

# **HOUND DAWG**

## **MAGAZINE**

*"I'M A HOUND DAWG!"*

**NO. 16 MARCH 2012**

### **SYD**

### **BARRETT**

**PSYCHADELIC ROCK  
CHILD WHO FORMED  
PINK FLOYD**

### **SKIN**

### **ALLEY**

**KRZYSZTOF**

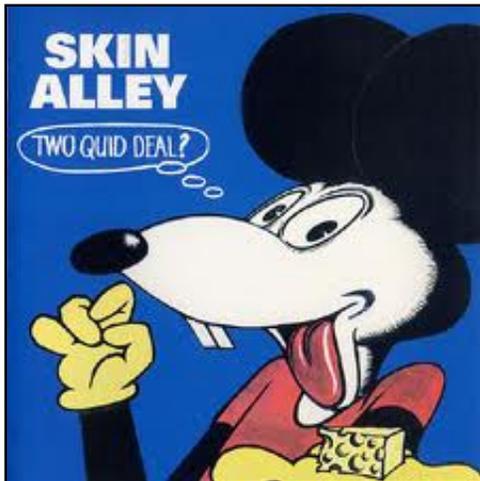
**JUSZKIEWICZ TALKS  
US THROUGH HIS  
CLASSIC ROCK BAND**



**PLUS! KEN DODD LIVE REVIEW**

**FICTION BY LINZI NAPIER**

**KENNETH J PERSIA'S HOLIDAY SNAPS**



## HOUND DAWG ISSUE 16

MARCH 2012

WISDOM TWINS BOOKS

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Hound Dawg is back... with a vengeance this time. It's back with brass knobs on. It's back wi-....No this is just silly... I'll start again eh?

Hound Dawg is back, and this time it means business. It means war! It means.... No, this is too serious.

Hound Dawg is back! It's back, and this time it's going to be staying back. And I don't mean as in staying back, like backing away from you, or keeping out of your way 'cos it's been stalking you and you've warned it to sod off. I mean it is staying back, as in staying here and it's going to be out every month now..... Which is nice.

This time around I take a retrospective look at the crazy diamond Syd Barrett, recounting his brief musical career and picking out the highlights. There is also a great piece I loved doing on Skin Alley, a 70s rock band that knew no limits, with some words from their keyboardist Krzysztof Juskwiewicz. There's an interview with the magazine's sponsor The 80 Year Old Hound Dawg, who was pleased to be reunited with his long lost brother Tex. Plus we can all be bored by Kenneth J Persia's holiday snaps, as he tours the many corners of Yorkshire with the missus.

A WORD WITH...

## THE OLD HOUND DAWG

CHRIS WADE CHATS TO THE 80  
YEAR OLD HOUND DAWG, WHO  
SPONSORS BOTH HOUND DAWG  
MAGAZINE AND HOUND DAWG  
RADIO

CW: Well Hound Dawg, thanks for stopping by. I know it was hard for you to do this, seeing as you are literally crumbling to pieces, with you being so old now.

HD: Ah don't worry about it partner. Being old is just a part of I- (Starts coughing violently... for AGES!)

CW: Are you OK?

HD: Do I look Ok you varmint?

CW: No, not really...

HD: Well I guess that answers your question then. (Raises his head, showing bloodshot eyes, which worries me)

CW: I guess it does.

HD: So does that mean the interview is over?

CW: Oh no, there are more questions yet Hound Dawg.

HD: Well shoot then, partner!

CW: OK. So you sponsor Hound Dawg Magazine and Radio. What was it about them that sparked your interest?

HD: Well I heard that at least 6 people were reading the magazine and I thought well, this is something I need to get my finger into!



CW: Your finger?

HD: Well, my paw then, smart arse! I like to stick my paw in a lot of different pies. Not literally, that would be unhygienic, especially for a canine like myself to do, seeing as I'm always digging in dirt for the bones and rifling through my shit. But I saw something real special in the magazine and I went along and told you I wanted to put some money up didn't I? I can see by this lovely office that my money has been spent wisely. Just how much *was* that signed picture of Hale and Pace you have framed there?

CW: Well it was a reasonable price, let's put it that way. Dirty Blake told me you were in every board game commercial from 1943 to 1947. Is this true?

HD: Not strictly, no. There was a Cluedo one I had to pass up as I was entertaining some troops with Bob Hope, and the role went to Claude Rains. But I was in most. I was also in loads of films too. I played a cactus in They Died With Their Boots On and also had a brief role as someone's sigh in Ben Hur. I once met that fella Stanley Cube Brick, think that is his name, when he was casting Lolita. I auditioned for the role of the object of James Mason's desire, but Stanley said my legs were too hairy. He went all pervy that fella didn't he? Filming Cruise and his ex bird in front of the mirror like a rude lad... made my cheeks go red.

CW: Glad we have that cleared up. Is it true that you have a brother who was living in a charity shop in Ilkley?

HD: This is true. Last time I was there in Ilkley, which is a small town in Yorkshire for those not in the know, I went into a charity shop to browse the stock. I often get various handy, useful items from there and they regularly put stock to one side for me. I recently got a Terence Trent Darby CD from there and a Les Dawson tea towel which I now put over that little handle on the oven. Anyway, I visited the shop one day with 4 quid in my man pouch to blow on items. I got in there, saw little that interested me in the usual spot I am magnetically drawn to. So I went over to the glass case. And there I saw him. My brother Tex. He was sitting there quite calmly, silently and as still as a tree trunk in fact, beside a flamboyant perfume bottle with a little *poof poof* device on it. I tried to speak to him but he said nothing. He just stared right through me. I started tapping on



the glass to get his attention, but he appeared to be in some sort of trance, like a robo dog or some shit. Then I started shaking the case loads and the staff got angry. She was an old lass, shouting from behind the counter; "Stop shaking that glass display case you jowly faced shit!" But I didn't listen to the old dear, turned round and flipped her the V, before continuing to shake the case. Then she shouted for Big Earl who stomped into the shop from the staff room where he had been enjoying a Viscount and a cuppa, and tried to restrain me. I said I would buy my brother in a bid

to release him from his strange transparent prison. I couldn't just leave him there and the thought of elderly ladies and cheap skates peering at him all day but never buying him, made me so ill I was almost literally sick on the floor. I asked how much he was and they replied 50 quid. I almost swallowed my tongue. But I was hell bent (not in a gay way) on getting him out of there! So I went to a nearby ATM and produced 50 pounds (well, 60 actually 'cos they only had 20s), dashed back in and bought him. We left the shop together weeping and hugged outside Boyes, the discount store round the corner that sells sweets and wool at competitive prices.

CW: Was it nice to see him?

HD: Oh yeah. I've not seen the side winder for nearly 50 years, since we were best boys on the original True Grit, I think.

CW: Will you be staying in touch with your brother Tex?

HD: Of course. In fact we are meeting up in June to go see former Animals organist Alan Price at the King's Hall in Ilkley. I am sure it will be grand.

CW: Let me know how it goes won't you?

HD: If I can yes.

CW: So how do you feel about the magazine becoming monthly?

HD: Well I think it's great. I was telling Gary Busey, my actor friend, all about it just this afternoon.

CW: What did he say?

HD: Not much. He just wanted to know where I kept my Calpol. But yeah, I think it's a great idea. It's just a shame I can't contribute too much, with me being really old.

CW: Ah never mind, we'll see to all the work.

HD: Why, thank you very kindly. You're a good kid, Chris! You really are.

**LIVE REVIEW...**

# KEN DODD

## THE LAST OF THE RED NOSED COMICS

**“IF YOU DON’T LAUGH AT THE JOKES, I’LL FOLLOW YOU HOME AND SHOUT THEM THROUGH YOUR LETTER BOX!”**

It’s hard to think of a time when Ken Dodd wasn’t spreading happiness throughout the land. My dad in particular has never remembered a time when Ken Dodd wasn’t famous. Beginning his showbiz career in the mid 1950s (Dodd that is, not my dad) he was breaking records at the Palladium and theatres all over the UK by the early 60s, his eccentric act consisting of snappy one liners, such catch phrases as “How tickled I am!” and a mad professor haircut made Doddy a house hold name.

