

# **HOUND DAWG**

## **MAGAZINE**

***"I'M A HOUND DAWG!"***

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### **NIGEL PLANER**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH THE  
LEGENDARY ACTOR**

### **PHILIPPE MORA**

**ON WORKING WITH DENNIS  
HOPPER IN MAD DOG MORGAN**

### **INCREDIBLE STRING BAND**

**HANGMAN'S BEAUTIFUL  
DAUGHTER, PLUS Q AND A  
WITH MIKE HERON**



**PLUS! NICK FLYNN MADONNA FRANK ZAPPA**

**HOUND DAWG ISSUE 22**

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**WISDOM TWINS BOOKS**

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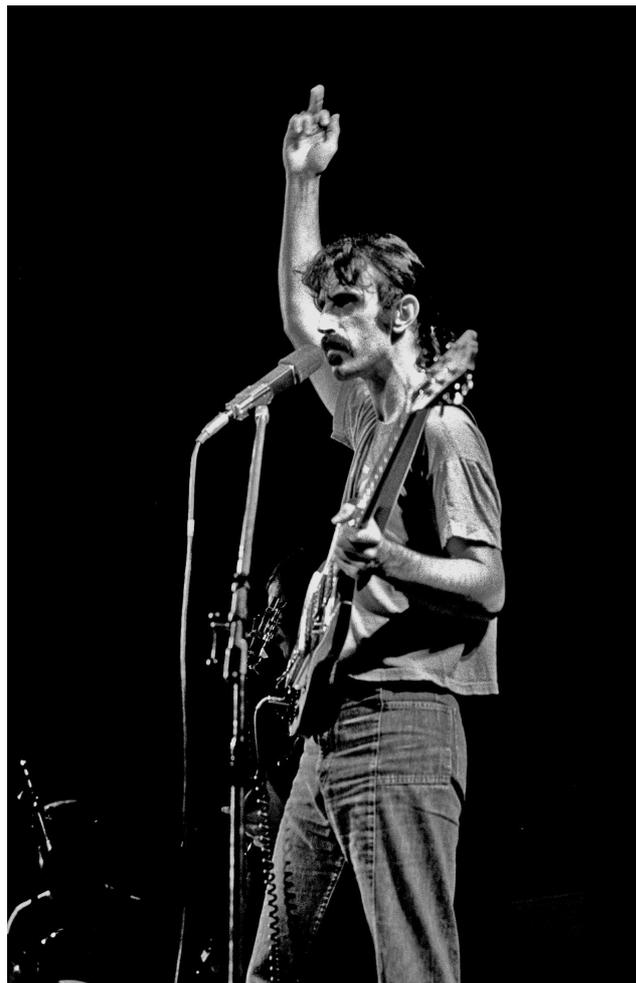
Oooh lovey, here's a good one for you. It's been a while, I know, and I am really really sorry, but I promise the first Hound Dawg free magazine in over a year and a half is one of the best ones ever.

First up is an interview with the legendary actor Nigel Planer, he of Young Ones, Comic Strip, West End Musicals, 80s chart hits and countless TV series fame. I email interviewed him for a book on my music project Dodson and Fogg, but as it's so interesting it seems a waste not to put it in Hound Dawg so everyone can enjoy it. He talks about his varied, illustrious career and reveals some fascinating titbits.

Also included here is a piece on the lost Dennis Hopper classic Mad Dog Morgan, plus a Q and A with Mike Heron, the legend behind the Incredible String Band.

You will also find other interviews, bits n' bobs and snippets from my books. Any questions just email me above and feel free to share this mag, and any others you might happen to read or download, with everyone you think might be interested.

Thanks for readin' hot shot...



# AN INTERVIEW WITH

# NIGEL PLANER

by Chris Wade

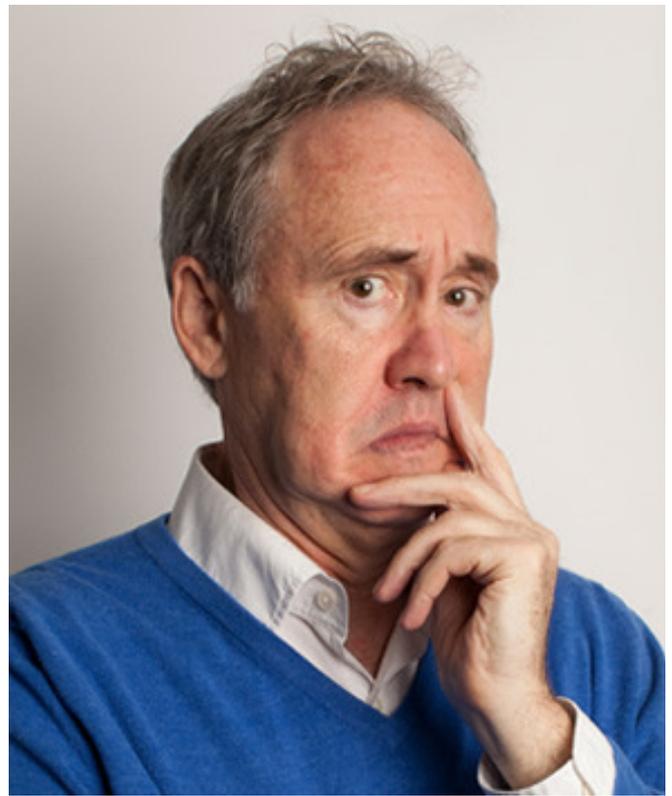
Nigel Planer has been one of my favourite actors all my life, so it was a thrill to get him on a Dodson and Fogg album. If you don't know the name, firstly you're daft, but he was in *The Young Ones*, *Comic Strip Presents*, tons of comedy and dramas on TV, has won Olivier Awards on the stage and his most recent work has included *Episodes* with Matt Le Blanc and *Boomers*. He narrated two stories on the *In A Strange Slumber* album and sang backing vocals on a track called *For A While on Roaming*. We also record under the name *Rainsmoke* with his brother Roger. Here he answers some questions about his varied career.

**Do you remember what the first single you bought was?**

I think it was *Walking Back to Happiness*, by Helen Shapiro. But soon after that the Animals brought out *House of the Rising Sun*, and that's when the single buying took a different turn. The Zombies, *Tobacco Road*, *She's not there*, The Stones etc. Moved onto albums as soon as I could afford though. *Tir Na Nog*. (remember them?) *Incredible String Band*, *Pentangle*, *Soft Machine*, *Colosseum*, John Mayall's *Turning Point*. And of course, Nick Drake.

**What or who, if you recall, got you first interested in playing and writing music? Were you self taught?**

Well I always used to write adolescent poetry and it was a natural progression from that when I got a classic nylon string guitar and a little Ukelele.



**When did you first write a song?**

Sitting on the toilet at my mum and dad's house. I used to spend hours in there. I think it went something like "I enjoy my own company, Because there's no-one else around, And nobody knows me, like I do. And I do."

**Is song writing therapeutic at all for you? It is for me.**

Originally it was yes, but soon I realized my limitations instrumentally and I concentrated on the words and melody more. For a few years I toured as a performance poet, in the 90s, and that was pretty much songwriting without the music.

**What can you tell me about any bands you had in the 70s?**

Well I was at Sussex Uni for a short while and I tried to get the guys I knew to be in my band and play my psych-folk songs, but when we got together most people just wanted to play rock and roll so I had to learn how to join in with that. There was also the band with my brother, which has turned into *Rainsmoke*, which we are working

on now, using all those old songs written in the early seventies. I did once have a harmony band which played in Bars, there was me on guitar and harmony vocals, and a couple of actor friends Joanna Munro and Anthony Head, singing lead vocals. We were called Boot Louis, and we had a regular spot and actually went home with cash in our pockets.

