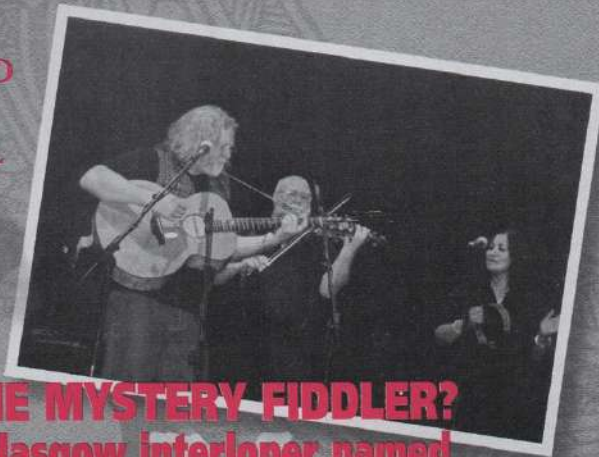


THE MAGAZINE OF THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND

be
G L A D
18
Summer 2001

BARDIC WEEKEND
ISB GO ONLINE
QUEEN JUANITA—
in pictures!
ON THE ROAD
with Robin
and more...



WHO IS THE MYSTERY FIDDLER?
Glasgow interloper named

Band On The Run!
The January mini-tour
& Bergen



and featuring: **OSMIROID OVERLOADER,**
notorious giant octopus...

Bergen STRINGS IN THE EARTH, SNOW IN THE AIR...

Jon Niklas Ronning caught Robin and Mike in relaxed mood after April's festival concert at Bergen, where the ISB shared the bill with Fairport Convention

JNR You played Bergen nearly thirty years ago. Was it nice playing here again?

Robin It was great playing Bergen again. We had a really good show. I think. You have to ask the audience what they thought of course, but I think they liked it pretty well.

JNR Do you remember anything from the last gig you did here?

Mike I don't remember a thing! But somebody said we played here in '72.

Robin We played in '72 and there was snow in the air.

JNR Not just strings in the earth and air?

Robin Well, there was snow in the air as well (laughs).

JNR What is the biggest difference between the ISB today and the ISB 1965-74?

Mike The biggest difference is that the original line-up of me and Robin and Clive didn't last very long. Clive left after the first album, and things like Air are really natural for him to sing. So it's lovely that he can sing that now, because he had already left at the time I wrote it. So I really enjoy doing the slightly later stuff with Clive.

JNR What are your favourite ISB songs?

Robin My favourite Mike Heron songs are Puppies and Swift As The Wind. I also like Air a lot, actually. I like a lot of songs, but I think Puppies is exceptional.

Mike Some of Robin's songs that we did tonight are pretty amazing. Waltz Of The New Moon is an amazing song and so is The Eyes Of Fate. They're not like any other kind of stuff. That's what I really like about Robin's songs from that era. As albums I like all the first five and bits of the later ones.

JNR What do you think of the Chelsea Sessions album?

Robin They were just songs that we left out, but some of them are actually better than the ones we put out on record.

JNR Alice Is A Long Time Gone is my favourite.

Mike That's a lovely song!

Robin It's a nice little song, isn't it? It's about children growing up fast. Several people seemed like Alice to me at the time. It was written in 1966.

JNR You wrote Frutch, Mike...

Mike Thanks for noticing (laughs). It's terrible! That song is a burden for me. The only thing I like about it is the youthful energy I display. I don't have that any more.

Robin Harmonica and breathing at the same time is pretty impressive...

Mike That makes me feel terrible because I can't do that any more. But apart from that I wouldn't put it in my top three hundred (laughs).

JNR What about Lover Man?

Mike I don't like that one either. Those are both not my favourite songs, but some people quite like them so they don't embarrass me too much.

Robin Al Stewart loved it, though.

Mike Yes. He put that one on an album.

JNR A song that you probably like better: Chinese White. Why did you write that song?

Mike I wrote it because of a particular kind of feeling I got one year at Christmas time. It was very spiritual. The feeling was not about Christmas cards and Christmas trees, just a nice feeling and that's what the song is about.

JNR Another favourite of mine: Darling Belle. How did that come about, Robin?

Robin Darling Belle is a song I wrote about my childhood memories and particularly about the First World War. One of the old ladies that looked after me when I was a little boy was married the first day of World War One and that same husband was killed on that same first day of war. It struck me because I was told that story a lot when I was a little boy. And she used to play The Minstrel Boy Has Gone To The War on the piano with one finger. I used to think about it a lot. It's her story really. Not mine.

JNR What of the ISB stuff can't you stand listening to?

Mike I would definitely have to go for Frutch. That would definitely win for me. I'm very different now from what I was when I wrote it.

Robin There are a few things I really hate. But I'm surprised to find that I like some of the early stuff a lot. We were trying too hard towards the end so I don't like the later stuff as much as the early stuff.

JNR Any new albums or gigs apart from the ISB ones coming soon, Robin?

Robin There have been talks about some gigs with Martin Carthy but so far nothing has come of that. I have just done a recording for ECM with some jazz musicians that's coming out next year. Poems of William Blake and Walt Whitman will be on that album, improvised to music.

JNR What about a reunion with the Merry Band?

Robin That would be very difficult to do, although I did play with Chris Caswell on the West Coast on my last American tour. But there are a couple of things going on this year in the autumn. We hope to do a dance theatre performance I have contributed to [Carmina], and also a live version of Dream Journals. That's something for the autumn in London. [Looks like it'll actually be Birmingham: see page 4—Ed]

JNR Do you have any solo albums coming in the future, Mike?

Mike I don't really. I'm keen on what the ISB is doing now and at the moment we've got an album from our current set. It consists of tapes from last year, live stuff. Lawson will mix that and it will be out soon. I'm more interested in that than in promoting my own stuff at the moment.

JNR: What's next for the ISB now?

Robin We take it one step at a time. We have some dates in the summer and winter and then we'll see what we do next year. But at the moment we're all enjoying it a lot.



small photos by Jenny Bolders; big photo by Stefan Veit

Summer 2001

18 of GLAD

SUBSCRIPTIONS, BACK ISSUES, INFORMATION, GOSSIP—

Raymond Greenoaken,
11 Ratcliffe Road,
Sheffield S11 8YA, UK
Tel: 0114 2661158
beglad@taproot.demon.co.uk

beGLAD WEB PAGE

www.makingtime.co.uk/beglad/

U.S. SUBSCRIPTIONS

(currently \$8 per issue)—
Rockin' World / Scenescop
P.O. Box 88
Northampton
MA 01061
USA
Tel/Fax: 413-253-2773
charles@rockinworld.com
Webpage:
www.rockinworld.com

beGLAD 18 is published by Taproot
Productions and edited by Raymond
Greenoaken.

Cover by Jas Wetherspoon.
Photos by Jon Ronning, Jenny Bolders
& Jean Hussain
Printed by SPC, Sheffield.

beGLAD is published twice a year, on June
1 and December 1. Issue 19 will be edited
by Adrian Whittaker; all contributions
should be addressed to Adrian at:

71a Colvestone Crescent

Dalston

LONDON

E8 2LJ, UK

awhitaker@candi.ac.uk

The deadline for inclusion in issue 19 is 15
October. We're always happy to receive any
ISB-related material—clippings, photos and
other memorabilia, illustrations, poems,
whatever—either on loan or as contribu-
tions to the beGLAD archive. Thanks to all
who have donated material over the years;
it's greatly appreciated.

beGLAD is currently £4 per issue in the
UK, £4.50 in Europe and £5 in the rest of
the world; these prices include p&p. For the
USA, see above. Please make all cheques,
money orders and postal orders payable to
Raymond Greenoaken, and send 'em to
the address at the top of this column.
Overseas subscribers: please pay by Inter-
national Money Order, or a cheque drawn
on a British bank.



GLADitorial

When the reformed ISB took the stage in January at Cardiff's handsome Victorian Coal Exchange, they found themselves playing under a stylish ornamental clock bearing the motto Tempus Fugit—"time passes". How true those words are, even today! Reunions are always a risk, and reformations riskier still. There's many a glum pundit who will tell you that you can never recapture the old magic, that it's all tied up with being young, footloose and naïve, or with the temper of the times. Time passes—marches on, indeed!—but the Cardiff show confirmed to us all that the Spirit of String, the shared vision that inspired both the band and their followers in those distant days, triumphantly endures. You could just tell that Robin, Mike and Clive were having a whale of a time singing those old songs again, and that Bina and Lawson were pleased as Punch to be up there with them. Slick and glossy they were not (some things never change!), but the music still goes straight to the heart.

It would be an easy option, of course, just to trot out a Greatest Hits package, especially with so much high-grade material to choose from. But new songs from Clive and Robin suggest that ISB 2001 are a living entity, rather than a travelling musical museum; and we know that Mike has a some sleek new numbers tucked in his back pocket too. We at beGLAD would place a modest wager on there being a few surprises lined up for the Summer and Autumn gigs. Hope to see you all here or there...

CONTENTS

2 Strings in the earth... Robin and Mike return to Norway **P6**

3 GLADitorial Tempus fugit...

4 Pieces of String News, rumour, scandal and allegation

6 A Cardiff gallery Stuff-strutting at the Coal Exchange

7 Milton Keynes Stuart Taylor sees the ISB stir up The Stables (pun!)

8 More Milton Keynes Front-row reflections from Steve Pillely

10 Glasgow Mick Fitzgerald takes it to heart + Mystery Fiddler revealed!

11 All writ down String references from the world of print

13 How did we get in here? ISB infiltrate the teen mags

14 Thanks to the grey sheep In search of String mondegreens

18 Obituaries Sandy Bull and John Fahey

21 Queen Juanita And Her Fisherman Lover go graphic!

24 In person tonight A look at a vintage ISB programme

26 Let's go Bardic! Robin's otherworldly seminar

29 Reviews CDs and live shows

32 A year in String Mick Fitzgerald tells it like it was

34 Witches Hat There are fairies at the bottom of your garden...

38 The end of innocence Circus Girl and Old Buccaneer re-appraised

41 www.incrediblestringband.com ISB go online

42 On the road Jay Ansell's adventures with the Celtic Kerouac

44 Cliff and the ISB Strange bedfellows...

46 I say... The Voice of Stringfandom



P10



P26

the incredible
string
band

SHEFFIELD CITY MEMORIAL HALL Saturday Nov 10 £15 box office 0114 2789789

Pieces to STRING

Double delicious

The ISB "Best Of..." collections compiled by Warner/Elektra and Island for simultaneous release will be hitting the shops on July 2. The track listings were finalised after extensive consultation with Pig's Whisker and assorted scholars of String. They are:

Elektra October Song/The Tree/Chinese White/First Girl I Loved/Koeoaddi There/A Very Cellular Song/Job's Tears/Puppies/The Half-Remarkable Question/Air/Sleepers Awake!/This Moment/Queen Of Love/Invocation

Island All Writ Down/Vishangro/Talking Of The End/Worlds They Rise And Fall/Here Till Here Is There/Red Hair/Antoine/Restless Night/Banks Of Sweet Italy/Moon Hang Low/Seagull/Saturday Maybe/Little Girl/Maker Of Islands/Dreams Of No Return/Cold Days Of February

The Island CD takes *Here Till Here Is There* as its title; the Elektra CD has the more prosaic title of *The Best Of 1966-70*, and cannibalises the title lettering from the first album, as well as exhuming the chunky Elektra logo from the '60s. Liner notes for both CDs are supplied by your Editor, if that's any incentive...

Down your way

Two clusters of dates on which you can see the reformed ISB in concert this year. In August they're back at the Bloomsbury Theatre in London, scene of triumphs in 1997 and 2000, on Friday 3rd and Saturday 4th of August; at Sidmouth International Folk Festival down in sun-kissed foot-and-mouth-ravaged Devon, playing the main arena on Monday 6th August; and at The Olympia in Dublin on Thursday 9th. Squeezed between the latter two, but subject to confirmation, which we've not heard at presstime, may be a concert at Cornwall's celebrated Eden Project site on Tuesday 7th August. The Eden Project is a ground-breaking enterprise located near St Austel that recreates tropical habitats from various parts of the world in a complex of geodesic domes. There's a performing space attached to it, and the ISB will be the first prominent act to play there.

In November the ISB embark on a short tour of England. The opener may be at Frome (The Cheese And Grain) in Somerset on the 8th (again, not confirmed at presstime), followed by Manchester (The Lowry) on the 9th, Sheffield City Hall Memorial Theatre on the 10th, Newcastle Opera House on the 11th, and Birkenhead (Pacific Road Arts Exhibition Centre) on the 12th. More dates likely... Here are the contact details that we know:

Bloomsbury 020 7388 8822

www.ac.uk/BloomsburyTheatre

Sidmouth 01296 392300

Eden Project 01872 262466

Dublin 0035 316 777 744

Manchester 0161 8762000

Sheffield 0114 2789789

Newcastle 0191 232 0899

Birkenhead 0151 6665060

The live album culled from last August's Bloomsbury concerts is now scheduled for release



in June or July as a limited edition. As we revealed exclusively in issue 17, production work on the album, originally due out in January, was halted by the flooding of Albany Studios. No title has been announced as yet: we suggest *Après Le Deluge*.

CP on CD

News also of Clive's projected solo album, most of which was laid down at Albany early last year. Pig's Whisker are planning to put it out sometime in the Autumn, and are weighing up the possibility of adding some 21st century versions of COB-period songs. Again, no title as yet: still in ze French eedion, 'ow about *Palmer d'Or?*

Who was that Scotsman?

Nicholas Whitehead, a reporter with the South Wales Argos, was in attendance at last Autumn's *Carmina* performance at Llandaff Cathedral, and wrote up the show for publication. In the event, his copy was not used, but we think it's worth having a look at. But surely he's confusing Robin in his opening paragraph with some other Scots singer. Any guesses? Dick Gaughan, we think at Be Glad Towers...

"It was quite a shock to see Mr Williamson. For quite a while now, I have not revised my belief that I had seen Robin Williamson quite recently and noted how different he is from when he was in the band. Thing is, that was twenty years ago, when he was at the Wyeside (Builth Wells, Mid Wales).

Back then, he was adamantly *not* the Robin Williamson we knew from the band. There was nothing hippy-ish or mystical and definitely nothing whimsical. He was a hard, bitter, nationalistic Scotsman who hated capitalism and the English. The audience, mostly composed of ISB freaks, left the gig blinking and scratching their heads.

"In Llandaff Cathedral, the audience was the same as ever—a very interesting assembly of old hippies, still looking quite colourful and distinctive. And this time, Robin Williamson was in harmony with them. He was the grown-up version of the young man in that old hippy band.

"He described the pain of leaving Scotland to live in New Malden where he went to a strict school where as much as possible happened in Latin.

"There was a sense of quiet triumph, of healing and integration, when he sat there at his harp, at his own gig, in a cathedral, and said to his audience: 'This is a psalm I was made to sing at that school. And this is the way I sing it now.'

"Bina joined in on vocals. The dancers were perfectly suited to the event, the venue and the job of interpreting songs about Creation. There was quite a bit of Indian influence in the dancing and it was performed with obvious warmth and good humour which doesn't often shine through in that art form.

"I met Michael Fitzgerald, who told me about the String Band email list. He found it an integrating experience for himself. Two of the big influences in

his life—the Latin Mass and the Incredible String Band—were, for the first time, coming together in an unlikely yet beautiful event.

Robin Williamson's vocals in the ISB songs, with those long, sliding notes, always suggested something a bit tongue-in-cheek and mischievous, possibly a piss-take. To hear that same vocal quality applied to sacred Latin texts forced a re-evaluation—of both his singing and the songs.

"He is saying to himself and his audience that we are grown up now. These texts are no longer owned by our masters who used them to depress and subjugate us, they are ours now. And we can enjoy them and benefit from them, free of old pain, free of old priests and schoolmasters.

"And to bring this message, and this audience, into a cathedral! Yes! Old RW seems to have sorted himself out. The playful young mischief-maker and the wise old man were in perfect harmony in Llandaff tonight."

What Robin did next

Our Mr W is as busy as ever this year. In April he went into the studio to record his second ECM album, once again featuring his settings of the works of various poets—in this case, Walt Whitman, William Blake and Henry Vaughan. To be called *Skirting The River Road*, it features Robin on guitar, harp and vocals, abetted by ECM house musicians Paul Dunmall, Mat Manieri, Mick Hutton and Ale Möller. We hear a few of Robin's own songs were revisited in the sessions, too, including *Here To Burn* from *Ten Of Songs*. Looks like it'll be the end of the year before the album hits the shops, but no doubt he'll be premiering some of the tracks on live dates in the coming months.

Robin is booked into The Mac in Birmingham for two consecutive nights in December, reprising the *Carmina* show on the 21st, with Bina and some of the dancers from the Llandaff performance and some form of back-projection. On the 22nd he reunites with two of the *River Road* sessionees for a long-awaited performance of the epochal *Dream Journals*; again, there will be back-projections, this time of a selection from Robin's extraordinary collection of weird postcards and the like, some of which have already been seen in the *Dream Journals* album booklet and in the reincarnation sequence in the *Be Glad* film. An Indian percussionist is likely to augment the line-up.

An earlier reprise of the show has been pencilled in for Glasgow on the 28th of October; no further details at presstime. Check with Pig's Whisker (01246 567712) or visit the ISB website if you need to know more. The *Carmina* soundtrack CD, meantime, is set for release round about midsummer, as a limited edition of 500 copies. There's talk at Pig's Whisker of its being a CD-ROM, to accommodate the Latin texts and Robin's English translations.

Following the unequivocal success of Robin's first *Bardic Tradition* weekend at Hazelwood House last year (see page 26 for a gripping account of the event), he's assembling materials for a follow-up at the same venue over the weekend of 30th November-1st & 2nd December. *beGLAD* hears that it's already fully subscribed (doubly-subscribed, indeed), but there's always the possibility of cancellations nearer the date. Contact Pig's Whisker if you want to be put on a reserve list.

Robin's projected collaboration with Martin Carthy, adverted to in last issue's *Pieces Of String*, has been placed on hold: it's so far proved impossible to find a period when both chaps are available to tour.

Robin and Martin are both appearing at the Beverley Folk Festival on the 15th-17th of June, but not, as far as we know, together. Robin's also booked in for the Festival At The Edge, the prestigious storytelling festival at Much Wenlock, Shropshire, on the 20th-22nd of July. He was last there in 1999, when he was the undisputed hit of the weekend, performing, amongst much else, a 15-minute version of the ballad *The Twa Sisters O' Binnorie*. Info on The Edge from 01952 504882 info@festivalattheedge.org

Net gain

The Incredible String Band website, administered by Pig's Whisker Music, is finally up and running. Mick Fitzgerald, who masterminded the operation, fills in the background on page 41. Point your browsers at www.incrediblestringband.com Easy to remember, no? The Pig's Whisker site, meanwhile, has been dismantled.



Joe (right) with fellow World Music luminaries Lucy Duran and Andy Kershaw

Boyd's Own Story

It looks as though Joe Boyd will be sitting down to write a "My Glittering Career" type of memoir sometime soon. Joe originally floated the idea to sympathetic publishers in 1996, and produced a specimen chapter that was published in the *Guardian Weekend* magazine on 4 January 1997, which discussed in illuminating detail the ISB's "conversion" to Scientology. His assertion in that piece that the band were "fractious", it has been suggested, was the catalyst that provoked Robin and Mike to set up the '97 reunion concerts. "Some book agents and publishers have expressed a lot of interest," Joe reports. "It seems to amuse people."

The opportunity for some serious time with the laptop seems to be opening up now that Joe has severed his association with Hannibal Records after twenty years of World Music high jinks. He hints strongly in an interview in the May edition of *Roots* (aka *Folk Roots*) that corporate interference by label owners Palm Pictures was the reason for his abrupt departure. A 20th Birthday bash for the label has been cancelled, as has a boxed-set retrospective of Hannibal's two decades stirring the musical melting pot.

Queen of Arts

Wolfgang Rostek writes from Germany: "Last year I found a website of a German school which, amongst other things, featured an art project, documented with some pictures, showing how pupils worked on the task of creating an album cover based on the song *Queen Juanita And Her Fisherman Lover*. Strange, I think, and a noble gesture of the teacher, who introduced the kids to the band." *beGLAD*'s Allan Frewin has a crack on page 21.

Happy Birthday to U!

beGLAD reader Stuart Godfrey passed the Big Five-Oh milestone recently. The occasion was marked by his spouse—clearly a culinary genius—with the magnificent creation pictured right. Which proves that the old saying that all good things are either immoral or fattening is perfectly true in the case of the ISB.

U 4 CD!

It's been a long, long road, but *U* has finally been lined up for CD reissue. Warner/Elektra, having taken the baton with the *Best Of* compilation, have dug the master tapes out of their corporate oubliette and promise a shiny new remastered version early in 2002. It looks likely that they may also reissue *I Looked Up*, which has never had a UK release on CD, perhaps in the Boyd-Wood remaster form in

which it appeared in the States on Hannibal a few years back. This means that all ISB releases from 1966-74 will at last be circulating in CD format—if only through second-hand outlets, as most of the Island albums are now deleted, as are the first album and *Changing Horses* on the Elektra imprint.



The forthcoming Wizz Jones album, *Lucky The Man*, to which Clive lends his banjoing talents on three tracks has hit a few delays according to the record label Scenescop, but may well be out by the time you read this. We weren't able to get our hands on a review copy in time for this issue: expect full coverage in issue 19.....

Surviving The Iron Age, the latest tv series in which romantic 21st century townies step into the shoes of their ancestors, required its unwitting victims to spend seven weeks of last Autumn in a reconstructed 700 BC Celtic encampment located within a mile or so of Penwern, the ISB's West Wales hideaway.....

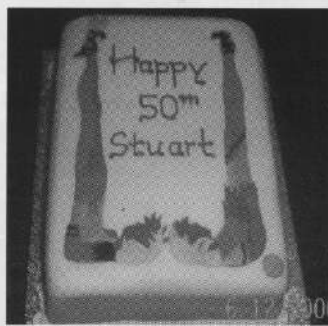
Robin's *Fiddle Tunes* book, first published in 1977, is still in print under the Oak Publications imprint, and now comes with a CD, replacing the primitive flexi-disc that originally accompanied the book. The CD features thirteen short tracks of Robin's fiddling, recorded, legend has it, in an L.A. garage.....

Allie Fox, whose album *Diving For Pearls* was reviewed in issue 17, writes to tell us that the album is now being distributed in the UK by Koch International. 0208-832-1818 or sales@kochintl.co.uk is your contact.....

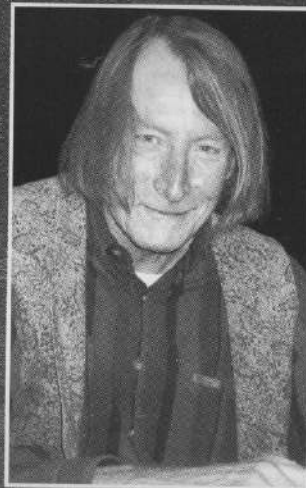
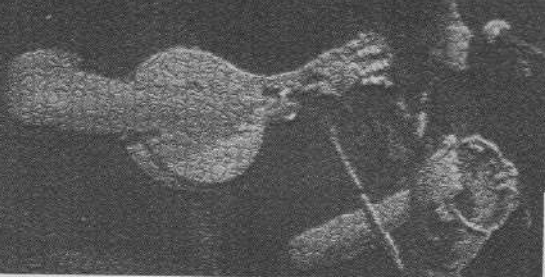
Robin's *Here Till Here Is There* turns up on a CD called *Beautiful Darkness: A Celebration Of The Winter Solstice*, by Martin Simpson, Jessica Radcliffe and Lisa Ekstrom (High Bohemia HBR CD002). Lisa Ekstrom takes the vocal on the song, with Gerry O Beirne on guitar. Available in the UK, we think, through Fledge'ing.....

There was a two-page review of The Monkees' recent boxed-set retrospective in June's *Q*. The title of the piece: *The Incredible Swing Band*.....

Our appeal last issue for the whistle-blowers pictured last issue at St Donat's and Bloomsbury to identify themselves has had a derisory response. Only two have stepped forward. Refer to the photos on page 10 if you have a copy to hand: Brent Young admits to being the chap in the shades on the extreme left of the bottom picture, and Mick Fitzgerald claims to be "the inanely grinning guy with the short beard in the foreground [of the middle picture] and my son Aodhrua owns the small arm holding the tin whistle." Saddam Hussain denies categorically that he is the man in the white shirt in the same picture: "One of my many security doubles," explains the affable despot.



.THE JANUARY TOUR... THE LANAUA
Cardiff



photos by Jenny Bolders



photo by Kieron Stanley

Stuart Taylor

samples some family entertainment

I WAS REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS. I hadn't seen the String Band since the Bloomsbury (Thursday) concert the previous August, so I bought my tickets early and awaited the date with keen anticipation. My friend, John, with whom I went to Bloomsbury, and my wife, Mandy, were not interested in accompanying me so I phoned my sister, Jude, who accepted the offer of a free ticket gladly. This is probably the first time that I would have ever taken my little sister out!

I had to drive down from Shropshire to the Woodstock area (just north of Oxford—not the one in New York State) to pick her up, and once the "hellos" and "how are yous" had been exchanged between my brother-in-law, nephews and myself, my sister and I set off, map in hand, towards sunny Milton Keynes, home of the Open University and very confusing roundabouts.

My sister hadn't seen or heard the String Band since circa 1973, when she saw them at the Cambridge Corn Exchange, so she couldn't remember any songs except the ones I used to sing in my youth: Hedgehog, Painting Box, First Girl I Loved. I obliged with a compilation tape I had produced for the car, which passed the time away until we arrived at the Stables Theatre, a modern affair with an abundance of staff milling around.

At halftime, I was standing in a queue in the Gents. No-one was communicating (very un-String Band), so I decided to strike up a casual conversation with the bloke behind me. "What did you think of the first half?" I asked.

He replied in a Monty Python/Peter Cookesque voice, "My wife and I thought it was terrible! We're going home."

"Are you serious?" I replied.

"Yes I am. I've been to folk concerts all over England and this lot seem like a bunch of lads getting together for the first time. I'm looking forward to seeing The Strawbs when they perform here."