Now in his 80s, going strong after nearly 60 years at the top, Dodd is still touring and pulling in the punters. Every show sells out quickly, tickets snapped up by adoring, loyal fans. A recent gig in Liverpool was sold out within 30 minutes. Amazing to think that after all this time, Ken is still at it, and people are still just as fascinated by his uplifting act.

Although I had never seen Ken live before, his live videos were a constant throughout my childhood, and my dad was always a big fan. My dad has been wanting to see him for god knows how long, so when we finally managed to get a pair of tickets for his show at Leeds Grande Theatre on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February, we were thrilled.

Now I have heard the stories of Ken’s shows going on for hours and hours on end, but I assumed they were a myth. One story in particular amused me; it was said that at one show the theatre manager walked on stage and gave Ken the keys, saying “Lock up when you’re done!” But these tales proved to have some truth. Ken stormed on stage at 7 p.m. banging a huge drum loudly, his hair stuck up in his trademark mad man style, his famous buck teeth as iconic as ever. The jokes started immediately, thick and fast, getting the sold out theatre right into the mood. Seeing Dodd live is a joy, not only for the quality of gags, but to see the legend himself in the flesh, a shining light of hope that old age doesn’t have to be feared. The man holds the audience, gets them in fits of laughter with such euphoric glee you sink right into it and relax. There is never a tense moment, as in other comedy sets, and everyone seems to be there for the party. Doddy is like an old mate, as familiar and iconic in England as fish and chips!

The first part of his set was broken up by a musical interlude, before Dodd re-emerged to inform us the interval was coming up. This was 10 o’clock! After a whiskey, we were back in our seats for the second act, which began with a magic set from the duo Amethyst. Then Dodd returned in famous red long feathery coat and a pair of tickle sticks. He had even brought on a flask and packed lunch. “Haven’t you brought yours?” he asked. He even asked one audience member, “What time do you want the



show to end?” the man replied, “2 a.m.” Dodd quipped, “Why do you want to leave during the interval?”

There were so many great gags, so many familiar ones delivered brilliantly by the master himself, and much audience chit chat, with Dodd returning to key members every now and then for jokes.

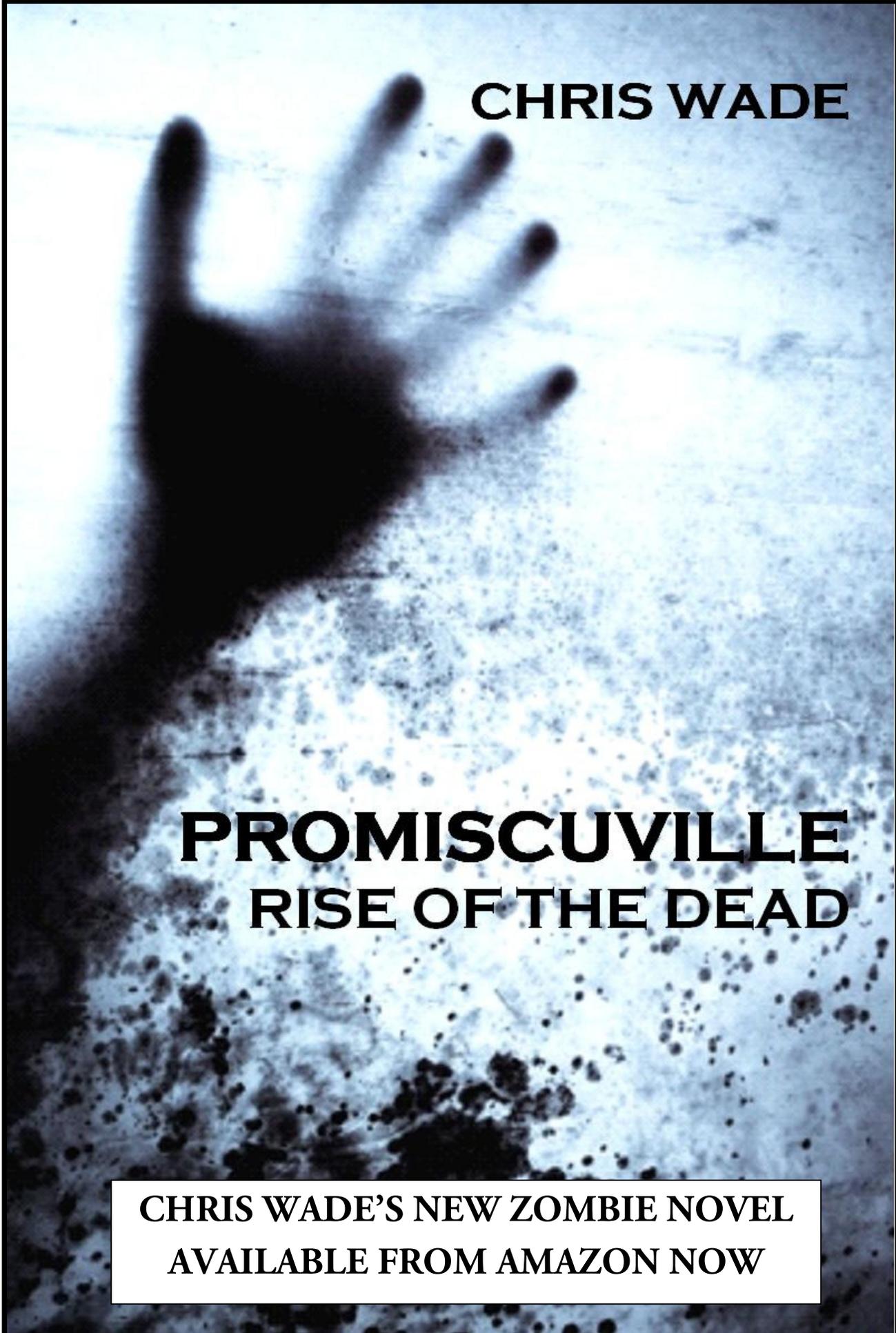
When it got to 11:30, it seemed that Ken was winding down. He had clearly loved it this night, almost sighing with sadness when he realised he had to finish it sooner or later. “I could stay up here all night,” he commented, half jokingly, but I believed every word of it.

The show entered an almost melancholy end when Dodd paid a tribute to the late comedian Frank Carson, who had passed away earlier that week. “A great comic and great friend,” he said, before imitating Frank with that catchphrase “It’s the way I tell ‘em!” “That’s it now,” said Dodd. “I’m the last of the red nosed comics. There’s only me left.” It was then you fully realised that Ken was the last of the great eccentric jester comedians Britain produced in the variety and music hall era. Before us stands a man who will be in the history books forever, a troubadour of joy who may have entertained and cheered up more people than anyone else in the world. He sang a song for Frank, the moving Absent Friends (I felt tears... and that isn’t a pun on Dodd’s famous number 1 single, it’s genuine) and finished with his trademark Happiness song. As he balled out the final note, the curtain came down on him, Dodd partially lit in the darkness of the theatre, one arm waving.

It was almost midnight. I don’t know how Doddy and the faithful old dears who come out every year to see him, lasted so long. I was knackered... But 5 hours is real value for money, shame I can’t say the same about the drinks in the bar. Every one should see Ken Dodd, witness a walking miracle of glee, 80 odd and still able to entertain us and himself (he was cracking up every now and then at his own gags which is a good sign) for hours on end. Dodd puts modern comics to shame really. When you next see one of those lazy comics, a mere 40 minute set that a kid could have churned out, using the exact same material 20 years on, think of Dodd, a true master of his craft. Dodd asked us near the finale if there will ever be the likes of Les Dawson and Arthur Askey again. We said no, and so did Dodd. But then again, there will never be a Ken Dodd again either, a figure of undiluted, pure and simple, innocent happiness. The last of the red nosed comics.

God bless Ken Dodd!

By Chris Wade



**CHRIS WADE**

**PROMISCUVILLE  
RISE OF THE DEAD**

**CHRIS WADE'S NEW ZOMBIE NOVEL  
AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON NOW**

## FICTION

### TOYS

By Linzi Napier

As I walk through the supermarket, it is plain to see every item you buy has risen up by 10p or sometimes a lot more. At times like this my favourite saying is “nobody’s got any money these days,” which isn’t strictly true, as there are a whole lot of people who are living a comfortable existence in this economic downturn. But then there are some that are literally living from hand to mouth, as my mum would say.

