heavy metal band have an absolutely iconic mascot? The list isn't all that long in terms of figures who have withstood the test of time. Of the big hitters, Motörhead had Snaggletooth, Megadeth hadVic Rattlehead, Dio had Murray. All iconic. But I don't think I'm speaking out of turn when I say that the fella on our cover this issue is probably the biggest and baddest of them all. I'm talking about Iron Maiden's Eddie, of course.

This issue we're celebrating 50 monstrous years of Iron Maiden with an exclusive Eddie cover and exclusive interviews with Steve, Bruce, Adrian, Dave, Janick and Nicko. It really has been quite the journey. And, as you'll find out, it's far from over yet. Until next month...



Siân Llewellyn, Editor

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This month's contributors



PAUL ELLIOTT
The first gig that Paul ever saw was Iron Maiden at the Guildford Civic Hall on February 26, 1981. It was the Killers tour, with Paul Di'Anno on vocals. And playing drums for the support band Trust was none other than Nicko McBrain. For this month's cover story Paul spoke to all the members of Iron Maiden in New York during their last tour with Nicko. Read our exclusive interviews from p24.



FLORIAN NICOLLE
A freelance illustrator since 2009, French artist Florian Nicolle uses a combination of watercolour, pencil, acrylic and digital painting to create striking, expressive portraits and illustrations – including the ones featured in this month's Iron Maiden cover story (p24). Check out more of his work on Instagram at @neo.innov.officiel and www.Behance.net/neo_innov



ALEX BURROWS
Classic Rock's former managing ed and current contributor spent Christmas balls-deep in *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash* for this issue's feature on the classic Pogues album (p58). Brought up by his dad on The Dubliners, he first became aware of The Pogues in the mid-80s and later saw them headline Saturday night at Reading 1989 during their *Peace & Love* tour, instigating a lifetime of whisky-induced insomnia.

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"IT'LL FEEL LIKE A BRAND-NEW BAND"

The Temperance Movement rise from the ashes.

The reunion of The Temperance Movement will be among the most anticipated – and unexpected – comebacks of 2025. Known for their highly emotional brand of blues-charged rock, the five-piece band broke the hearts of fans when singer Phil Campbell left to form the group The Byson Family in January 2020.

Talking to *Classic Rock* in 2023 to promote his solo record *City Lights*, Campbell said some provocative things about TTM, admitting: "The Bysons will ride again. I don't think the Temp will." Describing himself as "broken", Campbell said he was sober, but that "it's been a struggle".

When the news of a reunion with guitarists Paul Sayer and Luke Potashnick, bassist Nick Fyffe and drummer Simon Lea came last December, it was received with glee by fans. As a tour was announced, venues sold out and were quickly upgraded and extra shows were added. In their first and only interview since reconnecting, Campbell and Sayer give *Classic Rock* the lowdown.

How did this reunion come about?
Phil Campbell: I'm just going to admit this. I ended up going into rehab. Paul was among the last people I spoke to before that happened in October of 2023, and we stayed in contact when I got out.
Paul Sayer: Phil and I didn't talk for a while when the band went on hiatus, but I wasn't seething with anger. It had got to the point where we all needed to go our separate ways for a bit. Everyone needed some time apart. When Phil went into rehab I was concerned about him. I didn't hate him. I've *never* hated him. But what we were doing just wasn't working any more. And then at the start of last year [2024], Phil wrote me a long and lovely letter.
Campbell: I wrote to everyone in the band.
Sayer: And that's when the door began to feel ajar.

Phil, your 2023 *Classic Rock* interview contained some pretty damning statements about the final days of the band – "I compromised on songs", "I cut myself off completely from being me", "The Temp had my voice but they didn't get my songs".
Campbell: Listen, it's shocking for me to hear that. I don't even remember that interview. I was quite messed up at the time. In my mind I was running away from how amazing the band was. Coming out of the treatment centre and playing the music for the first time in ages, its beauty changed something inside of me. I became a fan of the band again.

You must have seen that interview, Paul.
Sayer: I purposely didn't read anything [from that press campaign] because I knew it might upset me. I also knew it didn't mean anything. Phil wasn't well. I know the guy inside out, which meant I didn't take anything he said personally.

When did the band play again for the first time since the reunion?
Sayer: It hasn't happened yet.
Campbell: But I do know that when we get in that room together it'll be lovely because of the chats we've had. There was a Zoom where we almost didn't talk about music, just laughed and slagged each other off for forty-five minutes. That really helped.



My downfall from The Temperance Movement was so awful because it defied the whole premise of this band: you should be up-front, honest and do the right thing. We were not hedonists and drug-takers. So my actions very much went against all of that.

It sounds like the band are continuing with a clean slate.
Sayer: In some ways. But I believe all of this will make us stronger. We've named this tour after the first single [*Ain't No Telling*] from the first record because it's meant to be a celebration. We *are* planning to make new music and to move forwards, and that's really important, but we are philosophical about everything that has happened. I'm proud of how we've got back to this place. A lot of bands wouldn't have been able to.

The term 'unfinished business' has become a bit of a cliché, but it seems relevant here.
Campbell: I think so. We've got three albums that haven't been played for the past five years, and if you ask me they were not played properly during that last year. It will be wonderful to put that right.

It's great to see you so clear-headed, Phil. How do you actually feel?
Campbell: Better than I have ever done in my life. Last year was mainly about getting my soul and my head back in place, but now I'm focused on physical fitness. It [being back in the band] gave me a point to what I was doing in life. Also we knew it would make a lot of people happy, which is great.

The announced tour was at first fairly conservative, but the London venue was upgraded, and shows in Birmingham and Newcastle were added.
Sayer: [laughing] I wanted to book Wembley, so I wasn't being conservative, but others didn't agree. And I was proved right [about the demand].
Campbell: After five years apart there was such a rush of joy from everybody to see the band back together.

When Phil walked away from TTM, did the others consider trying to find a replacement?
Sayer: It was considered, and Phil knows that, but we knew it would be incredibly difficult. And that's how it proved.
Campbell: Lockdown didn't help, of course, but had the band had got a new singer it would have absolutely killed me.
Sayer: Phil's being humble there. It wasn't lockdown [that nixed those plans]. Every single singer in the world was stuck at home looking for a gig. The truth is that Phil was the only man for the job.

Finally, what should fans coming to the shows expect?
Campbell: Oh, man, they're going to hear all of their favourite tunes, and the band will be back at its absolute best again.
Sayer: Nobody stopped playing music, so we won't be rusty. It'll probably feel like a brand-new band. You are going to see five very happy people on stage. **DL**

The seven-date tour begins in Bristol on March 17. See p98 for dates.

ROB BLACKHAM/PRESS

RIP

Thank you... and good night.

Alex Dmochowski

Death reported on December 21, 2024

Bassist Alex Dmochowski became a familiar face on the British blues scene playing with John Mayall, Aynsley Dunbar's Retaliation, Peter Green and Quincy Jones, among others. During the 70s he recorded several albums with Frank Zappa, including the iconic *Apostrophe (')*, under the handle 'Erroneous'. He was 79 when he passed away peacefully at his home in London.

Casey Chaos

October 9, 1965 — December 20, 2024

Born in Trenton, New York, Karim George Chmielinski was known to most people as Casey Chaos, the frontman with Amen, the confrontational agit-punk-metal band. A former professional skateboarder, the singer was known for his energetic stage persona. He had been dealing with heart issues, poor circulation and high blood pressure for several years. He was 59.

Wayne Osmond

August 28, 1951 – January 1, 2025

The second-oldest of the original Osmond Brothers has died at the age of 73 following a stroke. Besides being a singer, Wayne Osmond also played several instruments including guitar, saxophone and drums as a part of the group from Ogden, Utah who became megastars during the 70s. He died surrounded by his wife and children.

Bob 'Slim' Dunlap

August 14, 1951 – December 18, 2024

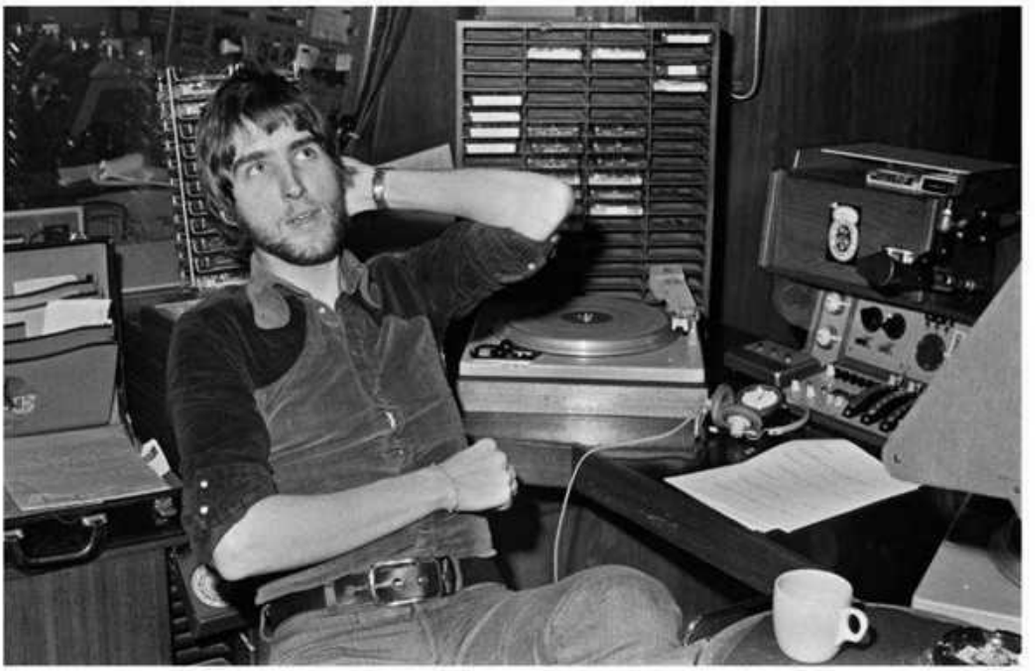
The former guitarist with The Replacements has died at the age of 73, more than a decade after suffering a stroke. Minnesota-born Dunlap joined The Replacements in 1987. After they split up in 1991 he released two solo albums: *The Old New Me* and *Times Like This*. Around the same time, he toured with Dan Baird to promote the former Georgia Satellites guitarist's album *Love Songs For The Hearing Impaired*.

Steve Segal

Died December 28, 2024

April Wine guitarist and leader Brian Greenway has announced the passing of Steve Segal, a guitarist for the Canadian hard rock group from 1992 to '95 who played on their albums *Attitude* and *Frigate*. Though details of Segal's career are scarce, he also worked in one capacity or another with Aldo Nova, Celine Dion, The Ramones, Alice Cooper, Jon Bon Jovi and others.

WORDS: DAVE LING



Johnnie Walker

March 30, 1945 – December 31, 2024

The pioneering radio DJ died on New Year's Eve at the age of 79, just two months after announcing his retirement from broadcasting due to ill health.

Born Peter Waters Dingley in the West Midlands, Johnnie Walker learned his craft on the pirate station Radio Caroline before joining BBC Radio 1 in 1969. He left to work in the US in 1975, then returned to the BBC in 1987. Even 50 years later, his wife Tiggy continued to refer to him as 'the pirate'.

Reluctant to work with rigid playlists, Walker was fired after claiming that people would be "dancing in the streets" following the resignation of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He went on to work for Radio 5 and was involved in the early broadcasts of fledgling London alternative music station Xfm. Further stints at Radio 1 and Radio 2 followed, and he hosted *Sounds Of The 70s* and *The Rock Show* until his retirement. He received an MBE in 2006.

Walker had battled the lung disease pulmonary fibrosis. His last broadcast was in October 2024, when he signed off from *The Rock Show* saying: "It's going to be very strange not to be on the wireless any more [but] life will be slightly less of a strain, really, trying to find the breath in order to do the programmes.

"Thank you for being with me all these years, and take good care of yourself and those you love. May we walk into the future with our heads held high and happiness in our hearts. God bless you." **FL/DL**

Jon Camp

Died December 13, 2024

Jon Camp, a former bassist with the British progressive-folk band Renaissance, has died at the age of 75. Camp, who also sang with the group, which he joined in 1972 alongside vocalist Annie Haslam, guitarist Michael Dunford, keyboard player John Tout and drummer Terry Sullivan, was part of the perceived classic line-up.

Camp appeared on every Renaissance album from 1972's *Prologue* to *Time-Line* in 1983, and also on Annie Haslam's 1977 debut album *Annie In Wonderland*. He also worked with Roy Wood throughout the 70s and early 80s, appeared on melodic rocker Robin George's debut album *Dangerous Music*, and formed the band Cathedrale, whose music was an 80s amalgam of pop and progressive rock and who also included John Young of Lifesigns. Their sole album was released in 2017 via Angel Air Records.

Young paid tribute to Camp, stating: "Cathedrale came very close to making that last step up the ladder. Those were heady times and I thank Jon for his friendship and love. Back in the 70s I used to go and see him play with Renaissance and even booked the band once for a show in Liverpool, so I was a fan and a friend. An immense talent." **JE**



JOHNNIE WALKER: P. FLOYD/DAILY EXPRESS/GETTY IMAGES; JON CAMP: PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES



Jimmy Carter

October 1, 1924 – December 29, 2024

Known affectionately as 'the rock'n'roll president', James Earl Carter Jnr, the 39th POTUS, occupied the White House from 1977 to 1981. A music lover, he died at the age of 100, having been treated for cancer and spending 19 months in hospice care.

In a social media post titled 'What a man! What a life! What a loss!', Peter Gabriel described the Democrat as "a truly extraordinary man and a rare politician who always stood up and spoke out for idealism, compassion and human rights and particularly for the rights of women and those who suffered real oppression."

Heart's Nancy Wilson said Carter was "an incredible bridge between policy and our humanity", noting that he had spent "98+ years making this world a better place".

Georgia-raised Carter was among the first US politicians to harness the power of rock music, with the Allman Brothers Band, the Marshall Tucker Band, Jimmy Buffett, the Charlie Daniels Band and James Brown all standing firmly in his corner in opposition to racial segregation and injustice of varying forms, in a path that eventually led to Carted receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

"It was the Allman Brothers that helped put me in the White House, by raising money when I didn't have any money," Carter said years after his presidency.

Once elected, Carter regularly invited musicians to the White House to perform, including Crosby, Stills & Nash, Dolly Parton, Charles Mingus and Willie Nelson, the latter famously claiming to have smoked marijuana on the roof of the building. **FL/DL**



Richard Perry

June 18, 1942 – December 24, 2024

Richard Perry produced some of the biggest-selling and/or critically acclaimed albums of the 70s, 80s and beyond, including Harry Nilsson's *Nilsson Schmilsson* and *Son Of Schmilsson*, *Safe As Milk* by Captain Beefheart, *No Secrets* by Carly Simon (including its signature global smash from 1972, *You're So Vain*), and *Ringo*, the 1973 solo album by drummer Ringo Starr, which sold over a million copies and featured contributions from the other three former Beatles.

Born in New York City, Perry came from a musical family, and received classical training on piano, guitar, drums, bass and oboe. His first chart success as a producer was *God Bless Tiny Tim*, a 1968 album by American singer Tiny Tim that reached the US Top 10, and he quickly became in demand and worked with major stars including Ray Charles, Barbra Streisand, Art Garfunkel, Diana Ross and Andy Williams and the rock band Fanny.

During the current millennium, Perry was a producer for Rod Stewart's album series *The Great American Songbook*. On Instagram, Stewart wrote: "You were there when Penny [Lancaster, Stewart's wife] and I began dating, encouraging our relationship. We are both in tears as I post this farewell."

Perry passed away at a Los Angeles hospital on Christmas Eve after suffering a cardiac arrest. He had also been suffering from Parkinson's disease. **DL**

JIMMY CARTER: BETTMANN/CONTRIBUTOR/GETTY; RICHARD PERRY: ALAMY

Manfred Schütz

July 5, 1950 – January 3, 2025

Born in Bamberg, Bavaria, Manfred Schütz became a driving force in the independent rock scene when he founded the record label SPV Records in 1984. The label was acquired by Napalm Records in 2020. For many years SPV was the largest indie music distributor in Europe, and its roster has included Whitesnake, Judas Priest, Magnum, Saxon, Helloween, Monster Magnet and Doro Pesch. The 74-year-old passed away after a long illness.

Russ North

July 22, 1965 – January 2, 2025

Lee Payne, bassist and leader of the British heavy metal band Cloven Hoof, broke the news of the passing of Russ North, aged 59, who sang on the band's late-80s albums *Dominator* and *A Sultan's Ransom*. "Russ's fantastic vocals will never be forgotten," said Payne. "You were world class." North also sang with Welsh band Tredegar, and reportedly auditioned to replace Bruce Dickinson in Iron Maiden in 1993.

Eric Carlson

May 22, 1958 – December 29, 2024

Known professionally as Sickie Wifebeater, the co-founding guitarist of controversial US trio The Mentors, Eric Carlson was born in Seattle. Along with bandmates Dr Heathen Scum on bass and drummer El Duce, he formed The Mentors in 1976. When performing he wore a black executioner's hood. Carlson was 66 years old when he succumbed to cancer.

Mick Moore

June 6, 1959 – December 5, 2024

A talented bassist and songwriter, Mick Moore was best known for his work with two New Wave Of British Heavy Metal bands. Firstly, he hooked up with the Metallica-covered Blitzkrieg in 1981, and then Avenger, with whom he recorded two albums: 1984's *Blood Sports* and the following year's *Killer Elite*. In 1985 he guested on the debut Blitzkrieg album *A Time Of Changes*. Moore died of pneumonia in hospital after being admitted for a number of health issues.

Maura Sutton

April 13, 1964 – December 30, 2024

Maura Sutton was a London-based music writer whose work appeared in a number of titles including *Kerrang!*, *Metal Hammer* and *RAW*. She also contributed to the very first issue of *Classic Rock* in 1998, for which she interviewed Brian May in the living room of his "huge" residence in Surrey. One of her childhood friends, Geraldine Ince, remembers Maura, who lost a battle with cancer at the age 60, as being mad about rock music and "infinitely modest about her journalistic talents".

Iommi And Hughes Team Up With Robbie

Tony and Glenn appear on new Williams track.

Tony Iommi and Glenn Hughes are among the special guests on the new solo album by former Take That singer Robbie Williams, which an insider has described as being "predominantly a guitar record". Iommi and Hughes appear a track called *Rocket*. "It's a rocker – a really, really cool song," says Williams's musical director Karl Brazil. Supergrass frontman Gaz Coombes is also a guest on the as-yet untitled album, which Brazil says includes "some great collaborations".

Williams told *NME*: "I wanted to make the album that I'd make if I'd left Take That now, knowing what I know. [*Rocket*] encapsulates that perfectly. [It has] massive guitars, as you can imagine. It's adrenaline-filled and balls-to-the-wall. That one in particular is my favourite song off my new album."

But let's not get too carried away. Williams is unlikely to be appearing at the Download Festival any time soon. **FL/DL**



Tony and Glenn: take *that*!

Fans Slate Rory Gallagher Statue

"Bloody awful" monument is unveiled in Belfast.

Fans of Rory Gallagher have reacted with puzzlement and indignation to a new statue of the late Irish guitar hero unveiled outside Ulster Hall in Belfast, a venue he played regularly. The life-size sculpture – designed by Anto Brennan, Jessica Checkley and David O'Brien of Bronze Art Ireland and based upon a 1972 photograph of Gallagher on stage at Ulster Hall – has been widely ridiculed for making its subject look unlike Rory, more like a woman than a man, and also for having Gallagher, a renowned Fender Stratocaster player, with a Telecaster.

"What's a chick with a Telecaster got to do with Rory Gallagher?" wondered one online critic. "As a Rory fan, that is bloody awful! [It] looks more like Madonna," wrote another. "Rory Gallagher looks like Cher," declared a third. Fellow Irish musician Thomas Walsh posted: "Ireland has unveiled its latest statue celebrating the life and career of one of our most beloved rock icons – KT Tunstall."

Gallagher died in 1995, aged 47. **FL/DL**

NEWS

Developers have expressed their "sincere regret" after the historic house in Sydney in which **Angus** and **Malcolm Young** of AC/DC grew up was demolished to make way for a residential development, insisting: "The previous long-term owner did not share this vital part of the property's background with us."

Down, the long-running sludge-rock supergroup featuring members of Pantera, Corrosion Of Conformity, Crobar and Eyehategod, are recording a new album to be released later this year. It's the band's first full-length record since *Down III: Over The Under* in 2007.

Southside Johnny & The Asbury Jukes have retired from touring in order to "manage ongoing health issues". It's uncertain whether the hugely influential band, formed in 1975, are likely to continue to record new music, or even to play in their locale of Asbury Park, New Jersey.

Jethro Tull release a new studio album, titled *Curious Ruminant*, on March 27 via Inside Out Music. Its nine tracks include the 16-minute epic *Drink From The Same Well*.



Despite turning down the chance to join Skid Row on a permanent basis, **Lzzy Hale** (pictured) would consider further collaboration with the group. The Halestorm frontwoman says: "The way we left it was like: 'I can't marry you, but we can totally have an affair some time.'"



IOMMI AND HUGHES: JOHN MCMURTRIE/PRESS; THUNDERMOTHER: MATS VASSFJORD/PRESS

WELCOME BACK

Thundermother

Filippa and Linnéa on catching Gene Simmons's eye, and what really happened with the old line-up.

Having staked their claim with 2014's debut album *Rock 'N' Roll Disaster*, Swedish riff-rockers Thundermother weathered a storm in 2023 when singer Guernica Mancini, bassist Mona Lindgren and drummer Emlee Johansson all split from guitarist Filippa Nässil (the three of them forming The Gems and slinging mud in the music press). Nässil built Thundermother's new line-up around Therion singer Linnéa Vikström, and they released their new album *Dirty & Divine*, which they describe as a fusion of "Black Crowes groove and heavy metal".

What are the new songs are about?
Linnéa Vikström: *Speaking Of The Devil* is about when you enter a room and you feel like: "Okay, they've been talking shit about me." It's about that frustration, like: "Just fucking tell it to my face, bitch!"
Filippa Nässil: *Take The Power* is basically saying that things are shit in the world right now and we've got to do something about it.

Isn't *Can't Put Out The Fire* inspired by a concert you went to as a child?
LV: Yeah. I got to thinking about my dad taking me to a Kiss concert in Stockholm when I was six years old. It was the *Psycho Circus* tour, so we had the 3D glasses. I was sitting on his shoulders, and I remember distinctly Gene gave me a little wave with his pinkie. Basically that song is a love letter to Kiss.

Do you have any stories from the sessions for the new album?
FN: Our bass player [Majsan Lindberg] was real sick during recording. She actually escaped from the hospital. We said: "Don't come!" But she said: "'I would not miss this for the world!" Then she fainted on the train back home to Stockholm.

Filippa, you've just had a baby with Pontus Snibb from Bonafide…
FN: I found out I was pregnant on tour. I didn't know, but Linnéa saw the signs. She just threw a pregnancy test at me!

Why have Thundermother had so many line-up changes?
FN: My honest opinion is that I was struck by bad luck. I was really unfortunate this last time, and I was like: "This can't be real." My biggest fear was to lose the whole band again, and I said it out loud to everybody. And then, sad to say, the singer, Guernica, that I fired, knew about it, and wanted to take advantage of that to make me look bad, I think. It's very sad but I think that's the reason why there's a lot of bullshit about me in magazines right now. You have to have fun and be friends and communicate and trust each other to have a band – and that wasn't there any more. So there was no other way to do it. I tried everything, for years and years.
LV: And from my perspective, we're talking about Thundermother as this band that changes line-up all the time. Can we name one band that has the same line-up since day one? I was in Therion for eight years… and all of Sweden has been in Therion!

> **"I'm in a band to make music, not to talk about internal conflicts."**

Your former bandmates have been quite critical in the media.
FN: It's a way of manipulating fans. I want people to think twice, basically. That's why I haven't made a comment about it, because it's beneath me, honestly. I'm in a band to make music, not to talk about internal conflicts I had with former bandmates. I don't care about that stuff. **HY**

Dirty & Divine is released on February 7 via AFM Records.



"We were all saying the album is gonna be compact and brutal."

HIGH HOPES

Last Train

With album number three they're hoping to pull into stations outside their native France.

Last Train say their new album, *iii*, feels like the beginning of the band. The French quartet's third certainly has the air of a fresh start – an ambitious, expansive rock record that mixes pugilistic, QOTSA-style riffing, Nine Inch Nails moodiness and epic atmospherics that nod to Sigur Rós – but they are far from newcomers. Despite the fact they're in their late twenties and early thirties, they are already veterans in band years, having formed the group when they met in high school.

"We started this band when we were twelve!" frontman Jean-Noël Scherrer says with laugh, talking to *Classic Rock* with drummer Antoine Baschung. "Our friendship is so important. We started the band because we were friends, not because we could play music, we just wanted to do something together."

It's the day after Scherrer's 30th birthday and they're both nursing hangovers, but there's no time for duvet days. There's business to attend to. As well as the dynamic, raucous music they make, they also oversee all their own band affairs. "We're self-producers with our own label and we also have our own tour company," explains Scherrer. "We manage the money and the strategy. We love that we do our own booking and make our own promo, and Julien [Peultier, guitarist] does our video clips."

Their autonomy was born out of necessity – "nobody was interested in the music we played!" declares Scherrer – but now they wouldn't have it any other way. "Maybe the day when we can leave it to someone else, we wouldn't," he says the singer. "It works for us and we love it."

There probably isn't much they don't know about the live sector, then, having played somewhere in the region of 500 shows since forming a decade ago. There have been high-profile support slots with Muse and Placebo, and main-stage festival billings, but Scherrer says his favourite moments are a little more low-key: "The first European tour we did, the four of us all together in a van, playing for twelve people every night, was the most beautiful tour we ever did."

The audiences have got bigger in their homeland since then, and the growling swagger at the heart of *iii* suggests their popularity abroad is about to grow too. Beginning sessions for the album off the back of an orchestral soundtrack project released earlier in 2024, the band were determined to make something hard and heavy. "After doing that we were all saying the next album is gonna be compact and brutal," says Baschung. "The purpose of it is to play these songs on stage."

Recording in the middle of France in winter, the band had to find a way to keep warm. "They had fireplaces and we lit a fire in every room. Setting those fires really set the mood."

The flame has been lit. **ND**

TTT is out now via [PIAS] France.

FOR FANS OF...



Some of *iii*'s best moments – such as the grinding groove and crunching guitars of *All To Blame* and the intricately layered splendour of epic centrepiece *Revenge* – hint at a band heavily influenced by Nine Inch Nails' monumental and most live-sounding record. Big, gnarly stuff with an enigmatic streak that sets them apart.

REMI GETTLIFFE/PRESS

REO Speedwagon Name Is 'Retired'

But bitterness sours the soft rockers' farewell.

REO Speedwagon played their final concert, in Las Vegas on December 21. Lead singer Kevin Cronin plans to carry forward the group's legacy, playing their hits under his own name, but not all concerned are happy with that.

"Get the facts straight please. [Cronin] did not found this band," says Bruce Hall, REO bassist since 1977, who had sat out some recent shows due to having had surgery then wanted to return to the line-up, only to be thwarted. "No one forced [Cronin] to re-brand. He wanted to tour with the sub bassist instead of me. The other two owners [of the name, pianist Neil Doughty and drummer Alan Gratzer] said no, and I was scheduled to return in 2025… so he quit."

The dispute led to "irreconcilable differences", with Cronin telling *Billboard*: "Never in my wildest dreams did I ever see this coming. I didn't want to end REO Speedwagon. This is sad, and I would do anything to continue [as] REO Speedwagon. I never quit the band; I never *will* quit the band. I just got outvoted and [must] stop calling it REO Speedwagon." **DL**



Broooce!

The Boss And Metallica Rock Pollstar Chart

But Taylor Swift and Coldplay are the top dogs.

Live music industry publication *Pollstar* says the touring scene is in a "strong and steady" state, having levelled out after "two and a half years of wildfire growth" following lockdown.

The world's most popular touring artist of 2024 was, of course, Taylor Swift, who pulled in more than a billion dollars in ticket sales, with Coldplay second in the global list. Fifth was Bruce Springsteen And The E-Street Band, who played 44 shows over the year and grossed more than $250 million, and the Rolling Stones weren't too far behind, with $235 million from just 18 dates. Metallica, who collected $179 million at the box office from 24 shows, were number nine, and Madonna rounded out the Top 10.

Pollstar confirmed the Sphere in Las Vegas, which only opened in 2023 and played host to a just four acts (U2, Eagles, Phish and Dead & Company) as the world's highest-grossing venue. **FL/DL**

NEWS

Iron Maiden guitarist **Adrian Smith** is among those who had their home destroyed by the wildfires that raged across Los Angeles in recent weeks. Others affected include Anthrax guitarist **Scott Ian**, Foo Fighters guitarist **Chris Shiflett** and songwriter **Dianne Warren**.

Alice In Chains guitarist **Jerry Cantrell** says he has discussed the possibility of collaborating with Metallica frontman **James Hetfield**. "James and I have talked about it, kind of," says Cantrell. "It's something I'd be really curious about, even to just write a song with him."

With **Jane's Addiction** currently 'on hold', guitarist Dave Navarro, bassist Eric Avery and drummer Stephen Perkins are working on new material without frontman Perry Farrell, whose on-stage meltdown brought a premature end to last year's tour.



Paul Rodgers (pictured) has revealed that he is writing his memoir. The former Free, Bad Company and The Firm singer and solo artist is inviting fans to contribute stories and photographs via a page at his website, PaulRodgers.com

Jack Moore, son of former Thin Lizzy guitarist and solo star Gary Moore, has released his debut single, *In My Shoes*, with an album to follow. "I think my father would have loved this song," he says. "There's a nod to Thin Lizzy's unmistakable dual guitars."



WELCOME BACK

The Lumineers

On album number five they address some serious topics, but musically they like to keep things simple.

Records by American folk-rockers The Lumineers have been selling by the bucketload since 2012's platinum-selling debut album and breakout single *Ho Hey*. With the group now down to the core duo of founders Wesley Schultz and Jeremiah Fraites, their fifth and latest studio album is *Automatic*, which addresses fatherhood, the passage of time, personal struggles, among other things. But as contemplative as it may be, The Lumineers' trademark feelgood factor – artful melodies, rushing choruses – is still very much alive.

Why do parts of the new album feel so reflective?
Maybe it's something to do with having kids. I'm forty-two now and was noticing the levels of technology and anxiety that younger people are experiencing. And in trying to find ways out of that, you see a lot of people medicating. As a touring band, at times you self-medicate. I know I have; the pressures on tour, the screws getting turned. So I see that happening with a whole other generation.

How has that touring pressure affected the band over the years?
I've been playing with Jer for twenty years, and I think we've both struggled with the fact that you need each other at times but you don't really *want* to need someone. So there's a duality to that. And I think that's led to some heavy stuff between us, and heavy stuff in all other areas of life too.

What's the secret of that partnership?
I remember hearing an interview with Nirvana, and they were like: "Just be really passive-aggressive!" I don't think that's the solution. Part of it is we grew up in the same home town and made music for seven or eight years before anything happened, so maybe that ability to stay in a group is down to knowing each other before things take off.

And are you still as tight as ever?
Jer and I found our North Star together with music. If you know what you're about, that'll never go away. Over the years you can have arguments but still really respect and appreciate each other. It's kind of like a marriage.

One of the new songs is called *Asshole*. Does it acknowledge that situation?
Yeah. That one brought a smile to my face when I came up with it. So many people have called me that, then they end up really caring about me. My wife thinks either I don't care enough what people think or I'm slightly autistic. But it serves me well in some situations, and it hurts me in others. I'm just curious how people argue and think, which can put a lot of people off. I hope Jer appreciates that I can be hard-headed and have strong opinions that but I'm self-aware enough to realise that I'm difficult.

> **"Melodies and lyrics matter so much to me in our music."**

You once said that basically anybody can play a Lumineers song. Is there something connective or reassuring about that?
It was more because it's not super-complicated on the surface. It's almost like Italian cooking – the ingredients are quality, so it'll taste good. Melodies and lyrics matter so much to me in our music. I love The Kinks, which is not the most overly complicated music, but Ray Davies comes at it from an innocent perspective and it just works. You don't have to be the most technically advanced person to say something that can affect someone very deeply. **RH**

Automatic is released on February 14.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: MARIANO REGIDOR/GETTY; LUMINEERS: WES AND ALEX PRESS



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HIGH HOPES

The New Roses

Formed in Germany, influenced by American bands, they're looking to bloom everywhere.

With their band name and song titles like *Down By The River* and *Natural Born Vagabonds*, you barely need to hear a lick of the New Roses' music to get an idea of the music they make. Sure enough, they do draw on southern rock traditions to make music steeped in the red, white and blue. But these good ol' boys are from Wiesbaden, Germany, and (certainly these days) draw more heavily from the harder side of rock.

"I'm not sure we're still that southern rock influenced," frontman Timmy Rough points out. "Yeah, personally, stuff like Lynyrd Skynyrd or the Allman Brothers is the sweet spot, the right mix of blues, country and rock, but we've all got different influences in the band; the other guys like Mötley Crüe, Guns N' Roses, Tesla, Poison… We mix it all together."

Rough first met drummer Urban Berz in 2007. Connecting over a shared love of old-school rock – a rarity in Wiesbaden at the time – the pair formed a covers band catering to homesick GIs from a nearby US military base. In December 2009 they got their first big break, opening for Black Stone Cherry in Wiesbaden. Although they'd played only covers up to that point, Rough stepped up with ideas for "three or four songs" that provided the basis of a set-list.

"A thirty-minute gig and people went crazy, man!" Rough recalls fondly. "People asked about merch and CDs. We'd got none of that. Besides, the applause you get from doing original songs is so much better than doing it because you nailed *Sweet Home Alabama*."

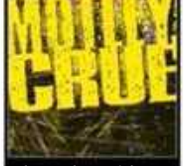
Even so, it took them a while to get their shit together. They officially adopted the band name in 2012, and the following year they released their debut album *Without A Trace*. They got their next breakout opportunity when the album's title track was selected to appear on the soundtrack to US biker drama *Sons Of Anarchy*. "We already used to play biker gigs," Rough says. "We played a hell of a lot more after!"

They've maintained consistent momentum racking up gigs with Kiss, Aerosmith and Scorpions, playing their own headline tours and releasing new albums. On their latest, *Addicted To Danger*, the southern rock foundation is still there, but it's cut with Springsteen-like heartland rock that also offers a back door to late-80s/early-90s Bon Jovi elements. But if the album title suggests a romanticism for sex, drugs and rock'n'roll, Timmy is quick to talk it back.

"Nobody gives a shit about your rock-star attitude today," he asserts. "I don't want to do anything that means I'd disappoint the people who come see us play. It's not the eighties any more. I always preferred the Bon Scott-type rock star – he's a naughty boy, a kid somebody'd given matches and a firecracker." **RH**

Addicted To Danger is out now via Napalm.

FOR FANS OF...



There's plenty of classic rock in the New Roses' DNA, but Timmy offers a left-field choice for kindred spirits. "Mötley Crüe only did one record with John Corabi on vocals, but the songs on that record share our vibe," he says. "Songs like *Hooligan's Holiday* could easily have been on our album, or they could've had our *Four Wheels* on theirs!"

VERA FRIEDERICH/PRESS

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The Knack

My Sharona

The LA band's stuttering rocker with the dirty m-m-mind, about someone who for co-writer Doug Fieger was "love at fist sight", was one of the biggest hits of 1979.

Words: **Bill DeMain**

For Doug Fieger, the secret of songwriting success was to stay in touch with his inner teenager. That meant raging hormones, unrequited love, and girls, girls, girls.

"When The Knack started, I wrote songs about girls," the late frontman told me in 2008. "I think girls is really what rock'n'roll is about." Indeed, every song on the band's 1979 debut album *Get The Knack* feels like it burst out of some sex-crazed adolescent bedroom. And although Fieger was 25 when he wrote it, he told me he "felt sixteen".

And that was all down to his lust for a raven-haired muse named Sharona.

In 1978, when The Knack (named after Richard Lester's film *The Knack... And How To Get It*) were rising through the LA club scene, Fieger's then-girlfriend Judy casually introduced him to her friend Sharona Alperin. Sharona was 17, a stylish clerk who worked in a clothing shop. "It was love at first sight," Fieger said. "Literally. I broke up with Judy shortly after and chased Sharona for a year."

It's a good thing he didn't catch her right away, because the thrill of that chase sparked the idea for the band's biggest hit.

"It was a conscious effort for both me and Berton [Averre, lead guitarist and co-writer] to come at it from the point of view of our remembered teenage selves," Fieger recalled. "We wanted to tell the story from that place, where it's more raw and direct."

Fittingly, Averre came up with the famous hammer-meets-chisel guitar riff. "He'd been listening to Elvis Costello's *This Year's Model* album, especially *Pump It Up*," said Fieger.

Although Alperin was in a relationship and put Fieger off, it didn't stop him from writing even more songs about her (*Frustrated* and *She's So Selfish*).

"Doug made it very clear he was in love with me," Alperin told National Public Radio. "It wasn't like my boyfriend and the world didn't know. I always say that he was *my* groupie, I wasn't his."

Still, she couldn't forget the first time she heard her namesake song: "One day, on my lunch break from the clothing store, I went to their rehearsal. And Bert and Doug were saying: 'Should we play it? All right, let's play it for her.' Cut to: I'm driving back to the store, thinking: 'Did I just hear a song with my name in it?!' It's a feeling I'll never forget because I can't even describe it."

Indeed, for Fieger, that reveal soon turned into an indescribable mix of emotions. It was part torture, part flattery to see Sharona at Knack gigs, dancing in front of the stage to her song.

Meanwhile, by late 1978 The Knack had become darlings of the Sunset Strip, selling out shows at The Whisky and The Troubadour, jamming with established stars like Tom Petty and Bruce Springsteen. "Bruce got on stage with us on a Friday night, and by Monday morning we had fourteen offers from labels," Fieger said.

"That song, and the whole beginning of The Knack was such a joyful experience."

They signed with EMI/Capitol, partly because it was the home of their favourite band, The Beatles. They were paired with producer Mike Chapman at The Record Plant studio in New York. Chapman, who'd made his name as one half of the Chinn-Chapman songwriting/producing duo behind glam rockers The Sweet and Suzi Quatro, had jumped the fence into new-wave hit making with 1979's other breakout hit, Blondie's *Heart Of Glass*. He understood that The Knack's appeal lay in their British Invasion vibe. So his approach was no fuss, no muss – cut the record like it was 1964.

"We were a tight live band," Fieger said. "So we didn't have to do a lot of takes. And Mike thought *My Sharona* was a huge hit. But for some reason Capitol wanted to release *Oh Tara* as the first single. We went along with it. That's why the album went to number one before the single; *My Sharona* wasn't released until a few weeks after."

My Sharona became the soundtrack of the summer of '79. It spent six weeks at No.1 in the US and was constantly on the radio, and made the Top 20 in many other countries. Every cover band playing school dances had a go at it. Pre-MTV there was even an early music video, the band looking fab with their skinny ties, Vox amplifiers and monogrammed bass drum head. That was in keeping with the black-and-white LP artwork that nodded to *Meet The Beatles*.

Predictably, some rock critics considered this hubris rather than hat-tipping. *Creem* called them "a carbon copy band of nothing particularly original". *Rolling Stone*'s Dave Marsh wrote: "The most salient characteristic of The Knack is their repulsive misogyny. Sexism pervades every song."

Reflecting on the backlash, Fieger told journalist Todd Longwell: "I'd always thought of The Knack as an art project. The concept was to start out with our remembered adolescence on the first album, then we'd progressively explore other, more mature things as we went on."

While The Knack's subsequent six albums did develop their sound, they never recaptured the buzz of their debut. But *My Sharona* has continued to enjoy a healthy pop-culture afterlife. In 1982 it was the inspiration for Michael Jackson to write *Beat It*. And although Devo denied it, their hit *Girl U Want* owes a debt to it. It was also famously parodied in *My Bologna*, the debut single that launched the career of 'Weird Al' Yankovic. It's been in an episode of *The Simpsons* and many films, including *Reality Bites, Charlie's Angels* and *Super 8*.

Fulfilling the song's hope, Fieger and Alperin finally did get together, and had a four-year run as a couple. They remained friendly until Fieger died from brain cancer in 2010. He called her "the love of my life".

"And that song, and the whole beginning of The Knack was such a joyful experience," he said.



M-M-MY DREAM HOME. *Angie, Layla, Maggie May.* The titles of many rock classics have enshrined the names of women. But how many of those women have then built careers on the songs? Sharona Alperin did. For 35 years she's been a successful LA realtor/estate agent, selling luxury homes to and for Hollywood A-listers. She's currently ranked in the top 1.5 per cent of agents in the US. On her website (mysharona.com, naturally), which features the familiar drum beat and guitar riff, she says: "*My Sharona* has had an impact on my ability to understand the entertainer's mind, there's something simpatico".

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Girl crazy in the late 70s: (clockwise from bottom left) Bruce Gary, Doug Fieger, Prescott Niles, Berton Averre.

RELEASE DATE
June 1979
HIGHEST CHART POSITION
UK No.6, US No.1
PERSONNEL
Doug Fieger
Lead vocals, rhythm guitar
Berton Averre
Lead guitar, backing vocals
Prescott Niles
Bass guitar
Bruce Gary
Drums
WRITTEN BY
Doug Fieger & Berton Averre
PRODUCED BY
Mike Chapman
LABEL
EMI

Q&A

Ricky Warwick

The Almighty frontman on his new solo album, digging Northern soul, his good work ethic, quitting drinking...

Words: **Dave Everley**

You can take the boy out of Northern Ireland, but you can't take the Northern Ireland out of the boy. After 20 years of living in the US – and before that Scotland, Bradford and London – Ricky Warwick has returned to the country of his birth. "I've still got a house in LA, but we've got this place here in Belfast too," he says, speaking via Zoom from the latter. "There's always been a pull for me. I always knew I'd end up back here." The notion of family and roots are woven into the Black Star Riders and Almighty frontman's new solo album, *Blood Ties*.

What does the title *Blood Ties* refer to?
It's about family. It encapsulates the big extended family I have around me, and what that means to me. And as you get older, you gravitate back to the people who love you and made you.

Did you get on with your parents when you were growing up?
I got on okay with my mother, and I loved her, but I had a brilliant relationship with my father. I really looked up to him. I'm an only son from a farming family, so it was mapped out that I'd leave school and work on the farm. Which I did for four years, until the music took off. But my dad said: "If you get a record deal, get your backside out of here, son, and go for it."

On the album's first track, *Angels Of Desolation*, you sing: '*I'm on the road to rack and ruin, I'm on the path to self-destruct*.' Is that autobiographical?
I dug deep on this record. *Angels Of Desolation* is about me quitting drinking three years ago and the effect it had on me. I was never the guy who would wake up and have to pour a vodka or open a beer in the morning, I was more of a binge drinker. But every bad decision I've made, I've made when I'd been drinking. The waking up with a hangover and wasting a day, the bullshit you talk when you drunk, getting nasty and slagging people off... I thought: "I've been on this road since I was fifteen, I'm going to try this other road, see what it's like."

And what is it like?
I wish I'd quit ten years ago. There's a clarity, positivity, no anxiety, you lose weight, you feel good, you don't talk as much crap. Well, that's debatable in my case.

Guitarist Billy Duffy from The Cult is on the track *The Hell Of Me And You*. Where do you know him from?
God, I've known Billy since the early days of The Almighty. I remember him and Ian [Astbury, The Cult singer] coming to see us at the Marquee. We bonded over music and football. He's been a good mentor over the years. Billy's just Billy – he doesn't bend for anybody, he doesn't acquiesce, he does it his way. That single-mindedness has been a big influence.

Charlie Starr from Blackberry Smoke appears on *Rise And Grind*, which namechecks Northern soul mecca Wigan Casino. Did you have to explain to him what Wigan Casino was? Or even where Wigan is?
He never asked me! I've always loved Northern soul. It was Justin Sullivan from New Model Army who got me into it when I was in the band [in the late 80s]. I was proud of getting Wigan Casino into a song.

A lot of people who have been doing it as long as you have started to slow down in terms of releasing records, but you keep on doing it. What keeps you at it?
The songs keep coming. It's that simple. As long as they keep coming, I'll record them. I love writing and recording and playing. My hunger for that stuff has never decreased. I like being able to be creative. I don't think I'd be the person I am without that. I'd be a very frustrated individual.

Do you ever think: "I should be bigger and better known than I am"?
Yes and no. If I analyse it, I could probably get a bit miffed about it: "Why don't I sell more records?" But then I think: "I've been doing this for almost forty years, and doing it on my own terms and being successful." I'd rather take that.

The Almighty played successful reunion shows in 2023 and 2024. Are there any plans to make an album?
I don't think so. I'm not feeling it – I don't know if I've got any ideas. The shows have been great, there's a nice vibe, and the patter and the jokes from thirty years ago have all resurfaced. But I'm not waking up and thinking about making a new album. But then if you'd asked me five years ago if The Almighty would get back together I'd have said no, but here we are.

You're still making a living in rock'n'roll after all this time. What's the trick?
Perseverance and hard work. I'm up every day at six-thirty, I'm in the gym for two hours, check the kids are alright, and then I'm straight to work. I make sure I'm always putting in the hours and hustling and being creative. It's a fucking job, and if you want to get paid you've got to treat it like one. That's something my dad instilled in me: if you want anything, you've got to work for it.

Are you going to be that guy out there at seventy-five dragging an acoustic guitar around?
I hope so. Who doesn't get sick of this? Playing to twenty-five, thirty people in a club when I'm seventy-five... it's all good as long as I'm enjoying myself.

If it does all go wrong with music, can you still milk a cow or shift a bale of hay?
It's funny, I've got a little bit of land and I have some sheep and chickens now. I've gone full circle. That stuff never leaves you.

Blood Ties is out on March 14 via Earache.



Ricky Warwick: nearly 40 years of music making, and doing things on his own terms.

"Something my dad instilled in me is: if you want anything, you've got to work for it."



6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

Shaman's Harvest

They've come through life-changing adversity. They know how to party. They're finally coming over here...

Interview: **Will Simpson**

"Yep, we've certainly taken our time," says Shaman's Harvest frontman Nate Hunt. That's something of an understatement. The band, who formed in Jefferson City, Missouri in the late 90s and blend southern rock, grunge, a whole load of blues and a little bit of soul into a sleek package, have released seven albums over their quarter-century history, the most recent of which was 2022's *Rebelator*. In all that time, though, they have never once toured Europe. But that's something that will finally be put right this spring.

In fairness, they've concentrated on building a following in their homeland, supporting AC/DC, Nickelback, Cheap Trick, Alice In Chains and Black Stone Cherry to name a few. But a whole load of adversity – the sort of thing that would finish off lesser bands – has also played its part. "I've had a rough few years," the singer says with a laugh.

They've survived a life-changing accident.
Back in 2013, with the band not yet making enough money, Hunt took on some work on a construction site. He suffered a 30ft fall, broke his leg and severed all his tendons. "I had about five surgeries," he remembers. "It was a long process. About ten years later I just needed to get rid of the leg, it was just too much pain. It took me about a year to get back on my feet, but it's the best thing I've ever done. I'm now able to stand up on my new leg. I can even do a jig or two, though there's not usually a lot of choreography in our shows."

Hunt also had cancer during this time.
The same year as he had the leg surgery, the frontman was also fighting on another, lethal, front: "I thought it was just a sore throat that wouldn't go away. But when I went to see a doctor he said it was a tumour. And it was malignant. They tried a few different treatments – chemotherapy, radiotherapy – and eventually I pulled through the other side. We always had a mentality of 'the show must go on'. We never took a break. We didn't talk about it to the press until it was behind us."

They've also survived a tornado.
This was while they were recording their most recent album, close to home in Missouri.

"The producer was on the top floor of the hotel



ADRIENNE BEAGCO/PRESS

and the tornado came right through the hotel," Hunt recalls. "I was driving home from the studio at the time. It was chasing me down the highway, and finally I pulled off under a petrol station and it just absolutely levelled the petrol station. It was a wild, wild night. We were lucky. But nobody slept that night."

They've partied (and partied) with Nickelback

Supporting A-list bands doesn't necessarily mean living a 'rock star' lifestyle. But for one memorable one night in 2017, it did.

"I'd never been in anyone's private jet before," Hunt says. "He [Chad Kroeger] had rented out an entire floor of this hotel. I don't know why – there were only three of us. We land. I don't have my belongings with me – they're six hundred miles away. Anyway, uncle Chad, er, he imbibes. So he orders everything you can order, and then realises it's just me, our bass player and him in this entire suite. So he starts inviting the maintenance man, the housekeepers, the manager…"

The party went on. And on. For more than a day.

"I'm trying to hide at this point in one of the rooms, just to escape. But he finds me and drags me back in. Meanwhile the hotel has gotten wind that their employees are up there. The hotel fires everyone. Chad refuses to leave until they're all hired back. It was a pretty legendary move. One of the most chaotic two days of my life."