WELL, WAS THE CONCERT REALLY THAT BAD? The answer is: of course not!

The first half commenced a la Bloomsbury with Chinese White, a little shaky perhaps with Mike and Bina not quite making the grade on vocals. Next came Ducks On A Pond, slightly edited but nevertheless enhanced by an uplifting Heron harmonica solo. The rest followed on from Bloomsbury, except that Robin sang a song from his *seed-at-zero*, remarking that the album was appreciated more in Europe (where English is not spoken), and Clive played a difficult piece from the turn of the last-century-but-one. Mike played Painting Box; again, tentative harmonies but OK, and Clive played a song which I am sure I had never heard before: something about "the world underground". This was a great song with a very powerful arrangement involving the full band. The first half ended with great promise for the future.

A MAN BEHIND ME SHOUTED "GENIUS" AS ROBIN SANG HIS FINAL NOTE...

AFTER MY STRANGE EXPERIENCE in the Gents, my sister and I chatted in our seats. She seemed to enjoy the first half, but wondered why Mike Heron was rummaging around in a "shopping bag" for something during Ducks. I explained that he was probably getting his harmonica ready...

The second half began magnificently with This Moment. Mike on top vocal form, again managing "I just want to tell each one of you..." and the band producing an interesting arrangement.

The performance progressed from strength to strength; Waltz of the New Moon was brilliant, inspiring a man behind me to shout "Genius!" as Robin sang his final note. Clive played Big City Blues well, although Robin's slide guitar was very iffy, and Strings In The Earth And Air was a joy. Robin and Clive, on fiddle and pipes respectively, played a very competent traditional tune, Paddy On The Turnpike, and Air was performed with power, though perhaps the vocals were a little off-key at times.

Eyes Of Fate, which I think was in this half, was superb; excellent background chants and Robin performing brilliantly. Mike sang a wonderful version of Maker Of Islands with harmonies from Robin and Bina (this was a highlight of the whole performance), and somewhere along the line, Bina and Robin sang a duet.

The last number was You Know What You Could Be, played in Cajun style with Mike singing well and fishing around in that bag again for a harmonica.

The averagely enthusiastic audience (I suspect many were local or there for curiosity) clapped, cheered and whistled for an encore and the band returned to play a faster and improved version of Empty Pocket Blues, and You've Been A Friend To Me finished the concert.

SO, NOW TO THE SERIOUS PART: was it all worthwhile and what of the future? Our Editor covered many of the points in the last edition of *beGLAD*, but this concert was different.

It was performed in a provincial theatre, albeit sold out, where the audience were enthusiastic but not fanatic, as at Bloomsbury. The first half was a little weak, with harmonies and arrangements somewhat lack-lustre, but this could be put down to either nerves or lack of rehearsal. The second half was very, very good with Mike singing well, Robin displaying his vocal and instrumental prowess, Clive playing a solid banjo, guitar and pipes, Lawson somehow holding it all together on keyboards, piano, washboard etc, and Bina adding a necessary—if occasionally a little shaky—vocal. What of the future, then?

It seems to me that the String Band contain an abundance of talent waiting to burst forth. Mike Heron is a brilliant songwriter who can produce the basis of the necessary material for a new album. Robin, as we all know, can write a mean song, but his wonderful talent lies in his multi-instrumental musicianship. Clive adds an American and vaudevillean banjo as well as promising pipes, which could enhance any new songs with the aid of new technology. Lawson provides the solid piano arrangements and production and Bina produces a mystic vocal essential for any ISB work.

We await new material with bated breath. My sister really enjoyed the concert, especially Mike Heron's permanent grin, and I went away totally satisfied at having seen my all-time favourite band for the second time within six months.

My lasting memory was that, on the way out of the auditorium, an official from the theatre, chatting to the dispersing audience, asked us whether we had enjoyed the show, commenting that he remembered the ISB for Hedgehog's Song, which they didn't sing.

So the question remains: should they do Hedgehog's Song? The answer: YES!

Postscript

Having spent the night at my sister's, I returned home to Shropshire via the M40 at about 7 am, joining the ludicrous cut-throat traffic. I left the chaos behind at Bromsgrove thinking one thing: "Thank you, Incredible String Band..."

THE JANUARY TOUR...THE JANUARY

IT JUST GETS BETTER AND BETTER. They just get better and better. I'd heard that Cardiff had gone down very well, "...and some surprises, one or two new tunes." So expectations were up.

Front row seat! Oh wow! Then I started to spot people I know, from the list and from Hazelwood House, just before the lights went down.

The band walk on, to the now accustomed rapturous welcome, as usual swelling a bit as Mike appears—he's still something of a novelty; or maybe, rather, it's Mike's presence that makes this the Incredible String Band.

No messing about, it's Chinese White, and a good, competent, if unremarkable rendition. They've taken up their usual positions, Robin to stage left, then Bina, Mike behind his keyboard in the middle, slightly set back so they're arrayed in an arc, then Clive seated with his banjo, and Lawson out to the right and sideways on.

Ducks On A Pond, after a bit of tuning, gets off to a false start: Robin calls a halt within a line or two, he's not quite in tune. And while he sorts himself out, Mike dives into the carrier bag he's got next to him. Presumably for his harmonica. After that, D On A P is a workmanlike performance, but they're still warming up. Later I was to compare it rather unfavourably with Waltz Of The New Moon.

Queen Of All The Gypsies is something of a showcase for Clive Palmer, and it seemed proper that each of the three original members had taken the lead on a song by now. Clive's banjo playing was a strong foundation, in this and most of the numbers tonight. But Robin was beginning to fly now, his sung and spoken parts, his voice working together with Clive's, made this the first high of the evening for me.

Nothing remarkable so far. Nothing remarkable! How quickly we get used to the fantastic! Here was the Incredible String Band performing some of their great songs, and it's "nothing remarkable". But nothing we hadn't seen last year, at Bloomsbury and the RFH for my part.

But now there was a surprise: a song familiar both to those who saw the band in the late Sixties (or have heard the tapes, particularly of the radio concerts) and those who who've heard Robin's fairly recent *Ring Dance* album: for this was the eponymous Ring Dance, done more as it was way back when, rather than the more experimental and arguably over-produced version on the album. It was rawer and more exciting, and featured Lawson playing his keyboard in a harpsichord setting. Lovely.

Next came Painting Box, getting off to its now usual uncertain and unrecognisable start—made the more so when Mike started singing, then noticed that the mic wasn't in front of him. He quickly grabbed it into place, with a happy grin that we saw a lot of this evening. After that, it was another competent, delightful, if unspectacular performance.

NOPE Milton Keynes Steve Pilley

finds joy in
the front row

Clive gave one of his brilliantly rambling intros and then started playing, if I heard right, Waltz Pathétique, solo on the banjo, a chance to show why his banjo playing is so celebrated. Then Robin performed a solo piece, On No Work Of Words, from *the seed-at-zero*, and a performance that did the song justice, without adding significantly to the rendition on that sublime and mysterious album.

Now came a selection of pipe and fiddle tunes. Since it was taking a while to tune up, Robin told us a bit about the tunes: Neil Gow's Wife, which he explained referred in fact to Neil Gow's fiddle, and before that (I'm sure Robin said "before that..."—but there's consequently a little confusion in my mind as to which title goes with which tune) The Rowan Tree, and then I'll Gang Nae Mair Tae somewhere or other. [Yon

Toon—knowledgable Ed] But once they started playing—ah, this was how I remember the ISB live, with their own extraordinary tunes and individualism interspersed with virtuoso performances of traditional material. The set started with Clive on his self-made Northumbrian pipes (complete with dog bone ivory, we were reminded) and Robin on the fiddle. As it moved into the second tune Lawson joined in with sampled strings. Neil Gow's Wife turned out to be a familiar, beautiful, wistful tune—I'm sure I've heard words sung to this, by the Dubliners perhaps? (The Dubs got a mention later tonight, as we learned that an extra last minute Glasgow gig has been scheduled, because the Dubliners had to pull out of a Glasgow concert and the Incredibles are to stand in for them. I wonder if they'll try the Octopus Jig?) By the time the third tune came in Bina joined in with her tambourine.

Bina seems a lot more confident and comfortable on the stage now than she did a year ago, and the audience seemed a great deal warmer towards her than on certain previous occasions. She's completely and undeniably an important part of the ISB now, and rightly so.

The traditional medley achieved my first gasp of the evening—I seem to have used the word "wicked" in my notes, so apologies to over-thirties for that.

Next, Clive told us that the following song was a collage of images from the middle east, and it turned out to be a new song, Land Of No Return (I think he said that was an Arabic or Persian name for heaven) Clive and Bina sang lead, Robin played the mandolin (perhaps just a touch too enthusiastically?) and this was just ecstasy. There was something of the episodic about it. To compare it with Ithkos would give the wrong impression, that being mired in the memories of that time, but nevertheless, what with the episodes and the middle eastern imagery, that not entirely disreputable number did come to mind. What wasn't clear, this being a completely new song, was who wrote it. [It was Clive—smartass Ed] Here's a vote for an *early* album release.

photo by Kieron Stanley



RY TOUR... THE JANUARY TOUR...

SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME SHOW AS SIX MONTHS AGO, BUT ENHANCED, PERFECTED..

NOCTURNAL INTERMISSION TIME, and a chance to meet up with fellow Hazelwood House alumni and list-members. There were eleven of us there, if I counted correct: as someone remarked, about a third of the class, and the transcendental evening was made to sparkle so much more by the wonderful and all too brief reunions. Indeed I felt a momentary regret when the lights in the bar dimmed to call us away from our reminiscences and signal the approach of the second half. Then I remembered where I was and went back to take my seat with enthusiasm.

This Moment opened the second half, and the ecstatic grins on faces round the auditorium were in evidence—and indeed on Mike's face—as he told “each and every one” of us that...

I'd been watching the interaction between the band, and particularly Robin and Lawson. A glance, a watching for the other to look up, a catching of the eye, an unspoken “OK, now let's...” and a rhythmic nod of the head as they change. Lawson, after some initial resistance amongst fans, has proven himself to be a vital member of the 21st Century String Band. His obvious musical excellence, which some had described as clinical or too smooth, is a vital foundation on which the others can securely base their flights of virtuosity. Anyway, Lawson's clearly unabashed: he's been making more use of sampled sounds in his contributions (not squelches and bleeps of course—there's no sign of the Acid Techno String Band on the horizon—but samples of real instruments, such as strings, harp and harpsichord). After the show he was telling us with great enthusiasm how he felt they added more to the music than the straightforward piano sounds he'd used previously.

Waltz Of The New Moon. I finally got the message that the pan pipe victories are no longer floating, only the palaces, so apologies for referring to that as a “mistake” in previous writings. The thing with Waltz 2001, as opposed to the current Ducks On A Pond, is that Robin sounds as if he means it, now, whereas with Ducks it's just a revisit to an old song, fondly remembered but no longer “on message”, perhaps.

Big City Blues. Robin borrowed Bina's seat, put on his specs, and took up a pose to allow maximum concentration on his slide guitar playing: one foot on the chair, guitar on knee, head bowed over the instrument. He might almost have had his tongue hanging out in the intensity of his concentration. I don't recall seeing Robin playing bottleneck before: maybe it's a new skill for him? I recently watched a Stefan Grossman tutorial video on bottleneck techniques, in which Grossman demonstrates a method of holding the slide which he had devised for himself; and I noticed Robin had adopted the same method. Hmm, I wonder... Anyway, new skill or not, his playing was note-perfect, even more accurate than his fiddling. BCB was yet another masterful performance by our heroes.

YOU SEE THE WAY THIS IS GOING? Substantially the same show as six months ago (and why mess with a successful formula?) but enhanced, perfected, with a few new numbers and some new revivals. It was bound to keep everyone happy.

Now Robin and Bina duetted on The Storm Is On The Ocean, while the others sat back and enjoyed. I suppose some of the numbers which are obviously important to the band, but which didn't go down so well at Edinburgh, are gradually being reintroduced, and nobody has any problem with it. During this, Mike and Lawson were nodding and swaying, each in time with the music, but out of sync, each unaware of the other. Then when I looked up after making a quick note about it, they were still swaying, but now grinning at each other.

Air next. Mike seemed to be having some trouble with the swell pedal on his keyboard, and the oh-so-dreamy intro—led vocally by Clive as always now—was interrupted once or twice by too-loud notes from the organ. Robin seemed to wince momentarily at that. Air is one of Mike's great pieces, but its effect is strongly dependant on the atmosphere it creates—it really needs to be perfect, this one, and maybe the band should leave it alone (give us a studio version!) for now if they can't do it full justice. Never mind, once the intro was through and Mike settled down (sheepish grin in place), they climbed back to the heights they'd been achieving so far.

Robin told us, amused and bemused, how the stories of antipathy between him and Mike in the Sixties can't have been true: he cited in evidence the time when they'd had to share a hotel room, and indeed a rather decrepit double bed, “me with my feet up alongside Mike's head, and he with his feet alongside my head.” He recalled the landlady of this hotel, one you wouldn't dare argue with, who served up breakfast of slabs of bacon swimming in tinned tomatoes, humming a tuneless supposedly traditional tune, which he later turned into the song his daughter Vashti insists on calling Isaac Fate, but we know better as The Eyes Of Fate. And another flawless rendition of a reheated classic.

Then a tune on the whistle, known both as Paddy On The Turnpike and Frosty Morning. I admit my attention was wandering a little by now, not through boredom, oh no, but rather a surfeit of ecstasy. That doesn't mean I'd double-dropped, by the way—this was a more natural high, but it was all too much for me for a few minutes.

My full attention was recaptured by Strings In The Earth And Air. Mike had gotten the hang of that swell pedal, and another delicate atmosphere was gorgeously created. A magic moment, a scene so beautiful it seems to belong to the otherworld, captured in a sound painting. This was perhaps the tightest number of the evening.

Maker Of Islands followed without much ado, and maintained the perfection and created a different, cosier mood. M Of I was never one of my favourites. On Thursday I listened to a recording from 1974 (the final Radio One concert) and, John Gilston's tasteful percussion notwithstanding, I thought how much better the song is with the full ISB 2001 contributing. (While I'm on the subject of that recording, I'd like to put in a vote for Jaek Straw's Wishes to be released—after all, we've got Ithkos and Log Cabin Home, and the previously unheard 1968, (a “twee” number if ever there was one), so why not this greatest of the tunes of that gig?)

Maker Of Islands was “great”, according to the note I scribbled down as I prepared to listen to the “final” song, You Know What You Could Be. I made no notes about this one, and my memory's already letting me down—assume in the absence of any note to the contrary that this one was just perfect.

BUT OF COURSE IT WASN'T THE FINAL NUMBER: the band barely got off the stage before they returned, in response to the irresistible cries of “more!” Empty Pocket Blues ensued, after Robin asked us to join in with handclaps on the downbeat. This time we got an up tempo rendition, a la Log Cabin Home, with Robin playing fiddle rather than the whistle. Lawson doubled on washboard and keyboard, while Bina rattled her tambourine on the upbeat in counterpoint to our handclaps. This was the only audience participation encouraged tonight (so no Smoke Shovelling Song with bells and whistles—properly I think: the joke had been made and enjoyed, no need to labour it). But in between my sad scribbles, necessary if I'm going to bring this report to the deprived amongst you, I looked up to see Robin mischievously catching Clive's eye as the latter warbled, “My pocket's empty, baby”, and turning out his waistcoat pocket to show it empty.

Then straight into You've Been A Friend To Me. As it progressed, Mike sought his harmonica, and tentatively started to blow on it. I'm told that Robin was taken by (pleasant) surprise, but my eyes were on Mike, as he came in with a single note, grinned boyishly, received a ripple of delighted applause and then got on with blowing on that harp.

AND THAT WAS IT. No second encore! I think we were too quick to give up, once the lights went up. But then again, it was twenty to eleven, an unusually late finish by recent standards; and when I counted up they'd given us no fewer than 21 pieces! Six Herons; 13 from the band's Sixties and Seventies repertoire; at least one completely new; six or so that we haven't heard from the current incarnation; and at least one complete reworking—Empty Pocket Blues—since last summer.

What words can bring you the sense of transcendence that these concerts engender? These are perfect evenings. Just hearing and watching the band on stage, so obviously enjoying themselves, is a magical experience. Add to that the reunions with so many like-minded friends, and hanging around and chatting to band members after, and that's more pure joy than I have a right to hope for. I do hope for more nonetheless, and joy of joys, I'll almost certainly get more!

THE JANUARY TOUR... THE JANUARY

I APPROACHED THE CONCERT WITH some worries. The night before in the Fruitmarket, the band—especially Mike and Robin—had been suffering with colds and sore throats. Also, Celtic Connections had decided to refund everybody with tickets for the Dubliners and so it was mayhem in the foyer as I tried to get mine. Impatient to get in, I did something I hadn't done since I was a child getting into a football match—I approached a stranger near the front of the queue and asked him to buy me a ticket as close to the stage as possible.

Moments later I was in possession of my ticket and inside the rather large auditorium. Again the worry set in: will it be empty, given the short notice? Will it be full of Dubliners fans looking for drinking songs? Will the band be in any shape to perform? I know I take it personally, but these are musicians I love and you worry about those you love.

Brian McNeill (ex of the Battlefield Band) opened proceedings playing fiddle, electric cello (I jest not), mandolin and guitar. He played a fine version of The Lads Of The Fair, which I had first heard done by Dick Gaughan and Andy Irvine in 1982, and produced a good response from the crowd—even the menacing guy in the front row who had taken a dislike to my ISB cap. To say he was not a great fan of Charles Stuart (Bonny Prince Charlie) would be an understatement. Enjoyable first set.

AFTER A BRIEF INTERVAL, the ISB came on. At this stage the downstairs of the concert hall was full, approximately 1,000. The opening bars of Chinese White showed that Mike's voice was on the mend and we were away.

Into Ducks On A Pond, after a brief interlude by Robin, who pointed out that over the years he had developed a reputation for writing lyrics which were oblique and open to many meanings. He noted that much of this air of mystery was due to the fact that the lyrics printed on the albums were often incorrect. He then pointed out that Ducks On A Pond had little to do with ducks or ponds, and in fact was more a reflection on the human condition. Well, the version served up certainly improved this human's condition. Robin's yodel and Mike's harmonica playing left one praying that those angels would long have a home in this world, and Lawson's frenetic honky-tonk playing at the end turned it into a celebration of the human condition.

Surprisingly, as in the Fruitmarket, neither This Moment nor Queen Of All The Gypsies was played, nor anything from *seed-at-zero*. Robin introduced Clive's solo banjo piece, Waltz Pathétique. Interestingly, for the first time Robin put Clive's approach to banjo playing into context. According to Robin, "...even by 1962 Clive had gained a reputation as the foremost expert in Victorian banjo playing—a very different style, much more polite than the standard tenor banjo and effectively the parlour room banjo style". This introduction helped me, and it was interesting to hear Robin's heartfelt admiration of Clive's knowledge of this particular style.

Clive's Northumbrian pipes had been a victim of an "accident" the day before, so the Neil Gow/Rowan Tree/Till Gang Nae Mair set wasn't a possibility. Painting Box has been helped by Robin's reworking of the fiddle accompaniment, but the highlights of the first half of the show were the new song Land Of No Return, and Big City Blues. Land Of No Return is based on the Persian mythological underworld from whence one can never return, unless, as Clive explained, you can trick someone else into taking your place. My impression from his introduction both in Cardiff and tonight was that the basic song was written by Clive in the past few months with the arrangement having been put together by the band in rehearsals the week before. Bina has found her place in the band—track one on the album of new songs.

Big City Blues was a joy, especially Robin's slide guitar. In Cardiff and at both shows in Glasgow, it was great to see that as well as playing fabulous technical slide he felt confident enough to "play the guitar by trying interesting shapes which might be chords".

Glasgow

Mick Fitzgerald
sees the ISB deputising
for The Dubliners...

THE SECOND HALF OF THE SHOW kicked on from there. A shimmering version of Waltz Of The New Moon left me grinning from ear to ear with my eyes shut, thinking this magic can't be found elsewhere. As the fire king's daughter echoed off, I saw a row of bemused Dubliners fans head for the door. As someone raised on The Black Velvet Band, I found this strangely comforting, because it's their loss...

Maker Of Islands saw Mike's voice soar out over the audience. This brings me to one of the highlights of this current batch of concerts. Robin and Mike were bouncing off each other vocally right through this and the other songs. Robin's harmony "All right," on Maker Of Islands was so full of warmth and togetherness as it wrapped around Mike's voice. No wonder he felt able to dismiss "myths" of bitter rivalry in the past. As he said, "It's not the way I remember it".

Again, Eyes of Fate was full-on Robin, allowing for a false start as he threatened to leave this world in a fit of coughing. I loved the line "As you can see, we've just got back from six weeks in a casino in Las Vegas. You can't expect slick." Perish the thought—give me soul any day.

Lawson has added some beautiful harp synth to Strings In The Earth And Air, which is a thing of beauty. The show ended with You Know What You Could Be, and the last of the Dubliners' fans left, missing the delightful twin fiddles of Robin and Brian McNeill on Empty Pocket Blues. Echoes of the Hot Club de Paris mixed with Log Cabin mixed with the Carter Family and Brian McNeill's grin of childlike delight were a joy to behold. How do I get to Bergen was my thought as the band left the stage...

To paraphrase (plagiarise) Karl Dallas' review of the Dead, the January night doesn't seem so harsh, the city doesn't seem so lonely, after two hours plugged into the ISB's life support machine.



Who was that Scotsman I saw you with last night...? Brian McNeill cosies up to Bina for a chorus of Empty Pocket Blues

photo by Jean Hussain

Call writ down

String snippets from the world of print

HARK THE HERALD

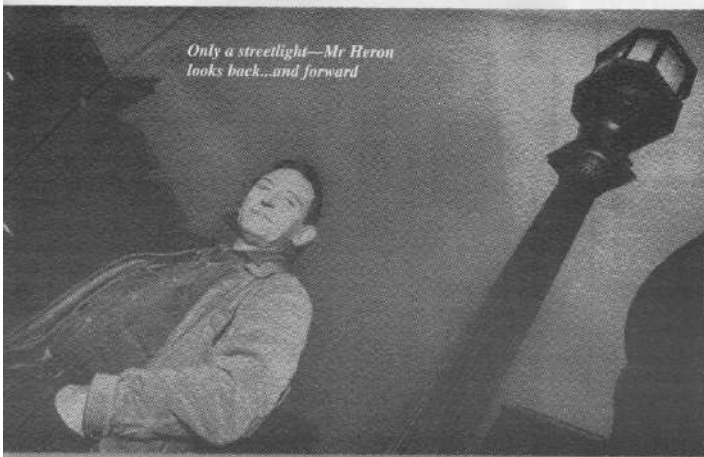
IN THE RUN-UP to the ISB's Celtic Connections concert in Glasgow last January, Scotland's *Sunday Herald* newspaper ran a piece on the band by reporter David Keenan, which incorporated an interview with Mike. Worth reprinting in full, we thought...

"The seven albums that The Incredible String Band cut for Elektra between 1966 and 1970 still stand as some of the most unimpeachably out-there sides ever funded by a major label. Based around the duo of Mike Heron and Robin Williamson, the band's back catalogue spans good-time jugband reeling, sad folk laments cut up with boisterous shout-a-longs and extended communal droning, all shot through with an almost palpable taste of acid.

"It wasn't that psychedelic," Mike Heron protests, conveniently overlooking a mountain of evidence that includes the kaleidoscopic eye-popping cover of their second album *The 5000 Spirits*—a freak flag classic—and the fact that his A Very Cellular Song was once covered by Neil from *The Young Ones*. "Well, perhaps psychedelic drugs blurred the edges of it," he concedes. Yet there's so much more to the music of The Incredible String Band than a warped looking glass reflecting the technicolour excess of the 1960s. In Heron and Williamson they boasted two of the most idiosyncratic and sweetly optimistic singer-songwriters of any decade.

"Their roots go back to the folk boom of the mid-1960s when venues such as Edinburgh's Crown Bar and Glasgow's Incredible Folk Club rang out with the newly invigorated folk forms, and musicians such as Bert Jansch and Anne Briggs sang the lives of a forgotten underclass. Two of the key musicians on the circuit, Clive Palmer and Robin Williamson (at that point imaginatively dubbing themselves Robin and Clive) were casting about for a guitarist.

"I was a real fan of theirs," Heron explains. "I used to go to the Crown Bar to watch them play and they decided they'd do better as a trio so they got me in. They were multi-instrumentalists and they needed me to just strum along. At that time the folk scene was pretty crazy—they ran The Incredible Folk Club from a venue above a shoe shop in Sauchiehall Street and it was open all night. There were no other clubs open all night at that time so it just became absolutely wild—you'd attract all sorts of characters, from thugs with swords down their trousers to people that just wanted to be somewhere in the middle of the night. Billy Connolly has some great anecdotes about that place."



Only a streetlight—Mr Heron looks back...and forward

"The band were still playing fairly traditional folk material when legendary producer and A&R man Joe Boyd (also responsible for the likes of Fairport Convention and Nick Drake) travelled up to Glasgow to catch them live. He already knew their folk repertoire inside out and was keen for the band to develop their own voice.

"He really wanted original writing and not just cover versions," Heron remembers. "I'd been in rock bands before then and I had a pile of songs I'd written, and so did Robin, so the emphasis was very much on song-writing and that's where I came to the fore 'cause I never was much of a multi-instrumentalist. Although, as it turns out, the first album was still fairly traditional sounding."

The band cut their first self-titled album for Elektra in 1966 and promptly split, with Palmer heading for India and Williamson to Morocco. "Robin was intending to stay in Morocco permanently," Heron recalls. "He'd rented his flat and was intending to live on the money but they passed some law that wouldn't allow the money out of the country so he had to come back. While he was out there he'd been learning to play the Oud and had really immersed himself in the atmosphere. Back then Morocco was amazing—a totally medieval atmosphere and he came back with a series of songs that were the basis for the first record we made as a duo, *The 5000 Spirits*, and I think of that album as more influenced by Morocco and pot than psychedelia. Back home I was involved in the fringes of the British psychedelic scene so we got lumped in with that whole Carnaby Street thing, but we were really more beatnik. Robin and Clive had been living a beatnik life in Edinburgh well before acid came along."