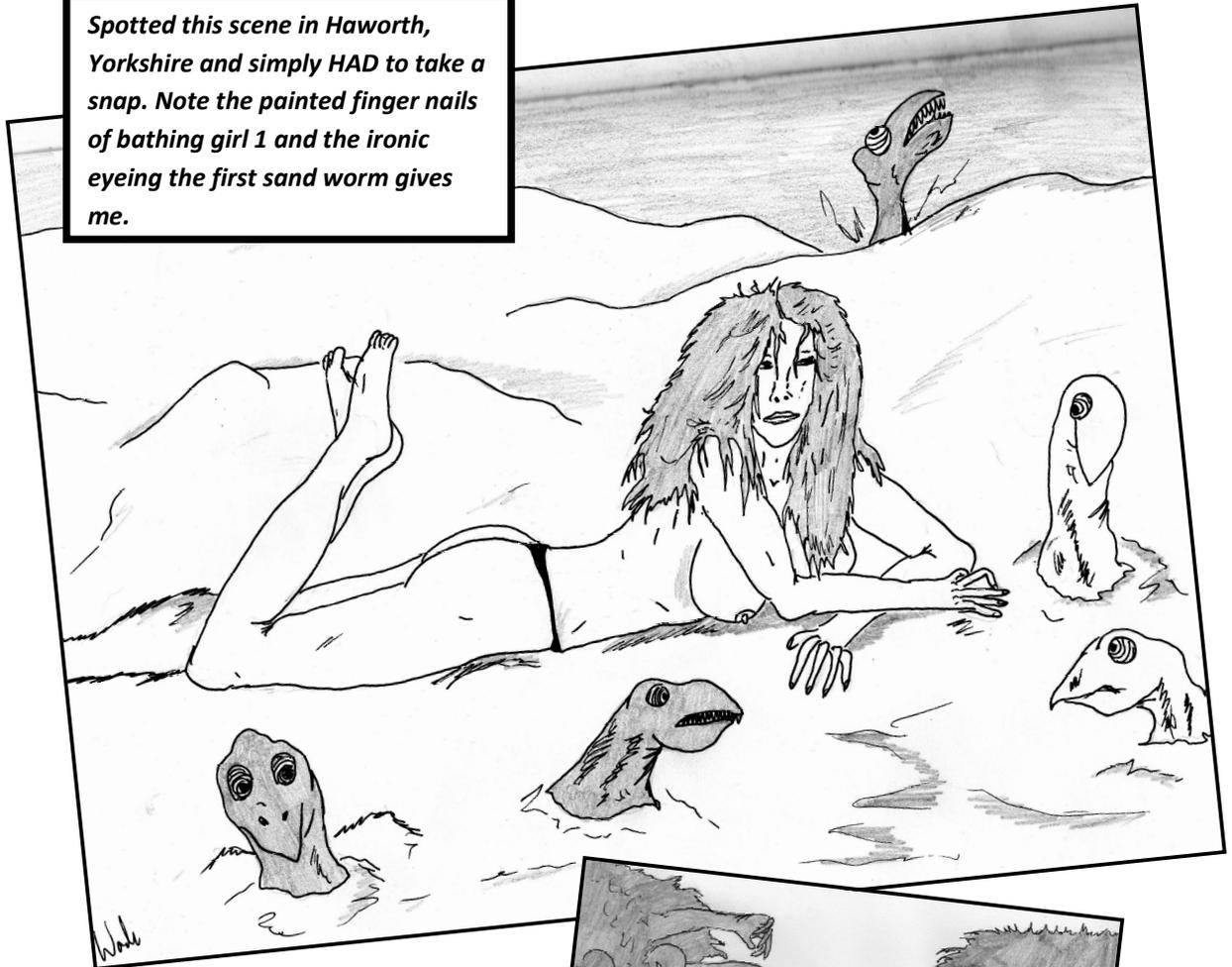
Back on my shopping journey and discovering my usual buys have again upped in price, I came across a heart warming scene in the toy aisle. There was a very young couple with their young baby. It has to be said the couple looked to be only children themselves; they looked dishevelled and quite pathetic. But how they laughed with their young baby, who was enjoying the time in the toy aisle with mum and dad, although they didn’t seem to be buying any, nor did they seem to have enough spare money to do so. This was a free play time with all the toys they could have access to on their little trip.

I smiled and continued my shopping, leaving the little baby’s echoing laughter in the distance. I quickly finished my shopping and as I paid at the checkout, I noted that the prices had gone up once again. As I headed out for the car, I noticed the small family leaving empty handed, smiling and laughing. The baby was fast asleep, clearly tired out from their little adventure. I smiled to myself. For a moment I thought ‘Are all the best things in life free?’ Then as I packed my shopping in my car, I noticed the young mum pull some familiar looking toys out from underneath the sleeping baby’s pushchair.

# KENNETH J PERSIA'S

## 2012 HOLIDAY SNAPS

*Spotted this scene in Haworth, Yorkshire and simply HAD to take a snap. Note the painted finger nails of bathing girl 1 and the ironic eyeing the first sand worm gives me.*



*Here's me lost in a hellish turmoil just outside Piece Hall in Halifax. You will notice the desperate grasps of the lost souls and my stiffened moment of catatonic terror. The wife caught this on our Canon Digital camera, reasonably priced from a second hand shop at only 199 pounds with 4 months cover for damages.*



(RIGHT) Can't remember where this was taken. Possibly Filey on day 3...  
(BELOW) The wife indulging her fantasies in Bingley.



LEFT: The wife pointed out this quite beautiful sight on our excursion through Skipton. Note clearly, the presence of the reaper trying to coax down 2 members of the village from the tree who grasp the branches with desperation. "We are not ready to go yet!" they argued. The reaper got the neutral assistance of local mechanic Davey Butter, who shared a dooby with Death. In the end the reaper had to get 4 of his mates to come along and we caught them making their ways, enigmatically, towards the scene. The things you see.... CW

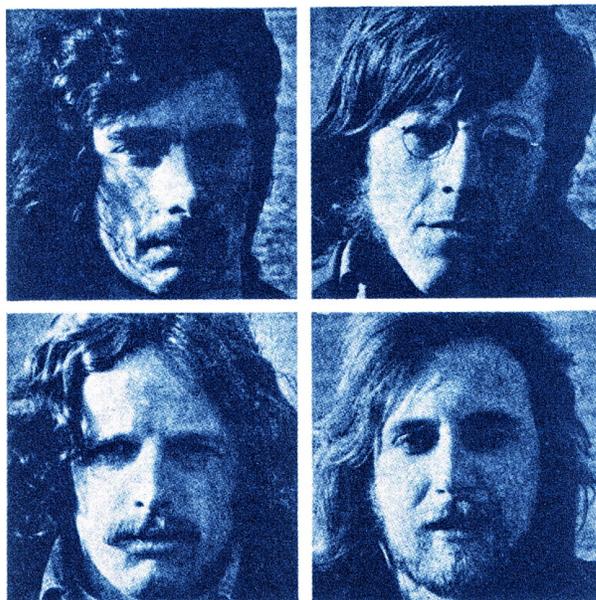
## CLASSIC ROCK

YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD OF SKIN ALLEY, THE OBSCURE 70S ROCK OUTFIT WITH LINKS TO HAWKWIND, SPACE RITUAL AND ATOMIC ROOSTER, BUT AFTER READING THIS YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK THEM OUT. WORDS: CHRIS WADE

*"I've been living in sin, smoking cigars and drinking gin!"* Even though I always thought their idea of sin was quite questionable, I thought Skin Alley were a great band. The jazz rock fusion that was so ripe in the late 60s and early 70s was rarely done better than when Skin Alley pulled it off. One record that sound tracked my entire childhood was a sampler/compilation my dad has called *Fill Your Head With Rock*, (which I now own myself!) and on it was a killer track, led by a great flute riff. It was *Living in Sin* by Skin Alley. My dad, in the pre internet days, was keen to know more about this mysterious band, and became ever frustrated when he could never find any details on them, or a copy of one of their albums for that matter. When the records were re-released on CD a few years back, dad bought the lot. Nowadays, thanks to the internet, interest in the band is probably higher than when they were together.