They're having their own 'Shaman's Harvest Day' in their home town.

"It's happening next year!" Hunt exclaims. "It was the end of our tour and the final date was in Jefferson City. We only had a couple of songs left, and then all of a sudden these people start coming on stage. The mayor comes on and announces a Shaman's Harvest day for next year. We're not sure yet what's actually going to happen, but I don't think anybody will get off school."

The band are looking forward to finally playing this side of the Atlantic.

"Having a proper pint will be great. I think we're hitting Ireland during St Paddy's Day, which will be an experience. And good grub – I've heard some tales about good food in the UK."

Shaman's Harvest tour the UK with Blacktop Mojo from March 5 to 29. *See p97 for dates.*



KILLERS, BEAST

With **Iron Maiden** celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, we talk to all the members of the band and look back over the successes, trials, tribulations, thrills, spills and genre-defining records of the longest-running and arguably greatest heavy metal band of them all.

Words: **Paul Elliott** Main photo: **John McMurtrie** Portraits: **Florian Nicolle** Photos: **Ross Halfin**



S, SLAVES, SONS, SOULS...







“When you start out as a band, you don’t think further than your first album. You dream about touring the world. Anything else is a bonus.”

Steve Harris

He wrote songs that shaped the sound of heavy metal in the early 80s, among them *Phantom Of The Opera, Wrathchild, Run To The Hills, The Number Of The Beast* and *The Trooper*. But when Iron Maiden bassist Steve Harris thinks back to the very first song he wrote – in the early 70s, when he was aged just 16 – he can only laugh at the absurdity of it all.

“My first band was called Influence,” he says. “Then we changed the name to Gypsy’s Kiss, which is Cockney rhyming slang for you know what. And I wrote this song that had an awful title: *Endless Pit*. Which isn’t Cockney rhyming slang, but it should be.”

The title wasn’t his. The blame, he says, falls on his school friend Dave Smith, who wrote the song’s lyrics. But forgetting the title there was something about that song – something that would prove hugely significant in the life of Steve Harris. Later, the main riff in *Endless Pit* was developed into a new song called *Innocent Exile*, which Harris performed with Smiler, the band he joined after Gypsy’s Kiss broke up. He also took that song into the band he formed in 1975. The band in which his singular vision would be fully realised, the band he has led ever since.

Innocent Exile was, in essence, the first Iron Maiden song. The first step on the road to world domination for one of the greatest heavy metal bands of all time.

Young guns going for glory: (clockwise from left) Steve Harris, Clive Burr, Paul Di’Anno.

This year, Iron Maiden celebrate their 50th anniversary with the Run For Your Lives tour, in which they will perform classic material from 1980 to 1992.

Ahead of this, *Classic Rock* met up with the band in New York City in late 2024 during the last weeks of their Future Past tour. The six members of the band – Steve Harris, singer Bruce Dickinson, guitarists Dave Murray, Adrian Smith and Janick Gers, and drummer Nicko McBrain – were interviewed separately over four days, before and after a show in Brooklyn. All spoke at length about the highs and lows of Iron Maiden’s career and their own lives within it: the classic songs and landmark albums; the personal challenges each of them has faced. They discussed the band’s longevity; how they have made it this far, and what the future might look like – for Iron Maiden and for themselves as individuals. As Steve Harris said: “When you start out as a band, you don’t

ROSS HALFIN x4



Paul Di'Anno fronting an early Iron Maiden. But his unreliabilty led to him being dismissed.



Gypsy's Kiss: (l-r) Paul Sears, Bob Verschoyle, Dave Smith, Steve Harris.



Iron Maiden in 1980 (l-r) Clive Burr, Dave Murray, Paul Di'Anno, Dennis Stratton, Steve Harris.

think further than your first album. You dream about touring the world. Anything else is a bonus. So to still be doing that all these years later is incredible. I feel so happy and lucky I can still do it."

Bruce Dickinson was equally buoyant. "I always wanted this to be the most extraordinary heavy metal band in the world," he said. "And I think we are, actually. With the repertoire, the songs, the depth…"

With Nicko McBrain there was a slightly different tone, lacking a little of his natural ebullience. He spoke candidly of how, on the Future Past tour, he had experienced difficulties with his dexterity since suffering a stroke in 2023; how he had adapted his approach to playing drums, easing back a little, cutting down the fills in certain songs or omitting them altogether in others. "It's funny," he shrugged, "because sometimes when I sit at my practice kit I can do the big drum fill in the intro to *The Trooper*. But even then it's a bit flaky, it's not clean. So rather than do it and not get it right, I leave it out."

He continued: "I've had forty-two years with Iron Maiden. Incredible. But none of us is getting any younger. Who knows how much God is going to grace us with in terms of longevity?"

In retrospect, it seems that he was already resigned to what was to come. Just a few weeks after talking to *Classic Rock*, McBrain announced on X that the final date of the Future Past tour, in São Paulo, Brazil on December 7, 2024, was his last with Iron Maiden.

Now, the Run For Your Lives tour is more than purely a celebration of Maiden's 50 years.

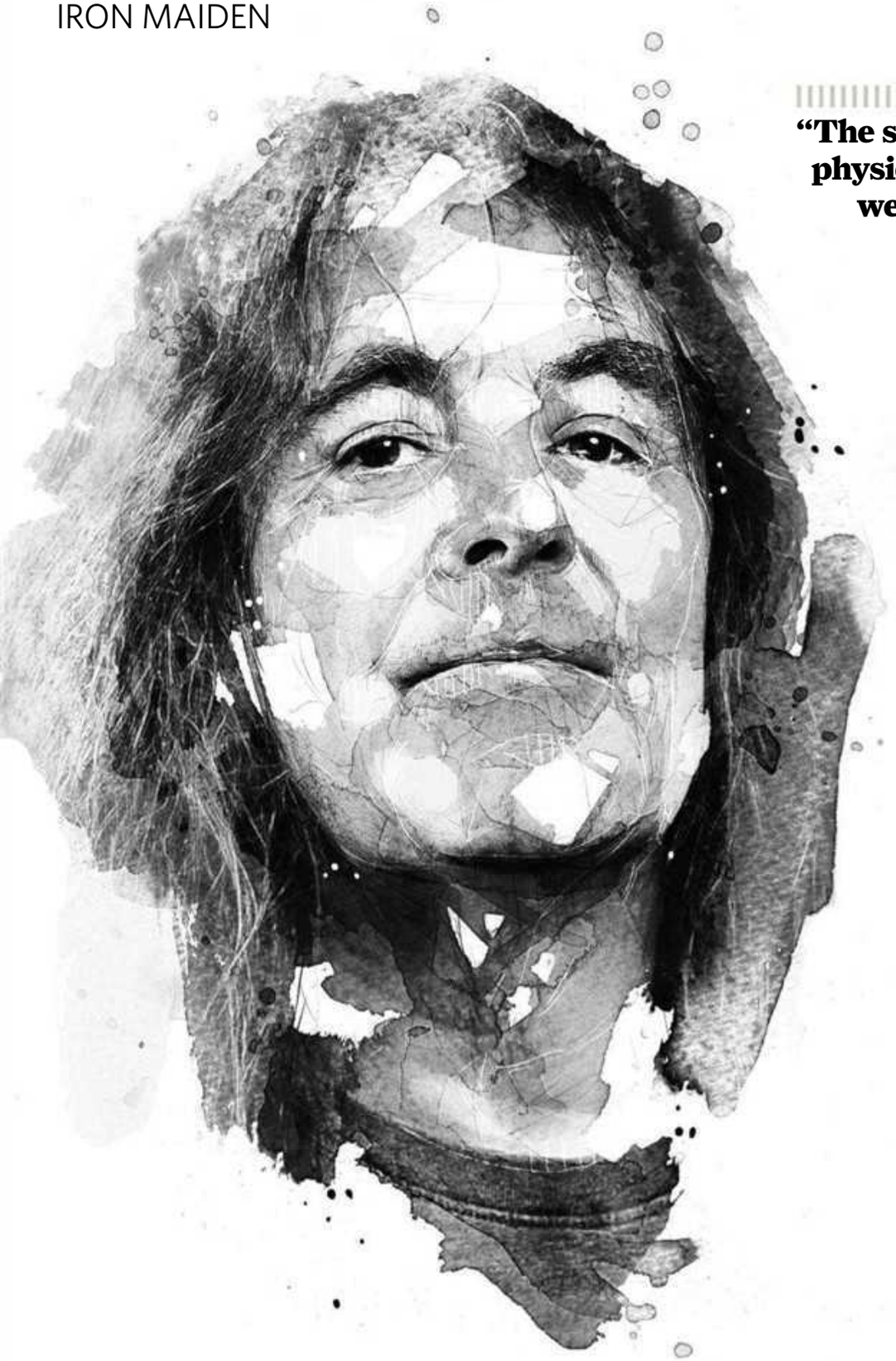


Simon Dawson, the drummer in Steve Harris's other band, British Lion, has been installed as McBrain's replacement. And with this, the band's first line-up change in 25 years, comes the beginning of yet another new chapter for Iron Maiden.

In late-afternoon sunshine, Steve Harris sits in the back of an SUV moving alongside the glittering Hudson River, en route from Manhattan to Brooklyn. The youngest of his four daughters sits up front. She's 21. Her father is thinking back to when he was even younger.

He can't remember the exact date, but it was in late 1975, September or October, when the 19-year-old Steve Harris put ➢

CENTRE: FRASER GRAY / ALAMY



“The show that we do is a very physical thing. How long can we keep going? I really don’t know.”

Steve Harris

For band leader Steve Harris, the pressures and responsibility sometimes weighed heavily on him.

the first version of Iron Maiden together. “It was Terry Rance and Dave Sullivan on guitars,” he says, “me on bass, Ron Matthews on drums – we called him Rebel – and Paul Day singing.” Harris decided on the name of the band during the Christmas holiday period. “Even my mum thought it was a great name,” he says, smiling. At the time, he was working as a draughtsman and living with his nan in Leytonstone, East London, after his parents had moved out of the city. “I could walk to the Cart & Horses if I wanted to,” he says of the pub where the band played their first gig, in 1976.

As leader of his own band, Harris was free to create music far removed from the meat-and-potatoes boogie of Smiler. Inspired by heavy rock giants Deep Purple and UFO and the progressive rock of Jethro Tull, King Crimson and Genesis, he quickly developed a unique style of songwriting – illustrated most powerfully in what he says is the definitive early Maiden song: *Phantom Of The Opera*.

“As a bass player, I don’t write or play like a guitarist would,” he says. “And with *Phantom* it was obvious that my style of writing was very different to what people were used to, and what guitarists were used to. My songs were unusual, a bit quirky, but it felt natural to me. And I wanted to play with aggression. People said that Maiden had this ‘punk’ thing, but everyone knows I don’t like punk at all, so it’s not that. At that age you’re full of energy, and that’s what you want to come through, but with loads of melody. That’s why I wanted twin guitars.”

There were numerous line-up changes in the first few years: brief periods with a singer, Dennis Wilcock, who fancied himself as the next Alice Cooper; a drummer, Barry Purkis, known as Thunderstick, who wore a balaclava on stage at a time when the IRA and the Yorkshire Ripper were putting the fear of god into people in Britain. But by 1978 Harris’s plan was coming together. He had a trusted second lieutenant in guitarist Dave Murray, whom he had fired a year earlier over a dispute with Wilcock. He’d also found a singer with a powerful voice and presence, Paul Andrews, who dubbed himself Paul Di’Anno.

As the band toured the UK and recorded a first demo tape, a grass-roots scene was developing, the headbangers’ answer to punk, christened The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal by weekly rock magazine *Sounds*. “We were in the right place at the right time,” says Harris. And in 1979 he found arguably his most important ally in Rod Smallwood, a former booking agent who became Iron Maiden’s manager, the Peter Grant to Harris’s Jimmy Page. It was Smallwood who secured Maiden a deal with major label EMI.

In December 1979 the band’s self-titled debut album was recorded in London with the line-up of Harris, Murray, Di’Anno, drummer Clive Burr (poached from rival band Samson) and second guitarist Dennis Stratton. It remains one of the greatest heavy metal albums ever made, full of electrifying songs, raw energy and streetwise attitude. Arguably the most influential album that came out of the NWOBHM, it was an inspiration for Metallica and many others that followed. And on the album’s cover, illustrated by Derek Riggs, was the monstrous figure of Eddie – an image that would become, in the words of Kiss star Gene Simmons, “the perfect trademark”.

Maiden’s second album, *Killers*, followed in 1981. It included *Innocent Exile*, the ground-zero Maiden song. It was the band’s first album with guitarist Adrian Smith, who had replaced Dennis Stratton. It was also their last with Paul Di’Anno.







After his exit from Maiden, Di'Anno had an erratic career and a chaotic lifestyle. In the months leading up to his death from heart failure on October 21, 2024, he had performed gigs while in a wheelchair, and had reconnected with Steve Harris. "I was in touch with him until a couple of weeks before he passed," Harris says.

After a moment's pause, he smiles as he remembers the good times they shared. "Paul was a lovable rogue. He liked to annoy me by dressing up like Adam Ant. Anything to wind me up. He liked to ruffle a few feathers, let's put it that way. And ruffle he did! He used to call me Hitler. I've been called the Ayatollah and Sergeant Major, but Hitler takes the biscuit, really."

After Di'Anno was dismissed from Maiden, he conceded that he only had himself to blame. Too many times he had blown his voice out on the road – too many late nights, too much booze and cocaine.

"Paul's voice had a certain quality to it," Harris says. "A rawness. But he didn't look after himself. He had this self-destruct button. And I got the impression that he never really believed he had it in him to go to the next level. I think there was an insecurity there."

There was no such insecurity with the singer who replaced Di'Anno. Bruce Dickinson, like Clive Burr, joined Iron Maiden from Samson, and had no doubts about what he had – a voice of phenomenal range and power. The doubts were in Harris's mind. "I was very worried at having a singer change at that point," he admits.

But in February 1982, *Run To The* ➢

Kiss's Gene Simmons says that with Eddie Iron Maiden had "the perfect trademark".

ROSS HALFIN x2; TOP LEFT: JOHN McMURTRIE



"We're gonna need more monitors..."



Flying the flag for British heavy metal.



A fresh-faced Maiden in 1981/82.



'Slasher' Dickinson with fencing foils at home in London in 1985.

Hills, Maiden's first single with Dickinson, hit the UK top 10. An even greater affirmation followed with the album, *The Number Of The Beast*.

"The fans took to Bruce incredibly well," Harris says. "It was an absolute relief, if I'm honest. And then the album went to number one, and it's like: 'Wow, what's happening here?'"

Hailed by *Sounds* writer Garry Bushell as "epic stuff", characterised by "raging Purplesque mayhem", *The Number Of The Beast* was a giant leap forward for Iron Maiden, with Dickinson's mighty voice at the rarefied level of legends such as Ronnie James Dio and Rob Halford. Over time, *The Number Of The Beast* would be widely acclaimed as the definitive Maiden album, with deathless heavy metal classics in *Run To The Hills, Children Of The Damned, Hallowed Be Thy Name* and that hellfire title track.

The Beast On The Road tour was Clive Burr's last with the band. His replacement was Nicko McBrain, who debuted on the 1983 album *Piece Of Mind*. With this and another monolithic album, *Powerslave*, Iron Maiden became the world's leading metal band.

"It was full-on in those years," Harris says. "Album, tour, album, tour. We got hardly any time off. But it was great. That's what we wanted."

However, not everyone in the band wanted it as badly as Harris. In the mid-80s the aptly named World Slavery tour, a 13-month marathon, was a test of physical and psychological endurance that took a heavy toll on the band, Dickinson and Smith in particular.

(Smith would leave the band during pre-production for 1990's *No Prayer For The Dying*. He was replaced by Gillan guitarist Janick Gers.)

For Harris, the greatest challenge came later. In all the years he has led Iron Maiden, only once did he think long and hard about whether he had it in him to keep this band going. It was in 1993, when Dickinson left and Harris was in the process of divorcing his wife Lorraine.

"Pretty awful things were happening all at once," he says with a sigh. "And I thought the rest of them are going to look to me for strength here, and I don't know if I've got it. There's that saying: who motivates the motivator? That's exactly how it was. But it didn't last long. A few days. I couldn't carry on feeling sorry for myself. I had to get on with it."

Dickinson's replacement was Blaze Bayley, who had previously starred in Wolfsbane, Tamworth's answer to Van Halen. Harris remains proud of Maiden's two albums with Bayley: *The X Factor* (1995) and *Virtual XI* (1998). "Honestly, I thought some of the songs on those albums were among the best I've ever written," he says. "But those songs were quite dark, probably because of where I was mentally at the time, without even realising it."

"I always wanted this to be the most extraordinary heavy metal band in the world."

Bruce Dickinson



Although Bayley gave it everything he had, he couldn't match Dickinson's vocal range or his charisma. And at a time when alternative rock held sway, Iron Maiden's popularity waned. Harris took an almost perverse satisfaction in adversity. "We were up against it, fighting for our lives," he says. "Being the underdog again, I enjoyed the challenge."

But it couldn't last. In January 1999, Steve Harris made the toughest call of his professional life, telling Bayley that his days in Iron Maiden were over.

"That's the worst side of being in a band," he says. "It's not something I feel comfortable with. Never have done. Never will. But you've got to do what's right for the band."

With that, the stage was set for the return of Bruce Dickinson, and with him Adrian Smith. Both were ready to rejoin Iron Maiden after years of solo projects, at a lower level than they experienced in the band. But Harris needed convincing."I was unsure about it for a while," he says. "I just wanted to make sure they were coming back for the right reasons. So you just take it bit by bit."

With Dickinson and Smith reinstated in a new six-man line-up now with three guitarists, with Gers having been retained, the band made *Brave New World*, released in 2000. Harris hesitates to call it a comeback album, but that was the effect it had.

"We made a really strong album, went out on tour, played Rock In Rio and all that kind of stuff " he says. "I said: 'This is great.' And I knew then that we could just carry on as long as we want."

There had been tension in the past between Harris and Dickinson, dating all the way back to the 80s, but second time around they were older and wiser.

"Bruce and me, we never had fights or anything like that," Harris says. "There were times when he got on my nerves and I'm sure I got on his nerves. But that's what it's like when you're in a band together for a long time. Certain characters will clash. But there's a chemistry that works when everybody's together. It just works. So why would you want to compromise that just for some bullshit stuff that goes down?"

Dave Murray and Adrian Smith are the two most laid-back characters in Iron Maiden. They also have the longest shared history, having become friends as school kids in East London. "We lived two streets away from each other," Murray says. "We used to jam, and eventually we put a little band together [named Stone Free, after the Jimi Hendrix song], and we'd play in the church hall."

In that brief period in the late 70s when Murray was temporarily out of Maiden, he teamed up with Smith again in the band Urchin. But after Harris had pulled him back in, his path was set. For the past 47 years he has been at Harris's side, through all the ups and downs. But he laughs – and Murray laughs often – when he measures the difference in personality and temperament between himself and Harris. "Probably the complete opposite," he says. "I'm just really chilled out."

When it comes to extra-curricular activities, few people in rock have more strings to their bow than Bruce Dickinson.

Murray's Zen-like calm is evident both on stage and off. When he talks about the power dynamic in Iron Maiden, he is deferential, and contentedly so. "The leadership comes from Steve, Bruce and Rod," he says. "I'm more like a team player, and I'm happy to be in that position. You couldn't have a whole band with people as laid-back as me, or else nothing would get done."

On stage he appears to be in his own little world. "There are a million things that can distract you during a show," he muses. "So you have to be good at tuning it all out." He has what he calls "a weird ≫



"[In the late 90s] It seemed like it was coming towards the end... Until Bruce and Adrian came back."

Dave Murray

analogy", but it works: "When you play golf, which I love, you've got to clear your head. If you can get your brain to shut up for ten seconds, you can hit a good shot. So in concerts I do go into that world of my own. It means I can focus on the music and the pure enjoyment of playing."

Murray was not immune to the pressure the band were under during that whirlwind period in the 80s, the World Slavery tour in particular. "We needed time off after that, for our sanity," he says.

But when he considers all of those days, weeks, months and years he has been on the road with Iron Maiden, he speaks with gratitude. "There wasn't much time to think about it," he says. "You just lived it. You played music, and you enjoyed seeing a world you'd never seen before. The first time I ever left the UK was with the band. And that was as exciting as the playing – seeing new countries, different cultures. So that, on top of playing the shows, was a total high."

"You just lived it," Dave Murray says of his years on the road with Maiden. "You played music, and you enjoyed seeing a world you'd never seen before."

Only once, in all these years, did he fear that the life he enjoyed with Iron Maiden might be at an end. It was in the late 90s, when Blaze Bayley was fronting the band. "I always liked Blaze," he says. "Good singer, lovely guy. But we were playing in smaller places, where previously we'd been playing in arenas. It seemed like it was coming towards the end… Until Bruce and Adrian came back."

Murray's life is, as he describes it, uncomplicated, and beautifully so. When he's not with Iron Maiden, he's with his family at home in the tropical paradise of Hawaii.

"I love playing," he says. "It's my favourite thing to do. But there's a fine balance between touring and having a life at home. In the old days with the band it was constant. You were living it twenty-four/seven. But now, once we finish a tour, I go home, decompress and basically let it all go."

Adrian Smith is a different kind of laid-back. Not passive-aggressive, but quietly contemplative. He was nicknamed Mr. Indecision by Steve Harris, but as he says: "Steve's very black-and-white. He just trusts his instincts. I like to absorb and go away and think about it. To me that's just being sensible."

The first time Smith was invited to join Iron Maiden, he thought long and hard about it before turning them down. At that time, late '79, he had high hopes for Urchin, in which he was the main songwriter as well as singer and guitarist. A record deal was a possibility. But Maiden had already signed with EMI and were about to record their first album. Smith recalls how his father had urged him to take the Maiden job. "My dad was a typical working-class guy, experienced in life, and he knew that you don't get these breaks very often."

Fortunately for Smith he got a second offer from Maiden just a year later, after Dennis Stratton was fired. This time he jumped at the chance. "Urchin by then was falling apart a bit," he says. Maiden were flying after a top-ten album and a European tour with Kiss.

Making the *Killers* album was a daunting experience for Smith: recording at Battery Studios in West London, formerly known as Morgan Studios, where major artists such as Paul McCartney, Pink Floyd, Black Sabbath and many more had created classic albums, and working with a famous producer, Martin Birch.

"I couldn't sleep for a week before we went in," Smith recalls. "Martin had worked with Ritchie Blackmore. I mean, Jesus! But he was very good with me, although he could be a bit edgy. He was a karate black belt and sometimes he'd be pulling moves, kicking and shadow-



Playing to win: Dave Murray and Janick Gers with Maiden in 2018.



Beach boys: (l-r) Adrian Smith, Nicko McBrain, Bruce Dickinson, Dave Murray, Steve Harris.



boxing, and then he'd go: 'Can you do that overdub?'"

It was on *The Number Of The Beast* that Smith first asserted himself as a songwriter within the Maiden. He co-wrote three songs, including *22 Acacia Avenue*, a song he'd performed with Urchin and had written when he was just 16, which goes some way to explaining the lyrical content. "It's about a young bloke going with a prostitute, an older woman, and losing his virginity," he says, laughing. "A teenage fantasy at the time!"

On subsequent albums, Smith, an instinctively melodic player and writer, delivered songs that were no-brainer choices for singles, some written alone, some with Dickinson, Harris or both: *Flight Of Icarus, 2 Minutes To Midnight, Stranger In A Strange Land, Can I Play With Madness, The Evil That Men Do, Wasted Years*, the latter based on a lick that he says "sounded like U2".

But at the end of a decade in which Iron Maiden had conquered the world, Smith was feeling burned out. "The eighties were very intense," he says. "For everybody. You've got to be mentally strong to get out there and perform every night. And I definitely had some issues. A lot of times I would retreat into myself. But sometimes I just completely freaked out."

In an era when mental health issues were rarely discussed – especially not by young men in a rock band – Smith felt isolated, unable to express himself other than drowning in booze and coke. "We just kept hammering away," he says. "It's what you've got to do. And everyone's got their own problems. They're trying to keep themselves together."

It was in 1990 that it all came to a head. "I'd started to feel like I was stifled in the band," he says. "I didn't know what I wanted to do."

The decision was made for him. "They sat me down and said: 'Are you into it? You've got to be a hundred per cent into it. We're going on tour for another nine months.' So… that was it. It wasn't like I said: 'Right, I'm leaving the band.' There was a lot of agonising. And like I said before, things are not always black and white."

For a while he felt okay about leaving the band. "I was kind of relieved, because I wasn't happy. Everybody knew that. So I bought a house, got married, had kids…"

Near the end of 1991, another major rock band approached him. Def Leppard were searching for a new guitarist following the death of Steve Clark in January of that year.

Smith had known Leppard guitarist Phil Collen since the late 70s. "Phil had auditioned for Urchin back in the day," he says. "And when I joined Maiden I knew that Phil had also been in the frame. He was mates with Paul Di'Anno."

As Smith remembers it, there were two key people who recommended him for the Leppard job: photographer Ross Halfin, who had known both bands since the early days of the NWOBHM, and Steve Harris, whose friendship with Leppard singer Joe Elliott began on a rowdy night in 1979 when Maiden played at sticky-floored old joint the Retford Porterhouse. Smith auditioned for Leppard in Los Angeles. "Great guys," he says. "We played together for a couple of days."

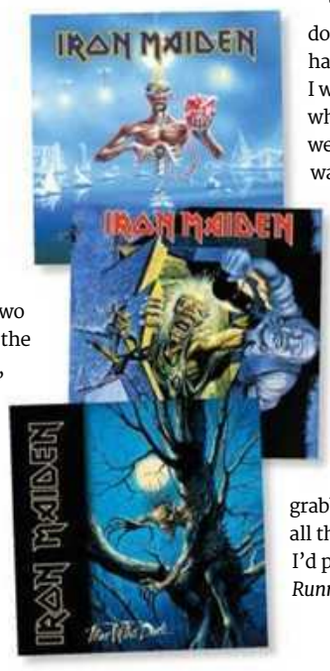
With his melodic sensibilities, he could have made a good match for Def Leppard. Instead they chose former Dio and Whitesnake guitarist Vivian Campbell. "He's more of a virtuoso guitarist than I am," Smith says. "And I guess that personality-wise he fit in."

However, just a few months after he tried out for Def Leppard, Smith came to the realisation that his heart was still in Iron Maiden. It was a realisation in which emotions he had suppressed finally surfaced.

On August 22, 1992, Maiden were headlining the Monsters Of Rock festival at Donington Park for the second time, and Harris invited Smith to make a guest appearance in the encore.

"It was my missus who said I should do it," he says. "Just to show there's no hard feelings. But when I got there I was nervous, and I started drinking whisky. So I was pretty lit up when they went on. I was at the side of the stage, watching them play all the songs I used to play, and I just burst out crying. I was overwhelmed. Up until that point I hadn't experienced much regret. But it really hit me then. There was a lot of my life in that band, and I was so close to where I used to be."

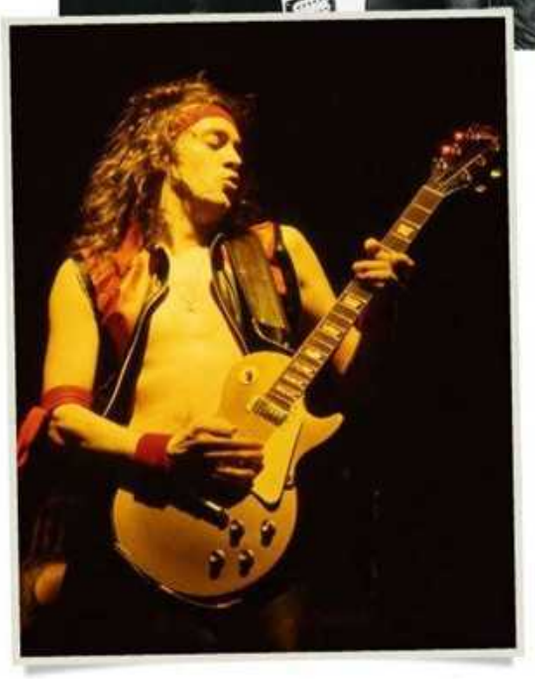
He pauses and smiles. "Luckily I had enough time to pull myself together. I hadn't brought a guitar. I just grabbed one of Dave's. Janick grabbed me in a headlock and pulled me all the way out onto the catwalk before I'd played a fucking note! And when *Running Free* started up, I thought: ➢



ROSS HALFIN x2. TOP: JOHN McMURTRIE







Above left: should be a band called Smiler. Dave Murray, Steve Harris and Adrian Smith.

Right: Steve Harris with Maiden manager Rod Smallwood.

Below: not a band called Smiler. Janick Gers, Dave Murray, Blaze Bayley, Steve Harris and Nicko McBrain in 1995.

'Fucking hell, this is a bit fast!' But I got through it – just about. And in the end it was a nice thing to do."

In the years that followed, Smith remained in Iron Maiden's orbit. His band Psycho Motel opened for Maiden on a UK tour. He then teamed up once again with Bruce Dickinson for two of the singer's solo albums: *Accident Of Birth* and *The Chemical Wedding*. In 1998, a year after *The Chemical Wedding* was released, Dickinson and Smith were approached about rejoining Maiden. And this time Smith didn't have be asked twice.

When Steve Harris attempts to describe the various personalities within his band, he laughs and rolls his eyes before carefully measuring his words. "Everyone's got their little idiosyncrasies," he says. "I mean, talk about a bunch of characters."

Of the three guitarists in Iron Maiden, Janick Gers is the most extrovert. Where Dave Murray is happy to go with the flow, and Adrian Smith likes to take his time in collecting his thoughts, Gers is more vocal, highly opinionated, and especially bullish in his attitude to making music.

On stage with Maiden he's all flash, throwing the kind of shapes that went out of fashion when all those hair-metal bands were killed by grunge in the early 90s. When he's off stage it's a different story.

"When I first joined Maiden," Gers says, "one of the things I heard was: 'You're not like a rock star. You're like one of the punters.' Yes, that's exactly what I am. This is part of my life. It isn't my whole life. You won't see me walking up Chiswick High Road with my bullet belt on. I can sit in a pub very quietly and have a drink, have a chat about football, religion, politics… anything but music, really."

Gers first encountered Iron Maiden in the days of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, when he played guitar with the band White Spirit, formed in his home town of Hartlepool. In 1981, as a member of Gillan, he befriended Bruce Dickinson, who took every opportunity to get close to his hero Ian Gillan. Many years on, after Gers had temporarily dropped out of the music business and taken a degree in humanities, he and Dickinson reconnected at a charity concert in London. In 1989, while Dickinson was on a short break from Iron Maiden, he recorded his first solo single, *Bring Your Daughter… To The Slaughter*, with Gers on guitar. The song featured in the film *A Nightmare On Elm Street 5: The Dream Child*, and was subsequently recorded by Maiden and became their only UK No.1 single.

Dickinson's collaboration with Gers was developed on the singer's album *Tattooed Millionaire*. And it was during rehearsals for Dickinson's solo tour that Gers received an offer he could not refuse.

As he recalls it: "Bruce had said: 'Learn some Maiden tracks.' I said: 'I thought we weren't doing Maiden stuff on this tour?' Bruce said: 'We're not. This is for Maiden. Adrian's leaving the band.'

"Because I was hanging around with Bruce, people might have thought I was trying to get into Maiden, but that was never in my mind."

Gers's reasoning is quite simple: "It never occurred to me that anyone would ever leave that band."

A rehearsal was quickly arranged at Maiden's HQ. Smith's gear was still there, but Gers refused to touch it. But as soon as he played a song with the band, any misgivings were forgotten.

"We did *The Trooper* first," he recalls. "And I got this adrenaline buzz. My hands were shaking. We did a few more, and they said: 'You're in!'"

But it wasn't all smooth sailing from there. When Dickinson left the band in 1993, Gers was mortified. "I felt like he'd left me by myself." The years with Blaze Bayley were problematic. "We made it hard for Blaze," he admits. "We made him sing *Run To The Hills, The Evil That Men Do* – songs that weren't in his range."

When Harris told Gers that Dickinson and Smith were returning to Iron Maiden, his first impulse was to offer his resignation. "My attitude was: 'I'll go. If you get Adrian back, it'll be like it was before.' But Steve said: 'That's not what I'm thinking. If Adrian comes back and you went, it's like we'd go backwards. But if we have three guitarists it takes it somewhere else.'"

In this triple-guitar formation, Gers is the loose







ROSS HALFIN x3; BOTTOM: GEORGE CHIN/ICONICPIX

"The eighties were very intense. For everybody... Sometimes I just completely freaked out."

Adrian Smith



cannon. "Even when I'm in the studio I'm all nervous energy," he says. "I like to just plug in play. It's the same when I'm playing live. For me it's all about intensity. Sometimes you're at the side of the stage and you're fucking knackered, you've been travelling all day, your knees are killing you. But then you run on stage and – bang! – you're in another world.

"On stage I feel this aggression, like a volcano going off. I'm completely fucking mental up there. I don't know why I swing my guitars around. Haven't a fucking clue. But one thing I do know: if you come near me when I'm swinging that guitar, you're going to get hit!"

In the restaurant on the 35th floor of a Manhattan hotel, with views across Central Park, Bruce Dickinson flicks through a cocktail menu arranged in somewhat pretentious categories: Earth, Wood, Water. With a boyish grin he holds the menu open at the page headed: 'Metal'. He orders coffee, but doesn't really need it. He's always in the mood to talk.

He begins by discussing a favourite meal that he cooks for himself on tour – egg-white omelette with steamed vegetables. The result of eating it, he delights in saying, is powerful flatulence.

Turning his mind back to Iron Maiden, he remembers the first time he saw the band play live, at London venue the Music Machine in 1980, when Samson, the band Dickinson was then fronting, found Maiden a hard act to follow. It was a chastening experience.

"All these Maiden fans turned up," he says, "and then immediately Maiden finished they all fucked off, leaving us to play to a hundred punters! I thought: 'There's something going on with this band. I think they're going to be big."

Samson's shortcomings were very much apparent to Dickinson during the recording of their album *Shock Tactics* in January 1981. They had some good stuff in the can, including a ballsy version of Russ Ballards's *Riding With The Angels*. But in an adjacent room at Battery Studios, Iron Maiden were making *Killers*.

"We were all in the bar together every night," the singer remembers. "And one time when Martin Birch and I were both drunk as lords, he played the whole of *Killers* to me at full bore, and it melted my fucking ears!"

In the summer of '81, the stars aligned. "Samson were slowly going down the plughole," Dickinson says. "And there were lots of rumours about Paul Di'Anno going around."

After Samson had played at the Reading Festival, Dickinson met with Steve Harris and Maiden manager Rod Smallwood in the backstage enclosure. An audition was arranged behind Paul Di'Anno's back. But when Dickinson arrived at it, he felt like he'd walked into a wake. "Everybody was just down."

The gloom lifted when they jammed on some rock classics: "A bit of AC/DC, a bit of Purple; *Woman From Tokyo*, *Black Night*." Then they tried some Maiden songs.

Adrian Smith in particular felt the pressures of album-tour-album roundabout.

"They'd asked me to learn four," Dickinson says, "but they'd only got two albums, so I just learned all of them. As soon we'd bashed through a couple, Steve phoned Rod and said: 'Can we get into a studio tonight?' And Rod's going: 'Fucking calm down! We've got some gigs to do with Paul first!' After that they all went out looking miserable again. I really felt for them – and I felt for Paul, too."

Once the last dates with Di'Anno were completed, Dickinson returned to Battery Studios, where Martin Birch had set up the backing tracks from the live EP *Maiden Japan*, minus Di'Anno's vocals. ➢



“This is part of my life. It isn’t my whole life. You won’t see me walking up Chiswick High Road with my bullet belt on.”

Janick Gers

With the rest of the band watching on, Dickinson recorded vocals for four songs including, somewhat fittingly for a new beginning, *Innocent Exile*. “When I was done, they all went off into this little huddle for ten minutes,” he says. “Finally they all came out and Steve said: ‘Well, let’s go for a pint – you’re in!’ That night we all went out to see UFO at the Hammy Odeon. We got royally pissed in the bar. And that was it.”

Paul Di’Anno’s failure was the making of Bruce Dickinson. But on October 22, 2024, the day after Di’Anno’s death, it was Dickinson who paid tribute during a Maiden show in St. Paul, Minnesota. In an impromptu speech, he mentioned a song from the band’s debut album. *Remember Tomorrow*, co-written by Harris and Di’Anno, is arguably the most emotive song Iron Maiden have ever recorded, and Dickinson now believes they should never play it again, out of respect for Di’Anno.

“If ever Paul owned a song, it’s that one,” he says. “I can sing it, and have done. But I think we should leave it with Paul now.”

Di’Anno had succumbed to the pressure of the band’s heavy touring within two years. Dickinson never cracked, but by the mid-80s he was struggling. While he didn’t lose his voice, he feared he was losing his mind. And when he thinks back on that period, he launches into a long, and at times brutal, self-analysis.

“All through the eighties we were working so hard, like eight shows in ten days over the course of eight months,” he says with a shake of the head. “That’s not great if you’ve got a kind of high-performance voice. It can’t perform at that level with that amount of attrition. And then at the end of one year of that, you get to do it all over again. And this goes on for five years… You’re under constant stress every night. You’re suffering from a lack of sleep and self-induced shit, whether it’s chasing after women, whether it’s drugs, whether it’s alcohol. And every day you just get up and do it all again. You’re a bunch of lads together against the world. And nobody’s going to help you if you fall down, so you’re just going to crack on, crack on, crack on…

“You’re not part of normal society. PTSD, dislocation – that’s effectively what you’ve got. And depending on your personality type, you deal with it in different ways. Steve became a recluse. Adrian was drinking himself into an early grave. I was busy shagging everything that moved. And none of it was healthy.

“I remember something that Pete Townshend once said about groupies. ‘The moment you realise that you can click your fingers and manipulate people into having sex with you, that’s the moment you’re going down the slippery slope.’ Up until that moment, it’s innocent. You can’t believe women are throwing themselves at you. You think: ‘Well, this is nice!’ And it is. It’s fucking great!

“But there’s a dark side to this. Where do you stop? When does it become a prop, like alcohol or cocaine? When does this become your reality – when it’s not actually real?

“So that’s when I started doing extracurricular activities like fencing. I was thinking: I’ve got to do something to keep my brain clean. Because I was looking around at our contemporaries in the eighties…”

He carries on: “We toured with Mötley Crüe. Complete fucking casualties, much of it self-induced. And I was like: ‘Please tell me I’m not going to end up like that!’

Shape-throwing Janick Gers is the most extrovert of Maiden’s three guitarists.

"I can't imagine being in a band with somebody who was on heroin, God forbid. When I was in Samson you'd have a joint every now and again. Or you'd do some speed and go: 'Fuck me! That was horrible!' And you don't do it again. But as soon as I went into Maiden, it was just: straighten up, fly right, and don't blow this. So apart from the odd recreational dalliance here and there in the early days, this has never been a big druggie band. Instead it was our personal lives that went down the shitter.

"And I don't know whether Steve felt that way, because he doesn't do touchy-feely, he's not a great one for expressing feelings – except maybe allegorically in songs. With Steve you have to read between the lines quite deeply."

Dickinson says that at the end of the World Slavery tour, he reached a crossroads in his life.

"I genuinely thought I should just pack it all in completely," he says. "Not go solo. Not do anything. Just stop being part of music, because it's just not worth it. It's tanked any relationships I might have had, or wanted to keep.

"Adrian's still got the original wife. I'm on my third, and I don't want to have any more, thank you very much. I'm very happy with the one I've got right now. I'm super-happy, because she's brilliant for my mental health. I think I'm shocking for hers! But all of us in this band have been through that mill. And you wonder…"

He takes a long pause.

"Sitting here, now… You know what? I think people might find it surprising that I say, on balance, it's been worth it. Some people might go: 'How can you even consider it might not be worth it?' Well I do, actually, right? I do.

"Weighing the scales of your life, there's a lot of things I missed. My kids growing up. Yes, I saw them, but I didn't see them to grow up in the way that normal people see their kids grow up. And all the failed relationships, because your mind is skewed. You don't have a normal set of priorities."

After the World Slavery tour, when the band began to make the 1986 album *Somewhere In Time*, Dickinson was, as Steve Harris once said, "off with the fairies". What Dickinson bought to the table – acoustic folk-rock songs reminiscent of Jethro Tull – were dismissed out of hand by Harris. "There was none of me on that record," Dickinson says. "I was just AWOL mentally."

In hindsight, he thinks it "amazing" that he hung in there as the singer with Iron Maiden for another seven years. He describes his time outside of the band, working as a solo artist, as "liberating". Equally, when he rejoined the band, he felt revitalised and ready for a new challenge.

"When we got back together, Steve, being Steve, was suspicious. Eyeing me up. I just said: 'Come on, let's get on with it and do a great album!' And it was."

That album, *Brave New World*, was the band's best since *Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son*. It also marked the beginning of a second golden age for Iron Maiden, which has been remarkable not only in the scale of the band's success but also its longevity. Twenty-five years now. Half the band's lifetime. But they might not have made it this far after what Dickinson experienced a decade ago.

The band had just finished making the 2015 album *The Book Of Souls* when Dickinson was diagnosed with throat cancer. It was a long road to recovery, 10 months of treatment. "I had a heavy fucking dose of radiation," he says. "Thirty-three sessions."

He says now that he always believed he would pull through. "I felt strong in myself. I was optimistic."

From the moment of diagnosis, he went through the hypotheticals one by one.

"The first thing on my mind was: 'I've got three children, I want to see them ➢









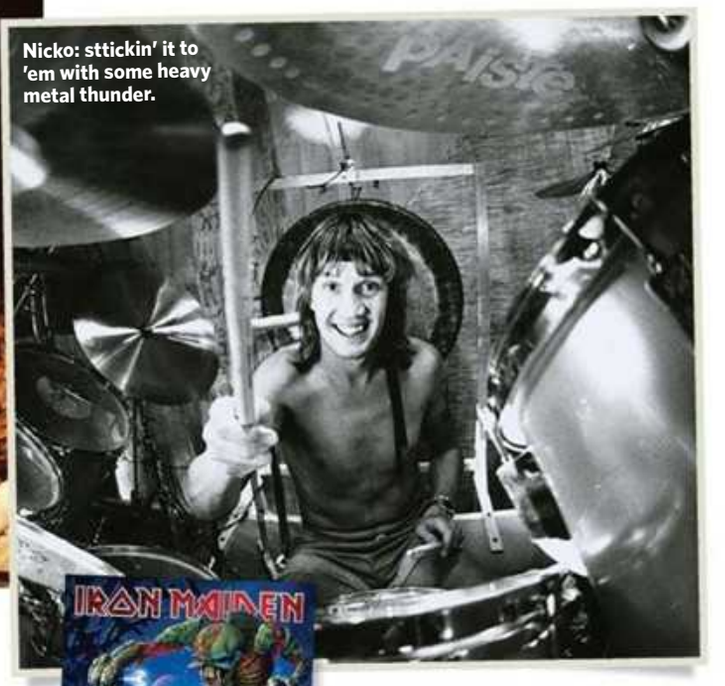
Janick Gers with Maiden at Wembley Arena, December 1990.



Still keeping the heavy metal flame burning after 50 years.

MAIN: DEAN KARR/PRESS; JANICK GERS: JIM STEELE/GETTY





Nicko: sttickin' it to 'em with some heavy metal thunder.

grow up, and so for that I need to be alive. And then, once we get that bit out of the way, let's see…

"It may sound sort of fatalistic, but my attitude was: if I can't sing properly, that would be it for me in Maiden. And I was thinking it wasn't right that Maiden should finish because of that. So I'd help them find a new singer.

"Early on, I made a series of 'what if?' decisions. What if I can't sing again? Okay, then I can't. What if I could do half of it? Well, then that would be discussion with the other guys: 'Do you still want to carry on with half a singer?' I absolutely went through all that."

After a pause, he smiles. "I got lucky," he says. "I got through it all, and although my cancer was in that general area, my vocal cords were not affected. So we didn't have to make that decision, because it all worked out."

A day after this conversation with Bruce Dickinson, and at the same restaurant table, Nicko McBrain gives his last interview to *Classic Rock* as the drummer with Iron Maiden.

Superficially, at least, it's the same old Nicko. The booming voice and unvarnished gor-blimey accent. The warm greeting and easy bonhomie. Except now, at 72, the self-described "grandad of the band" appears to have softened a little with age, and with the Christian faith he has embraced for the past 25 years.

Nothing he says on this day gives any clear indication that he has already made the decision on his future. But what is evident, when he talks about his performance levels behind the kit since he suffered a stroke in 2023, is a trace of wounded pride in a man whose powerhouse drumming has been at the heart of Iron Maiden for more than four decades.

When McBrain joined Iron Maiden in 1982, he was already well acquainted with the band. "I first met them in 1979," he says, "when I was working with a band called McKitty and we played at the same festival."

Two years later, on the *Killers* tour, McBrain was in the opening act, Trust, the politically charged French punk-metal band. "That was when I really bonded with the Maiden boys," he says. "But the thought of playing for Maiden one day? Back then it never crossed my mind."

During the *Killers* tour, he had struck up a friendship with Maiden drummer Clive Burr. "We were very close, me and him. Drummers are like that. I don't know whether we have that mentality of: 'I'm better than him.' At least we didn't."

But in late 1982, Burr was out of Maiden, and McBrain was in. On his first album with the band, *Piece Of Mind*, the opening track *Where Eagles Dare* began with a thunderous drum fusillade. "That," he says proudly, "was a great way to introduce myself." From there he would go on to make another 13 studio albums with the band.





***Do* look back: Nicko (below) at the end of his final show with the thrill ride called Iron Maiden.**

Near the end of this interview there is a brief pause when McBrain's son strolls into the hotel restaurant to say hello to his dad and give him a hug. A four-day stopover in New York is an opportunity for every member of the band to have time with their families, and McBrain will later allude to this in his farewell notice, stating: "I announce my decision to take a step back from the grind of the extensive touring lifestyle."

In his parting words to *Classic Rock*, he uses the present tense when he says: "It's an honour and a privilege to still be a part of it. The magic of this band's longevity is we still get on well, and we still have that passion for the music. I think that's the true essence of Maiden. And after all these years, I still love these guys. I'd take a bullet for them."

With his emotions rising, he turns to his faith. "I love Jesus and I believe in the Lord, and personally I think: 'How long is he going to give me?'"

But in the end he can't resist a joke. "I always thought it would be great to do a Tommy Cooper," he says, referring to the legendary fez-wearing comedian who died on stage – literally – during a live TV show in 1984.

"What a way to go!" he says, laughing. "But I'm not sure the boys would have wanted that."

Recently, Steve Harris laughed out loud at something that was written about him. He had been on tour with his other band British Lion, playing in small venues, the audiences numbering in the hundreds, not the tens of thousands that Iron Maiden perform to. On the day of a gig in what is statistically the coldest city in the UK, he read in a local paper:

SOOTY: MICK HUTSON/GETTY; ROSS HALFIN x2; BOTTOM: JOHN MCMURTRIE

“The magic of this band’s longevity is we still get on well, and we still have that passion for the music.”

Nicko McBrain



“Steve Harris could be on a beach in the Bahamas in his Speedos, but instead he’s freezing his nuts off in Aberdeen!”

“I thought it was hilarious,” Harris says. “But it did make me think: ‘Yeah, what the fuck am I doing?’”

Harris has lived in the Bahamas for many years, having first visited there in the 80s when Iron Maiden recorded *Piece Of Mind* at Compass Point Studios in the capital, Nassau. “It’s so beautiful there, I have to pinch myself sometimes,” he says. “But even though I live right on a beach, I can’t laze around in the sun for more than half an hour at a time. I just can’t. I’m not that sort of person. I need to be doing stuff. And playing music is what I love doing most.”

Which is why, at the age of 68, he has two bands instead of one. It’s why he has steered Iron Maiden through 50 years, and why he will continue to do so even without that old warhorse Nicko McBrain behind him.

“Obviously we can’t carry on for ever,” Harris says. “The show that we do is a very physical thing. How long can we keep going? I really don’t know. We were asked that question twenty years ago, and ever since.”

Dave Murray says that Maiden should, eventually, “bow out with dignity and grace”. Nicko McBrain has done so, and Steve Harris reckons he will know when it’s time. Smiling, he says: “You’d like to think your best mate would tell you, wouldn’t you? But I think you’d know in yourself if you can’t cut it any more. And I like to think that we’re still out there giving it large.”

Bruce Dickinson agrees. “Only recently this guy, a big fan, said to me: ‘It’s so great to see Maiden still doing it.’ I said: ‘Yeah, and we’re doing it for real!’ There’s no detuning. This guy said: ‘Lots of bands use backing tracks now…’ I said: ‘No! No, no, no, no, no!’ That’s the day I quit. Or the day we stop. If it’s not real, it’s not Maiden. The idea that you can turn it into the Disneyland Maiden, by using backing tracks, a few tricks…. No! Maiden has to be one hundred per cent real – and fucking fierce!”

