

# Be Glad...

for the song has no ending



An appreciation of  
The Incredible String Band  
past and present

us. News. News. News. News. News. News. News. News. News.

Hottest of hot news is that Mike Heron is due to be a TV star. Well, nearly. 'Roughnecks' is a seven part TV series due to be screened in spring 1994, dealing with the lives of a group of oil rig workers both on and off the rigs.

One of the characters, when on shore, spends his time wandering the hills remembering his youth and the halcyon days of the String Band. Cue much use of old ISB songs. In a wedding party scene Mike's band appear live and songs due to be specially recorded for the programme include 'Log Cabin Home In The Sky', and 'Everything's Fine Right Now' amongst others. Sketchy details for sure, but that's all that anyone knows at the present time.

The episode in question goes out at 9pm - we're talking prime time here - on Saturday the 21st of May. Filming will have taken place by the time you read this. More news in the May issue.

Robin has a new album out, but only in the USA unfortunately. It's on the Flying Fish label and is a collection of traditional songs recorded with none other than John Renbourn. Robin will be touring here next year with Renbourn and hopefully the album may get a UK release to coincide with those dates. In the meantime, hassle your importer. The album's called 'Wheel Of Fortune' by the way.

Mike is playing two dates as a duo (with guitarist John Rutherford) in early November in Birmingham and Bath. No venue as yet but if you're interested give me a ring after Nov 1st and I may know more. The full Mike Heron acoustic band is at Jackson's Lane Community Centre, The Archway, Islington, London on Friday 19th November - see you there.

Mike's 'White Bird' is used as backing music on the 'Dominoes' video. This video (Virgin Video/£10.99-ish) is a visual history of the 60s and has lots of interesting footage from that decade backed by Hendrix, Canned Heat etc 'White Bird' is used to backdrop a load of flower children aimlessly prancing round in a meadow somewhere....good video though and worth a watch.

Issue 15 of RCD magazine, one of those growing number of glossies created for people who dimly remember listening to good music in their youth, haven't kept it up and are now having it and the information sold back to them in a nostalgia package, has a free CD attached with the ISB's 'Circle Is Unbroken' on it, taken from the 'Live In Concert' CD.

The June issue of Q magazine featured a series on album sleeves and, believe it or not, 'Hangman's' was there. A good piece which gave a lot of information. The following month had a feature on band's set lists and there was a pic of an ISB set list!

The 'Live In Concert' CD is due to be released in Japan early next year with deluxe packaging including lyrics in both languages. What will they make of 'Willow Pattern'?

The ever-*ISB* hungry media had a funny turn in July and a piece on the String Band appeared in the Daily Telegraph (10/7) of all places. Quite a good piece really which must have added to CD sales that day.

As ever the CD re-issues were studiously ignored by most areas of the music press - one exception being an excellent review of the '1st' album and 'The Big Hugs' in the October issue of Folk Roots. John Crosby, an astute *ISB* reviewer in past instances, again hits the nail on the head..."The String Band ethic was all about both spiritual questing and a gentle playfulness.....Yet the band's legacy is perhaps stronger than many others of the hippie era, simply because it speaks eloquently of a genuinely, different role for male playfulness." Why can't they have reviewing like that in 'Q'?

Finally, newswise, the National Film Theatre, South Bank, London are showing the films, 'Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending' and 'Rehearsal', on 21st December at 8.30 pm and 22nd December at 6.30 pm. If you

haven't seen them you must - 'phone to book and check details on 071 9283232.

**Intriguing Box Ad**

If there is anyone out there with money they would like to see go into a good cause and who would like to be involved financially in interesting future *ISB* related projects please get in touch with me at the editorial address.



**Network Mail Order**

A full catalogue of Incredible String Band CDs, tapes, videos etc etc can be obtained by sending a sae to Network Mail Order, 196 Old Road, Brampton, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S40 3QW

*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*

Hello, we're back again with something of an autumnal treat for y'all.

The readers poll results were fascinating and useful and you can find the main points on page 35. Your ideas and comments were most welcome and gave me some new ideas for articles which should help make the magazine better. One frequent response on the questionnaire, besides wanting more interviews and features on general ISB, Mike and Robin topics which we will endeavor to supply, was that you'd like more of the 'how people got into listening to the ISB' sort of piece. I quite like that idea provided they're not too 'wandering from the point'.

Endless reams of 'facts' are only one half - sometimes the least interesting half - of the story of music and musicians. Fans' response to music - the reason we actually listen to the stuff - should be of equal interest to who played what, where and when, and in particular here Allan Frewin's piece speaks volumes on this. A look at an album - yes, but also a segment of life, about how you come across music and its initial and subsequent effects. Remember how Jim Morrison describes hearing rock'n'roll for the first time: "I wanna tell you about Texas Radio and the Big Beat, comes out of the Virginia swamps, cool and slow....."

- So what was it *like* hearing String band music for the first time, whether it was 1968 or 1986 or last week, set against the times and personal experience. All in all you can't separate a music from its fans and the effects thereon. Music is a powerful force that resonates within collective and individual lives. The String Band's music did all this, but only as part of a two-way process. I'm interested.....tell me. How was it for you?

But back to the poll. Another popular request was that the magazine became more frequent. 'Fraid that's not possible due to various time constraints - like I've got to go to work - and the fact that if it comes out more often we use the available material up quickly and when there's nothing else to say it'll stop.

LAST CHANCE! You'll find a flier for the 8/1/94 event enclosed - some of you will have had more than one by now but never mind. Response to this

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event has been sluggish and the simple facts are that if I don't have a hundred people willing to come by Nov 15th I shall have to cancel the event. Please support it if at all possible. I am assured by the Gods that all will be well weather-wise on the day - January is usually pretty mild in these parts with no snow for ages. So make an effort and support this type of event. If you do there will be more of them, if you don't I'm afraid the enthusiasm will dissipate.

We have the usual high level quality of contributors this time but don't let that lull you into complacency. If you'd like to write for 'Be Glad' then do so by all means. I'd particularly like some contributions from female readers - there are quite a few - 'cos I don't see why writing about music should be the male preserve that it tends to be - especially when dealing with the String Band who had quite a large female following. So come on goils. But if anybody wants to flex their pen the featured album next issue will be..... 'Hangman's Beautiful Daughter'. If anyone has any old music press reviews of 'HBD' I'd be grateful for copies - and if you want to contribute your thoughts on the matter get scribbling now. Deadline for all copy for the May '94 issue is March 15th at the absolute latest.

A subscription note - if your sub is up this issue please renew as soon as you can. It's cost me a fortune in reminder postage this time to contact all the people who wanted this issue but didn't renew their sub. Please, if at all possible, use the enclosed sub form if you know your sub has run out and send it back as promptly as possible. This enables me to plan the next issue .....and I can lash out and afford to have more photos screened for the next magazine.

One question on May's questionnaire told me what a lot of you are listening to besides the ISB & co (yes there is more to life than that!), and I've picked up a few new favourites from that. In return here's a few delicacies which

have enjoyed considerable play here at Roberts' Towers over the past few months: Ry Cooder - Meeting by the River, Dead Can Dance - Into The Labyrinth, Joni Mitchell - Blue, The Cure - Disintegration, Jefferson Airplane - Boxed Set, William Orbit - Strange Cargo II, Unholy Modal Rounders - Have Moicy, Roots & Blues Retrospective - Various Artists.....all well worth a listen, with the first two being of particular interest to ISB fans.

For future issues I'd like to run a 'Notes & Queries' section - you know, all those niggling little questions you've harboured for years about the ISB like who was Walter Gundy (credited on 'Changing Horses') - send 'em in and we'll do our best to come up with the correct answer. Also a 'reader's wants' column for people trying to track down ISB and related music, memorabilia or offering same. And a letters page wouldn't go amiss - send 'em in.

So, that's the first year of 'Be Glad'. May I take this opportunity to thank all of you for your help, support and encouragement over the past year. Subscriptions are rising rapidly but without your support and contributions this magazine wouldn't exist in the form it does. Much appreciated.

I know it's only autumn but in lieu of a Christmas/midwinter card to you all, have a good time and may your magic Christmas tree shine.

Big thanks and acknowledgements go this time to the usual suspects particularly including, Mark Anstey, Alan Frewin, Grahame Hood, Adrian Whitaker and anyone else who has helped with this issue.

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*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*

**Reviews.....Reviews.....Reviews.....Reviews.....Reviews.....Reviews**

Since the last issue quite a few items have surfaced on CD. Robin's 'Journey's Edge' (a tremendous album which just gets better and better and oh, those disco bass-lines!), the '1st' Album, 'Big Huge' and 'Changing Horses' amongst them. We're not going to review them here specifically as you are no doubt already familiar with their vinyl counterparts or have bought them on CD. If not Mark Anstey's excellent Network Mail Order service will have a liveried servant of the Queen deliver them to your house for a very reasonable price.

It has to be said though that the sound quality on all the above is vastly improved - 'Changing Horses' stands out here with percussion and vocals I could never hear on vinyl - and the three ISB albums have all the original artwork in booklet form and are all on mid-price on coloured CD. Great value for money. See the 'news' page for details of other releases to come.

Worth reviewing, however, are these three:



**Mike Heron's Incredible Acoustic Band: Official Bootleg. Price £7.50 inc. p & p from Network Mail Order**

Spring 1993 was, as many of you will know, the first time Mike's A.A.B. took to the road for a full tour. The tour report elsewhere in these pages gives you the lowdown on that, but this is the tape of the tour. Originally the soundboard tape from the Kendal 'warm-up' gig was going to be marketed as the official bootleg but muso musings put paid to that. This tape is culled from DAT recordings taken at a selection of gigs and features the band at their musicianly best. Those of you who bought the band's CD EP might have been a bit disappointed with the sound (I'm being economical with the truth here - it was crap). Don't let that put you off buying this, the sound here is crisp and clear, every note stands out and the whole thing has a well-blended sound.

Altogether it's a fine set of adult acoustic music and a testament to the development of civilisation as we know it that grown men can sing "just think" in high pitched Bee Gee voices (on

'Killing the Dragon') and get away with it - sorry Stuart and John!

The only problem is really that it isn't a full show, recorded in sequence. Hence we don't get 'Always', 'Heavy Feather' or 'Gaugin' and so forth, although this situation could be rectified by another official bootleg or if some record company could take the trouble to listen to the effort that goes into playing these songs and give the lads a deal.

In other words I'm sorry but you'll just have to buy it - as indeed you will the next item.



**Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Video. Price £16.50 (£17.50 Europe) inc. p&p from Network Mail Order.**

Much has been written (see last issue) about the 'Be Glad' film and it now has legendary status among Stringheads. Rightly so. I first saw it in Bradford in 1975 or 76 at the end of a long day following a night shift, and promptly fell asleep half way through. My significant other assured me it was dead good and I was suprised earlier this year at the Rio showing because I thought I was going to have sit through it and like it for what it was rather than because it was genuinely good.

Few films from this era have stood the test of time but Peter Neal's ideas and direction, intercutting live performances with interviews which resonate with the very essence of String Band, creates an otherworldly feel to this, one of the first 'rock-docs'. The fact that it has come to be released now, tewnty odd years

after its original release is thanks to a lot of hard work by Mark Anstey and Peter Neal, together with our very own Adrian Whitaker who arranged the London showing in February of this year. It is essential viewing for all ISB-ophiles. Even the fantasy fable towards the end is lots of fun and makes more sense of the instrumental stuff on the 'Be Glad' album. It's a limited issue so get it while it's there to be got.



**Robin Williamson In Concert - Video. Price £19.99 (£20.99 Europe) inc p&p from Network Mail Order.**

This video was recorded in Canada and features Robin in full story telling mode accompanied with his trusty harp and guitar.

To be honest the camera work is not that good and lacks the creativity expressed in the stories and songs and I think a Williamson story telling video would have been better filmed in more atmospheric surroundings. But if you are a big fan of Robin's stories and songs then it is a vital purchase.

Robin's voice and guitar work is in excellent order and he performs the set with some vigour and feeling. The boy sure can sing! As the cover blurb says - 'Probably the closest things to a 20th Century bard you'll ever encounter'.

*All these tapes and videos can be obtained from Network Mail Order, 196, Old Road, Brampton, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S40 3QW Tel: 0246 274441*



No expense spared for the back drop to 'Blackfoot Side' at the Sheffield gig!

*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*



A poet and a modern day bard, Robin Williamson has always told stories.

He was born on November 24th, 1943, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Raised there and in England, he has been a musician since leaving school at the age of seventeen. His first musical forays involved the traditional music of Scotland, England and Ireland as well as skiffle music, but it wasn't until late 1965, when he formed the Incredible String Band with Clive Palmer and Mike Heron, that his music began to gain larger recognition



The Incredible String Band went through numerous line-ups, a documentary film, and thirteen albums with such evocative titles as *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* and *Liquid Acrobat* as *Regards the Air*, until it finally broke up in 1974. For a while Robin contented himself with a solo album, fiddle and tin whistle music books, poetry collections, and a collaboration on a mystery novel, *The Glory Trap*, published under the name of Sherman Williamson. Then in 1977 he formed the Merry band, with whom he toured extensively and recorded three albums, turning to solo work once more in the early eighties.

More recently Robin has composed the music for a stage and British TV production of *The Mabinogi*, a score for a thirteen week TV series on British history, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, and songs and music for a dance theatre piece on Dylan Thomas. Robin's latest solo performances have been of a bardic nature incorporating harp, song and story. His latest recordings include a new album of songs, *Songs of Love and Parting*, a

## Talking With A Green Man

An interview with Robin Williamson

by  
Charles de Lint

collection of 17th century Lowland harp tunes, *The Legacy of the Scottish Harpers*, and a number of cassettes of Celtic legend, wit, mystery and romance.

This interview was conducted by letter and cassette during the Spring of 1985.

*You have been described as a 'Celtic Bard'. Could you give us some idea as to what is meant by this?*

The bards were founded in the dim and distant past. They were around when Caesar invaded the islands, as a part of the druid order, and they seemed to have survived in Scotland up into the beginning of the eighteenth century when the clan system was finally destroyed. They were poets and, as such, originally held a sacred function in Celtic societies.

*What would be the role of the bard in present-day society?*

I think the poet's sacred function is something that we have lost. In our society, it's been replaced with such things as the star system - the rock star, or the film star - that's the relic of it. But it's really something different. The star system is more like idol worship isn't it? The poet's function, rather than being worshipped, is perhaps to worship. Speaking for myself, I seek to give people a sense of continuity - a sense of their part in the universe and of us all partaking in the mystery of being alive and sailing this extraordinary ship of fools which is the world.

*Your stories, in performance and on*

*cassette, are usually accompanied by harp music. What brought your interest to the harp and how important is it to your storytelling?*

I'd always wanted to play the harp, but it wasn't until the late seventies and my work with the Merry Band that I came in contact with Sylvia Woods, who plays the harp. After the end of the Merry Band I began incorporating on the harp ideas that I'd always tried to do previously on the guitar. I think the harp is the perfect accompaniment to what I do now and, of course, it's traditional.

The ancient poets always used to play the harp or perform to harp accompaniment.

*Can you tell us a little bit about Scottish storytelling and how it survived over the years?*

When I was a boy in Scotland, there was a lot of surviving folklore, though no-one had got around to labelling it as such. It was just there. Scotland has proved to be, in the last five or six years, about the richest vein of contemporary traditional storytelling that's ever been collected anywhere in

*But I would read all day if I could get away with it and all night too with a flashlight under the covers, of that Green Man my namesake, or of Merlin of the borders, and in seeking out the stories of Britain's ancient heritage I delved.....*

*- Robin Williamson; from 'Five Denials on Merlin's Grave'*

Europe - including Ireland. They've collected hundreds and hundreds of stories in Scotland in the last twenty years.