"Any links they might have had with their psychedelic peers—or even consensus reality—were effectively severed by the time of their next full-length outing—1968's flawless *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*. From the timeless never-never land of the cover shot—the duo crouched among a raggle-taggle collection of gypsy children, lost somewhere in the woods—through the sparse, dislocated beauty of tracks such as *Waltz Of The New Moon* and *Kocoeoaddi There*, this was a record of such profoundly affecting melancholy and idiosyncratic charm that it could have been recorded at almost any time during the last century.

"By that time we had a pretty good idea of what we wanted to do," Heron states. "Something like world music really but incorporating it into songs with some kind of meaning. The thing that helped us was in those psychedelic days you could get away with anything. You'd go to the UFO Club in London's Tottenham Court Road and see a bill with Third Ear Band playing ritualistic early music then The Move—total pop—then Ravi Shankar. We just did what we wanted to do and it so happened it was acceptable at the time. Nowadays it might be a bit harder. I think things are a lot less open-minded now."

"In one of the more bizarre twists in a truly singular career, August 1968 saw The Incredible String Band in upstate New York as part of the Woodstock festival. 'The weather at Woodstock was so bad,' Heron recalls. 'We were meant to play on the Friday when people like Melanie were playing but it was pouring and the equipment was really wet so we said—bugger this. We thought we would die if we played. We played on the Saturday and it was a disaster—we went down so badly. It really did feel significant, though. Such a gathering—people genuinely thought that after this there

would be no more money systems, that it'd all be barter.

"But I do think it did change some things long term—the modern women's movement came out of the counter-culture, for one. Also the thing we tend to forget was that the draft was in place for American kids, they were expected to go and die for their country in Vietnam so for them Woodstock was a whole different thing—they were burning their draft cards there. For British people it was just a concert."

"As the 1970s dawned and the gross power of the record industry gradually reasserted itself, it became obvious that there was little room for the Incredible String Band's quirky world view. They recorded *Changing Horses*, a record that documented both their conversion to Scientology (long since abandoned) and electricity.

"I think we were being pushed towards that new electric sound," Heron admits. "You could see the end of the band coming—we were second on the bill to Three Dog Night and they had their drums set up on a huge scaffolding. It was the beginning of stadium rock and we just couldn't survive that. By that time we had a drummer and a bass player and they wanted stuff written for them and the stuff Robin writes is hard to accompany. So he left in 1974, right after the Three Dog Night gig."

"Fast forward to Hogmanay 2000 and St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh is the scene of an emotional reunion for all three original members (even the mythic Clive) and a host of their musical friends, including Bert Jansch and Billy Connolly. "It was certainly fun to be back," Heron nods, "but we knew it wasn't going to satisfy the fans. That night we mostly just did old folk and jugband stuff like we did when we first started and I didn't really enjoy that music so much. This time round it's going to be more like a greatest hits package, playing stuff from the first five albums but with an extra element in having Clive back. It's so nice because he would probably have sung the songs if he had still been in the band. Who would have thought we'd be playing concerts in 2001?" he bursts. "Pretty good isn't it?"

We agree, Mike, we agree!

FORGET THE FACTS—WE WANT THE TRUTH!

POST-MODERNIST MUSIC MAG *The Wire* ran a feature on the ISB in its August 2000 issue. The writer, one Ed Baxter, despite his novelist-*manqué* prose style, and despite raising factual inaccuracy to the status of an art form, unpicked our heroes' career with considerable insight. His portentous style goes straight into fourth gear in the opening paragraph (we counted six factual errors in this short passage):

"The snapshot, taken in 1968, shows them wild and unwashed, gathered under the branches of some trees, and they seem to form a family. Mike Heron is holding a blue and orange mask, the ears of which protrude like his own. Robin Williamson holds a red pencil. Christina 'Liquorice' McKenna's face is half hidden by her hair. The children's faces are staring into time: some of them are grown now, some are most likely dead. Trees, kids, the hangers on, the skinny looking dog: all part of the same weird tribe. The watch on one girl's wrist shows a little after three. It looks like rain. She looks at the camera, concentrates, aware of the figures behind her holding still, and can hear in the distance the sound of footsteps on wet leaves."

We at *beGLAD* reckon the watch says a quarter past twelve: as the photo was taken on Christmas Day (1967, actually), it would have been getting dark at Baltimore by three o'clock. Elsewhere in the piece, Baxter mentions a late photo of Likky, taken shortly before her Stateside disappearance: "Someone claims to have a picture, like a Mexican photo of Jesus taken at the One True Cross. She's leaning against a barn door that swings heavily in the wind, but her face is still hidden by her hair and the shadows, no way she'll be lured back into the daylight." Does anyone know anything about this photo? Has anyone seen it? Answers to the editorial address, please.

The ISB turned up again in *The Wire* in the December issue, as part of a "Primer" on Folk Music. The prose has a steely Marxist/Structuralist stiffness to it, but makes some telling points about the folk revival and about the String Band's relationship to

their "sources". Discussing *Hangman's*, the writer observes: "But though original in terms of concept and execution, traces [remain] of their roots... The guest appearance of Dolly Collins on harpsichord [sic] obscures the pattern of influence, and... suggests that the transformation of shared material, that originality resides in interpretation—a key motif in discussions of folk and World musics.

"Part bricolage, part borrowing, part theft, such a methodology side-steps ethical considerations and often speaks of a naivety which unconsciously expresses a lack of regard for the work of others, even as it defines a shared background, a tradition. The fate of folk music across the world has been to be dismantled, if not entirely destroyed, ironically often at the hands of enthusiasts and by those eager to preserve it. It's necessary, then, to state that what the Incredible String Band configures is a new kind of music. The digressive pattern of reinterpretation which we might imagine warping and refining folk song over the centuries is greatly accelerated, so that the individual songs shift rapidly through various (even contradictory) modes, their ends by no means being predicted by their beginnings.

"It is characteristic of the ISB at their best that their songs move not through repetition or logical progression, but through ruminative reiteration and unexpected developments that one is tempted to link to notions of stream of consciousness. Certainly, for all its faux naïf charm and amateurish gloss, this is highly sophisticated music, which nods as much to Dylan Thomas and Flann O'Brien as Robbie Burns or Jeannie Robertson. The ne plus ultra of this method is exemplified by Ducks On A Pond, which over a very few minutes drifts from nursery rhyme to Bukka White without any sense of melodic dissonance, while Williamson's outlandish vocal exertions provide the gestural template for singers as diverse as Robert Plant, Mark E. Smith and Euros Childs."

Ruminative reiteration, eh? Unfortunately, the *Wire* hack blots his copybook slightly by suggesting that Robin owed much of his vocal style to Anne Briggs (only someone with a tin ear for stylistic nuance would make such a remark), and hinting strongly that the tune for Waltz Of The New Moon had been half-inched from Briggs' Living By The Water. We think not... But let it pass: a gold star for divining the wellsprings of the String Band's originality.

epiphanies

Ed Baxter observes the mooring and warning of Scottish psychedelia follows *The Incredible String Band*

The first time I saw the ISB was in 1968, when they were performing at the Edinburgh Festival. I was sitting in the audience, and I remember seeing them for the first time. They were playing a song called 'Liquorice' and I remember seeing Christina McKenna's face half hidden by her hair. I remember seeing Mike Heron holding a blue and orange mask. I remember seeing Robin Williamson holding a red pencil. I remember seeing the children's faces staring into time. I remember seeing the watch on one girl's wrist showing a little after three. I remember seeing it look like rain. I remember seeing the figures behind her holding still, and hearing in the distance the sound of footsteps on wet leaves.

The second time I saw the ISB was in 1967, when they were performing at the Edinburgh Festival. I was sitting in the audience, and I remember seeing them for the first time. They were playing a song called 'Liquorice' and I remember seeing Christina McKenna's face half hidden by her hair. I remember seeing Mike Heron holding a blue and orange mask. I remember seeing Robin Williamson holding a red pencil. I remember seeing the children's faces staring into time. I remember seeing the watch on one girl's wrist showing a little after three. I remember seeing it look like rain. I remember seeing the figures behind her holding still, and hearing in the distance the sound of footsteps on wet leaves.

The third time I saw the ISB was in 1966, when they were performing at the Edinburgh Festival. I was sitting in the audience, and I remember seeing them for the first time. They were playing a song called 'Liquorice' and I remember seeing Christina McKenna's face half hidden by her hair. I remember seeing Mike Heron holding a blue and orange mask. I remember seeing Robin Williamson holding a red pencil. I remember seeing the children's faces staring into time. I remember seeing the watch on one girl's wrist showing a little after three. I remember seeing it look like rain. I remember seeing the figures behind her holding still, and hearing in the distance the sound of footsteps on wet leaves.



Ed Baxter

LET US PRAY

IT'S WELL-KNOWN IN STRING CIRCLES that Mike sourced his *Smiling Men With Bad Reputations* title to Timothy's Leary's *Psychedelic Prayers*. But who among you are familiar enough with that esoteric tome to identify the reference? Steve Hanrahan of Portland, Oregon to the rescue. As Steve points out, the Smiling Men appear in *Psychedelic Prayers VI—17* (based on *Tao Te Ching* chapter 19)

Walk Carefully When You Are Among...

"Holy men" and
"Righteous deeds"
Distract from the internal

"Learned men"
Distract from natural wisdom
"Professiobnal know-how"
Addicts people to the contrived and external

Be respectful and compassionate
But walk carefully when you are among

learned men
holy men
doctors
government officials
reporters
publishers
professors
religious leaders
psychologists
rich people
social scientists
women with beautiful faces
artists and writers
people who charge fees
city men
movie makers
people who want to help you
people who want you to help them
Christians and Jews

For such as these, however well meaning,
Place you on their chessboard
Addict you to their externals
Distract you from
The Tao within

The lesson of the Tao is more likely
to be found among
gardeners
hermits
eccentrics
people who build their own homes
children
parents who learn from their children
amateur musicians
serene psychotics
animals
those who look at sunsets
those who walk in the woods
beautiful women
cooks
people who sit by the fire
wanderers
bakers of bread
couples who have been in love for years
smiling men with bad reputations

And while we're on the subject, *Psychedelic Prayers* is also the likely source of Robin's line "Gate of the soft mystery" in *Three Is A Green Crown...*

Psychedelic Prayers III—11 (based on *Tao Te Ching* chapter 6)

Gate of the Soft Mystery

Valley of Life
Gate of the Soft Mystery
Beginings in the lowest place
Gate of the Soft Mystery
Gate of the Dark Woman
Gate of the Soft Mystery
Seed of all living
Gate of the Soft Mystery
Constantly enduring
Gate of the Soft Mystery
Enter
Gently...

After you, Claude...

THE VISION THING

IF YOU'RE IN THE HABIT OF BROWSING through the Popular Music section of your local Waterstone's or Borders, check out an intriguing tome entitled *Urban Spacemen And Wayfaring Strangers: Overlooked Innovators And Eccentric Visionaries Of '60s Rock*. Author Richie Unterberger turns the critical spotlight on a splendidly rag-tag collection of whackos and misfits ranging from The Fugs to The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown. Sounds like the sort of book in which the ISB would find a welcome, but they're conspicuous by their absence. Maybe they weren't sufficiently overlooked... Unterberger, in any case, is not a String Band fan, to judge by his writings elsewhere.

He does, however, devote a substantial essay to Kaleidoscope, who were the ISB's American doppelganger in their intemperate enthusiasm for pan-global influences and ethnic instruments. (Their third album was even called *The Incredible Kaleidoscope!*) We're planning a feature on the band in an upcoming *beGLAD*; they're definitely someone you should know about.

Unterberger's piece on raggy-arsed poetic terrorists The Fugs is worthy of your interest, too. As we mentioned in our piece on the Holy Modal Rounders in issue 15, founder-Rounders Peter Stampfel and Steve Weber were Fugs personnel at the time of the band's debut album in 1965, but left shortly after the album's release. Unterberger quotes Fugs head-honcho Ed Sanders on the subject of Stampfel's and Weber's departure: "[If Stampfel and Weber had stayed] I think we might have evolved into more of what our original intention was: more of a string-and-fiddle-based Incredible String Band-type group." The vacancy for an "ISB-type group" was of course filled the following year by Mike, Robin and Clive.



The "Incredible"
Kaleidoscope—
(top row) David
Lindley, John Vidican,
Chester Crill
(bottom row) Solomon
Feldthouse, Chris
Darrow

WE ALL HAVE OUR GUILTY PLEASURES, do we not? One of mine (the others we'll save for another time, I think) is word games. Puns, acronyms, palindromes, acrostics: anyone who spends a portion of their time exploring the uses of language will inevitably be drawn to such diversions. But the brain plays word games even when we're not aware of it. Take the case of "mondegreens".

A mondegreen usually arises when a listener mishears a part of a song lyric (or, less frequently, a passage of spoken verse or prose), and substitutes in their mind a comically surreal or incongruous phrase for the original trope. This is such a common phenomenon in modern popular music, where clarity of enunciation is rarely regarded as a virtue, that there exists a website dedicated to the accumulation of the more memorable examples. The address is www.kissthisguy.com after the *locus classicus* of the form: for who has not heard Jimi Hendrix's

"laughing at their whim", if daffodils can be said to entertain a collective whim; "and my pearls are clay" in Gently Tender becomes "...my pearls are clear", which makes sense of a sort without raising the ghost of a chortle. In Blues For The Muse, he renders "It's just my face you see here talking" as "...my fear you see here...", and acts as an unconscious bowdleriser when he alters the mildly raunchy "She's a noted rider" to the thoroughly prissy "...noted writer".

WE SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD on Mr Traum for this; given the often opaque utterances to be found in Williamson songs in particular, he made a pretty good stab at it on the whole. And "Perithian" is sufficiently evocative, I contend, to be classed as a "Happy accident" (sic). For String mondegreens of sublime and even transcendental silliness, the place to visit is another songbook, produced in the mid '70s somewhere in Europe (The Netherlands, we

"Thanks to the grey sheep..."

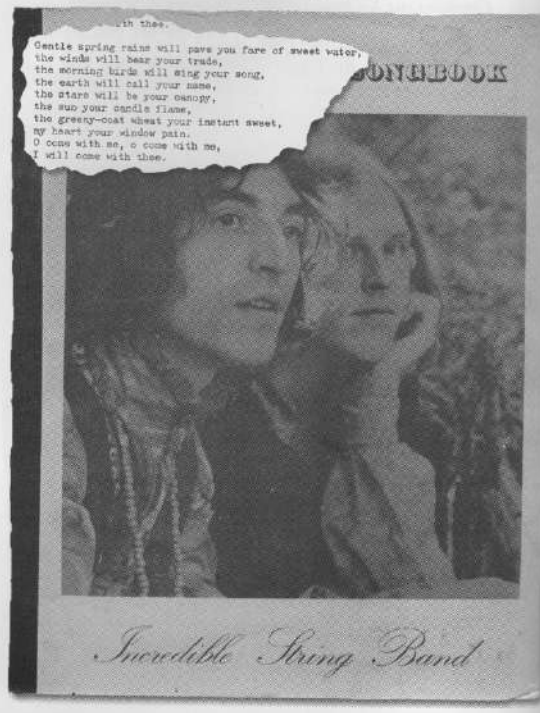
Raymond Greenoaken goes hunting for Mondegreens

Purple Haze and interpreted the line "Scuse me while I kiss the sky," as a frank declaration of homoerotic intent? Similarly, there are those amongst us who are convinced that Paul McCartney and Wings had a monster single smash in 1977 with *Mulligan's Tyres*; and that '90s popsters Pulp were singing not "We won't use guns, we won't use bombs" but the more aptly hedonistic, "We want cheese buns, we want cheese scones". Phew! Rock'n'roll, eh? Similarly, when Bob Dylan's adenoidal Minnesota drawl reached English ears, is it surprising that his most famous refrain came out as, "The ants are my friends, they're blowing in the wind"?

But why "mondegreen", you reasonably ask. Well, this sort of thing happens in trad folk circles too. In the Jacobite ballad *The Bonnie Earl Of Moray* there occur the lines "They have slain the Earl Of Moray/And laid him on the green". Generations of listeners have instinctively heard that second line as "And Lady Mondegreen", even though the unfortunate Lady M is otherwise unmentioned by the balladeer. Given that traditional songs were by definition transmitted orally, it was inevitable that mishearings would affect the texts over time. Usually such changes would be focused on short phrases, especially where personal or place names were present. Hence Earl William becomes Erwillian in *The Royal Forester*, and "By Norham" is reinvented as "Binnorie" in the ballad of that name. Occasionally, however, whole lines would be transmuted into something rich and strange. The opening line of an old folk carol, "Christ gave us ransom, died for you," takes on a mysterious poetry when it re-emerges as "Christ made a trance on Friday view".

All very interesting, but what has this to do with the Incredible String Band? It's no coincidence that, on ISB albums that came unaccompanied by a lyric sheet, mondegreens are as plentiful as swallows in summer. Several have been enshrined in the first ISB songbook. For example, transcriber Happy Traum was clearly working without a crib of the lyrics to *The Mad Hatter's Song* when he came up with, "O Perithian fate be kind..." There must have been many of us String devotees who immediately wanted to know more about the mythical state of Perithia, its history and customs. But we looked in vain to our classical reference books: what Robin actually sung (I'd guess) was "O Prithee and fate be kind..." Other than that, however, none of Happy's howlers achieve the surreal extravagance essential to the true mondegreen: "laughing at the wind" in *Painting Box* becomes

(think) and comprising the collected ISB lyrics from the first album through to *Hard Rope And Silken Twine*. It's clear from the outset that: (1) the compilers referred for the first album and *5000 Spirits* to Happy T's transcriptions; (2) they did not have access to the *U* lyric sheet; and (3) English was not their first language. As with "Christ made a trance...", which comes from the Traveller tradition, it seems to help a lot to have a non-English linguistic background when confecting mondegreens out of English-language lyrics.



Where the compilers were following a published text, their transcriptions are exemplary. Where no lyric sheet was available, however, their linguistic skills had to meet a sterner challenge. The results, while occasionally fairly remote from Robin's and Mike's intentions, have a delicious, almost Beefheartian poetry of their own. Here follow the more entertaining examples, arranged chronologically. For newer String devotees, I've included the Williamson and Heron original text for comparison.

Big Ted

Ted may be a moo cow
Ted may be a mooncow

The sows are busy with their piglets fine
The sows are busy with their piglets pie

Dust Be Diamonds

When I lay claim to nothing
When I lay claim to love-land

So look in the index, see my secret crime
So look in the index, see my secret poem

Mr & Mrs

Once-bitten apples of jealous dispassion
Twice-eaten hopes with the crust and the crumb
*Once it turned apples of jealous dispassion
Twice we turned home with the crust and the crumb*

...Of sugar-gilt nothing
...Shark that hills nothing

The Letter

Thought that the letter might be for Rose
Thought of a letter before I rose

The pilot was your Orpheus
The pilot was your courier

Pictures In A Mirror

His heart like a cat drowns in a well
His heart like a cat stoves in a wall

Blue lightning spikes the hills
Delighting spikes the hills

Two fingers thick, each link of coiled ore
Too big the pegs which linked the coiled door
(A frequent problem in medieval architecture...)

The bleeding image of her loss
The bleeding it is of her last

The priest intones
the priest stepped hones

The pain is boiling cold
The pain is boiling, ooh!

Foresters burn branches
Fire-stones burned brushes

When You Find Out Who You Are

It's awful strange in furious times when men did seek to stray
Along the road of discontent to gods of gold and clay
Some did seek security among the seas of change
Some did seek dear life to wound, a furious time and strange
*It's awful strange at furious times when men did speed too great
Along the road of this continent to gods of gold and play
Some did seek security among the seas of change
Some did see their life to wound, a furious time and strain*

Each moment born for you innocently
Each moment boils for you, innocent me

Further obscures the ancient trail
Brother explores the ancient trail

Tat vam asi
You are my zeal

How many shining hearts with love have guided me
How many shining hearts with love have died at ease
(Swooningly Keatsian, that one...)

It's better now to ask a friend what makes his world so grey
It's better now to ask a friend what makes his world a grave
(Arguably an improvement on the original...)

Bad Sadie Lee

I'm wanted in Texas and Tennessee
A warrant in Texas, San Antana say

I can shot better than Annie Oakley
I can shoot better than any old day

I fired a shot at a buzzard on a limb
Killed him stone dead but it went through him
And shot a buffalo down in Mexico
Shot a blasted Jim Crow in a bar I never had been
*I fired a shot at a buzzard on the land
Killed him stone dead by the winter wind
And shot a buffalo down in Mexico
I shot a passenger crow in a bar I never had a beer*

He left me for a ginger-haired ornery raccoon
He left me for a ginger-haired ordinary raccoon
(Certainly more poignant...)

Queen Of Love

The men at arms do seek to mark me and the monks raise hue and cry
The men at arms deceive to mark me and the monks raise human cry

Perfectingness or flaws
Perfectingness or applause

Fangs to the grey sheep
Thanks to the grey sheep
(cf fangs for the memory...)

I will play dreamweaver
I will play dream-weeper

Hirem Pawnitoff

(The numerous historical references and place names in this song are guaranteed to fox any foreign auditor...)
In Bread Street he did dwell
In Fren's Heath he did dwell

From Leeds to Carter Bar
From Leed to Catabar

Throughout the land his motley band in many a song did star
But with Biceps dead and Pretty Boy fled and Boot Hill claimed Bill Scar
*Throughout the land his motley band and many a songed star
There by such stand as pretty boy clan whooptail claim with a scar*
(There seems to be the beginnings of an entirely new language in that second line.)

The last good swag to pad his bag was forty years ago
He last did swag a pennies bag was forty years ago
(On the U lyric sheet, this line appears as "...to pad his lag...")

Weedy and few, his motley crew
We that are few, his motley crew

There you are, look you boy bach
There you are, look your way back

The strangers waved the band goodbye
The strangers wait abandoned by

His troop were drooping, wearily stooping, men of no fixed abode
His troop were trooping wearily, stooping men I will fix the mug!

Invocation

I make yield league to you
I make huge leave to you

You that move the heart in fur and scale
You that move the heart in fervent scale

With your green blood, my red blood let it be mingled
With your green blood, my red blood let it be wrinkled

I make reverence to you, round wakefulness we call the earth
And the fowl still you round with the rest, go calm the earth

Puppet Song

Bound to make some havoc with that violin smile
Bound to make some havoc with that violent smile

Cutting The Strings

I dug the footfalls in my path
I dug the footfolds in my pipe

Come With Me

The shouting mountains (O speak answer)
The shouting mountains must be conserved
(Environmentally sound if linguistically flaky...)

The secret land that love does see
The secret land that loves the sea
(A notable improvement on the original!)

The gentle spring rains will lave your face (o sweet water)
The gentle spring rains will pave your fare of sweet water

The winds will bear your train
The winds will bear your trade
(Just as good...)

The green mossed peat your incense sweet
The greeny-coat wheat your instant sweet

All Writ Down

I cursed you to your face when you turned to go
I cursed you to your face when you turned to gold

And I bow to you low
And I bow to your cow
(A traditional Dutch custom, no doubt...)

Waiting For You

The breeze is blowing and my hair is growing
Forgotten everything my mother knew
The breeze is blowing and my hair is growing
For God and everything my mother knew

I'm a ??? farmer
I'm a quagga farmer
(I always used to think this was "I'm a co-op farmer", but "quagga" may be a better bet. Any other suggestions?)

First time in captivity, folks!
First time in captivity poops!

That well-known bricklayer's labourer from Pilton, Mr Jack McMarker
That well-known bricklayer's labourer, palpating Mr Jack McMarker

And perhaps we just have time to devastate your syaesthesia
with one more searing chorus from Black Jack Davy
on the steam organ
*And perhaps we just have time to demonstrate your synthesiser
with one more cheering chorus from Black Jack Davy
on the seamorgan*

MORE THAN A FEW OF THOSE EXAMPLES could take their place alongside "The ants are my friends...". I think you'll agree. In the interests of balance, however, it must be said that our compilers did a pretty good job with several phrases that have proved impenetrable to even the most dedicated students of String. I think they're quite correct about Mike's yokel-like interjection on Big Ted: "Oh scrub that tub" certainly sounds more plausible than my own initial interpretation, "Oh stroke that thing"... By the same token, I reckon they've correctly rendered the enigmatic twelfth line of Mr & Mrs as "Magistrate's customer and the griev'd air". I know I'm not alone in having heard that as "...and the three bears"! As has been remarked upon elsewhere (see *beGLAD 10*), the Vedic aphorism "Tatvam asi" in When You Find Out Who You Are has attracted a variety of valiant readings by listeners unaware that they're hearing Sanskrit. "Tide upon my sea", "Try to farm my sea", "Tighter pharmacy": ingenuity has usually outstripped good sense. Our compilers' version, "You are my zeal" is arguably the most intelligent stab at it of any I've come across.

Subscribers to the ISB chatsite (groups.yahoo.com/group/ISB) will be aware that a lengthy and passionate discussion raged last year over the line "Big Ted's solid gone". This was variously interpreted as "...sold and gone", "...soul is gone" and even "...soul ain't gone", with compelling reasons adduced for each variant. Eventually, the authority of the author himself had to be invoked (via Pig's Whisker's Mark Anstey) to settle the issue in favour of the "solid gone" reading.

Speaking of whom... A few years back, I attempted to transcribe the words of Robin's then-unreleased Ring Dance, working from a low-fi *Sounds Of The Seventies* radio bootleg, but was hopelessly stumped by the line that Robin nowadays sings as "They ride blindfold down the hill". As Mr W was due to appear locally around that time, I took a portable tape recorder along to the gig, and at the interval quizzed him about the mystery line. As anticipated, he couldn't recall it (he hadn't heard the song in 25 years), so I slipped the tape into the machine and handed him the earphones. He dutifully listened to it a couple of times. "That's a nice arrangement," he remarked with beguiling immodesty. Of the offending line, he furrowed his brows and announced with a chuckle, "It sounds like 'They ride their bisons down the hill'."—perhaps the first instance of a writer confecting a mondegreen from his own lyric! (By the time he came to record the song for the *Ring Dance* CD, he'd clearly remembered the original wording, or something close enough in sense for his own satisfaction.)