The Run For Your Lives tour is a nostalgia trip. “A history lesson,” as Dickinson laughingly calls it. But both he and Steve Harris believe that the drive to create new music has been key to Iron Maiden’s longevity.

“It’s a fantastic back catalogue that we’ve got, but you don’t just rely on that,” Harris says. “We’ve done tours before where we’ve only played the old stuff, but we’ve always continued to make new albums. And even now, I’m still writing all the time. I’ve got so many ideas, it’s ridiculous, insane. I couldn’t finish off all the ideas I’ve had in three lifetimes.”

“God forbid we should make another record!” Dickinson says, laughing. “But we’re booked up through 2025, 2026… so let’s wait and see how we all feel about it.”

What Dickinson feels now is gratitude – and pride in what this band represents.

Nicko McBrain: by the time you read this, Maiden’s powerhouse drummer will have stepped down after a long and distinguished time with the band.

“I think Maiden is a power for good in the world,” he says. “It really is. You see that every night in the audience. And ironically, we’re now getting to enjoy it as well, whereas in the early days we were so caught up in it that it never occurred to us to go: ‘It’s great.’ Now, I appreciate how fantastic it is. So I’m constantly grateful at sixty-six to be able to still do it.

“And,” he says with a smile, “hopefully do it well.”

Iron Maiden’s Run For Your Lives tour reaches the UK on June 21. See p96 for dates, latest info at ironmaiden.com



SISTERS IN ARMS

Taking care of business in all aspects of their music and career, Rebecca and Megan Lovell, aka the fast-rising **Larkin Poe**, really are sisters doing it for themselves.

Words: **Polly Glass**



ROBBY KLEINPRESS

There are two dominant images of Larkin Poe, neither of which tell you the whole story. In one light they're the ballsy millennial blues rockers with a Grammy to their name, lap-steel shrieks in their records and T Bone Burnett, Elvis Costello and Mike Campbell in their corner. In another, they're the sweet, southern sister duo who play classic covers on YouTube (from Aerosmith to The Beatles, Pink Floyd to Pat Benatar), smiling into each other's eyes and harmonising as they've done since before they could read.

Now, through new album *Bloom*, we get a fuller picture of who Larkin Poe really are than ever before, evocative of the influences and life experiences that make them interesting. Riffy blues and southern rock on the one hand, hill country ballads on the other.

"We're having a bit of a renaissance with this album," singer/guitarist Rebecca says. "We're allowing, I think, more of that feminine beauty and melodic energy to come to the fore. And that felt really good. Because there has been this sense, sometimes, of going : 'Listen, clearly we're having success being blues-rocky and singing about, you know, kickin' ass and being badass and bulletproof and, like…"

"*Characters*," says lap-steel-player/singer Megan, finishing the sentence. She's the elder, more reserved of the pair, but with a quiet authority that her little sister patently respects.

"Exactly," Rebecca says, "this braggadocious energy that has existed for us."

Lovingly imbued with the sounds, places and people that formed them, *Bloom* is a rich tapestry of Americana, by turns jubilant and soul-searching. It's rock'n'roll by sisters who cut their teeth on bluegrass. The work of two bookish tomboys from rural Georgia (their record label, Tricki-Woo, takes its name from James Herriott's *All Creatures Great And Small* novels, which they read as children) who refined their sound by deconstructing their musical heroes. There's grit and softness, history and energy that has carried into their adult lives, all of it imbued with that strange, subliminal connection unique to siblings.

"We were fairly isolated children," Megan says. "We had each other and that was it. So we've been a package deal from the ground up. It has always been the two of us working on projects, going out and building forts, making roads."

> **"Wait, do we *want* to be a household name?'"**
>
> **Rebecca Lovell**

Larkin Poe are big proponents of the motto: 'learn by doing'. Whether it's sewing their own stage clothes, producing their own records or shooting YouTube videos from their sofa, they've become one of contemporary rock's biggest DIY successes. A cottage industry, in essence, albeit one that headlines enormous theatres and appears on *Jimmy Kimmel*.

Covering classic songs is a core part of all this, not just a trick for online hits. While co-writing and producing *Bloom* with Tyler Bryant (Rebecca's husband) at home in Nashville in early 2024, they listened to the likes of Blackberry Smoke, Sheryl Crow, The Black Crowes and Bonnie Raitt, sitting around the kitchen table, picking out riffs and other points of inspiration.

"Learning other people's songs has taught us a lot about what we sound like," Megan says, ➢



Larkin Poe – Rebecca (left) and Megan Lovell – at the annual Love Rocks NYC benefit concert in 2024.

"because over and over we had to take somebody else's song but make it sound like us. So it was a really good practice of 'how can we still be Larkin Poe over a variety of different genres?'"

"We can crawl inside just about any process and figure it from the inside out," Rebecca says. "That's why we started our own record label, that's why we started self-producing, why we both play guitars. We didn't want to have somebody up on stage playing for us. We're like, no, we're going to do it our damned selves."

When it comes to making records, this usually means nearly killing themselves by cramming the process between tours. For *Bloom*, though, they had some breathing space. Things would be different this time, they told themselves. They *would* take breaks. In the end they worked 26 days straight, leaving the home studio only to pick up their Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album for 2023's *Blood Harmony* record, which Bryant also co-produced. It's not that they're martyrs. They just enjoy this creative homebody life, comfortable with each other's input and not answerable to anyone else.

"We were having a really good time," Megan says laughing, "and we just didn't want to stop. [There was] a lot of frontman energy, but a surprising lack of ego. We all want the riffs to be very singable. We're thinking a lot about the live show when we're writing melodies – what is going to be really fun to sing with an audience."

You can hear that all over *Bloom*. *Bluephoria* is a warm, slide-powered singalong. Black Crowes-esque boot stomper *Easy Love Pt 1* evokes Rebecca and Tyler's union to infectious effect. *Nowhere Fast* is all groovy southern boogie with a wicked streak. And it's all shot through with the shared language of sisters, an ongoing, almost telepathic exchange that only the two of them understand.



Rebecca and Megan with their Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album, for *Blood Harmony*, at the Grammy Awards in 2024.

"We were fairly isolated children. We had each other and that was it."

Megan Lovell

"I am definitely the more verbose partner," Rebecca muses. "I'm the one that does the majority of the talking on stage, but it is always speaking in a royal 'we'. So often Megan and I will speak for each other. And interviewers don't understand that anything I say, it's been vetted by her. We are of a single mind by nature."

"Or she'll be able to read, like, if she's going to a place where I'm not comfortable or something, and she'll be able to divert," Megan adds. "There's a healthy amount of dysfunction in our relationship."

Increasingly they seem to own that healthy dysfunction, wearing it like a comfortable jacket rather than a weapon. Tender, mid-paced banger *Mockingbird* finds them showing compassion for their younger years ('*like a mockingbird, singing a thousand songs that don't belong to me, just to see who's listening*'), reflecting that search for self-acceptance we're all on to some degree.

"I think in having conversations, when we first started the writing process, we were like: 'Do we mean that?'" Rebecca muses. "'What if these are the characters of Larkin Poe that we've built?' Let's tell people the truth with this record."

So why not "tell the truth" until now? One reason could be to repel unwanted assumptions – specifically that soft tones and gentler sensibilities, in such a machismo-heavy sphere, could give the impression of sweet-natured 'southern belles' who need to be instructed, never mind that they've been in the music business most of their lives.

Bloom quietly counteracts such thinking (really through simple quality of songcraft), but it's rock'n'roller *Pearls* that explicitly faces the casual sexism experienced by just about every woman in the industry at one stage or another. '*I've been sweet,*' Rebecca sings, '*I've been shy, I've been dumb but never impolite giving you the knife to cut me down to size/Go on, give me your advice... fighting back a scream, listening too hard, got the sweetest little heart, gonna blow it all apart... I don't make demands, just shake my hand like you'd shake another man's.*'

"We kind of have baby faces," Megan concedes, "even though we're in our mid-thirties and we've been around the block several times. In a lot of ways we're very accepting of people's stories, or if people want to share their advice we accept it. There's a lot of 'teaching energy' that comes from…" She pauses, considering her words. "Specifically a lot of older, more established artists. And that can be a little annoying at times, although sometimes you just take whatever you want from it."

"I think so much of it is unconscious, too," Rebecca adds. "And we are at this unique point in time where people's awareness of gender identities, or the fact that you can't just talk to women in a certain way…"

"Like, the amount of conversations we've had with well-intentioned fans," Megan continues diplomatically, "like *really* well-intentioned older male fans, and how many people have told us: 'Oh, you don't get married, don't have kids', 'Don't do this, you should do this.' It's well intentioned, and it is unconscious. They're not understanding the impact that they might be having."

That fortitude is testament to their upbringing. Home-schooled on a farm in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains, the Lovells had the sort of childhood seldom found outside Huckleberry Finn novels. They built forts in the woods. They ran around in coveralls and grubby T-shirts. They didn't want to wash their hair. In place of watching TV they read stacks of books (they still do; Ian McEwan, Joan Didion and Stephen King

are among their favourites), played banjos and helped their parents – their father a pathologist, their mother an occupational therapist – build a large portion of their house.

"We were laying concrete, building rod-iron, doing trim work, laying sidewalk, laying stone, laying brick, figuring out electrical stuff…" Rebecca recalls. "We were tomboys. And I have to say, hats off to our mother that she didn't try to make us conform to any of her ideals."

It was their mother, a keen pianist and singer, who they sang with first. They were harmonising at her side as infants. From there they joined church choirs, and ingested their father's classic rock and heavy metal records. They studied classical instruments but ultimately formed acoustic bluegrass trio the Lovell Sisters, as teenagers, with their big sister Jessica.

It was a pivotal period. They learned to drive in a 15-seater van, bought with gig profits, and were schooled in the practical aspects of band life by Jessica, who was then 19, lead singer and the "grownup" in the group.

"She taught us everything we know," Rebecca says. "Because we were children at the time, Megan and I were just screwing around, working on our instruments and songwriting in the back of the van, being kids. And she definitely paved the way and taught us, like: 'Here's the spreadsheet, and this is how much we're making, this is how much it costs, and here's all the Map Quest directions.'"

After five years Jessica got engaged, went to college and left the band amicably. Megan and Rebecca, conversely, weren't done with music yet. They got back in the van and haven't left since.

"She [Jessica] loves music, but she hasn't played and or sang in quite some time," Megan says. "But we're working on her! Because when we do sing –and we don't sing together that often, but when we sing you would be amazed – it just comes right back. We really would like to do something."



Got each other's back.

ROBBY KLEINPRESS

Back in October 2023, Megan and Rebecca found themselves at a strange turning point. The *Blood Harmony* album had gone down extremely well. They were ripping through headline shows across Europe and the UK. Backstage at London's Roundhouse, they were getting ready to play to a full house. Everything was going to plan. Yet they were incredibly unhappy.

"We felt so much pressure about having sold that many tickets," Rebecca remembers. "The venue was so kind, they made such a big deal about it, and we were sitting back there drowning in imposter syndrome. I think moments like that caused Megan and I to have these conversations, like: 'God, we don't need to feel that way.'"

Accordingly, much of *Bloom* reads a little like mantras: steadying lessons to live by. Tedeschi Trucks-esque ballad *Little Bit*, in particular, stipulates guide posts for a 'less is more' approach (*'little dream, little plan, little rock'n'roll band'*). It's not an easy ask, in an age so driven by viral immediacy and public recognition. But they're working on it.

"In my personal life it's a work in progress," Megan admits. "Being an artist, you can compare parts of your art that shouldn't be quantified by numbers. You can compare your numbers on Spotify with somebody else's, or your crowd size to somebody else's. It can put you in a really weird frame of mind. I often find myself in that dangerous area of comparison. It's just really, really…" She laughs shyly. "It's not good."

> **"I believe in our abilities. We can do hard things."**
>
> **Rebecca Lovell**

"But it's the natural cheerleader in every human," Rebecca suggests, "to go: 'You're going to do it better this time!' or 'If you girls could just have a radio hit, then you'd be a household name!' And then me and Megan are like: 'Wait, do we *want* to be a household name?' We didn't get into music to be public figures or celebrities. We got into music to be musicians."

For now, their dreams reflect that mind-set. They fantasticise about a joint tour with their husbands (Rebecca's is the aforementioned Tyler Bryant, who leads his band the Shakedown, Megan's partner is Mike Seal, a revered guitar virtuoso on the Nashville circuit). They want to start families. They want to keep writing and performing. Less mass-market stardom, more small-batch artisanal empire, laced with that tenacious edge that's taken them this far.

"Larkin Poe is our baby," Rebecca concludes. "It's been our life's work. But we want to try to have kids and see how that works with being touring musicians. That's going to be a lot to figure out. But I believe in our abilities. We can do hard things."

Bloom is released on January 24 via Tricki-Woo Records.



GEORGE BODNAR ARCHIVE/ICONICPIX



"I WANTED A GROUP WITH GRIT, EXCITEMENT AND EDGE"

Between two spells with Deep Purple, singer **Ian Gillan** led two of his own bands, with great success. Here he looks back at Gillan, and how intra-band friction tore that group apart.

Words: **Dave Ling**

Following his first four years as the frontman with Deep Purple, Ian Gillan and his band Gillan emerged as one of the most popular and colourful rock groups of the late 70s and early 80s. With a high-energy sound that was turbocharged with melody, few will forget their run of appearances on *Top Of The Pops* for hit singles such as *No Laughing In Heaven, Mutually Assured Destruction* and their riotous revisions of Elvis Presley's *Trouble* and Stevie Wonder's *New Orleans*.

From an alarmingly non-conformist visual image to Ian's often quirky lyrics, which included rhyming 'ultrasonic' with 'gin and tonic', and their choice of subject matter (*No Laughing In Heaven* was a largely spoken-word paean to a sinner who cleans up his act to avoid going to hell, only to discover that up in the clouds partying is forbidden), Gillan – the band – rarely trod the conventional path.

They also grafted considerably harder than the average band, traversing the length and breadth of the country. Often revisiting Purple's *Smoke On The Water* at a time when that band's presence was sadly missed, it felt like Gillan – the man – was presenting us with a bucket-list moment that otherwise might never have been realised.

A new seven-disc anthology, *1978-1982*, brings together their studio albums along with B-sides, standalone 45s and out-takes, from the band's short but very sweet run. And although Ian Gillan admits that "things were not so good at the end", he says "the memories are definitely positive".

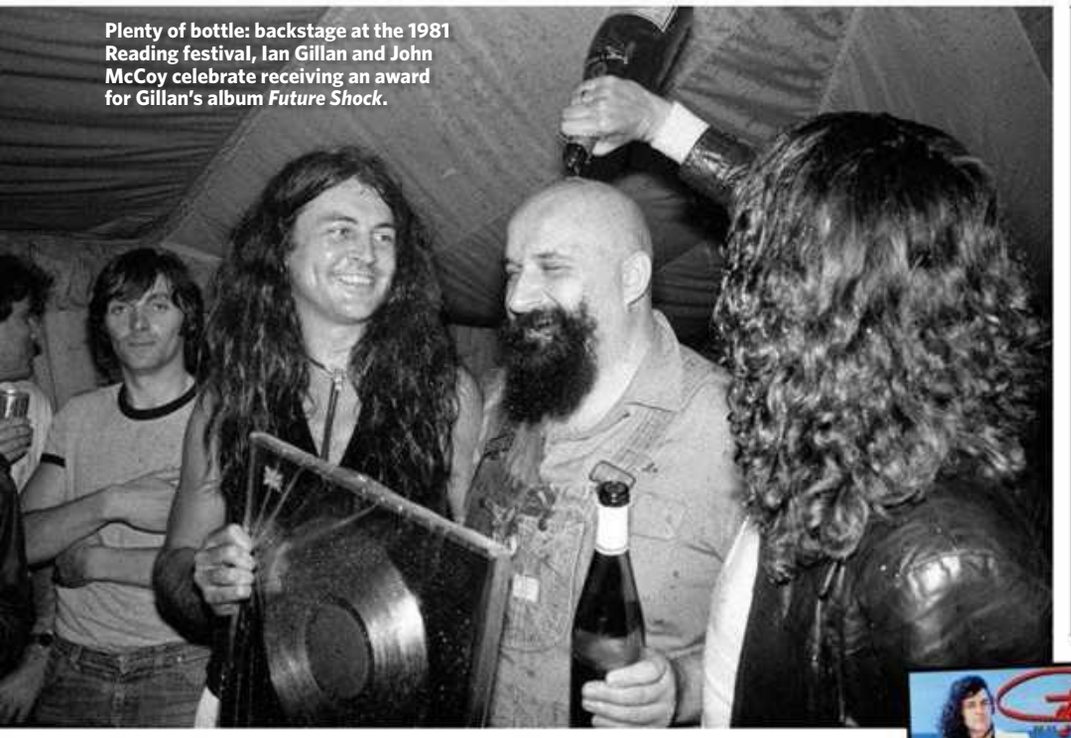
Gillan the band's forerunners the Ian Gillan Band had come to an end when keyboard player Colin Towns brought in a song called *Fighting Man* that was ridiculed by the rest of the group.

"The end of the Ian Gillan Band had been coming," reflects the singer. "Things weren't right, but it was so difficult because I was working with my heroes. I idolised Gus [bassist Johnny Gustafson, ex-The Merseybeats, Roxy Music] for being so talented. We needed to get back on track, but Ray Fenwick [guitar] and Mark Nauseef [drums] were happy with that jazzier type of rock, though I wanted to play rock'n'roll. *Fighting Man* was a catalyst. It was a simple song but it had a certain profundity, and when those two took the mickey out of it, that was it for me."

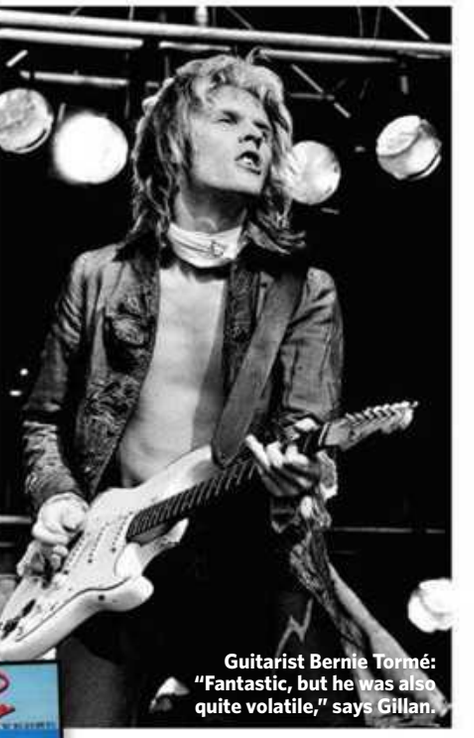
So you sacked yourself from your own band?

"Yeah. I just left."

In forming Gillan, Colin Towns had to be there. Colin was pivotal to it all. Rock'n'roll is good, but you also need a simple platform for virtuosity to shine. Colin kept that gravitas. He added ▷



Plenty of bottle: backstage at the 1981 Reading festival, Ian Gillan and John McCoy celebrate receiving an award for Gillan's album *Future Shock*.



Guitarist Bernie Tormé: "Fantastic, but he was also quite volatile," says Gillan.



texture and dynamics along with all of those musical elements.

Bernie Tormé was such a great guitarist.
Exactly. We had five guys that played equally well but Bernie was the one that stood out. I had spotted him some time earlier. He was amazing, and I marked him down for the future.

Shaven-headed man-mountain bassist John McCoy was almost a cartoonish character.
John was great. He made a big impact, just what we needed. He offset Bernie on the other side [of the stage].

McCoy projected quite a threatening presence.
He was ferocious looking, kind of manic. The kids either loved or were scared to death of him. John was a very, very good showman. His contribution to *Unchain Your Brain* [the opening track of the album *Glory Road*] was probably more important than all of the other guys because his bass line really set up that song. But you say 'cartoonish', and I suppose he was.

Here's a random memory: on the *Magic* tour in 1982, McCoy learned over the barrier to slap an astonished audience member in the front row who had dared to boo his bass solo.
I don't know about that incident. But I did learn that John was prone to violence, and I had to put a stop to that.

And last but certainly not least, drummer Mick Underwood (who died in July 2024).
Mick was an absolutely fantastic drummer [he had played in Episode Six with Gillan and Deep Purple bassist Roger Glover, preceded by a spell in The Outlaws with Ritchie Blackmore]. I first met Mick when I was still at school, at the bus stop at Henlys Roundabout [in West London]. He was carrying a briefcase with a pair of drum sticks sticking out. Along with Mitch Mitchell [of the Jimi Hendrix Experience] and a few others, Mick was another drummer taught by Jim Marshall. I make my own judgments, but when [Deep Purple drummer] Ian Paice says Mick is a great drummer, then it must be true.



Wanted man: Ian Gillan photo-call backstage at the 1981 Reading festival.

The band's first songs were released in Japan only, as the album *Gillan*, in 1978, and you've freely admitted that the following year, when it came to looking to get a record deal in the UK, you "couldn't get arrested".
That's correct. My agent and later manager Phil Banfield and I, along with Phil's partner Carl Leighton-Pope, sat around a desk with three telephones and called every record company listed in [entertainment industry bible] *Kemps Directory*, and nobody was interested. EMI [at the time still Deep Purple's label] replied: "Rock bands are history."' Stiff Records simply told us to fuck off.

How did that make you feel?
I believed that we had every reason to feel confident, as we had a thirty-eight-date UK tour sold out. However, the fashion was that rock'n'roll or hard rock was out of the window and punk and new wave was the thing.

I understood what was going on in the industry. I know how the business goes. The music business is full of shattered dreams. I looked at things with a longer-term view. I had spent five years chasing dreams with Episode Six. We made something like thirteen singles. Purple was a different type of band. We quickly found our niche and avoided chasing fashion. But I'm a realist, I knew it would be difficult.

In the end a small label called Acrobat took you on, only to go bust as the album *Mr Universe* reached number eleven.
They had no money. *Mr Universe* got into the charts, but the following week it disappeared because the factory [pressing plant] bill hadn't

TOP LEFT & BOTTOM: JUSTIN THOMAS/ICONICPIX; TOP RIGHT: GUS STEWART/GETTY

been paid. Had that not happened we'd have gone top three. It was frustrating, but [the incident] gave us just enough – just enough – to make the other labels think: "Okay, maybe we were wrong." Virgin came in for us and we had a fantastic relationship with them.

In music weekly *Sounds*, Geoff Barton awarded five stars out of five to *Mr Universe*, hailing it as "heavy rock for the 1980s".
Did he? I never read reviews. They don't interest me.

Around Christmas 1978, Ritchie Blackmore visited you with an invitation to join Rainbow. Although you declined, he still played with Gillan at the Marquee club in London. Were you tempted by his proposition?
No. The reason I had left Deep Purple was that they were moving into a kind of territory [later filled by Rainbow]. I didn't want that. I wanted a group with grit, excitement and edge. Also one that had balls. That's no reflection on Ritchie, who was a fantastic, amazing guitar player – in fact I said: "You can come and play in my band if you want" – but Ritchie has firm ideas about how things should be, and there were things that we disagreed on.

With the line-up stabilised (guitarist Steve Byrd and drummer Liam Genockey had contributed to *Mr Universe*) and a reliable support network behind the group, Gillan's major-label debut, 1980's *Glory Road,* needed to be a masterpiece. And it was.
Thank you. I still consider that record among the best I've ever made.

The free companion album *For Gillan Fans Only* was full of the band's irrepressible, zany humour, along with some great songs.
People seemed to like that. Every band, if they're enjoying themselves in the studio, will have a lot of out-takes. Chucking them away would be foolish, so why not bundle them together and make them available to the fans?

Let's not forget that Gillan had a lot of hits – six Top 40 singles in all.
That was lovely. As I said, Virgin never failed to put their weight behind us. The managing director said that Gillan saved the company. They were going through a bad spell at the time, though I had no idea of that until later on.

For us, the viewers, those spots on *Top Of The Pops* felt iconic. Your hair grew much longer, and with Bernie throwing his shapes the performances seemed charged with boozy bravado. You seemed to be thumbing your nose at the likes of Spandau Ballet and Culture Club, almost proud to represent the great rock community.
Not in slightest, no. I don't care what you call it – rock'n'roll, rock, hard rock – it doesn't matter. To me, rock'n'roll is not about a style, it's about an attitude. There have been a lot of definitions I can't relate to, let's not go there.



FIN COSTELLO/GETTY



"I used to go to the Camden Palace and drink with Boy George. I loved Culture Club."

But that's how I've felt all my life. Categories are irrelevant to me.

All the same, rock music used to get such short shrift on national television, so it really felt as though Gillan were flying the flag for rock.
Not to me. We never 'thumbed our nose', as you put it, to anyone. People often talk about the relationships between Sabbath, Zeppelin and Purple in the early days, and the magazines and media have always tried to pretend there was some sort of rivalry. That was rubbish. We would drink together. We were mates.

I used to go to the Camden Palace and drink with Boy George. I loved Culture Club. We had no competition with them. [With a quiet chuckle] I'm not quite so sure about Spandau Ballet.

For you personally, was that second phase of stardom a source of pride?
I don't pay much attention to that side of things. I love every minute of what I do; I'm like a kid in a toy shop. I remember my first [support] tour with Dusty Springfield, just as I recall playing the Marquee for the first time and my debut with Deep Purple. Working with Gus [John Gustafson, in the Ian Gillan Band] was special, as was meeting Cliff Bennett [of Cliff Bennett And The Rebel Rousers] for the first time. Those were my thrills. So no, I never appraised or analysed things in the sense that you mean.

Gillan achieved their fame the hard way. At the time of *Glory Road*, the band were playing around two hundred gigs per year. You said then: "Gillan are a non-stop touring band. There ➢



"Looks like we're doing something right." Gillan in '82: (l-r) John McCoy, Mick Underwood, Ian Gillan, Colin Towns, Bernie Tormé.

seems no reason to change that. I like this life." Was that completely truthful? Nobody likes being away from home for that long, surely?
[Slightly vexed] What do you mean? I still do it [with Deep Purple].

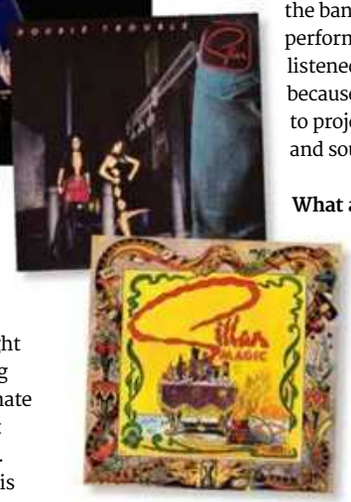
But not two hundred gigs a year.
We [Purple] started this last leg [of touring for the album *=1*] in May and I got home on Sunday [this interview took place in November]. So pick the bones out of that. I think it was less than two hundred shows back then, but let's not split hairs. The intensity of the touring hasn't diminished one little bit. Apart from the three years I left Purple, 1973 to 1976, I've been on the road since I was a kid. It's my life.

The next album, 1981's *Future Shock*, which featured the hits *No Laughing In Heaven* and a remake of R&B standard *New Orleans*, entered the UK chart at number two. Do you consider it as strong an album as *Glory Road*?
It depends what you're judging it on. It's like all of the records I've done, I can't say I like all of the songs but I've got to love them because they're my kids. Overall I really like that album, though I thought the drawing [of the band in 'space age' garb] on the cover was absolute crap. Having said that, the photos inside were amazing. I get a smile when I think of that record.

The old Gary U.S. Bonds hit *New Orleans* was possibly a strange choice for Gillan to cover.
I disagree. That song is part of my heritage, mate. I'd sing: '*Hey, hey, heh, yeah*' and the audience would *always* respond.

***Double Trouble* was a half-studio, half-live set that made the UK Top 10.**
I don't have much interest in my own live recordings, but I love that our performance at the Reading Festival [in 1981] was included in *Double Trouble*. Those versions of *No Laughing In Heaven* and *Mutually Assured Destruction* bring back such wonderful memories. The crowd that night was just awesome.

You appeared at Reading for four consecutive years (the Ian Gillan Band in 1978, Gillan in 1979, then as special guests in 1980, and headlining in '81). For us fans, Gillan really did feel like a band of the people. Were you proud of that?
It's an honour [that someone might think like that], but you're putting words in my mouth. I'm a passionate and intense person but I don't get very emotional about such things. The most excited that I would get is 'mildly content'.



Bernie Tormé suddenly leaving the band in 1981 felt like a real problem, but Janick Gers was brought in at quick notice.
It was a problem – for about five minutes. Virgin called us back from Germany to do *Top Of The Pops* for *No Laughing In Heaven*, but when I talked to the guys I got a really negative reaction. The label was paying for our flights to promote the new single, but Bernie insisted: "I'm not going, it's a day off." To which I replied: "If that's your attitude, Bernie, it's going to be more than a day off for you, mate. Because the van arrives at ten a.m. and anyone who isn't on it is no longer in the band." He wasn't there, so Janick came in.

You'd seen Janick playing with White Spirit on the *Glory Road* tour?
Yeah. I filed him away [in my mind] for future reference. Bernie was fantastic, don't get me wrong, but he was also quite volatile. Janick was much more placid. More of a steady guy. Janick walked on stage and [personality-wise] he changed entirely. I like people like that. It can be difficult when someone is still performing when they come off stage.

With respect to Janick, who of course went on to join Iron Maiden and remains there to this day, were Gillan as good without Bernie?
You can't compare the two styles. Just as Bernie did, Janick brought something [of his own] into the band. He was a stunning performer, he looked amazing. People listened to him. The band loved him because he fitted in well, in addition to projecting his own individual image and sound.

What are your views on *Magic*, the final Gillan album?
It [the line-up change] really worked. *Bluesy Blue Sea* is a really important song, one of my top five from the whole Gillan period. *Demon Driver* is another song I used to love doing live. I had a great time writing that album at a village hall down in Musberry [in Devon]. At that point the atmosphere in the band was okay.

All the same, it's been speculated that hints of things coming to an end were hidden in song titles such as *Caught In A Trap, Long Gone* and *Living A Lie*. Is there any truth at all in that, or is it complete bollocks?
[Laughing but sounding frustrated] It's complete bollocks. I still get that all the time. People will say: "Oh, this is a very personal song" even with a story of unrequited love that has been written ten thousand times before, albeit with a different twist. I can't tell you how many of my songs people have thought were about Ritchie. In fact there was only one.



Gillan backstage at the Monsters Of Rock festival at Castle Donington, August 1982: (l-r) John McCoy, Colin Towns, Janick Gers, Ian Gillan, Mick Underwood.

TOP: LIPOMUSTO/SHUTTERSTOCK. BOTTOM: GEORGE BODNAR ARCHIVE/ICONICPIX

Are you willing to name it?
No. But it was on *Who Do We Think You Are* [Deep Purple's 1973 album, Gillan's last in his first spell with Purple].

Gillan's final tour was a long, thirty-eight-date trip around the UK. It was announced before the first date that afterwards you would need to stop singing for nine months because of problems with your voice.
We had to cancel a few shows because I had laryngitis. One of my most memorable shows was at Portsmouth Guildhall. The fans sang the entire show for me – they got it. That's how special they were. Two separate consultants told me to have an operation or take six months off. I didn't believe that. After cancelling two or three more shows I got a bit of a croak back, and we managed to hobble through the rest of the tour.

After the Gillan band had finished, I was in Germany and was introduced to Professor Theobald from Munich University Hospital. He looked at my throat rather more holistically than the other two gentlemen had. He told me it was massively inflamed and infected. I had been singing around corners, basically. My tonsils were removed and I've never had a problem since. So that's the history. Anyone that doubts it can go take a hike.

Aware that the band was ending, what was the atmosphere like backstage as the tour headed towards its final date, at Wembley Arena?
I must give you some more background information. First of all, when I started Gillan I said: "Let's share everything." I didn't want to be a boss with backing musicians. It had to be a band. But that meant sharing not only the profits but also the expenses, and not everyone understood that. We were working in my studio [Kingsway], often for free. Basically, I was financing the band. Everything's on record, in the end it went to court. I was right and they were wrong. A lot of harm was caused. It was led by McCoy and followed by Underwood, neither of whom I will say a bad word against as far as their musical contributions go. But they upset the apple cart and the rest of the guys realised what was going on. There was violence, and they brought that into the studio. By that time I'd had enough.

The other accusation is that I wrapped up the band to join Deep Purple. I'll tell you exactly what happened there. When we played Hammersmith Odeon I went for a curry with Rodney Marsh [footballer who played for England in the early 70s, and has a huge love of rock music]. During our meal, Rodney had said: "Gillan are a great band, but not as good as Deep Purple." That got me thinking, especially as I was disillusioned with what was going on.

So the next day I called Jon Lord and told him I was winding up Gillan, and what did he think the mood would be [for a Purple reunion]. Jon said he would be interested and would ask around. When he called back, Jon said Ritchie was up for it but had commitments for the next year. So that's what happened. There was no premeditation, it was just that I could see a gap coming. After that last Gillan date at Wembley, I got a call from Tony Iommi and I went for a drink with him. That's how I ended up in Black Sabbath.



Ian Gillan at the 1981 Reading festival. "Wonderful memories," he says now. "The crowd that night was just awesome."

Had everything not imploded following that conversation with Rodney Marsh, was there a scenario in which Gillan could have continued?
No way. But it was Rodney's Deep Purple comment that triggered those thoughts. I literally had not considered the idea. However, I had already made up my mind that I had had enough of McCoy and company.

Following an exceptionally bitter split, John McCoy wrote a song called *Because You Lied* for his next group, McCoy, which they recorded with Colin Towns on keyboards. The song lamented your joining of Sabbath. Did you hear it, and what did you think of it?
No. But I read all about it, don't worry about that.

The words were particularly scathing: *'Can't wish you luck in your adventure, not while you're digging your gold mine/You played with live, and I'll just mention that the roof fell down on mine.'*

"I've been on the road since I was a kid. It's my life."

You can interpret that any way you like. I read jealousy. Jealousy and insufficiency.

If you happened to encounter John again, and he was willing, would you bury the hatchet and make peace with him?
[After a long pause] I don't think so. He caused so much trouble for my manager, Phil Banfield. [What McCoy did] was unforgiveable. It made me really angry. I've been with Phil since 1979, his professionalism is unchallenged, and McCoy was outrageously wrong.

In a more general sense, within the context of your life Gillan was a hugely important period.
Oh, massively so. It was a development period for me. I learned so much from so many people – including McCoy. It gave me so much in so many ways. Apart from any profit!

Gillan: 1978-1982 is released on February 14.

SONGS OF INNOCENCE, SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

Moving to a new studio, and with band members taking on new roles, with their new album **The Manic Street Preachers** continue to innovate and experiment.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Photo: **Alex Lake**



Eighteen miles, give or take. That's how far it is by road from Cardiff to Newport. Seven years ago, during the recording sessions for what would become their *Resistance Is Futile* album, the Manic Street Preachers ended their ongoing lease on Faster Studios in the heart of the capital (Nicky Wire: "grimy") and moved east and bought the Door To The River Studios in Newport. The surrounding area can best be described as bucolic – an adjective we use about a half dozen times over the next few hours as we stare out of the studio's picture window, through the thicket of ash trees and down to the transporter bridge in the distance. The scene, a Welsh archetype of lush countryside and heavy industry, is framed by a milky-white light that is part hazy sunshine and partly the promise of rain. Welcome to Wales.

The dauntingly large mixing desk, so big it had to come in through the picture window, dominates the room in this former family home-come-rehearsal space and studio. One of Richey Edwards's old stage jackets sits framed at the top of the stairs. Smaller ante-rooms, once spare



bedrooms one assumes, splinter off the main landing, one filled with shelves of drums, literally floor to ceiling, another with a row guitars that curves off around the corner and out of sight. "My few basses are shoved over there in the corner," sighs Nicky Wire.

James Dean Bradfield is making coffee, and explaining how the desk was brought over from the famed Rockfield Studios and transplanted to a cottage in Caerleon. "*A Farewell To Kings*," he says, listing some of the albums that were captured on that mixing desk in its former home. "A little bit of Queen, we believe, and definitely stuff like Graham Parker And The Rumour and Echo And The Bunnymen. We've just bought ten grand of parts for it which will see us through, because when stuff breaks in it it's nearly gone. Like an old Porsche."

It's a far cry from their former studio, and given the changing face of the last few Manics albums – the highly polished, harder edged record like *Resistance Is Futile* (made at Faster and this place), the lilting *The Ultra Vivid Lament*, and their latest, *Critical Thinking*, which outwardly and musically is as serene and calming as staring out at the ocean, before realising that below the surface hides a cruel undertow.

"Has our environment seeped into the music?" Bradfield ponders, repeating the question.

"Yeah, I think things are a bit gentler. But that coincides with the age too, doesn't it? And we were working on those Faster studio songs in 2016, so that's nearly ten years ago. I don't know, it may have affected it. I think this window and the view may have affected it, definitely. I do know that I like the isolation, that you can come in and record on your own, and I like that we're recording in a home. It's like we're in *Slow Horses* or a witness-relocation program."

He sets the coffee down.

"Toffee Crisp, or Wispa?"

"I think the last two in particular, the mixture of doing it here and at Rockfield, there is a calm in both those albums. I don't know, a calm euphoria at times."

That's what Nicky Wire says on the subject of upping sticks and leaving Faster studios for the ➢



Preaching to the converted in 2024: (l-r) James Dean Bradfield, Sean Moore and Nicky Wire.



Welsh countryside. The Manics' fifteenth album is notable for a few things, not least that it's bookended with tracks with Wire on lead vocals, and Bradfield has contributed three sets of – very good – lyrics. It might not be reinventing the wheel, but it shows a thirst for ongoing innovation and experimentation only enabled by anytime access to their own studio space. Their in-house engineer, Loz Williams, lives just down the hill, and Wire can drive here in 15 minutes. Which is what he did on the day of the Queen's funeral. "It wasn't a big 'fuck you'," he says, "I just wanted to avoid it."

We're on the first floor of the studio, which is dominated by a giant TV; the Manics watch a lot of sport in their down time. A glass table, on which sit a collage of the handwritten lyrics to *Faster*, the last remnant of the band's former home, sits between us.

"So, I came to the studio," Wire explains, "and all I had was Paul Cook's drum loop from *No Fun* as a guide – we never used it in the finished song – not much else, really, and wrote *One Man Militia*. I played the guitar, bass, used the drum loop, and did all the vocals. And then, obviously, the boys piled in and made it ten times better."

One Man Militia is a fitting end to an album, although initially it wasn't intended to be the closer. It's hard as nails, scathing and funny, dripping with Wire's ire. It's one of the earliest tenets of the Manics' sound: racked with impotent anger. It's bleakly funny, too, and ends with the band at full bore, crashing around the studio, Sean Moore hammering away at his kit, the band thrashing away at their instruments. It's a glorious crescendo.

"I love that ending, it's euphoric. I love what we all brought to it, you know, the first solo is me, you know, the surf one, and I told James to replay it, make it better, basically. He went: 'Oh no,' and he was taking the piss, but he went: 'You've got a really good vibrato! Which you can only say after forty years of knowing each other.

"But at first it was about this mantra, rather than trying to write a massive verse and a massive chorus. Just this mantra, which took off. That was a magic moment. It was just me and Loz here, and we resisted building on it too much: 'Let's do this fucking choir, let's put an orchestra here, less *Postcards From A Young Man*,' you know? We've defragged ourselves in terms of that, undoubtedly. *Hiding In Plain Sight* is the perfect example where we could have made that bigger and bigger."

"I was coming to this realisation: why do I put so much pressure on myself to find an answer in everything?"

James Dean Bradfield

Hiding, the second single from the album, with a Wire vocal and which is somehow saddened, angry and reflective, was written in just 15 minutes.

"I've still got that just-off-kilter rage, which I've controlled now but it's still there," says Wire. "When that goes, I'll probably just drop dead."

You enjoy the discomfort?

"Yeah, I need the discomfort. I need hard work and discomfort."

There's a real note of regret in the song where you sing about wanting to be in love with the man you used to be, in a decade when you felt free.

"I think most people would think that's probably the nineties I'm talking about, being in the band and everything being brilliant. Which is all true, but I think it's more a reference to the unadulterated beauty and innocence of the seventies. A lot of people think the seventies are some derelict fucking era, strikes, steelworks closing down. I'm not saying we were the richest people on earth or anything, but the one thing I'm more grateful for than anything else is growing up where I did with my mum and dad and my brother. It's just a fucking fluke of wonderment. I think there's no consequences when you're a child like that. Even when you're a big band later in life and things are going amazingly well, and having your own kids, there are so many amazing things, but there's always a consequence. Good and bad. But when you're at that point in my life, there were no consequences, it was just watching the telly, playing football, running everywhere. Days at the beach, endless skies, innocence."

"I still think about the single first, I'm a traditionalist like that," says Bradfield when asked about the first songs that gelled and began to feel like the beginning of the album, when they thought they might have something.

"So, when we got *Decline And Fall* down, I remember thinking: 'Okay, we've got a candidate for the first single,' that Skids vibe to it. Then when we put *People Ruin Paintings* together, I realised that we were coalescing around something a bit more thoughtful. So between those two was when I'd say I thought we had something to build on."

While Wire has taken to lead vocals with relative zeal ('zeal' is doing a lot of heavy lifting in that sentence), Bradfield, who showed flashes of lyrical brilliance on his solo album *The Great Western*, and then practically ignored the whole discipline for the best part of two decades, delivered three sets of lyrics for *Critical Thinking: Brushstrokes Of Reunion, Out Of Time Revival* and *(Was I) Being Baptised*, the latter prompting Wire to remark: "I wish I could have written that." It was inspired by a day spent in the company of

JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD: MATTHEW BAKER/GETTY; SEAN MOORE: SHIRLAINE FORREST/GETTY

legendary songwriter Allen Toussaint for the BBC programme *Songwriters' Circle* broadcast in 2011, recorded at London's Bush Hall, when Bradfield, Toussaint and John Grant performed and discussed their craft. It was peak introspective BBC 4 fare, but in a good way.

"We did the soundcheck, hung around the dressing room together, went up to his little room, went for a walk with him, spoke to him before the show, after the show. And inside I was like, fuck me, this is musical history, this is the man who wrote *Southern Nights* – and I fucking love *Southern Nights*. It makes me feel free, I don't know why. And he was talking about being young, breaking into the industry, talking without any bitterness, that was the thing. Whether he was talking about the impact of hurricane Katrina or tacit racism, or just what he thought of other people's versions of his songs, it was just gracefulness personified.

"Later I went searching for some old interviews with him. And he was talking about Katrina, and I remembered he had said something similar to me on that day, about when the floodwater was coming and he was thinking: 'Were we going to drown or were we being baptised.' And that duality of the way he was thinking, I love the idea of being able to twist something like that. If you have some kind of faith in something, which I think he did, not that I do, he could actually see the other side of the coin. When I left him I felt as if I'd learned something. I'd learned a new way of dealing with people. Just after half a day being with somebody, you know, that's a gift."

Less positive inspiration and more existential crises – which is very Manics – is the chiming *Out Of Time Revival*, which marries the ebullient – musically, at least – and the rueful beautifully. A song looking for meaning, just as the singer realises that seeking meaning in the everyday might be meaningless.

"We were coming out of lockdown when I started writing that," Bradfield recalls. "I'd go down to the beach and walk my dog, and each time I came back from the walk there'd be a new line for the song. And I was coming to this realisation as I stood on that beach: why do I put so much pressure on myself to find an answer in everything? I've watched too many films and I'm trying to find answers in the wrong places. There's too much symbolism. This beach hasn't got the answer, my dog hasn't got the answer, my brain hasn't got the answer, the horizon has not got the answer. I'm trying to find hope in all the wrong places.

"I'm trying to learn French, and I'm something of a Welsh speaker now, but that's some kind of ability. But that has no answer, they're just things in life. Not everything is a narrative, be pragmatic Welsh, there's no poetry in this. That's what the song is about. It's actually a bit of my dad; come on, fucking dig in. I look back at some of the stuff I learnt and believed and lived my life by, certain tropes, and you think: fuck me, did I waste my time?"

Do you think that's also partly because of where you are on the journey now, entering the third and final act?

"Yeah, because you realise it's maths, you know, and we have lost quite a lot of people from around the band over the years, and that continues to happen. We lost a good friend this year. You realise that you have emotions that come out of the experiences, you have hangovers that come out of these moments, the drunkenness of melancholy and sadness and tragedy, but when you come out the other side you actually realise that the race is the prize. You've just got to keep going."



Do you still enjoy the process, do you still enjoy making albums, not least this one?

"Yes. Because we have this place, the albums evolve more now. It's not like we switch on a light and the sessions start, and sometimes it's a full week, sometimes two days and sometimes you're alone or we're all here. Then we'll go to Rockfield and disappear from our families and the day to day to finish the process. We are talking about making an album where we just do something with a bit less thought, be a bit more organic, where it's just us and we go to one place and say we're doing it and get it done. That would be a different record to this one, but that's for another time. And you asked if I enjoyed making this album…"

He points at the ceiling conspiratorially.

"He didn't."

"It's not like I was in a fucking permanent crisis," says Wire, "I just found it really fucking hard work. That's probably a good thing. You know, sometimes you do get a lot out of that perceived hard work. But it's just because we weren't together that much, and again, it's worked in our favour. There's an energy on this album which has probably come through a bit of friction. But, you know, you spend a lot of time analysing how things work or don't work, especially with us, and sometimes it's the friction that works for you. I mean, bizarrely, *The Holy Bible* was an absolute dream to make. We were completely zoned in on the same page. You know, brutally rehearsed, there was no winging it at all. You can't with an album like *The Holy Bible*. It was just fucking great."

"We've done a lot of our growing up in public, made our mistakes too, but took our audience with us."

Nicky Wire

Was Richey okay then?

"Yeah, he was, to be honest. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy as the year went on. We've done a lot of our growing up in public, made our mistakes too, but took our audience with us. We've suffered at times with that. Which is understandable because our extremes are, you know, extreme. But it' s unbelievably rewarding now when you see the audience and you know they've got their kids with them, kids who are Manics fans too, coming full circle."

Critical Thinking is out now via Columbia. The Manic Street Preachers tour the UK in April and May. See p96 for dates.

SHIRLAINE FORREST/GETTY

THE VAGABONDS RETURN

With the release of **Thin Lizzy**'s new *Acoustic Sessions*, with Phil Lynott's 70s-era vocals, guitarist Eric Bell and producer Richard Whittaker tell us about grass-addled sessions, unfinished business and why this project definitely isn't AI.

Words: **Henry Yates**

If Eric Bell closes his eyes and lets the music carry him off, he finds himself right back at the beginning. The scene is London's Decca Studios, in the biting-cold winter of '71, and the veteran guitarist is a young man once more, flanked by his Thin Lizzy bandmates, singer/bassist Phil Lynott and drummer Brian Downey. None of the three Irishmen can believe their luck at being across the water, getting paid to do what they love. And it's about to get even better.

"If you'd stuck your head into the studio for Lizzy's first album sessions," Bell remembers, "you'd have seen three big joints. What happened was, Philip had a very small piece of hash, and he asked our producer – an American guy called Scott English: 'Is it okay if I roll this?' And Scott went over to this drawer and pulled out, like, a pillowcase of grass. He just said: 'Help yourself.' And that was it."

This distant memory, like so many others he'll share, has been triggered by Bell's recent work on *Acoustic Sessions*, a 10-track release billed as the first new Lizzy studio album in 42 years. This is the band's cult early material as you've never heard it before, mostly pared back to the wood and wire of Bell's acoustic guitar, Lynott's howled street poetry and Downey's supple, jazzy beats.

"Phil had two sides to him," says the 77-year-old. "One side was the rock image. 'I want to be rich and famous.' That was his classic line. And he did it. But he had a very different side which was more poetic and lent itself to acoustic stuff."

"Phil had a very different side, which was more poetic and lent itself to acoustic stuff."

Eric Bell

Mind you, that term 'new' regarding the album needs qualifying. Strictly speaking, only Bell's acoustic parts were laid down from scratch last May at Belfast's Start Together Studio. The late Lynott's vocals are alternative takes from the sessions for each of Lizzy's first three albums: the aforementioned self-titled debut, 1972's *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage* and 1973's *Vagabonds Of The Western World.* That this stitching of the space-time continuum sounds so coherent and vital is down to producer/mixer Richard Whittaker, perhaps best-known in these pages for his work with The Who and being the producer of the recent *Vagabonds Super Deluxe* box set.

In fact, Whittaker tells us, it was the latter project that led into this one. Having put out four stripped-down tracks last year as *The Acoustic Sessions* EP, Decca enquired if there was anything left in the vaults that might allow a full unplugged album. Not quite, Whittaker replied, but with some additional guitar from Bell the project might fly.