Storytelling survived, was continued and brought on into the twentieth century almost entirely by the lowest classes of people, particularly by the travellers or tinkers. But in the ancient past, storytelling - even some of the stories the travellers tell - originated essentially with an aristocratic class of poet, the bards, who were the

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associates of kings.

*Do you feel that class structure is important?*

Apart from disputing the notion that art originates in any particular class, no. I regard art as a classless pursuit. It seems to me that, if you become an artist, you step outside of the class system and can associate with both high and low. That's the charm and its virtue. While someone like myself will never be able to enter the world of a traveller like Betsy White - a marvelous Scottish storyteller - with my literary background I can add to the tradition what is perhaps its key to the future.

Storytelling must become classless in order to transcend its current demise in the world and to step into the future along side of various media developments.

Without these traditional extensions into the future, the world of the future will be very, very mechanized and devoid of the human touch. For the same reason that people turn to pottery for a sense of touch of the earth, I think people turn to the storytelling tradition for a touch of the human soul and our place in the world.

*How much of your storytelling is based on traditional sources?*

All of it is based on traditional folklore, but all of it is in my own voice. I have acquired my own niche in that continuing heritage because as a boy I was able to meet people like Jeannie Robertson, Jimmie MacBeath, Davey Stewart - the last of the great traditional Scottish singers. In a way,

what they represented has been handed on to me. I have become the next link in the chain by virtue of my having been there and been privileged to hear it. I am a part of that heritage and my stories are all based on it, but they are mine as well.

*Is there any difference in the way that you approach the writing of a story or a poem?*

Writing a story, writing a song, writing

example, because it's the personal emotion that is put into that tune that makes it unique. In that sense it's possible to put a lot of one's own personality into a traditional story without altering the content at all.

*How do you see storytelling surviving in the present day?*

When I used to live in North Africa, I listened to many of the storytellers in Marrakech and Fez. They have big market places in those towns where there is still the medieval-style tradition of open-air storytelling that continues in the present day. These storytellers tell stories that happened a thousand years ago, two thousand years ago, and stories that happened to them yesterday, in exactly the same tone of voice. I think that's very, very important.

In our society, storytelling is still alive as jokes and humorous

anecdotes. There have always been jokes, but I think one can extend the type of storytelling that is common and popular to include things that have happened to one, funny things, what somebody said, even telling what happened in a film. Present-day storytelling should try to include these things, together with the whole body of the tradition, and use it to make a leap forward into the future. That's what I try to do, anyway.

*Do you have any other advice for present-day storytellers?*

Just to tell the truth from your own heart. Other than that, there is no advice, except to add that I think it's very important not to analyse the ancient hereditary material that we've



a poem - they're all the same thing, whether creating or relaying. It's a question of finding your own voice. It's a question of *not* imitating somebody else. When people sound like themselves, there's an honesty and a truth about that communication that comes from something close to their heart, or close to what they are.

*But what if the source of the work is traditional?*

Traditional stories are not authored by one individual, but by the race or the nation. This doesn't deny the fact that an individual storyteller may have his or her own creative part in that continuance, of course. It's possible to be extremely creative, even when playing a simple fiddle tune, for

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been handed down by the past. It's a mistake to assume that we can make some superior sort of judgement as to its meaning. Also, the notion that some bits of the human tradition are not somehow suitable, that some fairy tales, say, are not suitable for children - that is also a mistake. Fairy tales have their own morals and their own ethics. Perhaps the violent element in some fairy tales is a sort of preparation for the violence and unfairness of the world. Such stories are much preferable to the junk pap on television or in movies like *Star Wars* and *E.T.* that are only imitations of our ancestral heritage.

In order to avoid storytelling's becoming some sort of cutesy parlor activity, or some patronizing entertainment suitable only for children, it's important to maintain a string thread to its roots - to the personal voice, to one's commitment to the millenia that go before us, and to the unchanged mystery of the stories themselves.

Stories are an inseparable part of the human dream.

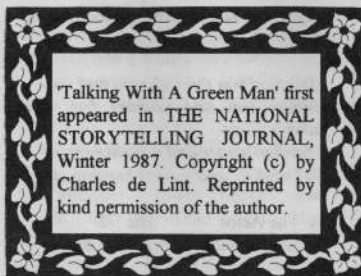


Photographs of Robin on stage in Richmond, Autumn 1992 by kind permission of Jim Hill.

An extensive list of Robin's storytelling tapes, writings and other goodies should write to:

Robin Williamson Productions  
 BCM Box 4797  
 London  
 WC1N 3XX  
 England

Please enclose an sae.



## Williamson In Winter

The bits of Robin's autumn/winter tour that will be relevant to you by the time this magazine is out are:

Nov 13th - London - Jackson's Lane Community Centre  
 Nov 15th - Liskeard, Sterts Centre  
 Nov 16th - Exeter & Devon Arts Centre  
 Nov 17th - Dartington Arts Centre  
 Nov 21st - Bath, Hat & Feather  
 Nov 22nd - Crediton Drama Centre  
 Nov 23rd - Bridport, Bull Hotel  
 Nov 24th - Cirencester, Niccol Centre  
 Nov 25th - Tewkesbury, Roses Theatre

Nov 27th - Malvern Youth Centre  
 Nov 28th - Banbury, The Mill  
 Nov 29th - Southsea, Railway FC  
 Dec 1st - Lydney, Feathers Hotel  
 Further details can be obtained by phoning the booking agent, Jon Benns on (0242) 581763

**Wanted:** Mike Heron's 'Reputation' album (neighbourhood). LP or cassette. Various items offered in exchange. Telephone 091 2610562, evenings.

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# More Trainspotting

(or, Every cell in my word processor has it all writ down)

Paul Bryant pursues the lost, the varied and the different

Here's some more notes from the further reaches of the Universal Stringbandography, that Grail we all work towards, which add to Raymond Greenoaken's article in issue 2, which itself added to my article in issue 1. (New readers may become confused here.) I omit the variants now released on the BBC Radio 1 Concert CD and the 'On Air' LP.

Songs which differed significantly between the live and recorded version (Part 2)

1. The Letter. Aug. '69. Much slower and twice as long.
2. Empty Pocket Blues. July '70. Full ISB version with *really piercing* Licorice singing.
3. Flowers of the Forest.
4. Beautiful Stranger.
5. Brindaban.
6. Lady Wonder.
7. Feast of Stephen.

These five, all from Heron's Smiling Men excursion, naturally sound different, rougher and (poor audience recordings notwithstanding) more appealing in many ways than the stiff arrangements on Smiling Men. The great uplifting CD version of 'Spriit Beautiful' shows how Heron, I think, became a little too experimental when he came to record the material. Great to hear Robin playing wild electric on 'Lady Wonder'. Shake it.

8. Talking of the End Early '71  
The instrumental line-up here is bizarre: two quiet electric guitars plus bass. Without all the studio malarkey it really sounds like a different song. The following extra verse with its extra tune comes after the "if I could sing only one song" section and is repeated twice:  
*If you go to the beautiful future  
Carry it my love from me*

*You'll see what's done in the heart of  
the sun  
And in the deep salt sea  
Remember every second since the  
world began  
Build new worlds for your play  
Reach out your hand, pick the fruit of  
the stars  
When all that mist rolls away*

9. How we danced at the Lord of Weir Oct. '71

This is another 'Spirit Beautiful', a song which by the time it was recorded had suffered a sea-change into something less than it was. But like Robin's solo material this is less a song than a dramatic monologue with incidental music, which means that each performance would have something of itself to give, an intonation or a particular phrasing.

10. Restless Night Early '72  
When this song arrived on 'Earthspan', the lovely slow jazz song it had been had suffered a lobotomy and all this tall wall mirror business arrived, with which I can myself make very little headway. The original, being the full version of the first part, contained extra verses as follows:  
*Restless night, walking nowhere in  
the foggy dew  
And the whole world is tip-toeing and  
whispering through  
Very low clouds*

*Doors are all closed and the stores  
are too bright  
I would go and tell them of the dreams  
we know  
But the night gets in and fits too tight*

*The whole world grows around cars  
and me in the clear night air  
And my body gets sad cause I see no  
stars here and no stars there*

11. Cousin Caterpillar Nov. '72  
An example of rearranging an old one and, unlike the awful 'Hangman' medleys, actually improving the song, this rocky version of a rather wistful tract of philosophy from Heron shoulda binna single. It's got a riff and a good beat.

12. Sunday Song unbootlegged, late '72

Like 'Painted Chariot' I seem to remember that this was longer once, even though the recorded version can itself be, I would say, not unfairly described as long.

From a transcription of a now-lost audience tape I myself made come two extra lyrical snippets, one of which contains a surprise:

*We were having an earth-span of  
silence  
To contemplate supreme being*

[And after the stanza beginning "Now my friends are scattered wide..."]

*And I want to tell you now  
And letters take too long  
And so now I give you this, a spirit  
song  
Friends who fold their wings away in  
the day*

13. Banks of Sweet Italy late '72  
This also had an extra (second) verse once:

*I followed you through rain and snow  
Though you had nothing but your  
father's purse  
A foreign winter and no other shelter  
(?) Drink in your eyes is burning clear*

14. The Actor late '72  
This also had an extra verse once:  
*Time knotted in the breezy twenties  
With lilacs on the ground*

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*Tennis on wet Sundays  
Tea taken without a sound  
But a kiss etc. etc.*

#### Note on Myrrh & Smiling Men

It seems that seven out of eleven of the Smiling Men songs were performed live by the ISB, but only four out of the ten Myrrh songs. The songs the ISB seem not to have performed are:

Call me Diamond/Audrey/Warm Heart  
Pastry/No Turning Back/Make No Mistake.

Strings in the Earth and Air/Will We  
Open the Heavens/Through the Horned  
Clouds/Sandy Land/Dark Dance/I See  
us All Get Home.

What does this mean?

????????????????????????????????????

#### Felix Facts

Following the recently unearthed Julie Felix TV session I went into research probing mode to see if we could get exact details of the ISBs appearances on that show. A letter to Mark Cooper, ISB reviewer and producer of the show LATER was passed onto the BBCs music and arts researcher, Jeannie Clark, and we can now reveal the facts! "The performance of 'Half Remarkable Question' and 'Painting Box' was recently found by the BBC Archive on an old compilation tape. The complete programme no longer exists, and as far as we know, unfortunately none of the other ISB performances exist. As you probably know, the BBC in its infinite wisdom, wiped many of their early programmes, in the severely misguided belief that the tapes themselves were more valuable for re-use, having no archival policy as such in the early days.

This performance must come from one of the '68 programmes, but unfortunately I do not have details as to which one it would have been."

Jeannie went onto say that the three dates they have for ISB performances are 3/2/68, 23/3/68 and 15/2/69.

It seems highly unlikely then that we shall ever see the other two performances. Those people who attend the 'Be Glad' 'Just After Christmas Party' will be able to watch the video of 'Half Remarkable Question' and 'Painting Box' 'til their hearts content though.

## CLIVE PALMER TAPES

### Charlie Cool Goes

#### West:

Side 1: Pike County/Roll On  
Buddy/Sally Anne/Jack Of Hearts  
(Dylan).

Side 2: Lonesome Road/Salty  
Dog/Cripple Creek/All The Good  
Times/Foggy Mountain Breakdown  
(Scruggs arr. C.C.)

### Clive Palmer: House Of Images:

Side 1: Pretty Boy Floyd  
(Guthrie)/Fear A Bhata (The  
Boatman) Trad /Dark Eyes  
(Palmer)/Absent Friends  
(Palmer)/Moving On Song (Go,  
Move, Shift) (McColl).

Side 2: Swanee Echoes (Alfred  
Kirby)/Buffalo Skinners Blues/  
Country Lanes (Palmer)/Cold In  
China (Kottke).

*Clive Palmer* -  
vcls/banjo/keyboards/Northumbrian  
smallpipes

*Tim Wellard* - gtr/cymbal (Moving  
On)

*Gina Brown* - piano (Swanee  
Echoes), keyboards (Buffalo  
Skinners)

*Pete Berryman* - gtr (Dark Eyes)

Two very welcome tapes received from Cornwall; the Charlie Cool resulting from Clive acquiring a Gibson Mastertone banjo and rediscovering his interest in bluegrass and early American country (with a small c!) music.

Charlie Cool had a summer residency in a pub in Mousehole and recorded this tape to sell at gigs. It's pretty straight-forward stuff, they

haven't dipped too deeply into the obscure waters of the genre, but I bet they are a lot of fun live. The songs are all good too, always nice to hear the distinctive Palmer vocals. Tim sings "Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts" and carries it off well. Actually Tim and Clive have quite similar voices and blend very nicely. If you couldn't make it to Cornwall this summer, this must be a pretty good substitute. Play it loud!

'House Of Images' was recorded last Autumn and is currently seeking a release in Europe. It is a very good album indeed, a worthy successor to 'Just Me', 'Dark Eyes' and 'Country Lanes' hark back to the gentle sounds of C.O.B. (on the former, Tim's guitar sounds almost like a balalaika). 'Absent Friends' is a smallpipe solo dedicated to Clive's late father. 'Swanee Echoes' is a lovely Edwardian piano/banjo duet, and you don't hear many of those these days.

'Buffalo Skinners' recalls songs such as 'State Of Arkansas', very personal stories of the less romantic side of life in the American West. Best of all is Clive's reading of Ewan McColl's 'Moving On Song', accompanied simply by banjo and Tim hitting a cymbal on the beat, hardly noticed at first, but absolutely making the song what it is.

Review by Grahame Hood.

Both the above tapes are available at £5.50 inc p&p each from:

Tim Wellard  
7 Boddinar Close  
Newbridge  
Penzance  
Cornwall  
TR20 8NN  
0736 50564

Buy them.

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# No Ruinous Feud

## Masterpiece or muddle?

The readers decide - or at least they tell us what they think!

In the last issue Grahame Hood threw down the gauntlet - who would take on the task of doing a feature on that curate's egg of an album No Ruinous Feud?

We received no less than ten offerings, both for and against and here present two of them, and a letter. Make your own minds up! So.....

The scene: A courtroom carved from living wood and wound with bright ivys and trumpeting haws. In the public gallery sit a Hedgehog, some Puppies and a Caterpillar amongst other strange creatures. In the dock stand Robin, Mike, Malcolm and Gerard Dott. Robin looks uneasy as he leafs through a Cosmos Skytours American holidays brochure. Mike grins and looks nervous but confident whilst Malcolm adjusts his cravat and looks into the future for a streetlight to be under. It's 1973, that most portentous of years for the ISB. Had they lost the plot entirely with No Ruinous Feud of was it the beginning of another era, if only..... Above them the pale ghost of a black haired, gap-toothed girl flits disconsolately whispering "I know you". The judge, a distinguished figure in black robe with scythe accessory, much given to telling people his name, draws himself to his full height and declaims: "Incredible String Band, you stand before your creations and subjects accused of making an appalling album, of leaving your public behind and of sundry other offences against the taste of those who thought 'Wee Tam & Big Hugs' was enough to base a religion on. How do you plead?" Every fan they ever had leans forward expectantly.....

## No Ruinous Feud?

by  
Norman Lamont

'No Ruinous Feud' appeared early in 1973, and was the ISB's attempt to break into the mainstream of 'progressive' rock (itself a dying category). The title and the smooth production were the ISB, and Mike in particular, signalling this unity of purpose. In these terms it failed; in artistic terms despite some brave showings, it was also a failure.