**Did you always want to act, or did acting just happen to be the thing that took over in your interests?**

I always did acting at school; not so much in the school plays, but in sort of alternative groups. And I joined loads of drama groups when I was young. After I dropped out of university and had tried a few jobs and been pretty useless at them, it seemed natural to choose the only thing that anyone had ever said “well done” to me about.

**You obviously enjoy acting, but do you get a similar passion out of music at all?**

I love acting, and I love music. So working in Musical theatre should be a good compromise. Only trouble is that often the music in Musical Theatre can be a bit... “musical-ly”... if you know

what I mean. Sort of twee and slushy. I liked the music in We Will Rock You, and in Chicago, and in Hairspray, but sometimes the music can be a bit slushy and sentimental which is not so much to my taste.

**When you had those mid 80s hits, like Hole in my Shoe, the Cliff Richard Living Doll and the Bad News stuff, did you find it gave you a bit of a glimpse into what it might have been like if you'd become a popular musician?**

What surprised me most when I had the hit records was how young the audience for pop music is. It was almost like being a children's entertainer. Radio One Road Show, the Tube, the kids' Saturday morning shows. You have to do a huge amount of promotion. I was lucky because I was in the character of Neil, so I was able to dip into the pop world, and find out what it's like to be a pop star, then dip out again. It was all only pretend! It was a really good way of killing off a stupid dream.

**You also did some music with Hugh Cornwell once, what was that like?**

Yeah, I met Hugh when we were doing Bad News up in Newcastle on the Tube with Jools Holland. Hugh was in the

Stranglers then, and we hit it off. So when it came to “doing a Dennis Waterman” – i.e. singing the theme tune to a TV detective series I was in called



King and Castle – I asked Hugh if he'd like to write it. The song he did is perfect – and my singing on it sounds like a cheap imitation of Hugh's voice. It's called Rough with the Smooth, and I still think it's a lot better than most TV theme tunes.

**Who are some of your favourite bands/musicians off the top of your head (not literally, that would be weird)?**

Was listening to Joe Jackson this morning, just by accident, randomly, he still sounds good to me. I have pretty eclectic tastes, and also they keep changing. For instance in the 90s I would've hated the Eagles, but I was listening to them recently thinking how perfect everything about the recording and song was. On the whole though I will tend to listen to more alternative type sounds. I like Pat Metheny, I like Philip Glass and John Adams and Terry Riley. (I remember his Rainbow in Curved Air from the 70s!) I like Indian music quite a lot, I used to like psych-jazz bands like Soft Machine and Nucleus. At the moment I am listening to some guys who I met last year called The Barcelona Gypsy Klezmer band. Amazing multi-lingual, multi national band.

**When doing a bit of backing vocals like on the Dodson and Fogg track For A While, how do you get such a good grasp of harmonies like you do? Do you have to really absorb the song and take it all in?**

I just went into the bedroom with headphones on and listened to it a lot. I have done a lot of harmony singing with my brother Roger over the years. I'm ok-ish with reading black dots, but I prefer to do it all on feel.

**You always seem quite chilled out with yourself. Do you think any of this comes from spirituality and your interest in Indian culture? Does creativity have anything to do with this too (again, it does for me)?**

I don't feel all that chilled actually.. Maybe it's just being older now, I've calmed down a bit. I'm over 60. One thing that makes me calmer, I've found, is practising Tai Chi. I've been doing it for about five years now. So, more Chinese than Indian... I don't find Indian history and culture all that chilled – more fiery and political and exciting. I think people in the West assume that anything Indian will somehow be all spiritual and love and peace, but India has a very volatile history and culture. This assumption is a vestige of the 60s when all the westerners were dropping out and going on the hippy trail across Asia. I know, I did it.

**If there were any of your characters you could revisit again, who would it be? Nicholas Craig?**

We first invented Nicholas Craig in 1986! ("We" means myself and Christopher Douglas who writes Ed Reardon on the radio) Nicholas has been a book a radio series, two or three mini TV series and several live shows. He's somehow had an enormous shelf life. Last time I performed him was this year at a Rik Mayall memorial gig in Dartmouth. Nicholas seems to ripen as he gets older and more bitter.. I do enjoy pretending to be him.

**One of my fave of your characters was Aldo Vini in the Comic Strip film Spaghetti Hoops. How do you get into a character like that?**

I loved doing that character, it's one of my favorites. It has a direct line in my mind with playing Peter Mandelson in Hunt for Tony Blair, and, this year, playing Rupert Murdoch in Red Top. I love the Comic Strip for being the only place where I get to play these rather weird and creepy parts. I think it's down to Peter Richardson who has always inspired the darker side of my nature with his dark sense of humour. We were a double act for years, and for some reason he sees all that weird potential in my acting, which usually gets missed by the normal TV casting people.



**LOST CLASSIC:**

**DENNIS HOPPER AS**

## **MAD DOG MORGAN**

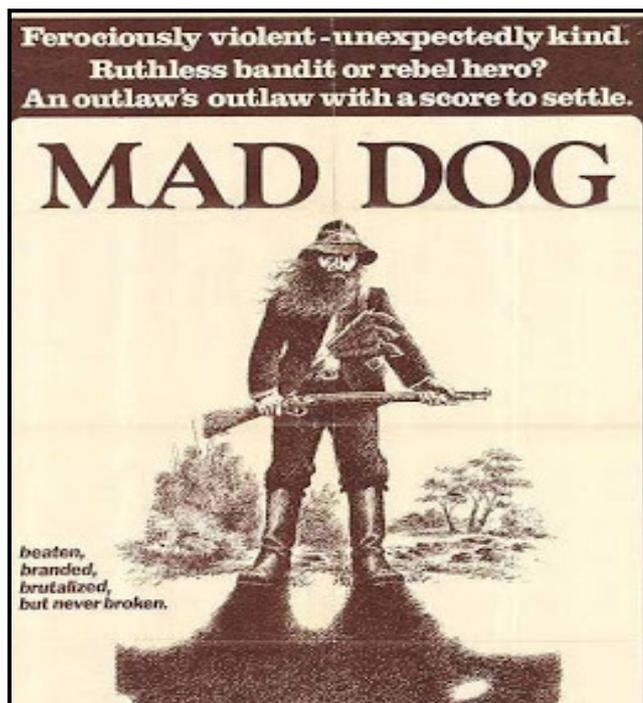
Although a Hollywood outlaw by the mid 1970s, Hopper was still landing some great parts; in fact they were some of the best roles of his career, but unfortunately they were in films that very few people were taking notice of. No one wanted to rest the fate of their picture on that wild card, drug crazed Dennis Hopper. Well, save one man. Enter Philippe Mora and his film Mad Dog Morgan. An acclaimed Australian filmmaker born in France, prior to working with Hopper on the story of real life outlaw Mad Dog Morgan, Mora had been cutting his teeth on more factual film work. "I had just made two feature documentaries that had been successful and I wanted to make a feature film," Mora told me. "The Australian historian and family friend Margaret Carnegie sent me her book Morgan The Bold Bushranger. I also had wanted to make a film in Australia after being in London since 1967 so this was a great fit. I wrote the script on

the ship voyage to Australia. My father, Georges Mora, a great supporter, and Margaret then helped me raise the money. My then partner Jeremy Thomas got a letter from his father, Ralph Thomas, which helped get a distribution deal from Greater Union. It was tough because there was no Australian film industry at all at that time."