"Phil would track so many alternative versions of each vocal," Whittaker says. "He did not rest. I mean, he wrote *Johnny The Fox* from a hospital bed, for crying out loud! Some of those [vocal takes] worked really well, but they were missing the guitar solo or whatever. So it made absolute sense that Eric got involved, because he was the guitarist on those early records.

"He's got a wicked sense of humour too," Whittaker adds of his partnership with Bell.

>

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY





Thin Lizzy rehearsing in London in 1973: (l-r) Phil Lynott, Brian Downey, Eric Bell.

"I remember when we went to last year's Northern Ireland Music Prize Awards. All these kids had been on stage accepting their awards. Then Eric came up for the Lifetime Achievement Award. He walks up to the microphone and he says: 'Welcome to the Antiques Roadshow…'"

Bell's dry wit is in evidence today ("When Decca called me up about working on the project, I just said: 'Bye'," he deadpans), but his respect for this material and Lizzy's legacy is palpable. "I did wonder: 'Can I do this?'" he admits. "The first thing I had to do was forget everything I played on the electric guitar, get rid of all those memories, because the original solo I did fifty years ago is still playing in my head. The only way I could approach this was making it up as I went along."

The project's north star, he adds, was a reinvention by another great electric warrior. "*Acoustic Sessions* actually reminds me of when Clapton did *Unplugged*. That was a strange thing to do, because he was obviously a superb electric player. Then he comes on stage, sitting down with an acoustic guitar. I think it woke up a lot of people, they weren't ready for it. But I think he started a new trend by doing that."

Some of these acoustic Lizzy tracks take a beat to identify themselves ("*Eire* is twice as long as the original," says Whittaker, "with Phil's ad libs in the background and that huge Ry Cooder-esque slide guitar"). Most notable is the absence of Bell's famous 'spaghetti western' intro to early hit *Whiskey In The Jar*. "What can you say?" he shrugs, a little ambivalent. "They have their reasons, I suppose. They let me keep half of my guitar solo."

Remembering Pt. 2 is arguably more thrilling than the familiar take from 1971's *New Day* EP, Bell's fingers flying across the frets. "There's that really fast acoustic solo, and he double-tracks it perfectly," says Whittaker. "Technically it's very complicated. On acoustic there's nowhere to hide. It's got to be perfect or you're in trouble."

"There's no AI anywhere near this project. I wouldn't allow it."

Richard Whittaker (producer)

The subject of 'real' musicianship naturally segues to a slightly thornier subject: the (false) rumour that AI was used on *Acoustic Sessions*. But Whittaker states bluntly: "There's no AI anywhere near this project. I wouldn't allow it. Eric wouldn't allow it. Decca wouldn't allow it. The whole Thin Lizzy establishment – there's no way. I don't think AI is very good, to be honest. It doesn't have any soul.

"Some people are saying this release is cashing in on the band's legacy. It's certainly not. From the get-go it's been a very authentic album and respectful to the original."

Whittaker stresses that for the fans it's an unprecedented chance to hear another side of Lizzy. "It takes it somewhere else. It emphasises a different angle of the band completely. You think of Thin Lizzy and you're into the big duelling guitars, *The Boys Are Back In Town, Jailbreak*, all that stuff. But people don't think of the earlier tracks. So I think it will enthuse a lot of people to go back and check out the first two or three albums. Then they can decide which version they prefer."

And what's in it for Bell? We suggest to him that one of the draws of this project might be his unfinished business with the band. Notoriously, his original Lizzy tenure ended when he lurched off stage in Belfast on New Year's Eve 1973, "out to lunch completely", he says, on drink and drugs. "My private life was pretty messed up. It got to the point where I just had to get out."

He pauses to consider this full-circle moment. "It's more of a surprise than anything to record under the Lizzy name again."

Did *Acoustic Sessions* give him a sense of closure?

"Yeah, in a funny way, it did."



No fire without a smoke. Thin Lizzy in February 1973.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY x2

Acoustic Sessions is out now via BMG.

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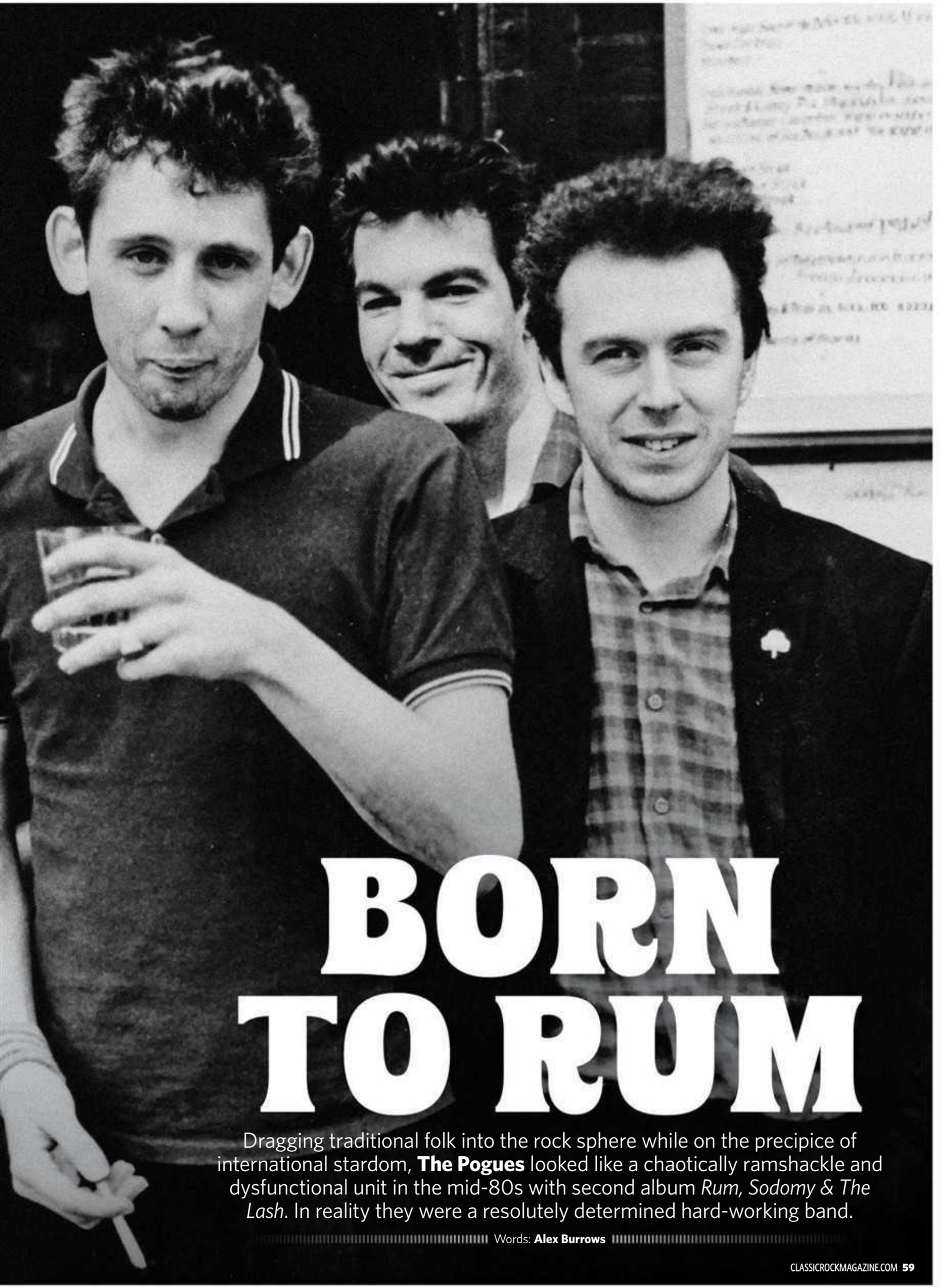
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The Pogues pop out for a bevvy during recording in 1985: (l-r) James Fearnley, Spider Stacy (album producer Elvis Costello lurking in the background), Cait O'Riordan, Shane MacGowan, Andrew Ranken, Jem Finer.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



BORN TO RUM

Dragging traditional folk into the rock sphere while on the precipice of international stardom, **The Pogues** looked like a chaotically ramshackle and dysfunctional unit in the mid-80s with second album *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash*. In reality they were a resolutely determined hard-working band.

Words: **Alex Burrows**



Cait, Shane, Jem and Andrew in their natural habitat.

Banjo player, folk music aficionado and actor/comedian Billy Connolly once described The Dubliners as "folk music's Rolling Stones". If that's the case, then The Pogues were its Sex Pistols: controversial, outspoken, unapologetic, but ultimately revered and respected for breaking the mould, and evolving the Celtic folk sound. Released towards the end of summer 40 years ago, The Pogues' classic second album, *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash*, was a remarkable progression from the previous year's debut *Red Roses For Me* – in terms of lead vocalist Shane MacGowan's songwriting as well as the band's rapidly accelerating popularity and notoriety.

Formed in London's King's Cross in 1982, The Pogues were originally named Pogue Mahone – an Anglicisation of the Irish phrase 'póg mo thóin', meaning 'kiss my arse'. (Shane's previous band, punk rock upstarts The Nipple Erectors, similarly abbreviated their name to the slightly less puerile The Nips).

With their punk background, their singer's insatiable thirst and the exuberance of their early material, it's easy to assume that life in The Pogues followed a clichéd rock'n'roll template of wild living and non-stop partying. But the famously raucous party atmosphere of the band's live shows belied the dedication of the self-taught musicians.

"I wouldn't say it was that chaotic," says tin whistle player and vocalist Spider Stacy. "We were following a steady trajectory; we were getting more and more popular. Shane's songwriting was just expanding."

"There certainly was a fair amount of hard drinking," says drummer Andrew Ranken. "But we were also working hard. There was a degree of professionalism and discipline, if somewhat unconventional and hard to recognise at times. We liked to get things done."

Rocketing out of the vinyl, the three-minute blast of *The Sick Bed of Cúchulainn* is a perfect opener for *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash*: energetic but shot through with darkness and death while retaining an indefatigable determination. Shane reimagines Irish folklore warrior Cú Chulainn on his deathbed with operatic tenors John McCormack and Richard Tauber singing by his side. The song also name-checks Irish Republican Frank Ryan who fought in both the Irish and Spanish Civil Wars. Indicative of MacGowan's prodigious literacy and historical knowledge that informed his songwriting, it follows a similar – yet amped-up – narrative to traditional folk standard and Dubliners favourite *Finnegan's Wake*; the protagonist is thought to be dead but revives to carry on drinking and carousing.

"It's about survival. And against massive odds."

James Fearnley

"There's a doughtiness there," says accordionist James Fearnley, on how the opening track epitomises the album's overall theme. "He's just going to keep going. There's a determination; despite the circumstances, we're all going to live".

The album title was suggested by drummer Andrew Ranken from an alleged quote by Winston Churchill about the British navy: "Don't talk to me about naval tradition. It's nothing but rum, sodomy and the lash."



"It certainly wasn't meant as a description of life in the band," says Andrew. "I think I might have come across it through reading George Melly's autobiography *Rum, Bum And Concertina*. Certainly not from reading anything by Churchill, which I'd run a mile from. I don't think I was terribly serious about it, I just threw it at the wall and it seemed to stick."

The album's morbid mood is reflected by its sleeve. Suggested by Jem's wife Marcia, it features the band members superimposed onto characters on *The Raft Of The Medusa*, a bleak 18th-century painting by Theodore Géricault that depicts dying and incapacitated shipwreck survivors floundering in turbulent seas, desperately clinging to the remains of a boat in anguish and despair, searching for a route to survival. It's the ideal image to express the dark and haunted songs: the anti-war Wilfred Owen-influenced *A Pair Of Brown Eyes* and cover of *And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda*; the exhilarating but lachrymose *Sally MacLennane*; the plight of the Irish labourer in *Navigator*; the distressing ballad *The Old Main Drag*; the anti-imperialist satire of *Billy's Bones* – and even the fate of an American Robin Hood-style folk hero.

Spider's gravelly tones take lead vocals on that cover of bluegrass standard Jesse *James* – his version inspired by Ry Cooder's recording from the soundtrack of 1980 western *The Long Riders*. Despite its Americana roots, the song is a natural fit with the rest of the album: poignant and sombre despite its upbeat celebratory nature. Its inclusion emphasises the similarities between Americana and Irish folk, a recurring Pogues subject explored further in the following album – their 1988 commercial peak *If I Should Fall From Grace With God* – with its themes exploring the Irish diaspora's emigration to escape homeland famine and poverty at the turn of the previous century.

That influence of evergreen Americana folk rock would also inspire *Rum* producer Elvis Costello. Already an accomplished singer-songwriter and producer by the mid-80s, Costello later described his task at the helm of *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash* as to capture The Pogues "in their dilapidated glory before some more professional producer fucked them up".

"We were big fans of The Specials and their album that Elvis produced," says Andrew. "We wanted that really open, bleak kind of feel."

Impressed by Costello's dedicated professionalism and the end result – especially in comparison to the Rizla-thin production of their debut – the band remember *Rum*'s studio sessions fondly. Mostly fondly.

"A spark went off between me and him," says James. "Being a busybody, I wanted to play everything for the overdubs. There was a certain amount of competition between myself and Elvis because I was trying to think of things before he did. If he had an idea for doing a particular overdub, I got shirty with him because he'd just pick up a guitar and go into the studio and do it. I said: 'We're the band, you're the producer.' So



On board HMS Belfast in the Thames for the press launch party of *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash*.

Elvis called a meeting and said: 'If anybody's got any ideas, just speak up and do whatever needs to be recorded.' And Spider said: 'Oh, James, what have you done now?!'"

So was Elvis an authoritarian producer?

"He had a whip!" jokes banjoist Jem Finer. "He had the lash!"

"We had the sodomy!" Spider interjects jokingly.

"It was really quite sordid…" Jem says, laughing. "No, he wasn't an authoritarian. He was disciplined and very encouraging.

"He was really very good at his job," says James. "It sounds brilliant and stands up to time. He really did well with Shane's voice."

"I think we had a big influence on him too," says Jem, "because he then went and made an acoustic album [Costello's 1986 Americana folk and blues album *King Of America*]. We fobbed him off with our bass player as well," Jem deadpans on Cait O'Riordan's departure. She and Costello became romantically involved after he saw The Pogues live just prior to the album sessions.

Evidently not invited to the band's 40th-anniversary tour of *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash* in 2025 – "Don't go there," says Spider – Cait O'Riordan didn't respond to requests to take part in this feature. She was brought into The Pogues as bassist by Shane in 1982 when she was just 17. She was later described by him during the *Rum* era as "a very strong Irish woman and she could be very aggressive," as he told author Richard Balls for his exhaustive in-depth biography of Shane, *A Furious Devotion*. "She was really into her rights as a woman and wasn't into manipulation," said Shane.

So do frictions remain between Cait the rest of the band?

"I don't have a problem with her," Jem says diplomatically. "I don't know about other people… When I've come across her she's been fine. But she left the band in 1986."

Now a DJ with SiriusXM radio, Cait revisited her beautiful soaring vocal on *Rum*'s striking cover of *I'm A Man You Don't Meet Every Day* for Shane's funeral in 2023.

Equally arresting, Shane's composition *A Pair Of Brown Eyes* was chosen as the album's lead-off single. Demonstrating that The Pogues were much more than a one-trick pony following the debut's furiously paced songs of drinking 'n' fighting, the sorrowful ballad marked a new direction. In the style of a classic folk song, it takes the form of a moving tale recollected by its protagonist. In this case, a war veteran recounts the grisly details of his life with only the memory of his lost lover's eyes to keep him alive. It quickly became a favourite of both fans and the band themselves.

"It's a great song, and lovely to play live," says Andrew. "It has such a strong melody and that massive swing."

Their first single to chart, *A Pair Of Brown Eyes* firmly established Shane's talent for songwriting and lyrical storytelling. While he composed all the original tracks on *Rum*, the album was also the beginning of his co-writing partnership with Jem. Together they came up with ghostly instrumental, *The Wildcats Of Kilkenny*, featuring blood-curdling screams and sinister metallic strings imitating razor-sharp swiping claws.

"Before the band even existed, Shane would teach me songs and I was sort of playing along," says Jem. "I'd inadvertently make up instrumental bits. But I didn't actually realise I was writing music, because I was pretty new to playing," continues the self-effacing and modest musician. "But they would find their way into things like the intro to *Boys From The County Hell* and the instrumental section of *Dark Streets Of London* [both from debut *Red Roses For Me*]. So that's how *The Wildcats Of Kilkenny* came along. Then I would start writing songs but thinking that no way my lyrics would be the lyrics; they were there for Shane to change. So we'd get together and I'd play him bits that I'd written – bits of tune or embryonic songs – then he'd play me stuff and sometimes we'd go: 'That would really work with this', or he'd take something and work on it. We didn't stay together writing for days on end until we got something, we'd meet up and exchange ideas and make cassettes."



Cait in the studio with producer and partner Elvis Costello shortly before she left the band.

While Jem began his songwriting with Pogues instrumentals, later in the band's career, he'd go on to co-write Pogues classics with Shane – *Bottle Of Smoke, Fairytale Of New York* and *Sunny Side Of The Street* – and his sole compositions the ➢

MAIN: STEVE PYKE/GETTY; INSET: ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/GETTY



Place your bets: The Pogues in 1984, *Red Roses For Me* era.



"There certainly was a fair amount of hard drinking – but we were also working hard."

Andrew Ranken

glorious *Misty Morning, Albert Bridge* and the Eastern-tinged *The Wake Of The Medusa*. As Jem's songwriting matured and evolved, Shane said he'd no longer rewrite lyrics. "I didn't think that was always the best idea," says Jem. For *Sunny Side Of The Street*, on *Hell's Ditch*, the band's final album with Shane, Jem purposefully stopped writing so many words; he simply wrote just the song title in order to galvanise the lyricist.

So did Shane gradually lose interest in songwriting throughout the band's career?

"I think he sporadically lost interest before we even started," says Jem. "He was often a difficult person to motivate. It would take weeks to even do the simplest thing. There was endless procrastination. But then, great focus."

Conjecture and speculation persistently followed Shane's alleged history as a rent boy in London during the 70s. It was often rumoured that the lyrics of *Rum*'s most affecting track, *The Old Main Drag*, a bleak and tragic tale of a harassed male prostitute in the dark underbelly of London, were at least semi-autobiographical: *'In the dark of an alley you'd work for a fiver/For a swift one off the wrist down on the old main drag.'* With its mournful uilleann pipes and Jem's measured banjo picking, *The Old Main Drag* is a melancholy tale of woe before its dramatically abrupt vocal ending suggesting death.

"There was an item in the news about some kid being found in a subway," says James, "who came down from Wigan, because he had his 'dancing bag'. [Referenced in the lyrics, '*my ole dancing bag*' was how Northern soul fans referred to their kit of non-work clothes kept for strutting their stuff at renowned nightclub Wigan Casino]. It's about survival," James says of the song's theme. "And against massive odds. It's hard out there, and that song's about how hard it is."

It wasn't until the release of Julien Temple's 2020 documentary film *Crock Of Gold: A Few Rounds With Shane MacGowan* that Shane finally admitted to his past. "Shane used to do it," says Shane's wife Victoria Clarke, when Johnny Depp raises the subject of rent boys. "But only hand jobs," Shane responds. "It was a job in hand," he says, snickering into his drink.

The release of *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash* was celebrated with a launch party aboard HMS Belfast moored in the River Thames. "We played in nautical fancy dress," says Andrew. "A great deal of rum was served by some charming and very camp sailors, and a journalist ended up in the drink – with the drink also in him, no doubt." The story goes that a sub-editor from music weekly *Melody Maker* ended up overboard. Equally bizarrely, Hanoi Rocks guitarist René Berg allegedly went in to rescue him.

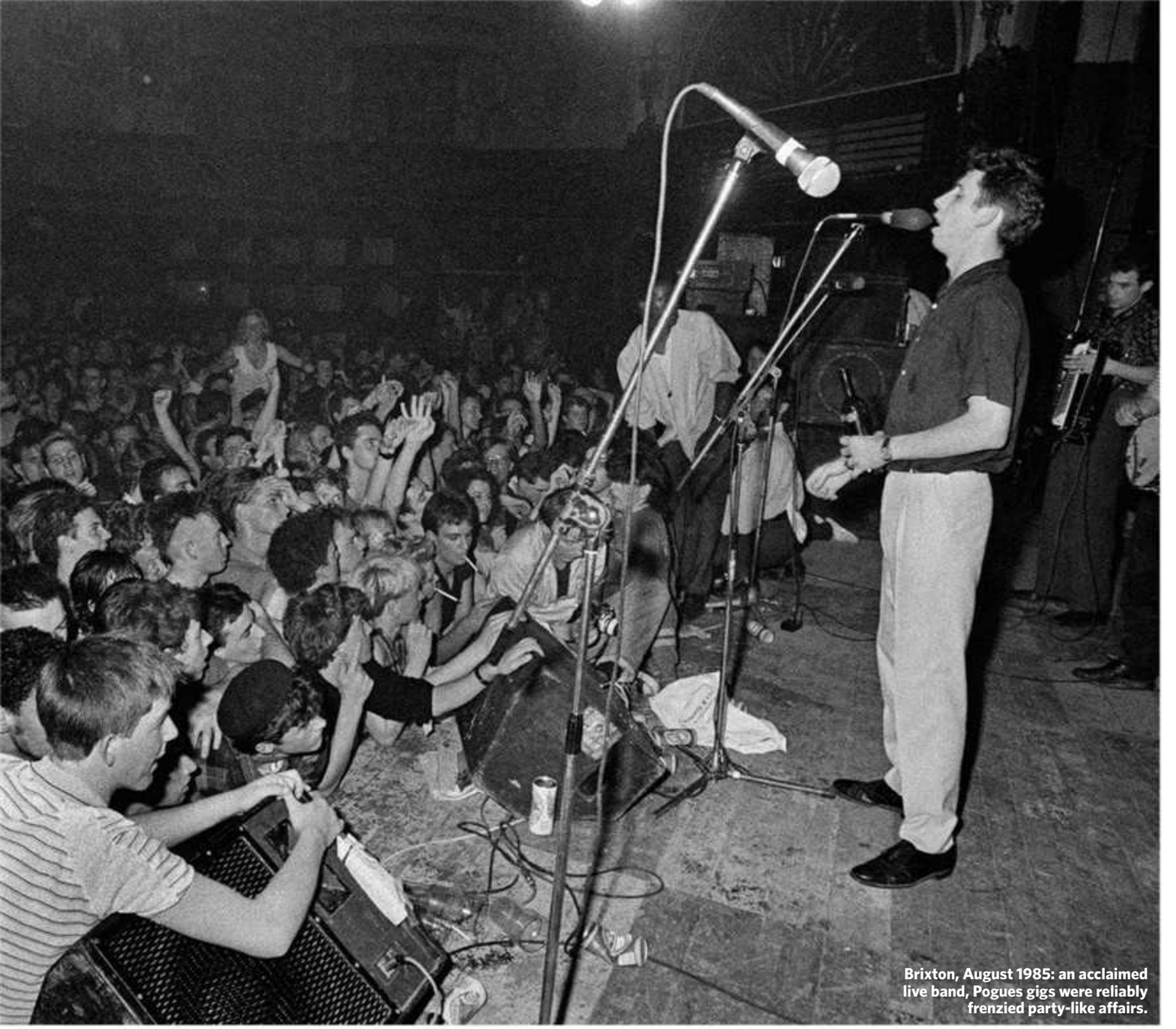
But even as the album was released, the band had already moved on and were back in the studio, again with Elvis Costello producing, working on a follow-up. The four-track EP *Poguetry In Motion* was released just six months after *Rum*, with three sole Shane compositions and another instrumental by Jem, *Planxty Noel Hill*. Shane's *Body of An American* would point the way forward to the Irish-American themes of *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*, and the EP sessions also included an early version of a new Shane and Jem joint creation – a certain Christmas song titled *Fairytale Of New York*. The demo had its duet performed by Shane and Cait, with Costello on piano, but the song was of course revisited for the eventual version on *Grace*. With Cait having departed after the EP's release, on what became The Pogues most famous song her vocal part was done by Kirsty MacColl, wife of *Grace* producer Steve Lillywhite and daughter of Ewan MacColl who wrote *Dirty Old Town* (the folk classic covered on *Rum)*. Cait was replaced on bass by Pogues road manager and aide Darryl Hunt.

But the real treasure of the *Poguetry In Motion* EP – included as bonus tracks with *Rum, Sodomy & Lash* since the album's 2004 reissue – is *A Rainy Night In Soho*, perhaps Shane's masterpiece, a timeless and touching love ballad. It was also played at Shane's funeral in a heartbreaking performance by his friend Nick Cave.

During the EP sessions, Costello and MacGowan argued over whether the final version of *A Rainy Night In Soho*'s instrumental break should be a muted flugelhorn, or a cor anglais (an alto oboe). They eventually compromised on the flugelhorn (performed by musician Dick Cuthell, best-known for his horn-section work in The Specials) for the UK release and cor anglais for the US version. "It sounded a bit too oily, if you know what I mean," James says of the latter.

The release of *Poguetry In Motion* – their first UK Top 40 hit – coincided with the band's first tour of the USA, and the start of a long love affair with America that would partly inspire *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*. The band spent their time on the road listening to the new Tom Waits album

PAUL RIDER / CAMERA PRESS



Brixton, August 1985: an acclaimed live band, Pogues gigs were reliably frenzied party-like affairs.

PAUL SLATTERY / CAMERA PRESS

Rain Dogs and watching the Sergio Leone 1984 gangster film *Once Upon A Time In America*.

The EP saw the band's line-up permanently expanded with the addition of guitarist Philip Chevron, who previously played in 70s punk band The Radiators From Space, and Terry Woods, ex-Steeleye Span, on cittern. Chevron had already played with the band for some live dates prior to the recording of *Rum*, when Jem took a leave of absence for family commitments when his wife Marcia was expecting their second daughter, Kitty. "Philip took over on banjo during that period," says Jem. "And then he kinda wouldn't leave! He became the guitar player. Shane decided he didn't want to play guitar any more – or Philip decided he did."

Chevron (who passed away from cancer in 2013) officially joined in between *Rum* and the *Poguetry In Motion* EP, but was still included in the album artwork. "He still somehow got his picture on the sleeve," Jem says of the cigarette card-style photos of the band dressed up in period naval garb for the album artwork, "but he didn't play on it. He was quite an operator… he was on the album, but he wasn't."

Shane was eventually sacked by the band in 1991, following the fifth Pogues album, 1990's *Hell's Ditch*, for increasing unreliability wrought by his alcoholism and drug use. *Hell's Ditch* was produced by ex-Clash frontman Joe Strummer, who would replace Shane for ensuing live dates, but Spider took over on lead vocals for their final two albums: 1993's *Waiting For Herb* and 1996's *Pogue Mahone*. Meanwhile, their former frontman would record two albums as Shane MacGowan & The Popes – 1994's *The Snake* and 1997's *The Crock Of Gold*. Shane reunited with The Pogues for occasional live dates between 2001 and 2014, but despite the occasional guest appearance on song covers, he released no further material or albums before he passed away in 2023.

"Shane was often a difficult person to motivate. There was endless procrastination. But then, great focus."

Jem Finer

The Pogues would have a significant influence on the 90s Celtic punk movement – bands like Dropkick Murphys, Flogging Molly, the Real McKenzies et al. But much deeper, in the same way that they pushed the envelope of Irish folk in the 80s with *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash* the last few years have seen a true renaissance of the music, with a fertile upsurge of acclaimed bands and artists. Influenced by The Pogues to a greater or lesser degree – even if just by having the door opened – Lisa O'Neill, Lankum, John Francis Flynn, Ye Vagabonds, Junior Brother, CMAT and the Mary Wallopers are taking the genre in an entirely new progressive and alternative folk direction, while respecting its rich history.

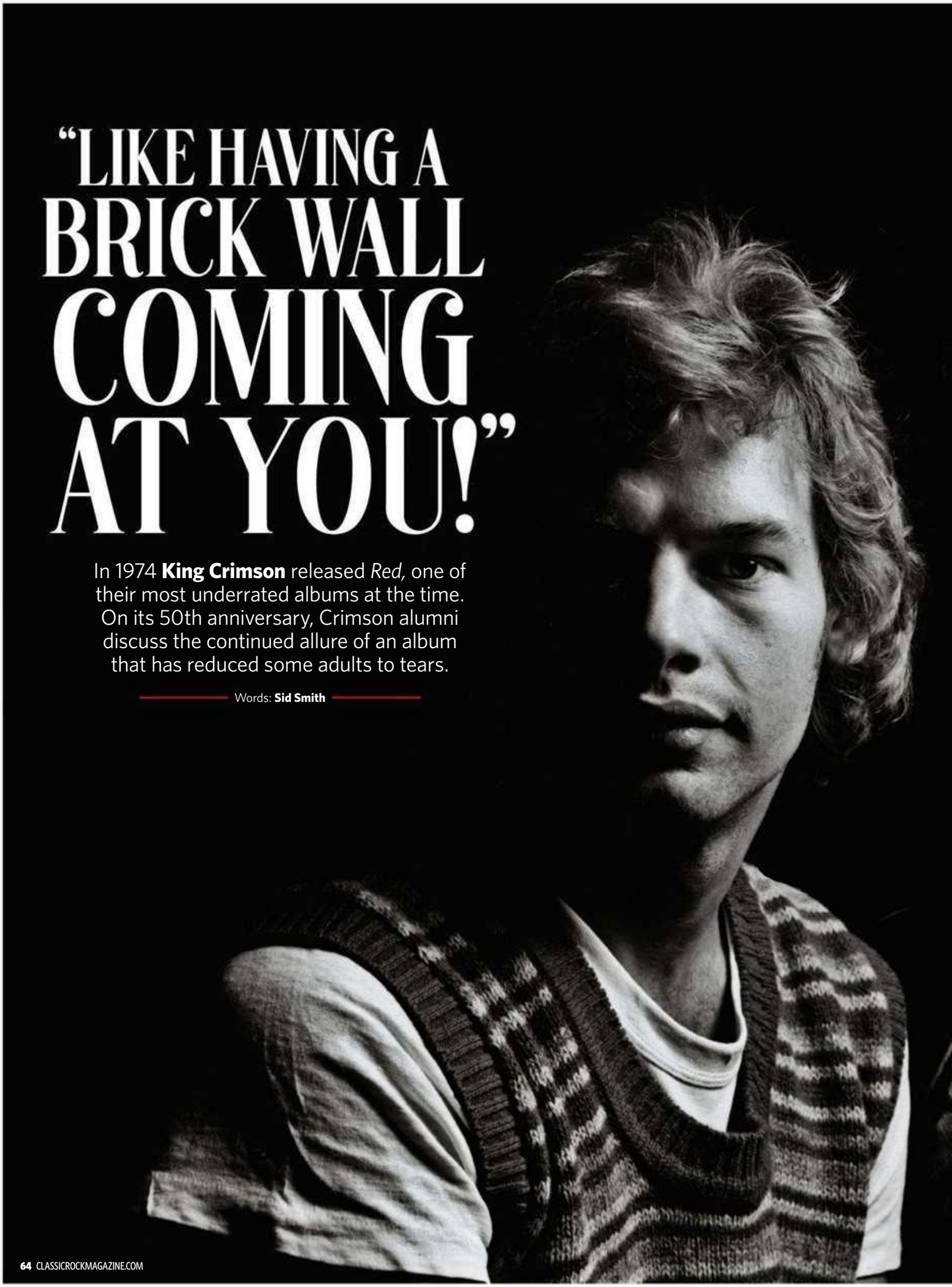
In a somewhat precocious question asked of MacGowan at the time of *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash*'s release in August 1985, the *NME*'s Danny Kelly wondered how Shane would like The Pogues to be remembered. In hindsight, his answer now seems to sum up the spiritual soul of that seminal album: "As being very good, as meaning something to quite a lot of people," said Shane. "As having a sense of humour, as being real, down to earth. I'd like it to be said that we reflected reality without being deliberately miserable or offering unobtainable escapism."

The Pogues feat. James Fearnley, Jem Finer, Spider Stacy, and special guests celebrate the 40th anniversary of Rum, Sodomy & The Lash with six UK shows in May (see p97 for dates).

"LIKE HAVING A BRICK WALL COMING AT YOU!"

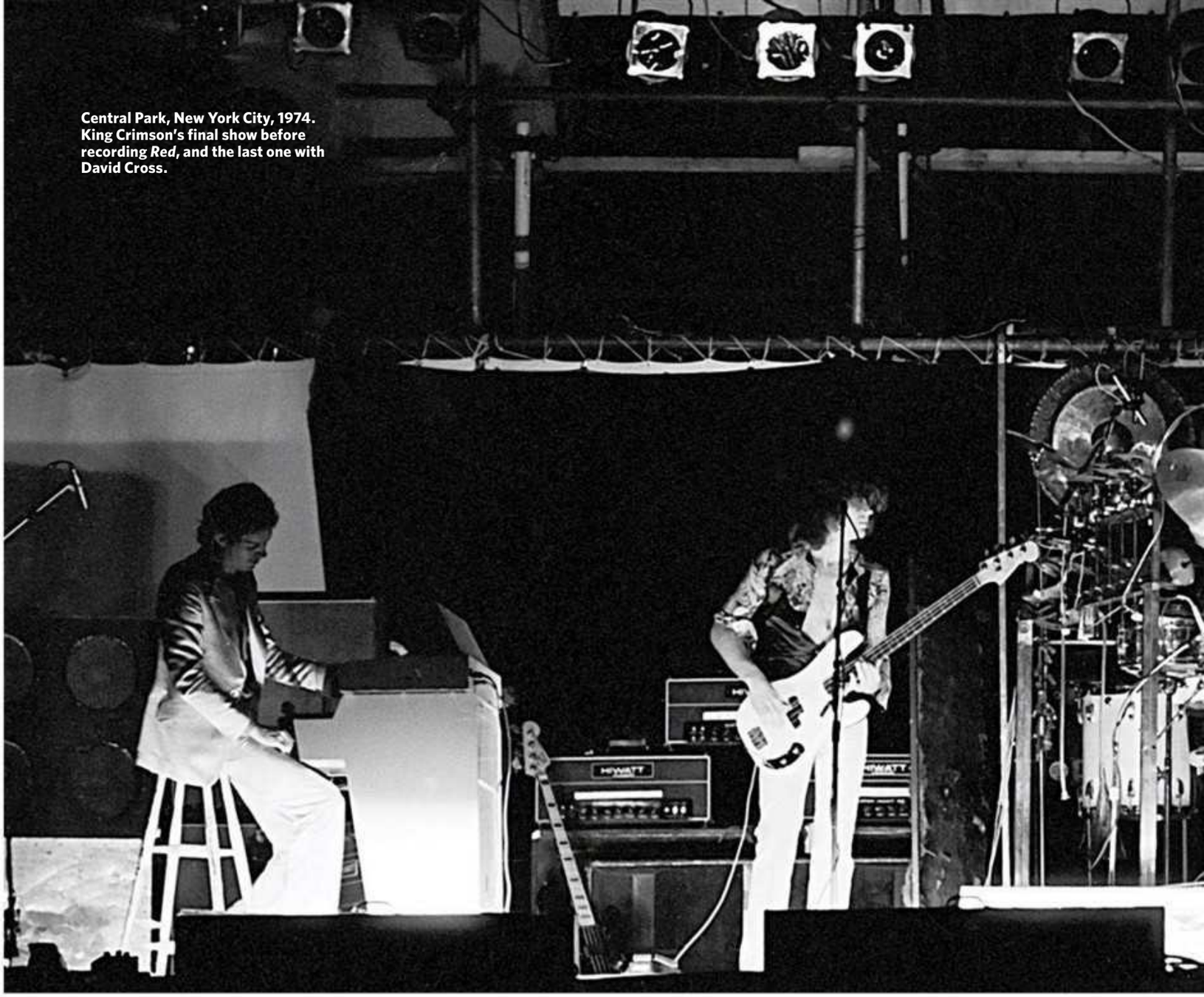
In 1974 **King Crimson** released *Red*, one of their most underrated albums at the time. On its 50th anniversary, Crimson alumni discuss the continued allure of an album that has reduced some adults to tears.

Words: **Sid Smith**





GERED MANKOWITZ COURTESY OF DGM LTD.



Central Park, New York City, 1974. King Crimson's final show before recording *Red*, and the last one with David Cross.

After finishing a take of the new instrumental track, guitarist Robert Fripp, drummer Bill Bruford and bassist John Wetton, keen to listen back to it, walk from the recording space of Olympic's Studio 2 into the control room, where engineer George Chkiantz sits at the 16-track desk. His assistant cranks the volume and presses play, and the sound blasts out of the speakers with a force that feels like they're being hit by a battery of heavy punch bags. As they listen intently, each musician's attention zeroes in on the tiniest inflection in their performance, listening at micro-level for any faults that might have gone unnoticed during the take, and at macro level to take in and assess the full picture.

After the final note has died away Fripp asks: "Well, what do you think?"

"I'm not sure," Bruford says. "The tune reminds me of *Tea For Two*, you know? I don't really get it."

"Well we don't have to use it," offers Fripp.

"No," Wetton counters. "We use it!"



It's interesting to think that had that conversation back in early July 1974 gone in a different direction, King Crimson's celebrated track *Red* might never have made it to the album they were making, instead consigned to the vaults, or perhaps making it onto a future Robert Fripp solo record.

Today, Fripp recalls the day the trio recorded *Red*, which would become the title track of King Crimson's album released in October that year.

"Bill did not get the piece *Red*, where he had just played the defining drum part, one of the highlights of my time working with Bill; he just didn't get what had happened," he says with a note of incredulity in his voice.

"My response to that, whether at that particular moment or shortly afterward was: 'Well look, if you want to use it and yet you don't know what you're dealing with, instead of sharing the publishing for writing it on this song, I will claim a hundred per cent of the publishing.' Which was agreed, but never happened. Eventually, some time in 2007/8, I was in touch with Bill and with John, and we had that finally, as agreed, put in place some forty years after recording *Red*."

Nothing in King Crimson is ever quite as straightforward as it might be, especially when it comes to charting the road to the album *Red*. Along the way, the gnawing combination of bone-deep exhaustion, individuals variously in the thrall of a crisis of confidence, spiritual epiphany, substance abuse and competing aims would snag and eventually unravel the fabric of the band to the point where it all came apart.

By the time of its release in October 1974, King Crimson had, in Fripp's words at the time, "ceased to exist" and despite positive reviews it failed to make it into the UK Top 30, peaking at No.45 for just one week, making it Crimson's poorest-performing album of the 70s. Yet in the face of adversity and commercial indifference, *Red*'s reputation and influence has grown steadily in stature over the 50 years since its recording, and it is regarded by many commentators, as well as by the band themselves, as King Crimson's most accomplished album since the wildfire success of their 1969 debut.

When the *Islands*-era Crimson members Ian Wallace, Boz Burrell and Mel Collins sheared away



COURTESY OF DGM LTD

from Fripp in April of 1972 following a gruelling two-month North American tour, the guitarist threw himself into producing free-jazz acts and Robert Wyatt's band Matching Mole's second album, all while considering his next step. What came next wasn't so much a step as a giant leap, with the formation of the quartet that would record 1973's *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*.

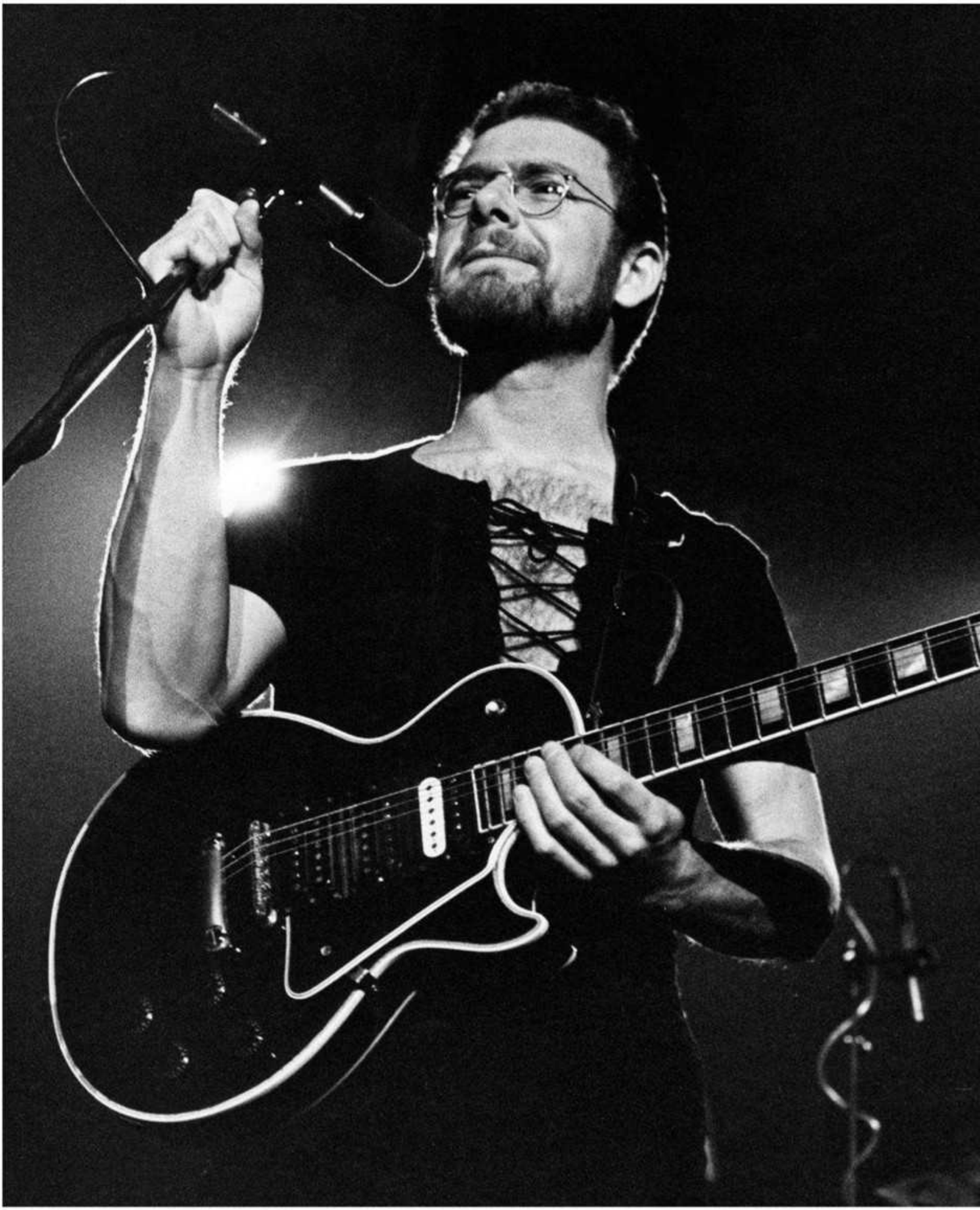
Surrounding himself with avant-garde game-changing percussionist Jamie Muir, young unknown violinist David Cross, former Family bassist John Wetton and Yes's firebrand drummer Bill Bruford, Fripp rebuilt King Crimson from the ground up with a distinct emphasis on a harder, precision-tooled sound fashioned and informed by ample reserves of musical technique of its eclectic members. With such an expanded musical vocabulary, Crimson reached comfortably into free-jazz expression as well as dynamics more akin to contemporary classical music than to rock'n'roll. Perhaps more important than any of this, they had at their disposal a unique and magical chemistry that enabled them to pursue collective improvisation at the drop of a hat. It was in the high-stakes environment during this short-lived incarnation's only UK tour, in the winter of 1972, that the seeds of the songs *Fallen Angel* and *One More Red Nightmare* were planted and left to slowly germinate. With Muir quitting the band abruptly in 1973, just before *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*'s release, the remaining quartet doubled down on the amount of improvisation in their live shows, integrating written material and spontaneous compositions to the point where audiences were mostly unable to tell them apart. Examples of this approach can be found on 1974's *Starless And Bible Black*, including the diaphanous title track, the pastoral calm of *Trio* and the querulous mutant funk of *We'll Let You Know*, and, later, *Providence* from *Red*, where the mood shifts from gothic ambiguity to confrontational avant-rock. All of these pieces, especially the last track taken from Crimson's final tour of the 1970s, demonstrate how important being on the road was for Crimson's creative process. But it came at a price.

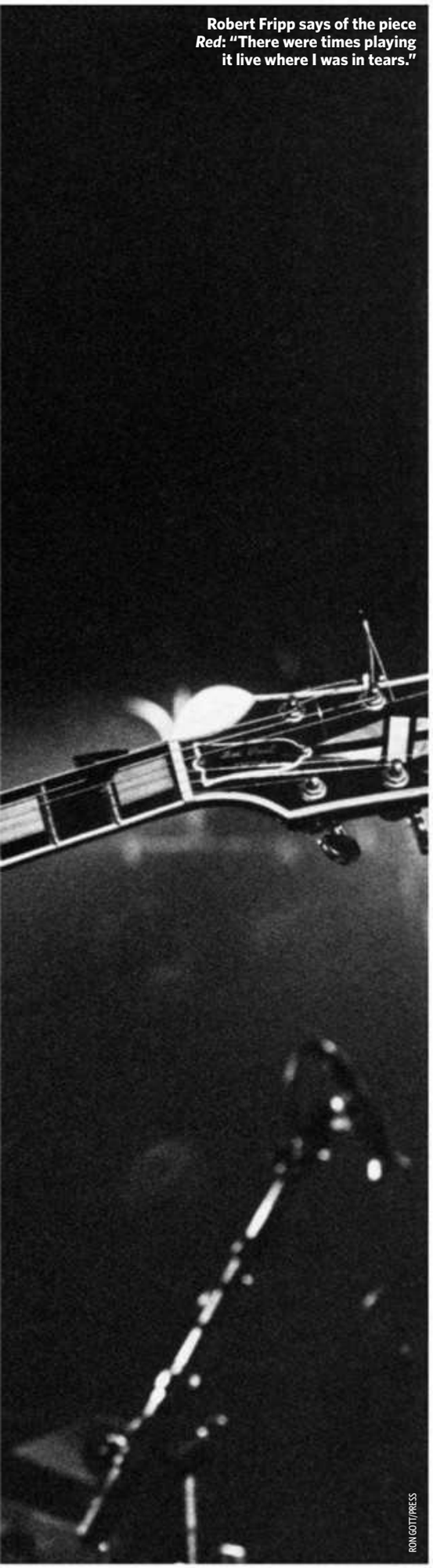
"I loved that cover. It suited the feel of the album; these three fairly stern faces, in some kind of relationship, the good, the bad and the ugly."

Bill Bruford

In considering the way rock bands toured in 1974 compared to today, the past was very much a different ball game. These days the average UK and European touring itinerary of a moderately successful group might stretch to around seven to 10 consecutive days. Fifty years ago it would easily be weeks, with only a few days off here and there. While King Crimson were popular enough in Europe, the feeling was that America was the place to be. Although their album sales figures were never remotely close to those of prog heavyweights Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, ELP or Yes, the feeling in much of the Crimson organisation was that their future lay across the Atlantic.

Throughout 1973 and most of 1974, Crimson schlepped between the East and West coasts and to many points north and south, toiling away in incongruous support slots, slowly but surely ➢





Robert Fripp says of the piece *Red*: "There were times playing it live where I was in tears."

RON GOTT/PRESS

pushing their way up to the top of the bill as they diligently worked the college circuit and the larger theatres of the period. In the popular imagination, being on tour might appear to be a glamorous cavalcade of foreign travel, nice hotels, sightseeing and the ego-stroking payoff of enthusiastic audiences cheering your work to the rafters. Of course, the truth is somewhat more prosaic. Touring then, as now, inevitably took place within the insular bubble of getting from A to B. Back then, hotels for King Crimson were entry-level. The possibility of appreciating the local sights was limited, as a day off would almost always be spent travelling to the next venue, given the distances involved.

What touring largely consists of is a lot of waiting around in anonymous airport lounges, and the back seat of saloon cars eating up the miles on featureless interstates, with a couple of local pit stops. Faced with this, even the well-adjusted can be undermined by the cumulative, potentially destabilising ennui and inertia that gets under a person's skin. Some deal with it better than others. Bruford kept busy, reading, attempting yoga, and practising saxophone – with a sock stuffed down the bell – in the privacy of his hotel room. Fripp, who had also been on the road constantly since 1971, systematically practised guitar as much as he could, read voraciously and kept a journal. Just as Jamie Muir had quit Crimson in 1973 to pursue a spiritual calling to become a Buddhist monk, during that final American tour Fripp's encounter with the writings of English mystic JG Bennett resonated with him deeply and profoundly, confirming his sense of needing to alter the course of his life. John Wetton, like so many of his contemporaries in rock, as a young, single man, eagerly embraced the 'sex, drugs, rock'n'roll' lifestyle. In the short term, hedonism was good fun, However, it would sometimes affect his judgement during the recording of *Red* as he experimented with different substances, and eventually became the foundation of his well-publicised battle with addiction in later life.