They formed in 1969, with the initial line up of Thomas Crimble on bass, Giles Page on drums, Max Taylor on guitars and Krzysztof Juskiewicz on Hammond. After Taylor was replaced by Bob James, who also played sax and flute (thus expanding the group's sound) they were signed in 1970 to CBS. Their inclusion on the massive seller *Fill Your Head with Rock* helped promote their self titled debut and the band got quite a live following together. Their second LP written at a cottage in Pagham was funnily titled *Pagham and Beyond*, and it featured one of their best songs, *The Queen of Bad Intentions*. Around this time, Crimble went off to join Hawkwind, Tony Brown replaced Giles on the drums and another line up fell into place. Nick Graham

# SKIN ALLEY



took Crimble's place, who had been a former member of rock outfit Atomic Rooster.

After recording soundtracks for 2 Italian movies, the band left CBS and Roy Thomas Baker cut an album at the legendary Trident Studios, but this was never released. The band then played at Glastonbury, before signing to Atlantic Records to release their third album, *Two Quid Deal*, which featured a Mickey Mouse lookalike on the cover. It was another solid effort. Their last record, *Skintight*, was released in 1973. The band split up, realising, as Juskiewicz states on his website: "we were forced to face the reality that there would be no money coming from our record deal... so reluctantly, we disbanded."

It seems the band is growing in interest, another strange mysterious prog-ish jazz rock group that thorough addicts of the era have discovered and now love. There is some great material on their albums. Now widely available on the net, their records are worth checking out. For me they are a band of pure diversity and range, one track can be one style, the next a totally different one. It makes listening to them a satisfying experience.

I spoke to Krzysztof Juszkwiewicz about the band, from its early days, to the growing legacy. He's a nice, friendly chap I must say.

**How does it feel to know people are still discovering your music from 40 years ago, and liking it judging by the reactions and reviews all over the net?**

It is always a pleasant feeling when you find out that your creative efforts have found an audience. I remember laughing at the notion that our music was "before its time"..... but forty years is pushing it a bit. I do remember that we always strived to retain elements of honesty and originality in our work,,,,, perhaps that is what people recognise. Otherwise, perhaps people have stumbled onto an alternative to the "X Factor" syndrome ?

**Do you remember the band forming? You were signed up quite quick weren't you?**

The band was formed by three buddies living off the Portobello road who recruited me to help them to create new music, At that time the big record companies were trying to cash in on this new phenomenon of "alternative" music without really understanding what it was all about, so they were signing up bands left right and centre just in case they could make a few bob out of them. We must have been part of that wave.

**Do you find the Fill Your Head With Rock sampler helped your career a little and perhaps is the reason so many people down the generations have stumbled into the music?**

There is no doubting that inclusion on this fantastic compilation album made many people aware of the existence of Skin Alley. We never thought of it as "career" enhancing in any way as we were not particularly aware that we had embarked on a career. I can only remember us being totally involved in the next pieces of music we were working on and hoping that someone might want to hear them.

**I want to ask about Living In Sin, which is just a classic. Do you remember writing this song, and recording it? Did you think it was a special track?**

L in S was originally a flute tune idea by Bob James. He came up with the melody, middle eight and lyrics. On his behalf I cringe at the comparison with Jethro Tull as Bob is a much finer sax/flute player whose influences were musicians like Charles Lloyd and other jazzers. Once the ideas were presented to the band, we collaborated to make it into what it became and, as in most of our work, we left big spaces for spontaneity and improvisation. We always enjoyed performing it live but did not recognise it as the iconic piece it subsequently became. We were always terrible at recognising which aspects of our work had the most potential for popular appeal.

**The second album is my favourite. Do you have fond memories of recording this in the cottage in Pagham?**

We went to Pagham in the winter to get our heads together and to compose music for the next album. It was, in fact, recorded in London after this sojourn. The cottage was great and I remember teaching myself to play the trumpet whilst standing in front of the incoming tide!

**The third and fourth albums sound different. Had there been a conscious shift in the sound for maybe commercial reasons or was it natural due to the line up change?**

This was entirely the result of the line-up change. Nick Graham came from Atomic Rooster with some great songwriting ideas which we incorporated into our repertoire and Tony Brown (aka Knight) came with a wealth of experience from the Jazz and R 'n B scene. Bob's writing was also developing and we totally immersed ourselves in our newly expanding possibilities. Commercial considerations were never on our radar, we always thought that we needed to express ourselves honestly.

**How did you feel when you came to the decision to split up?**

There were at least two aspects to this. On the one hand we had the reality check that our record company was no longer inclined to hand over any of the money our recordings were earning, and on the

other hand we did a gig with the newly created Mott the Hoople and they were all wearing make-up, platform heels and seemingly women's clothes. David Bowie was revving up his stuff and Queen were doing their shows. To us, this was too high a price to pay in order to continue playing our music. We were all very sad to have to accept this inevitability, and we have remained close friends.

**Did you find people getting into Skin Alley straight away or has it been gradual, and grown since the arrival of the internet?**

I am only aware of this new ripple of interest via the internet. Other clues lie in the fact that many record companies seem to have got hold of our masters, which incidentally we do not seem able to do, and are re-issuing all of our stuff including music which we can not get hold of ourselves ie our film scores. In a way it is gratifying that so many younger people have stumbled onto our music and enjoy it, but this is tinged with the irony that exploiters seem to be making a few bob out of it but not a groat ever reaches its original creators. No change there then!

**You're still making music aren't you? You must still enjoy it...**

I am and always have been a musician, it's what I do! I now live in France and have connected up with some great musicians to perform and have a good time playing. I am a very lucky bod. As well as this I have recently been able to fulfil a lifetime ambition and make a recording of the music I was raised on in our exile Polish community. I have really loved doing this and am now working on my next album in this genre.

**You said you cringe at it, but how do you feel about the comparisons to Jethro Tull and even the non satanic Black Widow material. I also think some of the material is similar to Caravan. Were these influences?**

I have already alluded to the comparison with Jethro Tull. I have a respect for the work of all of these bands but must admit that I have not really listened to them. I think it is a mistake to assume that our bands of the late sixties/early seventies belonged to some kind of mutually influential movement. In my experience

these bands seemed to be determinedly original, unique one-offs garnering their influences from all sorts of directions including other forms of music, art and literature and perhaps mysticism and political revolt. I cannot really recall any of these bands setting out to follow anyone else's formula, we all felt free enough to say what we ourselves wanted to express. Since that time, this has not been the case and young musicians now find themselves operating in idioms that have already been previously created.

**What was the best gig you played with Skin Alley?**

By definition, I can't remember the best ones.... but, Ragnarock in 1973 was pretty good and part of it has been captured on film!

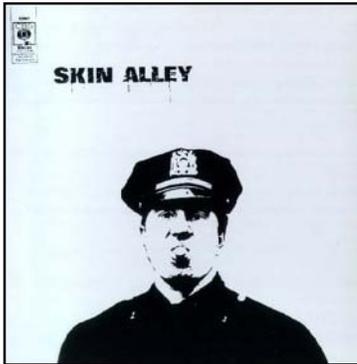
**One last question. I once had a bootleg of a Syd Barrett gig where he just left after 3 songs. Is it true you were on the bill with him and if so do you recall it?**

It is true, it was at the Corn Exchange in Cambridge but my memories of it are very hazy.

**He also added a nice little twist to the questions:**

For myself, another strange coincidence was your recent work with Rik and Ade. Although neither of them would probably remember me, I was in fact the resident "musician" at the Comic Strip when it first opened in 1980. I had previously done a tour with Nigel Planer and Pete Richardson and these were the guys who originally invented the Comic Strip at Paul Raymond's Revuebar. I was only there for about the first month of its existence after which I got more involved with my music studies and split the scene. I was particularly struck by your interview with Rik (in your mag.) when he talked about the magical or mysterious moments of uncertainty in a live audience when they do not yet understand what is happening, usually before some kind of punch line. When the Comic Strip first opened there were elements of chaotic yet spontaneous theatre but, to my dismay, after about a month these had been ironed out in favour of a more energetic, quick fired "rabble-raising" form of comedy. Their subsequent rise to fame showed that they were right and that I was barking up the wrong tree!