Take the title. Clumsy, the first ISB title not to ring like crystal. Fans wondered what the feud was: the Williamson and Heron solo albums? The "me and my backing band" approach of Earthspan? The departure of Licorice? The less devoted would just find it an odd mouthful.

If the title was puzzling, the sleeve was a deliberate challenge. Never mind the hippies, here is a sophisticated piece of modern product. The familiar 'The' was dropped from the name. The title was emblazoned on a tacky pop-

art flash (later used for Dylan's equally tacky 'Shot of Love' sleeve), stuck onto four clumsily-matched portraits of the Men. Mike leads the way into the Brave New World by sporting a collar and tie and a corrugated tin blazer. It's sobering to reflect in the light of 90s fashions that Mike's lapels here seem more dated than their garb on 'Wee Tam' or 'I Looked Up'!

If I dwell on the sleeve, it is because it was a fair ride on the Glasgow Underground from Listen in Cowcaddens on that frosty morning. My feelings of anticipation and puzzlement worked on the inner and outer sleeves for a good half hour before I got it on the turntable.

The opening seconds were another farewell to the misty world of Wee Tam. B.J. Wilson on drums kicks us into Mike's 'Explorer'. After 'Earthspan' was criticised for lacking in continuity, Mike took the helm for 'Feud' and decreed a rhythm section of bass and drums to underpin all the tracks, to give the ISB the authentic rock voice he longed for. What doubts I had gathered over the sleeve were blown away by this confident piece with its biting rhythm, Mike sings strong and true, and the wind

arrangements provide interest for many subsequent hearings.

The recruitment of Gerard Dott was intended to beef up the musical credentials of the band, replacing serendipity with professionalism. And were those really Janet Williamson and Susis Watson-Taylor on glossy 'backing-chick' vocals, or uncredited Island regulars like Sue & Sunny or Lisa Strike?

'Down Before Cathay' is the great country and western tune that Marco Polo never wrote. Beautifully produced, all cascading guitars over a happy ambling rhythm; Malcolm's romantic verses promise more than they deliver when you actually read through them ("the admire-able deeds of Kubla Khan we admired..." he declaims without irony) but the promise is enjoyable enough. Sadly it is Robin and Mike who betray the polished veneer of the song with their sheep-like entrance on the chorus. While fanatics like me gloried in hearing them sing together again, friends hearing them for the first time raised quizzical eyebrows at this moment. Listening again after all these years, it is 'Cathay' out of all the tracks that stays in my head.

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Ah, but 'Saturday Maybe' was the business. It convinced the fans that Robin could still work magic, but also that Mike's rock and string experiments could compliment it perfectly. In thirteen short lines Robin recreates a sad, furtive relationship in visual, tactile and emotional detail. "Lead me by the light of your electric fire...Across the sheets your nut-brown curls go tumbling". A friend said this was an old song, confirming the impression that Robin was losing interest about this time. As a songwriter myself I can only wonder at this perfect little gem.

After these three tracks, however, the cracks begin to show. A round of jigs followed; fine in concert but unnecessary here, lacking the rough edges and sense of fun of the 'Grumbling Old Men' set.

'Old Buccaneer' - ok we've had rock, country, folk and 'Saturday Maybe', but what is this? Apparently Gerard Dott was an old trad jazz crony of Robins, and they appear to have cooked up this and 'Circus Girl' between them. This wasn't even jazz, and though we tried to love it, well...Unlike 'Cathay', however, a close reading of the words rewards the effort handsomely.

'At The Lighthouse Dance' was the last ISB single, and was probably intended, in one ISB head at least, to rocket Malcolm into the fashionably camp ranks of Bowie, Bolan, Harley and Mercury. Live he mimed the pop-star, strutting and fey in turns, but oh dear, it looked like he meant it! A pleasant sequence of pop chord changes with lyrical nonsense of the powder-and-lace space cadet school, it was cited by many as evidence for the prosecution in the ongoing trial by fandom that Malcolm was subject to.

Here I probably depart from ISB heterodoxy and declare that I love 'Second Fiddle': I don't know why on earth it's there or how it happened, but it kicks off side two with a short burst of exuberant joy. 'Circus Girl' was like Buccaneer only worse. Rambling and

not even funny. Despite the efforts of Mike to forge a singularity of purpose, Robin and Mr Dott seemed to be pulling in another direction, a pull that seemed more Ruinous than on the happily patchwork Earthspan.

'Turquoise Blue', along with 'Little Girl' and the first three tracks, is probably the sound of the album Mike wanted to make, with Gerard providing the polish rather than the furniture. He smoothly recreates the mood of some tropical beach holiday, probably with the girl from Ipanema. Nowadays this would be called AOR,

work of a modern rock band.

In retrospect it would have taken more than a tight rhythm section and a strong production to pull the diverse strands together. Mike had his vision, Malcolm his ambition, Robin seemed aimless, and Gerard Dott had the uneasy post of everyone's session musician. Out of the album I think you would get a good Mike Heron EP, and a single of 'Saturday Maybe', backed with the cover versions 'Second Fiddle' and 'My Blue Tears' - but you'd still not have a band.



So, not quite a 'yes' from Norman, but not quite a 'no' either. The cavalry came to the rescue at this juncture in the form of a letter from editor of 'First Hearing', Simon Jones.....

Dear Editor,

So there was I enjoying the latest fun-filled issue of 'Be Glad', when some oink goes and upsets me by questioning the worth of 'No Ruinous Feud'. What is this tosh Sir, how dare you print such sacrilege? I'll have you know some of us value our admittedly ageing copies of said album. In fact Demon have just reissued it on compact disc! Proof indeed

of the appeal of this slighted String Band work.

'No Ruinous Feud' was the first Incredible album I laid my mitts on, and appealed to me for one very good reason. At the time I was expanding my understanding of rockin' roots and various bodies had told me to investigate the ISB but to be frank, when they played me early String things, well I listened for the electricity and there wasn't any. That wasn't to say I dismissed those first noodlings, but when I came across NRF why I was taken with the beast. There were reels and rock instruments and the band even looked odd enough. Immediate purchase ensued, travelling home on the train - I should explain all this was about eleven years after its

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## Sounds preview

February 17, 1973

**THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND: "NO RUINOUS FEUD" (ISLAND ILPS9219).** NOW THIS album is a joy to hear. I felt unaccountably disappointed with the String Band's last album, and I found it disconcerting because I couldn't really figure out what it was that left me feeling vaguely unsatisfied. There was a sense of coldness about it that I couldn't quite define, and to me it felt disjointed. This one is exactly the reverse — the feeling I get from the whole album is of a kind of exuberant, outgoing warmth; they sound as if they really enjoyed making it, and it communicates enough to make you wish you'd been at the sessions. For the first time in quite a while, I feel I'm sharing an experience with them, rather than observing their processes of creation. The feeling you get is of four guys burbling with ideas, getting together to record a bunch of songs they all really enjoyed — sometime you even feel that it's running away with them a bit, ideas tumbling over each other on the verge of chaos. I love it. It's a varied album in terms of material — from Heron's "Explorer", almost funky at its root with Heron's voice slicing clean through and kind of goppily back-up vocals, through "Second Fiddle", String Band miscellany singing out over a reggae track by Greyhound, and Robin Williamson's "Circus Girl", an almost frivolous piece with Gerard Dott's brass and woodwind combined into some kind of crazy, waltzing big top band behind him, to Heron's "Little Girl", a smoky, gentle song. But there's also a sense of continuity throughout that comes essentially from the strength of the rhythm section anchoring each track, and Mike Heron's sensitive, sympathetic and imaginative production. He's brought through some lovely touches — like the beautifully effective acoustic guitar runs that gleam through on Malcolm Le Maistre's "Down Before Cathay", or the way you hear three distinct but connecting layers of action in Robin's "Saturday Maybe": neat bass and drums at the bottom, strings in the middle somewhere, and economical acoustic guitar coming through on the top. It's hard to pick stand-out tracks because in their different ways they all do, but I think if I had to play you just one it would be Heron's "Turquoise Blue", which gently chunks its way along in a kind of soft, Latin rhythm with the vocal floating across the top and a beautiful clarinet solo. Heron once confessed an admiration for Jesse Colin Young, and this track works somewhere in the same area as some of his best stuff. *By Peter Jones*

initial release, I got many a bargain in Manchester's music shops - I found my copy to be on Reprise and from the United States, a gatefold sleeve, lyrics, musicians listed, all vital to a trivia freak like myself.

Neither did the melodies disappoint, 'Down Before Cathay', 'At The Lighthouse Dance', 'Saturday Maybe', and the switched on, juiced up 'Jigs', that first side is an excellent example of good time '70s singerwriter stuff I like it still! The second side got a bit slow and dragged, but No Ruinous made me go out and acquire more String offerings.

So Sir, I'll defend the poor creature against any comers who prefer the pixier days of the String Band. Some of us like their rockier inclinations. On with No Ruinous

Feud!.....on to 'Hard Rope & Silken Twine'!

Yours faithfully  
Simon Jones - Folk Roots/First Hearing

Editor's reply: Mr Jones is now resting in a secure therapeutic unit where the first four ISB albums are being subliminally fed into his central nervous system. An exorcist waits nearby should he suddenly break into Circus Girl without due care or attention.

One more or less 'for', another definitely 'for'....but. Allan Frewin pencilmeister extraordinaire for 'Be Glad' is back.....and this time it's personal.

## Frewin's Feud

So. How do you go about analysing 'No Ruinous Feud'? Track by track is the usual method, so I won't bother with that. Too technical. It's the general feel that's important.

I vividly remember my first encounter with the ISB. A record shop in Hastings. The summer of 1969. Me, fifteen and still reeling from the Rolling Stones Free Hyde Park Concert. And, my god, how the Stones have usurped that event! You'd think they were the only band playing that day. I'll tell you - that was the first time I heard The Third Ear Band. The first time I heard King Crimson. The first time I heard Family. Fabulous music coming at me from everywhere - music I'd never dreamed existed. And I stroll into this record shop in Hastings for a quick root through the covers. And I come across this weird album. No pictures, just a white cover with lyrics printed on it, the first letter of each song illuminated with flowers and fairies. Open it up and there's these two men gazing out at you. Hippies. Real hippies. Not like us school-kids, our hair creeping cautiously over our ears, dreading to hear at any moment the clack of approaching scissors. "Tie-dyed-freaky-straight". That was the phrase for what we were. Weekend hippies. Beads and bells and kaftans on Saturday and school uniforms on Monday. But this pair were the real

thing. My heart went out to them the same way it soon went out to this cracked American musician, posing on his album cover with a fish held to his face and a shuttlecock on top of his hat. (But that's a story for a different fanzine).

Those were the days, my friends. The days of listening booths in record shops. The days when you could say: can I have a listen to a bit of this? I came out of that booth like a boy who had peered through the gates of heaven. 'Job's Tears'. Voices like I had never heard. Music from another world. A world I wanted to be in - head, hands, feet and heart. It was like falling in love.

Well, now. What has all this got to do with 'No Ruinous Feud'? Bugger all, possibly - or everything. It's got a lot to do with falling in love with music. Well - more than music, really. It was everything about the ISB. What they looked like. The things they wrote about. The whole swirl of stuff that they carried about with them. It's about gobbling up the new album, whipping it out of the rack almost before it settles. Taking friends home in a bag and listening to them telling you about where they've been. Where they're going to take you. Over the hills and far away.

And then, as the sixties came crashing down, the feeling that your old friends aren't quite what they were. As if they've done something seriously wrong to themselves. As if they've stopped talking about life, the universe and everything, and started droning on about mortgages and life insurance. Eek.

I remember a review of 'Earthspan' at the time. A lament, really. The reviewer was positively lachrymose over the fact that she just couldn't summon up her old enthusiasm for the band. As if it was a problem with *her*, not with them. As if she'd grown up. As if the ISB was like a teddy bear or a beloved doll that one day finds itself in the bottom of a wardrobe. And, I've got to admit it, it *did* feel a bit like that for me as well.

My friends and I would spend hours wondering about it. What had gone wrong? Was it because Joe Boyd wasn't producing them any more? Was it because the girls had gone? Was it because it was 1973? Or were we too

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old? Was liking the ISB like going to Narnia? Was Aslan quietly telling us that we couldn't go there anymore because we were too old - because we had to get acquainted with the 'real' world?

Or were the ISB making crappy albums?

The crunch came with 'No Ruinous Feud'. We couldn't like it - and that's as honest as it comes. We played it over and over and over, snatching at straws. Trying to make a curate's egg out of a sow's ear. Trying to pretend it wasn't happening.

It was almost a relief when Robin went to America and it was all over. ISB fan-club member five hundred-and-something packed his letters from the band, his collected reviews and photos lovingly culled from five years of joyous travelling and put them, along with his teddy bear, in a quiet grave at the bottom of the wardrobe.

That's what it felt like at the time.

But why? What was really going on? They hadn't gone commercial. I'd had to come to terms with that when T lost its yrannosaurus and went electric. It wasn't that. It was something else. As if they were *trying* too hard. Trying very hard to be.....what? Relevant to the seventies? Or What?

The album cover. Now then, what can we say about that? All the bands you love come as a complete package. It's not just the sound they make. It's what they look like as well - the paraphernalia they carry with them. 'No Ruinous Feud' consisted of four glossy photos that seemed like they could have been slung together by anyone. I had a copy of 'Changing Horses' on my bedroom wall. *That's* what an ISB cover should look like. This was just.....nothing. It didn't draw you in. It didn't promise to take you anywhere.

The feeling of being let down really started with 'Liquid Acrobat' - especially for anyone who had heard the band perform much of the stuff on it on the radio.

It was as if Mike's production took the songs and shrink-wrapped them into shiny, disconnected, dead pieces. Butterflies pinned to the mixing desk. Cold and sterile. You could almost see Mike rubbing away at the songs until they shone with an empty, lapidary brilliance. The songs tightened and hardened and became brittle and

unlovely; all the magic sucked out of them. For heaven's sake, I *liked* it when the songs sounded like a shambles. I loved that. The days when, for whatever reason, a cock-up by the fiddles on 'Log Cabin Home In The Sky' was just left there. It was part of the magic. The way the seeming chaos of 'Creation' still hang together. The times when, on 'When You Find Out Who You Are', it sounded like Mike was tinkling away on his piano in a different room. (According to Joe Boyd, he may well have been). The times when the whole rickety, rickety chariot seemed to keep to the road by a single spinning wheel-rim.

But it wasn't just that the craziness and joy had gone out of it. It was the feeling that the balance had shifted. Where Robin had stood like a shaman on the hillside, leading us all on into the strange places of his imagination, it now seemed that we had been taken into an up-to-the-minute recording studio with Mike grinning away at the controls. The technician, it seemed had taken over from the mystic.

And it felt like Robin had got bored, utterly bored with the whole thing. As if Mike's reported comment that they wanted to get into shorter, more accessible songs, left no room for him to do what he did best. As if someone was trying to cage a phoenix so people could get a better look at it. And the phoenix was just sitting there, staring miserably through the bars and gradually getting greyer and greyer.

Look at Robin's songs on 'No Ruinous Feud'. Where's the magic gone? Where is the enchantment? The joy. A dreary, back street love affair with someone else's wife. Not even a love affair, by the time the words hit the page. Just a glimpse of a grinding unhappiness. A prosaic tale of a dead sailor, and two children looking bleakly back to what once was. And, god help us, the prime candidate for worst song in the ISB pantheon, a pointless little ditty about an acrobat.



Mike circa 'Feud'. "I hear that this Bruce Springsteen chappie is the new Mike Heron".

"The ringmaster's hat is as black as a wellington boot"??? What? Did Robin Williamson, the cunning, crafty, word-spinner and dream-catcher *really* write that? Why?