I asked Philippe how the film began to become a reality for him. "Basically we ran around pitching the film to civilians and finally had enough money to shoot," Mora says. "I think the budget was about \$350,000. Not much really for an ambitious film. But ignorance is bliss."

Dennis Hopper was in full on mad man mode when he signed up for the Mad Dog Morgan role and it's hard, if impossible, to think of a wilder actor than him in his manic days, or indeed someone so suited to the part of Mad Dog. How did Philippe come to cast Dennis? "We talked to Martin Sheen, Jason Miller, Stacy Keach and others. When we told Sheen's agent we were going with Hopper he said: You'll never work in this town again. I said: That's OK. I've never worked in this town anyway. I flew into Taos with Jeremy to meet Dennis. We were more nervous about the lousy single engine plane than meeting Dennis. I

took one look at him, greeting us and posing at the end of a rinky dink dusty runway, holding a rifle, and thought: "That's my Mad Dog!" Taos was wild then, and you had to check in all your weapons at the bar before getting a drink. We had no guns but Dennis checked in a few. His pickup truck was alarmingly riddled with bullet holes. He was charming and you could see if he wiped away the Taos earth from his face he looked like a movie star."



What was it like to work with Hopper in his prime? I asked Philippe. "This was my first film with an accomplished Method actor," Mora said. "We trusted each other as artists so after figuring out a few technical things it was a pleasure for me. I think my naivety in a way helped, so I was never thrown by anything odd, since I didn't know what odd was. Clearly in most scenes he was completely in the universe of the character and that was thrilling to record. For me, when he cracks up at the end with the family he never had, it's some of the finest film acting you will ever see. They all work in different styles. He is up there with Christopher Walken and Chris Lee - all completely different. I did think Chris and Dennis would get along and I introduced them. They became good friends and even worked together."

Hopper's reputation in Hollywood was at its lowest in the mid seventies, yet Philippe remembers a man who was totally into his role. "His total dedication and excitement. At sunrise one morning we walked together through the bush to the set. The birds were starting up, the colours of the dawn sky were beyond dazzling. Dennis suddenly shouted: WE ARE MAKING A MOVIE! WE ARE MAKING A MOVIE! That excitement about creativity has stayed with me. Picasso said an artist must retain one's child like vision, and Dennis to a great degree retained it through thick and thin."

How does Philippe look back on the movie now? "I am very proud of the film for many reasons, and many put Dennis' performance in the league with his best," he said to me. "I do as well. He included it as one of his favourites in a book about his art photography."

In 2009, Mora interviewed Hopper for a TV special, all about the making of Mad Dog Morgan, where the two men sat together and discussed their experiences working on the movie. "It struck me that Dennis remembered every detail of the experience of shooting that film. He wrapped up the interview by saying making the film was one of his great life experiences. Me too. I stayed in touch and would see him at various events like art openings and so on. I think the last time I saw him was at a Julian Schnabel opening at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills a couple of years before he left us. He himself had an interesting exhibition of giant paintings based on his photos of LA in the early sixties before that. He was always dapper in his latter years. The Taos earth was thoroughly wiped off."

Although it was quite an obscurity for a while, nowadays it's easy to get a hold of. While it may not be perfect, Hopper is fantastic in the role and any serious fan of the man should seek it out. A truly potty, unforgettable film it is.

CLASSIC ALBUM...

*INCREDIBLE STRING BAND:*

*THE HANGMAN'S  
BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER  
(1968)*

*"To me, the String Band albums are very much born  
a clash and reconciliation of tastes."*

- Mike Heron, Beat Instrumental

If there is one year that can be named as the ISB's pinnacle then it is definitely 1968. For starters they were at their most popular amidst the flower power bloom, adored and worshipped by their many followers worldwide. In this year alone they cut what many regard as their two seminal LPS, *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* and *Wee Tam* and the *Big Huge*. Both were successful albums, which tells you just how open pop buyers were back in the sixties.

Before the album's release, the ISB (Mike Heron and Robin Williamson) had made a giant leap when they were invited to play the 1967 Newport Folk festival. They went down a storm and Boyd recalls Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell being completely blown away by them, in awe of their unconventional and totally original style. 5000 Spirits and the songs of that era had clearly established them as key players in folk, but *Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* moved them along even further. The album saw the lyrical themes and musical direction become even more outlandish, imaginative, dreamlike and certainly more experimental, yet not recklessly so.

On the way back from a US trip in 1967, Mike and Robin had nipped into Elektra's New York City headquarters and "helped themselves" to some new LPs from Nonesuch International Series, a company releasing Eastern music in the Western



world. Under Mike and Robin's arms that day were records of Japanese kabuki theatre, popular Greek music, and even a compilation album of guitarists from the Bahamas. Clearly, it was about taking in as much as possible and not just whatever was entering the living room on TV's *Top of the Pops*. Mike and Robin may have not invented the sounds they were making, but they were clever and inquisitive enough to combine sounds from all over the world and put them on to one record in an original way.

By now, Heron and Williamson's then girlfriends were turning out to be full time members. As well as Licorice showing real promise musically, Mike's girlfriend Rose Simpson was also taking on a number of instruments, learning as she went along but becoming a fairly decent bass player in her own right. It was Williamson who originally had a liaison with Rose, but after a gig in York she had got out of Robin's bed and into Mike's sleeping bag, beginning their famous romance. "Rose was and still is as bright, cheerful and outgoing as Licorice was dour and secretive," Boyd wrote in his autobiography. "Her laughter is as hearty as Mike's and the pair were a delight to be around."

This aside, recording on the album would commence with four permanent band members. There were also some unexpected guest

appearances too. Judy Dyble, she of Fairport Convention and later Trader Horne, was present at the recording of the album.

“I didn’t ‘work’ on the album as such,” she told me. “ISB happened to be in the studio when Fairport were there waiting to do a session and they needed backing vocals on *The Minotaur’s Song*. So we were all (Fairport) drafted in to be the scratch choir. Just one of those ‘being in the right place at the right time’ things again.”

Recording techniques in the music industry had started to shift by 1968 and the ISB moved along with the advancements. No longer was it a case of crowding round one microphone in the centre of the room and making sure you were heard. It had all become much sophisticated.

“By the time we got to the second record,” Robin said. “We were jumping tracks, and by the time we got to the third... it came to be like painting. And that was a wonderful opening of a door. I always loved the idea you could sort of put something on and rub it out and try something else. That really began to be born in the studio. It was things you could do, we’d then try to re-create live.”

At the time, Boyd thought it was the best produced album he had been involved with so far and for me, *The Hangman’s Beautiful Daughter* has the best sound for an ISB album, and the finest opening tracks of all their records. Starting like a hazy sweet dream, Williamson brings us into the colourful proceedings with *Koeoaddi There*, his mysterious and moving portrait of a childhood that may or may not be real (either way seems beside the point anyway). Memories mirror your own throughout the song, with Williamson’s imagery so vivid it could be coming directly from a legendary poet’s childhood diary. Still, the melodies visit the listener briefly, make you smile and reflect, before they disappear as mysteriously and quickly as they appeared, being swiftly replaced by an even sweeter melody in an instant. For one song under five minutes to have this many

moods, styles, tunes and rich ideas in it is very rare indeed and lovely turns of phrase like “setting your foot where the sand is untrodden” seem just as musical as the Noah’s Ark of instruments populating the song itself. The baker’s stubbly grin, the bear Mrs Thompson gave him, the woman with the bulldozer, Bridgette and the people upstairs, skating on happy valley pond... the lines are endless and scenarios float and fly by as the song reaches its climax, with the rapid riddle of “earth water fire and death...”