"I was simply going with whatever was coming my way. And what came from John and Bill was startlingly impressive."

Robert Fripp

For David Cross, life in Crimson was rewarding from a musical viewpoint, although not without its challenges given his proximity to Wetton's increasingly louder-by-the-gig bass rig. He felt he was becoming marginalised by the combined force and volume of Wetton and Bruford's sound, described by Fripp as being akin to a "flying brick wall". Well before the end of the tour, Cross had already decided to quit, while being unaware that the rest of the band had already taken the decision to fire him when the group returned to the UK.

Speaking from his London home in 2024, in between dates performing the *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* album in full with his live band Cross, he admits candidly that his last few weeks with Crimson were extremely difficult.

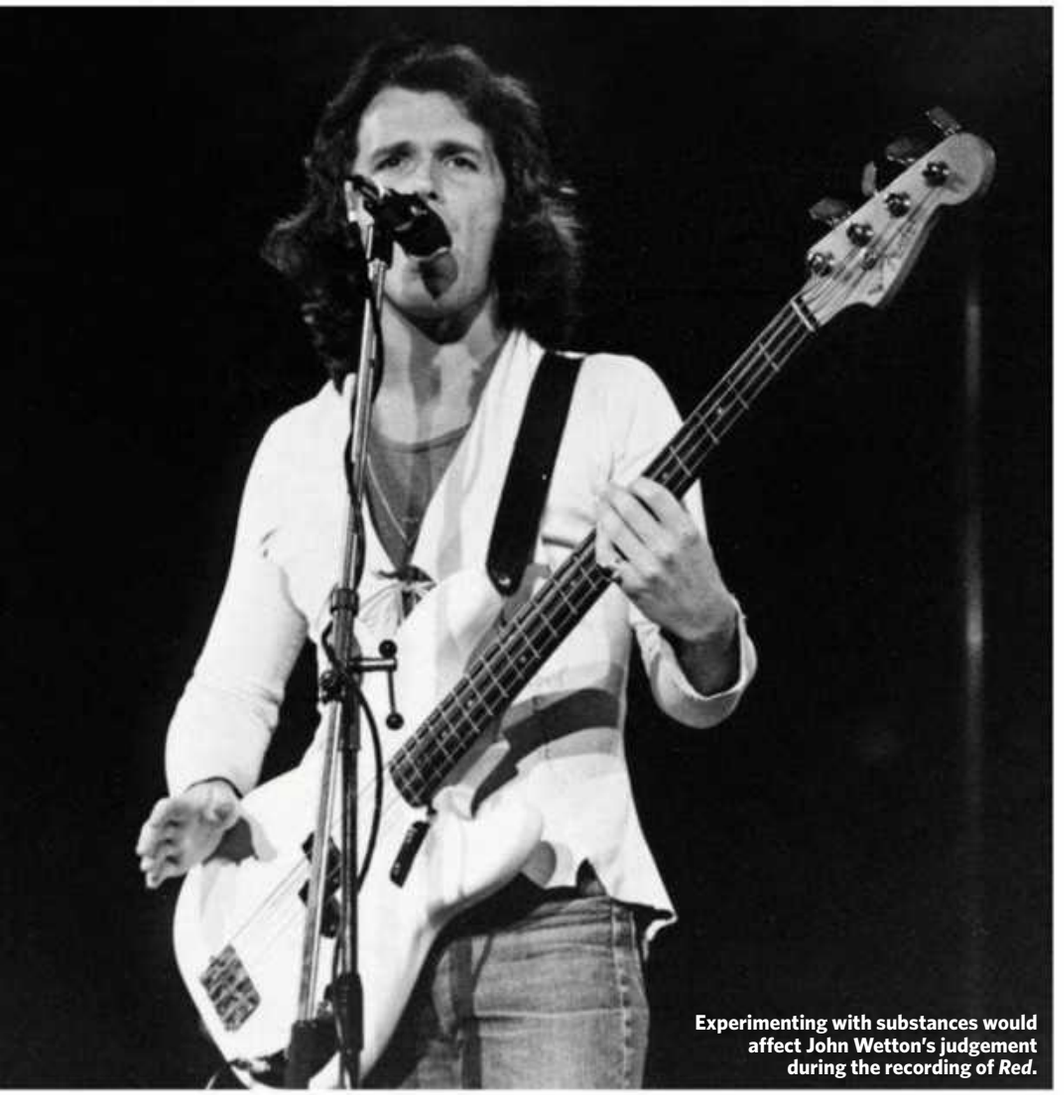
"I loved being on stage with that band, especially when we were improvising and when we were in the zone on stuff, able to really push forward," he said. "That was lovely. The bits I didn't like were when I let myself down, when I lost heart, when I lost courage. I didn't like that. I suffered from a lot of anxiety, which was probably caused by me drinking a lot. I started developing height phobia and stuff like that by that stage. That happened in a hotel in Texas. It was one of those first hotels that was built with the balconies looking down inside, and I was put up on the thirtieth floor or something. I just suddenly didn't like the drop down there as I tried to get to my room. So I got moved down to about the eleventh floor. The whole process of my mental health deteriorating like that was in itself frightening anyway. You do feel it's just happening to you."

With Cross filled with self-doubt and his problems beginning to affect his performances, Wetton in particular argued that what the group needed to boost their chances of really breaking America in 1975 was a stronger instrumentalist. Violinist Wilf Gibson, who had been in the Electric Light Orchestra, was sounded out by EG Management about joining. But Gibson, who had a young family and did not want to tour, rejected the approach. In any event, Wetton's real preference was for Crimson co-founder, sax-player and multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald to re-join, leading to McDonald being invited to guest on *One More Red Nightmare* and *Starless*.

In their soundchecks at the time, Fripp would often throw out a chord or a motif which might or might not get picked up on by the others. One of these had been the see-saw riff of *Red*. Sometimes a more fully fleshed-out idea would be presented in the more formal surroundings of the rehearsal room. Just as the inclusion of the track *Red* had momentarily hung in the balance at Olympic Studios, *Starless*, one of the most well-regarded and most recognised King Crimson tracks, was, for a while at least, the track that almost never happened. Wetton and lyricist Richard Palmer-James wrote a ballad, and presented an early draft of it at a band rehearsal in late 1973. Wetton has previously recalled being somewhat crestfallen when his sensitive song was met with polite indifference and the band moved on swiftly to other things.

"Rehearsals were always an icy and rather bleak kind of engagement," Bill Bruford says today. "There was a lot of floor staring."

However, what Wetton's bandmates *did* like was the line from the song's chorus: '*starless and bible black*'. Co-opted by Palmer-James from the opening passage of Dylan Thomas's 1954 radio play *Under Milk Wood*, it connected so strongly with Wetton and the others that it was assigned to an instrumental improvisation and used as the title of the follow-up to *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*. However, before its release, by the next bout of writing and rehearsing in February 1974, the quartet revisited Wetton's ballad, only this time it would be augmented by several decisive and transformational new elements. The first came during a soundcheck while the band were touring during the tail end of 1973. ▷



Experimenting with substances would affect John Wetton's judgement during the recording of *Red*.

"I can remember standing on stage in a soundcheck, messing around with it and just trying to trying to find some kind of satisfaction with it," remembers violinist David Cross, thinking back to the origins of the mournful, woebegone melody that opens *Starless*.

"I was experimenting with this kind of leap. I was always trying to find a way to get up and come down again. And I wanted to get up the octave and I wanted to feature the ninth of the scale, which is very powerful. I wanted to do it in a satisfying way. So I was always playing around with it, just wearing everybody down around it until we took some notice of it. Robert probably just got bored with listening to me fluffing around with it, and he picked it up and did some stuff with it and probably turned it into a proper tune, or I'd have just kept flapping around with it. He reckoned I started it and he finished it."

Another feature of the new piece came after Bill Bruford was playing piano at home.

"I was interested in music in its whole totality," Bruford explains, six decades after he came up with the glowering bass-line melody that underpins the whole central section of the piece.

"A piano is wonderful because you can see the notes and it's highly rhythmic. So for someone like me, who's going to do a rhythmic thing, just bang on a note and out comes a rhythm on a pitch. If you then change some of those notes, you get a rhythm with a bit of melody, and then you give it to John Wetton or to Robert Fripp to see what they do with it."

What Fripp ended up doing with Bruford's riff was to distil all his years of experience, skill and dexterity into one note played across two strings with some pitch bending for more than four minutes, something that Steven Wilson would come to describe as "the death of prog solo".

"What's important is the music, King Crimson, not the members of the band."

Robert Fripp

Adding to this already exciting brew was a bass riff that had originally been part of the early versions of Fripp's *Fracture*, written and performed in 1973. That fast-moving jazz-rock-style figure, propelled by the bass, provided the platform for the blowing/soloing section before the majestic recapitulation of the main theme brought the whole piece to a thunderous completion. Receiving its first live airing just days after the arrangements for all these separate instrumental sections had been hastily completed, *Starless* was a huge hit with audiences – thanks in part to the simple but incredibly effective lighting cue that suffused the entire stage in an infernal, glowering crimson-red light as the piece grew relentlessly in power and magnitude over that memorable Bruford-composed bass line.

As Fripp noted in his diary after the band's last performance, in New York City's Central Park on July 1, 1974: "Lights at the end of *Starless* really blew the crowd. Rapturous reception… Everyone was pleased with the gig. Conversation with John Wetton – lighting effects like that really make the difference."

By the time they came to record at London's Olympic Studios in July 1974 the remaining trio had played the song in concert more than 51 times. The fact that Crimson had at last been able to channel the raw energy of their live performances into the studio environment makes the finality of *Red* all the more poignant. That it was and remains such a powerful statement is all the more amazing considering what was going on under the psyche of the group.

As the sessions got under way, when Fripp told his colleagues that he was "withdrawing the passing of his opinion", and that his opinion didn't matter any more, Bruford and Wetton decided he was simply "pulling a moody", and got on with the task in hand. Fripp's approach was part of what he would later describe as a strategy of radical neutrality, "the doing nothing that enables doing everything". His not taking the initiative in the way he had done in previous recordings came in part as a response to reading JG Bennett's work and, during the weeks and months out of the road, a growing realisation that the madness and excesses of the music industry of which he'd been a part for five years were inimical with the life he wished to lead. The burden and responsibility of steering King Crimson against the crosswinds of commerciality and artistic compromise was ultimately becoming too much for him.

His idea of taking a sabbatical, and there being a Frippless King Crimson, but with Ian McDonald rejoining the group on a permanent basis, was discussed but ultimately nixed by the band's management, then already lining up another push in North America after *Red*'s release. Exhausted at the prospect of another year on the treadmill, Fripp increasingly saw the only way out was to put an end to the band. Very little of what was going on both on the inside and outside of Fripp's world was discussed with Bruford or Wetton. "I think it was probably very hard for them," Fripp reflects today.

Looking back on the making of *Red*, Bruford agrees with Fripp's assessment.

"It was *extremely* hard to deal with," he says. "But I also understand that if you impose these incredibly hard obstacles and hurdles to making something, and people stay in the room, you might just get there. John and I stood our ground and said: 'All right. Sod that, we'll do whatever we can here to make something up out of this.' I think John and I were emotionally very, very involved in this.

"Finally, towards the end, it got down to the mixing, and it was very much John and George Chkiantz who took the baby from the bathwater, wrapped it up and towelled it down. Giving birth to the thing was rough work. I'm glad Robert

DGM ARCHIVE/THOM ROBERTS/PRESS

acknowledges that at least his radical neutrality was quite a creative stimulant."

The power of the studio recording, with guesting players from the band's past, such as oboe player Robin Miller, cornet player Mark Charig, Ian McDonald and Mel Collins, and subtle orchestral additions such as the cello on *Red* itself and the four double basses lending the coda extra dramatic heft, is palpable. Even the chance discovery by Bruford of a 20-inch Zilket cymbal, upturned at one side like an Australian bush hat, discarded in a bin at Olympic, inadvertently became one of the defining sounds of the album. Even today, Fripp is in awe at what they managed to record.

"I was simply going with whatever was coming my way. And what was coming my way from John and Bill was startlingly impressive. When we actually played *Red*, the track, I remember Bill's playing… It still defines the part with the wonderful cracked cymbal. I mean, fabulous stuff… Bill was at the height of his young powers, and for me the most satisfying of Bill's drumming at any time in King Crimson was on the *Red* sessions."

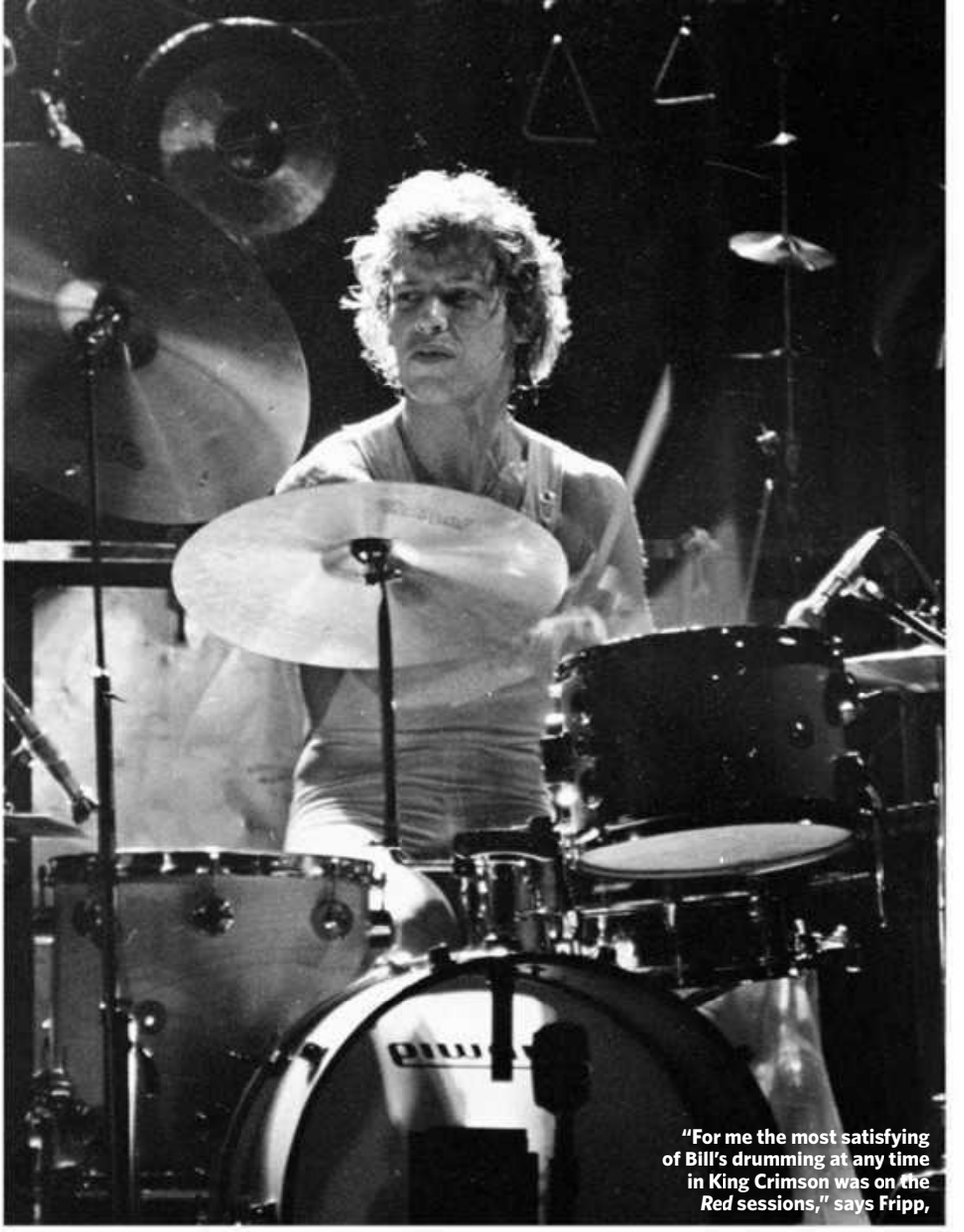
If the aim of all that touring had been aimed at building momentum and visibility, it's no accident that *Red* was the first Crimson album to feature the band themselves on its front cover, something that EG Management and Wetton had pushed for. Coupled with the individual shots taken by Gered Mankowitz, who in a spooky coincidence had taken the publicity shots for Giles, Giles And Fripp six years earlier, Wetton came up with the idea to have the back cover photo of a VU meter crashing into the red-etched No.7, symbolising that this was the album that was going to push Crimson into the next level.

"I totally loved that cover," says Bruford. "It suited the particular feel of the album: these three fairly stern faces, obviously in some kind of relationship, the good, the bad, and the ugly, appearing so starkly on the front. It suited the entire vibe so very well."

For his part, Fripp hated it in 1974, but in keeping with his policy of radical neutrality kept his misgivings to himself. These days he's more forthcoming, describing it as "fucking appalling. Why was it fucking appalling? Because one of the powers of King Crimson's artwork was the anonymity of the players. What's important is the music, King Crimson, not the members of the band."

When asked to choose his favourite of the three studio albums released in the 1970s, John Wetton chose *Red* without any hesitation. It's the same for Bruford, who in recent years has been lecturing university students since gaining his doctorate in 2016, and notes that he has seen the appeal of the record, along with some of the others he was involved with half a century ago, finding favour with a younger audience.

"Quite why it has longevity, and these little albums somehow seem to become greater than they're supposed to be, is odd and something to do with cultural change, I think. Young people seem to appreciate the old stuff, parroting their parental opinion that the new stuff is over-processed, over-regulated and corporate. *Red* seems to point in the direction in which music might be other than that, or continue to be other than that. In modern terms it's fairly unprepossessing stuff. I mean, the album has five tracks, of which there are only three songs on it, the other two being instrumental. It is such a little album in many ways, but it seems to have leapt out of its box of progressive rock and become greater than that."



"For me the most satisfying of Bill's drumming at any time in King Crimson was on the *Red* sessions," says Fripp,

DGM ARCHIVE/PRESS

After Crimson split in 1974, it was seven years before the title track got its first live outing, as a surprise inclusion on the set-list of the 1980s incarnation. That, though, is nothing compared with the 40 years that elapsed before *Starless* was played again from 2014 onwards. This latter period of the band's life also saw *Fallen Angel* and *One More Red Nightmare*, both numbers for which Fripp harboured a particular affection, finally make their live debut.

"All of the written pieces on *Red* were stunning," the guitarist says. "The *Discipline* quartet played *Red*, but not properly, in my view. We did a good version of it, but didn't have the weight that the seven- and eight-piece had to bring to those pieces. *Red* was an instrumental, so you didn't need a vocalist. [Current Crimson singer/guitarist] Jakko Jakszyk could deliver authentic versions of all that early material. Astonishingly good versions."

During that period when *Starless* was performed, it was common to see some audience members moved to tears. "There were times playing it live where I was in tears," says Fripp.

One admittedly crude measure of the way the song has continued to grow and resonate with new audiences and generations alike is the 14 million hits of the 2015 live performance notched up on King Crimson's YouTube channel, easily outstripping *21st Century Schizoid Man* as King Crimson's most popular number. Fripp is at a loss to explain the track's mass popularity.

"I can't speak for the multitude who pile onto YouTube, but I've said before, and I'll say it again, the musician doesn't write the music; music writes the musician. And if you're fortunate and manage to get yourself out of the way, sometimes music like that can happen."

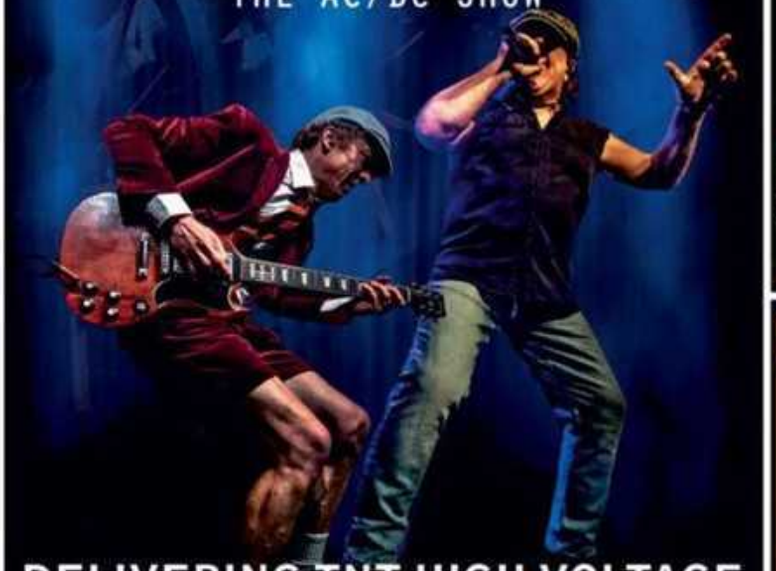
"Giving birth to the thing was rough work. Robert's radical neutrality was quite a creative stimulant."

Bill Bruford

A 50th-anniversary edition of Red featuring new mixes is out now. The expanded vinyl edition of USA is out via Panegyric. For more information go to www.dgmlive.com

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04 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2
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The Hard Stuff
The Ultimate Rock Reviews Section

12 pages

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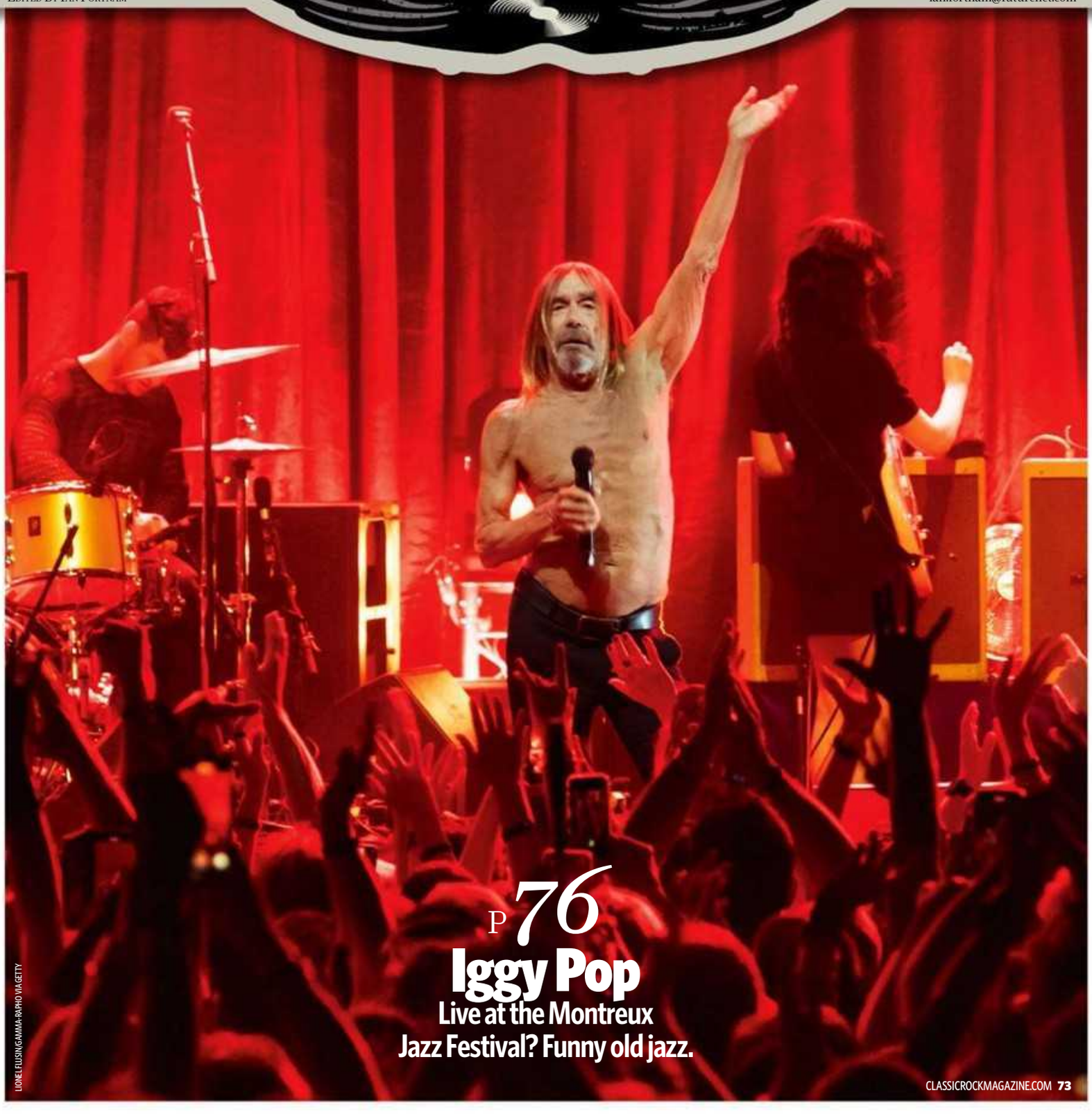
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Classic Rock Ratings

- A Classic
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Above Average
- Average
- Below Par
- A Disappointment
- Pants
- Pish

Ingredients:

P74 Albums
P80 Reissues
P84 Multimedia
P86 Buyer's Guide



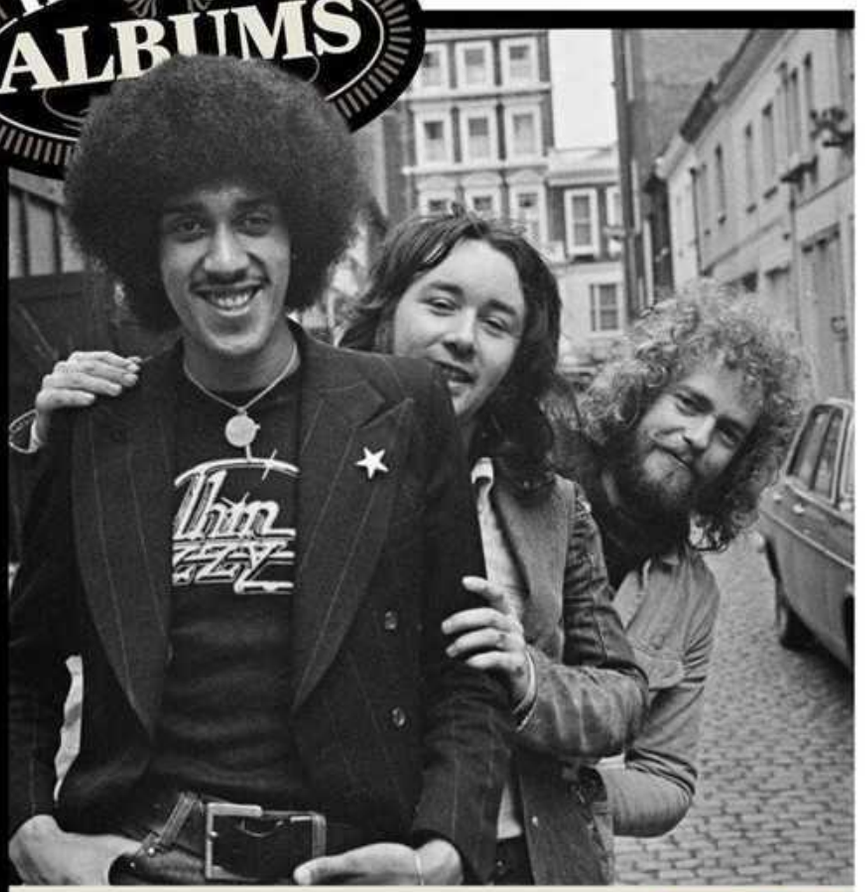
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Iggy Pop

Live at the Montreux Jazz Festival? Funny old jazz.

LIONEL FLUSIN/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY

The Hard Stuff Albums



Thin Lizzy

Acoustic Sessions *DECCA*



A 'new' Thin Lizzy album? We should be so lucky.

There's an argument to be made that the dead go on living in the memories of those who remember and cherish them to the present day. And while it's difficult to forget the shadow cast by Phil Lynott and Thin Lizzy (ask Black Star Riders, who made a magnificent fist of keeping the name and legacy alive for a short while), the reality is that you can no more reinvent the wheel than you can say that Lynott and Lizzy are back in the world and making new music.

Acoustic Sessions might be a cash grab – avert your eyes now if you think otherwise – but given the source material you can't help but admire the performances and rue that Lynott left us so early. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. These songs are, in essence, original vocal parts from Lynott, paired with brand-new pieces from founding Lizzy guitarist Eric Bell. As Bell says: "We recorded fresh parts to allow us to create new acoustic versions and added the vocals which Philip laid down on the day." Which could quite easily sound like the aural equivalent of welding together two cars from a motorway pile up, giving it a new coat of paint and flogging it as a new motor. And there are touches of that.

It's not the first time a band or label who lost their singer have resurrected a dead frontman; The Doors did a similar thing with *An American Prayer* after Jim Morrison's death – and got a Grammy nomination for their troubles.

So *Acoustic Sessions* is Bell-era Lizzy, new takes on old songs from their first three albums, and a much-vaunted acoustic take on *Whiskey In The Jar* that doesn't really move the more familiar electric version on one iota. At its best – meaning its fundamental, stripped-back best – there is a real charm in hearing the softly beating heart of songs like *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage*, the lilting *A Song For While I'm Away* (although it's far more colourful than your usual acoustic session) or the rambling, strident *Mama Nature Said*, Lynott's rangy vocals sounding more effervescent that ever, full of real spirit and verve against an understated backing. And while the PR for the album trumpets that listeners can now "experience what might have been their *MTV Unplugged* moment", this is the diminishing returns of a great legend. Old ghosts in a new machine.

Philip Wilding

Benjamin Booker

Lower *FIRE NEXT TIME*

Beauty and horror combine on experimental musician's third.



There is one fleeting moment on one song on Benjamin Booker's album *Lower* that is genuinely more terrifying than anything even the most brutal of metal bands have ever achieved. The peace of a pillowy bed of distorted, woozy noise rock – influences this time around include My Bloody Valentine and classic hip-hop – is shattered by a sudden, wildly unexpected audio clip of a school shooting, a devastating shock to the system made all the more haunting by subsequent clips of Booker's baby daughter gurgling, innocence in the face of violence.

Having previously released albums of garage rock and 70s-inspired glam, the hypnotic drone and fuzz of *Lower*, married to dreamy, sleepy vocals, marks another about turn for this wonderfully unpigeonholeable artist, and, seven years in the making, it's his most immersive work to date. Booker is a unique talent, and here he's at the peak of his powers.

Emma Johnston

Bilk

Essex, Drugs And Rock And Roll *SCRUFF OF THE NECK*

Uh-oh, we're in trouble...

What if Blur had come from Chelmsford instead of Colchester, and had preferred Oasis to themselves? Bilk are without doubt the most Chelmsford band extant: their SX vernacular, their market stall wink-wink demeanour, their *Eastenders*-weaned, cut'n'shut laddishness. All three Bilks boast a similar 'gaw blimey Mary Poppins' appeal to *Modern Life*-era Albarn, but they've a distinctly post-punk Gallagher swagger to their distilled Britpop lads-rock, an unashamed ear for trad riffs and outmoded yet enduring boys-will-be-geezers attitudes.

It's always possible that you could open an album with a song like *RnR* (with its chutzpah-packed '*I'm a rock'n'roll star today*' chorus) without having spent teenage years glued to *Definitely Maybe*, but it's unlikely. Sneery, snotty (sub) urban post-rap tales of being both a *Fuck Up* and a *Slag* ('*Why is it wrong for girls, but it's okay for guys?*') fly by: a bit of Mike Skinner here, a shade of McFly there. And then it hits, Bilk's Sol Abrahams is, to all intents and purposes, a slightly swearier one-man Shampoo. Yes, as irresistible as that.

Ian Fortnam

Ringo Starr

Look Up *LOST HIGHWAY*

Beatle goes country.



Now 84, Ringo Starr seems to have been slowing down for decades. Yet when he does push the boat out, he invariably sets sail for uncharted waters.

Look Up is produced by hipster T Bone Burnett, who wrote or co-wrote nine of these 11 songs. It's a languid affair, and Starr's semi-spoken, shoulder-shrugging vocals sit well with these jaunty but wry ear worms.

A former Beatle has nothing to prove, of course, but Burnett seems to understand him like no producer since Richard Perry helmed Starr's mid-70s solo peak. So whether it's a man who often seems to have too much time on his hands pontificating upon that very topic on the post-breakup tune *Time On My Hands*, or raising a cheery middle finger to Beatles obsessives when on *I Live For Your Love* he notes archly: '*I don't live in the past*', he's in his comfort zone, while quietly making almost as much mischief as The Beatles' resident jester once did. And his autobiographical lyric on the Allison Krauss duet *Thankful* shows he's not without self-awareness.

John Aizlewood

Hawkwind

Live At The Royal Albert Hall *CHERRY RED*

Three-CD release of 2023 show, plus studio rehearsals.



Now led by long-term member Dave Brock, Hawkwind showed that their velocity was undimmed, their rocket engines still capable of full blast despite the passing of the years. That's evidenced on the opening chimes and bubble analogue of *Levitation*, before they settle into a heads-up, no-nonsense hard-rocking groove, generally sustained throughout the gig, which also features vocal

JACK KAY/EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

interventions from Arthur Brown. There's brief, acoustic respite with, for example, *Underwater City*, while extracts from their 2023 album *The Future Never Waits* such as *Rama (The Prophecy)*, with its Eastern fragrances and shimmering cymbals, show they remain uncompromising in their vision, unsullied by our particular modernity. Here, ultimately, is the heartening sound of a group taking yet one more trip around the planet and to '*leave no star unturned*', as they sing on *Born To Go*. True enough.

David Stubbs

Edvard Graham Lewis

Alreet? *UPP*

Solo album from Wire bassist belies cheery title.

With Lewis being a Newcastle United supporter, the Geordie greeting of his latest solo album comes from a real place. However, in its dark, lucid yet oblique lyrical narratives, rendered in Lewis's distinctive baritone, and its innovative use of guitar/electronics, it's a title replete with mordant irony. From the distressed volley of *Shaft*-like emissions on the cleverly punning *Kinds Of Whether,* to the dark wedding march of *Key Weapon*, Lewis fearlessly avails of sonic options unavailable to him in early solo incarnations such as He Said. The likes of *Switch* and *Bang!*, meanwhile, bear all the heft and elegance of Wire at their most magisterial. A good deal more than alreet, for sure.

David Stubbs

The Hellacopters

Overdriver *NUCLEAR BLAST RECORDS*

Swedes power in with album number nine.



The rough edges of The Hellacopters' 1996 debut *Supershitty To The Max* are long gone, but placing an aviator-shaded Keef on their current tour poster and citing fellow countrymen The Hives as the only other band still carrying the torch proves that while there are more famous Swedish bands, none are as committed to garage rock'n'roll as The Hellacopters.

Following their 2008-22 hiatus, the quartet have bombarded us with anniversary reissues, but here they show that old dogs can turn new tricks. *Overdriver* is at the singalong end of their musical spectrum, delivering a high-energy cocktail of Kiss, Mott The Hoople and Hanoi Rocks. They ease off the accelerator for *Coming Down, The Stench* and *Doomsday Dreams*, but most of these 11 songs are up-tempo blasts of in-your-face guitars (by singer Nicke Andersson), Robert Eriksson's rolling drums and rollicking piano by Anders 'Boba' Lindström. *Token Apologies, Wrong Face On, Faraway Looks, (I Don't Wanna Be) Just A Memory* and *Do You Feel Normal* (the last two channelling Cheap Trick) are all absolute belters. Closer *Leave A Mark* revisits their Stooges/MC5-inspired origins. Great fun.

Neil Jeffries

DITZ

Never Exhale

REPUBLIC OF MUSIC/DOMINO

Scathing post-hardcore band draw new blood types.

While this Sussex five-piece's 2022 debut *The Great Regression* sounded like a burst of cathartic noise releasing the aggression bottled up during covid lockdowns, this follow-up shows a broader palette of gnarly noise-rock. *God On A Speed Dial* will again invite comparisons to erstwhile tourmates Idles, but *18 Wheeler* throws up invigoratingly ragged memories of the Birthday Party, before *The Body As A Structure* recalls Big Black and a more rhythmically driven Slint with its scrapes of industrial guitar discord and churning bottom end. Elsewhere they veer from hints of LCD Soundsystem (the spoken-sung *Four*) to Kasabian (*Taxi*), but it's the lyrical imagery that just as often grabs the attention. '*I'm on my way to get flowers for Haile Selassie,*' they confess at one point. '*Arial black and bold italic,*' they drawl at another. Well it beats singing about girls who didn't love you.

Johnny Sharp

L.S. Dunes

Violet *FANTASY*

My Chemical Romance-adjacent alt.rockers deliver melody and emotion on album number two.



Like an emo Avengers, L.S. Dunes bring together members of My Chemical Romance, Thursday, Coheed And Cambria and Circa Survive. And it shows. Their second album sets its heart-on-sleeve emoting to some properly sweeping, arena-sized tunes.

But this is music made by men in their late 30s and early 40s, and any youthful gaucheness is long gone. Singer Anthony Green's high, nasal whine may evoke the mid-2000s, but there's a grown-up emotional maturity to *Machines* and the moving *Forgiveness* – less "I won't tidy my bedroom", more a determined celebration of all that life has to offer.

The ongoing careers of the members' other bands indelibly marks L.S. Dunes as a side-project. Which is a shame, as they stand impressively on their own two feet.

Dave Everley

G3

Reunion Live *EARMUSIC*

Guitars and more guitars.



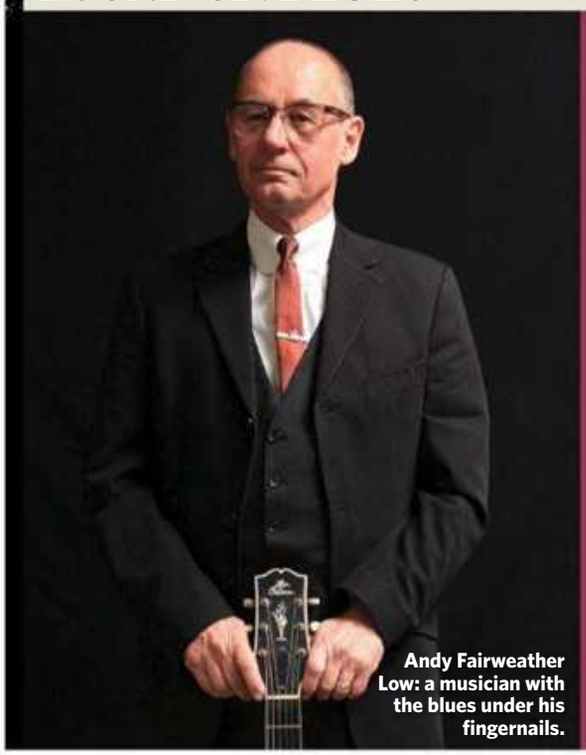
Twenty eight years after Joe Satriani put together the first G3 tour, he reunited with the other two guitarists – Steve Vai and Eric Johnson – for a US tour last year. The G3 concept, which for a while in the early 2000s was an annual event with a varying cast, had lain dormant for the previous six years so there is a sense of coming full circle.

Listening to three axemen, who were in their prime, on the first G3 tour playing their respective sets with the same skill and dedication in their mid-to-late 60s is an almost humbling experience. Johnson's set is perhaps the most intriguing because he has remained the most inscrutable and elusive of the three, not to mention being the oldest at 70. They only give away their ages on the choice of encores: *Crossroads* as done by Cream, Hendrix's *Spanish Castle Magic* and Steppenwolf's *Born To Be Wild*.

Hugh Fielder

ROUND-UP: BLUES

By Henry Yates



Andy Fairweather Low: a musician with the blues under his fingernails.

PRESS

Andy Fairweather Low

The Invisible Bluesman

LAST MUSIC COMPANY



Given his collaborators over the decades – Eric Clapton, John Mayall, BB King – the notion that Andy Fairweather Low has never previously released a solo blues album seems like a glitch in the matrix. Yet it's true. But while this largely live covers set doesn't necessarily flex the Welsh guitarist's creative muscles, it confirms him as a musician who has the genre under his fingernails.

The album takes a moment to get going. Opener *My Baby Left Me* is low-octane and a little polite, all strummed acoustics and brushed drums. But something brilliant happens halfway through *Gin House Blues*, with the guitarist firing off a raunchy electric solo, and with the amp valves finally glowing hot the album is off to the races.

Baby What You Want Me To Do packs a nasty fuzz tone. *Mystery Train* has the clickety-clack velocity of a 20-something garage band. Fairweather Low's hollered vocal on *Bright Lights, Big City* suggests his throat will hurt in the morning.

Hannah Wicklund

Live At The Troubadour

STRAWBERRY MOON



Last year's *The Prize* announced the South Carolina singer-songwriter as a hungry talent with tunes to kick your teeth in. This set at the star-making LA bolthole confirms that she can smash it live too. For a taste of the front row, try *Witness* – imagine a powered-up Tori Amos – and the Appalachian-sounding cri de coeur *Lost Love*.

Jerron Paxton

Things Done Changed

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS



With his youth spent listening to the radio in LA's South Central, it's uncanny how much nuance 35-year-old Jerron Paxton has absorbed from blues gone by. With his vintage boom-and-groan vocal, this multi-instrumentalist would genuinely sound like a centuries-old acetate were it not for his nudge-wink modern lyricism.

Will Wilde

Blues Is Still Alive

VIZZ TONE

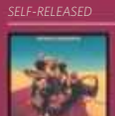


Endorsed by Walter Trout as "the best I've ever heard" – and recognisable for his bandolier of harmonicas – the Brighton harp man blows like the north wind on his new album. Featuring Trout, the squalling title song (and recent Louder Track Of The Week runner-up) is your entry point, but Wilde's tin sandwich delivers plenty of gold.

Liz Jones & Broken Windows

Double Measures

SELF-RELEASED



Corralling some of Scotland's best players, this Edinburgh six-piece have the talent to roam beyond the prescribed 12-bar and pentatonic box. *Johnny Knows The Roads* is a wistful night drive by way of R.E.M.'s *Losing My Religion*, while the title track is a winningly wonky gypsy-jazz lurch.



Larkin Poe

Bloom *TRICKI-WOO*



Nashville siblings serve up more country-infused rock'n'roll on album six.

Leaning into country music has been a lucrative and/or cynical career choice for generations of rockers from the Eagles to Kid Rock. Larkin Poe's Rebecca and Megan Lovell have travelled in the opposite direction. Raised in Georgia on a diet of bluegrass, they got the down-home rootsy thing out of their systems early on before toughening things up with a shit-kicking, lap steel-heavy sound that makes Bob Ritchie sound like the Rust Belt huckster he really is.

Like their five previous albums, *Bloom* has country music in its heart and rock'n'roll in its veins. *Mockingbird* opens things with some spiralling slide guitar and deep organ, before Rebecca slides in with a vocal that switches up in a heartbeat from smokily soulful to lung-busting but never over-the-top.

Bloom doesn't broaden the Larkin Poe sound, but it deepens it: the joy is more joyous, the heartbreak more alluring. *Bluephoria* is a Stax-inspired soul-rock vamp, the two-part *Easy Love* sees Rebecca wearing her romantic heart on the sleeve of her embroidered denim shirt. '*Weighed down by doubt, sometimes I get stuck/But you know how to pull me out, cos you are my luck*,' she sings on the smouldering *Part 2*, presumably referring to co-producer and romantic partner Tyler Bryant (if she isn't, he's in trouble). Closing song *Bloom Again* is a twilit heartbreak ballad held up by delicate harmonies and the haunted ghost of a fiddle in the background, before it erupts with some dramatic slide guitar soloing.

On paper, Larkin Poe are a band, but really it's all about that voice and that guitar sound, maybe with a few harmonies dusted on top. There are no concessions to passing trends here – no guest spots from passing rappers, no incongruous beats dropped in for clubs where they serve expensive bottles of vodka in roped-off areas. *Bloom* is as earthy as the dust blown up by a Tennessee gale, and if it sometimes wanders into cliché, so what? Rock'n'roll and Nashville are both built on clichés – it depends on how they're delivered, and Larkin Poe deliver everything with style, clichéd or not.

'*You try to tell me what to do, you try tell me what to don't/I do what I want, when I want*,' sings Rebecca threateningly on country-glam stomper *Pearls*. It's a call for authenticity in a plastic world. With *Bloom*, Larkin Poe prove they've got the whole authenticity thing locked down.

Dave Everley

Thundermother

Dirty And Divine *AFM*

Rising Swedes return, refreshed and rapacious.



Thanks to music that sits shrewdly between AC/DC, Aerosmith and Kiss, and a veritable shit-ton of womanly swagger, Thundermother have steadily become one of Europe's best-loved hard rock bands. Now audibly upgraded by bringing in powerhouse vocalist Linnea Vikström Egg, the Swedes have finally made the album that their celebrated live prowess deserves.

Dirty And Divine is a joyous, hook-stuffed riot, comprising 10 instantly memorable anthems that revel in their own fresh-as-a-daisy trad-rock purity. Guitarist Filippa Nässil is amazingly versatile, and her gutsy, nuanced playing provides the glue that binds these songs together. From the strutting, bluesy *So Close* and the fiery 80s hair-metal of *Speaking Of The Devil*, to the *White Wedding*-esque *Dead Or Alive* and *American Adrenaline*'s rapacious stomp, everything sounds exactly as an authentic, shit-kicking rock'n'roll album should.

Dom Lawson

Iggy Pop

Live At Montreux Jazz Festival *EARMUSIC*

Rock pioneer gets horny on the Lake Geneva shoreline.



If the notion of over-familiarity may preclude the desire to dive into an Iggy Pop live album, then be prepared to think again. Recorded in Switzerland's Auditorium Stravinski in 2023, the then 75-year-old punk progenitor and his five-piece band are augmented by a trombonist and trumpet player and the effect is akin to hearing him refreshed and anew.

The horns are particularly simpatico during spirited opener *Five Foot One*, where their punctuating stabs increase in intensity much like the free jazz that partly inspired him back in the 60s, and perennial favourite *The Passenger* bounces with their boost. But credit to Iggy for the deep dives that are brought to the fore. The Stooges' *Sick Of You* is exhumed to glorious effect, and the woozy *Mass Production* and creeping *Endless Sea* feel like siblings separated by albums. Iggy is in fine voice throughout, raising a middle finger to both age and doubters.

Julian Marszalek

Black Eyed Sons

Cowboys In Pinstriped Suits *OFF YER ROCKA*

Former Quireboys and Down N' Outz bring a host of rock-star friends.



Sprung from the ashes of the Quireboys fall-out (singer Spike on one side, guitarist Guy Griffin the other), this debut from the newly minted Black Eyed Sons begins exactly as you might imagine: a Stonesy-sounding romp titled *Lie To Me*. And while familiarity might breed contempt, arrest your expectations, as what follows, with the help of artists like Joe Elliott and Charlie Starr, is a glimmering mix of country, glam and rock'n'roll.

Highlights include Elliott's Mott-like title track, Mike Tramp helping out on the Jayhawks-sounding *Your True Colours*, Starr's country like lament *Autumn Reigns*, and Dan Reed helping out on the keening *So Glorious*. Admittedly a lot of it wouldn't have been written had the Stones not made *Exile*, but there's hidden songwriting depths here that go beyond an address book of famous friends.

Philip Wilding

Slinky Vagabond

The Eternal Return

SLINKY VAGABOND SOUNDS

Second album from fashionista and musician.

The union between Doncaster clothes designer Keanan Duffty and Italian multi-instrumentalist Fabio Fabbri is unlikely, but on a startlingly well-crafted album that features Glen Matlock, and Bowie alumni Earl Slick and Mike Garson, they've built a world rooted in 80s New Romanticism with surprisingly muscular guitar work. *Perfect World* has the kind of grinding solo last heard on Guns N' Roses's *Chinese Democracy*. There's the odd clunky lyric ('*When a legend dies, even androids cry*,' a notion possibly not rooted in scientific fact), but they channel their inner Cockney Rebel on *End Of The Show* and Suede's better period on *Lady Bump Discotheque*, while the splendid *Icarus Falls* almost

ROBBY KLEIN/PRESS

lurches into Backstreet Boys' *I Want It That Way*. It's not clear what they want here – Duffty is based in California and seems reasonably successful – but it doesn't sound like they're just dabbling.

John Aizlewood

The Night Flight Orchestra

Give Us The Moon *NAPALM*

Sweden's AOR evangelists keep the joy coming.



The first album that the Night Flight Orchestra have made since the untimely death of guitarist and songwriter David Andersson in 2022 could easily have been a dour and downbeat affair. Instead, *Give Us The Moon* marks a seamless transition into a new era by being every bit as joyful as the Swedish retro-nerds' previous six records.

Frontman Bjorn Strid has nobly upheld the band's tradition of giving AOR a boot up the backside. The absurdly catchy likes of *Shooting Velvet* and *Melbourne, May I?* have rootsy grit underpinning their unctuous, 80s sheen, and melodies that twist cherished clichés into smart new forms. Everything sounds like a hit, from *Paloma*'s syrupy synth-rock and *A Paris Point Of View*'s wistful disco, to the indulgent sprawl of *Stewardess, Empress, Hot Mess,* and the band's commitment to spreading a little happiness remains endlessly endearing. Form an orderly conga line and have at it, cheeseballs.