Yup, that's the crux. Robin was bored shitless and seemed to be going along for the ride. Listen to his vocal on 'Dreams Of No Return' on the 'On Air' CD, if you don't believe me. There's boredom, if you like. There's someone who'd rather be doing something else.

And Malcolm? Well, I quite liked his songs on 'Earthspan'. He must have liked them as well, because he wrote them all over again for 'No Ruinous Feud' - only not as well. (I remember seeing with some surprise that he was included in the line-up of Mike's 'Reputation' album, and thinking what a nice chap Mike must be to let him tag along).

In fact, the only person who seemed to be in top form and thoroughly enjoying himself was Mike. A Mike Heron solo album would have been infinitely preferable to 'No Ruinous Feud'.

I also thought the album title was wrong. There should have been an exclamation mark after No, and an "Oh" in front. "Oh No! Ruinous Feud". That would have made more sense.

Take 'Explorer', 'Turquoise Blue' and little girl and you'd have a lovely Mike Heron EP.

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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 spend some time on a sunny beach. Someone who should come back to us after a good rest and dazzle us all over again. Just as he was.

It seems a little pointless to go through the tracks. "Shall we stick some jigs on somewhere? They always seem to go down well at concerts." "Yes, okay. If you like." "People are listening to a lot of reggae these days - what about a reggaeified instrumental?" "Yes, if you like." "And there's this Dolly Parton song..." "Yes, if you like. Put what you *like* on it, I don't care. I don't even want to *be* here anymore. Have you seen that American tourist guide about anywhere?"

I've just noticed that I haven't even mentioned 'Weather The Storm'. "Stormy weather in the world since the day I was born..." Yes, well, it certainly *sounded* like it Robin. It certainly did. And maybe you should have stopped bailing and swum for it a couple of

years earlier. But then we might not have got 'Cold Days Of February', and that would have been a shame.

Of course, this is an overview and not a review. I'm actually sitting here listening to 'No Ruinous Feud' on CD (Yeah! I *bought* it on CD - after everything I've been saying! What does that tell you eh?), and I'm thinking, you know, it's not *that* bad. I mean, 'Explorer' is actually dead good now I come to listen to it again. But that's not the point. The point is about feelings from 1973. The feeling that a love affair was over.

It won't have gone unnoticed that a couple of hoary old ISB debating points have been left out of this piece. Scientology and Gerard Dott, to be precise.

I wasn't unaware of the fact that the band were into it way back in 1973, but I certainly don't remember thinking a great deal about it, especially after I had sent off for some information and had discovered that it cost (if I remember correctly) £200 to join up. No, I didn't think Scientology was the

problem.

As for Mr Dott, I remain as bemused today as I was at concerts at the time, when the rest of the band would wander off so that he could do his ragtime piano party piece. Very nice, I'm sure, and well-played - but what was the point? Was it that the idea of co-opting untrained musicians had passed their sell by date? Was it because Mike was now into scoring all the songs, and thought that a 'real' musician would be better able to follow what he had written? Or, in the grand old ISB tradition, was it simply that Gerard Dott was in the vicinity and everyone (someone?) thought: oh, what the hell - why not?

Incidentally, my eternal gratitude will go out to anyone who does a 'proper' review of 'No Ruinous Feud' and proves that I've got it all wrong. Any takers?



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# No Feud Like An Old Feud

It was 1973, and the times they were a-turning. The 60s had begun belatedly in 1963, with the emergence of the Beatles and (as Philip Larkin pointed out) the invention of Sex, courtesy of the contraceptive pill; and if Altamont sounded the death-rattle of that turbulent and intoxicating decade, arithmetic demanded that the last rites be deferred at least to the close of 1972. On cue, a new aesthetic entered popular culture at that time. The preening but innocent buffoonery of Glam Rock (so-call'd) was being redefined by the like of David Bowie, Lou Reed, Roxy Music: onto the androgynous poutings of Bolan, Glitter et al. they were grafting Warholian grotesqueries and obsessions. The buzz word of the day was...Decadence.

The era of universal benevolence, spiritual journeying and "getting it together in the country" was officially over. So where did that leave the

"In one way 'No Ruinous Feud' was the end of a cycle. And at this point now we're far enough ahead from the end of that cycle to be writing in the middle of another one. It's a fruitful time right now. It's going to be really exciting to see what shoots on."

Wise words mate - Mike Heron, from the second ISB songbook. 1973

Incredible String Band, laureates of the fast-fading hippie dream? Robin Williamson and Mike Heron would have made unlikely denizens of the demi-monde; but their elfin warblings and limpid visions of Life's wonders were now passe - or so the critics dutifully informed us. 1972's Earthspan had shown the ISB feeling tentatively in new directions, toying with more conventional song structures and instrumentation, fumbling for the pulse

## Raymond Greenoaken

Raymond's article arrived just as I'd closed the book on No Ruinous Feud but I knew you wouldn't want to miss it. So here it is.....

of the new decade. despite some fine melodies and adventurous arrangements, however, there were no clear hints of an identity crisis that would engulf them on their next vinyl outing, No Ruinous Feud.

No Ruinous Feud, released in February 1973, a mere five months after Earthspan, remains a delicate subject in ISB fandom. To many it represents a failure of nerve, a misguided (and largely unsuccessful) appeal to mainstream tastes. It owes as little to the brittle theatricality of the new Decadents as it does to the bombast and bedimmed earnestness of that other creature of the time, Progressive Rock. It steers an uneasy middle course between the two, eschewing the polymorphous poetry and exotic instrumental shadings of old in plodding pursuit of the jack o'lantern of Accessibility.

We can trace this concern back to the sessions for Mike's 1971 solo album, Smiling Men With Bad Reputations. John Cale, the ex-Velvet Underground viola and keyboard abuser and one of several living legends drafted into the sessions by Joe Boyd, confided to Mike his view that the ISB's multi-instrumental divaginations would work better if tethered firmly to a solid rhythm section. And as Mike became increasingly the more dominant influence within the ISB, so Cale's nostrum was absorbed by degrees into the band's philosophy.

By this time the ISB were formally a

quartet: Mike, Robin, Malcolm le Maistre and their colourfully named new recruit Gerard Dott. But in concert the band was frequently augmented by a rhythm section drawn from the ranks of roadies and sound men, and this was the formula favoured for No Ruinous Feud. Thus, feud is the most conventional, pop-inflected album in the ISB canon. The songs, too, were brief, direct and mostly innocent of any hidden mystery. Robin in particular had curbed his natural disposition towards rambling structures and arcane imagery; his 'Saturday Maybe' showed a compactness and grainy realism that were almost shocking. Only Malcolm, with the medieval travelogue 'Down Before Cathay' and the elliptical 'At The Lighthouse Dance', persisted in writing songs in the old ISB idiom.

Feud was allegedly recorded and released so soon after Earthspan as a counterblast to the critical hostility the latter had attracted owing to its 'disappointing' bittyness. This tends to suggest that the band's confidence in their collective vision was becoming somewhat frayed, and that the Cale Rhythm Method was pressed into service as something of a panic measure. Initially the strategy appeared to turn the trick: the critics were mollified and trumpeted a return to form. But, in the eyes of many, the album has not worn well over the intervening years. To veteran ISB devotees it is reportedly an embarrassment, and even Mike Heron has hinted that he has come to share that view.

Certainly it is packaged in the most unappetising way. The front cover alone would deter the most desperate burglar if placed strategically in the kitchen window. The title, rendered in uniquely charmless lettering, leaps out of a pop-art explosion; around it are mug shots of the lads, evidently the work of D. Bailey, lensman to the glitterati of 'Swinging' London, though it's fair to say that a partially-sighted

*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*

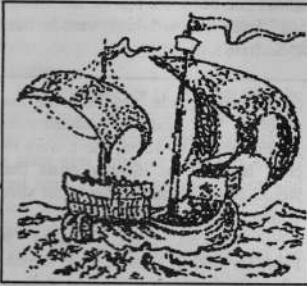
chimpanzee with an Instamatic could have done as good a job. A tritely-composed group photo adorns the rear cover, with the track listing framed by another explosion. It's difficult to see what kind of impression the design team (yes, it took a team to concoct this abomination) were aiming to project, other than one of professional ineptitude. The tackiness extends to the inner sleeve, where amongst yet more explosions (could they possibly be adverting to the word "feud"? There's imagination!) we're regaled with the song lyrics and incomplete and frequently erroneous performance credits. Most comically, the producer's and engineer's credits are transposed - engineered by Mike Heron, indeed! (The various errors are faithfully reproduced on the CD reissue).

But is the music itself as lacklustre as the sleeve seems to promise, as many ISB scholars now maintain? I would suggest not. The worst one can say of the almost omnipresent bass'n'drums is that, on the majority of tracks, they add nothing of any consequence, while, here and there - on 'Explorer' and 'Weather The Storm' especially - they work very well indeed. Their use throughout the album combines with the emphasis on western instrumentation (another concession to changing times?) to give an impression of homogeneity, but closer inspection shows this to be illusory, for the old eclecticism is bubbling busily under the surface sheen: jazz, trad and contemporary folk, West Coast, reggae, calypso, country and western and vaudeville are all integrated with a sure instinct. Feud may be less than the sum of its parts, but some of its parts are actually very tasty. Half a dozen of the tracks could hold their own in any ISB retrospective, and at least one - Mike's 'Little Girl' - has the glow of greatness about it. True, there is also the odd clinker, but we'll come to that by and by. Time for a short guided tour of the album's contents...

A salvo on the drums from Procul Harum's B. J. Wilson presages Mike's 'Explorer', the opening track on side one. Mike's hoarse, passionate vocal is buttressed by the kind of tight, punchy playing that was seldom in evidence on Earthspan. Flute, oboe and clarinet provide stabbing interjections in the manner of a rock horn section. The

titular hero, an Edwardian polar explorer benighted in some forlorn Artic waste, laments his singular ill-luck in two verses and an impassioned coda. A strong opener, over too quickly by half.

Malcolm's 'Down Before Cathay' follows, with a lighter, springier arrangement than the previous year's concert version. Malcolm's narrator (Marco Polo, some have suggested) strides becloaked through autumnal woods to the shores of medieval Cathay to take ship for a lengthy sea voyage, passing Mandalay in verse two and suddenly appearing off the



Levantine coast in the middle eight (having presumably circumnavigated the entire African continent in this pre-Suez Canal scenario). The drums shift to the off-beat for an instrumental break on organ or possibly accordion (uncredited), and then the voyagers are bafflingly moored again off Cathay, where they decide to "cast away" their "fair bodies", though precisely how and why they do this is not explained. Odd stuff, for sure, but propelled pleasantly along by Robin's nimble guitar work and some spicy harmonies from Robin and Mike.

A complete change of scenery for 'Saturday Maybe', Robin's bleak, poignant meditation on the furtiveness, guilt and snatched delights of an adulterous affair. The song is a small masterpiece of compression and economy, enhanced by Mike's atmospheric string score. Not at all Williamson fare, it's a song that, to my mind, has grown in stature over the years; and one that still polarises opinion in ISB fandom, I gather. (Ed's note - I have to agree with Raymond here and despite the number of people who shrug and look shiftily the other way when 'Saturday Maybe' is

mentioned I think it's a fine piece of atmospheric observation).

The misleadingly titled 'Jigs' are a medley of traditional reels assembled as a showcase for Robin's mercurial fiddle playing. No individual titles are given, but I can reveal that they are 'Breakfast In Texas', 'The Mountain Road' and 'The Mason's Apron'. A standard slice of folk-rock, but capably done nonetheless, with the rhythm section cooking nicely, effective staccato guitar from Jack Ingram, and some breathtaking triplets from Robin on 'The Mason's Apron'.

'Old Buccaneer' finds Robin in playful but also piquant mood with a slaty yarn of derring do on the high seas. A poppy arrangement featuring electric guitar (uncredited) and saxes and a Caribbean flavoured fade-out, forswearing the jug-band rhythms of the 1972 concert version; a good example of Robin's storytelling in song, and arguably underrated in the ISB canon.

Malcolm's 'At The Lighthouse Dance' casts a backward glance at earlier ISB practices: oblique, almost hallucinatory imagery, and the sort of sequential melodic structure (much favoured from the 'Mad Hatter's Song' onwards) in which the conventional verse-chorus-middle eight formula is eschewed and the melody constantly evolves to match the lyric. The technical term for this, if anyone cares, is *Durchkomponiert*. It's recorded that Malcolm offered up the 'seed of a song' and the rest of the band shaped it into its eventual form. 'Lighthouse Dance' was chosen as the single from the album, but despite its choppy rhythms and skittering reggae-

#### INCREDIBLE STRING BANDS

"At The Lighthouse Dance" (Island). Not one of their best efforts, and I would seem a dreary roundelay, despite the addition of fisherfolk drums and tam o'shanter guitar. Over now to our tam o'shanter expert, Ralph Jersey: "Ah ye sinners" (sits on chair turned back to front and sticks finger in ear), "ye's ear for real music." Ave crew enough. *Mark*

fied chorus, its chances of gatecrashing the Radio One playlist were not great. The then-fashionable synthesiser (played by Tony Cox, uncredited on the sleeve) makes its first appearance



on an ISB album.

Side two opens with another drum roll, whereupon Robin on whistle and Gerard on clarinet essay Duke Reid's sunny instrumental 'Second Fiddle' over a backing track by the reggae band Greyhound, who'd had a chart hit a year or two earlier with the nursery ditty 'Black and White'. A curious combination, but effective, despite the shrill protestations of 'Sell Out' by ISB purists. It's inconsequential stuff, pure froth, but twinkling with good humour.

### Incredibles

DISPENSING WITH preliminaries, the Incredible String Band moved straight into some "No Ruinous Feud" numbers before a capacity campus crowd at Sussex University. The first gig of their latest tour was before a mainly older audience, many, who apparently, were several line-up changes behind the times and were hearing the new album numbers for the first time.

It didn't really matter though. What "Second Fiddle" nearly did, "At The Lighthouse Dance" did completely... the very power of Mike Heron was quite stunning as he drove the students to a foot-stomping crescendo before silencing them just as effortlessly.

Even though it wasn't generally known that the new numbers being played for the first time at Sussex were composed by Mike, there was really never much doubt about it. Their performance was unmistakably I.S.B., the way in which each number was anchored to a really strong rhythm section and the subtle but firm order in which the potentially raggedness of four people's ideas were brought together, are trademarks associated with him more than any of the others.

It was rich in detail and inspiration, and yet the overall flow made it much easier to approach than some of their earlier appearances. Mike Heron's new role as producer as well as arranger, composer and player appears to have given the entire band a new live confidence and togetherness. — JEFF SAMUELS

Live Feud - March '73

Which brings us to Robin's 'Circus Girl', still a source of toe-curling embarrassment for many Be Glad readers. The ramshackle and tinny arrangement for piano, horns and snare

drum, Robin at his reediest vocally, a witless lyric and a weak melody wandering purposelessly through half a dozen key signatures: this was thin gruel for even the most committed enthusiast. In mitigation, the key changes are cleverly accomplished and the whole thing only runs to two and a half minutes. Moving briskly on...

'Turquoise Blue' shows Mike in his mellowest mood, a 'hot weather' song (concert-goers were invited to imagine "a hot sunny day on the astral plane"), it dates back to '71 as a feature of the live repertoire, and in fact is captured on the In Concert CD from the same year. The major 7th recordings and descending chromatic runs are quintessential West Coast; some commentators detected a Jesse Colin Young influence. It's a languid, woozy piece with deft fretwork and a toothsome clarinet break, all pinned tidily together by Jack Ingram's unobtrusive (and uncredited) drumming.