Williamson later remembered the track in an interview.

“If you answer the riddle you’ll never begin; there’s no answer to the riddle, but the whole song itself was a dream from start to finish, the dream I had put to music, so it has the same logic that the dream has, which is not much logic. There are bits and pieces about early memories in Edinburgh and so forth, but it’s a collage song with bits of this dream, bits of early childhood, and it’s basically the fact that I consider that life is pretty much an unanswerable riddle, with not really much of an answer to it some of the times. I think that’s its magic. Anyway that’s what that song says.”

The album continues its daydreaming with the surreal pre-Monty Python mock jollity of *The Minotaur’s Song*, where medieval England and the poshest choir imaginable assault the senses from every angle. Knowing the ISB had such a great sense of absurd humour gives the album another shade of character. It also showcases another recurring style throughout the band’s records; vaudeville, and even hints of camp, sing-along British musical hall. As well as folk and world music, they were also taking in mainstream British traditions too; ones from decades earlier, centuries even. Nothing was out of bounds for the ISB collage.

“Certainly, the children have seen them,” must surely be one of the most chilling opening lines to a song ever, and once again Williamson brings us more fantastically haunting imagery in *Witches Hat*, which also features the unforgettable line

“next week a monkey is coming to stay.” Musically the song conjures images of children playing in the high grass, chasing fairies, and the mad flute section that clashes with the guitar melody suggests more magic. It’s childhood again, rich and wondrously exploring the wild, seemingly endless summer days we had as kids, our fearless adventures and plots and schemes. Or of course, it could all be another dream. Memories, after all, the further they reach back, can often have the same mental atmosphere as a long lost dream, with indescribable scents and hazy landscapes you barely recall. What is a dream and what is reality? Perhaps this theory best sums up the moods of your average ISB album, the muddled results of moulding together two states of consciousness.

The first Heron penned song here is the epic A Very Cellular Song, at times a heavenly hymn, a celebration of the lord and life itself, while drifting in and out of discordant oddity just as much as it delights in its own divinity. “All it was, was a trip,” Heron said of the song and its inspiration. “And that was the music I was listening to, that and interspersed with Radio 4, bits of plays, people talking to each other, and I happened to be listening to the Pinder Family before I started.” The Pinder Family had sung We Bid You Goodnight, a section of which is included in the song. Heron had also admitted he had written the song whilst on acid. “It wasn’t personal though,” he said. “I was writing a song for the world while on acid.” He also once called it a “diary of a trip.”

“The classic track is A Very Cellular Song,” Boyd later said. “Which is almost like a suite of songs, in which he brings hymns and oriental this and medieval that. Cellular images were very prevalent in discussions about psychedelia, the idea that when you were high you could look at your hands and see the cellular construction of your flesh and you could actually break down and perceive what was going on under this calm exterior of your skin.”

When one of the girls is heard whispering “Amoebas are very small”, it brings in my personal

favourite section of the song, a gently sung verse by the Amoeba himself. “If an Amoeba was feeling a bit lonely they would just split down the middle,” Mike later chuckled. “They wouldn’t have to bother with sex or anything like that. That’s the implication of that particular bit.” And the song slithers and squelches on, eventually culminating in Mike’s lovely blessing at the end.

The scale of this 13 minute epic is almost like a full album in itself, yet it only merely finishes off side A and there are still 6 tracks to go, 2 more penned by Heron and 4 more Williamson cuts. Still, I personally feel these four opening tracks are among the very finest the ISB ever committed to vinyl.

Of the album’s title, Heron stated at the time, “The hangman is death and the beautiful daughter is what comes after. Or you might say that the hangman is the past twenty years of our life and the beautiful daughter is now, what we are able to do after all these years. Or you can make up your own meaning - your interpretation is probably just as good as ours.”

With Robin stating the whole album was meant to be like a dream, you find yourself going along with that definition much easier. Sure, an album doesn’t necessarily need a theme for you to enjoy it, but to know the occasional lunacy and the constantly changing themes, ideas and stories are tied together with a loose concept, certainly gives the album a well rounded balance.

Such matters didn’t seem to enter the public’s minds at the time the record was released though. In March of 1968 it was released and peaked at Number 5 in the UK charts, but only climbed into the top 200 in the US on their Billboard chart. It didn’t help matters that America’s biggest music magazine, Rolling Stone gave the album a cold review. Admitting the Minotaur’s Song was a good track, they added “Heron and Williamson are superb musicians, on this album they apparently forgot it... they didn’t know where they were going.” However DJ John Peel championed the

band and played this album heavily on his influential show, ensuring UK success.

The wonderful album cover shot of the band, with the girls and the gathered children, deserves more than a passing note. It was Christmas 1967 and the four ISB members were staying with their friend Mary Stewart in Baltimore. The children in the image are Mary's and the chaps in the back are two other friends Roger Stewart and Nicky Walton. A great article published in the 90s tracked down some of the children. One was Robbie, three years old on the cover, who recalled the photo "shoot."

"I have brief memories of that picture being taken, walking through the woods, dressed all funny, but that's it. A lot of things were a big game at the time. It didn't mean anything to me to be on the cover as such, but I grew up loving music, whereas everyone else at school was into football." Such naivety from one of its cover stars fitted the music within its iconic sleeve perfectly. The reverse side of the album, often used as the cover in some editions, is a rather striking image of Mike and Robin in full eccentric garb set against a bright blue sky. Either picture is cover worthy, epitomising the ISB in their 60s tripped out prime.

So many retrospective reviews of the ISB albums looking at this period dive straight into the drug connection, the thought of taking LSD then putting the album on the turntable and feeling your mind expand. Of course it is nonsense. Heron and Williamson never set out to make music that could only be enjoyable while under the influence of heavy drugs, even if they most certainly were on acid when they wrote it. In many ways, *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* and some of the other records are a drug in themselves. For the inquisitive forward thinking music fan, the album shows that anything is possible in music, that there need not be any boundaries. As a musician I really admire that outlook and can enjoy it with a cup of tea and a Hobnob, rather than with a heavy helping of acid. Maybe I'll try both at once one day...

Of course the ISB, it can be said are the perfect musician's band. A lot of people can write a song, a 3 minute ditty especially, with the standard chords and the expected structure. It's fun doing so in fact. But when listening to the ISB as a musician, there most certainly could be an amount of envy brewed up when listening closely. There is no traditional form at all; the lyrics are so imaginative you can't imagine where they have come from. If you tried to do a song in their style, you would end up sounding like some escaped loony. There is something to be said for individuality that can not be replicated.

The flavours injected by the girls also need to be noted. Boyd, although being impressed and touched by the natural progression Rose experienced on the bass, noted that he felt their involvement marked the beginning of the "decline" in quality with the ISB's releases. In my opinion he could not be more wrong. Some of their finest work lay before them.

*The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* is still probably their most influential album. There is the famous quote of Robert Plant, where he said Led Zeppelin took *Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* and simply followed the instructions. But there are more moments where Zeppelin and ISB cross over. Plant mentioned them in *Q* magazine in 1993.