Of course, just because a song lyric is included on a lyrics sheet, that doesn't mean it's an accurate account of the writer's intentions. As we all know, ISB lyric sheets have often been unreliable. The *U* sheet in particular is frequently at variance with what is actually being sung. Lines are transposed, words mistranscribed (eg. "frozen snows" in Cutting The Strings instead of "fallen stones", and "buttercup's pale clear light" for "...bright soft touch" in Walking Along With You), and on one occasion a completely new verse is inserted—in Light In Time Of Darkness, where the verse "Formless bliss..." is expanded to two verses:

Oh timeless closeness springing
Between our paths in time
Oh crystal bell of truth ringing

Formless bliss comes flying
On wings of laughter free
Oh road of beauty crying

It seems likely that this represents an earlier version of the lyric, which Mike has obviously compressed at the time of recording. This may also be true of the "buttercup" line, and of "frozen snows", though the latter sounds to me more like a mishearing.



"And I bow to your cow..."

COMPETITION ALERT!

AND NOW, CONFESSION TIME. I have to admit responsibility for a few String-related mondegreens myself, though happily they didn't see the light of day. I was deputized by Pig's Whisker in 1998 to transcribe the lyrics of Robin's *Ring Dance* album for the CD booklet. Fortunately, my efforts passed before the eyes of Mr W before they were committed to print, and he was quick to amend "She drove men from the glens away/To Australia's modern farms" to "Sheep drove men... to Australia's mutton farms" (At Waverley Station); and "walking the streets of gospel" to "...Gospport" (Gaul For Sure). My version of the Waverley Station line "Chapel's lock, Whiskey's clock, mind of the government man" similarly exposed my ignorance of Edinburgh landmarks: try finding Charles Rock or Whitty's Clock among the purlieus of Auld Reekie! One mistranscription escaped the author's eye, however, and found its way into print: a modest String-type prize to the first person to spot it and confirm the sighting to *beGLAD*.

In fact, while we're in Competition mode, I'd like to ask *beGLAD*'s fervid readership for any ISB mondegreens they've been carrying around with them since they were first introduced to the recordings of the band. For my own part, I believed "sick sad morning" in First Girl I Loved to be "thick-set morning" until Happy Traum put me right. I'm sure you can do better than that. Deadline for entries is the 1st of November; the prize will be a copy of the second ISB songbook (*Smiling Men to No Ruinous Feud*: a mondegreen-free zone, unfortunately: Robin, Mike and Malcolm had obviously cleared the text before publication). The best entries will be published in issue 19. Points will be awarded for ingenious homophones (words that sound the same but are spelled differently), poetic turns of phrase and sheer stupidity.

It seemed to me as I was preparing this piece that the best mondegreens encapsulate a sort of oblique, paradoxical wisdom that makes them akin to Zen koans ("...the sound of one hand clapping" etc—you know the sort of thing). And at that point I noticed that my name can be anagrammatised as "Ray Mondegreen Koan", which brings us neatly round to my opening remarks about word games. Another anagram of my name is Any Kangaroo Merde, but we won't go into that now...

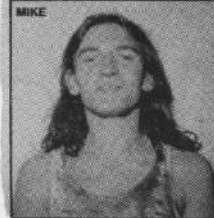
Thanks to Paul Bryant for his help in compiling the above. Paul has given me the addresses of two mondegreen websites: the *kissthinguy* site referred to earlier, and www.thechicagoloop.net/lyrics/ Of the former, he says: "This site kept me laughing out loud for a full hour. After that you just can't take it any more."

You have been warned.

How did we get in here?

Though teenyboppers of the Sixties and early Seventies proved largely resistant to the rugged charms of the ISB, the band nevertheless found themselves, on one memorable occasion, in the pages of the teen weekly *Jackie*. You don't believe us? Here's the proof...

String Along With The Incredibles...



THE Incredible String Band have an incredibly twisting tale to tell, but I'll try to unravel it for you.

They can't just their finger on a time and a place and a date, and say that that was where and when they started. At different times, the group has had three members, then two—and now four.

The four who comprise the band at the moment are Mike Heron and Robin Williamson, and their two former girlfriends, Rose Simpson and Liqueurice.

That's the name by which she is known; Liqueurice will admit only to that or "Licky".

But let's go back to the beginning (as all the best storytellers say)...

To the Crown Bar in Edinburgh, where Robin Williamson and Clive Palmer used to play gypsy-type music, with Scottish and Irish folk songs, to an audience of students that often used to include Mike Heron, who was then studying law and economics at Edinburgh University.

"It used to be a very un-intellectual sort of club," he says. "And as well as folk music, they played a lot of American blues. Even then Robin and Clive were professional musicians, and living a beatnik sort of existence."

"Then we all caught on to the 1930 string bands—bango music, and the jug bands which preceded it."

They decided to form their own string band playing that kind of music, with Clive on banjo and Robin on fiddle. I was asked to be the third member, and we all moved to Glasgow where we opened an all-night two-nights-a-week club in Southhall Street.

"A friend of ours was running a rock club downstairs, so we had a folk club upstairs, we called it Clive's Incredible Folk Club."

IMPRESSED

Like all aspiring musicians, they were anxious to record their own music—so they approached Joe Boyd, who was then with Elektra records. They sent him some tapes, and he flew up to Glasgow to see them. But that night everything went wrong.

"As I was walking along the street to the club, someone stopped me and told me the police had closed the club up," says Mike. "So I turned round and went straight back home."

"We didn't see Joe after all, that night, but we sent him some more tapes. Luckily, he was impressed that we were writing original material of our own that he liked, so he invited us down to London, signed us up, and we made our first LP."

No sooner was the LP out than the three of them decided to split.

Clive went off to Afghanistan, warning the others he was in no rush to come back. Robin went off to Morocco—where he stayed two months. Mike remained in Glasgow, working solo.

By this time, Robin had a girlfriend—Liqueurice. And Mike was going out with Rose Simpson. Are you still with me?

"When Robin came back, we got together again—just the two of us... and brought out two more LPs, did a series of concerts, and some TV. Rose and Liqueurice just trotted along for a while."

"They were with us all the time, and first they did some sessions with us."

TOUR

Now, although no longer their girlfriends, the four of them are working together consistently as the Incredible String Band. They completed a successful tour of America at the end of last year and next month undertake a string (ha, ha) of British University dates. Plus a tour of Scandinavia in March.

And they all live together in a small community in the Scottish Borders, an hour's drive from Edinburgh Airport.

They've rented eight cottages, and a village hall from the local laird, and there they live—each with their own cottage, and with artist and cancer friends sharing the other four.

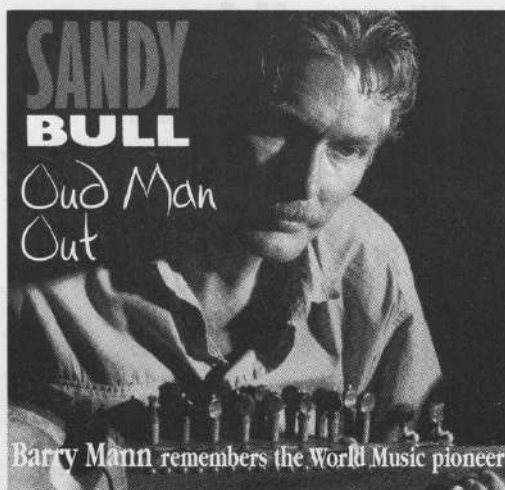
"We rehearse in the hall... practicing dance and mime as well as music," says Mike.

"Early last year we stayed there at the time working on our pantomime 'U'. There's usually about twelve of us up there at any one time—one of the guys from Slingsby Orange has a cottage there, too. There's two lakes and land around us... it's very peaceful."

"When we took over the cottages they were all in a bare undecorated state—they hadn't been lived in for twenty years, and we've each decorated our own cottage to our own taste. Each one has about four rooms, and the water's been connected."

"And we all help each other. If we're working in the hall, then one of us goes down there early and lights the fire—it's icy cold there in the winter."

"It's a very happy, natural, creative atmosphere—and a good one in which to work."



ON MONDAY, APRIL 16TH, I was sorry to hear about the death of Joey Ramone. Later that day, it turned into a double bumper when, after enjoying a piece called Gotta Be Juicy Or It Ain't Love from his *Demolition* LP on Vanguard, I learned that one of the most important people to introduce what we now know as "world music" into the folk realm, Sandy Bull, was gone from this mortal coil.

Sandy made me love Pop Staples' bluesy vibrato-drenched guitar playing. Roebuck "Pop" Staples went to his reward earlier this year, or the end of the year 2000. Sandy bought an oud sometime back somewhere in Europe or the Middle East during his travels. It was quite early in the '60s, I think before '64. He used it on records before the ISB did, I'm quite sure; certainly by '67 Robin Williamson, Sandy Bull and the American (Californian) band Kaleidoscope with David Lindley and Chris Darrow all played the oud. I believe Solomon Feldthouse also played it with Kaleidoscope; maybe they all did alternately.

In '74, I was 20 years old. I stayed at a place where I was supposed to "get it together", a self-help kind of program to help me get a job, an apartment and eventually perhaps a split level house, car, kids and all and become a "grown-up male stranger", but that was a little strange to me. Sandy was there to get off heroin, which he did. The first week, he suggested I ask for permission to go out for the day with him. We went to Central Park and listened to a veena player. The veena is a sitar-like musical instrument which Stringheads will be familiar with from Mike Heron's *Spirit Beautiful*, where it's played by two musicians from the London Asian community.

"This guy's out of tune; I can't stand out of tune music," Sandy said,

after we had listened to him for a while. Similar to Mike Heron's "pinching" the chorus melody for *White Bird* from an Indian tune, Sandy picked up a Pakistani tune from a juke box in a Pakistani restaurant! He must have carried it in his head until he finally played it. How par for the course for a man who could tell me the veena was out of tune!

He studied oud with the great Nubian oud master Hamza El Din and produced a 1964 Vanguard LP of Hamza El Din on which Sandy played bongoes and tar drum, and yes, Sandy was very ahead of the ISB. His 1964 Vanguard LP *Inventions* features oud on the Brazilian guitarist Luis Bonfa's *Manha De Carnival*. The great jazz drummer Billy Higgins played with him on *Blend II* on *Inventions* and *Blend* on *Fantasias For Guitar And Banjo*, Sandy's first LP for Vanguard. He incorporated the Pakistani tune learned from the jukebox in *Blend II*. Higgins later appeared on Sandy's 1989 CD, *Jukebox School Of Music*, on his own(?) Timeless label. In *Blend II* he mixes an Ali Akbar Khan melody, the folk song *Pretty Polly* and Ornette Coleman's *Lovely Woman* (so-called on the LP notes—I think it is actually called *Lonely Woman*). The Pakistani tune is in there too and at one point he plays *Wabash Cannonball* on the guitar.

Sandy helped me to appreciate country music. It was at a live concert I heard him call George Jones the greatest country singer alive! For me, there was always this dichotomy between the music I related to, ie the country rock of the Byrds, Grateful Dead, ISB doing Dolly Parton's *My Blue Tears*, *Flying Burrito Bros* and Dylan, and the earlier generation of country musicians whose music they clearly revered. Merle Haggard was a redneck honky; today he's cool and has a whole new audience of punk rockers and intellectual city folk. Many rock-related people including Sandy helped me love the music, but there was a dichotomy between my generation, including the people 10-15 years older who influenced us, and the shit-kicker country artists. Just like America was polarized between the anti-Vietnam people and the ones who were for the war. Haggard was covered by the Grateful Dead, yet he also proclaimed, "When yer running down my country, hoss [corruption of horse, a shit-kicker expression for guy or dude], yer walking on the fightin' side of me." Certainly not masters of war! How could I buy records by these people? I can see now that Sandy and all these people performed and/or recorded these "all American" artists' songs because they were deeper than the superficial jingoistic anthems they also wrote implied.

Well, I shed a few tears for Sandy Bull, and in a voice stained with sadness I said to myself, I hope yer jamming in heaven now with Pop Staples, Sandy.

I last saw him two years ago at an NYC club called the Cooler where Robin Williamson has played. He remembered me; he had with him his twentysomething-year-old daughter playing tamboura (an Indian drone instrument) with him. I don't know if he had been diagnosed yet, but he died of cancer. He was about sixty when he died, about a week before I'm writing this. It's a real shame.

REHEARSAL



This 1975 James Archibald documentary features the Scots Guards, the Royal Opera, a boys' choir—and the ISB rehearsing and performing *Ithkos*! There are ONLY A FEW copies left (on VHS video with box & sleeve). First come first served! If sold out, all cheques will be returned.

To order, send a cheque for £15 with your name and address to—

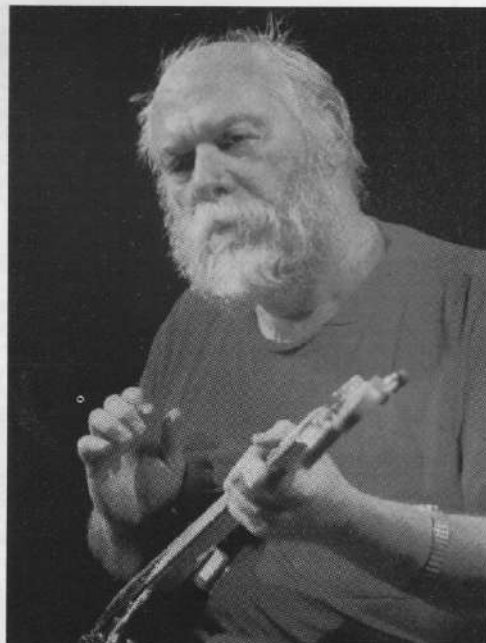
Adrian Whittaker, 71A Colvestone Crescent, Dalston, London E8 2LJ

This includes EEC postage costs—for other countries add on a pound, though note that the format probably won't be compatible.

Death Chants, Flang Dangs & Turtles

A SHORT APPRECIATION OF THE
DIFFICULT LIFE AND CURIOUS
PERSONALITY OF JOHN FAHEY
(1939-2001), GUITARIST

Paul Bryant



JOHAN FAHEY PLAYED STEEL STRING open-tuned syncopated acoustic guitar in a style he called "American Primitive" which he borrowed from the black and white players of the 1920s and 1930s and developed into something uniquely uplifting, rare, and strange. He did this for over forty years and over forty albums, beginning in 1959 with the legendary *Blind Joe Death*, "the most famous obscure record ever made", as it was called.

Fahey was the living embodiment of Nik Cohn's advice to aspiring artists: "Get obsessed and stay obsessed." The obsession was with the acoustic guitar, and what adventures could be had with it. He grew up in the mild pastures of Takoma Park, a suburb of Washington DC, first becoming interested in bluegrass and classical music, and then experiencing a kind of road-to-Damascus conversion to black gospel and blues on hearing Praise God I'm Satisfied by Blind Willie Johnson. That was the beginning. But the kind of guitar-playing Fahey had in mind was going to get him nowhere. He wasn't going to rock and roll, he wasn't going anywhere near Andres Segovia, didn't want to join a folk group either, and he wasn't a hot bluegrass stylist. "He wasn't doing any of those things people made a living at on that instrument in those days," said Dick Spottswood, baffled friend.

Using ignorance as a weapon, the 20-year-old Fahey borrowed \$300 and issued his first album himself, in 1959. A hundred copies were printed. He didn't know how he could get a real record company to take any interest in him, and he couldn't be bothered anyway, so he did it himself. (This was in the days when forming your own record company was "like making your own car", as E.D. Denson said later). The record was called *Blind Joe Death* and it became, as one reviewer put it, "the most famous obscure record ever issued".

Blind Joe Death wasn't just a remarkable precociously original statement of great power and grace, it was also a ridiculous in-joke. One side of the white label said "John Fahey" and the other bluesier side said "Blind Joe Death". Some early listeners fell for the hoax and assumed there really was an old bluesman called Blind Joe Death. Traces of this legend can still be detected lingering amongst the more senior folklorists of America.

Four years later, under one of his various pseudonyms, Fahey himself described the music on the record:

"From listening to these selections it is apparent that by April 1959 Fahey had absorbed direct influence from the works of Elizabeth

Cotton, Two Poor Boys, Sam McGee, Barbecue Bob, Charlie Patton, Sylvester Weaver and Walter Beasley, Mississippi John Hurt or Frank Hutchison, and the Carter Family; not to mention the Episcopal Hymnal. His amazing capacity for assimilation and synthesis thus became evident early in his recording career. It is all the more amazing for the obscurity of the work of those artists before the inception of the Origin Jazz Library. It is clear that John owes a debt to the Harry Smith Anthology". [The seminal *Anthology Of American Folk Music*, released by the Library Of Congress in four volumes in the Fifties and an important String source. We'll have a lingering look at it one day—Ed]

AH YES, THE MUSIC OF JOHN FAHEY—what was he actually playing? It's a dizzying blend of the dissonance of Bela Bartok and the syncopation of Mississippi John Hurt. He borrows, adapts, twists and bends melodic ideas, phrases and passages from black and white folk traditions, and from Western classical music (such as Sibelius and Saint-Saens) with an insouciant, reckless freedom. He buries tunes inside other tunes and hammers them into different shapes. He plays with tempo and tension. Not so much an original composer, he's more of an alchemist, and completes his transformations with intriguing or bizarre titles: *The Downfall Of The Adelphi Rolling Grist Mill*, *When The Catfish Is In Bloom*, *The Transcendental Waterfall*, *The Dance Of The Inhabitants Of The Palace Of King Philip XIV Of Spain*, *Orinda-Moraga*, *The Death Of The Clayton Peacock*...

It took three years for *Blind Joe Death* to sell out, and Fahey, by now a theology student, decided that he should record a follow-up. With a very straight face, he described it as follows:

"In 1963, John recorded his second LP, saddened that Death was not there to share in a triumph that was as much his as anyone's. The extent of that triumph may be seen in the fact that our Directors, without hesitation, issued (in part) the following statement in a June press conference: 'It is a measure not only of the tremendous gain in maturity, stature, and international reputation of Mr. Fahey, but of the vital and expanding folk market in this nation and across the seas, that we have, without precedent, decided to issue an initial pressing of 300 copies of *Death Chants, Breakdowns, & Military Waltzes*. The elaborate sleeve notes which accompanied Volume Two set the pattern

for the rest of the 1960s: they wove a bizarre mythology around the lives and characters of Fahey and his friends, and they mercilessly lampooned the earnest folklore of the day. Here he is having fun with a track from the next album, *The Dance Of Death And Other Plantation Favorites*:

"Give Me Corn Bread When I'm Hungry is a children's skip rope song from Afghanistan. Many Afghans moved to California following the merciless suppression of their nation by the evil red forces of Great Britain in the 19th century. Shortly after their arrival, they taught the miners in Plumas county how to ski and thus introduced the sport to this nation. John learned the song from a group of children whose parents were attending the National Afghan Liberation Day festivities. Believing the San Francisco Bay Bridge to be an entrapped goddess which will return them to their native land, the entire Afghan population solemnly gathers together on May 22 and, standing on the span, they pelt the shore with rotten eggs so that it may wish to release the bridge."

Fahey moved forward through the '60s on several fronts at once. He resented being pigeonholed with folk/blues artists ("I'm not a folk, I was never a folk, I come from the suburbs.") and living as he was in Berkeley, California, he disliked hippies, which was tough because they were the only people who listened to him. So he had aggressively short hair and wore suits throughout the '60s. Speaking in 1985, he said "There was only one good thing about the '60s—they were 20 years closer to the '30s than the '80s."

With fellow blueshounds Bill Barth and E D Denson, he rediscovered the spectral Skip James and the carthy Bukka White, both of whom had recorded in the '20s and '30s and were missing, presumed dead. (Skip James! a true legend! Pulling no punches Fahey later commented, "I hated him and he hated me.")

In his music Fahey continued to experiment with anything that came his way. He knew a flute player, so flute/guitar improvisations would appear occasionally; he made friends with Al Wilson (of Canned Heat fame) who owned a veena, so a gorgeous veena/guitar duet, *Sail Away Ladies*, appeared in 1966 (which wasn't Fahey's first excursion into Eastern music—that came in 1964 when he adapted Ravi Shankar's theme from *The Apu* trilogy and turned it into a mesmerising tune called *On The Banks Of The Owchita*). He also made a series of found-sound collages involving gamelan orchestras, Tibetan monks, singing bridges and the like, and issued them with titles like *A Raga Called Pat Parts 1-IV*. He was esoteric and he played snappy two-minute versions of *Bicycle Built For Two* as well. He was a serious man with a great sense of humour. The joy you can hear in his exuberant genre-bending experimentation can only be compared with the *Incredible String Band*.

His eccentricity was nowhere more evident than in live performances. In fact, he didn't play for a paying audience until 1964, perhaps conscious of the fact that he didn't sing. In the mid-'60s, if you played acoustic guitar, it was because you were a singer. Fahey did not sing. He also was never really convinced that playing to an audience was such a great thing either. He would regularly transgress the conventions of what performers were supposed to do, as, for instance, when he brought live turtles on to the stage, explaining that their habitat was being destroyed in California; or when he asked the audience on another occasion for a wife. Sometimes when it was time for the intermission he would stay on stage, smoke a cigarette and stare at the crowd. On another (bootlegged) evening he seemed to become depressed during the performance, and began a rambling monologue about how disgusting his own life was and that maybe he and the audience should commit group suicide (this was before Jonestown).

Oh yes—he had a thing about turtles. He just liked them... a lot...

THE RECORD LABEL FAHEY INVENTED for his first two albums became a real one when he issued new LPs by Skip James and Bukka White, and then a string of other less obvious artists, such as Charlie Nothing and his *Psychedelic Saxophone and One String Sam*. (Finally Takoma got lucky when Leo Kottke sent in a demo tape. That one was a hit.)

So the '70s lumbered on—more records, most of them brilliant, and some by John Fahey and his Orchestra (another experiment, this time with some Dixieland jazzmen). Takoma Records was sold to

Chrysalis. Fahey got a drink problem, then in the 1980s his health started to deteriorate. Fewer records, some not so good now, and bad live performances. By 1987 he could say "I'm making more money losing weight than I am playing guitar. My father-in-law pays me \$100 for every pound I lose." He was only half joking. Divorce followed, and at the end of the '80s Fahey hit the skids, and wound up living in cheap motels in Salem, Oregon, and, when the money really ran out, in men's hostels. When the Salvation Army hostel objected to some of his personal habits and threw him out he lived in his car. In a poor-taste reprise of the lives of his revered bluesmen, he pawned his guitar several times.

And then history repeated itself. As when he and his college kid pals discovered Skip James in a hospital, guitarless, ill and broke in 1963, so in 1994 Byron Coley, a young reporter from *Spin* magazine, tracked him down, and self-consciously re-discovered John Fahey. And it worked. The double-CD *Best Of* issued by Rhino, also in 1994, called *Return Of The Repressed*, and Coley's article in a national rock mag ("The Persecutions and Resurrections of Blind Joe Death") kick-started Fahey's career—suddenly a whole lot of people wanted to hear those dancing, mesmerising "stabilised improvisations", those sparkling fandangos and two-steps and flang dangs.

Fahey however had other ideas. Just as he got his audience back, he decided that ALL his old music was bogus. "Most of it was kind of cosmic sentimentalism," he growled, calling it "pretentious" and "dishonest". In quick succession he issued three CDs (*City Of Refuge*, *WombLife* and *The Epiphany Of Glenn Jones*) which were nothing like the previous 35 albums. Melody, syncopation and harmony were jettisoned, relics of a previous life. The reviews ranged from:

"...sounds like what you might get if you gave a six-year-old an acoustic guitar and a white noise generator—except there would be in the six-year-old's work a genuinely positive and creative exuberance that is conspicuous in its absence here."

to:

"The guitarist's warm, seemingly haphazard strumming is filmic in sound, like a silent movie whose characters' voices you have to imagine slipping in between and on top of his impassioned playing..."

If that wasn't enough for fans to take in, he announced that he was through with the acoustic guitar and at the age of 59 was going electric. Oh, and he formed another record label, called *Revenant*, which specialised in re-issuing "raw" music. Fahey was up and running, and it was like he had a premonition that his time wasn't long.

He died unexpectedly on February 22nd this year. People only tell you what they really thought of you when you're dead, and just as well, really. We have learned a whole lot about the irascible, cranky, curmudgeonly, warm, aloof, arrogant, truth-telling, myth-making, inclusive, obstinate, demanding, generous, garrulous, friendly, visionary and very peculiar old American primitive since 22nd February. But we knew the only important thing already. It's the first thirty seconds of *The Yellow Princess*, of course.





Fisherman have you gone crazy - mending your nets all day in the sun...



just when the sun was highest in the sky she came by and took you by the hand

into the shimmering ocean an underwater land

Saying: "I am Queen Juanita, come to my palace so grand..."



Fisherman, come..."