## YOUR MIND IS OBSCENE: A GUIDE TO SKIN ALLEY'S ALBUMS



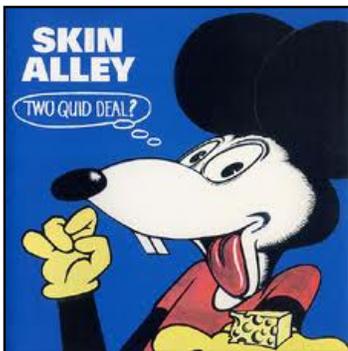
### SKIN ALLEY (1970)

Ecclectic, often brilliant, often plain intriguing. Skin Alley is a real masterful piece of musicianship, with the band on versatile form. We have their signature piece Living In Sin, in my mind a classic rock track, with that hooky flute line and that great guitar solo. Brilliant. Track 5, Country Aire is a folky instrumental that reminds one of Tull (although I know a comparison to Tull might seem naïve), with the most pleasant of hooks, and there is spooky atmosphere on All Alone, more floaty folk rock delight on Night Time, shocker jazz on Marsha and even medieval harpsichord on Concerto Grosso, a most unusual mix of cop show theme tune and typical 70s rocker.



### TO PAGHAM AND BEYOND (1970)

Big Brother is Watching You is a great opening track, great vocal, organ work and a real strong rush of bass playing. Take Me To Your Leader's Daughter is another flute led tune, the pervy jazz of Walking in the Park contrasting to this. For me the LP's finest moment is The Queen of Bad Intentions, a track I have heard so much since I was born that it has a special place for me. Great melody, great solo and great vocal delivery. "I AM A MAN YOU ARE MY MAIDEN!!!" Probably their best album in all.



### TWO QUID DEAL (1972)

Although the band don't quite sound the same., there are some gems here. Their style seems more upbeat and conventional at first, especially on Nick's Seven, which is still a good track. It's all cool riffs on So Many People , funky strutting on Bad Words And Evil People, and something a little more like their first two with Skin Alley Serenade



### SKINTIGHT (1973)

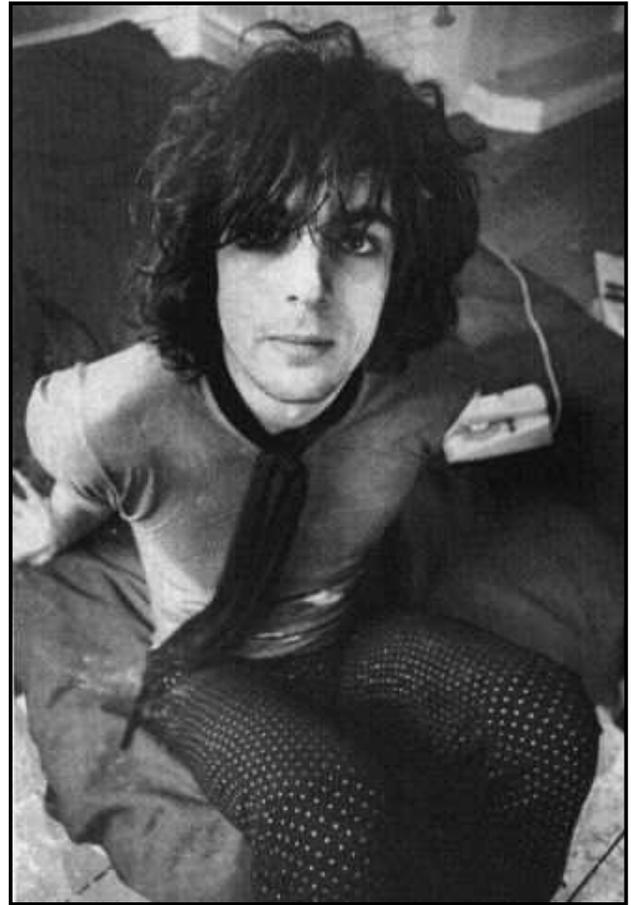
Skintight could really be a totally different band, all conventional rockers and rollers, which is perhaps a natural progression for the band. Still, it's an interesting progression. Often sounds like Elton John and Neil Sedaka in its writing style.

***“AND MY TURQUOISE WAISTCOAT IS QUITE OUTTA SIGHT!!”***

# **SYD BARRETT**

It's a fact that Syd Barrett had become a mythical figure long before he died. He was rock's alleged curtain twitching recluse, a figure of worship to some, a figure of fun to others. He was the ultimate story of former rock god turned hermit, living with his mother in Cambridge. There was the odd spotting of him in the last thirty years of his life, former friends who had seen him shaven headed going shopping, or doing his gardening, press who had taken a blurred snap of him going about his life. Devoted, obsessive fans would make the trip to his home, camp outside his house and post gifts through his letterbox. By then though, Barrett was unreachable, not interested in the media or his status as the man who started Pink Floyd in the late 60s, took too much acid and went bonkers. An author who wrote a book on Barrett once visited his home to ask if he minded him being the subject of his next publication. Barrett was gardening and ignored the questioner. He just wasn't interested. Barrett had retreated to a quiet life, living off royalties from sales of his album with Pink Floyd, the brilliant Piper at the Gates of Dawn and the inclusion of his tracks on their massive selling greatest hits CD Echoes. He also loved to paint, which became his primary interest in these "obscure" days. Oh how we all love to hear of an ex star living in some dark cellar, shunning the lime light and society in general.

But after his death in 2006, Rosemary, Syd's sister, was to destroy the rock myth bullshit of Syd Barrett forever, claiming that Syd had actually found happiness in his life, "a simple life, boringly normal" as she put it herself. He loved DIY and couldn't understand why people might be interested in him, 30 years after he was in a rock



band. "He was too involved in his own thoughts to have time for fans." She said. Rosemary was Syd's, real name Roger, best friend. After his mother died in 1991, he remained in the house alone. Rosemary also shuns the rumours that he suffered from mental illness at all, even though Syd did spend some time in a private home in Essex, for "lost souls" as Rosemary put it. Rosemary did worry about him however, and was aware he could be fragile, especially when faced with his famous past. An old Cambridge friend once came across Syd and his sister, and said "Hello Syd, do you remember me?" Before Syd could speak, his sister cut in and said he was only interested in buying ties today. She admitted she could be over protective, but all this was out of love.

He didn't even own a TV or radio, seeing them as pointless, not did he listen to any pop, save the Stones, and was more into jazz. He also had a major interest in art, often heading to London to check out the galleries. In his own painting, he

would complete a piece, record photographic evidence of it, then destroy the original. "Once something was over, it was over. He felt no need to revisit it." Was Syd getting something out in the only form he knew? Something that simply HAD to come out? Who knows?



Even though Rosemary goes on to slam the attention his mental issues receive, her defences against the accusations don't exactly paint a normal, overly healthy life. Then again, what is a healthy life? I myself spend a rather long time in my office. Some people may see that as odd. But the truth is, he wasn't that interesting any more, and bore no resemblance to the Syd of Lucifer Sam, Bike and Baby Lemonade fame! Syd was great with kids, according to his sister; the kids on the street, his nieces and his nephews were in stitches with him. He was a loving man too, so this is no case of a pale faced hermit staring people down with an icy glare. He was different, self absorbed in his own little world, but not dangerously strange as some press reports might paint him.

With Pink Floyd in the late 60s, Syd and the gang defined the psychedelic London scene. Their album Piper at the gates of Dawn featured Syd's classic child like nursery rhyme lyrics (The Gnome, Lucifer Sam), weird trippiness (Flaming) and rock freak outs (Interstellar Overdrive). It was a primal sound for the Floyd and Barrett helped guide them through the early phase, although Roger Waters is often negative towards the band's

output in these days. As the band became pop stars, with singles like See Emily Play and Arnold Layne becoming chart hits, Barrett found fame hard work and started to, how can I put this, behave rather oddly. His antics included catatonic TV appearances, not answering questions in interviews, detuning his guitar on stage, not turning up for gigs, and writing purposely alienating material for the band, in a transparent attempt to destroy their commercial appeal. It is fair to say he hated the fame game. Some blame his LSD consumption for the gradual downfall of his mental state, while some claim it was all just a deliberate awkwardness to piss everyone else off. One event that seemed to push it was when Barrett, the main songwriter, was teaching the group a song, and kept changing the arrangement as they played along. He kept on singing "Have you got it yet?" They soon got the swing of Barrett's subtle joke and gave up. In the end they just stopped picking him up for gigs, seeing if he would notice and replaced him with one of Barrett's old chums, Dave Gilmour. Syd was then side lined from activities, but that didn't stop him coming along to the band's shows and staring demonically at Gilmour from the front row.