"We'd always had their records, but we were playing at the Usher Hall in Edinburgh and Robin and Mike came along, and found that, despite the bamboozle and the noise of Led Zeppelin, there was some kind of Celtic folk music beating in the middle of it too, something tangible despite the macho gestures. And I suppose we started a sort of mutual appreciation society. I love their storytelling and their capacity to charm with lines like 'I hear that the Emperor of China used to wear iron shoes with ease.' Up until then I'd been more concerned with why Howling Wolf would climb to the top of the curtains and slide down them at the age of 56 and weighing 200 pounds while playing harmonica. *The Incredible String Band* was tales from another place altogether. I thought their

whole communion of audience and musical troupe was absolutely wonderful. However, somehow or other The Prince of Darkness drew me closer and closer to Alice Cooper and the ridiculousness of rock culture and I kept looking behind wistfully as I jumped on the starship and went off to commit more carnal atrocities. The one thing we always wanted to do in Led Zeppelin was to finish off the show with the String Band's A Very Cellular Song,



the bit that goes 'I was walking in Jerusalem just like John. Goodnight, goodnight.' But Bonham, bless him, said something very like Fuck Off!"

You wouldn't listen to Zeppelin and immediately think of the Increds, but influences do not always come out in the most obvious way. While often subconscious, they clearly sometimes externalise as a straight homage. For instance, Zeppelin's classic movie *The Song Remains the Same* is very reminiscent of the ISB's own film, *Be Glad For the Song Has No Ending*, both in title and content. They even filmed it in Wales and made it more than a little mystical to say the least. Plant has always shown his fondness for the band; befriending Rose in the 90s for instance, and asking Robin to play support for his and Page's MTV Unplugged appearance, which unfortunately never happened. *Stairway to Heaven*, with its flute lines and complex weaving chords, owes more than a note or two to the ISB.

Its influence aside, the album is simply a gem and you can never tire of its invention, the eclectic collage of sounds within it. It's maybe a good place to start when approaching the band's discography.

## Q AND A WITH MIKE HERON

**You have said in the past that the first album was one of the best ISB records, for its purity and rawness. Do you still like the album?**

The first album is not really my favourite but it represents what happened when Robin, Clive and myself put together a band and a repertoire. It brings back memories of meetings, places, taking the show we'd made around the folk clubs, and finally the three of us in a circle at Sound Techniques studios round a clutch of microphones making an album in a day. So I have warm feelings for it.

**The 5000 Spirits album was quite radically different. How do you look back on the making of that album?**

Robin went off to Morocco and Clive to India; the band had really broken up. Six months later Robin returned inspired and carrying lots of North African instruments and a bundle of songs. The two of us played the songs we'd written on our holidays and thus was born 5000 Spirits. We still recorded in Sound Techniques, but using a different recording method. We would put down a basic song and embroider it with overdubs.

**How do you look back on the Hangman's Beautiful Daughter album?**

Hangman was moving on but now incorporating Rose and Licorice. Our Very Cellular Song was my attempt to write a piece that used as many styles and combinations of the four people's attributes. It's a "trip" through consciousness starting with the domestic and moving through awareness of the spectrum of life's conditions, to a prayer for the wellbeing of all.

**Do you have a personal favourite ISB album at all?**

When it comes to favourite albums I've always been drawn to songs. So when the songs on an album blend to make a whole experience bigger than themselves, that's a special bonus. And for me Hangman's Beautiful Daughter would be far and away the best example.

**a look at...**

# **BEING FLYNN**



Then from out of nowhere comes the truly compelling, tragic and darkly funny Being Flynn. In a line of more iffy movies, it's a relief that De Niro made something worthy of his talents again and gave one of his most powerful, well rounded and moving performances in years.

Directed by Paul Weitz, the film is based on the extraordinary memoir of poet and writer Nick Flynn. It follows Nick (played by Paul Dano in the movie), a struggling writer who from out of the blue gets a call from his father John Flynn (De Niro), who he hasn't seen for 18 years. The drunken "teller of tall tales" left the family home when Nick was a child, leaving his mother (played brilliantly by Julianne Moore) to raise the boy. She took her own life, a traumatic event that Nick carries with him to this day. John phones his son and asks him to help him move all his belongings elsewhere, as he is being evicted from his apartment. Eventually, John runs out of places to stay and firstly ends up sleeping in his taxi cab. When he crashes the car blind drunk, his license and car are taken from him. First he turns to the harsh, cold streets, then resorts to the homeless shelter where Nick works. The arrival of his father though forces Nick back into drink and drug abuse. "Am I like my father?" is a question Nick might ask himself, as the man from the past floats around his world causing uproar and chaos. But eventually the two men overcome their differences and come to a strained reconciliation of sorts.

First off, this is an extraordinary film. The fact it's a true story is amazing in itself, but the movie itself really takes you by surprise. The strange and

strained father-son relationship becomes increasingly compelling and Paul Dano is a double for a young Nick Flynn. He gives a virtuosic performance himself, going through every emotion in the book, and every stimulant too, haunted by his mother's suicide and his father's constant presence.

Although the film seems to have had only a small release, De Niro's performance did attract some acclaim, although not as much as it deserved. "It's been ages since De Niro tackled a character as rich and challenging as this, and he tackles it head-on," Star Tribune wrote of the film. "It's a thrill to see De Niro behind the wheel again."

It's the kind of fearless, gritty and unflinching performance he gave in his younger years, certainly a return to former glories that few people seem to have picked out. John Flynn may be a dark character, but De Niro makes him so well rounded that you feel and even care for the guy. When sleeping rough on the streets, De Niro looks totally bedraggled, disappearing before your eyes into the hollow eyed drinker, stiff as a tree in the harsh night's chill. John is a bullshitter, and his stories are completely ludicrous. John taunts his son with his ridiculous stories and foul mouthed rants. "I am a sought after houseguest," he insists, claiming to his son that this is all research and he hasn't *really* hit rock bottom like the rest of these poor souls. "Life is gathering research, I like that. Where's my pen?" he says. John insists he is a great writer, a genius and that his book is "classic" and "a masterpiece." You doubt it even exists, but in the end, Nick reads it. Like the man himself, John's

book shows some promise but soon degenerates into mindless, incomprehensible babble. One scene that had me howling with laughter is when they have wrapped De Niro in a blanket, and he stands there like a Roman Emperor, shouting out "Sucko my cocko!" There's more than a little humour in Being Flynn.

Strangely, there is a rather poignant parallel to one of De Niro's earlier "classic" (as John Flynn might say) movies, that being *Taxi Driver*. Not only does Flynn drive a cab (and at one point sleep in it), but he appears to be in his own cut-off, deluded world, much like Travis Bickle. Think of the letters Travis writes



to his parents, the ones which become increasingly bizarre and lie packed as they go along. There is indeed a little John Flynn in the line "My sensitive work for the government..." or "I've been living with a girl for months now, her name is Besty but I can tell you no more..."

When Flynn insists he has a friend in L.A. with a spare room and job ready for him, desperate for Flynn to stay, you can't help but laugh. How he constantly insists he is a genius and how he will one day be famous is kind of ironic when you think about it. John Flynn may be a little more than pleased that a legendary actor like Robert De Niro has played him in a movie. Although he wouldn't show his delight to you, - he would probably turn the conversation to how good his writing has been going and that Dustin Hoffman should have played him.

Personally I think this ranks up there with De Niro's finest performances of all time. There's some fiery Jake La Motta rage, Rupert Pupkinesque head in the clouds delusion and of course some darker Travis Bickle qualities. It's a like a

combination of all his best performances, merged together to create the most captivating portrait of one strange man who actually exists. I really can't praise his efforts enough, and the film as a whole for that matter. It truly is close to perfection; the direction, the voiceover work, the acting, the script, the little touches. The film makes you think about, ponder and observe even the very minor characters, so that you wonder what *their* life is

like when they walk off the screen. When you consider that many De Niro films took years to build their audience and become classics, perhaps *Being Flynn* might one day be viewed as a stand out in De Niro's career. Nick Flynn must be pretty damned proud that his book inspired such a revelation of a movie. (Note: Flynn himself

actually appears in the AA meeting scene).