Many were bewildered by the inclusion of Dolly Parton's 'My Blue Tears', evidently at the behest of Mike, an ardent Dolly admirer (she was little known in Britain at that time). More sour cries of 'Sell Out', but drowned by the merry racket of wailing viola and honking bass clarinet as the band hurtle through the song - vocal duties shared by Mike and Malcolm - in less than two minutes. A breathless but charming performance that gives a timely lift to the album after the ditherings of 'Circus Girl' and the languor of 'Turquoise Blue'; and several notches above Dolly's own recording of the song.

More up-tempo caperings follow with 'Weather The Storm'. This squib of Robin's was in the concert repertoire as early as February 1970. At that time a loose strumalong thing, it was later transmuted into a Mungo Jerry-esque jug-band stomp; on Feud it's given a spare, witty, energetic treatment with organ and saxes prominent. Robin's on top form vocally, and even contributes a loopy whistling solo; and what in truth is a fairly slight song draws out one of the album's outstanding ensemble performances.

Feud closes with 'Little Girl', a gentle whisper of a song that puts the album to bed rather as 'Nightfall' does the

Hangman's Beautiful Daughter, warm, subdued vibes and Mike at his most tenderly confidential: the one undoubted classic on the disc.

No Ruinous Feud was, in it's way, a radical departure for the ISB, an attempt to weave the multifarious threads in the band's music into a seamless vestment. This was at least partially successful, but the result, as a whole, is unsatisfying. As the next - and last - album Hard Rope and Silken Twine, was to show, much of the music's innate strength resided in vivid contrasts and polarities: the unifying force was the unique syncretic musical vision of Mike Heron and Robin Williamson, rather than any technical formula of the sort propounded by well-meaning Velvet Underground alumni. Happily, this lesson did not go unheeded, and from a renewed confidence in that central vision flowed the majestic moments on Hard Rope that offer a fitting conclusion to the band's recording career. But Feud, too, has its own quiet delights, and though it is certainly the ISB's most lightweight album by some distance, it still repays attention twenty years on.

**THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND:**  
"No Ruinous Feud" (Island).  
Live. The Incredibles have always put a smile on my face. On record it's the same, but until now there's rarely been a thread running through an album. In the past each song has been taken and recorded as they felt, now with "No Ruinous Feud," Mike Heron has produced the Incredibles album. Or at least the most acceptable Incredibles album yet to the unaccustomed ear. Critically it's hard to fault their music, it's so different from anything else that whatever they do has to be applauded if only for trying. If Malcolm Le Maistre wants to sing about Lighthouse Dances good on him, it's better than hip references to coke. If "No Ruinous Feud" don't make you happy, then brother you're doomed. — M.P. 1973

March '73



Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93

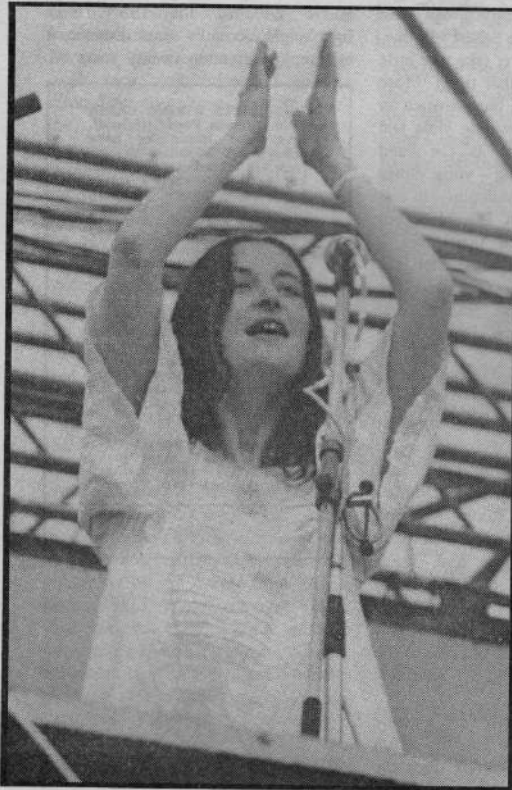
# Bickershaw Festival

## Photo Special!

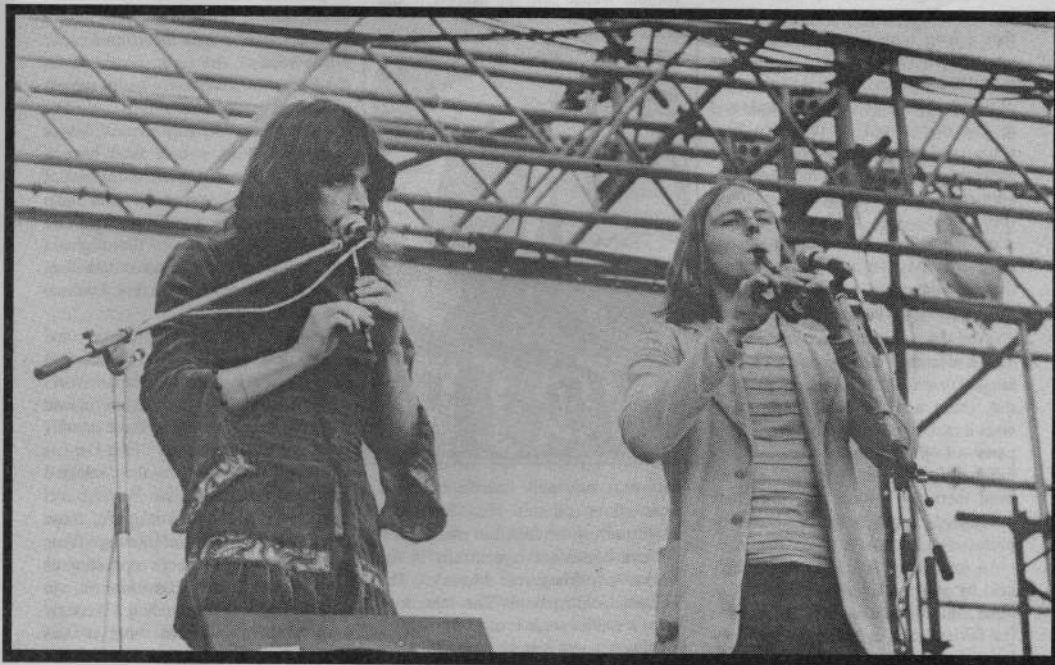
Bickershaw. The very word has an exotic ring to it. The promise of far off places redolent with pungent fragrances. Well perhaps not, but to those who were young enough on 6th May 1972 it had one of the best line ups of a British rock festival ever - Cpt Beefheart, Grateful Dead and so on. The Incredible String Band were

sandwiched on the Saturday afternoon between Donovan and Al Stewart. So, no reviews, set lists or what have you.

Just the pictures, which were taken by rock photographer Barry Plummer who has graciously given his permission for me to reproduce some of them here. But before we go pictorial a Bickershaw fact - did you know that it was actually organised by Jeremy - yes, that Jeremy - Beadle in one of his earlier guises as a rock promoter?



*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*



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*Be Glad for the Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*



Ok class, get out your copy of 'Myrrh' and play the track listed as 'The Dancing Of The Lord Of Weir'. Listen to it well. It is probably the strangest song Robin Williamson ever wrote, both lyrically and musically.

Who knows why, when and in what circumstances 'The Lord of Weir' was written, or when it was first played live? Its first wide public exposure came on the thirteenth of October 1971 when it was included as part of a four song John Peel show. Prior to the song Robin introduced it with the following:

"Some people hold that fairies are the life or consciousness from anything, like a plant or a small forest, a wind or a sea - the consciousness of natural things. And some people say that fairies are, in fact, legendary memory of a different and non-human race who lived probably in Britain and Europe and possibly survived in remote places until as late as the 15th-17th centuries."

In that same month, at Birmingham Town Hall, 'Weir' was prefaced by:

"This song is another quite new one. I got the idea from hearing this theory that a long time ago in Britain there was different races living here apart from human races. There was this race of people who lived in the outlands and in the moors and in the very high places and they were accredited with supernatural abilities and they lived in a very crude way, herding deer etc. And they were very wild, and they're supposed to have given rise to legends of fairies, and I wrote this song taking that as a viewpoint and it's called 'How We Danced At The Lord Of Weir'."

And again from an interview:

"It's a fantasy story about a remote, imaginary past. It's based on the idea that there actually were fairies who were a race of people who lived in wild parts of Britain and were slightly different from ordinary mortals....They lived there for a long time until they eventually got wiped out by persecution."

An interesting idea, and one widely held by many scholars in one form or other, the idea being that rather than the fairies being a "different and non-human race" (though who are we to

# The Lord of Weir

## A fairy story?

Rev. Robert Kirk

say?) they were Neolithic peoples who retreated before the advent of metal users and fled to remote and far places where they lived simply, often underground in the 'hollow hills', revering the spirits of nature. The country inhabitants knew of their existence but were wary of their ways and magics and left them to themselves. This legend may be the origin of many a medieval 'wild man' story and several counties have tales of 'Brownies' and the like who came from the hills to help at harvest time and without whose help the harvest would



fail and the milk curdle. Further explorations of this idea for those interested can be found in many good folklore books and specifically in the works of Margaret Murray. The William Golding book 'The Inheritors' takes a similar angle too.

Other poets and writers have covered the same theme, notably one

poem from early this century which begins with, "Up the airy mountains, down the rushy glen/we daren't go a-hunting for fear of little men/Wee folk, good folk/Trooping all together/Green Jacket, red cap/And white owl's feather".

We could go on but suffice it to say that folklore was obviously the source of the song and it demonstrates Robin's deep knowledge of and influences drawn from the period where ancient history and folklore overlap, mythic times when deeds became legends and magic was definitely afoot. 'Weir' was certainly an intimation of what was to come with Robin's later focussing on Celtic myths and legends.

'Weir' tells the story of how the local lord gets above his station and steals one of the fairy tribe's women, "she of the wild eyes, she of the wild hair". Using their small magics the tribe enter Weir's hall disguised as minstrels and play the fairy dance, compelling the mortals to dance against their will out into the world to be saved only when they think "one kind thought". Their kinswoman is rescued and they return to their home beneath the ground.

But back to the song. Live and on the Peel show 'Weir' is, like its subject matter, otherworldly. The instrumentation actually sounds like it's being played by people who have a different concept of music to the rest of us while Robin's voice wails and skirls the story over the top. The version on 'Myrrh' had lost some of the original's bite but nonetheless is an outstanding track. If you don't possess it I advise immediate purchase.

This feeling of wildness and strangeness, which also permeated much of Robin's earlier work, culminating in 'Weir' was again revived on some later recordings, most notably on 'Song of Mabon' and 'Five Denials On Merlin's Grave' on the 'Selected Writings' album. Like 'Weir', and indeed 'Invocation' from 'U', these resonates with an incantatory force which re-inforces Robin's reputation as a modern bard. His interest in Scientology notwithstanding I strongly suspect that Robin has more of this type of song in his repertoire which has yet to be revealed in public.

*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*



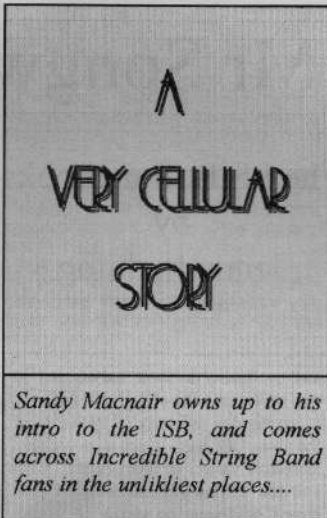
Well...the questionnaire in issue two was certainly one to rekindle memories - as I carefully considered my responses to questions 1 & 2. Indeed, my answer to no. 2 probably had the Editorial Staff rolling in the aisles, as I was forced to admit that the 1976 NME Encyclopedia of Rock was responsible for nudging me in the direction of the ISB. As an aspiring 18 year old hippy nearly ten years too late, this was my bible on all those groovy sixties sounds that I'd missed out on. I was doing my best to look the part though. I had the afghan coat, the headband, the embroidered jeans, the beads, the hair halfway to my waist, the 'Peace' tattoo....(Surprisingly you get away with walking about Edinburgh like this without being laughed out of town) - but what I did not have was an ISB record! That, however, was soon to change, as I read the following paragraph in the NME book:-

*'The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter' appearing in 1968, still stands as something of a masterwork. Critically acclaimed not only in the 'underground press' but also in the 'quality' Fleet Street papers, it further revealed the compositional abilities of Heron and Williamson as unique in structure and variety. 'Folk' had long since become a redundant description for a music so eclectic and rich in texture. The majestic 'Hangman's Beautiful Daughter' set its own standards, defined its own territories.*

One visit to my local record shop later, I sat back with the headphones on, in anticipation of hearing some far-out 'folk music'. What was I expecting? Probably vague notions of some stirring knees-up Steeleye Span sort of stuff, until:-

*The natural cards revolve  
Ever changing  
Seeded elsewhere  
Planted in the garden fair....*

What the bloody hell was this? My jaw dropped, and carried on dropping, right through 'The Minotaur's Song' and 'Witch's Hat', and by the time 'A Very Cellular Song' impinged itself on my consciousness I was well and truly hooked. Bur did I LIKE being hooked?? I wasn't yet quite sure...Too much weirdness to deal with at one sitting! But I found myself returning to



the album with increasing frequency, and it wasn't long before 'The 5000 Spirits had joined 'Hangman's' in my collection.

Looking back, I reckon I got almost as big a kick from sneaking one or other onto the turntable when unsuspecting mates were visiting, enjoying their reaction which was in nearly every case the same as my original response, namely, "What the bloody hell is THAT!!!" The ISB turned out to be an act who aroused strong emotions, ie you either loved their sound or hated it - there was no middle ground! And of course they had to be listened to under favourable conditions...Visiting a mate recently, I was astonished to see a collection of ISB CDs, plus Robin 'n' Mike solo stuff, as any mention by myself of the band had brought nothing but abuse! He grinned shamefacedly when I pointed this out. "Me and the String Band just got off on the wrong foot", he explained. "Years ago I woke up on some stranger's floor after a party, suffering a terrible hangover, when some bastard put 'Waltz Of The New Moon' on at full volume.." I nodded sympathetically. Clearly not the ideal situation for an ISB introduction...

But over the years, ISB freaks have cropped up in the strangest places. I was once starting a new job within a certain office, and feeling great trepidation as the boss was reputedly a Hitlerite terror and highly eccentric

into the bargain. Certainly my heart sank to my boots when I first glimpsed the immaculate crewcut form in the pin-striped suit and brightly polished shoes - he looked like the sort who would delight in making a scruffy longhairs' life hell. But as he approached I realised he was singing away to himself, while all the other workers instantly clamped their hands over their ears:-

*The Iron stone  
I brought it home  
Heavy in my hand....*

We got on like a house on fire from then on. We sat around all day discussing the size of amoebas and the relevance of little clouds to everyday life, and did no work at all. This was very pleasant while it lasted, until the inevitable happened, and I was unceremoniously sacked. I then went for a job interview with the Post Office, having filled in all the usual garbage on the application form re hobbies etc.

"So you like music?" said the stern-faced interviewer. "What do you listen to?"

"Oh, the Doors, Led Zeppelin...er, The Incredible String Band." I admitted ruefully, waiting for the inevitable withering put-down/blank uncomprehending stare. But he was smiling gently, with a faraway look in his eye. "I think one of my favourite memories of those good old days is sitting in my comfy armchair reading 'Lord of the Rings' and listening to 'U'", he reflected.