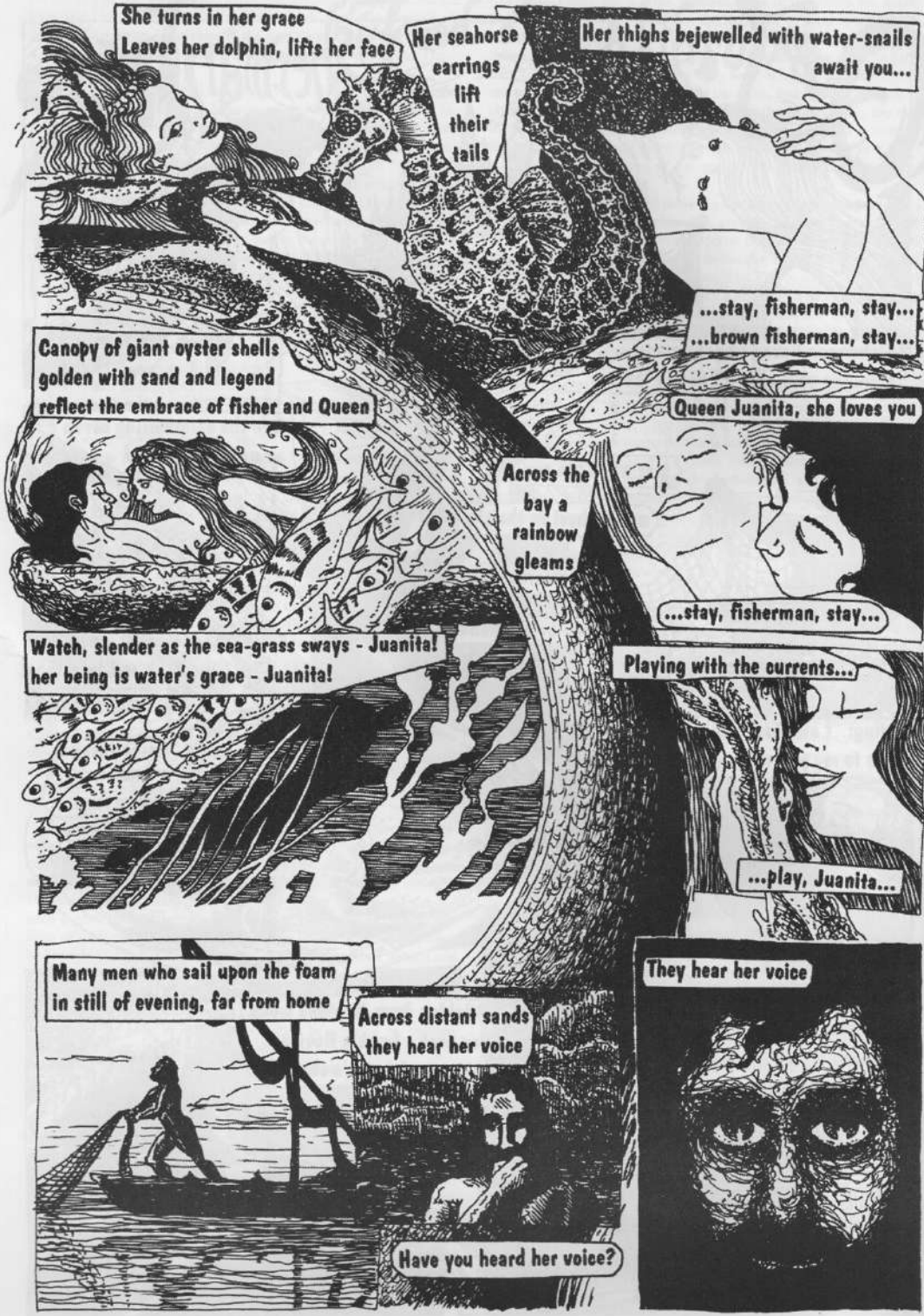
"Queen Juanita and her Fisherman lover..."



Lying in the cool green stillness the seaweed's lazy drift Among the glistening pearly shells the languorous seabed's shift



Drinking from Neptune's cup you sent a bubble floating to Queen Juanita's cheek...



She turns in her grace
Leaves her dolphin, lifts her face

Her seahorse
earrings
lift
their
tails

Her thighs bejewelled with water-snails
await you...

...stay, fisherman, stay...
...brown fisherman, stay...

Canopy of giant oyster shells
golden with sand and legend
reflect the embrace of fisher and Queen

Queen Juanita, she loves you

Across the
bay a
rainbow
gleams

...stay, fisherman, stay...

Watch, slender as the sea-grass sways - Juanita!
her being is water's grace - Juanita!

Playing with the currents...

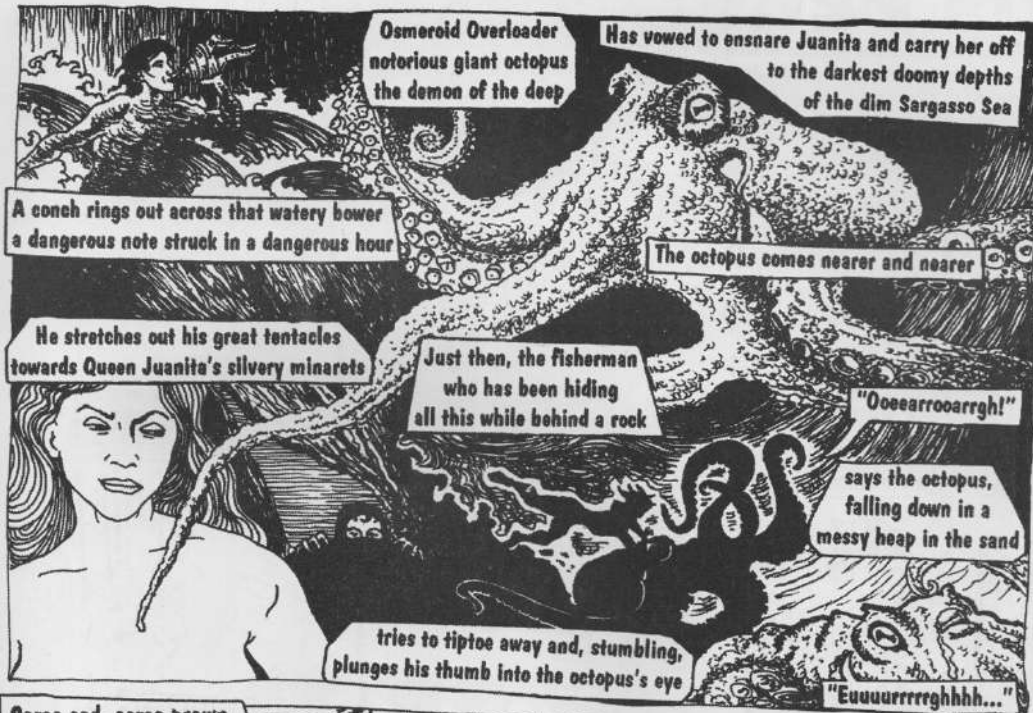
...play, Juanita...

Many men who sail upon the foam
in still of evening, far from home

Across distant sands
they hear her voice

They hear her voice

Have you heard her voice?



Osmeroid Overloader
notorious giant octopus
the demon of the deep

Has vowed to ensnare Juanita and carry her off
to the darkest doomy depths
of the dim Sargasso Sea

A conch rings out across that watery bower
a dangerous note struck in a dangerous hour

The octopus comes nearer and nearer

He stretches out his great tentacles
towards Queen Juanita's silvery minarets

Just then, the fisherman
who has been hiding
all this while behind a rock

"Ooeearroarrgh!"

says the octopus,
falling down in a
messy heap in the sand

tries to tiptoe away and, stumbling,
plunges his thumb into the octopus's eye

"Euuuuurrrrrghhhh..."

Come cod, come prawn
Come cockle, come skate

Come fat, come thin
Come early, come late

Come swim, come plunge
Come float and treading



It is the day of our great Queen's wedding



The guests are drinking
and the guests are eating



Extra! Extra!
Read all about it!
Queer goings-on
in underwater cave!

Fisherman mending your nets all day in the sun



How do you laugh so loud?

How do you laugh so long?

And the ocean will sing forever
of Queen Juanita and her fisherman lover



Queen Juanita and her fisherman lover

IN PERSON TONIGHT...

Concert programmes were produced for relatively few ISB tours and events. The earliest we know of is this programme from 1968. The format is unusual: long and thin; and much artful use is made of empty space. But there was still room for a couple of rarely seen photos of Mike and Robin taken at Penwern in the summer of that year, and a column of "News" assembled by Joe Boyd (see facing page). Thanks to Jean Hussain for the loan of her copy; she got it at Brighton Dome on 1 November '68.

IN CONCERT

THE
INCREDIBLE
STRING
BAND

PRODUCED BY ROY GUEST
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
WITCHSEASON
PRODUCTIONS LTD
A
PRESENTATION

The Dome, Brighton
FRIDAY, 1 NOVEMBER, 1968
at 8.00 p.m.
(Doors open 7.30 p.m.)

**THE
INCREDIBLE
STRING BAND**

ROW
B 68

STALLS CIRCLE 6/6

Tickets not available for exchange or refund
TO BE RETAINED BY TICKET HOLDER

AVAILABLE MID MARCH:
THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND THIRD LP:
'THE HANGMAN'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER'



EUK 228 MONO
 EUK1 7028 STEREO

POSTERS

OSIRIS

OSIRIS LTD
82 CHARLOTTE ST. W.1
W.1A 3AA



“ The Incredible String Band have completed shooting a film and are currently working on the sound track. It includes an archetypal fable by Robin set on a magic island as well as segments of them in concert at their Royal Festival Hall Concert last March. It is in 16mm colour and BBC1 has bought an option on it for Omnibus. They'll decide, when it is finished, whether or not to show it. The film is directed by Peter Neil (who made the Jimi Hendrix film which was recently shown at the NFT) and co-produced by John Marshall and myself.

The new record is a double LP, and should be available by the end of October. It is called "Wee Tam and The Big Huge" and includes 18 new songs (just under 90 minutes of playing time). It will be available both as a double LP in a fold-out jacket or as two separate records in individual sleeves for those who can't bring themselves to part with £3. 19. 10d. all at once. If you buy the double you get a broadsheet of Robin's poem "The Head" including an illustration by Robin. As to the content, let me say only that I have seldom enjoyed doing anything so much as producing this record.

In May we visited America, played some bad gigs, some mediocre ones, and a few very good ones, the best being a solo concert benefit for WBAI (The New York radio equivalent of IT, Black Dwarf, Oz and the Third Programme all rolled into one) at the Fillmore East to a standing-room-only crowd. The underground radio stations have played "Hangman's Beautiful Daughter" enough so it appeared for two months in Billboard's Top 200 LP charts (the lower regions) and we go back at the end of November for two New York concerts and one in Boston.

Robin now shares a farmhouse in South Wales with Rakis and Malcolm, two actor-dancer-mimes formerly with the Exploding Galaxy, who appeared with the ISB in New York and acted in the film. They may appear at some of the current concerts. The girls you see on stage are Robin's Licorice and Mike's Rose. Licorice sings on the new LP, and plays tambourine and harp. Rose plays fiddle and drums and sings on choruses. Mike and Rose now live in the countryside outside Edinburgh.”



LET'S GO



Steve Pilley takes a journey to the Otherworld, with the Bard as guide...

photos by Jenny Bolders

SET OUT WEDNESDAY AFTER WORK, driving a car for the first time since April, into dark and sporadic rain. And very slow traffic. I got to East Grinstead about quarter to eight. Hans' place is lovely, cottage-like, tasteful. He and Cesca made me very welcome, and he showed me his studio and lots of his work.

Next morning we set off when we were ready, and arrived at Westonbirt Arboretum about one. The rain almost miraculously held off while we explored for two and a half hours, much of it in mud—our decision to bring wellies proved wise, and not for the last time.

We left Westonbirt nicely freed-up, just as the night was coming down, and we got to Hazelwood House about half past seven, from the motorway to smaller and smaller roads until we arrived at the foot of a dark hill in the middle of blackness, with the welcoming lights of the House before us. We were first to arrive, and found the place pleasingly shambolic in many ways—the food, the anxiety to make sure everybody paid, guests not quite but almost being asked to do their own washing up!

But very nice, Victorian apparently. George arrived soon after. Janey the hostess told us she thought alcohol was banned during the workshop so we'd better have some now, before the official start. Brent breezed in an hour or two later; I saw him carrying instrument case after instrument case upstairs, and wondered if he was Robin's roadie. We soon learned that he wasn't: he'd brought his own instruments on the grounds that were sure to be a lot of talented musical people there and he hoped to pass around his guitar, banjo, mandolin, bodhran and small pipes. Brent's one of those annoying people who's good at everything (except climbing over fences), but he's also a terrifically nice guy. He put my mandolin playing in the shade, somewhat—his was louder, flashier; a dobro mandolin, engraved chrome, all shiny and loud—and he played it better, at least he did in the traditional style, which is not my strength.

Later, Karmanie arrived, a Scottish "healer" with some New Agey ideas, but a strong and confident voice and, it later proved, considerable talent for songwriting in the traditional style.

NEXT MORNING AFTER BREAKFAST Hans, Brent and I explored the area. We climbed a steep hill and found the earthworks of a 400BC fortress, with a smaller mediaeval same inside it. It blew wind and rain: I was glad of wellies and hood. We saw a tree so strangled with ivy we couldn't tell what it was; the ivy had a trunk of its own wrapped around the other. Hans proved very adept at climbing over fences: I was more in Brent's league.

Then sun started to come out. We made our way back downhill until we got back to the house. Then we followed a unique stone stairway down into the grounds of the house and a meadow tumbling down to a swollen river, with a ruined boat house. Brent had a mind to fetch his pipes down there after lunch, and I thought I'd bring down the mandolin too.

During lunch Alan turned up, another Scot, with a small harp! We never got back down by the river that afternoon. As it wore on we sat in the lounge and out came the instruments. We were playing as



people began to arrive. We had been carefully introducing ourselves to all newcomers to begin with, but we got lost in the music, and soon they were arriving thick and fast. I nodded to Mick Fitzgerald as he arrived, and he introduced us to Jean, from Leeds, from the mailing list [the JSB chatline on the web]. There was a little old man, Daniel, turned up, and a young lad maybe eighteen or twenty, he was Ollie from the list (and by Sunday I realised that Steve Campbell was there too, but he hadn't connected me with the name of Nothofagus [Steve P's email cognomen]). At a suitable moment, I gave my version of Rattle Taggle Gypsies, which went down very well ("And we thought you were introverted,"—Alan).

Robin, it turned out, was staying in a nearby village, not in the house, which was maybe a shame, but on the other hand maybe it made us less inhibited—especially as he would have to deny himself drink, and maybe didn't want to put temptation in his way. He breezed in around teatime and joined us for the evening meal before we started the first session in the classroom.

In this session, among many other remarkable matters, we learned about the realms of Abred (the material world), Annwn (the Otherworld) and Gwynnydd (the dwelling place of the Celtic gods), which sit in concentric circles around us.

A few stragglers had come to join us as the evening progressed, including France, a harper and storyteller in his own right. Jason informed me that France was at Robin's recent Canterbury gig [see *beGLAD 17*, also p 23 of this issue]; he made his acquaintance there.



The formal part of the evening finished with Robin playing us a harp tune. He called it A Pity That Youth Doesn't Last, but confessed that that was just a convenient name for it, as he didn't know its real title. Robin left, and most of us congregated in the lounge and made tunes with harp, mandolin, guitar and voice till past midnight.

ROBIN HAD ASKED US each to gather four stones, or pine cones, or something similar, before the morning session started, so I'm out in the early morning sun trying to get bits of tree. There was an attractive Monterey (I think) Cypress tantalisingly close, with its ping-pong-ball-sized spherical green-brown cones, but I could reach neither the ground to scavenge for fallers nor the branches to surreptitiously steal one, pre-empting its fall.

So I ended up with four stones. Hans had the bright idea of bringing cushions into the room, so I discarded my chair. The sun was streaming in through the picture windows that lined the east wall, and I was facing that way, gazing out over the tree-hidden meadow and river to the far side of the valley, coated with trees bare of leaf but with many-coloured twigs in the sun, blotched green with conifer plantations, and the blue cloud-raced sky.

Last evening had set the scene for the whole of Saturday, which after an introduction was arranged into four "sessions", each one containing an introduction from Robin around the legends of the Celts and their symbolism and significance.

After the last afternoon session we sat around in the lounge awaiting dinner. Ollie was playing on my mandolin when Robin came by and queried it, taking it for a small guitar, no, a twelve-string? Oh, it's a mandolin, and he had a play on it and we chatted for a while about it. Then Brent came by with his dobro and eclipsed me again, but Robin was very interested in the way I'd got it strung and the tone of it.

After dinner we all potted about, Robin went off after a while and the session intensified. I offered my poem about the Man Who Invented The Hat, which went down very well, but fortunately only a few of the company were present at the time. And I jammed along with the mandolin, drank half a bottle of wine, and later in the evening gave a raucous impromptu and probably gruelling-to-listen-to rendition of Cunia, a bawdy song I know from the Dubliners, the tune of which the others had been playing while France was hesitantly suggesting the words. That was fun. We got to play plenty of ISB numbers too—Log Cabin Home amongst others—and Tom and Diana suddenly produced fiddles. I limited myself quite properly to playing the mandolin during these.

Several of the gathered assembly did their party pieces too: there were some great skills and art amongst us. A video or even audio recording of the evening would have been a great memento—but I'm probably glad there wasn't one. I remember Karmanie singing about an adventure she'd had Friday morning with a local landowner. I remember Noel performing, but I can't remember what. I think it was Don

The Otherworld tour party

who started the ISB-singing. Jo and Jenny, I think, were both from Cornwall—Jo at least performed some Cornish material. Oh, and Paula the redhead had recently moved to Ireland, with the breathy voice.

That evening I remembered to do something I'd promised myself, and missed the previous night, if there was a clear sky, in all that blackness I must look at the stars. And they were spectacular. It's a long time since I saw a sky like that. I stood staring at it for quite a while, and it was mild, warm, and during the day the December sun had been Septemberish and hot.

NEXT MORNING AFTER BREAKFAST we started the final session, at the end of which Robin invited everyone to say a bit about themselves, or do their piece, or whatever. And we did! Nearly all of us had something to say, or show. Joanne did a great Cornish song, in Cornish, with movements not unlike what I do with the Gypsies. Hans (after trying to excuse himself on account of his accent, but had Robin twisting his arm and suggesting the story) told of how he had bought lapis lazuli in—where was it? Morocco?—for colour for painting. I think I was the only one sad enough to do something I'd already done during the weekend: The Man Who Invented The Hat. I apologised for that, but it is my proudest piece. People told jokes, recounted little anecdotes or adventures, sang songs, made speeches, told stories—so much talent, so much good feeling.

A last lunch, then packing the car, standing around for a photograph (...ah, you know the rest. Hmm. A whole group of (largely) middle aged persons indeed, but expressions not dwarfish and conversation by no means tinned), saying goodbye, leaving contact details, replacing the stones, and we're off into the sunshine that soon turned to dark, back to Hans' where they kindly gave me another delicious meal (and let me do yet another performance of the Hat—Cesca hadn't seen it, after all!) And so home.

What Robin had given us, I guess, was the key to some of the symbols we find repeated in Celtic myth—and a series of meditations based around them designed to provoke inspired thought. And a bibliography, so we could review and dig deeper. But he also gave us a deeply relaxing, incredibly exhilarating weekend in a magical location, and a number of new friends with a mutual interest.



(left) In the departure lounge: your astral plane will depart in one hour... (below) Jamming in Annwn, including Steve P on mandolin and Brent Young on dobro-mandolin

Travellers' Tales

Jenny Bolders assembled the following testimonials from many of those present at Hazelwood House

"This weekend has opened a box of magic that was closed too long. May the next one be soon."

"This was really quite good. Really nice. Let's do it again. Hazelwood House is pretty fine too."

"Delightful and inspiring. Motivating and enchanting. A weekend to make Abred almost as wonderful as Annwn."

"I have a cat called Tiddles. She flies!"

'Oh, has she got wings?'

'No, I fling her!'

And if we didn't manage to fly (into the realms of Bardic imagination), we were *flung*—by Robin's wicked humour. What an entertaining and educative good time... and good food too!"

"It was a rare and wonderful privilege to spend a weekend with such an array of talented and magically vocal individuals. Robin conducted the whole event with a warm, gentle, deftly witty touch."

"An experience beyond expectation and price! What a privilege to participate in such a journey, not to mention the first(?) rehearsal of the Incredible Stribute Band! I hope this becomes a regular kind of conventicle."

"It's always a privilege to spend time in Robin's company, to enjoy his warmth, wit and wisdom, and to partake of his encyclopedic knowledge, not only of all things Celtic, but of just about everything else as well."

"The birds of Rhiannon twittering about my head, may it ever be so."

"In the fortnight leading up to this weekend I've lost my job, had my car wrecked and separated from my wife. Before coming I thought, 'Bardic bollocks! What will this have to do with the REAL WORLD?!"

Fortunately, I came anyway (good move...). Being at Hazelwood with Robin and the others has reminded me that the 'real world' exists on a far deeper level than the one I'm used to operating on, and that I'm powerless over life's circumstances."

"Scratching the surface of the Celtic Mysteries. Looking forward to the next one."

"After this weekend, I will listen to the songs and stories with new ears—there is so much in them that I had never really heard before. And what a treat it was to be able to share this with such a lovely group of interesting and sympathetic people."

"I nearly didn't come—too stressed, too far to drive, just one more thing to do—in fact, it's *the* one thing I needed to do to kick me into taking the steps I need to de-stress my life—for the shining brow of Taliesyn I have journeyed far, and yet gone nowhere at all."

"I'm looking forward to my next visit to Annwn in the company of Robin and this wonderful group of 'Bardic weekenders'."

"I learnt a lot about the magical power created by bringing together a group of open-minded people. Such creativity and expressiveness flowed in this group."

"Simply inspirational!"

Views

David Kidman and Jonas Dalrymple sift through the latest String-related stuff...

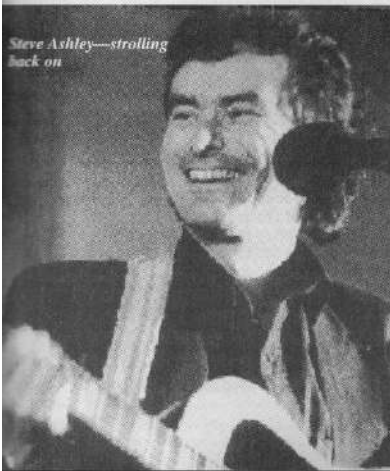
CDs

STEVE ASHLEY Everyday Lives

Topic TSCD.526

Back in the wildly unpredictable '70s, everywhere you turned there were singer-songwriters (some unbelievably bad), so sheer weight of numbers meant that not all could achieve an appropriate measure of appreciative recognition. In Steve Ashley's case, although his talent was feted fairly widely around mid-decade, he later spent quite a time without a record deal. Even diehard String devotees might not recall Steve's name buried in the chorus credits for Shirley and Dolly Collins' 1969 album *Anthem in Eden* (which happened to include what was until the release of *Chelsea Sessions* the only available recording of that "lost" Williamson song God Dog). Steve went on to build up a healthy folk-rock pedigree, first as a founder member of Ashley Hutchings' influential Albion Country Band and then with his own band Ragged Robin (which among other things backed Anne Briggs). He went solo (ostensibly, albeit backed by the Fairport Nine band) for the rightly acclaimed *Stroll On* album (1974), which convincingly demonstrated his credentials within the context of the still-evolving folk-rock scene (Fire And Wine still raises the hairs on the back of the neck). There was a follow-up album (*Speedy Return*), then the inevitable years of hectic touring in the manner of the times, but despite continuing to write prolifically it was not until 1982 that Steve was able to release the fine *Family Album*, a concept work in all but title. Thereafter, though given moral and practical support from the Fairport/Woodworm crowd, Steve struggled through the '80s, producing two *Demo Tapes* for the peace movement and another album, *Mysterious Ways*, before calling it a day in 1992 and taking a break from music. The release of a retrospective compilation *The Test Of Time*, then an expanded CD reissue of *Stroll On*, by the Market Square label back in 1999, together with a well-received cameo appearance with Fairport at that year's Cropredy, seems to have acted as

Steve Ashley—strolling back on



Fit & Limo—not necessarily in that order

catalyst for Steve to get a new album together. And pretty excellent it is too; sadly I don't have space for a track-by-track breakdown, however...

Before you're driven to despair by the relative tenuousness of the String connection so far (after all, Steve didn't even sing on God Dog!)—and there's an even more tenuous thread in that Steve's producer for *Stroll On*, Austin John Marshall, co-produced the *Be Glad* film—note that Steve himself explained (in the compilation's liner notes) that his early songs had reflected "two strong influences—the style and strength of composition which I found in traditional English songs and the freedom of expression which I heard in the early albums of the Incredible String Band". The circle is indeed unbroken, for on his new album Steve has enlisted Robin to play harp on one track (the episodic Gog And Magog). Sure, he's also brought in Simon Nicol, Danny Thompson, Chris Leslie, Dave Pegg and Gerry Conway (among others), but not to generate a full-steam-ahead folk-and-roll sound. Instead the impact is more folk than rock, with a wonderfully light touch, the musicians carefully selected on each individual track to provide a gently complex backdrop for Steve's thoughtful songs; these confirm his status as an acutely observant (albeit an often deceptively laid-back) commentator on English life, in which respect some critics justifiably view Steve's songwriting as on a par with that of Richard Thompson and John Tams. Like these songwriters, Steve uses his hard-won freedom of expression to present a distinctive and not always comfortable view of English life that doesn't shy away from political comment yet steers clear of empty polemic.

An integral and recurring element in Steve's worldview is his ritualistic interpretation of the changing seasons, whereby love, death and resurrection form part of a larger pattern. Steve expresses this through his mature and canny cognisance of English tradition in the widest sense, allied to a true respect for traditional values. Having said that, there's also a distinctly childlike playfulness in the way he knowingly

introduces and manipulates familiar references and peoples his creations with characters from myth and song; the method is simultaneously obvious and oblique, yet the result is delightful and irresistible. Down Among The Hop Poles, in transcending affectionate nostalgia (and, like *Over There In Paradise*, paying tribute to Peter Bellamy), manages to be both moving and uplifting. Steve's vocal style is most attractive too, embodying an appealing fragility in its delivery; for example, *Dance With You* has an almost tearful tenderness offsetting the frustration and depth of feeling in the words. Occasionally I hear uncanny shades of Bert Jansch in Steve's vocal phrasing (perhaps most evident on *Catch Him If You Can*), but it's impossible to mistake Steve's singing for anyone else's and, as I've already hinted, his songs have a combination of forthrightness and delicacy that's highly individual. We should indeed be grateful that Steve has survived, and the inspired *Everyday Lives* is worth your serious and detailed attention.

David Kidman

FIT & LIMO As Above So Below

September Gurls SGDCD26/LP31

"Trancelike tribalistic dances... Tibetan bowls and trumpet announce acid chamber songs of upsetting beauty... Bell-tinkling and mooring... Inspiration taken from Jerry Garcia, Stan Owsley, the sound of wind, grasshoppers and blackbirds." Yes, Fit & Limo walk amongst us again, scattering their intricate and lovingly-woven nosegays of pastoral nostalgia. *As Above So Below* is another of their soundtracks for a summer's afternoon among the leazes of Elfland.

We're gravely informed by the accompanying press-release that F&L's "acid/traditional/medieval folk-rooted sound takes on new hues by transferring the emphasis to extended jam-like improvisations

[and] playful freeform mantras", and the opening track, Owsley Blues, seems to confirm the thesis, consisting as it does of a three-minute song with a seven-minute intro and four-minute coda. But in fact the majority of tracks are of more modest length, with only a handful breaking the five-minute barrier.