If De Niro made more films of this ilk, channeling that inner intensity and primal believability, perhaps the cruel critics might ease off a little and some of his former reputation as our finest actor might be reconsidered. Not that De Niro himself would care either way of course. To give him credit, he is still an extraordinary actor, capable of power, humour and charisma in equal measure. But *Being Flynn* gives De Niro the chance to shine like he hasn't shone for years.

It helps of course that the subject matter is powerful and that Nick Flynn captured the relationship with his own father so touchingly in his original book. It was all there on the page, laid out before him and De Niro relished the opportunity to play such an explosive part.

Vanity Fair greeted De Niro enthusiastically, writing "Just when I thought that Bob De Niro was wasting his great talent on too many silly movies, along comes a smashing performance. Please go

see Being Flynn. De Niro is magnificent and I think he'll get nominated for an Oscar."

He did receive an Oscar nod that year - not for Being Flynn though, but for his next movie.

## **AN INTERVIEW WITH**

### **NICK FLYNN**

The writer of Another Bullshit Night in Suck City, on which the film Being Flynn is based, Nick Flynn is a renowned poet and memoirist. I asked him some questions about the film and working alongside Robert De Niro.

**How did De Niro come to be cast as your father in the film?**

He got his hands on my book, responded to it, and tracked us down. He called me into his Tribeca office to talk about it, before he spoke to the producers.

**Paul Weitz did the screenplay. How much did you have to do with converting the book to the film? And do you think it's translated well to the screen from your original words?**

Paul worked on the screenplay for 7 years, and sent me all the drafts, and I sent him back my feedback... it felt like a really good working collaboration. As far as him using my words, at times he did, but in the end I knew it was his project, and that he had to find his own meaning in it, which he did.

**What was it like meeting De Niro for the first time?**

I was called into his office, he was a little late, stuck in New York traffic, but sent word he was on his way. I sat in the lobby, surrounded by posters of his films, until he arrived. We talked for about

an hour, and it was pretty clear we both wanted to work together on the project. He had a really dog-eared copy of my book with him, and he asked a lot of insightful questions... mostly though it seemed we were checking each other out, to see if we could work together.

**What kind of things did he do to prepare for the role? Did he come to you for research?**

I document a lot of his prep work in the Reenactments (Nick's memoir of the making of the film, well worth reading - Chris) - the coat, the teeth, going over boxes of my fathers things, holding my fathers club in his hand...

**Did you get to see De Niro performing up close during filming? What were your thoughts on seeing him at work?**

He was utterly committed to his acting, He never phoned it in, he checked in with me before and after each scene. It was all very impressive and moving, how seriously he took it.

**I am interested if De Niro met your father at all?**

They did meet once (Paul met my father a few times). My father held forth for a couple hours when they met, not all that interested in De Niro and afterwards De Niro knew he needed to be able to monologue like my father, so I wrote 8 pages of monologues for him, and he would show up on those days with every word ready to go...

**What has reaction been like to the film?**

Folks that have seen it tell me they are impressed and moved by it, though I would say that Focus (production company) did a half-assed job of promoting it. The title sucks, and all of us knew it and tried desperately to change it, especially De Niro

# ***GET INTO THE GROOVE***

**A LOOK AT  
WHEN  
MADONNA  
BECAME A  
MOVIE STAR**



In this energetic romantic comedy, Rosanna Arquette plays Roberta, a bored and frustrated housewife married to the wealthy Gary Glass (Mark Blum), but becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the soulless, suburban yuppie nightmare she is trapped in. Out of boredom, she started to obsessively read the ads in the New York papers and becomes particularly interested in one ongoing saga involving Jim and the free spirit Susan (Madonna), who goes all over the world from month to month living a glamorous life style. One day she reads a new ad which reads "Desperately Seeking Susan." When Roberta goes to the destination mentioned in the ad, Battery Park, she spots Susan. After buying Susan's jacket (once worn by Jimi Hendrix), she arranges another meeting at Battery Park. Later, Roberta is knocked out cold and wakes up with amnesia, and is

mistaken for Susan. Meanwhile, some less than savoury types are searching for some stolen Egyptian earrings which Susan has in her trunk and the plot thickens.

It's a simple enough storyline, but little clever touches are added in to keep it fresh. Writer Leora Barish ensures the script never becomes saggy, filling it full of unexpected (and often comfotingly expected) plot twists and funny gags. Director Susan Seidelman keeps up the pace too, ensuring the farce moves speedily.

The part of Susan was one of the most battled for Hollywood female roles that year, even though the film was quite low in its budget. Originally, the producers saw this as a vehicle for superstars Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton, but even by the mid 80s they were arguably too old to be playing

the roles of Susan and Roberta. There were numerous other actresses up for Madonna's role, including, very nearly, Ellen Barkin, but it's hard to think of anyone else but Madonna in that part now. With her iconic jacket, endless outfit changes, huge trunk, dark sunglasses and care free attitude, this was a truly brilliant acting debut for Madonna, a role that was not unlike like herself (cocksure and confident), with just a little bit of bohemian flare added in (somewhat reminiscent of photos from her earlier rebellious days in bands). Her second album *Like A Virgin* was selling madly at the time of release. When she was originally cast however, she was not a huge mega star and her rise to the top coincided with the film's theatrical release, helping to make the movie a box office hit. After all, it was only a 4 million dollar film, relatively low budget by Hollywood's standards and had little riding on it.

Director Susan Seidelman looked back on the film's success in 2009: "When it came out it hit the culture at just the right time, it was such a surprise. There's something wonderful about discovering a movie, and that's why I think it was embraced, in part. No one knew what it was going to be. It still shows on TV. No one thought it was going to have that kind of longevity."

Madonna's presence though, at a time when her fame was becoming stratospheric and every young girl wanted to look and dress like her, made this film the hit it was and gave it a much needed dose of natural charisma. Madonna's Susan is a magical creation, a careless and cool character who sort of strolls on to the screen and nonchalantly dominates any scene she is in. There's a naturalistic edge to it, and you get the impression she was getting a real buzz out of playing this free spirit, cruising from town to town looking for new adventures. She did her own hair and make up for the film too, so clearly she had a similar level of artistic control over her character as she did with her music.

Just how much of Madonna's role in the film is down to acting though is another matter. This is definitely a star performance and she is effortlessly magnetic whenever on the screen. Madonna is speaking her lines with an coolness, as if she couldn't care less what anyone thinks and perhaps



this is the key to why it was such an authentic characterisation. Maybe Madonna herself didn't care what anyone thought. She had bagged a part in a big movie, a now iconic role and clearly at the time, a much desired character. It was the perfect part for her - her first big appearance in the movies, in a role that combined her true self with a little touch of liberated movie exoticism. Madonna was just being naturalistic and cleverly altering already apparent facets of herself to fit in with Susan. Still, she holds her own with the more experienced Arquette and her other co stars, including a brilliant Aidan Quinn.

Although her character is almost the whole of the 1980s personified into one pop cultural entity, there is much more to it than that. Watching the plot becoming more daft and complex, you think back to classic cinema of yesteryear and those

quirky female leads from the golden era; Audrey Hepburn at her kookiest, a touch of vintage Jane Fonda and Shirley MacLaine. It's the kind of star performance that is hard to define and a very old fashioned comedy in many ways; that glamorous

were in the downtown music scene. I can't postulate what kind of response the film would have gotten had Madonna's star not risen so fantastically in such a short period of time. Sometimes things converge and make a thing



presence, the few chosen words, the charm and the overwhelming appeal which makes every man in the film fall over themselves to get to her. It's remarkable that such an inexperienced actress could make such a big impression in her first film.