I got the job. So if the ISB were responsible for getting me sacked previously, I reckon they can take credit for securing me employment as a postie, although I don't feel like thanking them for it!

YOU!

Have you come across String Band listeners in odd places? Any strange introductions to their music? Heard it played in peculiar places? Anything like that - send it in and we may well use it. Ta.

*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*

Songbooks can be frustrating things; at best they can give a real insight into the composers' thought processes and how they make the music they do; at worst they are riddled with inaccuracies and carelessness. For example I recently came across an Eddie Cochran songbook which tells you that the second verse of 'Something Else' contains the lyrics "There's a charm maid just for me, to own and cuddle be a luxury". See what I mean!

Fortunately the ISB were well served by Happy Traum, who was responsible for their first songbook, covering the music from the first album up to 'Wee Tam and the Big Huge'.

Traum, with his brother Artie, have put out a series of albums from the late sixties onwards, working with a host of luminaries from the US folk/rock/country scene. Happy himself also worked with Bob Dylan re-recording some of the tracks from the then officially unreleased 'Basement Tapes', which appeared on Dylan's 1972 'More Greatest Hits'. Later he got involved in Homespun tapes, which are tuition tapes for various instruments. They now do both audio and video tapes, taught by respected performers such as David Grisman, Richard Thompson, Dan Crary etc. All familiar names to readers of the greatly lamented 'Swing 51' magazine which did a series of articles on the musical career of the Traum brothers, to which the curious are referred.

To what extent the ISB helped Happy can only be guessed at, the conversation reported in the last 'Be Glad' ('You're Bringing *Who* Home For Supper, p.31 - "Happy Traum will work them out" smiled Mike), which smells a bit of false modesty to me, implies they just let him get on with it. Happy himself says in his introduction, "It was a fascinating experience for me to work on this collection of their songs. It gave me the occasion to explore and discover both the whimsy

# Hey, Mr Songwriter

The I.S.B. Songbooks

by

Jenny Pudding

question about his family (? he says), admits to a year at University (no benefit). His favourite things? "Melons, turkish delight, Salvador Dali, ivy, ferns".....then he decides later he doesn't have any favourite things, they just sprang to mind. Fair enough.

and profundity in their music, and it was well worth the effort". He goes on to explain the difficulty of transcribing the music of a band which uses such an incredible variety of instruments. "Can you see writing out tablature for pan pipes?" and went on to say he would basically only write out the guitar part, except in the case of certain songs where the keyboards were such an integral part of the song that he included their parts too, e.g. 'Waltz of the New Moon', 'A Very Cellular Song' and 'The Minotaur's Song'.

The cover artwork is the same as on the back cover of 'Hangman's', the back cover being the front cover of the album if you see what I mean. Due to space restrictions Likky has had to go! The first few pages have a dozen or so photos of Robin and Mike (or Michael as he is referred to throughout, including the cover) which appear to date from the 'Hangman's' and 'Wee Tam' period. The pair were also asked to fill in questionnaires asking the usual name/where born/statistics/family/favourite things etc. Thus we learn that Robin is five foot ten inches tall, weighs ten and a half stone, reckons his family is "Something else", and has been educated in the school of life. His favourite things are: "Wild hills, sweet friend Licorice, dog leaf. Music is prayer everything else is interesting in an infinite sort of way." This doubtless sincere passage has of course been exposed to ridicule by the so-called hippy Neil, in his 'Book of the Dead'. Boo.

James Michael Heron, in contrast, is a mere five feet seven inches and weighs ten stone seven pounds. He does not appear to understand the

The music in the book includes most tracks from the 1st album, 'Spirits' and 'Hangman's'. Clive Palmer's contributions to the 1st album are omitted, as is 'Whistle Tune' and 'Womankind'. The two instrumentals are both credited as traditional. Palmer's 'Empty Pocket' may have had a different publisher? Perhaps Happy just didn't like 'Womankind'!

Few tracks are included from the double album; only 'You Get Brighter' makes it from 'Wee Tam', with 'The Big Huge' yielding 'Cousin Caterpillar' and 'The Greatest Friend'. 'Log Cabin Home' is a particularly surprising omission. 'Cousin Caterpillar' also has the only error I have found in the book (there may be others). The low G in the fourth bar can't be on the 3rd fret if the 6th string is tuned down to D now can it...anyone? yes, At the back there...that's right it should be the 5th fret. Still, even Homer nodded. What is interesting about the selection from 'Wee Tam and the Big Huge' is that they are all Heron songs, didn't they think anyone fancied playing along with 'Maya'?

Happy has included the various tunings used in specific songs, ranging from the 'dropped D' tuning of 'Caterpillar' to the common 'open G' (DGDGBD) of 'First Girl'/No Sleep/'The Tree', 'open D' (DADF#AD) of 'October Song', the CFCFCF of 'Hedgehog' and the EEBEBE of 'Chinese White'. The arrangement of 'First Girl' is particularly effective. Well done Mr Traum.

The second songbook was not to appear until 1973, covering the albums the band made for Island up to 'No Ruinous Feud', and including 'Myrrh' and 'Smiling Men With Bad

Reputations'.

This of course leaves several albums not covered, and you will just have to work out 'Big Ted', 'This Moment' and 'The Letter' for yourself! It is possible that some other titles were published as individual songsheets but these have not come to light yet. 'Big Ted' is a likely candidate. Anyone out there seen or even got them?

This is a good point to mention that several ISB songs have been published in the songbooks of artists who have covered their songs. I can think of at least two; a Judy Collins songbook has her arrangement of 'First Boy (Girl) I Loved', and I have an appalachian dulcimer tutor by Neal Hellman (Dulcimer Songbook, published by Oak, very good book by the way) which has an arrangement of 'Everything's Fine Right Now' in it, though I don't know if Neal has recorded the song himself. There are almost certainly others. Early British folk magazines also frequently published songs in the mid-sixties and may be another source. Sorry to be so vague here, I am just trying to suggest likely places to look if you have access to sources like these. There is also in existence a book of ISB lyrics, covering all their albums up to 'Feud'. The only omissions are 'Vishangro', 'Fair As You' and 'Bridge Song'. The book is typewritten, duplicated and well bound using the 'Big Huge' photo as a cover. It's a bootleg item, probably from the US (or maybe Holland-ed.). I have never seen an original copy of this.

Back to the second songbook. The cover shows colour photos of Robin, Mike and Malcolm, who were obviously considered to be the ISB at that point. The photos date from the 'Feud' period and are of the band live on stage. Malcolm is pictured doing a leap in the air with platform shoes on! Don't try this at home kids. The back cover features more photos; of Gerard Dott, Robin, Jack Ingram and Mike, Mike with Stan Lee on bass and

Gerard on clarinet, and Malcolm again.

There is a fine selection of photos throughout the book, and an interesting interview with Mike and Robin of where they were at the time (the interview is dated 24/6/74). The interview ends thus; "Mike - In the future there will be change. Progress and change. At the moment we are at a moving point, not still at all. Robin - That's right. It's very true that we are in the middle of a lot of changes, and the group will be changing. Mike - In one way 'No Ruinous Feud' was the

Robin, Likky, Malcolm and Mike (showing his teeth for some reason), a youthful looking Robin in winter coat and hat, Malcolm sledging (brilliant!) and, to illustrate 'Feud', one of Gerard playing clarinet with a rather concerned looking Mike behind him.

The music itself is set out in conventional fashion; three lines; melody, left and right hand piano, with chord names above.

There are few surprises in the songs chosen, though did anyone else in the world really want to know how to play

'Cosmic Boy'? 'Black Jack David' is a surprising omission, but you wouldn't have to be very clever to work it out for yourself... The jazzier chords used in 'Moon Hang Low' and 'Restless Night' show how Robin's writing has broadened its scope since the early days.

Both of the songbooks are (naturally) no longer in print, though of course are liable to turn up in the most unlikely places. My original copy of the first book disappeared with the piano stool when my mother took it into her head to sell the family piano. Its replacement turned up in my local Oxfam two years ago. A bargain at £1.50. The second book turned up in a music shop closing down sale. Again for £1.50. So you never know! Just remember to watch out for the low G in the fourth bar of the intro to 'Cousin

Caterpillar!

*With special thanks to Stephen Robbins for the details of the bootleg lyric book.*

Editor's note - I haven't got either songbook anymore (had to sell 'em years ago when I was poor) so if anyone has either for sale I'm yr man. Jenny has suggested various places to try and seek them out, but also libraries are a good place - possibly via the inter-library loan - and a 'Be Glad' reader assures me that there was a copy of the first songbook on the shelves of Swiss Cottage library only a few years ago. Good hunting!



end of a cycle. And at this point no we're far enough ahead from the end of that cycle to be writing in the middle of another one. It's a very fruitful time right now. It's going to be really exciting what shoots on." Indeed.

The rest of the book is in five sections covering 'Smiling Men', 'Liquid Acrobat', 'Myrrh', 'Earthspan' and 'Feud'. Each section has a photo and details of recording dates and studios used. There are no details of when individual tracks were recorded, and of course a track can be started in one studio and finished in another. The photos are all excellent; a rather craggy looking Mike, a group shot of

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## Mike

It is, as Mott the Hoople's Ian Hunter so rightly said "a mighty long way down rock'n'roll". And Mike Heron's been with it most of the way. Today, sporting a New Order T shirt, he's just over half way through his Incredible Acoustic Band's spring '93 tour and I've managed to catch an interview in the subterranean caverns of 'Be Glad's' headquarters. But first the tour report....

Audiences, it has to be said, weren't massive, certainly in part due to poor advance advertising but perhaps equally due to '1987 Effect' - a little known phenomenon in which the fans remembered the 87 Mike-up-front-Frank Usher-on-guitar-in-your-face rock tour. Fans with your average genteel ISB musical sensibilities didn't seem too happy with that version of Mike's talents and maybe they thought it would be the same again. It most emphatically wasn't.

The pre-tour gig at Kendal's smart Arts Centre showed the promise of what was to come, and the band gave a wonderful and well-

received performance. The tape of that gig almost became the 'official bootleg' but that's another story.

First night of the tour proper was at the Duchess of York in Leeds, a venue more used to snot-rock than Heron's brand of adult oriented acoustic music, but no problems, the crowd were appreciative and the band played well. The following night in Hebden Bridge (at the Trades Club), that well known northern retirement town for hairies, wasn't too bad either and the 'act' put on by their resident sound people just had to be seen (and heard) to be believed.

By the time they'd got to Sheffield at the end of the first leg of the tour

## Tour Report and Part One of an interview featuring questions he's been asked a million times before.

by  
Andy Roberts

things had gelled from the polite musicianship of the Kendal gig to an enmeshed, organic sound in which the whole was holographically contained in the separate parts of each musician. In short it was good! In the upstairs room of of 'The Shakespeare' pub, usually a C & W club meeting place



Mike and the boys at the Sheffield gig

and festooned with ersatz western and Indian tat (perfect for 'Blackfoot Side!') a rapt audience was treated to an exceptional set, with 'Gaugin in the South Seas' being at its languid, shore-lapping best. Incidentally, 'Gaugin' was the only song out of the set played on tour which *all* the band agreed they liked to play!

As luck would have it I managed to catch them again at St Helen's - not bad but the audience were a bit too noisy - an advert for the evils of alcohol if ever there was one. Highlight of that gig was two teenage girls who appeared to have taken the fashions of Rose and Licorice to their hearts. This is what ISB music can do to the youth of today! A couple of

days well needed rest led them on to Southport which, soundwise, was definitely the best gig of the tour, with probably the largest audience. Crystal clear sound, fantastic playing and to paraphrase Mick Jagger "Stuart's good tonite ineeee?". That gig should have been recorded.

Following a three day lay off back in Scotland the band hit the midlands and I didn't catch them again until second to the last night, at York, and again I have to say it was really good despite the limitations of the venue, small stage tucked away at the end of the pub. The tour finished the following night at the Adelphi in Hull.

Alright, you're thinking, there have to be drawbacks, it couldn't have all been as good as that, but in truth it was. Several people who I coerced into going to see them, and who wouldn't normally have done, were highly impressed, long time fans equally so. All wanted more and those who got to more than one gig were doubly and triply impressed. We didn't even have to be polite and pretend it was good when it wasn't. The real problems lay with the usual things at this level of

touring, small gig venues with smaller stages, surly promoters who often weren't too keen to part with the miserly sums of money they had to pay the band, poor advertising on both venue and promoters part, the amazing vanishing gig at Nottingham (if you were there you'll know), crap PA systems and soundmen more used to thrash metal than finely-wrought interplay, and so on. In short the problems facing Mike at the moment are not creative or technical but logistical.

Admittedly there could have been a bit more String Band material on view. Not just from the nostalgia point of view but because it would be intriguing



## Mike Heron's Incredible Acoustic Band live!

The Joiners, Southampton 15/6/93

1st set: Always/Tom & Alexei/Leaning On My Heart/Killing The Dragon/Favorite Sins/1968/29 Words.

2nd set: Jack Of Hearts/Gaugin In The South Seas/Cry All My Rain/Song For Robert Johnson/Heavy Feather/Blackfoot Side/Feast Of Stephen/Baby Goodnight.

With a meagre audience of only twenty stalwarts the gig looked destined to be something of a wash-out, but it served as a timely reminder that Mike Heron has a strength and sincerity of character greater than history shows.

Promoting his first new recording for years, the performance recalled the intimacy and warmth of Heron at his classic best. The strength of Heron lies in both his powerful melodies and his original lyrical imagery, and tonight's gig was both moving and highly entertaining.

His largely acoustic band attacked the material with such an effortless enthusiasm it was impossible not to get sucked in and seduced by these moments of supreme craftsmanship. John Rutherford's lead acoustic guitar lines weaved majestically around the songs, underpinned by some stunning bass fireworks from Stuart Smith. But it was the rhythm guitar of Heron that enabled the superb percussive embellishments of Dave Haswell to shine. He gave the performance a unique gloss of tone and colour that was gorgeously arranged and hugely emotional.

Their wonderful warm and human performance transcended moist-eyed nostalgia and deserved a good deal more attention than it received from the local punters!

to hear the current line-up display their abilities in interpreting old songs, songs which have become part of many people's personal luggage over the years and which we'd like to see re-vamped and re-worked occasionally. I think it's time we formed a 'bring back 'Red Hair' pressure group.....and I've got this curious, nagging, desire to hear Mike and the boys cover Brinsley Schwarz's 'Shining Brightly' and Lowell George's 'Willin' (???!!!!). I can be cured.

Basically the band need a good record deal which will allow the material they are playing live to be heard as it sounds now - a good live album wouldn't go amiss - and a decent tour in medium sized venues together with some better advertising.

If this doesn't happen then this current incarnation of Mike Heron's music will be lost to a great many people who, given time and the opportunity will give them the support they need. A final thanks tourwise must go to Mike, John, Dave and

Stuart for putting on a professional show no matter what the circumstances and for remaining good humoured throughout the tour, and also to Tommy, Mike's unsung guitar tuner, van driver, sound man pesterer, occasional CD seller and general all round helpful person, without whose hard work etc etc etc.



But now it's mid-tour, hot and sunny outside but cool, in all senses of the word, down in my office. Mike looks ready so.....

I first asked Mike how the new band came about and what had brought him out of the retirement of the past few years.

"I was doing a lot of interviews and

stuff for the ISB albums on CD and it reached a point where people were saying no, we don't really want to interview him on the radio but if he did a little session.....so it came directly out of that and then I thought, well, what would be fun and not kind of like a real struggle, and what would help the songs to get out. So I thought of forming an acoustic band, just me and some guitarist as yet unspecified. I immediately thought of Stuart. I'd worked with him before and it seemed at the time he would be ideal for that."