He did make two solo albums before leaving the business altogether, Madcap Laughs and Barrett, which are almost musical versions of Van Gogh; imperfect, interesting and at times brilliant portraits of a troubled, unique mind.

After his interest in the business lessened, Barrett and his new band of musicians played a few gigs, and in 1972, they performed their final show in Cambridge (see the Skin Alley article), with Syd leaving the stage after a few songs. Through 1973, with one appearance at a jazz and poetry event, he became even more introverted, living in hotels and only contacting others when collecting royalties from the record label. One friend saw him in the street and asked him where he was going. Barrett replied, "far further than you could possibly imagine." Although I see where his sister is coming from, it is undeniable that his retreat

from the public eye and society is interesting, mostly due to how iconic he once was. And with rumours that he was schizophrenic, it's hard to believe there was little to be concerned about. Another famous sighting of Barrett came in 1975 when Syd, now with a shaved head, shaved eyebrows and larger frame, visited his former band mates Pink Floyd in the studio while they were recording Shine On You Crazy Diamond, a song that was funnily enough about him. At first they didn't recognise him and were upset by his strange behaviour (he was brushing his teeth frantically). After this he attended Gilmour's wedding and bumped into Roger Waters in Harrods. This was the last time the band ever saw him, but his presence haunted their subsequent material, especially The Wall which was directly based on him.

He sold the rights to his solo albums and moved into a hotel, around the time The Sex Pistols and The Damned tried to employ him as a producer. He wasn't interested of course. It was after this, once the money had run out, that he moved back with his mother to Cambridge. From here on, the cult of Barrett only grew more and more.

So what is left once the myth and folk lore is knocked down? Well, the music.

### [ESSENTIAL BARRETT TRACKS](#)

#### ARNOLD LAYNE

A perfect little single, typical of the British scene at the time in musical scope and lyrics. The music is almost hypnotic at times, and Barrett showed he could match Ray Davies as a quirky storyteller.

#### SEE EMILY PLAY

Possibly Barrett's best known track, the catchy melody made the track a winner and the music accompanying it shows a band at their best. The lyrics are beautiful, "Put on a gown that touches the ground. Float on a river forever and ever... Emily."

#### BIKE

Perhaps Barrett's most eccentric track with the Floyd, hilarious lyrics about a man's bike that has "a basket, a bell that rings and lots of things to make it look good." There is also Gerald the mouse, the plate of gingerbread men and a room of musical tunes, before the mass chorus of quacks for the last 30 or so seconds. Off the wall and barking mad, a pure delight from start to finish.



#### LUCIFER SAM

Another classic from the Piper... album that takes you away to a Lewis Carroll- esque land of magic cats, set to a Batman riff with swirling organ and heavy thumping bass.

#### FLAMING

Any song that features the lines "Yippee you can't see me, but I can you," and "lying on an eiderdown" is an instant winner to me. This is pure sixties freak out, and an early sign that Barrett could sometimes sound troubled on record.

#### THE GNOME

Classic Floyd fairytale, telling the story of a little gnome who lives in the grass. Innocent yet so trippy it's quite baffling.



### VEGETABLE MAN

Barrett's lost classic with the Floyd, a totally mad rocker, with Barrett clearly telling the world he feels like he is losing himself. The song leaks desperation and turmoil, but at the same time is musically brilliant. One to seek out if you can find it, although it isn't officially available even now.

### SCREAM THY LAST SCREAM

So weird it's scary, with haunting lyrics and chipmunk effect on the vocals, this was one of the maddest things he did with the Floyd and it was rejected. Another lost classic.

### JUGBAND BLUES

His Floyd swan song, a muddled, Sgt Pepper esque finale to his time with the band. "I'm wondering who could be writing this song..." is such an odd line, simultaneously insane and self aware. How much was Syd playing the game people expected from him?

### TERRAPIN

Acoustic loveliness that opens the Madcap Laughs album, with the excellent line "oh baby my hair's on end about you!"

### BABY LEMONADE

Pure poetry, as Syd tells us "cold iron hands clap the party of clowns outside." It's a great piece of music too, one of his most listenable from an occasionally confusing solo discography.

### GIGOLO AUNT

Syd goes groovy on Gigolo Aunt, a sing a long catchy tune, especially odd for Syd. Decent musical accompaniment and cool lyrics make this another accessible tune for newcomers to his sound.

### HONEY LOVE

A favourite of Graham Coxen, this sounds like the route of Brit pop. "Ice cream, 'scuse me, I seen you looking good the other evening," is a line you might hear among today's indie rockers.

### BOB DYLAN BLUES

His ode to Mr Zimmerman, only released on his best of CD in 2005. It's done in Bob's song writing style, a bare acoustic number with a positive feel to it. "I'm a poet, don't you know it, and the wind you can blow it" shows he had his sense of humour intact too.

### LOVE SONG

A sad one that conjures up strange mixed feelings. The sweet musical arrangement and Barrett's charming lyrics, "I knew a girl and I like her still, she said she knew she could trust me and I her will," hint a normal conventional side of Barrett that never really got to show itself in his life.

### GOLDEN HAIR

Look out your window, golden hair.... Mysterious, calming and haunting, elements Barrett could perfect if he really tried.

### IF IT'S IN YOU

Hear how Gilmour leaves in the big mistake, as if to punish Syd for all his odd behaviour. Brings a saddened smile when you hear the fragility of the lyrics and his fractured voice in the studio. Perhaps the one track that sums up Syd's vulnerability and awkwardness. (WORDS: CW)

The Golden Days of....

# THE KINKS

CHRIS WADE TAKES A LOOK AT THE DEFINING ERA OF THE KINKS, FROM 66 TO 69, WHEN RAY DAVIES' SONGWRITING HIT ITS PEAK

By 1966, Ray Davies was rightly regarded as one of the UK's best songwriters and certainly the chief satirical commentator on the British music scene. His band The Kinks, having completed four albums prior to *Face to Face*, were still very much in the full swing of their R and B rock phase. The previous effort, *The Kink Kontroversy* had been a vast improvement on the first two records. While *The Kinks* and *Kinda Kinks* do contain some good moments, the finished products sound rushed and thrown together. But *The Kink Kontroversy* sounded more polished and had a far wider range of styles and themes; there was the witty calypso of *I'm On An Island*, the three bar beat of *I Am Free*, the nostalgic *Where Have All the Good Times Gone* (which hinted at a future direction for the band) and the unforgiving classic raw Kinks rocker *Till the End of the Day*. In 1966 however, Davies was more open to the idea of expanding not only the sound of The Kinks, but also the social and satirical undertones of their music. As George Melly christened them, "those brilliant piss takers", the songs suddenly became more mocking in content, containing a subtle hint of a bite, a bite which Davies always managed not to shed any blood with.

On the heels of their Number 1 smash hit, the classic *Sunny Afternoon*, The Kinks were ready to release their fourth record, unarguably their first complete artistic success. Funnily enough the album had been recorded in sessions between October 1965 and June 1966, and the songs as a collection can



almost be viewed as a progression of Ray's abilities. It should also be noted that Ray had what most people refer to as a nervous breakdown just before recording commenced. Some of the tracks of course, feature not only hints of a troubled mind, but full blown smacks of depression and confusion.

*Face to Face* opens with the raucous rocker *Party Line*, featuring a typically in your face vocal lead by Dave Davies. It's a fantastic opening track and a perfect way to ease fans from the familiar Kinks sound into the darker, more provocative areas that will soon be unfolding.

The second track is the melancholy *Rosie Won't You Please Come Home*, with Ray putting himself in the role of worried parent, wondering where their daughter may be. This is an area that not many pop writers of the era explored; after all, the 60s were the ultimate decade of rebellion and

lamenting the absence of a little girl grown up hardly seemed cool. But Davies, ever the one to turn conventions on their head, conjures up a beautifully sad document of the neurosis that may find itself swimming in the head of a parent. It was a theme he would later develop even further, albeit in a more upbeat fashion in Polly, a song that never saw a proper release until it was put out on the three disc re issue of The Village Green Preservation Society. Rosie... though stands more obviously as a sincere plea from Ray to his sister Rose who had recently moved to Australia. These are early signs of Ray's autobiographical melancholia appearing in one of his songs. Sonically, the song marks a step forward not only for The Kinks, but for the evolution of pop itself. Starting with a bumping acoustic and bass rhythm, the arrangement is soon enhanced by the inclusion of Nicky Hopkins on the harpsichord (Hopkins' presence gives much of the album an underlying beauty that is easy to over look, but ultimately enhances the material).