Dom Lawson

Jinjer

Duél *NAPALM*

Ukrainians find their progressive groove

Jinjer have never been a band to stand still. 2017's *Pisces* might've been their breakthrough to global audiences, but by *Wallflowers* in 2021 they'd all but shed their metalcore roots in favour of something altogether more progressive. Adding breakout choruses with a wild-eyed unpredictability that made them feel like tech metal's answer to Faith No More, they made it clear that they wouldn't be defined by their past successes.

Four years on, they're shifting gears again. On *Duél*, musicianship is king, Jinjer seemingly deciding that they needed songs as sonically acrobatic as vocalist Tatiana Shmayluk. Her trademark switch from ascendant melodies to demonic growls are still up-front, but unlike *Wallflowers*' breakout choruses, here winding, complex instrumentals steal the spotlight. There's a trade-off in festival-ready singalongs, but *Hedonist, Kafka* and *Someone's Daughter* show the band still have impressive earworms among the twists and turns of their most progressive album to date.

Rich Hobson

Lacuna Coil

Sleepless Empire

CENTURY MEDIA

The ghost of goth-metal past remains on the Italians' tenth.



Thirty-one years in, Lacuna Coil are heavier than ever. After revisiting their 2002 breakthrough for *Comalies XX*, they've effectively picked back up where 2019's *Black Anima* left off, adding more heft and thump to their sound that leaves the goth-metal tag they started with looking increasingly threadbare and redundant.

Echoes of their earlier sound remain, though. *On Nomine Patris* deploys some of the Middle East-inspired sonic mysticism that defined *Comalies* and *Karmacode*. Even amid their heaviest moments, Cristina Scabbia's voice soars and swoops with an athleticism and grace still breathtaking after 25-plus years.

Although threatened by homogenisation – the breakdown/mosh-call of *Scarecrow* could've been dead dropped by any metalcore band of the past 20 years – they retain enough magic and individuality to make *Sleepless Empire* another triumphant record, and are at their best when deploying defiant, ascendant choruses as on *Gravity, I Wish You Were Dead* and *Never Dawn*.

Rich Hobson

Dream Theater

Parasomnia *INSIDE OUT*

None shall sleep.

The return to Dream Theater of drummer Mike Portnoy after a 15-year absence has been acclaimed by some fans as akin to the Second Coming. Although his stand-in Mike Mangini, never really departed from the template that had already been laid down, there's a rejuvenated feel to this reunion album of the 'dream team', which is themed around the impact of sleep disruption from sleepwalking to nightmares.

There's a sharper-edged heaviness to the sound, clearly evident on *Night Terror,* which follows the ominous instrumental introduction, with an onslaught of maddening riffs and thunderous bass, and singer James LaBrie is in fine form. A similar barrage opens *A Broken Man,* which describes the battle traumas that leave soldiers with nightmares and insomnia, and is heightened by their traumatised voices. In contrast, *Midnight Messiah* is more intricate and multi-layered, while the 20-minute heavy, proggy *The Shadow Man Incident* is an epic finale.

Hugh Fielder

Tokyo Blade

Time Is The Fire *CHERRY RED*

If they could turn back time.



In some alternative timeline, the past eight years or so of Tokyo Blade would be the band's actual career trajectory across the 80s, providing some consistency and progress, instead of the line-up changes and uneven output that dulled the promise of their NWOBHM debut album.

With their reinstated 1982 line-up still in place, *Time Is The Fire* delivers 14 epics, with vocalist Marsh sounding strident and bold and guitarists Andy Boulton and John Wiggins pulling out all the stops on the riffs and solos front. The ferocity and intent are almost palpable, and what you get is some very fine melodic metal indeed, *Feeding The Rat*, *Are You Happy Now*, the spooky *Man On The Stair* and Thin Lizzy-channelling *Soldier On* the pick of an album that buzzes with energy. And to think, it's only taken them around 40 years to get here.

Essi Berelian

ROUND-UP: MELODIC ROCK

By Dave Ling



Bonfire: tuneful radio rock and meaty riffs.

LEONARD LUDWIG/PRESS

Bonfire

Higher Ground *FRONTIERS*



Back in the big-haired 80s, Bonfire released a trilogy of masterfully mellifluous albums that seemed to propel the German band to the very threshold of an international breakthrough. In the end, line-up changes and an unsuitable record label caused them to tumble at the final hurdle, and in 1989 guitarist Hans Ziller, suffering from an undiagnosed bipolar disorder, had the ignominy of being ejected by the group that he'd founded.

Seven years later Ziller regained control of Bonfire, and with almost 20 albums now accrued he continues to lead them. Their first release for Frontiers, *Higher Ground* once again features Dyan Mair, whose shrill voice blighted last year's slightly metallised re-recordings set *MMXXIII*, but here he sounds more subdued and a little more in line with expectations. *I Will Rise, Lost All Control*, the low-slung, fist-in-the-air title track and stirring album closer *Rock 'N' Roll Survivor* (the latter the title of Ziller's forthcoming, apparently no-holds-barred memoir) are textbook examples of tuneful radio rock, founded on riffs meaty enough to feed a pack of starving XL bullies.

Wildness

Avenger *FRONTIERS*



The fourth album from these hirsute Swedes, who have improved massively since bringing back frontman Erik Forsberg in 2020, offers a banquet of smooth, mannered Scandi-hard rock. Although there are moments when some additional oomph might have added some variation, to undermine the joy generated by *Wings Of Fire, Broken Heart* and *Poison Ivy* would be churlish.

Craig Brooks

Desolation Freeway

ESCAPE MUSIC



This solo debut from the singer and guitarist with Touch (the veteran New Yorkers of *Don't You Know What Love Is* fame) is a stirring and colourful set of tunes, enhanced by the dancing keyboards of Touch bandmate Mark Mangold. Already immensely satisfying, the mix by One Desire's Jimmy Westerlund adds a welcome contemporary slant.

Mikael Erlandsson

The Second 1 *PRIDE & JOY MUSIC*



Much-travelled Swedish singer, multi-instrumentalist and writer Mikael Erlandsson is a solo artist, a member of Secret Service, Last Autumn's Dream and Autumn's Child and a veteran of the Eurovision Song Contest. *The Second 1*, a pleasingly relaxed sequel to his now three-decades-old album *The 1*, is guaranteed to put a grin on the face of the listener.

Juliet's Not Dead

This World Is Ours *TMR*



You might be a little more familiar with JND under their recently abandoned previous moniker Twister. The hard-gigging band from the North East like to call their music "high-energy modern rock", a description that perfectly befits this album's 10 intelligently constructed, melody-conscious nuggets. A crisp, fresh-sounding production accentuates the quartet's vision.

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The Hard Stuff Reissues



Gillan

1978-1982 *EDSEL*



Purple survivor's career-reviving vehicle rides again across seven discs.

The mass cancellation of hard rock's heroes at the hands of punk has always been greatly exaggerated, but by the late 70s Ian Gillan had lost his way. The Ian Gillan Band's jazz-fusion direction hadn't thrilled his old Deep Purple fan base, and, incredibly, Gillan – his new, reassuringly hard rocking outfit – couldn't get a UK label to release their self-titled debut in 1978.

It became known as The Japanese Album, and its reissue in this seven-disc set of the band's albums shows its rejection wasn't due to lack of quality. Exhilaratingly urgent, high-octane romps *Secret Of The Dance*, *Back In The Game* and *Message In A Bottle* subsequently ended up in marginally superior form on 1979's *Mr. Universe*, as the classic Gillan line-up took shape with Bernie Tormé on guitar and the ever-photogenic John McCoy, scaring *Top Of The Pops* viewers, on bass.

They'd hit their stride in the slipstream of NWOBHM and *Glory Road* (1980), then made the UK top five. Its first two singles, the stomping *Sleeping On The Job* and *No Easy Way*, along with the almost hardcore-paced opener *Unchain Your Brain*, have dated better than *Trouble*, their hit Elvis cover. The B-sides included here are worth a listen too, even if the lurching, lairy *Handles On Her Hips* is decidedly last-decade in terms of sexual politics. *Your Sister's On My List* is a similarly guilty pleasure, and the album it's thrown in with, *Future Shock*, is the most swaggering, assured set of Gillan's short lifespan. *No Laughing In Heaven* and *Sacre Bleu* have a theatrical chutzpah that still shines through, and the band even make a fine stab at a ballad with *If I Sing Softly*.

Within six months they'd followed it up with *Double Trouble*, with a live disc recorded at the Reading festival that summer thrown in. The studio tracks (padded out with earlier non-album hits *Trouble* and *Mutually Assured Destruction*) don't hit quite as hard as the set that preceded them, but the live takes on *No Easy Way* and *Vengeance*, each featuring new guitarist Janick Gers letting rip, remain choice moments.

Alas intra-band tensions meant 1982's *Magic* would be the band's swansong. While it's their least-loved album, *Caught In A Trap*'s angsty synth-rock departure and *Bluesy Blue Sea*'s more epically inclined material sound well-crafted and intriguing 40-odd years later.

Soon after, though, Deep Purple would regroup, and Gillan (the band) would be history. But that five-year spell did a fine job of revitalising one of rock's finest frontmen.

Johnny Sharp

Nektar

Journey To The Centre Of The Eye, Expanded *ESOTERIC*

Blowing the hive mind.



The welcome revival of the Nektar catalogue continues in reverse gear, reaching their 1971 debut LP. It's a continuous piece split into 13 tracks built around the concept of a rocket launch and the nuclear arms race. Sonically it's similar to (but heavier than) the Moody Blues' Mellotron-loaded *To Our Children's Children's Children*.

As well as two mixes of the original album, the five-CD set includes The Boston Tapes, recorded in the US in 1970, prior to their official debut. The previously unreleased sessions see the band evolving musically with the Beatlesque *Good Day* and the single *Do You Believe In Magic?*; their version of *Sealed With A Kiss* owes a nod to *You Never Give Me Your Money*.

Also included here is a pair of German concert bootlegs, both from 1971. The booklet features contributions from Derek 'Mo' Moore, bass player and sole surviving original member of the band. A pleasing inclusion on the Blu-ray is the black-and-white promo for *Good Day*, in which the band members cycle through the snow to a florist then hand out flowers to bemused passengers at Hamburg railway station.

Claudia Elliott

Fat Mattress

How Can I Live? The Complete Recordings *CHERRY RED*

Noel Redding's 60s side project's back catalogue.

Branding experts would surely shake their head at Noel Redding's choice of band monicker when he formed another group during time off from the Jimi Hendrix Experience. But as un-transcendental as the name Fat Mattress might have sounded, much of the material they produced had a distinctly lysergic tint at first, if only of a similarly Toytown, psych-lite variety to that of singer Neil Landon's previous band the Flower Pot Men.

This three-disc anthology shows they also had more than just Redding's Jimi associations going for them. Their self-titled 1969 debut leans heavily on hint-hint references on the likes of *Mr Moonshine* (*'put a little something in my wine'*) and *I Don't Mind*, although quite what kind of 'gas' is being peddled by *Petrol Pump Assistant* (*'very very persistent, selling petrol to all the passers-by'*) remains a mystery. *Magic Forest* (a hit in Holland, apparently) is similarly likeable flower-child beat-pop, written by Landon and bassist Jim Leverton, who would take creative control for 1970's *Fat Mattress II* after Redding took his leave. *The Storm*'s folk-rock singalong and the extended country-rock jam *The River* suggest a band in search of new, post-psychedelia directions, and that impression is reinforced on the tracks included here from the band's third album, which would have featured Redding back in the fold had they not split during its recording. *Cold Wall Of Stone*'s funky, bluesy strut and the soulful *Which Way To Go* (pencilled in as a Leverton solo single) show promising roads not taken.

Johnny Sharp

The Dickies

Reissues *CAPTAIN OI!*

First two albums from cheery Californian punks.



In the best sense of the term, The Dickies were a joke (and still are, although their 2022 single *A Gary Glitter Getaway* received precious little airplay). As punk took a po-faced stance, The Dickies developed a cartoon-style approach that involved covering old non-punk chestnuts, from *Silent Night* to *Nights In White Satin*, in brief and super-fast fashion. Those crowd pleasers were supplemented by similarly brief and fast originals, where they were *Bowling With Bedrock Barney* or lamenting that (*I'm Stuck In A Pagoda With) Trisha Toyota*. Purists hated them, everyone else, especially in the UK, was tickled.

The February 1979 UK Top 20 debut *The Incredible Shrinking Dickies* (**7/10**) featured versions of *Paranoid* (a generation's introduction to the music of Black Sabbath), *Eve Of Destruction* and, on a generous helping of extra tracks, their hit version of the *Banana Splits* theme and *The Sound Of Silence*.

A mere eight months later, there were fewer covers on *Dawn Of The Dickies* (**7/10**) and it only reached No.60 in the UK,

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY

but enhanced by two additional self-written songs their own songwriting had leapt forwards. *Manny, Moe & Jack*, their tribute to a local garage, would be their finest original moment.

For all the wackiness and lust for life, there was darkness at the edge of this particular town, and multi-instrumentalist Chuck Wagon would take his own life in 1981. But for these still-loveable albums, The Dickies were the dafter side of the oh-so-serious punk uprising.

John Aizlewood

Iain Matthews

Thro' My Eyes: The Vertigo Years 1970-1974 *CHERRY RED*

Five-disc set traces the foundations of his six-decade solo career.



Since his debut single with The Pyramid in 1967, Iain Matthews has appeared on enough albums to fill a small record shop. By the point at which this five-CD collection begins, he'd already racked up two LPs with Fairport Convention, before his country-infused debut solo set *Matthews' Southern Comfort* birthed the band of the same name, who recorded two further albums and a hit cover of Joni Mitchell's *Woodstock* in 1970.

This set, which supplements Matthews's three Vertigo albums with live performances (many unreleased) dating from 1971 to 2022 opens with *If You Saw Thro' My Eyes* (1971), a remarkably consistent record that captured his emergence as an outstanding singer-songwriter. His nine self-written songs boast imaginative chord changes (*Hearts*) and understated vocal power (*Desert Inn*), holding folk and country-rock elements in delicate balance, with tempered accompaniment from former Fairports bandmates Richard Thompson and Sandy Denny, and longstanding guitar foil Andy Roberts. A previously unreleased acoustic show (with Thompson and Roberts) recorded during the tour will thrill Fairport fans with *Genesis Hall*.

Tigers Will Survive (1972) doesn't quite match its predecessor, but delivers six creditable Matthews compositions (notably the shapeshifting title track), and beguiling covers including a surprisingly effective a-capella *Da Doo Ron Ron*. Hastily recorded contractual obligation *Journeys From Gospel Oak* (1974) still scores with well-suited covers (*Sing Me Back Home*) and stellar originals (*Knowing The Game*), while abundant solo and full-band live performances highlight the material's enduring appeal.

Rich Davenport

Bill Nelson

Quit Dreaming And Get On The Beam: Deluxe Edition *ESOTERIC*

Four-disc reissue for Nelson's critical and commercial gem.



Like most pioneers, Bill Nelson found that wandering off the perceived musical path was about as welcome by his then label EMI (and its sister US imprint Capitol) as if he'd flooded the MD's office with industrial slurry. Blame Be-Bop Deluxe's enduring legacy, but no one who'd heard the band's 1978 album *Drastic Plastic* could have been too surprised by what Nelson did next. But the *Quit Dreaming* tapes were enough to scare the folks at EMI, and having taken receipt of the album (recorded in 1979) they locked them away. Two years later, Mercury Records saw sense and released the tapes, and watched *Quit Dreaming* sail into the UK Top 10.

Time, and this reissue, have been kind to what must have been perceived as Nelson's take on new-wave electronica, when in fact he wasn't surfing the wave, but had spotted it some years before his contemporaries had even thought to wade into the water. This treasure trove – a series of radio sessions, including John Peel tapes, a new stereo mix of the original album, a Blu-ray disc and 50-plus bonus tracks is a brittle delight. Forget that momentarily, though, and revel in the distorted Nelson dreams of the electronic crackle on tracks like *Banal, Do You Dream In Colour* and the jagged, discordant *False Alarms*.

Philip Wilding

Tigertailz

For A Few Dollarz More (The Archives Vol. 1: 1984-1991) *HEAR NO EVIL*

Early career retrospective from the band the Manics could have been.

Cursed by being born 5,000 miles from where the action was, candyfloss-haired glam tarts Tigertailz made it their mission to bring a little bit of the Sunset Strip to South Wales. They failed, of course, but by god they had fun trying.

This three-CD box set brings together the two albums and various singles and EP tracks that made them... well, not famous but briefly talked about. 1987's *Young And Reckless* is rougher than a Barry Island Working Men's Club, but what it lacks in gloss it makes up for in exhilaration. Singer Steevi Jaimz's penchant for chasing music journalists down the street with planks of wood got him fired before 1990's *Berzerk*, and new boy Kim Hooker brings a more polished approached, not least on million-dollar power ballad *Heaven* and the genius pop-metal of *Love Bomb Baby*, one of the era's all-time great songs.

The box set is rounded out by a disc of early singles tracks and later EP cuts, including spot-on covers of Metallica's *Creeping Death* and Megadeth's *Peace Sells*. Success still eluded them, but failures don't get much more glorious than Tigertailz.

Dave Everley



The Verve

This Is Music: The Singles *UMR*

Two decades on, the Wigan rockers' singles compilation still soars, swoops and crushes.



There's always been a boldness to The Verve's attitude: titling their 2004 singles compilation *This Is Music*, after its opening track, was intended as a brash, definitive statement, rendering all other sound unworthy. This vinyl anniversary reissue, with its original bonus tracks now replaced with the two singles from 2008's reunion album *Forth*, has lost none of its bravado over the past two decades.

Its first three tracks lay out The Verve's initial evolution, albeit non-chronologically. *This Is Music*, representing 1995's second album *A Northern Soul*, thunders in on tides of swirling psych-rock that sound like Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix battling for supremacy over an alternative dimension in which it is forever – hazily – 1969, with singer Richard Ashcroft, a disembodied voice within the storm, singing about working-class glory. *Slide Away*, a firestorm behind glass, showcases the gentler, frictionless shoegaze that characterised much of their 1993 debut *A Storm In Heaven*, and then *Lucky Man* exemplifies the string-stroked acoustic rock of 1997's *Urban Hymns*. On this evidence alone you might expect *A Northern Soul*, rather than *Urban Hymns*, to have been their mega-platinum peak, and its material continues to crush everything around it for at least two discs. The austere, monolithic *History*, for example, is a pointer to what's to come, its hem merely brushed by the kaleidoscopic blues of *Blue*, Spandau Ballet mimic *Sonnet* or the romantic lustre of *She's A Superstar*, a nine-minute glide over sonic war zones.

The band's confidence stretches as far as saving their best songs for the latter half. Here, hallucinogenic early single *All In The Mind* scuttles towards a frenzied take-off, Eastern textures bringing the mystique. *The Drugs Don't Work* and *Bitter Sweet Symphony* mark the magnificent culmination of the band's development, the former a sublimely wistful, beautifully judged addiction ballad, the latter grandiose indie pop at its very finest, even if the Rolling Stones took much of the credit (and cash). The inclusion of *Forth*'s already dated electro-rocker *Love Is Noise* only lessens The Verve's historic standing, sounding like a band chasing modern relevance rather than being born leaders. But, even revisited 20 years on, there's still enough meteoric noise here to leave a formidable crater in the rock landscape.

Mark Beaumont

PRESS



Sharks

Car Crash Supergroup – The Island Records Years 1973-1974 *LEMON/CHERRY RED*



Singer's tribute to Andy Fraser's short-lived post-Free supergroup.

The precociously talented Andy Fraser was 15 years old when, facilitated by his surrogate father Alexis Korner, he joined Paul Rodgers, Simon Kirke and Paul Kossoff in forming Free in 1968, and co-wrote their classic hit *All Right Now*. Friction with Rodgers led to bassist Fraser leaving in mid-1971, and he led the short-lived Toby before returning to Free. Frustrated by Kossoff's escalating drug addiction, he left again in June 1972.

Veteran guitarist Chris Spedding, envisioning "my transition from 'session man' to 'rocker'", accepted Fraser's invitation to join his new band, alongside drummer Marty Simon and singer Steve 'Snips' Parsons from Hull band Nothineverappens. Brandishing Joe Cocker-like vocal paroxysms and his own songs, Snips had beaten Robert Palmer and Leo Sayer at auditions, but worried Fraser when recording Sharks' debut album *First Water* that December.

Still sensitive from conflicts with Rodgers, Fraser clashed with Snips over songs, although their contrasting approaches are quite effective. Enhanced by his liquid bass, Fraser's *Follow Me* and *Doctor Love* invoke early-70s piano-pounding blues rock, while Snips eases the vocal pyrotechnics on slowies *Ol' Jelly Roll*, Mott-like *Steal Away* and the slide-scythed *Snakes And Swallowtails*. Spedding and Snips contribute the sprightly bull-roaring *World Park Junkies*.

Predictably, Sharks were hailed as a new supergroup as they toured the UK, until Spedding's Pontiac Le Mans, customised into the 'Sharksmobile' with fin and grille teeth, crashed into a tree and Fraser injured his wrist. After the album's release, the dissatisfied bassist departed to form his own trio, and was replaced by US session bassist Busta Cherry Jones.

With the addition of keyboard player Nick Judd, Snips's songs dominate 1974's *Jab It In Yore Eye*, which includes acoustic slowie *Rain Or Shine*, the dramatic *Revolution Of The Heart*, hilarious Bruce Lee tribute *Kung Fu*, the wired *Cocaine Blues* and the block-rocking *Sophistication* (cited as Sharks fan Mick Jones's inspiration for The Clash's *Should I Stay Or Should I Go*).

Tour-knackered and drug-sodden, Sharks recorded their third album (disc three here), released in 2016 as *Car Crash Tapes*. Their bite sounds oddly muted on workmanlike rockers like *The Shadow Knows*. After Island Records rejected the mixes and dropped the band, Sharks split. Spedding returned to session work, Snips joined the Baker-Gurvitz Army.

Each disc here ends with live tracks recorded in May '74 at Providence, Rhode Island. A worthwhile, if patchy collection.

Kris Needs

Frank Black

Teenager Of The Year *4AD*

Shiny vinyl release as the album hits 30.



That 4AD are releasing this glorious second solo album from the Pixies frontman on gleaming gold-coloured vinyl is only right and proper, as it still stands as his crowning glory in terms of music outside the band. In fact it finds him rejuvenated after Pixies' pre-hiatus swansong *Trompe Le Monde* – the songwriting here is impeccable, madly inventive and overflowing with a sense of freedom and joie de vivre, beautifully at odds with the gloom of the imploding grunge scene of the time.

Black has an innate understanding of the power of a tight pop chorus, respect for classic American rock'n'roll, and a sense of punk weirdness to make it all sound brand new. The songs are pared down to the bare minimum, 22 of them each around that magic bar of three minutes, but he fits so much into those precious seconds, from cod-reggae to wild whoops. *Headache*, the album's hit single, sounds like just that, tension behind the eyeballs jauntily and cheerfully endured, its bounce and drive its own remedy, clearing to make way for the Roy Orbison-worshipping *Sir Rockabye*.

Lyrically and musically clever, wildly varied and irresistible, *Teenager Of The Year* is the sound of a man running wild in his own imagination, and it's still brilliant three decades on.

Emma Johnston

Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe

An Evening Of Yes Music Plus *CHERRY RED*

Yes no Squire.

Quite how four fifths of the classic Yes line-up landed up in conflict with their bass player who had the rights to the band name is just another chapter in one of rock's greatest soap operas. Suffice to say this is a live album from the 1989 ABWH tour featuring a pile of Yes glories from their 70s heyday along with some songs from their then-recent self-titled album.

The show was quite the spectacle. After a mood-setting introduction of Benjamin Britten's grandiose theme (actually by Henry Purcell) from *The Young Person's Guide To The Orchestra*, Anderson drifts in with *Time And A Word*, accompanied by acoustic guitar, into which he weaves *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* which had revived Yes's fortunes a couple of years earlier. After Steve Howe's *Clap* the show moves forward majestically, with new songs like *Birthright* slotting seamlessly between *Long Distance Runaround* and *And You And I*.

As a two-CD/DVD package, however, there are problems. Recorded for a TV pay-per-view, the sound does not do the band justice. Plus bassist Jeff Berlin is ridiculously low in the mix. Listeners will also have to accept Bruford's electronic drum kit and Wakeman's synthesiser obsession which give it a dated 80s feel.

Hugh Fielder

Kevin Ayers

Bananamour *ESOTERIC*

Fourth from the poster boy of whimsical early-70s British prog.



In the early 70s, any label worth its 'underground' cred had at least a couple of loveable British eccentrics on their roster who were never really expected to break out of their bubble and hit the commercial fast lane. EMI offshoot Harvest was built for comfort, not for speed, and one of theirs was wine-drinking girl magnet and former Soft Machine cog Kevin Ayers.

Although on his fourth album *Bananamour* it might be possible to detect a breeze, rather than a wind, of change in the direction of cash tills, as a whole it's more of his wonderfully esoteric and whimsical style typified by earlier songs such as the bucolic *Girl On A Swing* and the musically gorgeous/lyrically bonkers *Song For Insane Times*. If there is a new commercial element, it might be in gentle acoustic rocker *Shouting In A Bucket Blues*, with album guest Steve Hillage's guitar driving it along, or the soul-touched *Don't Let It Get You Down*; you certainly won't hear any in the likes of the spacy, very Hillage *Decadence*, the children's-party singalong *Oh! Wot A Dream*, the rather lovely piano waltz *Hymn*, and others.

This remaster is just of the original viny issue, and doesn't have the four extra tracks that

BRIAN COOKE/GETTY

were added for the CD release, but those mostly throwaways won't be sorely missed.

Paul Henderson

The Fall

Levitate *CHERRY RED*

Two-LP edition pressed in transparent red vinyl.



Staggering incoherently out of the 20th century like leaving a Wetherspoons at closing time, The Fall's *Levitate* (1997) was the most obstreperously avant of their late-90s triptych, even introducing drum-and-bass into the Fall musique concrète mixer.

With the band beset by financial and personnel friction, album number 19 was an ignominious end to that idiosyncratic Fall sound: the machine-like rhythm section of drummer Karl Burns and bassist Steve Hanley (who left after its release). Along with Sister Sledge's *Lost In Music*, the 1959 novelty song *I'm A Mummy* (originally performed by cartoon voice actor Bob McFadden) was one of Smith's more bizarro cover choices, especially leading into the customary vitriolic and phantasmagorical Fall of *The Quartet Of Doc Shanley*, the tape assemblage of *Tragic Days* and the schizophrenic abrasion of *4½*. All of which combine to make *Levitate* the ultimate eerie soundtrack to the most unsettling Lars von Trier film never made.

Alex Burrows

Mercury Rev

The Secret Migration

CHERRY RED

First time on vinyl for dark horse delight.



By 2005, Mercury Rev were established as respected masters of serene soft-psych Americana, their beginnings as chaotic noiseniks, making it up as they went along way behind them. (Their early gigs were as sophisticated as five chimps bashing tin buckets.) Yet somehow *The Secret Migration* feels undervalued among their catalogue, perhaps because superficially it seems like 'just' more of the same thing they'd then been honing for a while. It sounds absolutely gorgeous today, as elevated as Cocteau Twins, but tenderly tuneful and with subtle undercurrents weaving in and out of Dave Fridmann's production. There's an alluring lilt and lightness to *Black Forest (Lorelei)* and *In A Funny Way*.

A 2020 five-CD edition gathered every shaving from the studio floor, and alongside the original album this two-LP version gives us the highlights of those. The out-takes are very high standard, and include surprisingly successful covers from The Replacements' *Androgynous* to Paul Williams's melancholy *I Never Had It So Good*. Their rendition of Bobby Charles's *Tennessee Blues* taps into the kind of bittersweet longing for fulfilment which by now was the Rev's raison d'être.

Moving.

Chris Roberts

Vibravoid

An Introduction To

FRUITS DE MER

Give it a swirl.

Arriving in the early-90s no man's land for psychedelia, German trio Vibravoid helped themselves to krautrock LPs discarded in the street. This double-CD set of covers, compiled by frontman Dr Christian Koch, gathers together their junk-shop inspiration. It's a timely reminder of the brilliance of late-60s and early-70s tracks by fellow Germans Can, Kraftwerk and Amon Düül II, followed by a volley of post-Syd Barrett Floydian classics. As well as delving into whimsical pop (*Hole In My Shoe, Incense And Peppermints*), there are more obscure songs with 80s Australian scenesters Tyrnaround's trippy *Colour Your Mind* and New York electronica pioneers Silver Apples. Four of the tracks from CD One are performed live on CD Two, delivered with great aplomb. If you've ever wondered what an Eddie Cochran tune might sound like set to sitars, then wonder no longer.

Claudia Elliott

The Go-Betweens

G Stands For Go-Betweens: Vol 3, 2000-2006 *DOMINO*

For true believers only.



The third and final volume in this exhaustive set dedicated to documenting nearly everything this much-loved Brisbane group released focuses on principal songwriters Robert Forster and Grant McLennan's output from the 21st century.

Four vinyl albums, seven CDs and a 112-page book capture the bright-yellow sound and melancholy feeling exquisitely – the final three studio albums *The Friends Of Rachel Worth, Bright Yellow Bright Orange* and *Oceans Apart*, plus lashings of B-sides, radio sessions are rare demos, including 14 previously unreleased songs the duo recorded together in 1991.

It's rare that a band will return after hiatus to equal, or even better, their original output, but the Go-Betweens manage it effortlessly, and songs like *Mrs Morgan, He Lives My Life* and *Darlinghurst Nights* grow in stature every year. The Go-Betweens moved on from original influences such as Lou Reed and Television decades and decades ago.

This collection is given unwanted added poignancy by the passing of McLennan in 2006 and is absolutely beautiful, a treasure trove from Australia's greatest rock band.

Everett True



The Creation

Our Music Is Red With Purple Flashes *EDSEL*

Classic 60s material outweighs misfiring reunion albums in definitive box set.



The Creation were the UK's answer to the Velvet Underground. Pioneering and forward thinking, both bands pushed sonic boundaries with guitarists whose unorthodox approaches would prove highly influential over the years (and in certain cases wholly appropriated), while drawing heavily on the Pop Art scenes of the 60s. And although each band generated greater interest from beyond their domestic borders, they also remained cult concerns.

Unlike the Velvet Underground, The Creation never recorded an album in their heyday. Released in mid-1967, *We Are Paintermen* was a compilation of their steady stream of singles that failed to trouble the UK chart yet proved popular in Germany and Scandinavia. Indeed, such was their impact over there that producer Frank Farian later refashioned *Painter Man* from its raw, freakbeat roots into a disco smash for Boney M in the 70s.

Despite their formidable live reputation, The Creation failed to capitalise on their magic. Matching The Who for aural hooliganism under the aegis of the late producer Shel Talmy, their explosive debut single, 1966's *Making Time*, was the collision of gloriously primitive riffing with an art sensibility that saw guitarist Eddie Phillips making use of a violin bow – a move that would later be lifted wholesale by Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page. Elsewhere, the wide-eyed and frothing *Biff Bang Pow* was exceeded by the droning psychedelic colossus *How Does It Feel To Feel?*, which here is represented in its UK and US versions, the latter characterised by its unruly and avant-garde approach. Facing indifference at home, unsteady line-ups and a demanding schedule on the continent, The Creation split.

They reunited in the 80s, but *Psychedelic Rose* – unreleased until the noughties – is marred throughout by horribly dated production and an ill-advised reworking of *Making Time*. Later they were signed by uber-fan Alan McGee for – who else? – Creation Records, but 1996's *Power Surge* sounded like a 70s glam album just at the point when the label was living out its fantasies of the 60s to the full.

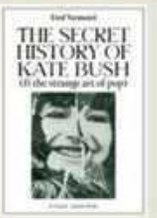
Although they were of their time, The Creation were curiously out of it too while paving the way forward. Their 60s material – here on mono and stereo discs, with the former packing the greater punch – remains essential, the rest of their output less so as they chased a legacy that couldn't be caught.

Julian Marszalek

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS



The Secret History Of Kate Bush (& The Strange Art Of Pop)



Fred Vermorel *LE GOSPEL/ANTENNE*

Fanmail, or philosophy? One of rock's most notorious books returns.

"Pop is the only art which counts today – it stands where painting stood in the early [20th] century," Fred Vermorel wrote in his deeply strange 1983 book, now reissued with archival notes, an interview with Kate Bush's father and an afterword by the author on his "absurdist experiment". Loathed by Bush fans, *The Secret History Of Kate Bush* is wildly misunderstood, although not necessarily underrated. It's essentially four divergent texts glued together. There's a tracing of Bush's genealogy all the way back to the Vikings, some unhealthy stalking of the singer in suburbia which rings fake even though it's presented as authentic, a dissertation on pop as an art form (by far the most insightful part), then various tangential interviews. It was the first two sections that offended fans, who'd anticipated a biography, not an abstract, literary, Robbe-Grillet-like endeavour aiming to both satirise and caricature fans' obsessiveness, while applauding the deranged magic of fame.

It banks on a busload of irony, and Vermorel's mad-professor persona is outlandishly wonky. Remember, Bush wasn't really in vogue at this time. After *The Dreaming*, her star rose again with 1985's *Hounds Of Love*. But to reiterate: this is not a biog. Now, it's a fascinating relic from a less jaded era when pop and rock music were intensely analysed by critics who fancied themselves as poets, when they could slaughter a big new release without being benched for losing advertising, and when stars were seen as both fair game and prophets or messiahs. It's unlikely anybody will write similarly feverish prose about Ed Sheeran or Dua Lipa.

Away from the frankly weird digging into the Bush family, Vermorel's Gurdjieff-referencing musings cast a clearer eye on the industry's puffing-up of ephemera, although his thoughts are very of their time. "EMI takes care to show her with the same scrupulous art as Moscow depicts Karl Marx and Thorn Industries its computers," he ponders, adding that Bush is not a "vacuous nonentity" like Debbie Harry because "she looks like she might menstruate, or punch my nose". Wow. In the afterword, Vermorel notes that "the cult of Donald Trump is more fanlike than political", and irrational faith over reason is his core theme here. Kate's dad, who humours Vermorel, seems eminently sane.

This book is an enthralling throwback to a time when writers about pop believed in the holy significance of the medium, and of themselves.

Chris Roberts

On Track... Sparks 1969-1979

Chris Sutton *SONICBOND*

The Maels' first decade analysed forensically.



The premise is simple: take every Sparks song of the 70s – singles, album tracks, demos, out-takes and oddities such as their work on Adrian Munsey's *C'est Sheep* – and explain them with added context.

Assisted by assorted Sparks collaborators – but not the Maels – museum manager and playwright Chris Sutton is a mostly reliable guide. He details missed opportunities such as Mick Ronson touring with Bob Dylan rather than joining Sparks and producing *Big Beat,* or Andy Warhol pricing himself out of duetting with Russell Mael on *Beat The Clock*. His awkward dismissal of *Equator* ("it does go on for ages") might raise eyebrows, but he's terrific on demos such as the 1978 ones that Arista Records turned down before Sparks teamed up with producer Giorgio Moroder to craft *No 1 In Heaven*. After which, regrettably, Sutton leaves them, leaving us in turn rather hoping for a follow-up.

John Aizlewood

Solidarity Forever: The Art And Soul Of Stevie Van Zandt

Robert Lawson *FRIESEN PRESS*

Trainspotteringly detailed fan's account.



Leaving personal details to Van Zandt's 2021 memoir, lifelong fan Robert Lawson here swings the spotlight on the New Jersey activist, solo artist, actor and lifelong Springsteen associate's records, gigs and political events, down to set-lists and catalogue numbers.

With intermittent illumination from his subject, Lawson shocks (and corrects) Van Zandt himself with the depth of his knowledge, much gained from bootlegs. Van Zandt emerges as a fearless workhorse in love with the rock'n'roll world rubbing shoulders with his megastar heroes, notably on the anti-apartheid *Sun City* album and events. With E Street Band stints just part of the action, more attention is given to solo albums up to 2019's *Summer Of Sorcery*. Along with *Lilyhammer*, there's also background to his famous role as Silvio Dante, Tony Soprano's consigliere in *The Sopranos*. Originally auditioning for the lead role, Van Zandt made sure his wife and music appeared throughout.

Kris Needs

The Rolling Stones

Welcome To Shepherd's Bush *MERCURY*

Still got the silver.



A couple of days before wowing the masses at Wembley Stadium in June 1999 on their No Security tour, the Rolling Stones popped into Shepherd's Bush Empire for a quick refresh in front of die-hard fans, passing celebrities like Stephen Tyler and Joe Perry and, for some reason, a bunch of snooker players. The stage was cosy but big enough to incorporate the band's backing singers and a horn section, and the Stones took the opportunity to brush down a few obscurities, such as *Melody* from *Black And Blue*, and give a first try-out for *Moon Is Up* from *Voodoo Lounge*. Sheryl Crow also showed up to bump bums with Jagger on *Honky Tonk Woman*.

The film and Blu-ray disc catches them in vivid close-up before the wrinkles really started to show, and some of the split-screen effects show the same person from different angles which is a cool trick.

Hugh Fielder

Ghosts: Journeys To Post-Pop – How David Sylvian, Mark Hollis And Kate Bush Reinvented Pop Music

Matthew Restall *SONICBOND*

Intriguing account of how three pop stars receded into silence.



"If you're such a private person, why would you become a pop star?" one of Mark Hollis of Talk Talk's bandmates asked. Matthew Restall's enjoyable and in places personal account of Hollis, former Japan vocalist David Sylvian and Kate Bush is an attempt

ANGELO DELGIOVANNADORI VIA GETTY

in part to resolve that paradox. All three began as seemingly shameless pop phenomena before their work evolved and developed, away from the 'centre' - Sylvian split up Japan precisely because they were so successful, it seems; Bush drifted into reclusiveness; Hollis undertook an extraordinary, incremental journey from sub-Duran pop into the avant garde.

Restall's passion and involvement for his subject, as well as the framing and coinage of 'post-pop', lift this book well above the realms of standard hack pop bio. There's much to chew on here.

David Stubbs

Philip Lynott: Renegade

Alan Byrne SONICBOND PUBLISHING

Ode to a black man.



Previously published only in Ireland, this updated account of the late Thin Lizzy leader now includes recent additions to Lynott's legacy such as the 1976 box. It's also an unusual entry in the Philo-graphy in that it concentrates as much (if not more) on his work outside Thin Lizzy as it does on the glory years within the band he's famous for fronting.

All the great Lizzy albums are covered fairly, although author Alan Byrne is a little hard on *Johnny The Fox*. But it's the recounting of the Dublin scene that Lynott emerged from in the late 60s (some of those characters are still knocking around), then his solo work starting with his part in Jeff Wayne's *War Of The Worlds* (Wayne initially had Paul Rodgers in mind), and on through his two Lizzy-less albums and his failure to launch Grand Slam that make this informative biography worth your time.

Pat Carty

A Complete Unknown

Dir: James Mangold

Timothée Chalamet shines as Bob Dylan in early-days biopic.



As with the closing scenes of *The Wanderers* (1979) and *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013), the cinematic Bob Dylan has long symbolised change. And by wisely focusing on the seismic development between Dylan's arrival in New York in 1961 and his epoch-changing electric set at the Newport Folk Festival four years later, *A Complete Unknown* is less a history lesson – no toking with The Beatles here, and other liberties are taken too – and more a meditation on artistic reinvention.

Dylan's enigma is maintained by Timothée Chalamet's pitch-perfect performance (and singing) of a mumbling phantom who articulates through his songs when not gliding between lovers, friends and collaborators. Equally enthralling are Monica Barbaro (Joan Baez), Elle Fanning (Sylvie Russo but really Suze Rotolo) and Edward Norton's saintly Pete Seeger who circle around Dylan before their respective orbits are discarded, all directed by James Mangold's impressive eye for period detail.

Julian Marszalek

Too Far North: Musical Scenes From The North East

Ian Fawdon

TYNE BRIDGE PUBLISHING

A deep dive into the Newcastle scene and beyond.



It's a constant source of agitation for the North East that so many bands and artists get as far north as Leeds and Manchester, then skip the North East and head straight up to Glasgow. Why, Ian Fawdon asks, is the region so often overlooked, and does it have a genre and scene comparable to those in London, Manchester and Liverpool?

In his search for answers, he interviews a wide range of artists from the region, from The Animals for the 60s rock'n'roll boom, via Lindisfarne and The Unthanks for this part of the world's impeccable folk scene, punk and NWOBHM, all the way through to modern-day marvels such as Nadine Shah. The result is a celebration of a part of the UK that is special for the diversity of its talent, without shying away from the myriad challenges presented by its distance from London and its one-time cheque book-waving A&R men. It's a canny read.

Emma Johnston

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Brian Fallon: thankfully a survivor.

Brian Fallon

With The Gaslight Anthem and solo he's made some marvellous records, but industry pressures extracted a heavy toll from him.

On *No Surrender*, song seven on Bruce Springsteen's most successful and most misunderstood album, *Born In The USA*, he sings: '*We learned more from a three-minute record, baby, than we ever learned in school*.' Brian Fallon, The Gaslight Anthem's frontman and sometime solo artist, started elementary school in New Jersey in 1984, the year *Born In The USA* was released. And with no disrespect intended to the state's educational institutions, it's fair to say that the most important and impactful lessons he absorbed before reaching adulthood came from The Boss, with additional tutoring from Tom Petty, The Replacements and The Clash.

Memorably, in the summer of 2009, as the world was still learning Brian Fallon's name via the word-of-mouth buzz on his band The Gaslight Anthem's brilliant second album, *The '59 Sound*, Fallon stepped onto Glastonbury Pyramid Stage during Springsteen's headlining set, stood cheek-to-cheek with his hero, and sang *No Surrender* into the same mic.

For a time, The Gaslight Anthem seemed destined for grand platforms too. But, as many wide-eyed innocents before him had discovered, the music industry can break the spirits of even the most ambitious and determined dreamers. And when in July 2015 the band declared an indefinite hiatus, having released three more albums to increased expectations but diminishing returns, their leader sounded exhausted and more than a little disillusioned by the toxicity of the business, revealing the cost levied on his mental health. It was sad to observe from a man who, on his band's debut album, *Sink Or Swim*, sang of treasuring songs '*like a comfort wherever I'd go*'.

Happily, music would lead Fallon out of the darkness once again, his lower-key, less-pressurised solo career – launched with 2016's fine *Painkillers* – having rekindled his passion, self-belief and faith. In March 2022 The Gaslight Anthem confirmed their return, and strode confidently back into the limelight last year with their sixth album, *History Books*, its title track featuring Fallon and Springsteen united in song once more.

Lessons had been learned, and second time around The Gaslight Anthem sound in no mood to surrender the spotlight. "I don't feel finished yet," Fallon told us, explaining his motivations for getting the band back together. "I don't feel like I've done my best work yet… And we're not bringing this band back to play garages."

Paul Brannigan

Essential Classics



The Gaslight Anthem

The '59 Sound

SIDEONEDUMMY, 2008

In the opening minute of *Great Expectations*, track one on The Gaslight Anthem's second album, Brian Fallon's lyrics reference a diner, a car, a radio station, a girl called Mary, fading dreams and flight in search of a better life. Comparisons to Bruce Springsteen would later irk him, but come on, really, what did he expect? To be fair, Fallon probably wasn't anticipating the record to find the broad audience that it did, but it deserves to be heard far and wide. From that inviting opening to goosebumps-inducing closer *The Backseat, The '59 Sound* is a damn-near-flawless collection.



Brian Fallon

Painkillers *ISLAND, 2016*

On July 29, 2015 The Gaslight Anthem announced that they were taking an indefinite hiatus. "With a band that's all heart, if you're not sure where your heart is at, you have a choice: you either stop it or ruin it," Fallon explained.

Recorded in just 14 days, *Painkillers* is the sound of a revitalised man falling in love with music anew, and perhaps even falling in love with Brian Fallon anew, following the emotional battering that came with the break-up of his marriage. It's an album good enough to make Gaslight Anthem fans fear that their beloved band might never, ever, ever be getting back together.

OLLY CURTIS

Superior Reputation cementing



The Gaslight Anthem
American Slang
SIDEONEDUMMY, 2010

Following up TGA's breakthrough record was always going to be challenging for Fallon, and it's to his credit that he showed little interest in revisiting familiar ground with *American Slang*. Songs such as *The Diamond Church Street Choir* and *The Queen Of Lower Chelsea* are the work of a band on the rise, shimmering with confidence. In a nice touch that spoke of his gratitude to those who'd helped elevate his band, Fallon titled *Stay Lucky* in tribute to former *CR* writer Ian Winwood, who wrote TGA's first magazine cover feature, for *Kerrang!*



The Horrible Crowes
Elsie *SIDEONEDUMMY, 2011*

Influenced heavily by the Afghan Whigs and Tom Waits, The Horrible Crowes found Fallon and his English guitar tech (who later became TGA's touring guitarist) Ian Perkins diving deep into the darker, less pure aspects of desire, lust, love and obsession. That Fallon decided to branch out with a side project when The Gaslight Anthem were gathering genuine momentum speaks of his confidence at the time, but in retrospect one wonders if it might have been wiser to save excellent songs such as *Behold The Hurricane, Ladykiller* and *I Witnessed A Crime* for his other band's major-label debut.



Brian Fallon
Sleepwalkers *ISLAND, 2018*

While his first solo album *Painkillers* was the sound of Brian Fallon dipping his toes back into the water, *Sleepwalkers* sounds like the work of a man determined to make a proper splash. His second solo record is a more full-bodied work, and while it lacks the consistency of his solo debut, opener *If Your Prayers Don't Get To Heaven*, with its Motown soul groove, is as good as anything he's ever written, *Etta James* burns with world-weary wisdom and bitter regrets ('*I was lost and alone, a million light years from home, it was nobody's fault but mine*') and the jazzy, bluesy title track is Fallon at his most winning.



The Gaslight Anthem
History Books
THIRTY TIGERS, 2023

The Gaslight Anthem's comeback album needed to be good, and it was. The fire was back in Fallon's belly, and it shows. This was not the time for left-field, experimental detours, and as such the only criticism that could really be levelled at *History Books* is that it plays things a little safe and straight. Still with the presence of Bruce Springsteen on the excellent title track, fist-pumping singles *Positive Charge* and *Little Fires*, and Fallon clearly feeling comfortable in his own skin once again, it was good to have The Gaslight Anthem back.

Good Worth exploring



The Gaslight Anthem
Sink Or Swim *XOXO, 2007*

Full respect to those who were on board from day one, but most Gaslight Anthem fans came to the band's debut album after falling in love with *The '59 Sound*, and regard it as something of a bonus reward for digging deeper. There's a charming naivety, innocence and energy to the record, exemplified by *I'da Called You Woody, Joe*, Fallon's open-hearted fan-boy 'thank you' letter to The Clash ('*This was the sound of the very last gang in town*'), and specifically Joe Strummer, for changing his life, but there's craft and maturity in the songwriting too, with *Wooderson* perhaps the best signpost for what lay ahead.



The Gaslight Anthem
Handwritten *MERCURY, 2012*

The stakes were high for The Gaslight Anthem's major-label debut, with words like 'The New Saviours Of Rock' being attached to their name by media who paid attention to the genre roughly once every five years. And when the group came roaring out of the blocks with irresistible lead-off single *45*, it seemed briefly like predictions about TGA following Foo Fighters' trajectory into stadiums might not be so far-fetched. However, despite the album reaching No.3 on the *Billboard* 200, and No.2 in the UK, the increased expectations and pressure weighed heavily on Fallon, and sucked some of the joy from TGA's achievements.



Brian Fallon
Local Honey
LESSER KNOWN, 2020

With the benefit of hindsight, one might interpret the slim-line form of Fallon's third solo record, comprising just eight tracks, as an indicator that he was coming to a realisation that he didn't have too much more to say. "When I finished *Local Honey*, I remember feeling like I had finished something that I was really trying to complete," he told us later. *Local Honey* might not be a record that will attract a host of new believers into the congregation, but as one of the most natural, warm and unself-conscious records Fallon has made in his career it possesses an easy charm all its own.

Avoid



Brian Fallon
Night Divine *LESSER KNOWN, 2021*

While Brian Fallon's Christian faith is undoubtedly hugely important to him, making his fourth solo record a deeply personal one, even his most devoted followers would need the patience of a saint to sit through an album that has the singer-songwriter crooning his way through a selection of hymns and Christmas carols, *Amazing Grace*, *Silent Night* and *Nearer, My God To Thee* among them. If your idea of a good time is hanging out at Salvation Army fêtes or school Nativity plays, then fill your boots with this album, with our blessing. But there's a reason for the old saying that the devil has the best tunes.