Stuart Smith, bass-master, had toured with Mike on the 1987 tour.

"And he knew John (Rutherford) and I asked Frank, my old guitarist about a percussionist, and he mentioned Dave and from there we started practicing together in Dave's flat and it was such fun that we immediately knew we'd like to go a little bit further, and we ended up doing a radio Scotland session."

Mike found them all easy to play with, and the hardest part came in getting gigs because, as he says "No one knew what I was going to do, so it was very hard to get gigs for an unknown quantity".

I ventured to suggest that the current sound was, ahem 'organic' and where you might expect the direction shown in the ISB to have taken him. Grown up String Band music?

"I think so, I think it's got a direct relationship to what I was doing with the String Band. There's something about that kind of music cos I'm so wordy, it's all very well me doing it with a rock band but nobody's hearing the words, it's just impossible. It's a characteristic of my writing that it's very wordy and they don't really come over with the rock band, especially in a live situation....."

The current live set includes '1968' and 'Feast of Stephen' from Mike's ISB days. Why, I queried these two in particular out of the zillion songs from 'those days'?

"Well, when we'd done a few kind of obvious songs like 'Robert Johnson' and so we got out all the songs, and really the boys thinking not about the quality of the songs but how suitable they would be for them to breath on, for them to give the songs a characteristic of their own. They're not a personal choice of mine, they're what

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was right for the band. I'm not really picky and I like just about everything! No, there's maybe about one song I wouldn't do (laughs), I wouldn't do 'Frutch', I like it and I wouldn't be embarrassed hearing it but I wouldn't perform it."

I thought that 'Maybe Someday' might have been a good one for the current band?

"Yeah but that's a little bit marked with String Band, got to be careful with these things, whereas something like 'Red Hair' we could maybe get away with 'cos it's my song. The band are anxious to do more stuff but I think we've got a really balanced program at the moment."

Cohen, Dylan, all the other singers of a 'certain age' are still around and I queried how Mike felt to be going into his sixth - count 'em - decade, still playing music. When you started off with the String band did you have any inkling that you might still be doing it as the twentieth century shambled to a close?

A simple answer - "I never thought about doing anything else really"

When did you first pick up a guitar?

"Well, it was a ukelele. Yeah, I did piano lessons but I wasn't a brilliant success at school, I was generally kind of rescued by interesting boys who liked to take care of the waifs. And I wasn't good at sports, so I made these interesting friends and one time I went to a, like a scout camp in Perthshire and there was a boy there playing the ukelele and he was absolutely the life and soul of the party, and I immediately bought a ukelele and taught myself how to play and became the life and soul of the party doing Fats Domino songs."

How did the early String band sound on the first album come about -because it is 'world music' before it existed as such - and there must have been nothing around to influence you at the time...or was there?

"No there definitely wasn't. The first album really is the kind of music that we would have liked to think a jug-band - 'cos it was meant to be a jug band - would play. In fact an alternative name for the String Band was the Fruit Jar Drinkers, suggested by Clive, and it was that kind of thing, it was a jug band format we were after. But it was not a jug band like any other

one. The New Lost City Ramblers would be about the closest, but then you'd have Clive not doing the Earl Scruggs finger picking, he would be doing the old-fashioned flailing, and Robin would be doing the fiddle playing with not the customary American vibrato, so it was immediately becoming quite bizarre, it was an invented music to accommodate the three of us and to make it something we could sit round and listen to because there wasn't much music then. There was The New Lost City Ramblers, Ravi Shankar, Blind Gary Davies.

Did you listen to John Renbourn and people like that at that time?

"Well, we employed them! When we moved from the Crown Bar and did Clive's Incredible Folk Club in Sauchiehall Street it was all night and so we had a lot of guests. We had John Martyn on a few occasions. We'd start off with me doing a little set on my own and then Robin would do one on his own, then Clive, interspersed with different acts and the acts were like Archie Fisher, John Martyn, Bert Jansch of course who was living with Robin at the time and that's how we met John Renbourn, through that."

Following the first album Robin went to North Africa, Clive to India and Afghanistan. What did Mike do?

"Yeah, I did 'Frutch' (currently languishing unheard on the '5000 Spirits' outtakes -ed). I did a complete tour of most of Scotland and a few gigs in England too that Archie Fisher set up in the folk clubs and I did it with a harmonica rack and I did Dylan songs, 'In My Time Of Dying', and it was crowd-pleasing, folky stuff, harmonica and vibrant energetic guitar."

Was there any reason why you didn't follow Robin and Clive on what was then the nascent 'hippy trail'?

"No, I wasn't really tempted. I was just really enjoying the fact that I was getting audiences. I really liked that. You see Clive didn't like the first album because it was already going in the direction of what they really wanted which was writers. Nobody really wanted a British version of the New Lost City Ramblers, particularly in America, and it was an American label. So they wanted songwriting and that's where I came to the fore because

before that I'd just been a strummer really, for them to do their violin and banjo and whatever over, so I came into my own when the first album was made and the producer Joe Boyd indicated that we would be very popular with the company if we did a lot of original material, and Clive just had a couple of songs and so did Robin."

Mike's songs seem to be the strongest on the 1st ISB album. Did he agree?

"Yeah, well, I'd been writing songs for a long time and Robin had been doing more poetry."

'5000 Spirits' followed next, without Clive Palmer.

"Robin came back from Morocco and I was doing my solo bit and he'd come back with all these wonderful instruments and suggested we got together. So we got in touch with Joe and he got us into a studio, I think it was Sound Techniques, and we'd played the songs briefly to each other before, but not really. So they're really songs that we wrote on our holidays. And that's why there is a liveliness to it."

Who were the ISB songs written for - for an audience specifically or for yourselves?

"Very much to provide a kind of music that wasn't there. Because this is pre-Andy Kershaw, people weren't exposed to that kind of music and just felt a gap. We didn't like pop music much - I did more than Robin, he'd been brought up on folk ballads."

Rose and Licorice were to join the band in the late 1960s but what about the two female dancers who appeared with them before then. The mysterious Mimi and Mouse?

"Yeah, one of the things Robin liked to do was multi-media stuff, involving the audience and so-on. It left me completely cold, I didn't really like it, wasn't what I wanted to do. But being as how I was a fan of Robin's I liked to see him expand in that direction, he was fulfilling himself by doing that and it entertained the audience. So all the things with Malcolm and with Mimi and Mouse were more condoned by me and Mimi and Mouse first joined to play the minotaur, they dressed in a minotaur's suit, one in the front and one at the back (much laughter). I don't think they did any of my songs when I

think about it! Joe Boyd might know where they are - he hated them!"

Onto 'Wee Tam & The Big Hugs'. To my mind the most naive - in the correct sense of the word - unaffected album they ever did and a peak album. 'Puppies' for instance. As John Peel once said only the String Band could get away with singing about such things and be "innocent of deceit".

"Yeah, it's one of the things not often tackled in the music business. But it's very easy to get into thinking that music is the be all and end all, the most important thing and really 'Puppies' is about that, about how you have to balance things and how it's never that important."

'Air' - another famous Heron song, also used as part of the soundtrack for Milos Foreman's 'Taking Off' film.

"Milos Foreman was a big fan and he was always trying to get us in a film, but he couldn't really think of a way of doing it without taking the piss!"

Is 'Air' taken from a Tahitian melody, as rumour has it?

"No, it's not a pinched tune - more influenced. Now 'White Bird' is a pinched tune from a very obscure Pakistani or Indian film. Things like 'Gaugin' are a more a pinched 'feel' and some of the lyrics are the ones that they sing to you as you sail away."

What of the ISB/Al Stewart connection? Stewart had recorded 'Lover Man' as the opener on his 'Bedsitter Images' lp and recalled an Italian sojourn he had had with the ISB in 'Beleeka Doodle Day' ("I had a week in Italy with Mike and Robin and some songs").

"It was quite an extraordinary tour. It was in the town of Turin and we were given a cultural liaison officer and all we did, Robin Al Stewart and I was taken to this wonderful restaurant. But we had to listen to Al Stewart moaning all the time about some childhood love that he'd never got over, so that was the downside. We were there for a week and the funny thing was we had a residency in this cultural arena that they'd opened but they hadn't really

publicised it and told people it wasn't the Communist Club anymore and we had all these women with black shawls were just sitting there. Waiting. And to top the humiliation there was this guy who got on stage and he would do a translation of the entire lyrics before we performed. He would read it out word for word and then we'd play."

What about the String Band and TV. Besides the three Julie Felix shows there doesn't seem to be much else for a band of such stature at the time. Was there anything else?

"The most wonderful one we ever did was for a regional station in Norfolk and that was quite fantastic. Just me and Robin. We went in the afternoon and met this guy who'd just got the job as presenter - he usually did the weather or something - and he was really nervous and uptight.

was the kind of person that was so nice you wished she could sing! Actually the same thing applied to Sandy Denny, she could clear a pub in five minutes. But she kept at it and became an absolutely beautiful singer."

Away with such scurrilous talk - was it a conscious decision for you and Robin to write separately, 'Dust Be Diamonds' being the only joint composition.

"Yeah, we were both quite private songwriters and we'd tend to roll up with a song and say 'here's this song, what would you like to do with it? And be very open about it. That's in fact that's how I ended up playing sitar because what would happen would be I'd turn up with my songs and Robin would have a whole selection of things he could do with them, whereas all I could do is like guitar or a bit of keyboard. So a sitar seemed like the ideal thing to interpret them, particularly after the one played by Soma on, which album is that now? The first one that has sitar is not me. It's played by a guy called Soma, I think it was the 'Mad Hatter's Song'. Soma was a sitar teacher, who taught me a little bit.

Did you like the sitar as an instrument.

"I loved it for that but when the band broke up I never played it since.

It's hopeless for writing on you see. But for the purposes of embellishing things that Robin did it probably reached its peak in things like 'Nightfall' and that song's very satisfying to me, and for the job I was doing it's just right but it's not really something that I would do in the normal course of events."



Part two of this Mike Heron interview will be in the May '94 issue of 'Be Glad', looking at songwriting, the Island years and the break up of the ISB.



Stuart and Mike at the soundcheck for the Kendal gig

Anyway, so Robin laid out all his instruments on the table in preparation for the interview later and then we would do a couple of songs.

Then Robin and I went out by the river and had an enormous joint, and came back in, and the guy presenting was really nervous and he'd made loads of mistakes already, and he got to us and took us over to the table, telling the viewers how he was going to interview us and then we would do a song. So he said "Robin, tell me, how many instruments do you play?" And Robin said, "I don't know".

"And we did a couple of kids shows, one for Yorkshire Television, about three I think. I always enjoyed the Julie Felix shows and she was so nice. She

# On The Road Again

by  
John Little

"Are you sure they know how far it is?" Olga asked me as we drove from the southern edge of Birmingham.

A couple of weeks before, I had received a telephone call from Mark Anstey, Mike Heron's manager. Mike and his 'Incredible Acoustic Band' would be playing at the Hibernian Club on the Pershore Road, Birmingham on June 24th and Mark wondered whether I knew of any accommodation for them on the night of the gig as I live in Coventry and might have some local knowledge.

As the Band would be travelling to Southend the day after the Birmingham gig we had suggested that they could stop over at Olga's house in Coventry the night before but had stressed:

a) There would be a 45 minute drive from the gig, and

b) It is a tiny terraced house and two or three band members could find themselves sleeping on inflatable mattresses.

Mark consulted the map and felt that Coventry would be a good stopping off point with regard to the next day's gig and he felt that the band would be happy with the arrangements. However I had a sneaking feeling that he might just keep the prospect of inflatable beds to himself.

Having never been to the Hibernian before, Olga and I had to first pick out the club itself. It turned out to be a dreary looking corner pub and not the cosy club I had fixed in my mind's eye.

We parked in a side street and walked around the pub looking for the band's blue Mercedes van. Yes, there it was in the no too full car park with Dave Aitch looking rather miserable at the wheel. Having made the seven hour journey south from Edinburgh they had arrived at the Hibernian to be told that there were no PA facilities and the best that could be offered would be cobbled together prior to the gig. The Landlord was phoning round trying to locate suitable equipment. Not very hopeful - there might not be a performance at all.

Olga and I walked to the front of the pub and entered to try and find Mike. In view of the fact that we hadn't seen a single poster outside the pub advertising the gig (and neither had I noticed any newspaper adverts) I was not too optimistic that it would be well attended and although the bar was reasonably busy at 7.45pm I got the feeling that there weren't too many Mike Heron supporters in evidence.

I had just ordered a drink (the barmaid got a gold star for surliness) when Mike appeared from a side room. It was the grin that we noticed first despite the depressing circumstances. Mike was now resigned to the fact that there probably would not be a set at all and in fact was rather warming to the idea of a decent curry in a nearby Balti House.

We sat down and surveyed the scene and while we chatted we were joined for a drink by two more Heron fans who introduced themselves as Glynn and Pete. It turned out Pete is a member of a Cajun band and as luck would have it had a spare mike in his car which Mr Heron thought could be of use and which was therefore added at once to the list of available equipment. At last guitarist John Rutherford appeared to announce that things were looking a bit more hopeful and the band members disappeared through to the adjoining hall to try and piece together the assorted bits of equipment along with the newly acquired mike.

We wandered through the pub at about 9.15, passing by the 'dressing room' - behold John Rutherford staring at a wall. Ho hum! A single orange wall light yawned back. 'Nice dressing room John! - enjoying the sun bed?' We found a seat near the stage door in the scout hut style hall. The turnout, as expected, was pretty poor, I'd say about forty people in all but then again with the amount of coverage the gig had I was surprised that anybody turned up at all.

Without any announcement the band walked on to warm applause and sat in readiness. Mike Heron and John Rutherford on guitars, Stuart Smith on fretless bass and Dave Haswell on percussion - a delightful array of anything that might make a noise if tapped, bashed, scraped or stroked. To ease into the set we had 'Always', a lovely, gentle number to warm up both the band and the audience. It really is good to hear Mike again after so many years - his voice has lost none of the warm yet haunting character that has always been his trademark. Then came 'Gaugin in the South Seas'. This reminds me a little of 'Turquoise Blue' with its wistful tropical air. The perky 'Tom & Alexei' came next, as featured on the Acoustic Band's CD, with its timely reminder that, "there's only one Earth to share". Then a favorite - '1968'! Nice introduction to this one by Mike with Dave Aitch 'lurching towards the Tabla'.

Mike was explaining that the song had been written to show his admiration for Robin when a rather immense looking gentleman dressed in a fetching kind of Lorry Driver meets Bonanza style got to his feet to bellow "you mean love Mike, not admiration." All credit to Mike who patiently explained that no it really was admiration not love, but this didn't dissuade the Mighty Meathead who protested loudly. I would like to say that the audience as a man rose up and removed said person from the hall but it was left to Mike and the rest of the band to defuse the situation and proceed with the number which was performed beautifully despite the interruption ('1968' always leaves the hairs on my arms standing on end).

For the rest of the set our surly heckler had his back firmly to the stage and held forth to his own table.

'Killing the Dragon' came next with Dave cruelly shaking to death what looked like an Armadillo as an intro. Mike explained that the song came

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about when he dreamed he was standing on a podium in an arena and that the vast crowd began to tell him that they were sorry for things they had said against him in the past (I think). At this point the Mighty Meathead, encouraged by several quarts of Germany's finest, started to rise to address us. Unfortunately we'll never know what new pearls of wisdom were to be imparted as he leaned over backwards too heavily and ended up on his arse. What a shame.