Nor are these mere unstructured doodles; there's more than enough going on to hook the attention throughout. F&L turn their talents to virtually every instrument the ISB ever took on stage, and a few more besides, including the now deeply-unfashionable Appalachian dulcimer and the fashionable-again sitar. Not forgetting those signature sounds of psychedelia, the Farfisa organ and the backwards guitar.

Vocally they sound as fey and winsome as ever, replicating perfect Home Counties vowels for the exclusively English lyrics. As you might expect, their lyrical concerns are of a piece with their delicate sound world. There's no place here for the cynical or world-weary. When a voice warbles earnestly, "In the music of the seasons/I can hear my sweetheart's voice," you have to either surrender to its sweet-natured sincerity or swiftly subscribe to the nearest anarcho-syndicalist collective.

Me, I love it. Music for remembered summers.
**September Gurls Records, Sigmundstr. 92,
 90431 Nürnberg, Germany**
septembergurls@compuserve.com
limomusic@web.de

Jonas Dalrymple

SILVERHAND

Laughing Raven

A well-filled CD of unpretentious acoustic-based folk-rock with a Celtic tag that's as obvious as the band's name. That probably tells you most of what you need to know to decide whether to read any further, but actually I could think of many worse ways of spending an hour. Silverhand was formed in 1996 by Chris and Lisa Burbick, natives of Southern Oregon, the band name taken from a legend of an ancient Irish king. It's a four-piece, with Chris's mandolin, bouzouki, electric guitar and Lisa's acoustic guitar being augmented by Doug Heydon's basses and Mike Fitch's drums. A couple of mates help out occasionally with fiddle and extra percussion. The material is a mixture of Irish and

Scottish trad tunes and Chris's original songs; the tunes (seven sets in all) are certainly well enough played, with plenty of what the band's press release calls Chris's characteristic left-hand ornamentations, but in the end there's not a lot of variation in either instrumentation or technique between tune-sets, and I tended to lose interest at times as I yearned to hear another melody instrument. To the band's credit, though, their arrangements aren't unduly thrashy, and the rhythms are handled with sufficient restraint to allow the picking intricacies to percolate through, but more of a lift is needed at times. The four songs are clearly strongly inspired by traditional forms and subjects, but tend to be melodically repetitive and outstay their welcome; Chris's singing style doesn't always convince, either. But at least the band don't resort to washy keyboards and the like, for which they are to be commended. So, while the music here doesn't exactly disappoint, neither does it exactly catch fire enough to sustain continuous interest.

www.laughingraven.com

David Kidman

M J COOPER

Off The Rails

Mick's another of those *beGLAD* subscribers to release a CD of his own. But sad to say, this collection of his own music doesn't make a lasting impression. Most of the 20 pieces are instrumentals; the snag is that even though each individual piece is attractive enough, and very capably arranged with dominant keyboard and programming texturing, many of the pieces sound pretty similar so there's not much to stimulate further investigation. It's like a classy contemporary film score (that's meant as a compliment, I might add!) rather than demanding and challenging home listening. The last five tracks are non-instrumentals; they can't really be termed songs, more recitations to Mike's characteristically keyboardy backings—My Pet Coelacanth is bizarre and deadpan, Whalesong more animated, for instance. The verses do have something to say, even within the metric straitjacket discipline embraced, but I'm not sure that the accompaniments do an awful lot for them (the guitar textures used for *The Ragged Musk Ox* come as a welcome relief). Proceeds from the sale of this CD go to the International Red Cross. (Contact 01704 534790)

David Kidman

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Sounds Like Freedom: Songs And Poems Of Geoff Parry, Volume 4

GMP 4

This CD gathers together assorted musicians and singers from the North-West on a collection of settings of the words of Geoff Parry (some more obviously songs than others), most of which share laudable pacifist themes and sentiments but do so simply and unaffectedly. Though all tracks are worth a listen, the performances are (inevitably) variable. The opener *That's Africa To Me* is an inauspicious start—Alison Younger's peerless singing is let down by a predictable, cod-ethnic and twee synth arrangement. One or two of the other vocal performances also seem either too precious or striving for emotive effect. I much preferred the more subtle responses and gentler, more considered approach of *Scold's Bridle* (Circumstances Alter Cases) and Pete, Mandy and Brian (the tender *Let's Not Say Sometime*). Five tracks comprise Geoff's poems recited rather than sung, two of these by Geoff himself. I would have liked some information on the artists—I know surprisingly few of them, even though I'm not totally unfamiliar with the local folk scene.

In aid of Amnesty International. (Contact 0207 814 6200)

David Kidman

RUFUS BIGGS

Swimming Against The Tide

You may remember Rufus by his tasty cover of *Turquoise Blue* on *The Hangman's Beautiful Grand-Daughter*. The promise demonstrated there is amply fulfilled on this album. It's a home-produced affair, but the production values are very creditable; you'll have heard worse recordings come from serious studios. The packaging, however, takes the art of self-effacement to the point of invisibility. You won't find Rufus' name anywhere on the album, nor any image of the lad. The cover shot seems to be an artfully-blurred photo of an armchair, blazoned over with the title and nothing else. On the tray insert, the only instrumental credit is for the semi-anonymous Annette, who contributes cello and piano to two tracks; Rufus is unnecessarily reticent about his own instrumental prowess, which seems to include Spanish, electric and slide guitars, mandolin, drums, bass, keyboards and sitar. Plus he sings in a pleasing light tenor.

Rufus has assembled twelve songs here. In the absence of writing credits, I think we can safely assume they're his own compositions. He's got a sure ear for a good tune, though his melodies tend to drift like elusive gossamer rather than whacking you across the head. Lyrically, we're in recognisable introspective-singer-songwriter territory; the words act together to convey a mood and percolate into your consciousness almost subliminally.

There's nothing much here that you could pin down as an identifiable ISB influence. You might be put in mind of Syd Barratt, Tim Buckley, Arthur Lee and Mike Oldfield at various points on the album, but these would be more accurately described as echoes than as influences. If you've a taste for the works of any of those gentlemen, there's a good chance you'll find plenty here to please you. It really is rather good.

Contact Rufus at 19 Hurst Road, Ringwood, Hants BH24 1AX.

Jonas Dalrymple



Silverhand—jigging it up in Oregon

LIVE

ROBIN WILLIAMSON Nettlebed Song Club, Oxfordshire 5 February 2001

Eight people who met at Robin's Bardic Tradition weekend in Devon last December had a reunion at Nettlebed a couple of months later when we gathered to see Robin in concert, and also to hear one of our number, France Ellul, performing on the same bill. France was taught to play the harp by Robin, and is a member of the roots band Vitae, and of an ensemble of harps and other instruments who are just about to bring out a CD entitled *The Seven Harps Of Avalon*.

Robin had been ill the previous week; he had only just recovered his voice and nearly did not make the gig at all. No-one would ever have guessed. Robin gave us a non-stop stream of words and music with all his usual energy and enthusiasm.

He began at the harp with *North Sea Beaches*, *The Road The Gypsies Go* and some harp tunes, and continued with *I Have Seen Old Ships*, a poem written by the American James Elroy Flecker in the 1890s and set to music by Robin for his new album for ECM. Other songs during the first half included *Skull And Nettlework*, *Deep And Dark Are My True Love's Eyes* by Archie Fisher and *Hold Hard These Ancient Minutes* by Dylan Thomas. Then he got us all singing along to *John Barleycorn* and *Good Ale You Are My Darling*, with a funny story woven in.

The second half was opened by France Ellul on the harp, accompanied by the superb tabla player Tarsam Kalyan, who plays with the Banghra band Alaap D C, as well as with *The Harps Of Avalon*. France began with a haunting slow air, *Y Pur*, then the tempo changed as the tabla joined in to give this lovely melody an infectious rhythm.

Justine Moile from Vitae played guitar and sang her own gentle composition *Treasure*, accompanied by Tarsen on tabla, then France returned to give us a Breton theme followed by Carolan's *Maire Dhall* (*Blind Mary*) in which the ethereal harp and the tabla blended perfectly.

For his second set, Robin began with some excellent harp tunes including *South Wind* and *Planxty Irwin*, and then sang the *Hillaire Belloc* poem *Do You Remember An Inn, Miranda?* from the new ECM album, which promises to be in quite a different style from the sublime *seed-at-zero*. *Waltz Of The New Moon* followed, which was just as stunning in this solo version as it was at the recent String Band concerts. The remainder of the second set featured *Take A Heed Of Me Sometimes*, *The Flying Cloud*, a cautionary tale about a young man leaving his home in Waterford to sail first on a ship transporting slaves and later on a pirate ship, then *Seventeen Come Sunday* which was followed by *The Herring Song*, with which we joined in, and finally the Carter Family song *The Day Will Soon Be Over*.

Someone commented that he had not heard Robin sing so sweetly and melodically in a long time, and the songs were enriched by some wonderful guitar work.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable evening, rounded off perfectly by Robin, who always has time to stop for a friendly chat.

Jenny Bolders



Above: France Ellul and Tarsam Kalyan

Left: the Maestro



Below: the Nettlebed Nine-- Noel Plunieridge, Sarah Worthington, James Mundy, France Ellul, Scott Howfield, Jenny Bolders, Robin W. Jean Hussain, Glenn O'Raw

photos by Jenny Bolders (and A N Other)



A Year In String

...and then some

Mick Fitzgerald
makes that long, strange trip

I KNEW BY THE TIME LICORICE
WHISPERED "AMOEBAS ARE
VERY SMALL" THAT THERE
WAS NO GOING BACK...

SOMETIMES IT'S NOT NECESSARY to be there and other times it's essential. The Incredible String Band played in my home venue, the Savoy Theatre in Cork, on their last tour. I was too young to know them and anyway confused them with that other "string band", String Driven Thing. Besides, all my concert money (as much as a thirteen-year-old could have in those less affluent days) was put aside to see my Celtic heroes Horslips as often as humanly possible without leaving Cork. Later that year I discovered the Grateful Dead and the realisation that there was music out there which couldn't be captured in record reviews or other people's opinions—you just had to hear it and feel your soul swell. Radio Caroline was still floating around the Dutch coast, and I'd curl up with my Roberts Radio waiting to hear the odd track by the Dead and enjoying the randomness of my introduction to the music that my age group was too cool to hear.

On a late night show on Radio Telefís Éireann in 1975 I put up with Joni Mitchell hissing on summer lawns in the knowledge that Truckin' lay around the corner, when suddenly along came this magical amalgam of sounds which captivated my ears but puzzled me. Here was a song that was obviously romantic and a love song (frowned upon for someone as cool as me) and yet insidiously different—a whole new Painting Box of sound. Definitely worth investigating. Off like Ali Baba I headed to my personal treasure house—Uneeda Records, the best and most offbeat bargain bin record shop in town. Amidst the collection of Blue Hawaii and Fruuup records I found *Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*. The group scene was reminiscent of the back cover of my beloved *Aoxomoxoa*, so at £2.50 it was worth a punt—even if the track I was looking for wasn't on it.

Home I headed to undress my new love. There is something incredibly sensuous about an LP. The joy of reading the cover and discovering links with other albums is rather like finding something in common with a girl you fancy—so it's not just lust, you convince yourself, and proceed to take the record out the sleeve and wait for that familiar crackle (growing up on second-hand records, there was always a crackle). Then that moment of possibility as you wait for the sound to make its entrance. And what an entrance—Koeoaddi There—drawing you in, lulling you into thinking this is an album of folk wailing, and then Robin opens the world of childhood to you and you feel yourself sitting on the wall waiting for the postman.

I don't remember much else about the first hearing, but I knew by the time Licorice whispered, "Amoebas are very small," that there was no going back. Excited, I rang Chin Ho Leary, who, because he had an older brother with his own collection, was my personal rock encyclopaedia. "Conor", to give him his correct name, "Have you heard of the Incredible String Band? They're amazing." "Broke up last year—my brother said good riddance—poncey music."

Crestfallen, I pursued my solitary interest, gradually filling my collection with any albums available—*Wee Tam*, *The Big Huge*, *5,000 Spirits*, *U*. Then seven years later I hear that Robin Williamson has an album out on Claddagh Records and is playing a gig in Dublin. Now, a super cool 22-year-old immersed in the twin joys of the Dead and traditional Irish music, I know nothing can stop me—it's not the Incredible String Band and I prefer Mike Heron but at last I'm going to see one of my heroes.

Then life plays one of its many great tricks. There's nothing worse for a manic-depressive than choice. As a crap but fanatical soccer player I'm shocked to find myself picked for my university's senior team in a cup game the same day as the concert. I couldn't say no to the first step towards World Cup glory, so played my first and last senior game—put in a performance worthy of Celine Dion—and missed the concert. My girlfriend and Likki look-alike buys me *Songs Of Love And Parting* as a consolation and also to encourage me to buy her a harp. Funnily, the cover with Robin on the rocks summed up the state of the relationship but, God, what a final present. Here at last was something current and yet age-old. The door to heaven had been re-opened for me.

Soon the Merry Band albums were added to my collection. I wrote off to Robin's address on one of the album covers and found that he was playing at the Edinburgh festival. My heavily pregnant wife and I planned our trip—nothing could stop me now. Funny thing, pregnancy: it quite often leads on to babies and, while one can talk learnedly about the imminent child, nothing prepares you for the reality and the realisation that everything else comes second. So when Robin played his festival date I was watching my darling Aoife being christened. I'd catch up with Robin later.

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER AND MUCH CHASTENED by what life and my part in it had thrown at me and those around me, I found myself with time on my hands. Illness and the rapid approach of my fortieth birthday had led me to set up my own business with no greater motivation than "There must be more—I'm sure I remember there being more". Waiting for business to come in, I sat in front of my PC and listened to CDs, browsing the Internet looking for lost and new treasures. Then on a random search I find an announcement of a reunion concert by THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND. Nothing was going to stop me—rang my children Aoife (14), Fionnuala (12) and Aodhrua (8)—to see if they fancied a magical mystery tour to Scotland to see the Incredible String Band. They agreed, largely on the basis that Aoife loved the cover of *Songs For Children Of All Ages* painted by the master grinder of lapis lazuli, Hans Diebschlag; and, besides, magical mystery tours had produced many moments of magic for their Dad and themselves. So the adventure began.

Despite all the cynicism built up over the years, I placed unrealistic expectations on the New Year's gig in Edinburgh. But what a magical mystery tour it was—ice-skating in Prince's Street Gardens, the joy on my little boy's face as he ordered room service at two in the morning and then the introduction to that thing of beauty, the String Band audience, smiling and benevolent: quite an achievement with your balls frozen off in December. Also the first hint of a discovery waiting to happen—Robin sang a song purely on the basis that his mother loved it. Much criticism was heaped upon it, but I could hear my mother singing it as well, and the circle seemed unbroken again as my smiling son fought off sleep, still smiling, and the three generations melted into one. I went away without the songs I came to hear but feeling that, if not well, at least I was reconnected to life support.

As we caught the late train to Glasgow, Aoife whispered "Do you have Paris on record?" and Fionnuala wondered when the next gig would be. "I'll come too," said smallie, "and I'll stay awake all the way through it 'cause I'll be nine."

Over the next few months I discovered with the aid of those on the ISB discussion list that many of my missing albums were available—soon *Changing Horses* and *Be Glad* were in my possession but not for long. Then a real gem—*Conflict Of Emotions*—Mike Heron's muse stripped bare, the floorboards and chairs creaking in the recording: as the standout track stated, it took my breath away yet. It's a life-affirming pleasure to discover new joy and feel the years open up in front of you rather than have them looming behind. Then came news of more gigs: rumblings of discontent from many who wanted the (partly mythical) past unsullied but excitement amongst those young enough to have enough sense. So off we headed again: first stop St Donat's. This was the business. We got totally lost in the Llanwit Major Triangle, spent two gorgeous days idling around Cardiff, visited Bridgend during a power-cut—makes Des Moines look second rate as Bob Weir would say—and then sidled up the gig. My little boy wanted to do some videoing so headed out into the garden. To his and his even more childish father's surprise, the band appeared for a photo session so Aodhrua managed to video the band messing about in the garden. When Robin and Mike noticed him and waved you could see Aodhrua swell with pride.

The concert was a delight—tears were flowing down my face as Mike's *Maker Of Islands* shimmered like the polished gem that it is—crowned for a little boy when he got to play penny whistle during *Smoke Shovelling Song*. Onwards to Cropredy, despite the addition of petrol to a diesel engine—my heart may have been somewhat restored but my ailing brain continues to misfire. A great introduction to the joys and pitfalls of festivals followed, but the band were excellent. Highlight of the festival was realising that my daughter was now a young woman and watching her plan in her head what she'd do differently when she went to a festival on her own. Then back to Liverpool to see Parma hammered by the Reds—football after the String Band: should have thought of that in 1982.

The kids went back to their mother and the final stage of the tour was a solo effort. Their parting shot of "You're too hairy to be a groupie," seemed even more apt when I discovered that I had inadvertently booked myself into the same hotel as the band in London. Over the next couple of days I spent half the time trying to avoid harassing the band members, and the other half trying to thwart the nobler aspirations in the early part of this sentence. Happily I was more successful in the latter than the former.

SO THE TRIP WAS OVER: 4 marvellous gigs to look back on and confirmation that magic still existed. Time to go back into the box I had come from and await the onset of winter. On the way back to my home in the Isle of Man I glanced at adverts for *Carmina* in Cardiff and "A Bardic Weekend" in Devon. Probably give them a skip, I thought, but thankfully I didn't. Steve Pilley has described *Carmina* beautifully in the previous edition of *beGLAD*. However, as this is a personal odyssey, I will add a few words of my own. I was raised a Catholic and caught the tail end of the Latin mass before the influence of Vatican II moved towards vernacular devotion. As Robin's voice echoed subversively around Llandaff Cathedral in sonorous Latin, I felt my grandfather standing beside me with his booming voice and was in the company of the giant of my childhood and one of the giants of my adulthood—I'm getting quite fond of feeling happy. I had burnt my hand in a Chinese restaurant a half an hour before the performance and had it wrapped in ice; unfortunately, the combination of the melting ice and my transfixed face must have given the impression that I found the music very very very moving. Wet dreams aside it was a special evening.

The Bardic Weekend in Devon was an exercise in faith. No one who attended knew what to expect but whatever we may have expected we got more. Not only was the weekend itself an eye-opener, it also introduced me to many fellow travellers who had remained invisible brethren until that time. Spending time with good people is a very underestimated pleasure and an antidote to life's troubles. Robin gave generously of his time and feelings and I came away freer and more ready for that voyage to the always island.

God, it's been a good year, and I haven't even mentioned listening to Captain Williamson's Mandolin in Cephalonia during an earthquake (well, tremor, but what's life without a little bit of hyperbole?). If you haven't got *seed-at-zero*, get it. Shine On.

The Home of
the Fiddle and
the Banjo

◀ ORB ▶

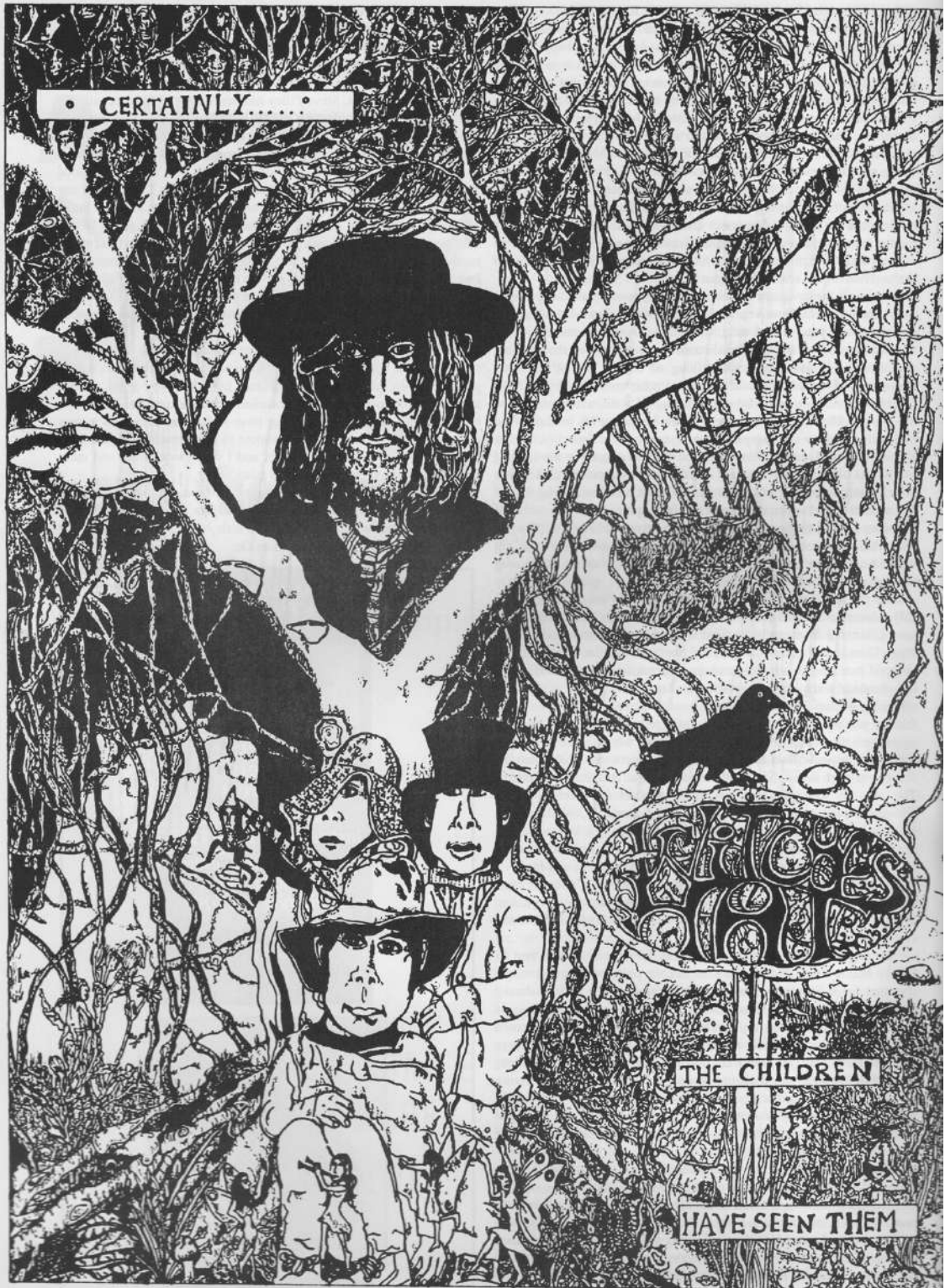
Makers
Dealers
Repairers

of stringed musical
instruments since 1985

Eyam Hall Craft Centre
Main Road, Eyam,
Derbyshire S32 5QW



www.orbmusic.co.uk



IN QUIET PLACES



WHERE THE MOSS GROWS GREEN.....

COLOURED SHELLS.....



JANGLE TOGETHER.....

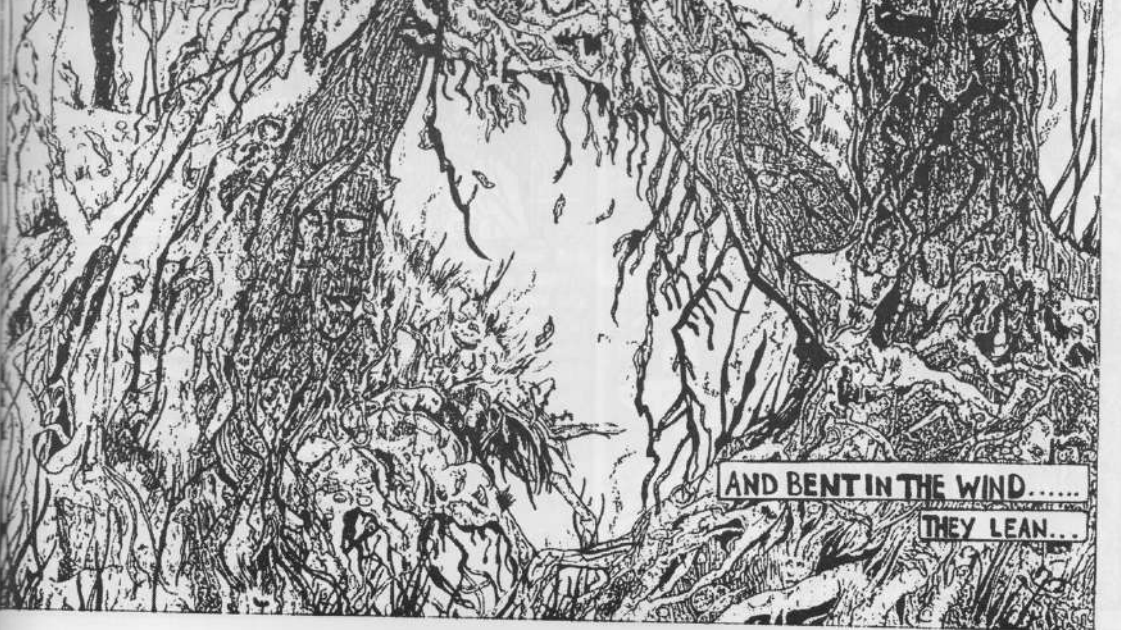
THE WIND IS COLD....



THE YEAR IS OLD...



THE TREES WHISPER TOGETHER



AND BENT IN THE WIND.....

THEY LEAN...

IF I WAS A WITCHES HAT



SITTING ON HER HEAD



LIKE A PARAFFIN STOVE

I'D FLY AWAY



AND BE A BAT...



ACROSS THE AIR I WOULD ROVE...

STEPPING LIKE A TIGHTROPE WALKER



PUTTING ONE FOOT AFTER ANOTHER...

WEARING BLACK CHERRIES.



FOR RINGS...

THE END OF INNOCENCE

Raymond Greenoaken

discovers hidden depths in Circus Girl and Old Buccaneer

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF *beGLAD*, the mag's founder and first editor Andy Roberts organised a "Favourite ISB song" survey. Readers were invited to vote for their top String song, and the results were presented as a list: the song with the most votes took first place, and the songs with fewest or no votes brought up the rear. One of those songs to attract no votes at all was the infamous Williamson composition *Circus Girl*, on *No Ruinous Feud*. Although Andy's survey made no attempt to discover Stringfandom's least favourite song, the chances are *Circus Girl* would have strolled away with that unwelcome accolade.