Essential Playlist

Wooderson
Sink Or Swim

I'da Called You Woody, Joe
Sink Or Swim

Blue Jeans And White T-Shirts
Señor And The Queen

Great Expectations
The '59 Sound

The '59 Sound
The '59 Sound

The Backseat
The '59 Sound

American Slang
American Slang

The Diamond Church Street Choir
American Slang

45
Handwritten

Handwritten
Handwritten

Stay Vicious
Get Hurt

A Wonderful Life
Painkillers

Steve McQueen
Painkillers

If Your Prayers Don't Get To Heaven
Sleepwalkers

Sleepwalkers
Sleepwalkers

You Have Stolen My Heart
Local Honey

History Books
History Books

Positive Charge
History Books

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08 FEB BARTON UPON HUMBER THE ROPEWALK
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15 FEB HARTLEPOOL STEELIES
16 FEB BARNOLDSWICK MUSIC & ARTS CENTRE
21 FEB DEVIZES CORN EXCHANGE
22 FEB RIPLEY TOWN HALL
28 FEB PRESTON THE CONTINENTAL
14 MAR WIMBORNE TIVOLI THEATRE
16 MAR LIVERPOOL BLUES FESTIVAL
27 APR GLASGOW BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL

17 MAY ABERTILLERY THE MET
24 MAY NEWBURY ARLINGTON ARTS
30 MAY WORTHING THE FACTORY
07 JUN FLEET HARLINGTON
05 JUL ALFOLD ROCK & BLUES FESTIVAL
08 AUG BRIGHTON KOMEDIA
09 AUG BUXTON BLUES FESTIVAL
10 AUG STOCKPORT FIREVOLT
05 SEP SOUTHAMPTON THE BROOK
07 NOV WHITBY ROCKS
05 DEC LOOE BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL

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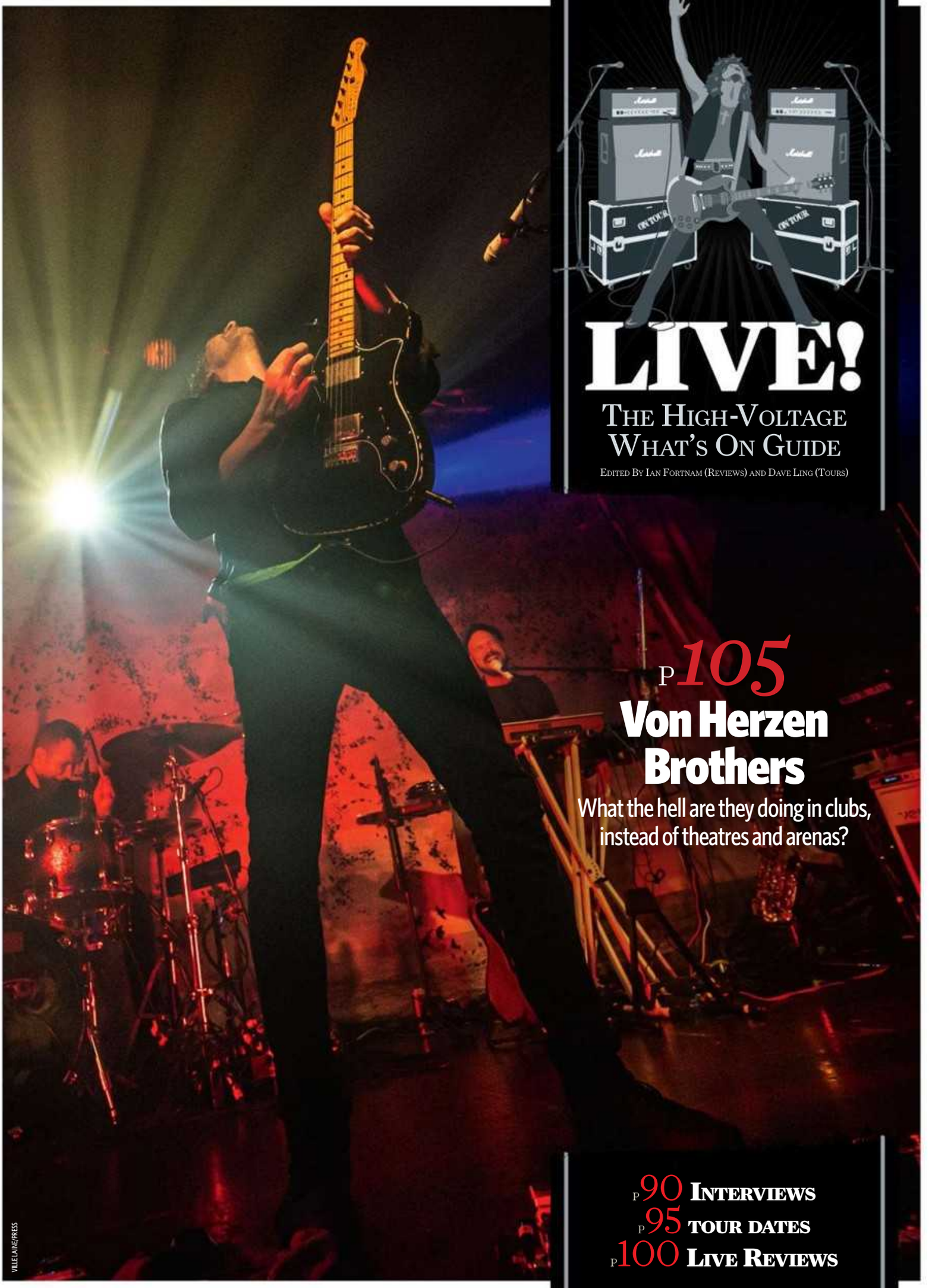
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FRI 31ST OCT - DEVIZES CORN EXCHANGE

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LIVE!

The High-Voltage What's On Guide

Edited By Ian Fortnam (Reviews) and Dave Ling (Tours)

P105

Von Herzen Brothers

What the hell are they doing in clubs, instead of theatres and arenas?

P90 Interviews
P95 tour dates
P100 Live Reviews

VALLE LAINE/PRESS



Uriah Heep

The veteran rockers are saying farewell to touring, but it's not the end of the band.

Last September, Uriah Heep announced a final series of world tour dates billed as The Magician's Farewell. As the trek begins with seven UK dates, ever-present guitarist Mick Box and Bernie Shaw, the band's singer since 1986, explain that even after 55 years we haven't seen the last of the Heep just yet.

Mick, as Heep's elder statesman can we assume that saying farewell was your decision? And how did you break it to the rest of the band?
Mick Box: Having been there from day one you can kind of say that it came from me, but actually it was a joint decision. None of us are getting any younger, and since Brexit and covid the touring side of the business is becoming tougher and tougher, making it almost impossible to do the really long tours that we like to do. Tour bus prices have tripled. The Government only allows us ninety days outside of the country. It's more and more difficult, on every front.

It's the end of the road, but it's a long road.
Box: This is only the end of long, arduous touring, and that process will take two to three years.
Bernie Shaw: A normal year of touring for us was two hundred days away from home, but Brexit has really kicked all of that in the pants. The only countries that used to require a carnet [a full list of a group's equipment and merchandise] were Russia and Switzerland. Now it's everywhere.

Does the door remain open for playing live?
Shaw: Yeah. We'll stick to the local stuff – things like festivals and weekend gigs. Those are still fair game.

If the Download Festival was to offer Heep a slot, you'd be there?
Box: [Enthusiastically] Oh, a hundred per cent.

What about the possibility of Heep releasing new music?
Box: We're not ruling anything out.
Shaw: With Davey [Rimmer, bassist] and Russ [Gilbrook, drums] contributing a lot to the last album [2023's *Chaos & Colour*] as well as Mick and Phil [Lanzon, keyboards], recording won't be affected. But touring, no. That's a young man's game. I mean, look… we've been doing this for fifty-five years.

KEVIN NIXON

How does the finality of it all affect you on an emotional level?
Box: In a way it makes me sad. But we don't travel the world in private jets. For bands like ours it's become a really hard slog. Now we can get the best of both worlds.
Shaw: It's like before, just with a smaller suitcase.
Box: I take two suitcases: one for stage clothes, the other for my sense of humour.

What should we expect of the set-list for The Magician's Farewell Tour?
Box: We haven't really sat down and discussed it yet. I'll suggest some songs and we'll talk, see how they work out in the rehearsal room.

Presumably it won't be a massively long show, in the style of the fiftieth-anniversary tour.
Shaw: No! Definitely not!
Box: We've got Tyketto and April Wine out with us, so that's impossible. Most venues have a restriction on how long you can play.

Those are two rather fine special-guest bands. Tyketto have a great current line-up, and April Wine haven't played the UK since, I think, 1981.
Box: We've played with April Wine before, so in some ways it'll feel like a bit of a reunion.
Shaw: As a proud Canadian I grew up listening to that band. I'm looking forward to seeing them again.

It could still be a long way off, but in an ideal world where would you like the very last scheduled Uriah Heep gig to take place?
Box: We don't try to put those goals in front of us, they become a burden. As long as we're healthy and happy, I don't really mind where it happens.

How do you expect to feel once the final notes have faded away?
Box: [grinning] I won't feel anything. They'll be nailing the lid down on me. I've already requested that my coffin be a big wah-wah pedal… so it'll be the final 'wah'.

Heep are gradually closing the door on performing live. What is your view on the long-term future of rock music?
Box: The [perilous] state of the business is dictating things, unfortunately. Everything's being done through Pro Tools [recording software] and bands no longer seem to make it into the studio to record as a band.
Shaw: It's all become way too sterile. In my own experience, there are a lot of 'okay' bands around, but nothing too special.
Box: We can play in sixty-four countries, so [rock music] is still alive and well. But, for me, the business has changed so much, and not for the better. A lot of the individuality has gone. Too many bands look and sound the same. Guitarists go to college and spend two years learning how to play, but you can't tell them apart. Back in the seventies, Tony Iommi, Ritchie Blackmore and myself all had strong individual sounds. It was the sum of each musician that gave the bands their different flavours. Unfortunately I don't really see and hear that any more. **DL**

Uriah Heep's UK tour ends on February 27 in Bexhill-on-Sea.



Romeo's Daughter

Catch the band who had the best AOR album of 2023.

Frontwoman Leigh Matty previews the latest run of shows by this long-running, UK-based melodic hard rock band, whose song *Heaven In The Back Seat* appeared on the soundtrack to the fifth *Nightmare On Elm Street* film.

It seems like an eternity since Romeo's Daughter reunited for an intended one-off gig in 2009. Has the reconvened band achieved more than during the first spell?
It's hard to tell, because back then a record label [Jive] handled the machinations, and we've since claimed our independence. It's not always successful, but at least we're in control of our own lives and what's being put out. Our most recent album, *Slipstream*, was definitely the most successful self-released one.

You must be doing something right, because *Classic Rock* said *Slipstream* was the best AOR album of 2023.
Thank you so much for that. The reviews were really positive, and it's still selling now. We deliberately delayed streaming it at first because we wanted people to come to the website and buy a physical album, but now they can get the download as well.

Why is the band's self-titled first album not on Spotify?
We're not completely sure who owns it. It went through several deals. from Zomba [parent company of Jive] to Sony, who bought it. We've tried to clarify the situation but never found anything conclusive. That's something that we really should get to the bottom of.

You are the face of Romeo's Daughter, but guitarist Craig Joiner writes the lion's share of the material. Is there any weirdness in a guy interpreting the feelings of a woman, for example a song like *I'll Make A Man Out Of You*?
[Laughs] I get what you mean. Over the years he's got pretty good at knowing how I might feel in almost any situation.

Many of Romeo's Daughter's songs are now almost forty years old. What has made them withstand the test of time?
Mutt [Lange, co-producer of the band's debut] had a big influence on that. Our first album still sounds fantastic. Play it alongside other eighties bands and you'll hear that sprinkling of magic from Mutt.

What was the biggest lesson you took away from working with Mutt?
Mutt could always make a song better. He pinpointed their best parts and improved them. Also, he was very kind to me as a novice singer.

Did Heart ever thank you for *Wild Child*, which they covered on their album *Brigade*?
Not that I know of. Not a sausage.

Did you like their version?
Um… I didn't *love* it. Craig and I went to see them and they were opening the show with it as we arrived. That was very surreal. Their version was *alright*, I suppose.

You've been doing some unplugged gigs.
Over a weekend in January [2025] we record an acoustic live album at a gig in Barnoldswick. Should people like that, we'll do more of it. Unplugged shows are tricky because everyone must be spot-on, but they're also great fun, especially for me as a singer because there's less need to battle to be heard. **DL**

Romeo's Daughter play plugged-in UK shows in February and March.



"This will be our biggest show to date. The production level is going to be elevated like Papa Roach fans have never seen before."

Papa Roach

Don't expect *Infest* in full, but you will get some old-school tracks and some re-imagined.

Frontman Jacoby Shaddix sets the scene prior to the veteran Californian nu metallers playing three 25th-anniversary shows in celebration of their multimillion-selling breakthrough album *Infest*, with support from American metalcore band Wage War.

Back in 2000, Papa Roach spoke about the fortitude of the roach ("cut off its head, it can survive until it starves to death"). How come you're really still here and selling out arenas?
This was the goal all along. We didn't just wanna be a flash in the pan. We wanted to be a band that had a career, a legacy. It's been a journey, and I truly believe 2025 will be another high point.

For a band playing to just thirty people in a New York Club, it's pretty wild that 2000's *Infest* went double-platinum within a couple of months.
It was our time. We had spent several years crafting and honing our skills and refining who we were as musicians and as artists. *Infest* really struck a chord with the youth culture. Its honesty and vulnerability were received and celebrated.

How did its apparent overnight success affect you as a person?
I had no idea how to handle fame. I just partied my way through it. Eventually the dust settled, and I had to change my ways if I wanted to have a career.

Will you be playing the album from front to back, or dropping in the songs as you go along?
I have no desire to play the entire album from front to back. But we are gonna go into some deep cuts, throw in some old-school tracks and some re-imagination moments of the old-school era. We definitely want to celebrate it, but we have so much going on now that we want to celebrate that as well. It's gonna be a journey through the years.

All this time later, how do you think *Infest* stands up?
It stands like a skyscraper in the Papa Roach landscape of music.

In presentation terms, what kind of a show are you planning in these huge venues?
This will be our biggest show to date. The production level is going to be elevated like Papa Roach fans have never seen before. We are so over-the-top excited.

Tell us about the validity of nu metal. It got a raw deal at the time, but the charts don't lie.
There were a lot of polarising personalities in that genre. Love it or hate it, it was a massive movement. The reality is we all sounded so different from each other. I'm just so grateful that that era and music is having a resurgence with the youth of today. Not a lot of genres get to have a second time in the sun. Nu metal definitely is having a moment right now. We are definitely going to seize this moment.

You've been sober since 2012. Is rock music wrong to glamourise alcohol and drugs the way it does?
Rock definitely glamourises the self-destructive lifestyle. I was part of it. I've lost friends and family members to it. I guess that's what made me want to change. All I'll say is that I'm grateful that I put the bottle down back in 2012 for good. My life is forever changed. I was headed down a path to utter self-destruction.

What's the best rumour you've heard about yourself?
There was a rumour that I had a secret underground water park in my backyard. That's some funny shit right there.

Papa Roach are preparing a twelfth studio album, to be released in 2025. What should we expect?
We're picking up where we left off with our album *Ego Trip* [2022], but some of the songs on this new one are a bit heavier.

Might we get to hear a song or two at the shows?
You'll have to come to the show to find out. **DL**

The first of the band's UK dates is at London's Wembley Arena on February 7.

BRYSON ROATCH/PRESS

"AN EIGHTIES WET DREAM... ALL THE INGREDIENTS ARE THERE, VERY WELL CRAFTED AND WELL PUT TOGETHER"

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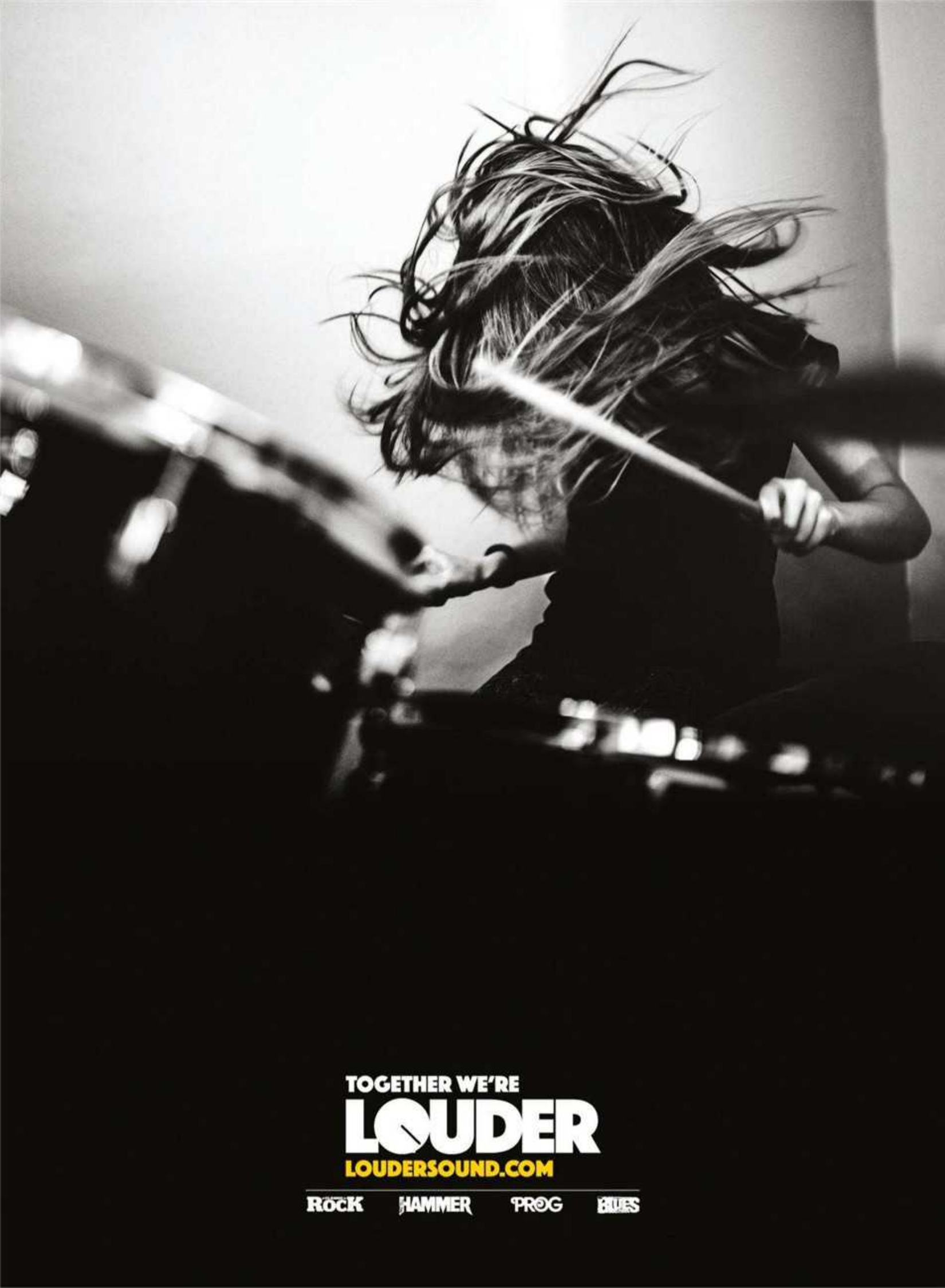
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Tour Dates

BRYAN ADAMS

Newcastle	Utilita Arena	May 8
Manchester	AO Arena	May 9
Leeds	First Direct Arena	May 10
Aberdeen	P&J Live	May 11
Glasgow	Hydro	May 13
London	O2 Arena	May 15
Liverpool	M&S Bank Arena	May 16
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	May 17
Birmingham	BP Pulse Live	May 18

AIRBOURNE

Brighton	Concorde 2	Mar 3
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 5
Glasgow	Barrowland	Mar 6
Leeds	Stylus	Mar 7
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Mar 9

ALABAMA 3

Belfast	Limelight	Mar 7
Dublin	Academy	Mar 8
Limerick	Dolans	Mar 9
Birmingham	Academy 2	Mar 14
Leeds	Warehouse	Mar 16
Sheffield	Foundry	Mar 20
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Mar 21
Edinburgh	Queens Hall	Mar 22
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	Mar 23
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Mar 28
Cardiff	Tramshed	Mar 29
Brighton	Concorde 2	Mar 30
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Apr 3
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Apr 4
Northampton	Roadmender	Apr 5

AMPLIFIER

Stourport	Civic	Mar 6
Newcastle	Cluny 2	Mar 20
Glasgow	Audio	Mar 21
Lancaster	Gregsons Hall	Mar 22
Leeds	Hyde Park Book Club	Mar 28
Sheffield	Sidney & Matilda's	Mar 29
London	Islington Hope & Anchor	Apr 4
Bristol	Louisiana	Apr 5
Northampton	Black Prince	Apr 11
Manchester	AATMA	Apr 12
Birmingham	Sunflower Lounge	Apr 18
Cardiff	Fuel Rock Club	Apr 19
Brighton	Brunswick	Apr 25
Ramsgate	Music Hall	Apr 26
Leicester	Soundhouse	May 2
Cambridge	Portland Arms	May 3
Bournemouth	Bearcave	May 9

ARENA

Chepstow	Winter's End Festival	Apr 27
Kinross	Green Hotel	Apr 29
Bilston	Robin 2	May 1
Norwich	Waterfront	May 2
Fletching	Trading Boundaries	May 3

ASIA

Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Apr 10-12

ATOMIC ROOSTER

Kinross	Green Hotel	Mar 27
Wakefield	Venue 23	Mar 29

AVANTASIA

London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Mar 24

BAD TOUCH, THE DUST CODA

Norwich	Waterfront	Mar 6
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Mar 7
Newcastle	Northumbria University	Mar 8
Glasgow	Cathouse	Mar 9
Manchester	Academy	Mar 11
Birmingham	Academy	Mar 12
Cardiff	The Globe	Mar 13
London	Islington Academy	Mar 14

BLAZE BAYLEY

Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	May 8
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	May 9
Southampton	Joiners	May 10
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	May 11
Bridgwater	Cobblestones	May 15
Swansea	Sin City	May 16
Nuneaton	Queens Hall	May 17
Bradford	Nightrain	May 18

BEHEMOTH, SATYRICON, ROTTING CHRIST

London	Brixton Academy	Apr 12

THE BLACK KEYS

Leeds	Millennium Square	Jul 8
Manchester	Castlefield Bowl	Jul 9
London	Alexandra Palace Park	Jul 11

BLACK SPIDERS

Birmingham	Asylum	Apr 19
Derby	Hairy Dog	Apr 20
Manchester	Rebellion	Apr 21
Exeter	Cavern	Apr 22
London	Haggerston Signature Brew	Apr 23
Newcastle	Social	Apr 24
Sheffield	Corporation	Apr 25
Crumlin	The Patriot	Apr 26
Leeds	Key Club	Apr 27

BLUE ÖYSTER CULT, WHEN RIVERS MEET

London	Palladium	May 25

JOE BONAMASSA

Glasgow	SEC Armadillo	Apr 21
Cardiff	Utilita Arena	Apr 23
Liverpool	M&S Bank Arena	Apr 25
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Apr 26
Brighton	Centre	Apr 27

JOE BONAMASSA PLAYS RORY GALLAGHER

Cork	Live At The Marquee	Jul 1-3

BRAVE RIVAL

Barton-on-Humber	The Ropewalk	Feb 8
Wavendon	The Stables	Feb 9
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	Feb 13
Hartlepool	The Steelies	Feb 15
Devizes	Corn Exchange	Feb 21
Ripley	Town Hall	Feb 22
Preston	The Continental	Feb 28
Wimborne	Tivoli	Mar 14
Liverpool	Blues Festival	Mar 16
Glasgow	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	Apr 27
Abertillery	The Met	May 17
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	May 24
Worthing	Factory Live	May 30

THE BRIAN JONESTOWN MASSACRE

Nottingham	Rock City	Feb 4
Glasgow	Barrowland	Feb 6
Liverpool	Olympia	Feb 7
Leeds	Beckett University Union	Feb 8
Newcastle	NX	Feb 9
Belfast	Ulster Hall	Feb 11
Dublin	Olympia Theatre	Feb 12
Manchester	Albert Hall	Feb 14
Southampton	Guildhall	Feb 15
London	Brixton Academy	Feb 16
Birmingham	Institute	Feb 18
Brighton	Dome	Feb 19
Cardiff	University Great Hall	Feb 20

ELKIE BROOKS

London	Cadogan Hall	Feb 8
Gateshead	The Glasshouse	Feb 15
Northampton	Royal & Derngate	Feb 21
Birmingham	Town Hall	Feb 28
Bournemouth	Pavilion	Mar 2
Worthing	Assembly Hall	Mar 7
Salford	The Lowry	Mar 16
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	Mar 20
Torquay	Princess Theatre	Mar 28
York	Barbican	Apr 11
Edinburgh	Queens Hall	May 27
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	May 29

DAN BYRNE

Chester	Live Rooms	Feb 6
Manchester	Retro	Feb 7
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Feb 8
London	Islington Academy	Feb 9
Newcastle	The Cluny	Feb 12
Glasgow	Hug & Pint	Feb 13
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Feb 14
Sheffield	Corporation	Feb 15

CAGE THE ELEPHANT, SUNFLOWER BEAN, GIRL TONES

Glasgow	Academy	Feb 13
Manchester	Apollo	Feb 14
Wolverhampton	The Halls	Feb 16
London	Brixton Academy	Feb 17

PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF MOTÖRHEAD

Southampton	1865	Feb 15
Brighton	Concorde 2	Feb 16
Sheffield	Corporation	Feb 28
Leicester	Academy 2	Mar 2
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Mar 13
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Mar 14
Falmouth	Princess Pavilion	Mar 15
Lincoln	The Drill	Mar 20
Oxford	Academy 2	Mar 21
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Mar 22

JOE BONAMASSA



The busy bluesman brings his smarts, slick licks and more in the spring, then in July delivers just songs by Rory Gallagher.

See below for dates. Currently April 21 to 27 and July 1 to July 3.

Norwich	Waterfront	Mar 27
Manchester	Rebellion	Mar 28
Newcastle	The Grove	Mar 29
Glasgow	Garage	Mar 30
Derby	Hairy Dog	Apr 3
Buckley	Tivoli	Apr 4
Leeds	Warehouse	Apr 5
London	Islington Academy	Apr 6
Limerick	Dolan's Warehouse	Apr 18
Dublin	Whelan's	Apr 19
Belfast	Limelight 2	Apr 20

ERIC CLAPTON

Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	May 18
London	Royal Albert Hall	May 21, 23, 24

THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN

Southampton	1865	Mar 13
Penzance	The Acorn	Mar 14
Ashburton	Arts Centre	Mar 15
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Jun 19

ROSALIE CUNNINGHAM

Birmingham	Castle & Falcon	Mar 6
Hebden Bridge	Trades Club	Mar 7
Newcastle	The Cluny	Mar 8
Liverpool	Rough Trade	Mar 9
Sheffield	Dorothy Pax	Mar 11
Reading	Face Bar	Mar 12
Bristol	Louisiana	Mar 13
Brighton	Hope And Ruin	Mar 14
Ramsgate	Music Hall	Mar 15
Colchester	Arts Centre	May 20
Leeds	Old Woollen	May 21
Galashiels	MacArts	May 23
Glasgow	Ivory Blacks	May 24
Edinburgh	The Hive	May 25

CUTTING CREW

Worthing	Factory Live	Feb 6
Hampton	Hub Club	Feb 7
Shrewsbury	Abbey	Feb 8
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Feb 10, 11
Sheffield	The Greystones	Feb 13
Selby	Town Hall	Feb 14
Barton	The Ropewalk	Feb 15
Otley	Courthouse	Feb 16
Milton Keynes	MK11	Feb 20
Deal	Astor Theatre	Feb 21
London	Putney Hald Moon	Feb 22
St Albans	The Horn	Feb 26
Hertford	Corn Exchange	Feb 27
Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Feb 28
Camberley	Login Lounge	Mar 1

CYNIC, RIVERS OF NIHIL, BEYOND CREATION, DAATH

Glasgow	Slay	Mar 4
Dublin	Academy	Mar 5
Bristol	The Fleece	Mar 6
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Mar 7
Manchester	Club Academy	Mar 8
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Mar 9
Birmingham	XOYO	Mar 10

ROGER DALTREY

Brighton	Dome	Apr 20
London	Palladium	Apr 21
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	Apr 23
Wolverhampton	The Halls	Apr 24
Dundee	Caird Hall	Apr 26
Glasgow	Armadillo	Apr 28
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Apr 30
Gateshead	Sage 1	May 1
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 4
Halifax	Piece Hall	Jul 30
Margate	Dreamland	Aug 8

THE DARKNESS, ASH

Ipswich	Regent Theatre	May 7
Oxford	New Theatre	May 8
Swansea	Arena	May 9
Guildford	G Live	May 11
Hull	Connexin Arena	May 12
Liverpool	Guild Of Students	May 14
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	May 15
York	Barbican	May 17
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	May 18
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	May 20
Newcastle	City Hall	May 21
Manchester	Apollo	May 22
Bristol	Beacon Theatre	May 24
Portsmouth	Guildhall	May 25
Leicester	De Montford Hall	May 27
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	May 28
London	Wembley Arena	May 29

KIM DEAL

London	Barbican Centre	Mar 1

Recommended

DEWOLFF, SILVEROLLER

Glasgow	Stereo	Apr 12
Manchester	Deaf Institute	Apr 13
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Apr 15
Bristol	The Fleece	Apr 16
Oxford	Academy	Apr 17
London	Highbury Garage	Apr 18

WILLIE DOWLING

Wolverhampton	Giffard Arms	Feb 7
Wakefield	Venue 23	Feb 9
Newcastle	The Cluny	Feb 10
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Feb 11
Bournemouth	Anvil	Feb 13
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Feb 14
Ballymena	The Diamond	Feb 15
Birmingham	Asylum	Feb 20
Bedford	Esquires	Feb 21

DROPKICK MURPHYS, GOGOL BORDELLO, THE SCRATCH

Birmingham	Academy	Feb 4
Glasgow	Academy	Feb 5
Manchester	Academy	Feb 6
Cardiff	Utilita Arena	Feb 7
London	Alexandra Palace	Feb 8

GRAINE DUFFY, STEVIE NIMMO

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Feb 25

EMPYRE

Newcastle	Cluny 2	Apr 25
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Apr 26

SIMON GREEN/PRESS

LIVE!

Cambridge	Junction 2	May 2
Sheffield	Corporation	May 3
Bristol	Louisiana	May 9
Nottingham	Bodega	May 10

FIREWIND, FURY

London	Camden Underworld	Feb 9

FISH

Haddington	Corn Exchange	Feb 18, 19
Manchester	Albert Hall	Feb 21
Wolverhampton	The Halls	Feb 22
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Feb 23
London	Palladium	Feb 25
Bristol	Beacon	Feb 26
Aylesbury	Waterside Arts Centre	Feb 28
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Mar 1
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 2
Liverpool	Philharmonic	Mar 5
Newcastle	City Hall	Mar 6
Aberdeen	Music Hall	Mar 7
Glasgow	Academy	Mar 9, 10

SAMANTHA FISH

Frome	Cheese & Grain	May 28
Liverpool	Arts Club	May 30
Southampton	The Brook	May 31
Oxford	Academy 2	Jun 1

Recommended

THE FLAMING LIPS

Birmingham	Academy	Apr 25
London	Brixton Academy	Apr 26
Dublin	Olympia	Apr 28, 29
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	May 1
Leeds	Academy	May 2
Manchester	Apollo	May 4
Bristol	Beacon Hall	May 5

FM (UNPLUGGED)

Chelmsford	Social Club	Feb 21
Poynton	Blue Funk Club	Feb 22
Kinross	Green Hotel	Feb 23
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Mar 1-3
Crumlin	The Patriot	Mar 7
York	Fulford Arms	Mar 8
Sheffield	The Greystones	Mar 9
Norwich	Waterfront	Mar 14
Huddersfield	Parish	Mar 15
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Mar 28
Frome	Vine Tree	Mar 29
Shoreham-by-Sea	Ropetackle Arts Centre	Mar 30

GALAHAD

Southampton	1865	Jun 21

GREEN LUNG, UNTO OTHERS, SATAN'S SATYRS

Bristol	Marble Factory	Feb 17
Dublin	Academy	Feb 18
Glasgow	Garage	Feb 20
Manchester	The Ritz	Feb 21
London	Kentish Town Forum	Feb 22

GHOST

Manchester	Arena	Apr 15
Glasgow	The Hydro	Apr 16
London	O2 Arena	Apr 19
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Apr 20

GODSMACK, P.O.D., DOWNING POOL

London	Hammersmith Apollo	Apr 7

GUNS N' ROSES

Birmingham	Villa Park	Jun 23
London	Wembley Stadium	Jun 26

BETH HART

Bristol	Beacon	Feb 18
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Feb 20
Coventry	Warwick Arts Centre	Feb 22

HAWKWIND

Gateshead	Glasshouse International Centre	Apr 17
Guildford	G Live	Apr 18
Bournemouth	Pavilion	Apr 19
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Apr 20
Aylesbury	Waterside Theatre	May 10
Liverpool	M&S Bank Arena	May 10
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 11
Sheffield	City Hall	May 23
Portsmouth	Guildhall	May 24
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	May 25
London	Barbican Centre	May 26

JACK J HUTCHINSON, MATT PEARCE & THE MUTINY

Coulsdon	Tuesday Night Music Club	Apr 8
Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Apr 9
Guildford	Boileroom	Apr 10
London	Highbury The Grace	Apr 12
Leicester	HRH Blues Festival	Apr 13
Bradford	Nightrain	Apr 16
Derby	Flowerpot	Apr 17
Hastings	The Carlisle	Apr 18
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 19

INCUBUS

London	O2 Arena	Apr 26

IQ

Bury	The Met	Feb 14, 15

IRON MAIDEN, THE RAVEN AGE

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jun 21
Manchester	Co-op Live	Jun 22
Dublin	Malahide Castle	Jun 25
London	London Stadium	Jun 28
Glasgow	Hydro	Jun 30

BILLY JOEL

Edinburgh	Murrayfield Stadium	Jun 7
Liverpool	Anfield Stadium	Jun 21

ROBERT JON & THE WRECK

Edinburgh	Liquid Room	Apr 26
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Apr 27
Hull	The Welly	Apr 29
Norwich	Epic Studios	Apr 30
Folkstone	Quarterhouse	Apr 1
Birmingham	Academy 2	May
Gloucester	Guildhall	May 7
Chester	Live Rooms	May 8
Portsmouth	Guildhall	May 1

LAURENCE JONES

Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Feb 6, 7
Leeds	Old Woollen	Feb 8
Edinburgh	Voodoo Rooms	Feb 14
Glasgow	Audio	Feb 15
St Leonards-on-Sea	The Piper	Feb 21
Norwich	Waterfront	Feb 22
Dunfermline	PG Mallows	Feb 28
Aberdeen	Tunnels	Mar 1
Exeter	Phenix Arts Centre	Mar 6
Manchester	FAC251	Mar 7
Birkenhead	Futureyard	Mar 8
Woking	Fiery Bird	Mar 15
Selby	Town Hall	Mar 21
Darwen	Sunbird Records	Apr 3
Lincoln	The Drill	Apr 5
Pontardawe	Arts Centre	Apr 11
Cardiff	Acapela Studio	Apr 12
Bristol	The Exchange	May 23
Wavendon	The Stables	May 29
Dover	Booking Hall	May 30

JUDAS PRIEST, PHIL CAMPBELL AND THE BASTARD SONS

Scarborough	Open Air Theatre	Jul 23

JUDAS PRIEST, ALICE COOPER, PHIL CAMPBELL AND THE BASTARD SONS

London	O2 Arena	Jul 25

KID KAPICHI

Huddersfield	The Parish	Mar 22
York	Crescent	Mar 23
Liverpool	Arts Club	Mar 25
Blackpool	Bootleg Social	Mar 28
Stoke-on-Trent	Sugarmill	Mar 30
Southend-on-Sea	Chinnerys	Apr 3

KERRY KING

Manchester	Academy 2	Aug 12
Bristol	SWX	Aug 13

KING DIAMOND, MYRKUR, PARADISE LOST, UNTO OTHERS

Manchester	Academy	Jun 30
London	Chalk Farm	Roundhouse Jul 1

KING KRAKEN

Swansea	Hangar 18	Apr 19
Bridgwater	The Cobblestones	Apr 25
Brighton	Waterbear Venue	Apr 26
London	Camden Devonshire Arms	May 2
Norwich	Roxoff Festival	May 3
Bradford	Nightrain	May 9
Leicester	Firebug	May 10
Bromsgrove	Breaking Bands Festival	May 23
Crumlin	The Patriot	May 24
Coventry	Tin Music & Art	Jun 6
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Jun 7
Glasgow	Audio	Jun 8

KNOCKED LOOSE, BASEMENT, HARMS WAY, PEST CONTROL

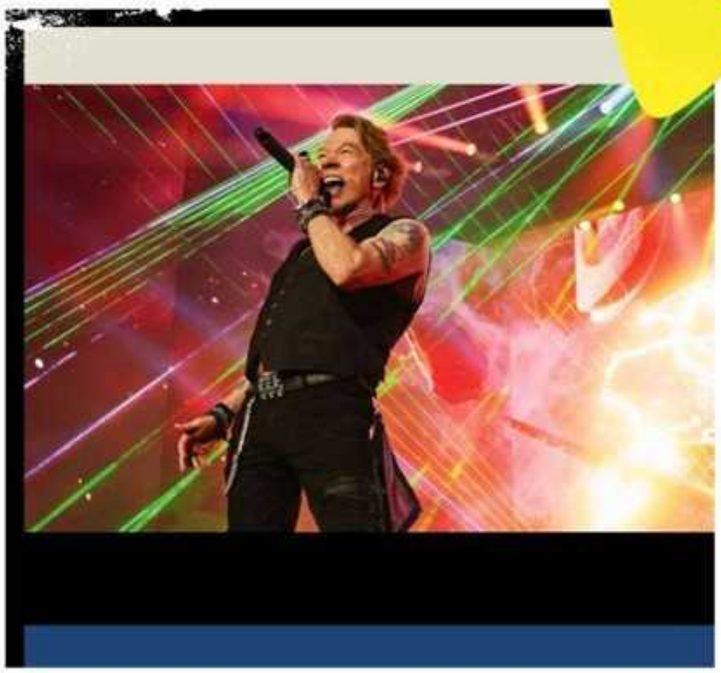
London	Brixton Academy	Mar 17
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Mar 18

LENNY KRAVITZ

London	Wembley Arena	Feb 28

LAIBACH

London	Islington Assembly Hall	Feb 22
Manchester	The Ritz	Feb 23



KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY

Southampton	1865	Feb 24
Bristol	Trinity Centre	Feb 25

LEVELLERS COLLECTIVE

Guildford	G Live	Mar 6
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Mar 7
Northampton	Royal & Derngate	Mar 8
York	Barbican	Mar 9
Buxton	Opera House	Mar 11, 12
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Mar 13
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	Mar 14
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Mar 15
Malvern	Theatre	Mar 16
Bath	Forum	Mar 18
Torquay	Princess Theatre	Mar 19
Poole	Lighthouse	Mar 20
Aylesbury	Waterside Theatre	Mar 21
Croydon	Fairfield Halls	Mar 22
Basingstoke	The Anvil	Mar 23
Truro	Hall For Cornwall	Mar 25

LIMP BIZKIT

Glasgow	The Hydro	Mar 8
Dublin	3 Arena	Mar 11
Birmingham	BP Pulse Live	Mar 13
Manchester	AO Arena	Mar 15
London	Wembley Arena	Mar 16

LINDISFARNE

Berwick	Maltings Theatre	Feb 15
Tenbury Wells	The Regal	Feb 22
Tamworth	Assembly Rooms	Feb 23
Carmarthen	Lyric Theatre	Mar 14
Poole	Lighthouse	Apr 5
Whitby	Pavilion	May 25

LINKIN PARK, SPITIBOX, JPEGMAFIA

London	Wembley Stadium	Jun 28

JOHN LODGE

Birmingham	Town Hall	Apr 6
Manchester	RNCM	Apr 8
Glasgow	Pavilion Theatre	Apr 9
London	Highbury Union Chapel	Apr 11
Bristol	St George's Hall	Apr 14
Guildford	G Live	Apr 15

LORDI

Wolverhampton	Wulfrun Hall	Apr 2
Newcastle	NX	Apr 3
Manchester	Academy 2	Apr 5
Glasgow	Galvanizers	Apr 6
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Apr 8
Bristol	SWX	Apr 9

NICK LOWE AND LOS STRAITJACKETS

Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Feb 10
Bath	Komedia	Feb 11
Wavendon	The Stables	Feb 12
London	Highbury Garage	Feb 13
Glasgow	Pavilion	Feb 16

JEFF LYNNE'S ELO

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 5
Manchester	Co-op Live	Jul 9
London	Hyde Park	Jul 13

ERJA LYYTINEN

Oxford	Academy 2	Apr 2
Dudley	Lamp Tavern	Apr 3
Liverpool	Academy 2	Apr 4
Newcastle	Think Tank	Apr 5
Edinburgh	Mash House	Apr 6
Glasgow	Nice 'N' Sleazy	Apr 7
Sheffield	The Greystones	Apr 8
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Apr 9
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Apr 10
London	Islington Academy 2	Apr 11
Sittingbourne	Apple Yard	Apr 12

JESSE MALIN

London	Islington Assembly Hall	May 1, 2

MANIC STREET PREACHERS

Glasgow	Barrowland	Apr 11, 12
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Apr 18, 19
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Apr 25
Bristol	Beacon	Apr 26
Manchester	Apollo	May 2, 3
Swansea	Arena	May 9
Swansea	Arena	May 10

MARILYN MANSON

London	Hammersmith Apollo	Feb 21
Newcastle	City Hall	Feb 22
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Feb 23

MASSIVE WAGONS

Cambridge	Junction	May 15
Newcastle	University	May 16
Leeds	Stylus	May 17
Cardiff	Tramshed	May 18

MASTERS OF REALITY

Southampton	1865	Apr 6
Manchester	Rebellion	Apr 7
Glasgow	Classic Grand	Apr 8
London	Gt Portland Street 229 Club	Apr 9

CHANTEL McGREGOR

Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Feb 8
Stowmarket	John Peel Centre	Feb 20
Tring	Dembe Theatre	Feb 21
Liverpool	Blues Festival	Mar 14
Sheffield	The Greystones	Mar 22
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 23
Godalming	Borough Hall	May 24
Southampton	The Brook	May 25
Bilston	Robin 2	May 27
Manchester	Night & Day Café	May 28
Hertford	Corn Exchange	May 29
Hull	Social	May 30
Hungerford	Croft Hall	May 31
Hastings	The Carlisle	Jun 1

MIKE + THE MECHANICS

Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Mar 3
Aberdeen	Music Hall	Mar 4
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Mar 5
Perth	Concert Hall	Mar 7
Stockton-on-Tees	Globe Theatre	Mar 8
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Mar 9
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	Mar 11
Hanley	Victoria Hall	Mar 12
York	Barbican	Mar 14
Ipswich	Regent Theatre	Mar 15
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Mar 17
Sheffield	City Hall	Mar 18
Halifax	Victoria Halls	Mar 20

Gateshead	Glasshouse	Mar 22
Llandudno	Venue Cymru	Mar 23
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Mar 24
Leicester	De Monfort Hall	Mar 26
Basingstoke	The Anvil	Mar 27
Bournemouth	Pavilion	Mar 29
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Mar 30
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	Apr 1
Northampton	Derngate	Apr 2
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Apr 4
Eastbourne	Congress Theatre	Apr 5
Oxford	New Theatre	Apr 6
Guildford	G Live	Apr 8
Bristol	Beacon	Apr 10
Swansea	Arena	Apr 11
Plymouth	Pavilions	Apr 12
London	Royal Albert Hall	Apr 14

MICHAEL MONROE

Newcastle	University	May 22
Glasgow	Slay	May 23
Belfast	Bel-AOR Rocks	May 24
Southampton	1865	May 26
Brighton	Concorde 2	May 27
Bristol	Thekla	May 28
Swansea	Sin City	May 30
Buckley	Tivoli	May 31
Lincoln	Call Of The Wild Festival	Jun 1

ALANIS MORISSETTE

Dublin	Malahide Castle	Jun 29
Belfast	Belsonic Festival	Jun 30
Cardiff	Castle	Jul 2
Lancashire	Lytham Festival	Jul 4
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jul 5

NAPALM DEATH, CROWBAR, FULL OF HELL, BRAT

Dublin	Academy	Mar 4
Glasgow	SWG3	Mar 5
Newcastle	University	Mar 6
London	Brixton Electric	Mar 7
Liverpool	Academy	Mar 8
Birmingham	Institute	Mar 9

STEVIE NIMMO, GRAINNE DUFFY

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Feb 25

NAZARETH

Dunfermline	Glen Pavilion	Mar 1

OPETH, GRAND MAGUS

Bristol	Beacon	Feb 25
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Feb 26
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Feb 28
Manchester	Albert Hall	Mar 1
Glasgow	Barrowland	Mar 2

PANTERA, POWER TRIP

Glasgow	Hydro	Feb 18
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Feb 19
Dublin	3 Arena	Feb 21
Birmingham	BP Pulse Live	Feb 23
London	Wembley Arena	Feb 25

PAPA ROACH, WAGE WAR

London	Wembley Arena	Feb 7
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Feb 8
Liverpool	M&S Arena	Feb 9

CASSIDY PARIS

Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	May 8
Preston	The Ferret	May 9
Glasgow	Classic Grand	May 10
Llandudno	Motorsport Lounge	May 15
Chester	Live Rooms	May 16
Wolverhampton	Giffard Arms	May 18
Hastings	The Carlisle	May 23
Crumlin	The Patriot	May 30
Lincoln	Call Of The Wild Festival	Jun 1

PIXIES

Aberdeen	P&J Arena	May 13
Edinburgh	Academy	May 14
London	Brixton Academy	May 16, 17
Leeds	Academy	May 19
Birmingham	Academy	May 20
Cardiff	Utilita Arena	May 21
Newcastle	City Hall	May 23
Manchester	Apollo	May 24

THE POGUES

Leeds	Academy	May 1
Birmingham	Academy	May 2
London	Brixton Academy	May 3
Glasgow	Barrowland	May 6
Manchester	Apollo	May 7
Newcastle	City Hall	May 8

IGGY POP

London	Alexndra Palace	May 28
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	May 31
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 3

PRIMAL SCREAM

Bristol	Beacon	Mar 31
Southampton	Guildhall	Apr 1
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Apr 3
Glasgow	Academy	Apr 4, 5
Birmingham	Academy	Apr 7
Liverpool	Mountford Hall	Apr 8
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Apr 10
Manchester	Aviva Studios	Apr 11
Nottingham	Rock City	Apr 12
Belfast	Ulster Hall	Apr 14
Dublin	Olympia Theatre	Apr 15
Leeds	Academy	Apr 18
Newcastle	City Hall	Apr 19

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD

Bristol	Academy	May 22
Ware	Stone Valley Festival	May 23
Bournemouth	Academy	May 24
Torquay	The Foundry	May 26
Brighton	Chalk	May 27
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	May 29
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	May 30
Norwich	Epic Studios	May 31
Dublin	Olympia	Jun 1
Limerick	Dolan's Warehouse	Jun 13
Cardiff	Depot	Jun 14
Hastings	White Rock Theatre	Jun 26
Newark	Stone Valley Festival	Jun 27
Oxford	Academy	Jun 28
Warrington	Parr Hall	Jul 1
Leicester	Academy	Jul 3
Lincoln	Engine Shed	Jul 4
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Jul 5
Sheffield	Leadmill	Jul 30
Northampton	Roadmender	Jul 31
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Aug 1
Cheltenham	Town Hall	Aug 7
Durham	Stone Valley Festival	Aug 8
Coventry	Empire	Aug 9
Cork City	Hall	Aug 15
Belfast	Putting The Fast In Belfast	Aug 16

QUEENSRŸCHE, NIGHT DEMON

Manchester	Academy 2	Feb 11
Birmingham	XOYO	Feb 12
Bristol	Marble Factory	Feb 14
London	Brixton Electric	Feb 15

RAGING SPEEDHORN, KILL THE LIGHTS

Norwich	Waterfront Studio	Mar 7
Manchester	Rebellion	Mar 8
Newcastle	The Cluny	Mar 9
Glasgow	Cathouse	Mar 10
Belfast	Voodoo Lounge	Mar 12
Dublin	Grand Social	Mar 13
Cardiff	Clwb Ifor Bach	Mar 14
Nottingham	Old Cold Store	Mar 15
Bristol	The Fleece	Mar 16
Exeter	The Cavern	Mar 17
Southampton	Joiners Arms	Mar 18
Herne Bay	Kings Hall	Mar 20
London	Camden Underworld	Mar 21
Birmingham	Institute 2	Mar 22
Sheffield	Corporation	Mar 23

BONNIE RAITT

Belfast	Ulster Hall	Jun 1
Dublin	Vicar Street	Jun 3, 4
Manchester	Apollo	Jun 7
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	Jun 8
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Jun 10
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Jun 11
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Jun 14
London	Royal Albert Hall	Jun 16
Brighton	Brighton Dome	Jun 17

TROY REDFERN

Leamington Spa	Temperance	Mar 1
Blackpool	Love Live Festival	Mar 2
Kinross	Green Hotel	Mar 3
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 4
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Mar 5
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	May 1
Stockton-on-Tees	Blues At The Bay	May 2
Doncaster	The Leopard	May 3
Derby	Flowerpot	May 8
Birmingham	Joe Joe Jims	May 9
Hastings	The Carlisle	May 16
Sheffield	The Greystones	May 18
New Milton	Forest Arts Centre	May 22
Aldershot	West End Centre	May 23
Winchester	The Arc	May 24
Worthing	Factory	May 25
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	May 26
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 27

ROMEO'S DAUGHTER

Wakefield	Venue 23	Feb 23
London	Highbury Garage	Mar 28
Hastings	The Carlisle	Mar 30

RONNIE ROMERO

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Mar 6
Bradford	Nightrain	Mar 7
Oldham	Whittles	Mar 8
Newcastle	Trillians	Mar 9
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 10

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

SANTANA



Guitar hero Carlos is still leading his crew through rattling rhythms and tasty tunes. Catch them while you can.