Dandy, the third track, is a classic piece of Davies observation. Here he documents the care free life of a young ladies man, sneaking in the back doors and tickling fancies wherever he goes. The song however turns around in the end to a more sad and truthful conclusion. What about when Dandy is old? What will be his fate in his latter years? Davies observes "When you gonna give up?" and notes when he is old and grey he will remember the warnings. But Davies ends on a seemingly positive note. "Dandy, you're all right!" Something tells me Ray doesn't really believe this. There will, no doubt, be an overwhelming sense of regret when Dandy finally reaches old age and realises he is alone. The jollity of the song with its upbeat rhythm, balances against this gloom perfectly.

Too Much On My Mind instantly reeks of inner turmoil and one cannot ignore the fragility of Ray's emotions at the time of writing. Involved in bitter business pursuits with managers and song rights, as well as feeling the pressures of fatherhood and marriage, this song is a grim, yet musically gorgeous slice of mental panic. While the lyrics are saddening, and we really feel the worry seeping out of the speakers, the arrangement is brilliant; the harpsichord, the backing vocals, the Ivory pounding

and a perfect vocal performance from Ray make it possibly the best song on the record. But we are concerned, as listeners may well have been when the album was released, when Ray unashamedly exclaims "My poor demented mind is slowly going." Session Man comes across as obvious criticism of the numerous well known hired players that would so often invade recording sessions in the 1960s. The way Ray utters the rhyming chorus "He's a session man, a chord progression, a top musician" is at once hilarious and scathing. There is a real difference between these two beasts, Ray the artist who never craved technical perfection and the nameless (but we can guess who it may be) session man who is banished from the studio if he can't cut the mustard. But the song ironically features a brilliant bit of harpsichord from session legend Hopkins, who the song may just be about. Session Man is a classic example of Ray at his most bitchy. Brilliant. ("He's not paid to think just play" indeed).



Rainy Day in June is definitely the most atmospheric song on the record, with its thunder sound effects and imposing arrangement. It perfectly paints a picture we all know, peering out of the window as the rain runs down the glass and the lightning strikes.

House in the Country is an aggressive attack on the established rich man, definitely a step up from the criticism in A Well Respected Man the previous year. The conformed "respectable" gent has become a wicked figure of greed and arrogance, all so "smug"

with his sports car and his home which ceases to be a home due to the empty headed being that inhabits it. Davies really had the dagger out for this number. The musically upbeat Holiday in Waikiki puts Davies in the shoes of a holidaying Englishman who is clearly disappointed with the commercialisation of the Hawaiian resort. All he wanted it seems was a quiet break away from the money go round and the rat race, but found himself entering a very similar world where everyone, even the ukulele player are out for cash! The thumping Ivory toms at the start and end of the track give it a nice touch, although for me it is the least interesting cut on the album.

Most Exclusive Residence For Sale is another piece of short fiction, documenting the hard times of a rich man having to sell off his large property. Here we have, like many of the other tracks on the album, a clear short story in a 3 minute track. It was an art form Davies would go on to perfect, especially on the follow up album Something Else by The Kinks. Fancy is a fantastic Indian style piece, reminiscent of The Kinks' 1965 single See My Friends, with the twelve string guitar hitting its one note to create a hypnotic drone. Little Miss Queen of Darkness is a lighter acoustic track, which is masked in its happy rhythm by an underlying dark lyrical theme. Davies had obviously observed a disco queen in some club somewhere, a girl that "looked so happy" but had "sadness in her eyes." It was clear that Davies the great observer had emerged. While everybody else danced around him, enjoying the music and drink, Ray was sat, possibly in a corner table, observing the social goings on in this most phoney of places, the discotheque. You're looking Fine is a second rocker from Dave Davies, taking centre stage for a leering comment on the physical delights of a girl.

Sunny Afternoon of course is one of the band's best known and most loved tracks, autobiographical with Ray in a contemplative mood prior to his nervous breakdown. As it begins with that unforgettable descending riff, we are taken on a sublime three minute journey into troubled suburbia. Ray recalled the recording of the song to Rolling Stone in 1969. "...it was made very quickly, in the morning, it was one of our most atmospheric sessions. I still like to keep tapes of the few minutes before the final

take, things that happen before the session. Maybe it's superstitious, but I believe if I had done things differently - if I had walked around the studio or gone out - it wouldn't have turned out that way. The bass player went off and started playing funny little classical things on the bass, more like a lead guitar: and Nicky Hopkins, who was playing piano on that session, was playing Liza- we always used to play that song - little things like that helped us get into the feeling of the song. At one time I wrote Sunny Afternoon I couldn't listen to anything. I was only playing The Greatest Hits of Frank Sinatra and Dylan's Maggie's Farm - I just liked its whole presence, I was playing the Bringing It All Back Home LP along with my Frank Sinatra and Glenn Miller and Bach - it was a strange time. I thought they all helped one another; they went into the chromatic part that's in the back of the song. I once made a drawing of my voice on "Sunny Afternoon". It was a leaf with a very thick outline - a big blob in the background - the leaf just cutting through it."

The album closes somewhat unspectacularly with I'll Remember, an older track that had actually been recorded during the Kink Kontroversy sessions in October 1965. Its inclusion is a mystery to me and I believe they should have closed with the epic Sunny Afternoon.

Shel Talmy handled production perfectly on this album and the band had their best sounding record yet. The album was a hit and was also received very well by critics who celebrated the arrival of pop's new satirical force. It has to be said that, although the Beatles and The Rolling Stones dominated the scene, the subject matter of their tracks never dealt with the hard things in life as Davies' work always did. Lennon and McCartney didn't seem to be that interested in poverty (which Davies explored so powerfully in the band's 66 number 8 hit Dead End Street), social circles and criticising much in general. Theirs was a much friendlier world of love and fantasy and by 1966 The Beatles were already sinking into psychedelic trends, a sound that The Kinks never even once attempted or gave in to.

Funnily enough, Ray was less than content with the finished product. He stated in February of 1967: "I wasn't too keen on the last album. It was

more of a collection of songs than an LP. It didn't seem to fit together too well." This is somewhat puzzling, seeing as the songs really did gel together as a whole. We had social commentary, images of nature and personal torment, all arranged with tremendous detail and featuring Ray's sharpest lyrics up to that point. But as well all know well, Davies had far bigger ambitions than the limitations of a 40 minute record couldn't begin to hold for him.

The following year the sound of the group and the witty quill of Ray Davies would advance a stage further when they reluctantly released *Something Else By The Kinks*. While the somewhat lazy and far from "selling" title hints at a product thrown together from bits and pieces, the album itself is one of my favourite Kinks records. Recorded in the spring of 1967, during which long time Kinks producer Shel Talmy exited the band's career. Ray saw himself standing up as producer for much of the work, something that people have criticised. Many artists, no matter how creative and brilliant they may be in their field, require an outside voice, someone to come in and



judge what may be a particularly self indulgent or undisciplined piece. Although Ray wasn't left fully to his own imagination on *Something Else By The Kinks*, he would in future

however find his ideas unmanaged by any one but himself. The phrase kid in a candy store springs to mind.

The material presented on the album was once again, as with *Face to Face*, totally at odds with the psychedelic movement. "It was a fad and we wanted nothing to do with it," proclaimed the late bassist Peter Quaife. "We conformed for a few seconds by wearing multi coloured gear but we knew we didn't fit into all this, especially Mick Avory (Kinks drummer). Just think of it, Mick Avory as a flower power kid." Being out of fashion was quintessential Kinks behaviour in the late 60s.