"In the case of *Desperately Seeking Susan*," director Seidelman recalled, "because Madonna had never acted in a film before, I didn't cast her for her experience as an actress but because she had an interesting persona that I thought would be right for the character of Susan, and I wanted to capture that on celluloid."

In another interview she said "Madonna lived down the street from me, so she wasn't "Madonna," in quotes. I knew her from people who

that's even bigger than the two alone. By the time we finished shooting the film, Madonna's *Like a Virgin* album came out and that's what catapulted her to the first level of stardom. You never knew how long that was going to last, but certainly that made a huge splash. Simultaneously she had this movie, and had the movie not been well received, it wouldn't have mattered. But the fact that she's good in the movie, people seemed to like the movie and she suddenly had this meteoric album — all that converged. So much about what makes something happen or not happen has to do with having the right stuff at the right time."

At the Los Angeles premier, fans gathered from miles around to catch a glimpse of their heroine arriving at the screening. In the video of the event,

Madonna blows them all a kiss, playing the movie star with ease. She says of her character "She's irresponsible, she's adventurous, she's courageous and she's very vulnerable." The interviewer asks, "is she Madonna?" The Queen of Pop herself looks into the camera and tellingly replies "we have some things in common."

On the set of the movie itself, Madonna gave an interview for television, saying "I play Susan, a very free spirited femme fatale, charming everyone and breaking people's hearts. But everyone likes her because she represents fun and adventure." Again, she could have been talking about herself and she knew that very well.

Released the year I was born, this film has a lovely nostalgic feel to it now, with the music, the fashion and the dialogue. It's a perfect snapshot of a time, when Madonna's very appearance told you she was something unique. She has some wonderful moments throughout, not least her first appearance in the bedroom, snapping pictures of her one night stand and packing her suitcase up for the next chapter. Another great scene gives us a telling glimpse into how Susan lives her life, washing in a public rest room, oblivious to what the other women might think, as she dries her arm pits under the hand dryer. Yes Susan is wild, free and ready for the next thrill, but there is something almost childish behind this breezy, sharp dressed front. It's almost as if there's a hint of that little girl lost about her, somewhere deep inside perhaps.

Another stand out scene, perhaps the most famous in the movie, is when Madonna amusingly dances to her own song, the brilliant Into the Groove, in a smoky 1980s night club spot. Typically for Madonna, unarguably the greatest PR woman in the world, she makes sure we hear the song in its entirety, literally having to prick up our ears to pick out the dialogue from under the music. Now that's genius.

Madonna aside, the film flows wonderfully and the script is tight as can be. The supporting cast are all on top form too, working in aid of the farcical plot. It was a big hit at the time and proved successful with the critics too, who saw it as a charming throwback to the farces of the 1930s. I liken it to Woody Allen, in its tone, quirky characters, performance style and plot shifts.

Reviews at the time seem to agree it's a decent film, a somewhat freakish surprise hit that came from nowhere. Roger Ebert thought it was solid, commenting "What I liked in *Desperately Seeking Susan* was the cheerful way it bopped around New York, introducing us to unforgettable characters, played by good actors. It has its moments, and many of them involve the different kinds of special appeal that Arquette and Madonna are able to generate. In a dizzying plot they somehow succeed in creating specific, interesting characters."

Retrospective reviews all seem to agree that it was the one definitive movie where Madonna found her perfect role. *Time Out* wrote that it was an "emancipated screwball comedy, even if the plotting is square as a square peg. Madonna has never found a better fit than the role of Susan, a thrift-store free spirit - and even then Arquette gives as good as she gets with a deliciously kooky comic turn."

Looking back on the classic movie, *BluRay.com* wrote "*Desperately Seeking Susan* has a fresh, youthful way about it that keeps it humming along when dramatics fail to earn interest. Perhaps this is the Madonna magic in motion, with the star's iconic style and swagger sparking the picture to life whenever she's onscreen, creating a personal aura of irresistibility."

It has to be said that much of its success and longevity is down to Madonna's presence alone, even though the film still works on numerous levels. It caught her at that magic point in time, resulting in an explosive collision of star and movie, that could never be repeated again.

## Q AND A WITH LEORA BARISH



I ask a few questions with Leora Barish, who wrote the screenplay for *Desperately Seeking Susan*.

**How did you come up with the idea for the film? Do you remember how it started?**

I had seen and loved Jacque Rivette's film, *Celine and Julie Go Boating*. In it, an ordinary woman living an imaginatively very modest life sees a woman on the street - a chaotic, charismatic, mysterious woman - and simply gets up and follows her into an alternate reality which you feel is an invention of the strange woman's imagination. Together, they start to play with that reality. It's about playing and reality and women being the imaginative creators of their lives - a fantastic movie. A few days after I saw it, I noticed the personals in, I think, the *Village Voice* or maybe it was another paper, and the personals seemed to fit into a Rivette-like premise.

**Looking back now, Madonna got the Susan role. How did she fill the part from how you envisioned it in the script?**

Pretty much perfectly. She slipped into the role and it fit her like a glove because it was kind of like her own bad-girl Boy Toy persona at the time, and on top of that, she rocked it. I think she especially connected with the amoral, pseudo criminal, selfish, powerful, curious, improvisational qualities of Susan.

**It's got to be Madonna's most celebrated film role today. Do you think it's a good performance?**

She's an accomplished, charismatic performer, but she's not really, you know, an actor.



**How much control did she have over the part? Did she change much about her original character?**

It's like a tune that she could play the shit out of. Like I said, she rocked it. She added her own riffs that revealed it, enhanced it, made it more saturated.

**This film was made by strong women and stars strong women. What are your views on female movie roles today?**

The importance of women characters and actors in film has mostly deteriorated since the 70s and probably before that: the 50s, the 30s. I happened to watch some of *Serpico* last night; the female characters as written in that movie are inexplicably dreadful, so go figure. I've never made a study of women in film, so I don't know enough to have an opinion on those changes. However, one more note on that: there are lots of male buddy movies in which the women are irrelevant and almost no female buddy movies in which men are irrelevant, so that's interesting, right?



## **AN INTERVIEW WITH** **SCOTT THUNES**

**The legendary Frank Zappa bassist looks back on his time working with Frank in this extract from Chris Wade's book, THE MUSIC OF FRANK ZAPPA: 1978 - 1993**

**Were you always a fan of Frank Zappa?**

My brother turned me on to Zappa when I was at least 10, if not younger (this would be around 1970) and I dug him so much. My first album purchase included We're Only In It For the Money. I listened to him up until about 1972 when he did Montana and Grand Wazoo (which I still adore and is in my top three Zappa albums) but then kind of stopped, even though we all knew and loved the Black Page and learned it. I saw him play in 1975 and was not impressed, and saw him again in 1980 (still not impressed) but I ended up playing

with him a year later. So, yes, huge fan, but also a critic and naysayer.

**You were on some of my favourite Frank albums. What can you share about the making of Ship Arriving Too Late...?**

I recorded Valley Girl with Frank in the studio, sitting in a chair across from him and us putting it together bit by bit. Took about two hours. The rest of it was live cuts.

**How much freedom did you have in playing Zappa's bass lines, and how much of your own input was there?**

I had total freedom. After the first two tours I was never told what to play except when given a chart as in When The Lie's So Big.