See below for dates. Currently June 18 to June 21.

Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Mar 11
London	Camden Underworld	Mar 12
Great Yarmouth	HRH Fest Spring Break	Mar 13

DARIUS RUCKER

Belfast	SSE Arena	Sep 29
Glasgow	The Hydro	Sep 30
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 2
Manchester	AO Arena	Oct 3
London	O2 Arena	Oct 5

SABATON

London	O2 Arena	Dec 4
Manchester	Co-op Live	Dec 5
Nottingham	Motortpoint Arena	Dec 6

SANTANA

Glasgow	The Hydro	Jun 18
Manchester	Co-op Live	Jun 19
London	O2 Arena	Jun 21

SATCHVAI BAND

York	Barbican	Jun 13
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jun 14
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Jun 17
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Jun 18
Manchester	Apollo	Jun 19

SAVATAGE

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jun 16

Recommended

SAXON, DIRKSCHNEIDER

Belfast	Ulster Hall	Nov 4
Dublin	Olympia	Nov 5
Manchester	Apollo	Nov 7
Sheffield	Octagon	Nov 8
Glasgow	Academy	Nov 9
Newcastle	City Hall	Nov 11
Bristol	Beacon	Nov 13
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Nov 14
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Nov 15
Cardiff	Great Hall	Nov 16

SARI SCHORR

Derby	Flowerpot	Apr 24
Buckley	Tivoli	Apr 25
Birmingham	Hare & Hounds	Apr 26
Newcastle	Xerox	Apr 26
Hull	New Adelphi	Apr 29
Glasgow	Stereo	Apr 30
Manchester	Deaf Institute	May 1
Sheffield	The Greystones	May 2
Norwich	Waterfront	May 3
Bristol	Louisianna	May 6
Cardiff	Acapela	May 7
Hastings	The Carlisle	May 9
London	Shepherds Bush Bush Hall	May 10

THE ZAC SCHULZE GANG

London	Highbury The Grace	Apr 4
Leeds	Belgrave	Apr 5
Manchester	Gullivers	Apr 6
Newcastle	Cluny 2	Apr 8
Edinburgh	Voodoo Rooms	Apr 9
Nottingham	Bodega	Apr 13
Brighton	Prince Albert	Apr 14
Bristol	Louisiana	Apr 16

SHAMAN'S HARVEST, BLACKTOP MOJO

Bristol	The Fleece	Mar 5
Southampton	1865	Mar 6
London	Islington Academy	Mar 7
Birmingham	Institute 2	Mar 8
Manchester	Rebellion	Mar 12
Glasgow	Cathouse	Mar 13
Newcastle	Anarchy Brew	Mar 14
Belfast	Limelight 2	Mar 19
Dublin	Academy	Mar 20
Cork	Cyprus Avenue	Mar 21
Swansea	Sin City	Mar 22
Buckley	Tivoli	Mar 26
Derby	Hairy Dog	Mar 27
Norwich	Waterfront	Mar 28
Brighton	The Arch	Mar 29

THE SISTERS OF MERCY

London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	May 25, 26

SKUNK ANANSIE

London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Mar 28, 29
Cardiff	University	Mar 31
Bristol	Beacon	Apr 1
Nottingham	Rock City	Apr 3
Manchester	Apollo	Apr 4
Birmingham	Academy	Apr 5
Norwich	LCR	Apr 7
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Apr 8
Glasgow	Academy	Apr 10
Newcastle	NX	Apr 11
Leeds	Academy	Apr 12
Bournemouth	Academy	Apr 14
Brighton	Dome	Apr 15
Guildford	G Live	Apr 16

SOCIAL DISTORTION

Manchester	Albert Hall	Apr 25
London	Sheperd's Bush Empire	Apr 26

SON OF MAN, THE MIGHTY RA

London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Aug 9

SONS OF LIBERTY

Bridgwater	Cobblestones	Feb 28
St Austell	Band Club	Mar 1
London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Mar 13
Hastings	The Carlisle	Mar 14
Northampton	Black Price	Mar 15
Bradford	Nightrain	Mar 27
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 28
Glasgow	HMV	Mar 29
Newcastle	Trillians	Mar 30
Oxford	The Bullingdon	Apr 25
Swansea	Hangar 18	Apr 26
Bristol	The Exchange	Apr 27
Buckley	Tivoli	May 9
Leicester	Musician 2	May 10

SONS OF SALEM

Bristol	Thekla	Mar 27
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Mar 28
Leeds	Key Club	Mar 29
Newcastle	Anarchy	Mar 30
Glasgow	Cathouse	Apr 1
Manchester	Club Academy	Apr 2

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY

LIVE!

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 3
London	Camden Underworld	Apr 4

SPIRITBOX
London	Alexandra Palace	Feb 13

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & THE E STREET BAND
Manchester	Co-op Live	May 17, 20
Liverpool	Anfield Stadium	Jun 4, 7

STEREOPHONICS
Belfast	Belsonic	Jun 5
Dublin	St Anne's Park	Jun 6
Cork	Virgin Media Park	Jun 7
Huddersfield	John Smith's Stadium	Jun 14
Glasgow	Bellahouston Park	Jun 28
London	Finsbury Park	Jul 4
Cardiff	Principality Stadium	Jul 11, 12

STIFF LITTLE FINGERS, RICKY WARWICK & THE FIGHTING HEARTS
Brighton	Concorde 2	Mar 11
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 12
Manchester	Academy	Mar 14
Newcastle	City Hall	Mar 15
Glasgow	Barrowland	Mar 17
York	Barbican	Mar 18
Birmingham	Academy	Mar 20
Bristol	Academy	Mar 21
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Mar 22

STRAY
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Feb 28
London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Mar 1

SUPERGRASS
Glasgow	Barrowland	May 8
Nottingham	Rock City	May 10
Sheffield	Octagon	May 12
Newcastle	NX	May 13
Birmingham	Academy	May 14
Manchester	Albert Hall	May 16
Cardiff	University Great Hall	May 18
Leeds	Academy	May 20
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	May 22

SWEET
Cardiff	Tramshed	Apr 3
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Apr 5

TERRORVISION, SCARLET REBELS
Sheffield	Corporation	Mar 6
Chester	Live Rooms	Mar 7
Leicester	Academy	Mar 8
Cambridge	Junction	Mar 20
Margate	Dreamland	Mar 21
Oxford	Academy	Mar 22
Hull	The Welly	Mar 23

THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT
Bristol	Trinity Centre	Mar 17
London	Camden Koko	Mar 18
Manchester	Academy 2	Mar 20
Glasgow	Garage	Mar 21
Glasgow	Barrowland	Apr 9

TESSERACT
Brighton	Chalk	Feb 11
Cambridge	Junction	Feb 12
Cardiff	Tramshed	Feb 14
Leeds	Project House	Feb 15

THOSE DAMN CROWS
Oxford	Academy	Mar 10
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Mar 11
Bournemouth	Old Fire Station	Mar 13
Norwich	Waterfront	Mar 14
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Mar 16
Sheffield	Corporation	Mar 18
Lincoln	Drill Hall	Mar 19
Morecambe	Alahambra	Mar 21
Edinburgh	La Belle Angele	Mar 22
Aberdeen	Lemon Tree	Mar 24
Liverpool	Academy 2	Mar 25
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Mar 27

THUNDER MOTHER, COBRA SPELL, VULVARINE
London	Highbury Garage	Feb 11
Manchester	Rebellion	Feb 12

TREMONTI
Bristol	Academy	Feb 5
Glasgow	SWG3 Galvanizers	Feb 6
Belfast	Limelight	Feb 7
Dublin	Academy	Feb 9
Birmingham	Institute	Feb 11
Manchester	The Ritz	Feb 13
London	Kentish Town Forum	Feb 14

WALTER TROUT
Warwick	Arts Centre	May 6
Cardiff	Tramshed	May 7
Southampton	1865	May 8
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	May 9
Cambridge	Junction	May 10
Brighton	Concorde 2	May 11

ROBIN TROWER
Buxton	Opera House	May 14
Glasgow	Oran Mor	May 15
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	May 17
Birmingham	Town Hall	May 18
Frome	Cheese & Grain	May 20
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	May 21

MARTIN TURNER EX-WISHBONE ASH
Winchester	The Arc	Mar 6
New Milton	Forest Arts Centre	Mar 7
Aldershot	West End Centre	Mar 8
Worcester	Huntingdon Hall	Mar 9
Cardiff	Earl Haig Club	Mar 13
Tavistock	The Wharf	Mar 15
Stroud	Subscription Rooms	Mar 16
Twickenham	Eel Pie Club	Mar 20
Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Mar 21
Bilston	Robin 2	Mar 25
Kinross	Green Hotel	Mar 26
Glasgow	The Ferry	Mar 27
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Mar 28
Hull	Wrecking Ball Arts Centre	Mar 29
Derby	Flowerpot	Apr 4
Sheffield	The Greystones	Apr 5

TYGERS OF PAN TANG
Hastings	The Carlisle	Apr 10
Worthing	The Factory	Apr 11
Newport	The Patriot	Apr 12
London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Apr 13

TYTAN
Newcastle	Trillians	Feb 14
Glasgow	Ivory Blacks	Feb 15
Nuneaton	Queens Hall	Feb 28
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Mar 1
Gravesend	Red Lion	Mar 14

URIAH HEEP, APRIL WINE, TYKETTO
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Feb 19
Bristol	Beacon	Feb 20
Gateshead	Glasshouse	Feb 22
Glasgow	King's Theatre	Feb 23
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Feb 25
London	Palladium	Feb 26
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Feb 27

ADRIAN VANDENBERG
Glasgow	Classic Grand	May 6
Belfast	Empire	May 7
Dublin	Whelan's	May 8
Sheffield	Corporation	May 9
Buckley	Tivoli	May 10
Newcastle	Riverside	May 11
Manchester	Rebellion	May 13
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 14
London	Camden Underworld	May 15
Crumlin	The Patriot	May 16

RICKY WARWICK & THE FIGHTING HEARTS
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Mar 8
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Mar 9
Cardiff	Clwb Ifor Bach	Mar 24
Lincoln	The Drill	Mar 25

WAYWARD SONS
Hertford	Corn Exchange	Apr 4
Stoke-on-Trent	Sugarmill	Apr 5
Gloucester	Guildhall	Apr 10
Southampton	The Brook	Apr 11
Buckley	Tivoli	Apr 18
Glasgow	Cathouse	Apr 19

WILCO
London	Royal Albert Hall	Jun 22

WILL WILDE
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Mar 4
Hastings	The Carlisle	Mar 21

Recommended

THE WILDHEARTS, JIM JONES ALL STARS, DIRT BOX DISCO
Sheffield	Leadmill	Mar 7
Cambridge	Junction	Mar 8
Manchester	The Ritz	Mar 9
Norwich	Epic Studios	Mar 11
Glasgow	Garage	Mar 13
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Mar 14
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 15
Southampton	1865	Mar 16

STEVEN WILSON
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	May 9
Bristol	Beacon	May 10

ALANIS MORISSETTE



You oughta know that there's a whole lot more to Ms Morissette than just the hit songs. Pop along and find out.

See previous page for dates. Currently June 29 to July 5.

London	Palladium	May 12, 13, 19, 20
Newcastle	City Hall	May 15
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	May 16
Salford	The Lowry	May 18

YOU ME AT SIX, KID KAPICHI
Cardiff	Great Hall	Mar 14
Southampton	Guildhall	Mar 15
Nottingham	Rock City	Mar 17, 18
Newcastle	NX	Mar 20
Glasgow	Barrowland	Mar 21
Leeds	Academy	Mar 26
Manchester	Academy	Mar 29
Birmingham	Academy	Mar 31
London	Wembley Arena	Apr 4

Festivals

2000 TREES
COHEED AND CAMBRIA, ALEXISONFIRE, TAKING BACK SUNDAY, MORE

Cheltenham	Upcote Farm	Jul 9-12

ALFORD ROCK & BLUES
WHEN RIVERS MEET, BRAVE RIVAL, NINE BELOW ZERO, MORE

Alford (Surrey)	Springbok Estate	Jul 3-6

ARCTANGENT
KARNIVOOL, MELVINS, ROLO TOMASSI, MORE

Bristol	Fernhill Farm	Aug 13-16

BEARDED THEORY
IGGY POP, MANIC STREET PREACHERS, SISTERS OF MERCY, MORE

Derbyshire	Catton Part	May 21-25

BEL-OAR ROCKS
MICHAEL MONROE, FM, CRASHDIET, MORE

Belfast	Mandela Hall	May 23-25

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
MACHINE HEAD, MASTODON, TRIVIUM, GOJIRA, MORE

Derbyshire	Catton Park	Aug 7-10

DESERTFEST
EARTH, ZEAL & ARDOR, PALLBEARER, MORE

London	Camden various venues	May 16-28

DOWNLOAD
GREEN DAY, KORN, SLEEP TOKEN, MORE

Leicestershire	Donington Park	Jun 13-15

FAIRPORT CONVENTION'S CROPREDY
FAIRPORT CONVENTION, ALBERT LEE, MORE

Oxfordshire	Cropredy	Aug 7-9

FOREVER NOW
KRAFTWERK, DEATH CULT, THE DAMNED, PIL, MORE

Milton Keynes	Bowl	Jun 22

FUSION
VON HERTZEN BROTHERS, SOLSTICE, LAZULI

Stourport	Civic	Mar 7-9

LEEDS BLUES RHYTHM AND ROCK FESTIVAL
THESE WICKED RIVERS, GRAINE DUFFY, JON AMOR

Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Feb 23

LOVE LIVE
FM, NAZARETH, PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS, MORE

Blackpool	Winter Gardens	Feb 28-Mar 2

MAID OF STONE
MICHAEL SCHENKER'S UFO YEARS, BLACK STONE CHERRY, SWEET, MORE

Maidstone	Mote Park	Jul 18-20

MAYOR'S FEST
MASSIVE WAGONS, VIRGINMARYS, THE KARMA EFFECT, MORE

Milton Keynes	Giffard Arms	Apr 4, 6
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Apr 5

NORTHERN KIN
MICHAEL SCHENKER'S UFO YEARS, MIDGE URE, UNDERTONES, MORE

Durham	Thornley Hall	Aug 1-3

NOZFEST
SCARLET REBELS, KIM JENNETT, DOOMSDAY OUTLAW, MORE

Southampton	1865	Aug 16

PROG FOR PEART
AMAROK, KALLE WALLNER, COMEDY OF ERRORS, MORE

Abingdon	The Northcourt	Jul 18, 19

RADAR
CARPENTER BRUT, ZEAL & ARDOR, NORMANDIE, MORE

Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Jul 4-6

ROCKERS REUNITED BLUES FESTIVAL
BRAVE RIVAL, CHANTEL McGREGOR, TOM KILLNER, MORE

Liverpool	Adelphi Hotel	Mar 14-16

STEELHOUSE
W.A.S.P., THOSE DAMN CROWS, MORE

Ebbw Vale	Hafod-y-Dafal Farm	Jul 25-27

STOCKTON ON TEES BLUES RHYTHM AND ROCK FESTIVAL
SUGARAY RAYFORD, CONNOLLY HAYES, BEN POOLE, MORE

Stockton On Tees	Arc	May 10

WILDFIRE
BLACK SPIDERS, AUSTIN GOLD, BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE, MORE

Lanarkshire	Wiston Lodge	Jun 27-29

WINTER'S END
ARENA, WOBBLER, ANTIMATTER, MORE

Chepstow	Drill Hall	Apr 24-27

Y NOT
THE PRODIGY, PRIMAL SCREAM, MORE

Derby	Pikehall	Jul 31-Aug 3

GILBERT FLORES/PBNSKE MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

NEW RELEASES

CRAIG BROOKS - DESOLATION FREEWAY
Out 21st February
CD catalogue No: ESM397

After a lengthy hiatus the members of TOUCH all met up in NY City on May 19, 2019 and began writing and recording a third album, "Tomorrow Never Comes", which was released on Escape Music in 2021. It was a worthy comeback album which put the band back at the forefront of melodic rock.
After the TOUCH album was completed, Craig Brooks continued writing songs and recording. He sensed that he had some new, interesting music at hand, a unique twist to his own songwriting. At this point he asked buddy Mark Mangold if he would be interested in collaborating on a Craig Brooks solo effort. The final result is a new album titled, "Desolation Freeway" for 2025. An exciting new chapter begins..

Craig Brooks – Guitars / Bass / Keyboards / Vocals (Touch/American Tears)
Mark Mangold - Keyboards (Touch/Keys/Michael Bolton/Cher)
Josh Devine - Drums (One Direction/Levara/Turkish Delight)
Doug Howard - Bass (Touch)





BOB CATLEY - LEGENDS
Out 24th January
CD catalogue No: ESM396
Vinyl catalogue No: ESMV1025

After the great success of 'The Tower', Bob Catley and Gary Hughes got together again for the follow-up – 'Legends'. While not a full-blown concept album, each track was written about legendary figures from literature, mythology and real-life. With the band again mostly consisting of members of Ten, such as Vinny Burns and Steve McKenna, this time the drum stool was occupied by Dante Fox's Jon Cookesy. Artwork has once again been provided my world-renowned artist Rodney Matthews. Maintaining his lyrical acumen and the melodic splendour seen on 'The Tower' and countless Ten releases, Gary Hughes and Bob Catley proved that there's really was a magic created in this working relationship. Bob Catley's second solo album continued to show that he was one of the UK's best vocalists. In fact ... LEGENDARY!!

Limited edition double gatefold 180g vinyl of 500 copies only, "Savannah" and "Mimosa Marble" colours, all individually numbered 1-500. 1000 CDs limited edition individually numbered 001 to 1000

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'Tonight might have been the best Paul McCartney concert ever.'



Something in the way... McCartney delivers classic after gold-plated classic in Paris.

Paul McCartney

Paris La Defense Arena / London O2 Arena,

The first and last nights of the former Beatle's European tour.

Forty thousand people, in Europe's largest indoor venue, are happy to let it out and let it in. A McCartney show – he's doing two nights here - is an experience unlike any other. Almost every song, like their singer, is so storied, so famous, so much a crown jewel of pop culture. The 82-year-old does not, however, allow the gig to be a museum, even if most are assuming this tour is their last chance to catch him. He switches at breakneck pace between Beatles classics and his Wings personal favourites, between standards and surprises. A two-and-a-half-hour set is replete with ridiculous riches. Nobody wants to be the guy queueing for the bar or loo when a canonical moment in rock history is played. At a McCartney gig that's inevitable, so relentless is the jouissance of this human jukebox. Is his voice as indomitable as it was in his youth? Of course not. Are these songs as great as ever? They're getting better. As he sings tonight, they're '*getting better all the time*'.

Because he's in France, he plays *Michelle* for the first time in six years, and reads out a few greetings in French. He even waves a French flag around, possibly unaware that their government's collapsed today. But if any songs need no translation, it's these. Beginning with *Can't Buy Me Love*, then careering through *Love Me Do* and *Drive My Car*, the feelgood factor of a Macca show peaks early – and then just keeps on peaking. "That's the only costume change you're getting", he says, taking his jacket off three songs in and rolling up his sleeves to get to work, hopping between guitar, bass and piano. (The lights, lasers and pyrotechnics, punctuated with old Beatles footage just in case anyone forgets we're in the presence of top-tier godliness, get busy throughout.)

There's plenty from *Band On The Run*, with an effusive *Jet* and a grinding *Let Me Roll It* conquering composure. The latter segues into a jam of Hendrix's *Foxy Lady*. For all the adrenalin, the show takes a stab at contextualising Paul's career. There's The Quarrymen's *In Spite Of All The Danger*, and a daisy-fresh *I've Just Seen A Face*. *Here Today* and *Now And Then* honour Lennon, while *I've Got A Feeling* has Paul duetting with on-screen John video. The tender wonder that blindsides everyone is *Something*. McCartney starts George's gem solo on ukelele, but as the band come in the emotional sweep is damn near overpowering, seeming to stop time.

That's a trick *Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da* can't manage, even if the communal singalong is hearty, but it wouldn't be Macca without a token lovable misstep to throw everything else he does into relief. Even the (by his standards) deep cuts are golden: *Junior's Farm* struts like a cockerel, *Nineteen Hundred And Eighty Five* absolutely pounds. How frustrating it must have been for McCartney, then only in his 30s, to have Wings' early-70s emissions patronised by Lennon-centric critics when he was juggling alchemy, tossing out triple somersaults for fun. He's vindicated by how snugly and sinuously the Beatles and Wings material hangs together tonight.

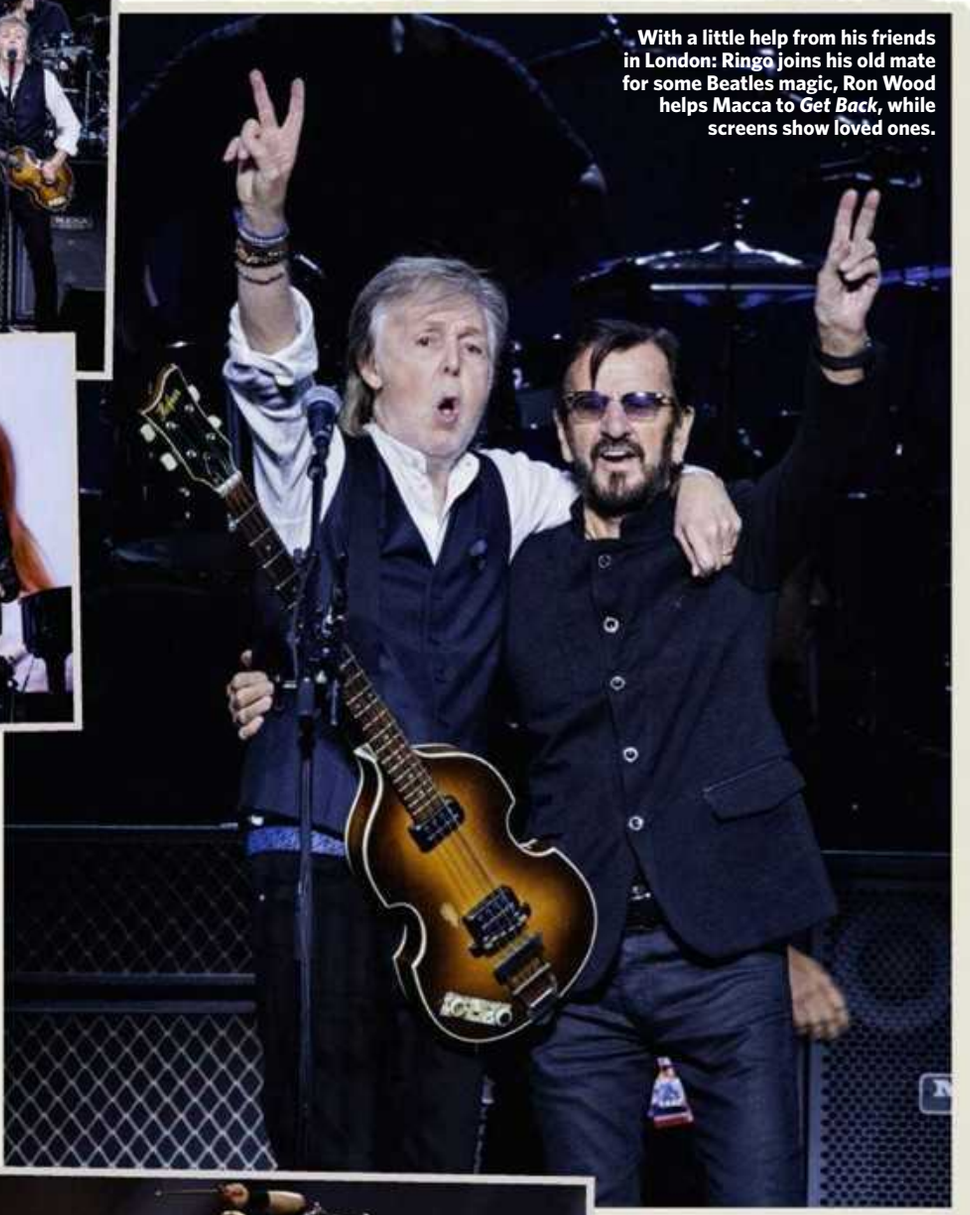
Everybody knows what's coming for the home straight, but hearing it – or rather, being a part of it – is infinitely more intoxicating than reading about it. *Get Back*, *Let It Be* (e-lighters aloft), *Live And Let Die* (cue fireworks frenzy) and *Hey Jude*, in such a context, tolerate no grinching about sentimentality.

Macca still hasn't had enough, the encore relishing the raucousness of *Helter Skelter* and the

KIRSTY SPAROW/GETTY X2







With a little help from his friends in London: Ringo joins his old mate for some Beatles magic, Ron Wood helps Macca to *Get Back*, while screens show loved ones.

impossible grandeur of the climax of *Abbey Road*. It's wonderful to be here.

Chris Roberts



It's the last show of the tour and, while *Venus And Mars* might not be out tonight, the stars are. A flurry of Dames - Emma Thompson, Judi Dench – walks past our seats, followed by various junior McCartneys, while in the cheap seats a small man in sunglasses bides his time.

Celebs aside, this is an extraordinary night. Almost 40 songs (three-fifths of which are Beatles numbers) in excess of two and a half hours that largely passes in a moment, a children's choir, a Rolling Stone and the greatest rock'n'roll drummer in the world all combine to create an extraordinary night. McCartney's voice is much improved since 2019's Freshen Up tour and there's definitely something in the chilly air tonight. Song choices range all across time and space, from *I've Just Seen A Face* to *Junior's Farm*, from *Nineteen Hundred And Eighty-Five* to *Getting Better*. Chronologically there's an extraordinary 60-year span, from 1958's *In Spite of All The Danger* to 2018's *Come On to Me*. And, as if for a bet, we get *Let It Be, Let 'Em In, Let Me Roll It, Letting Go* and *Live And Let Die*.

The atmosphere is celebratory, to say the least. There's a rare outing for *Wonderful Christmastime*, a song not performed since Wings' last show, in Glasgow in 1979. That time there was a drum machine, this time there's a children's choir. There's nothing from Paul's most recent album *McCartney III*, no *The Long And Winding Road* and (still) no *With A Little Luck*, but if McCartney did all the songs you wanted to hear he'd be here for a month of fun days, And nowadays part of the fun is seeing McCartney balance his own history – the nine years with Wings, the 45 as a solo artist – with his legend. On the 1976 American tour, he performed five Beatles songs. Now he does 20. And these days he is, as George Harrison once remarked, all of the Beatles. We get Paul doing Lennon's *Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite*, Paul doing George's *Something*, Paul doing *Now And Then*, Paul duetting with an on-screen John Lennon on *I've Got A Feeling*. We also get Paul and Ron Wood on *Get Back*, and, when the small man in sunglasses walks through the crowd to the stage to sit behind the drums, Paul and Ringo on the *Sgt. Pepper's* reprise and, best of all, a raucous *Helter Skelter*.

There are stories, too, most notably the ever-more-embellished *Blackbird* back-story, and this may be the first concert ever where a bass guitar nearly gets a standing ovation, but surprisingly few from the most anecdotal ex-Beatle. It is all about the songs. The end of the show is perhaps a little predictable, but since it's *Let It Be, Live And Let Die* and *Hey Jude*, nobody in the audience minds, especially when it's followed by Ringo (who makes some gnomic utterances from the stage that clearly confuse even McCartney) and then the epic ending of *Abbey Road*. Then he's gone, presumably to party the night away.

The rest of us join the streaming crowds to slowly exit into the cold night, warmed to the soul by 60 years of inventive, melodic brilliance. We may not get a tour like this again, but there's always the chance of more new music. McCartney wears the weight of history lightly, like a straw hat, because the legacy is rooted in joy, excitement and above all optimism. And tonight might have been the best Paul McCartney concert ever.

David Quantick

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The Sheepdogs

London Islington Assembly Hall

Canada's premier old souls end UK tour on a high.

★ "If you like fun and... y'know, being *alive*," a friend observes post-gig, slightly pissed, "you'd like this." It's hard to argue.

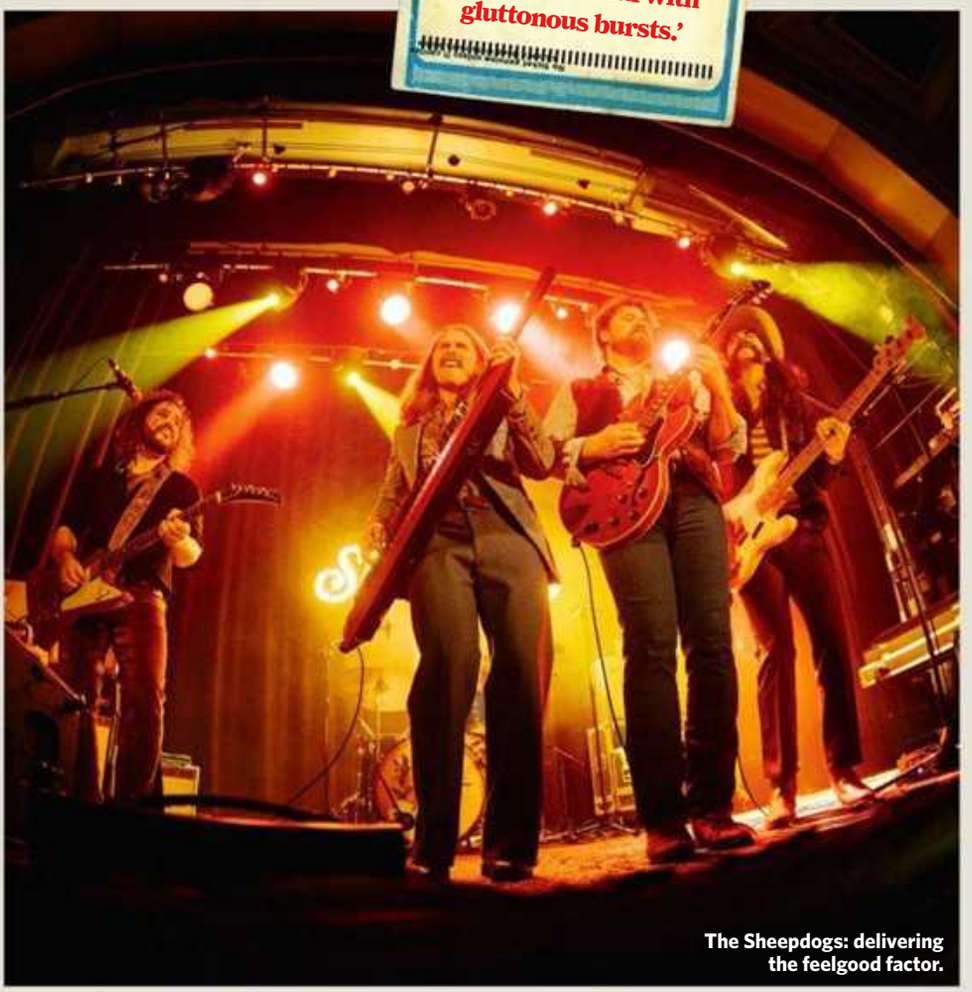
If you seek immaculately executed yet characterful present-day rock'n'roll with Americana in its veins and The Beatles in its heart, The Sheepdogs are tough to beat. Freshened with highlights from two new EPs, tonight's set-list flows like a balanced meal with gluttonous bursts in all the right places. For every dose of sugar there's raw heat; the Beach Boys heartache of *Darlin' Baby* one minute, the roughened punch of *Scarborough Street Fight* the next.

Frontman Ewan Currie radiates velvety goodwill and wry humour, but this is no one-man show. Currie's multi-instrumentalist little brother Shamus – armed with a keytar in place of his usual trombone – adds crucial seasoning and substance; guitarist Ricky Paquette veers between twin-lead sparkle and arse-kicking solos; bassist Ryan Gullen anchors everything with equal parts groove, harmony and moustache; Sam Corbett drives the beat with Ringo-like class. All five of them sing. Walls of rich sound ensue. At one point a guitar tech in a banana costume dances nonchalantly across the back of the stage.

As they close with *Feelin' Good* it's difficult not to feel better about life – or at least wear our anxieties a little more lightly than before.

Polly Glass

'The set-list flows like a balanced meal with gluttonous bursts.'



The Sheepdogs: delivering the feelgood factor.

ROB BLACKHAM/PRESS

Massive Wagons / Florence Black

Birmingham O2 Institute 2

Lancaster's 'best overlooked band in Britain' fire it up.

★ As AC/DC put it almost 50 years ago, it's a long way to the top if you wanna rock'n'roll. And Massive Wagons are taking the scenic route.

It's another packed-out show, and you can't help but wonder what it'll take to get the Lancastrians the recognition they clearly deserve as their good-time rock'n'roll makes them a frontrunner for Best Overlooked Rock Band In Britain.

They're not alone, though. Florence Black might still be relative newcomers, but they're clearly on the rise. *Start Again* packs plenty of punch, while *Rockin' Ring* hints at their allegiance to fellow Welsh band Budgie and the megadome-filling metal band they inspired, and it seems criminal that too few in the venue know *Look Up* to turn it into the gigantic sing-along it deserves.

Wagons have no such issues. *Earth To Grace* has been out barely a fortnight and already its songs feel like well-loved anthems; *Missing On TV, The Good Die Young* and *Free And Easy* find the audience in fine voice, doubly so when fan-favourites *Tokyo, A.S.S.H.O.L.E.* and *Ratio* take the roof off. Frontman Baz Mills is joyous as ever, but there's an added seriousness with shout-outs to mental health support charity Andy's Man Club, adding an earnest message beneath the slapstick.

Rich Hobson

The Southern River Band

London The Garage

The new Antipodean heroes take another big step.

★ Due largely to the popularity of a wonderful YouTube earworm titled *Stan Qualen,* but also to the patronage of The Darkness's Justin Hawkins, who hailed them as "a proper rock'n'roll band", the Southern River Band's previous UK tour saw upgraded venues and sold-out signs. Mere months later the Australians are back again, celebrating their addition to the bill of this summer's Download Festival by passing around a bottle of Glenmorangie Scotch malt whisky.

Resembling a cross between a young Alan Lancaster (RIP) of Status Quo and comedian Bob 'Spit The Dog' Carolgees, the SRB's undoubted star is the magnetic Cal Kramer. With an expletive-charged quip for all occasions – the 'C' word is lobbed around without a shred of embarrassment – the hirsute, moustachioed frontman also turns out to be a very fine guitarist. "This song goes out to anybody who's been to jail, or is likely to go to jail," he says with a grin, introducing *Vice City III*.

Multiple volleys of thunderously hard boogie fill a kick-ass 80 minutes, including *Fuck You Pay Me* and of course *Stan Qualen*. The Quo reference is valid, although at various points the hat tips towards The Angels, Rose Tattoo and Bon-era AC/DC, and the stadium rock of Van Halen and Thin Lizzy.

Definitely ones to watch!

Dave Ling

Myles Kennedy / Devin Townsend

Birmingham O2 Academy

A weird pairing proves to be a match made in heaven.

★ When did Myles Kennedy realise he was a rock star? Perhaps when his band Alter Bridge became one of the first 21st-century rock acts to leap up to arenas? Or when he was chosen as the vocalist for the most iconic guitarist of the past 40 years? Or maybe it's packing a room with thousands purely on the strength of his own name.

Devin Townsend strips back some – and we stress only *some* – of the bombast for a solo acoustic set, but he isn't exactly breaking out the kumbayas. He still belts out *Love?* like an angry god, and delights in vocal gymnastics on *Deadhead*, *Solar Winds* and *Lightworker*.

The last time Kennedy played Birmingham it was, by his own reckoning, a disaster. Losing his voice, much of the set was taken up by "fucking guitar solos". "So it's so good to see so many of you back tonight... or just unaware!" he jokes.

The dividing line between Alter Bridge and his solo output is marginal, but there's a twang to the likes of *The Art Of Letting Go* that hints at this being an extension of Kennedy's personal tastes. From the hip-swinging *Nothing More To Gain* to the soulfulness of *Love Can Only Heal*, the material harks back to the sounds of yesteryear, delivered by one of contemporary rock's greatest vocalists.

Rich Hobson

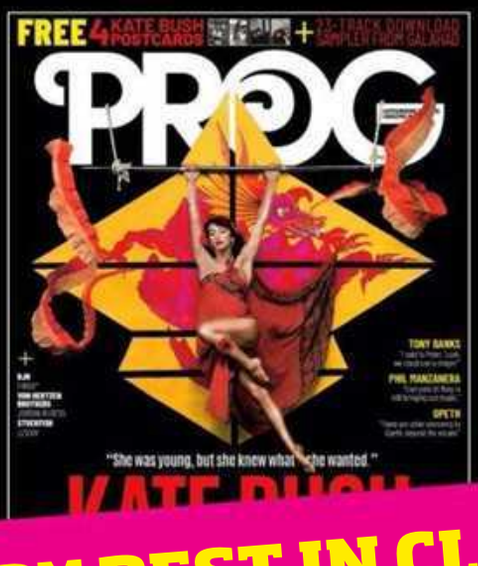
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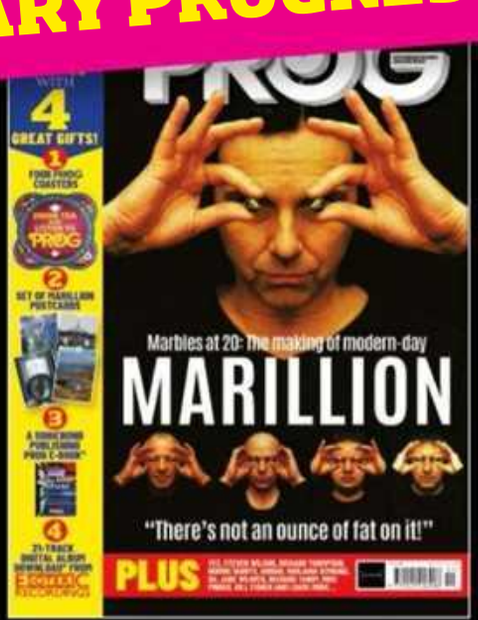






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Mark Lanegan 60: A Celebration

London The Roundhouse

Star-studded celebration of late alt. vocalist.

★ If we can judge a man's true fame by his celebrity fan club, then Mark Lanegan was clearly a superstar. Timed to commemorate the gravel-voiced former Screaming Trees frontman's 60th birthday, this mighty musical memorial brings together a multi-generational cast list of Lanegan's friends, acolytes and former collaborators including Josh Homme, Chrissie Hynde, Dave Gahan, Bobby Gillespie and Greg Dulli. "Mark would have pretended to hate all this," a grinning Homme says, "but he would have loved seeing all you guys here."

Lanegan passed in 2022, aged just 57, with no official cause of death yet revealed. But although his songs were full of fatalistic gloom, they are mostly transformed into life-affirming anthems at this gathering by a swashbuckling multi-guitar supergroup. Gahan reins in his usual stadium-sized swagger but still brings a livewire disco-pimp energy to several songs, including a glorious *Some Strange Religion*. Although Chrissie Hynde wears her icon status lightly, her bejewelled voice cuts through the evening's heavy fog of testosterone like intoxicating perfume. Despite a little too much bluesy, blokey, indie-rock Americana at the expense of Lanegan's quieter moods, this rich musical feast ultimately packs a hefty emotional punch.

Stephen Dalton

'This rich musical feast ultimately packs a hefty emotional punch.'



Josh Homme and Dave Gahan, part of a multi-generational cast.

HANNAH MEADOWS PHOTOGRAPHY/AVALON

The Fleshtones

London The Roundhouse

Overlooked legends finally set The Roundhouse aflame.

★ When the Flamin' Groovies topped an Independence Day bill at this venue to celebrate the US bicentenary on July 4, '76 they brought the Ramones with them, as support, to play their debut UK show. It might have made for a cosier fit to have brought The Fleshtones instead, CBGB regulars who, like the Groovies, had more of a retro approach to rock'n'roll than da Brudders' Blitzkreig bop. But they didn't. The 'Tones finally hit the UK in '81, too late for punk immortality

Tonight's Fleshtones aren't bitter. They're clearly damned glad to be here (supporting The Damned), yet utterly determined to flaunt their old-school credentials, at one point listing their esteemed contemporaries – all of whom, it has to be noted, left way larger ripples in rock's pool – before launching into *Remembering The Ramones*. With much to prove they go right ahead and prove it. This late-60s-going-on-16 quartet rock like hepped-up hyaenas. Fuzz-toned, Farfisa-packing garage rockers who throw formation show band shapes in similar incendiary style to the '69 MC5, these sweat-slicked, star-jumping, proto-Hives never let up. And we're only delighted for them. "This is our first time here!" they persistently enthuse. Shame. If they'd been here 48 years ago they could have changed history.

Ian Fortnam

The Damned

Southampton O2 Guildhall

Punk national treasures stick to their early-80s purple patch.

★ There's nothing quite like a hook for a tour, and for The Damned's latest trip around the UK it's the first time their 80s line-up – including both Rat Scabies *and* Paul Gray – have played together since 1989.

While *Beware Of The Clown* and *The Invisible Man* are a nod to the new, thankfully tonight's set is mostly rammed with gems from *Machine Gun Etiquette, The Black Album* and *Strawberries*, a consistently high-quality trio of goth-punk classics. Blasting into life with a quick sprint through *Love Song*, followed rapidly by *Machine Gun Etiquette* and *Wait For The Blackout*, it's almost like listening to a rapid-fire Damned 'best of', with Dave Vanian and Captain Sensible providing plenty of end-of-the-pier-show banter in between. *The Lively Arts, Plan 9 Channel 7* and *I Just Can't Be Happy Today* are particularly good, and The Captain takes the mic for *Life Goes On*. Given the date, a nice touch is the inclusion of *Limit Club* (dedicated to The Ruts' Malcolm Owen) from The Damned's 1981 *Friday 13th* EP. The gig wouldn't be complete without *Neat Neat Neat* and *New Rose*, of course, and the encore highlights include a seasonal romp through *There Ain't No Sanity Clause* and a manic *Smash It Up* (both parts).

Altogether a bit of a belter.

Essi Berelian

Von Hertzen Brothers

London The Garage

Flute solos, convoluted singalongs, a set-list for the ages.

★ Christmas 2024 has come early to this north London venue. Over the space of two exhilarating hours on a brisk Monday night with the temperature on the street dropping like a stone, the Von Hertzen Brothers heat up the Garage and make the outside world slip away, positing the eternal VHB question: why aren't one of the most dynamic modern and consistently fulfilling prog-rock bands filling theatres and arenas, instead of playing club gigs like this? Let's change that and make it our Christmas wish for this year.

That's of little concern to the band, though, who go at the Garage the way a child goes after ice cream, crashing in with a haymaker of an opening salvo in the shape of the breathless *The Relapse*, from their excellent new album *In Murmuration*, the chiming crunch of *Flowers And Rust* and the barrelling *You Don't Know My Name*.

Thankfully, before anyone in the audience keels over from sensory and aural overload, the band drop down through the gears to deliver the doomy *Lost In Time* (imagine if Black Sabbath had undergone a prog period, and you're close) and the elegiac *Beneath The Silver Stars*. Like the Von Hertzens' career arc, it's a seamless transition from one style to the next, sounding beguilingly easy and often brilliant, just like the band themselves.

Philip Wilding



The Soundtrack Of My Life

Von Hertzen Brothers frontman **Mikko Von Hertzen** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Polly Glass**



With deep roots in Finland and India, and a musical palette informed by classic rock, pop, traditional styles and beautiful voices from various genres, Mikko Von Hertzen has a keen sense of the many possible paths to a great song. Together with his brothers – guitarist Kie and bassist/keyboard player Jonne – the singer/guitarist stirs the sounds and sights of a diverse life into enigmatic rock anthems, most recently on their tight yet rich ninth album *In Murmuration*. These are some of those sounds.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

The lullabies sung by our parents. We always fell asleep while either mummy or daddy or grandma was singing. They were traditional Finnish lullabies, or it might be a British lullaby that is translated to Finnish, and Christian hymns. They were singing all the time.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

I started playing piano when I was four or five, and by the time I was eight or nine I had to perform because I went to this musical school. When I was in the seventh grade I started playing drums, and in an end-of-school festival we played *Panama* by Van Halen and Queen's *We Are The Champions*. I was thirteen or fourteen years old.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

If I think about which once made the biggest impact on me, it would be The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. For me that was next-level songwriting. For a top four I would pick Queen's *Night At The Opera*, *Sergeant Pepper's*, Jeff Buckley's *Grace* and *OK Computer* by Radiohead.

THE GUITAR HERO

I regard Kie [Von Hertzen] as one of the best guitarists in the world, because he crafts his solos so well. But that aside I really love Mark Knopfler, because when he's playing guitar he's telling stories. Brian May would be up there too, because he's got that similar vibe – he makes it sing, and he transports you into somewhere you wouldn't expect.

THE SINGER

Freddie Mercury, Jeff Buckley and Chris Cornell, but of those three I would probably pick Freddie. His command of his voice was so amazing. I'm a little bit more drawn to the soft and fragile side of his voice, like *Love Of My Life*. In that song I feel like Freddie is, in a way, very naked. He's singing from his heart.

THE SONGWRITER

John Lennon and Paul McCartney. They are probably the best songwriters in pop and rock ever, that duo.

"Freddie's command of his voice was so amazing. I'm drawn to the soft, fragile side."

They complement each other. There's a reason why they didn't separate the songwriting from each other in the credits. We always call everything 'Von Hertzen Brothers,' even though somebody wrote the song, because we understand that it's a team effort.

THE BEST RECORD I'VE MADE.

It's so lame to say "the new one". You can't look at it objectively, it's still too close. So I would say... [long pause] *Approach* from 2006 was for us, nobody was backing us in any way and we just put it out. Then *War Is Over* [2017], that's a very strong album. And *Red Alert In The Blue Forest* [2022] – I don't think anybody in this world does music like that.



THE WORST ALBUM I'VE MADE

Probably the first album [*Experience*, 2001]. It was still a bit raw, we didn't really have an identity yet. *Stars Aligned* [2011] has good songs, but we missed the mark a bit with the production.



MY GUILTY PLEASURE

We sometimes have a lot of fun with Scatman and nineties Eurodance things. If the time is right and we are in a partying mood, we could easily see ourselves doing karaoke of *Coco Jamboo* [by German Eurodance group Mr President] or something.



THE BEST COVER VERSION

I really liked Heart's version of *Stairway To Heaven*. And I'd say our band made a really good version of [King Crimson's] *21st Century Schizoid Man*.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

Anathema. They really know how to craft songs. They should be on the same level of appreciation as Steven Wilson.



THE BEST LIVE BAND

She's Anohni & The Johnsons now, but when they were still Antony & The Johnsons their 2013 gig in Helsinki was amazing. His voice and the whole thing with an orchestra, it was so engaging and so magical.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

If it's a rock club, I would go for Foo Fighters' *One By One* or something like that. Or *The Look* by Roxette.

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

Sigur Rós, for sure. *Untitled*, the 'bracket' album [( )], and I would play the whole album.

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

Jeff Buckley's version of *Lilac Wine*. Oh my god it's great. And that last part when he drops it down, it's so soothing.

THE SONG I'D WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

Maybe *Moonlight Sonata* by Beethoven. I played this on the piano when I was young. It's beautiful.

In Murmuration is out now via DoingBeingMusic. For updates visit vonhertzenbrothers.com

MIKKO VON HERTZEN: VILLE JUURIKKALA/PRESS; FREDDIE MERCURY: RICHARD MCCAFFREY/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES


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