Even today, *Circus Girl* is a byword for cheesiness, a sort of plimsoll line for how low the late-period String Band could sink. As far as I know, no-one has ever said a good word about the song, and at first glance it's not hard to see why. *No Ruinous Feud* is universally regarded as our heroes' least durable slab of vinyl. (David Kidman points out that *NRF* could equally stand for No Redeeming Features.) Just about every song on it is tainted to some degree by the opprobrium attached to the album—which is certainly unjust in the case of Mike's three contributions. *Explorer*, *Turquoise Blue* and *Little Girl* could all have punched their weight amongst the band's golden age repertoire. Malcolm's brace of compositions, though without hinting at any great substance, at least showed a talent for hooklines. But Robin's four songs, it was widely felt, were well below the standard we expected from the man who wrote *Maya*, *October Song* and *First Girl I Loved*.

"Where's the magic gone? Where is the enchantment? The joy?" snorted Allan Frewin in his *Feud* reappraisal piece back in *beGLAD* 3. "Take *Saturday Maybe*, *Old Buccaneer* and *Circus Girl*, and you've got someone who'd lost the plot and who ought to take himself off somewhere... and come back after a good rest and dazzle us again." (The fourth Williamson song, *Weather The Storm*, didn't quite fit the thesis, since it had been rattling round the String Band repertoire since early 1970.) Robin, our man Frewin suggested pertly, was clearly bored shitless with String duties at this point. And we can glean from what Robin himself has said that he was singularly unenthusiastic with the direction the band was then travelling in.

Nevertheless, it's clear from *Saturday Maybe* that he wasn't content just to mark time, that he felt a need to take his songwriting into areas he'd not previously explored. This is the probably the bleakest song he's ever written, a grey, joyless tableau of adulterous love among the smokestacks of some drizzly Northern town. The fact that it's written with breathtaking economy and instinct for detail (as well as beautifully understated compassion) counted for little at the time: we still wanted the Williamson who "dreamed the world all alive".

But he hadn't entirely washed his hands of earlier lyrical concerns. Although few people seemed to notice, *Old Buccaneer* and *Circus Girl*, far from being mere ennui-induced doodles scratched out in an intellectual vacuum, returned to a theme that Robin had earlier made supremely his own: the child's-eye view of the world. His take on this theme, however, was now interestingly different. In songs like *Witches Hat*, *Water Song* and *The Mountain Of God* childhood perceptions were presented as unmediated by "adult" intellection: an instinctual sense of wonder enables the child to take the world at face value, unanalysed, unexplained, untroubled by Keats' "mere touch of cold philosophy". This state of holy innocence was more vividly and exactly represented in the music of the Incredible String Band than in any other. This, we know, is one of the qualities that attracted John Lennon to the band. Unlike Donovan, who was exploring similar territory with no little skill and insight, the ISB were able to deal with the subject without sentimentality. Children's experience is given its

MELODY MAKER, May 11, 1979, p. 22

The Eternal Variety Show



Incredible String Band

Chick Corea Mike Garson

Woody Woodmanson

A concert to celebrate the 25th anniversary of 'Dianetic' by L. Ron Hubbard.

Thursday May 9 at 7.30



232 Seven Sisters Rd H4

Tickets at £1, £1.50, £1.75 & £2 from Rainbow and equal agents.

own space and validity: "Certainly the children have seen them..." That "certainly" is rich with poetic intelligence.

But that was then. In *Buccaneer* and *Circus Girl*, Robin deals with the child's-eye view in a new and different way. Both songs take as their subject the uncomfortable transition between the state of simply being and that of understanding. *Buccaneer* shows Cissy and her friend becoming aware of mortality. "Cissy dear, don't let's go near the church today/The big bell's tolling and the hearse goes rolling..." They know that, despite the jaunty assertion in the coda that the old man's gone off buccaneering into South Sea retirement, his "old bones" are actually in that hearse. (This is made more obvious in the earlier version of the song on the *In Concert* CD, where the children peer through the buccaneer's window and see him by lamplight writing out his will.) And accompanying that knowledge is the unspoken realisation that his tales of derring-do on the high seas were just a pack of colourful lies. They can't take things at face value any longer. They're growing up...

It may be that the lack of a memorable tune has deflected attention from the fact that *Old Buccaneer* is a key song in the ISB's canon. It marks a significant shift of focus in the band's world view. For the first time, they were singing about innocence lost, rather than retained or regained. From this perspective, the song can be interpreted as being, in a sense, about the ISB's own loss of innocence, their coming of age.

Since Joe Boyd's departure in 1971, they'd pretty much looked after their own affairs and probably learned a lot about the rapacity and exploitation of the music industry. Artistically, too, they were beginning to see the need for a degree of compromise. We know that this was not a process with which Robin felt comfortable. It's likely that these thoughts were loitering somewhere in his mind at the time he wrote *Old Buccaneer*. It may be reading too much into the song to see it as a conscious distillation of such thoughts. But, hey, the muse works in mysterious ways...

THE INCLUSION OF *CIRCUS GIRL* on *No Ruinous Feud* makes it something of a companion piece to *Buccaneer*, in that it also deals with this loss of childhood innocence. The theme is addressed here, however, in a much more affirmative and playful fashion. Maybe that was Robin's way of balancing things out.

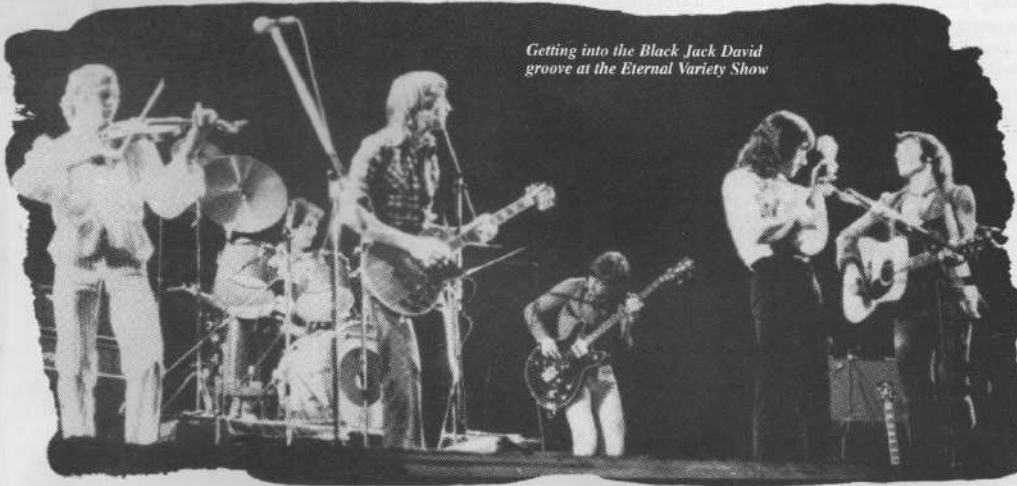
One of the problems with *Circus Girl* is that it's presented on the album without any clues to its context. You'd be forgiven for hearing it as the mildly off-colour reverie of some testosterone-troubled young adult male—the staple subject-matter of rock'n'roll, in fact. But Robin made it clear in concert that this was not the case. On a live bootleg recorded at Dublin State Cinema in March 1973, he introduced the song thus: "This is a song called *Circus Girl* and it's about a little boy at the circus looking at a lady acrobat, and thinking how fantastic she is..." It's plain from this that *Circus Girl* actually concerns the earliest stirrings of the male libido.

The two great realities in this vale of tears are sex and death, and awareness of both tends to emerge in the run-up to puberty. It's a moving between states, between worlds, and just as *Old Buccaneer* focuses on death, so *Circus Girl* homes in on sex.

It takes only a few seconds' reflection to confirm that the lyrical perspective is a child's rather than an adult's, or even an adolescent's. Consider: "How could you love me, you're so far above me..." Literally so, of course, but also "above me" in the sense of being much older. Or consider: "You fly through the air, you've got princess hair, I'm really impressed..." You can hear there the authentically earnest voice of a child. (The "princess" reference is surely a nod to fairy tale convention rather than to any member of the British Royal Family—Princess Di, remember, was only thirteen at the time.) Or: "Your picture cheers hospital wards..." That could be a nicely subtle hint that our lad has recently been through that childhood rite of passage, the tonsilectomy. Or: "The ringmaster's hat is as black as a wellington boot..." Of this line, Allan Frewin wrote: "What? Did Robin Williamson, the cunning, crafty word-spinner and dream-catcher really write that? Why?" Because, when placed in its true context, that's precisely the sort of simile a child would come up with: the wellington boot is arguably the closest thing in a child's world to a sleek top hat—black, shiny and tubular, no? Or consider: "You smoke long cigars and you don't get sick..." Which, as most of us know, is the effect that the first illicit drag most often has on the curious child. Seen from this angle, even the "grown-up" observation "You've got beautiful legs, and you sparkle and flirt/And I don't mind lipstick all over my shirt" sounds like a child trying to imagine himself into the skin of a sophisticated young adult.

The discovery of sexual feelings can be an unnerving episode in a young child's development; especially in Judeo-Christian culture, with its often queasy ambivalence towards sex. But it's really only since the "manufacture" of childhood in the 18th and 19th centuries that sex has been seen as some sort of pollutant to a child's sense of self. *Circus Girl*, I'd suggest, is a simple, guilt-free celebration of burgeoning sexual awareness: not the death of childhood, but the entry into a whole new realm of intense and cherishable experience. This makes it both a contrast and a complement to the darker perspectives of *Old Buccaneer*.

So much for the surface texture of the song. We should never forget that Robin is not just a songwriter, but a poet. This invariably means that even his most apparently superficial lyrics often work on more than one level. In the case of *Circus Girl*, he seems to be drawing on powerful imagery to illumine that sense of moving between worlds. Jugglers, dancers, acrobats—the whole panoply of the circus: these are images that Robin draws upon repeatedly in his work to adumbrate spiritual intimations. The acrobat is a particularly potent symbol in this context. He/she is a creature of glamour (in both its current sense and its old sense of otherworldly enchantment) who moves with apparently preternatural skill in the space between the upper world



Getting into the Black Jack David groove at the *Eternal Variety Show*



Mick Fitzgerald spills the java beans on the new ISB website

HOPEFULLY BY THE TIME you read this article you should have discovered the above website—the first Official Website for The Incredible String Band.

The site went live on May 14th and all content has the Incredible String Band imprimatur. A lot of work has gone on over the past few months to turn a notion into a reality, and over the next few months the site will continue to be upgraded with more functionality being added. I thought it might be useful to mark the launch of the site with a brief article for the *beGLAD* readership on the background to the site and our hopes for it.

Over the past year when bumping into Mark Anstey at gigs or ordering stuff from Pig's Whisker the conversation invariably turned to future delights—some of which have happened, some of which are currently unfolding and some of which may never happen. A recurring theme was the lack of an official website as a natural focus for the band's current and future fan base. This was not to decry the many sites created by enthusiasts in different countries—such as Martin Payne's *Be Glad* site in the UK. However, it was felt that a central site could aid the spreading of the ISB message and give a natural focus to the many Stringheads out there. It might also give Mark Anstey a break from dealing with my many phone queries on latest developments and provide a method of distributing more specialist recordings and publications. The idea bounced around in my brain for a few months as I rescheduled my business commitments around getting to as many gigs as possible. For those of a Dilbert Disposition the mission statement had become, "To meet our clients' needs within the ever-expanding demands of seeking out real pleasure in the form of musical heaven".

Then I thought, "Why let your clients choose you—why not choose your clients?" One of the joys of being your own employer is that no matter how mad the idea you get to run with it. Suffice to say that one enthusiastic phone call later I had committed Marshotel Limited and myself to providing the ISB with an official website. Now all I needed was a design and a development team. Soon my music-mad (but not ISB-friendly) brother was roped in along with his colleagues and we were off.

MARK'S BRIEF TO US WAS VERY SIMPLE—"It should look like an ISB site and we'll know what that looks like when we see it". My brother was stunned but I explained to him that I knew what this meant, and soon the three of us met up in Manchester Airport and agreed the detailed design parameters. Much of what you now can see was agreed at that first meeting. However, much is yet to be added and we intend to build the site significantly and add many new features with regular upgrades and changes of content.

At present the site consists of:

- ☛ a Home Page that flashes between the cover photo from *The Chelsea Sessions* and black-and-white photos of Mike and Robin.
- ☛ a News section that, even though it is currently full, only hints at what's to come from the band and the individual members over the coming period. This section will be updated as soon as information is available.
- ☛ a Tours section which will include the first news of any forthcoming concerts and events along with booking details.
- ☛ an Audio/Video section which will feature high-quality downloads. It is also our intention to use this section in the future to provide

limited-life excerpts of rarities such as the *seed-at-zero* interview disc which was featured at launch.

☛ a Press Room that will feature short background articles on the band and the ability to download more detailed information. It currently features an excellent article written by Raymond Greenoaken. The temptation was not to credit Raymond and see how quickly the word "pellucid" jumped out at readers to confirm the source of the wisdom. However we stuck with the more conventional crediting. [We suspect this to be an Anstey-inspired jibe at your Editor's sesquipedalian tendencies—indignant Ed]

☛ a Contact section which will enable people to register on the Pig's Whisker mailing list and eventually will enable people register their full details on line to take advantage of special offers and early notice of events.

The next stage of development will see the addition of a secure on-line store enabling people to order a much expanded catalogue of Incredible String Band related material. This store will be certified to the highest security standards.

I hope that you agree that the site has a definite ISB feel to it, but I know we are only at the genesis of this project so would welcome any input from the invisible brethren in developing the site to its fullest potential. Please feel free to inundate me with suggestions at webmaster@marshotel.co.uk

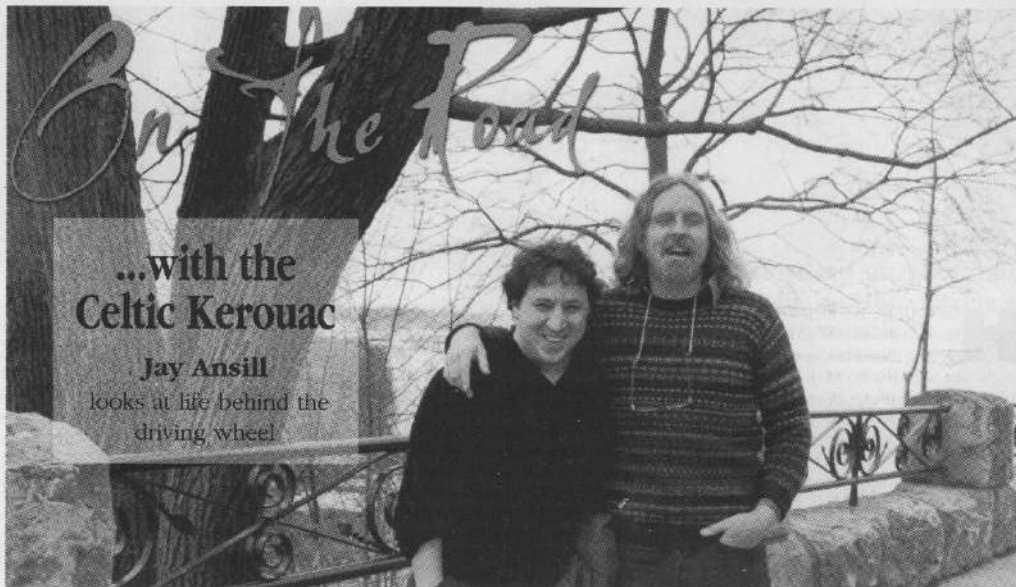
THE OFFICIAL SITE DOES ALLOW one to link to another project site which I am currently developing, namely the annotated ISB lyric site—www.isblyrics.co.uk This site provides footnotes and lyrics for Incredible String Band songs. The standard procedure will be to provide links for words or phrases that might benefit from some elucidation, without attempting to give definitive "interpretations," since that's a very personal endeavour. The approach adopted (and much of the style and even wording) initially mirrors that used by David Dodd for his groundbreaking Annotated Grateful Dead lyrics site. Over time the styles of the sites are bound to diverge but I as editor thought it only right to reflect the inspiration behind the creation of this site.

One of the problems faced by myself as editor and the contributors in preparing the site is that the standard sources for Incredible String Band Lyrics—The Songbooks I and II and the lyrics supplied on the original albums and CDs—have proved to be at variance with those actually recorded. Therefore some readers may find that they disagree fundamentally with the texts. As appropriate, some lyrics will include an analysis section, which will provide technical information on the lyric's construction, and some potential avenues for interpretation. I actively encourage anyone with differing interpretations and lyrics to send them to me via the links provided on each song's pages.

The initial scope of the project will be limited to lyrics of original songs performed by the Incredible String Band, Robin Williamson, the Merry Band, Mike Heron, Reputation and the Incredible Acoustic Band. I would hope that by the end of the summer all existing songs, including some unreleased gems, would have their lyrics printed and annotated on the lyric site. My thanks to all those who continue to help with this project, especially those in the ISB discussion group (isb@yahoogroups.com) and again any input is welcome. Please forward your comments on this site to isblyrics@marshotel.co.uk

Please enjoy and Shine On.

WWW.INCREDIBLESTRINGBAND.COM



HER NAME WAS TOBY SACHSENMAIER, and Robin couldn't get it right. We were on the NY Thruway on the way from Woodstock to Buffalo, where Toby ran a concert series. Incidentally, as we were loading out from Robin's afternoon show at the theater in Woodstock, the band playing that night was loading in. It was The Average White Band, a group of Scots who had a hit in the '70s called *Pick Up The Pieces*. The guys were awestruck at meeting a founding member of the legendary Incredible String Band, and it was one of those episodes that made me realize that Robin, besides being my own personal hero, really was a big deal.

But back to the Thruway. Every once in a while, we'd stop to use the rest rooms, or grab a snack, or fill up the van, and Robin would say "Why don't you give Sachsenheimer a call to let her know when we'll be arriving." He'd never get it right, no matter how many times I'd correct him. At some point on that particular drive, Robin got something in his head about the roots of Western Religion, and gave a very involved lecture, entirely off-the-cuff, touching on various aspects of history, mythology, theology etc, with long quotes from various sources: Robert Graves, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Allen Ginsberg, concluding with "We should try Sachsenheimer again." "SachsenMAIER, Robin, MAIER!" But then that became a joke in itself. He'd bungle the name more and more every time, till it became a surreal echo of the actual thing. Tippy Waxenburger, Nippy Picklegruber, Bobby Smaxenwiper.

As a young hero-worshipping wannabe I had met Robin a number of times in the early '80s, but for some reason he took a shine to me, and we became sort of friends in that "touring musician" kind of way; he'd be happy to see me at gigs, and we'd send postcards occasionally, and I visited him at his house in Los Angeles on a trip out there once. During a particularly grueling tour in 1988, Robin and I were talking between sets at a club called Godfrey Daniel's in Bethlehem PA [see the top right photo on page 40: the same venue ten years on—Ed], about how exhausted he and particularly Bina were, but some day we should find a time to play some music. "In fact," he said, brightening up, "What are you doing for the next three weeks? Do you want to drive me for the rest of the tour?" This seemed such a bizarre proposal that I had to accept. I was able to clear my schedule, and two days later Robin, Bina and I were on our way to somewhere in upstate New York. After teaching me the ropes (the job also involved being in charge of the money), Bina went for some much deserved rest at her sister's, and Robin and I were off.

ROBIN WILLIAMSON DOESN'T DRIVE. He never learned. So he needs someone to drive him to gigs. But I think part of the idea is to keep from getting too bored and lonely. Robin and I have proved to be great traveling companions. We always have plenty to talk about and usually have amazing conversations. I always joke that the main thing we have in common is an extremely high regard for Robin Williamson. But Robin says that we have become so close that we are on "insulting terms"; we've become so familiar that we can say practically anything, and to the uninitiated we might be accused of being brutal toward each other. Occasionally I need to remind him that it is a long walk to the next gig.

As Robin's traveling companion, I have had the fascinating opportunity to observe how Robin approaches concerts in a wide variety of settings; I've seen him play big concert halls, intimate folk clubs, completely non-intimate, cavernous rock clubs, school assemblies, a few glorified bar gigs, a house concert, one surreal showcase in a hotel room in Toronto to a group of puzzled corporate presenters who had no idea what to make of Scotland Yet. There is also the occasional poorly publicized, sparsely attended debacle. (One time, we spent a whole day trying to track down a promoter near Albany NY, who turned out to be basically homeless and unable to pay the fee... Robin played to about fifteen people in a huge old-fashioned music hall.)

One of the things that is so interesting about these shows is how committed Robin is to the performance. He consistently puts on a great show, which always perfectly fits the situation. It's also fascinating to see the shows evolve: to see how Robin tries things and fits them into the shows. Occasionally, one of our jokes from the van will find its way on stage. ("Repetition is the soul of wit... you can say that again"—that one's mine.)

One time we were on our way from Boston to a club called The Left Bank in Blue Hill, Maine. The club, by the way, is also a bakery and a restaurant, run by an eccentric genius named Arnold Greenberg. Our first time there, Robin and I stayed in rooms on the upper floor, where Arnold and his wife live. They also have a vicious-looking German Shepherd, and one day Robin asked me to run upstairs to get something out of his room, but the dog growled at me and I was too scared to go past the first few steps. After Robin teased me for being such a coward, he went upstairs to get it himself, but only got about as far as I did. Our next trip there, we got hotel rooms!

During that particular trip, I brought a cassette of a Mick Hanly record to listen to in the van, and there was one song on the tape that

Robin liked called The Unfortunate Miss Bailey. He asked to hear the song several times during the drive, and at one point, shortly before the concert, he started thinking about the song, but couldn't remember one particular line, and would I mind running out to the car (in sub-zero temperatures) and listening to the tape to get that line, it was driving him crazy. Robin performed the entire song that night—perfectly, of course—and every night for the rest of the tour.

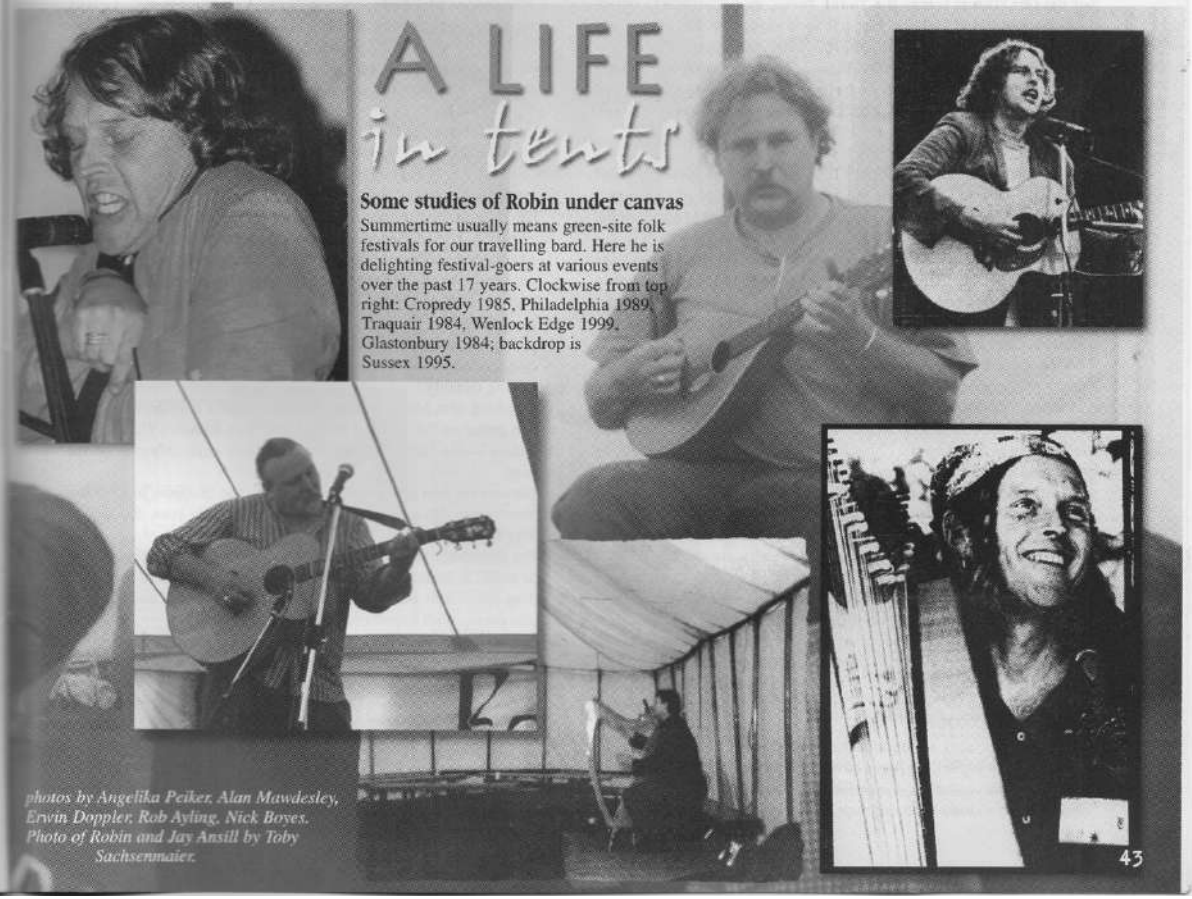
In Copake Falls NY there is a church called St Bridget's where Robin has played several times for a concert series put on by a close friend named Melinda Gardiner. (I've played a few concerts there myself.) The church has a decent sized parking lot, which has been the scene of some of the funniest and most terrifying times of my life. This is where I've traditionally allowed Robin to have a go at driving the van. It's not that he goes fast, he doesn't. He goes very slowly and takes great care, and yet, it's hard not to get the feeling that he's going to destroy the van, or drive over the sign in front of the building, or through the stained glass windows, across the sanctuary, into the Rector's office. Robin acts like a giddy little kid and I think a good part of his enjoyment has to do with the way I grab the armrest and grit my teeth in sheer panic.