Beginning with a track as strong as David Watts is a guarantee that the following 40 minutes are going to be of a very high standard. Telling the familiar

tale of one boy's idolisation, almost worshipping of the perfect childhood hero at school, there were instant hints of homosexuality picked up by listeners and critics alike. When Davies hints that he is "so gay and fancy free" and that the girls who try to go out with David Watts fail as he is "pure and noble" we think that not only may Watts not be interested in the fairer sex, he might also be in love with himself too much to be into either gender. *Death of a Clown* was Dave's chance to shine once again, a catchy and melancholy song which surprised many when it was released as a Dave Davies solo single and reached the top 5. The term *Death of a Clown* had been a line Dave had uttered out of nowhere one day and his brother, apparently keen at the time to help Dave get into song writing, helped him out and put him forward for the spotlight with the number. It's a brilliant song, with that haunting melody and those sweet tragic lyrics. Of course, Ray would spend most of the 70s introducing his brother on stage as *Death of a Clown* Davies in a mocking tone, belittling his brother, without whom the band would arguably never have rocketed to the top of the charts back in 1964. If Ray had been encouraging back in 1967 of his brother's song writing ability, then that was not to last.

*Two Sisters* is a beautiful piece of writing from Ray, which definitely works on a number of levels. While Priscilla the house wife is jealous of her fancy free living sister, the two characters obviously represent Ray and Dave. By 67 of course, Ray was the shy, stay in type, writing the songs for the band along with the responsibility of a child to think about. In *Two Sisters*, he puts across a quiet jealousy, Dave obviously being the one with the "luxury flat" and the "smart young friends" while the house wife Ray looks into the washing machine. Priscilla has enough and attempts to be free again, until of course the moment she lays her eyes on her children again. By the end though, Ray/Priscilla reaches a conclusion and decides he/she/they are happier than they would ever be if they had the care free life style. So Priscilla celebrates by running round the house with "her curlers on." The arrangement is sheer perfection; the delicate harpsichord, Ray's double tracked vocal and that thumping bass. Far and away one of my favourite Kinks tracks and a prime example of why Ray was dubbed the Noel Coward of his time.

No Return is a quiet acoustic interlude which does very little but is pleasant enough, before the anthemic sing-along splendour of Harry Rag comes diving out of the speakers. Using cockney rhyming slang and the catchiest of choruses, Ray paints a vivid image of man and woman's reliance on a good old fashioned smoke. Harry Rag, or fag, has become a luxury, an item of relief, where everything in the world is OK as long as a cigarette break is round the corner. Although it wouldn't have been out of place in a musical like Carol Reed's Oliver, it has a slight sinister edge to it when we realise the reliance is also an addiction. Tin Soldier Man and Situation Vacant are two splendid looks at two very different slants on life. The first an amusing look at the life of a soldier, sung in a spoozy child like manner. Situation Vacant is another slice of Davies piss taking, with the mother in law urging the son in law to get a better job and bring in the money for her girl, when all she really wants is for the guy to be out of the picture all together.

We are also treated to two more Dave Davies songs; the brilliant rocker Love Me Till the Sun Shines and the quaint Funny Face, two gems hidden in a fantastic collection of sublime Ray pieces, showing of course that Dave was becoming quite the song writer in his own right. Lazy Old Sun, by far the nearest to psychadelia the band got in this era, is a slightly eerie track that sounds vaguely drug induced. Ray proved not to be a big fan of the finished recording: "Unfortunately, the song just didn't come off, really. When you look at it in writing, it's a lot better. I don't like a lot of the lines. It's nicer when I think about it than when somebody tells me what it's like. I know what I was getting to, but didn't quite get there. It's a joke, it ended up as a joke, a very sad joke...too bad." While Afternoon Tea and End of the season might be looked upon as filler material, the album closed with the wondrous gem that is Waterloo Sunset. Closing the LP off with such a strong track and one that had proved to be a big hit for The Kinks, was seen as a possible way to get the album some decent sales. But of course, as is well documented, the album was something of a flop in the UK and the US alike, reaching Number 35 in The Kinks' homeland. There are a number of reasons why the album and other Kinks albums alike sold disappointingly, and that is down to the band's label, Pye. They really failed to

market The Kinks as nothing more but a singles group and didn't help matters by releasing budget priced compilations of earlier Kinks hits at the same time an album of new material was coming out. It was an increasingly frustrating thing for Ray, who often voiced his negative opinion on the label.

Using themes he had been exploring more and more in the band's material, Davies retreated the band's sound to England. Disappointed but now used to the fact that the group's ban in the US continued on, Ray put together a very English collection of songs that were all about keeping the old in order, the British traditions and the quaint little things we used to hold dear a long time ago. There is a feeling of sadness about the album but at the same time, it warms your heart.

"Maybe Village Green... is my psychedelic album," suggested Ray to The Onion in 2002. "I withdrew to my little community spirited... my trivial world of little corner shops and English black and white movies. Maybe that's my form of psychadelia."

While the rest of the rock and pop world was freaking its self out something stupid, Ray had back stepped the band to an Orwellian world of simplicity, totally out of date with modern music of the era, but certainly more durable over 40 years later than most product of its time. Ray's observation may just well be true. Maybe this is as far out as The Kinks could really get.

It's well documented that the album was a flop at the time of release and that its world wide sales were somewhere around the 20,000 mark, but over the years it has become known as one of the most influential, sublime and important records of its time. Originally set to be an ambitious double album, it was first released as a 12 track record, where it received some favourable reviews before confusingly disappearing off the shelves again. It finally re-emerged in 1968 as a 15 track album, titled The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society. With the theme set, Davies was in complete control of the



project and for the first time took on fully the role of producer.

To Rolling Stone, Ray summed up how the themes of the LP had originated: "Three years ago I wanted it to be Under Milk Wood, something like that, but I never got the chance to do it because we had to make albums. Somebody told me that I preserve things, and I like village greens and preservation societies. The title track is the national anthem of the album, and I like Donald Duck, Desperate Dan, draught beer. Johnny Thunder lives on water, he don't eat food, he feeds on lightning (laughter). Frankenstein. It's not a cowboy song. It would be nice to hear The Who sing it. Phenomenal Cat went to Singapore and Hong Kong and decided it was just was well to get fat. I didn't, he did. It was completely his own decision. And he came back and ate himself to eternity"

From the opening bars of the title track, Village Green Preservation Society feels like home. Those wonderful lyrics, coupled with that unshakable melody makes for a perfect marriage and a superb introduction into Ray's lost, or possibly non-existent little world.

Do You Remember Walter is almost a continuation of the themes explored in David Watts. The guy Davies, or the narrator of the song at least, idolised at school has grown older and conformed to a life of marriage and early nights. The Preservation theme has been used to enhance the fact that while things change and memories remain, perhaps things were never as great as you remembered them anyway. Picture Book is a thumping tune, a nostalgic look at the joy of picture albums and the idea of preserving images on paper forever. Johnny Thunder is a cool, rocking story of a motorbike riding rebel who refuses to tame himself, clearly the only bit of unrest on the perfect landscape of the village green.

I would say that the one song which perhaps best defines the album is People Take Pictures of Each Other, a song which revisits the ideas used in Picture Book, only here it features an irritated Davies demanding them to "show me no more please," highlighting the apparent pointlessness of taking photographs. Davies does have a point, making the

very idea of keeping memories and snap shots of a moment seem rather daft. It's as if Davies is mocking the fact that people only take pictures to prove they existed. While it may be a cynical and somewhat miserable point, it is also very valid. There is however something sad about looking at a picture where most of the people in it are dead. So while the Village Green idea is nostalgic, celebrating the old, it also shuns the sadness and ludicrousness of the most treasured of all nostalgic items – the photograph. Juxtaposing with an upbeat rhythm, this album closer is perhaps the best example of the way the whole album combines subtle lyrical sadness with upbeat musical jollity.

The one track that clinches it for me though is Animal Farm, one of Ray's most perfect songs. Peter Quafe cited it as a favourite, claiming it sent shivers up his arms, and I myself find the dreamy quality to the song, where Ray wishes to escape the wild world which is "half insane" and retreat to a simpler life of pigs and goats.

It needs to be added that there were some key non-album tracks around this period. Days, a classic Kinks single, now sounds so familiar it is as Bob Geldof once noted "as if anyone could have written it" (apart from him of course.. ooh bitchy!!). There's Lavender Hill, Misty Water and Berkley Mews, Rosemary Rose and Till Death Us Do Part, songs that stand to one side of any trend of the time, some obscure, some classic. If you've not heard of these, I suggest you go out and purchase Face to Face, Something Else by The Kinks, the 3-disc set of The Village Green Preservation Society and The Great Lost Kinks Album. I promise you'll enter a different world, a world of phenomenal cats, wicked witches and sweet melodies. It's Ray Davies' world, and he might let you in it, for a little while.



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