**What sticks out from your work on Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention?**

They were live cuts except for the other song I recorded with Frank in the studio, We're Turning Again. This time we recorded with the whole band and we got it done rather quickly as I recall. What sticks out to me is that since Yo Cats wasn't made with real musicians (of course except for Ike singing) but was composed directly on the Synclavier, we only played it live once, and that was in Boston. Boston was a funny city to play in because Frank always knew that the audience would be filled with musicians because of the Berkley School of Music. All the students would always come to the shows to see what Frank was up to next, and to critique his musicians. Yo Cats was performed with the Synclavier parts and we all 'finger synced' to the music, meaning that none of us on stage made any noise or sound at all; until the very end, where I think we played the 'scary motif' all together.

**How did you develop that sound of yours and the tone of it? I love it boyo. Did Frank express fondness for your individual sound?**

When I was younger, me and my friend Joe Gardner was so enamoured of the bass, we had rules. One of them was 'no treble' and 'only fingers'. When I left jazz and went into New Wave, I was given an album by Joe Jackson and told to listen to his bass player, Graham Maby and try to emulate him. I fell in love with his tone, his style, and learned a lot. Next year I was playing with Frank. BUT! I didn't use my own bass. He told me he wanted me to use two identical Carvin basses so if I broke a string we would have a similar sound for recording. After the first two tours (81,82) I asked him if I could use my two Fender basses and he agreed. My 1965 Precision Bass with round wound strings and Frank's amplifier made a particularly pleasing bright sound and I ended up making it even more bright because of my love for Chris Squire's and J.J. Burnel's tones - the bassists

for Yes and The Stranglers - along with my feeling that normal and darker bass tones were boring.

Frank never said anything about my tone or tried to change it in any way. When I used a chorus pedal on the 1988 tour (because I noticed that he put chorus on everything before that that ended up on record) he never said anything. I just figured if he liked that sound why don't I get to actually hear it like that myself every night. Now that I know more about what it meant for him to record everything every night, I'm surprised he let me put it directly on tape.

**Can you name some particular pieces you enjoyed playing most and why?**

I recall always enjoying Cruising for Burgers. I thought that was an immense groove and sounded very large in my ears. I also enjoyed Andy. It was very hard but I love the chords and the alternating time signatures. Alien Orifice was, to my ears, a great jazz tune and I love the way it leaves the middle section and goes back to the 'head'. Bamboozled By Love was never one of my favourite songs to play but when we added the bass line to Owner of a Lonely Heart as the backing to a guitar solo by Frank, it turned it into another type of song entirely. Big Swifty was a great swing tune, and, since it was originally based on a Frank guitar solo, unlike any other tune I'd ever heard. Dancin' Fool was always fun, and once in Austria, I jumped off the riser and made Frank forget the words I landed so hard. He stopped the song (usually a bad thing) and made me get back up on the riser and jump again so he could start it over 'correctly'. That was sweet of him. One of my favourite songs of his was Eat the Question, so I was quite pleased we did that even if it was only 5 times in the US and 8 in Europe. Florentine Pogen was another fun song to play and very groovy. Sofa was fun for me 'cause I got to play George Duke's baseline on the Minimoog. Why Don't You Like Me was fun before we changed the words to



**Some great gigs with you on bass are out there available. What were some of the very best gigs you recall, or the most memorable?**

I don't know about how to know which shows are good or not. I never had a list of 'those shows' that I needed to go back and listen to, except one in 1984 at Jones Beach where I had a bass solo on Nigger Bizness that I thought was great. I listened to it afterwards and it was... meh.

**What do you think looking back on the 88 tour? Even though there was some trouble on it, did you enjoy it?**

The 1988 tour ruined my life for years for listening to Frank's music, wishing I was out of rock music and having to deal with musicians, and I was near suicidal afterwards. Many of the people who I played music with on that tour I have never spoken to again, and one in particular I go out of my way to avoid. One of them apologized to me afterwards and we're pals, but at least 6 of them I'm quite happy to never see again, nor can I ever go to see any of the "Banned from Utopia" gigs 'cause several of those people who ruined my life (and that tour, incidentally) are still involved in that shit.



**How did you come to cease working with Frank?**

Frank stopped touring.

**Do you remember the last time you saw him?**

I don't! That's a great question. I played music with his sons Dweezil and Ahmet for several years after I didn't play with Frank anymore, so I saw him a lot over the years, but I had been fired from the Dweezil band and so was 'persona non grata' up at the house by definition. I was never invited

Michael Jackson stuff and I always loved to play Zomby Woof. Mr. Green Genes, Orange County Lumber Truck, What's New In Baltimore, and T'Mershi Duween were all quite interesting to play and never bored me.

up for any of the Margarita Nights they had up there; didn't even know about them until after Frank died. Still kind of bummed about it. I heard he had died when I was on tour in Europe in 1993. The last memorable time I saw him at the house was when he and I and Mike Keneally sat around and listened to his collection of old rock and roll and doo wop 45s. It was a treasured moment for me and I'll never forget it.

**Looking back, do you ever find it amazing you worked so closely with the iconic Frank Zappa? Or does it just feel like an other part of your life?**

Of course. I marvel at the ridiculousness of it almost every day. That a kid from San Anselmo could pass into his world so easily and then of course leave it so easily, too, never gets old as far as musings go. If I had it to do over, I would spend far more time with him, prying his mind open and being more 'composer-oriented' with him rather than as 'scared sideman'. Knowing how easy-going he was with people who 'deserved' his time less than I did makes me wish I could shake "Early 80's Scott Thunes" and make him be more involved in Frank's life at the time.

The problem with that is anything that would have made me stick around longer or be more involved may have kept me from meeting my current wife and having my kids. I often wonder how my time with Frank impacted my future relationships and think that there's a possibility that I could actually be this happy and fulfilled without ever actually having met him. But then I say that it's impossible and that everything happens the way it did for a reason, and since here I am, happy married father guy, my time with Frank must have been correctly perfect.

**Finally, how would you sum up Frank as a guy and a musician? What phrases come into your mind?**

This is the toughest one of all. I hate the question "So, what was he like to work with?" which is usually the question that I get from most 'people' or interviewers. I refuse to answer it as it's really unanswerable in such a short time, but given enough time I could at least let you know the general feeling of how it was with us. This question you're asking is quite similar. If we were sitting around with some beers, I was comfortable, and I liked you and cared that you knew this, I could explain in detail many interactions I had with him that caused me to love him the way I did, respect him in the ways that I respected him, and wish I could spend more time with him than I did.

As it is, though, I thought of him mostly as a 'scary boss man' whose opinion I cared so much about that I messed up and acted the fool more often than not. You know how it is when you meet your crush and your mind gets tied in knots? That's what it's like being with Frank on the daily. Even if you're sitting around the backstage area and laughing and making jokes, you're still trying to impress Frank. Many of the guys were better at it, had more practice at it, and were 'those kinds of guys'. I was never that kind of guy. I wanted to impress Frank with ME, not how I was trying to be, and that made it more difficult 'cause he would have to ask me for my opinion on something before I made it. I hate listening to people spout their opinions without being asked for them.

So for me, Frank was the most fair person I've ever met, he loved musicians and he loved hanging out with them, and he was funnier, smarter, and more intense than anybody else you've ever met. It was exactly as you'd think. Tough, but fun. Difficult to keep up but worth every second. I loved him.



# WHITE HOUSE ON THE HILL

By Linzi Napier

# **HOUND DAWG MAGAZINE**

Thanks for reading darlings....