Often the routing of the tours makes little geographical sense. The agent who books the tours, although he claims to have grown up on the East Coast, lives three thousand miles away and seems to have forgotten that it takes a while to make some of these drives. Robin and I joke that we should take some of the money from the tour and buy the agent a map of the Eastern US. Every tour has at least one outrageous drive: Toronto to Manhattan (including a stop at customs at 2am with one UK citizen, one US citizen and a van full of musical instruments, CDs and books.), Pawling NY to Washington VA (which Robin incorrectly informed me was Washington DC) where we were forced to miss an afternoon storytelling workshop.

But the van is like our own personal Ionesco play, our private Theatre of the Absurd; where just the constant mispronunciation of poor Toby Sachsenmaier's name can be as entertaining as Shakespeare. We have our own Vaudeville act: Braxton and Hicks (pregnant women should get the reference) and we spend hours translating popular song lyrics into the King's English (for example: Elvis Presley's big hit You, Sir, Are Simply A Hunting Canine) and where I get to enjoy one of the most unusual and valuable friendships of my life.

SO WE FINALLY ARRIVE AT Wimpy Micklesburger's house in Buffalo, promising not to say anything that might embarrass ourselves or each other. I ring the doorbell; both of us staring at the ground with our hands crossed behind our backs like two naughty schoolboys suppressing giggles, when we hear the door start to open. I maintain that Robin lost it first, but before the door was fully open, we were both in uncontrollable hysterics, doubled over, howling, in tears. Confused but also laughing along, Toby asked what was so funny, to which Robin, as soon as he could regain composure long enough to speak, replied: "Just life!" I still laugh when I think about that.

Jay Ansell is a musician—main instruments Celtic Harp and violin—who has released three CDs. Robin wrote the sleeve notes for the first of them, *Origami* (Flying Fish). His most recent is a collection of his settings of poems by Robert Graves. He did the transcriptions of Robin's *Legacy Of The Scottish Harpers* records for the accompanying book published by Mel Bay. Jay lives in Bucks County, PA (home turf of Jesse Colin Young and Michael Hurley, and of Steve Weber and Robin Remaily of the Holy Modal Rounders: see *beGLAD 15*) with his wife and daughter.



A LIFE in tents

Some studies of Robin under canvas
Summertime usually means green-site folk festivals for our travelling bard. Here he is delighting festival-goers at various events over the past 17 years. Clockwise from top right: Cropredy 1985, Philadelphia 1989, Traquair 1984, Wenlock Edge 1999, Glastonbury 1984; backdrop is Sussex 1995.

photos by Angelika Peiker, Alan Mawdesley, Ervin Doppler, Rob Ayling, Nick Boyes. Photo of Robin and Jay Ansell by Toby Sachsenmaier.

CLIFF

the

Shadowy, blue—but not incredible



COMPARISONS ARE ODIUS, so the saying goes. But some comparisons are merely odd. Barry Shinfeld, it seems, was the popular music critic for some Home Counties weekly newspaper way back in the 1960s, and, one week in November 1969, his arts editor sent him out to cover a series of three concerts, staged on consecutive nights, at the famous Fairfield Hall in Croydon. Sandwiched between Cliff Richard and The Shadows on Thursday the 6th and The Blues And Gospel Festival '69 on Saturday the 8th were the Incredible String Band. Barry was particularly drawn to the contrasts in the style and repertoire of Cliff 'n' The Shads and our own ISB. In his eyes, it was a case of the Old Guard versus the Young Turks, and it was clear which side he favoured. You can just tell he'd rather be writing for the *International Times* than for the *Croydon Advertiser*... Given our theme of "Tempus Fugit" in this issue, it's interesting to view the reformed 2001-vintage ISB in the light of his remarks about The Shads' "advancing years". This is what he wrote. Where are you now, Barry?

“FROM THE SUPERFICIAL GLOSS and glitter of Cliff Richard to the eerie musical conglomeration of the Incredible String Band to the pulse of the Blues and Gospel of the Deep South...

All this in just four days at Fairfield Hall—a strange diversity of music, like seeing a Hitchcock, an Eisenstein and Mickey Mouse on consecutive nights at the cinema.

The most dramatic change, visually and audibly, was between Thursday and Friday nights last week.

First came the hyper-white smiles, the meticulously-rehearsed and pretty predictable routines of the Cliff Richard bill, followed less than 24 hours later by the less conventional Incredible String Band.

Take the difference in presentation: two of The Shadows were still religiously performing the "Shadows Walk" in time to the music, as though it were an integral part of a church service.

Cliff was in an expensive black suit and white shirt with ruffles down the front, jogging across the stage as he sang.

The Incredible String Band were, to say the least, more relaxed. At the opening, the stage could have been a gipsy encampment: Mike Heron sat barefoot, cross-legged, on the floor, sitar in hand [Which hand?—pedantic Ed]; Robin Williamson, hair cascading down to his lower ribs, wore trousers with different coloured legs; and the men were complemented by the strangely-attired girls, one in a flimsy Isadora Duncan dress and the other in floor-length velvet.

In the case of the men, it should be pointed out, hair is still the great divide: Cliff and the Shadows wear theirs "respectably" long—there is a difference.

The jokes also exemplify the difference. The Shadows self-effacingly apologised for their advancing years: "When we went to school—shortly after the Great Fire of London..." Cliff strenuously denied, with a chuckle, the rumour that he was to become a nun.

Williamson's humour was more earthy. He had the audience in stitches with a lengthy diversion on the mating habits of pigs—information from observation, apparently—which was totally uninhibited, delivered without embarrassment and with no four-letter scarcity.

The Incredibles belong to the post-Beatles wave, whereas the perennial appeal of Cliff and the Shadows is locked in a more conventional pre-Beatles era.

The head-shaking youth of "Livin' Doll" is now knocking on—with five gold discs and 20 silver ones in his wake.

The Cliff show, in fact, had much to offer what looked to me like a predominantly female audience. Hank Marvin only had to walk up to the microphone and greet the audience and one mum in my vicinity let out an ecstatic groan and collapsed into delirium.

The good-looking, well-scrubbed syndrome of inoffensive, watered-down sex-appeal still has its following. The emphasis is on a sort of respectable sensuality—not explicit, as with the performers of the Hendrix school.

Musically, Hank Marvin is still very much an accomplished guitarist by any standards, coaxing as he does those whining, well-sustained top notes as in "Slaughter on 10th Avenue", "Wonderful Land" and "Somewhere".

The only original Shadow left in the group, Marvin is now well-supported by Brian Bennett (drums), John Rostill (bass) and Alan Hawkstraw (organ, piano), all of whom, if they did not already have it, have quickly acquired the polite, saccharine Shadows persona.

Cliff went smoothly through a representative repertoire including "Many a Tear Has To Fall", "Good Times", "Throw Down A Line", "The Day I Met Marie", "Livin' Doll", "Bachelor Boy" and so on—no congratulatory n for "Congratulations", which still takes the cake for stultifying banality.

Something new, however, was his commendable if still novice effort at solo guitar on "A Taste of Honey" and Tim Hardin's "Lady From Baltimore"—the latter, for me, was the most enjoyable part of the evening.

This was the first appearance by Cliff and the Shadows in Croydon for four years. No doubt they will still be able to pack the hall in another four years' time.

The Incredible String Band may or may not still be around then. Their music is basically gentle, like a sequence of ethereal graffiti. It is often discordant but can be melodic, and when you can hear the words, poetic, with humorous and intriguing lyrics.

There's a cheerful optimism and a quality of innocence in what they play ("By the time you hear this song, your troubles will be gone"; "When you find out who you are—beautiful beyond your dreams"). As they say in "Ducks on a Pond", they sing "a magic word, speak of hopes and [sic] thoughts absurd".

Their music embraces traditional folk (both British and American), rock, calypso (at which they excel), Indian ragas, and blues.

But their performances—and this is nothing new to Fairfield—tend to lack continuity, with tiresome breaks, sometimes of four to five

minutes, between songs while they clump and clatter, re-arranging their instruments.

In fact the vast range of instruments the four play, too numerous to mention, create confusion. Tuning up tests the patience of the audience. The first half was a non-event—the proceedings were lackadaisical, almost soporific.

The two girls, Rose Simpson and Caroline [sic] McKecknie [sic] ("Licquorice" they call her), were largely superfluous.

In the second half, however, they took a more positive part and by the time they reached "Big Ted", the song about the pig in the risqué preamble, things had improved.

"Juanita", a story about a maiden who is pursued by an octopus, illustrated with screams, heavy drumming and clashes of cymbal, brought the audience to its feet.

Incredible String Band: sometimes tedious, sometimes richly rewarding!



They're free, and they're for you!
Send your small but perfectly formed
appeals and desires to:

**beGLAD, 11 Ratcliffe Road,
SHEFFIELD S11 8YA**
beglad@taproot.demon.co.uk

*It's that man again! Robin's and Cliff's fates
still curiously entwined some 25 years on...*

Evening Gazette, Saturday, October 15, 1994

Time Off 9



★ The Village People are back. The boys, who became a cult band among gays, and who tried to persuade us it was fun to stay at the YMCA are coming to a venue near you. See over the page for details.

SOUNDS Scene

Cliff still tops the bill

Voice of the ISB



THIS Edinburgh-born musician who inspired Neil Young to form the first band, arrived in the Northwest next week for two gigs. Robin Williamson, co-leader of the legendary Incredible String Band, brings his individual talents to Richmond's Georgian Theatre Royal on October 16 and the following evening to Durham Town Hall. Robin teamed up with Mike Heron in 1962 to form the Incredible String Band and within five years they had left the folk scene at Scotland to play off-road concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall, New York's Feltman stadium and,

of course, Woodstock. The band conjured up 18 best selling albums between 1962 and 1974 and were admired by everyone from Bob Dylan to Billy Connolly. Robin's performances are a spellbinding mix of steep falling, songs and Celtic harp. Tickets for the Richmond gig are available from the Georgian Theatre box office on 0149 23718 and for Durham Town Hall (0244) from Tolson Records in Durham, Newcastle and Sunderland or by post from Alan Meadows, 1 Wood Street, Bernard Castle, DL12 87R. Tel: (0833) 8827.

MANY may sneer at Cliff Richard's 30th birthday in the music industry and, like or loathe his music, it's a dead weight of admiration. Following last week's release of an album - The Hit List - to commemorate the achievement, he's now announced a 35-date tour of the UK during which he'll perform all 35 hits on the album.

No anyone going along to Wembley, the NEC, Glasgow's SECC, Aberdeen's Exhibition Hall or the Belfast arena will hear Cliff sing everything from Living Doll to Summer Holiday and Miss You Again to Misteltoe & Wine. A Cliff will be appearing at Sheffield Arena 19th.



DEARIE, VERIE FOR 'SCOTLAND'S OWN' December 13-16.

Tickets £22 and £19.50. Ring the box office on 0742 249428 for details.

FOR SALE

Robin Williamson *The Penny Whistle Book* £4
ISB *Rehearsal* video £8
Mike Heron's *Reputation* LP £6

WANTED (or exchange for above)

COB *Moyshie McStiff* tape (copy)
ISB *Relying The Knot* video copy
Robin Williamson *Journey's Edge* LP
Live tapes or anything of interest.
Jonathon Church, The Dower House,
The Old Rectory, Landbeach, Cambs
CB4 8ED
01223 864274

WANTED

New Morris Dancers!
Both Cardiff Morris Men and Cardiff Ladies Morris are looking for new recruits. If you live near Cardiff in South Wales and would like to give morris dancing a try, please contact us. All enquiries please by email to String Band fan and Morris person **Mark Knott** mark@knott32.fsnet.co.uk

WANTED

LP *On Air*
LP *The Incredible String Band* (1st album)
LP *Mike Heron—Casablanca* (Will pay 50)
CD *Mike Heron Smiling Men With Bad Reputations*
CD *Mike Heron's Incredible Acoustic Band*
Tapes *The Glen Row Tapes Vol 2 + 3*
45s *Any ISB and Mike Heron Singles*
beGLAD issues 1 to 7 (Originals)
WILL PAY TOP PRICES
Kieron M Stanley
25 The Brackens, Clayton, Newcastle-Under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 4JL.
kieron_stanley@hotmail.com

iSay...

The Voice of Stringfandom!

Wise words, Bob

Dear **IsGfLAD**

I found a book on Dylan (59p) last week in my local charity shop (I have lots of Dylan stuff) and was speed-reading it when, lo and behold, I was looking at page 119 and read a Mike Heron line: the chorus of Puppies, and the last line of an interview with Dylan dated 1969. *Wee Tam* is '68, so it could be that it is a quote. I am aware of Dylan's approval of the String Band but have not come across this mention before. Have you? Perhaps there is a story here.

I enclose the details for reference.

Kind regards,
Paul Cassidy
West Bridgford,
Nottingham

The book is *Bob Dylan: A Retrospective*, and is edited by Craig McGregor for Angus and Robertson (1972). The interview in question was conducted by Michael March, and concludes with March bearding His Bobness for the lack of political commitment in his later '60s work, arguing that his fans have certain expectations that, as an artist, Dylan is obliged to acknowledge.

What's political, man? Sorry, I can't do that William Zan Zinger [sic] stuff anymore. Besides, none of them know along the line what any of it is worth. Everybody wants to be inside my shoes and I'm married with three kids. Where the fuck is Nashville in space?

Q. But as a poet you must realise that people associate your musical thoughts with their existence. They want...

A. Did I hear product or me? They've pirated the basement tape, xeroxed Tarentula, and make me cut my hair off... Right now I'm into my existence and it feels good.

Q. Has your voice changed? On Nashville Skyline it's higher and smoother...

A. That's because I'm higher and smoother. Q. I mean...

A. "Music is so much less than what you are." OK?

Not only is The Zimm plainly quoting Mr H, he evidently expects his interlocutor to recognise the quote.

Wise words, Bob (2)

Dear **IsGfLAD**

I wonder if anyone else has noticed the remarkable resemblance between William ("Smokey") Robinson, author of *My Girl*, *My Guy*, *Going To A Go-Go*, *Shop Around*, *Tears Of A Clown*, *Since I Left My Baby*, *Get Ready*, *You've Really Got A Hold On Me*, *I Second That Emotion* etc and "America's greatest living poet" (R. Zimmerman) [It's that man again...—Ed], and Robin Williamson, author of *October Song*, *Eyes Of Fate*, *First Girl I Loved*, *Koeoaaaddi There*, *Three Is A Green Crown*, *Darling Belle*, *Job's Tears*, *Maya*, *Island Of The Strong Door*, *Love Letter To My Wife Bina* etc and indeed "quite good" (R. Zimmerman).

Is it mere coincidence that they are not merely anagrams of each other but spoonerisms too?

Has anybody ever seen the two of them in the same place at the same time, or are they like Clark Kent and Superman, always just missing each other and yet there is always a conveniently placed phone booth.

Could they, in fact, be one and the same person?

I think we should be told.

Jon Collie
London

Old friends' reunion

Dear **IsGfLAD**

A friend of mine, Nicholas Downey, now based in New York, is an old friend of Lawson's and came over for the Bloomsbury gig. Nicholas got to meet up with Lawson on the Tuesday before the concert. He is now back in NY and has sent me the attached letter, which gives a nice insight into the band's preparations.

Hi Stuart,

It's almost superfluous to say I had a great time at the concert. What a pleasure just to see the guys on a stage again, a shining occasion! I could have watched them for hours and hours. The whole thing was doubly special for me too, seeing my friend Lawson up there with them. I had a great time with Laws when I was over there, and spent an

afternoon with him in his studio on the Tuesday before the concert. He's such a fun guy to be with, a terrific talker, you never need to ask him questions—he just runs on a mile a minute. My one regret is that, the day before, Robin, Bina and Clive were there doing some last minute things. Robin, it seems, lives literally just around the corner from the studio and Laws says he usually loves company, but felt it was an imposition to just wander around that day, as he was leaving later that day. Pity. Laws says that when we come back next time we can drop in and see him. What a thought. Laws was very funny, in particular talking about Clive—seems he was always getting confused about what song was coming up next, so Laws developed a number of vaguely hidden signs to clue him up. Apparently, also, he was always eager to get to the end of their rehearsals so he could "go get a pint." There was an almost holy feeling in the place—Lawson pointing out where Robin would sit to play his harp, Mike liked to place his piano here to see the monitors etc. Lawson also treated us to a run-through of the programme. God, does he play well! He also happens to be a great guitarist as well, as if the one instrument was not enough. So I spent an hour or so singing along, as best as I am able, to ISB songs with him. Only got a bit confused on *Ducks On A Pond*, which seemed a lot slower to me, with Laws all the time telling me where the other members came in with harmony, guitar, banjo etc. It was all quite a thrill, I can tell you. Then to see the whole thing put together at Bloomsbury was just extraordinary. You seem to have somehow read my mind regarding what were the high points of the gig—to me This Moment was very special, Mike did a great job on that one. Also Air was very satisfying. But the whole thing just flew by so fast it's almost impossible to focus on high points. It was all a high point to me, I liked Clive's little solo piece dedicated to his late father, simple but effective, I thought.

Clive was the first person I saw when I got to Bloomsbury, he was standing outside smoking a cigarette and talking to Bina. So I talked to him for a little while (to tell you the truth I didn't know at the time who Bina was) particularly praising him for his amazing banjo playing on *Just Like The Ivy* on the CD of the same name, certainly the best I've ever heard from him. Have you heard that album yet? Laws gave me a copy of it when I visited him, and it being the only CD I had in the country, I played it over and over again as we travelled down to Devon and Cornwall.

Fits perfectly! Also, afterwards did get to speak (briefly) with Robin, at length with Mike, mainly about what he'd been up to, why he didn't play guitar at all on the Thursday (did he on the Friday?)—he said he'd all but abandoned it for years, sad. And, of course, talked to Lawson. Took everybody's photo, which I've shamefully not had developed yet, and got to meet Lawson's wife and two adopted girls. (You might have met them too, without knowing it, they were the ones selling CDs and posters.)

All in all, I'm still kinda breathless about the whole thing. Did get my poster signed by everybody, by the way, which will get framed one of these days. Procrastination runs riot around here. Haven't heard from Lawson since I got back, which is hardly surprising, since he's on holiday in the wilds of Scotland until Saturday, but I'll inundate him with questions then. I'm glad you got to introduce yourself to him. It's thanks to you that much of the foregoing got to happen. Bless you.

Best wishes and fondest regards,
Nicholas

Stuart Godfrey
Risca
Gwent

Sufi sunshine

Dear beGLAD

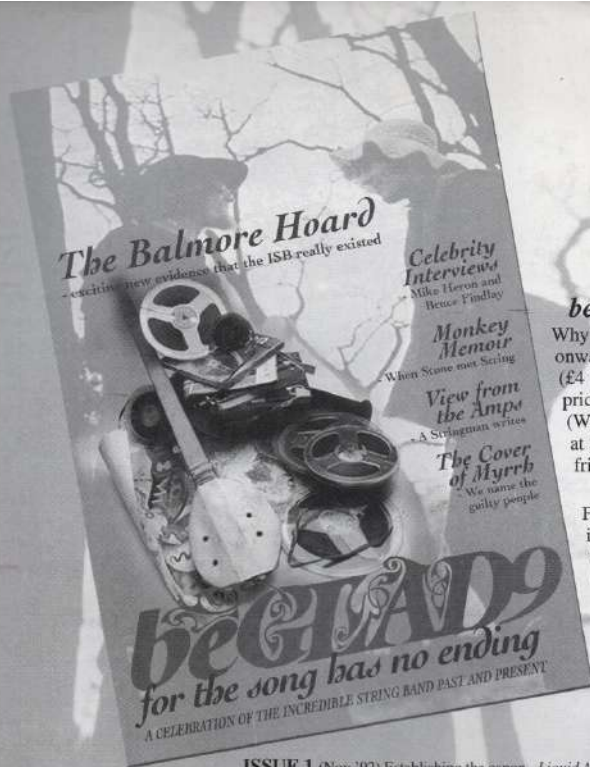
When I worked at the Bodhi Tree Bookstore in LA they had (and still have) a plaque by the front door with "May the long time sun shine..." etc. written upon it. Whenever Jimmy Page and Robert Plant would come to the store (which never coincided with my being there) they would ask if anyone knew where those words came from and if anyone had heard of the ISB. Of course, none of the staff would know. Later, as I would come in to work, "Hey David, have you heard of a band called the Incredible...?" It was, however, a Sufi or a Hindu chant first.

All for now
and now for all
David Nigel Lloyd
California Hot Spring CA
USA



photo by Jean Hussain

The way we
used to be...



beGLAD has been through a few changes in its 18-issue lifespan.

Why not check our past glories?—All issues from no. 8 (Summer 1996) onwards are permanently available in their original sleek form, at £3 each (£4 for issues 13-16), which of course includes postage and packing (the price is £4.50 for Europe, £5 for the rest of the world). Issues 1 to 7 (Winter 1992 to Winter 1995) remain available as bound photocopies again at £3 per issue, worldwide. All from the address on page 3. Impress your friends by acquiring the **FULL SET!**

For newer readers, we've supplied a rough guide to the contents of each issue, below. These are merely selected highlights—there's far more than we can tell you about here. Twice a year, in June and December, **beGLAD** brings you forty-eight pages packed with fact, commentary, analysis, opinion, anecdote and whimsy, lavishly embellished with photos and illustrations. Everything you could decently expect to know about the ISB, as well as about Robin, Mike, Malcolm, Rose, Likky and Clive individually, is yours for the reading.

ISSUE 1 (Nov '92) Establishing the canon...*Liquid Acrobat* retrospective...the life of Clive...*Vishangro* explained...U-turu; ISB in perspective...interview with Robin...Mike's movements; and more.

ISSUE 2 (May '93) *U* retrospective...*Be Glad*—the film...ISB and Pentangle...Big Ted's grave...*Earthspan* scrutinised...Dr Strangely Strange...more thoughts on the canon...taking the ISB home; and more.

ISSUE 3 (Nov '93) Robin interviewed again...final canon thoughts...*No Ruinous Feud*—the great debate...Bickershaw photo-feature...Lord Of Weir—his background...A look at the Songbooks...major Mike interview part 1...ISB at the BBC part 1; and more.

ISSUE 4 (May '94) *Hangman's* retrospective...comprehensive study of album sleeves part 1...the return of Malcolm le M...the Not Quite Christmas Party photo album...a look at Pooka...ISB cover versions tracked down...major Mike interview part 2...Robin at home; and more.

ISSUE 5 (Nov '94) *Changing Horses* retrospective...ISB film soundtracks...comprehensive study of ISB album sleeves part 2...ISB at the BBC part 2...Joe Boyd tells all...Woodstock...definitive guide to ISB instrumentation; and more.

ISSUE 6 (May '95) Robin's post-ISB music...ISB album sleeves part 3...Live at Leeds with Mike, Robin, Malcolm and Dr S. Strange...more thoughts on *Hangman's*...the strange life of Robert (not Robot) Johnson...Joe Boyd interview part 2...instrument guide part 2; and more.

ISSUE 7 (Nov '95) *Wee Tam And The Big Huge* retrospective...ISB album sleeves part 4...Log Cabin lore...trad. influences on the ISB...grasping the nettle of Scientology...instrument guide part 3; and more.

ISSUE 8 (May '96) Rose Simpson reveals all...Mike and Robin—the new CDs in depth...further reflections on *Wee Tam And The Big Huge*...*Job's Tears* and *Douglas Traherne Harding* deconstructed...Robin looks back...on stage with Malcolm and Clive; and more.

ISSUE 9 (Nov '96) Early ISB recordings rediscovered...*5000 Spirits* retrospective...Robin looks back part 2...recording *Reputation*—the true story...*Darling Belle* anatomised...Bruce Findlay interviewed...Graham Forbes remembers axe-wielding past...the Stone Monkey story; and more.

ISSUE 10 (May '97) Mike and Robin say let's do it again...*I Looked Up* looked over...Malcolm Le Maistre gives that long awaited interview...remembering Bardney...Famous Jug Band potted history...the alternative ISB story part 1...*October Song* dissected...Balmore memoirs; and more.

ISSUE 11 (Winter '97) Mike & Robin on stage together—pics and breathless commentary...Malcolm's interview part 2...*Hard Rope* reappraised...the Penwern period revisited...*Ithkos* in pictures...the alternative ISB history part 2...guide to the ISB's Edinburgh...String roots; and more.

ISSUE 12 (Summer '98) Billy Connolly remembers...Malcolm's epic interview concluded...more from the "Not The Reunion" gigs...First Album deconstructed...Kilmanoyedd memories...the Pig's Whisker story...return of Gilles Crooked-Deal... *5000 Spirits* reanalysed; and more.

ISSUE 13 (Winter '98) Rose reveals more...Mike's '87 tour—the facts...Malcolm on the road...the inside story of Glen Row...*Be Glad*—the album...Robin gets brassy...Mike's sitar tutorial...the Zen of the ISB...*Lordly Nightshade* under the microscope; and more.

ISSUE 14 (Summer '99) The ultimate Clive Palmer interview...The Auld Alliance—Robin & Clive together again...Myrrh & Smiling Men revisited...Then Glen Row Tapes—what went where, and why...Lawson Dando speaks out—Robin's studio wizard in exclusive interview...The Old Fangled Tone dissected in septh...Mike at the movies...Lord of Weir goes graphic...Glen Row photo album; and more.

ISSUE 15 (Winter '99) Robin and Clive on tour...Mike's "In Your Dreams" compilation...the Merry Band: four glorious years in words and photos...Winged We Were: the ISB tribute CD in detail...ISB in Barcelona...the remastered Elektra CDs appraised...the Holy Modal Rounders: the ISB's evil twin...Yellow Snakes And Ricketty Ladders—the ISB board game; and more.

ISSUE 16 (Summer '00) The Hogmanay reunion—full report and photos...Likky at last!—part one of the long awaited major feature...Mike's *Mystics* remix anatomised...*U*—the ultimate investigation...Robin talks instruments...Concerning Fuzz and Pan...Robin and Dylan—the Thomas connection renewed...Julie Felix remembers; and more.

ISSUE 17 (Winter '00) ISB reform: it's official—full coverage of the summer concerts...Likky's sister interviewed...Robin goes Latin: Carmina at Llandaff...a look at Mike's lost Casablanca album...Clive Palmer: a complete discography...the ISB's adventures in the charts...what Mike did next: after the Incredibles part one; and more.

beGLAD