'Original Sins' next - the feel of this one harks back to much earlier days with its simple lyrics and blues style and hold on, what's Mike whipping out of his jeans? - a harmonica! Sounds good too, and he's clearly enjoying playing it. 'Leaning on my Heart', a good strong number also featured on the CD is next and then 'Jack of Hearts', a song apparently about Jack Kerouac. 'Heavy Feather', I don't think is available on record or disc but I'd heard a recording of this when it featured on a late night Radio One programme a couple of years ago and it came over well tonight. It's a pity it's not been recorded yet. 'Blackfoot Side' seemed more melodic than on the Glen Row Tapes and suited the purely acoustic style.

Now a real treat - Mike mentioned that he had never considered writing a 'Cliff Richard style' Christmas song but this particular number he could describe as a sort of Christmas Carol - 'Feast of Stephen'. This, for me, was the highlight of the set - the number building up to its final "she flies, she flies...", with Dave Aitch making sure to use every piece of percussion he's got and then some - he's smiling like a kid in a toy shop. The band left the stage and were called back for an encore.

At this point I was horrified to note that Mighty Meathead had somehow managed to stumble onto the stage and was crouching behind and over Mike's shoulder. The band began to play and Megamouth began to bray.

"You've been talking all night" said Mike quietly, "so shut up so we can

play this for our audience." To everyone's relief Mighty Meathead exited stage left, not to return. The band ended with a glowing 'Baby Goodnight', to hearty applause from the small but appreciative audience.

So, an eventful gig, the sound quality being pretty poor because of the lack

worried he was going to throw up on my shirt."

It only remained for the band to pack their gear back into the Merc and, of course, to be paid - but where the Landlord? He hadn't been seen throughout the set. After some time he appeared and announced he had in fact

been at another gig! Great support, that. Once everything was stashed in the van we set off. I must say it was unnerving as I didn't want to lose them during the journey. With the Mercedes bobbing and weaving behind we made our way through the suburbs of Birmingham and on to sunny Cov. I thought maybe they hoped I had been joking when I mentioned the inflatable beds but John Rutherford soon got the hang of the foot pump! We had a quick look at the map to confirm the route for the next day and Olga and I bid Mike and the band goodnight, leaving them to their coffee.

Q

Incredible String Band: difficult but absorbing.

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Writings 1980-'83

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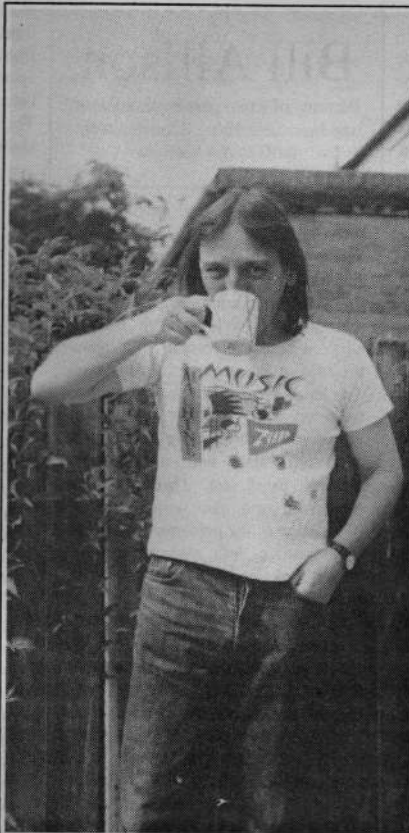
Folk crowds alongside Indian, Scottish and Bulgarian influences on the Incredible's first, and most accessible, album (1966), while newest member Mike Heron's rock'n'roll interests are already being felt on tuneful tracks like Flow Happy! Am and Everything's Fine Right Now.

The Big Huge (1968) spent much of its life as an excellent double album with Wee Tam and, although it has its moments as a single - particularly Maya - Williamson's greater influence (six tracks out of nine) ultimately gives it too much of a melancholic air.

Changing Places (1969) is a brave failure: the track, White Bird, attempting to catch flight in words and sound, almost makes it but the ridiculously pretentious Creation is doomed from the start - at around 15 minutes each, both songs need a less sprawling focus than the band were willing to offer.

Meantimes, some difficult but absorbing material on Williamson's solo effort - generally about his own life and his love for Scotland - is worth making an effort for.

Colin Shearman



Sent to Coventry?

Mike wielding his specially designed Ibanez, wide stringed, 'cup' guitar, essential for those morning ragas.

of equipment, but the band still sounding great and with Mike's voice on form. A nice combination of old and new material with the acoustic nature of the band complementing Mike's vocals. Afterwards I asked Mike whether the meathead had put him off? "No, not really, I was more

*Be Glad For the Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*

# The ISB at the BBC

## Introduction

It is clear that there are some civilisations that have influenced the progress of humankind in every respect, and yet knowledge of these people has somehow been forgotten. Their costume, their building, every aspect of their culture and society must have affected that which followed. Our current general acknowledgment of some of these movements is often limited. The legacy is certainly there. Exactly what that legacy is, however, often remains unclear. Pre conquest South America is one example.

Curiously enough, by comparison, as the progress of pop music is, at present, being hurriedly being chronicled, similar ideas seem apparent. Over the last thirty or forty years of pop music there have been artists whose work was so influential that it profoundly affected what happened at the time and what was to follow. Some of these artists are regarded as greats. Others have been forgotten. The Incredible String Band stand as an example of this.

Only recently has this begun to be rectified. This magazine has been a prime mover. The last few years has also seen the release of the ISB's work on CD. This has made their material available again. Two of these CDs, 'On Air' and 'Live in Concert' contain performances and songs which have never been available before. These CDs contain BBC Radio One sessions.

Many readers of 'Be Glad' will be aware that the ISB broadcast very regularly for the BBC. To others this will be news. All will probably be surprised to learn that the ISB broadcast at least seventeen BBC sessions of various kinds. The recent CDs mentioned contain material from six. Unfortunately, however, these six sessions have not been released in their entirety on these CDs. Furthermore, the packages are not annotated in depth. Therefore it is not made clear

by

**Bill Allison**

Part one of a two part exploration of the Incredible String Band and their BBC Radio Sessions

this article is going to be biased, you're right. It's because I am biased. I write from the heart. I write as a fan. I've spent at least hours of afternoons listening. I love this crew. So do you. The ISB at the BBC. On with the show.....

when each song and session was recorded and broadcast.

This article attempts to catalogue and describe all known ISB BBC Radio One sessions. In order to do this, in what follows, I've tried to adopt a common format. This shows the title of the programme and dates. The dates show when the session was recorded and broadcast. On several occasions, sessions were re-broadcast at a later date with an additional number, listed last. Then the songs performed and the writer. Then a description of the performance. As was ISB practice, let's assume that each writer took lead vocal on his or her own song.

In the vast majority of cases, these sessions were astounding for several reasons. The ISB often performed well known songs from record quite differently in concert. The band always played sections of their then current concert programme for their BBC sessions. Obviously the BBC sessions document these performances.

More importantly, the concerts and therefore the sessions, did not often, if ever, reflect the then current ISB record release. Instead they used the concerts, and sessions, to explore other musical avenues. And, in fact, much of this material was never released on record. Consequently the BBC sessions are unique for they contain a great deal of rare material. Where a song remains unreleased on record, it is underlined at the beginning of each session.

The Incredible String Band. They did affect what happened then and they did affect what followed. If you think that



## John Peel - 'Top Gear'

Recorded: 10/10/67

Broadcast: 15/10/67

'Painting Box' (MH)/'Mercy I Cry City' (MH)/'Chinese White' (MH)/'Nightfall' (RW)

The first known BBC session, on reflection now, some twenty six years later seems simple and straightforward. Only the listeners of the time would have been shocked. The Incredible what?x??!

There are four songs that are very similar in arrangement to their recorded versions. Just Mike and Robin and some songs. Guitars, gimbri, flutes, hand drums. However a little hint at things to come in the BBC sessions. Two of these songs would not be on record for at least another six months. 'Mercy I Cry City' and 'Nightfall' would appear on 'The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter'. That was way back in the 1960s. Yes you made your own amusement then.



## John Peel - 'Nightride'

Recorded: 4/3/68

Broadcast: 6/3/68

'Bid You Goodnight' (Pindar)/'Won't You Come See Me Some Sweet Day' (RW)/'You Get Brighter' (MH)/'All Too Much For Me' (RW)

*Be Glad for the Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*

This exciting early session typifies exactly what some of the ISB BBC sessions were all about. Of the four songs, two, both Williamson numbers, remain unreleased on record. However, to begin at the beginning. 'Bid You Goodnight', the first song, featured as a part of Mike Heron's 'A Very Cellular Song' on 'Hangman's), is a West Indian gospel song borrowed from the Pindar family. World music. The band often took this song out of its very cellular context and performed it live.

The second song 'Won't You Come See Me Some Sweet Day', is a delight. A long Williamson number, often performed in concert and well known by fans, always recognised and applauded, but never appearing on record. Throughout the years the song went through different arrangements. The version here is slow, with a mandolin as lead instrument, backed by guitar.

*"Build your cathedrals  
with the shapeless bricks of time  
Friends they change like wispy mists  
but promises are fine"*  
declaim the opening lines. This is a classic unrecorded song. It's difficult to date its origin, however it sounds and feels like something that would have fitted wonderfully well onto the 'Hangman's' album set.

The third song is Mike Heron's 'You Get Brighter', from the 'Wee Tam' album, in a version similar to the album cut.

The final song, 'All Too Much For Me', is another Williamson tour de force, seemingly one that will never appear in record form on album. Mike plays organ and Robin plays guitar and sings.

*"You look too hard for anything  
it disappears  
I've been looking now much too hard  
for years and years and years"*

The lyrics feature Williamson philosophy set to jug band beat. We could perhaps even have here some of Williamson's own lyrical response to Scientology. Both Williamson and Heron were converts to Scientology in the Spring of 1968. This set contains the only known performance of this song.



John Peel - 'Nightride'

Recorded: 5/2/69  
Broadcast: 5/3/69

'All Writ Down' (MH)/'Dust Be Diamonds' (MH & RW)/'Theta' (RW & MH)/'Fine Fingered Hand' (RW)

Dust be diamonds indeed. Things are never what they seem. On the surface a fairly mundane session looking at the titles now. However none of this material was released until at least six months after the session. The version of Mike Heron's 'All Writ Down' which went out as the B side of an edited single version of 'Big Ted' in October 1969 is fairly close in style to the version on the session.

'Dust Be Diamonds', one of the very few songs credited to Mike and Robin is similar to the recorded version too (on 'Changing Horses'). 'Theta' is the last instrumental piece from the collection on side two of 'Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending'. It takes up the last two minutes or thereabouts of the twenty six minutes and forty five seconds.

This leaves 'Fine Fingered Hand', an unreleased Robin Williamson song. Here you have Robin at his most mystical, most meandering, and to all Robin fans, probably his most wonderful. Six effortless minutes of Robin singing and wailing. His voice is followed by a guitar, flute, sitar and hand-drums groaning and droning. This is a song that would have graced any ISB album, about colours that eyes have not shown, and girls bringing essence in love hewn jars. "I glanced down at her hand, her fine fingered hand".



**INCREDIBLE STRING BAND**

**BBC Radio 1 Live In Concert**

WINDSONG WINCD 029 \*\*\*\*

**Earthspan**

EDCD 360 ED CD 360 \*\*\*

**No Runicus Feud**

EDSEL ED CD 367 \*\*\*

**Hard Rope & Silken Twine**

EDSEL ED CD 368 \*\*\*

**ROBIN WILLIAMSON**

**Myrrh**

EDSEL ED CD 366 \*\*\*

Glimmers of interest in the Incredible String Band were rekindled last year with the re-issuing of three early Elektra LPs and the first-time release of On Air, an album of songs recorded for Radio One sessions. Now it is happening all over again.

Live In Concert is culled from two shows in 1971 and '72, and is a more worthwhile collection than the shoddy On Air. There are half a dozen never before released songs, performed acoustically; here, too, is the interplay of the multifarious instruments and narrative voices of the band in their prime.

Over the next couple of years, as leaders Mike Heron and Robin Williamson began to wander around in less interesting circles, Malcolm LeMaistre (misspelled on the live LP) began to assert himself, particularly on Earthspan and No Runicus Feud, whose sound is often drums/bass/guitar as much as anything incredibly stringy. ISB purists, however, often attest that his joining marked the beginning of a protracted end.

The 1973 swansong, Hard Rope & Silken Twine, may be something of a hotchpotch but Heron's side-long song sequence, Ithos, more ambitious than pretentious, is effective, and Williamson's Cold February and LeMaistre's Glancing Love remain great songs by any standards.

The Incredible String Band's cleverness and the quality of their musical invention is to be heard somewhere on all these albums, including Williamson's 1972 solo, Myrrh and supersedes the ear-strangeness and the occasional hippy feyness.

Seven ISB CDs are now on catalogue, and Williamson and Heron have recently been pictured together for the first time in a couple of decades. It couldn't be that their time is come again, could it?

John Beaulieu



*Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*



'John Peel - 'Nightride'

Recorded: 5/8/69

Broadcast: 24/8/69

Re-broadcast: 1/11/69

'The Letter' (MH)/'This Moment' (MH)/'Gather Round' (RW)/'Waiting For You' (RW)/'Black Jack Davy' (MH)

This session comes from a period when the band seemed to be reaching even greater heights. Old, new and different forms of song, music and performance were peeling off like finger nails. As individual writers, Williamson and Heron were beginning to diversify. The ISB, too, as a playing unit were also perhaps beginning to reach the pinnacle of their talent.

However, the songs performed here are not World Music, but down home rock. Heron's 'The Letter', opens the session. This was a song that would eventually end up on the 'I Looked Up' album. Heron's own roots were in rock and he continued to tap this vein for the band. The version here is rougher, cruder and more forced than the recorded version. There are different instruments and personnel than on the record. The lead instrument here is piano, although there is an electric guitar, bass and hi-hat in there somewhere. These differences are part of the band's and the sessions' appeal. Each moment is indeed different than any before it, which moves us to the next song.

With 'This Moment', another Heron song, we move from rock to acoustic delight. Totally different, but equally Heron. This version is similar to the recorded version on 'I Looked Up', Mike and Robin play acoustic guitar, Rose and Licorice sing something more than support vocal. This was a song that was to become a well known ISB number and often used at the time to open live shows.

The unreleased number from this session is called 'Gather Round', written by Williamson. It has a vague country sound, but the voice that Williamson uses to sing lead certainly

imitates country style. Rose and Licorice sing backup vocal and an acoustic and an electric guitar vie with each other to underpin the vocal. The song bounces along packed with Williamson lyric. It would have easily sat more than well with other unreleased output at this time. It never made it onto record, although it was featured in concert.

'Waiting For You', written by Robin, with drums, guitar, organ and vocals makes this a mammoth vaudeville production. Williamson's lyrics feature plenty of examples of what he was to call, in later years, cosmic humour. This is a long song which often ended live shows. The song appeared as part of 'Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending' record, although it was not featured as part of the film.

A performance of 'Black Jack Davy' is the fifth song in the session. This completed a preview of three out of four of Mike's songs which would appear on 'I Looked Up', eight months before the release of that record.



John Peel - 'Top Gear'

Recorded: 20/7/70

Broadcast: 25/7/70

Re-broadcast: 3/10/70

'Won't You Come See Me Some Sweet Day?' (RW)/'Empty Pocket Blues' (CP)/'Dark Eyed Lady' (RW)/'Flowers Of The Forest' (MH)/'Beautiful Stranger' (MH)

This is a very interesting session for several reasons. Not one of the five songs recorded for the session appeared on an ISB album in this form. In fact, only one of the five, 'Empty Pocket Blues', was recorded at all by the band itself, four years prior to this session on their first album in 1966, 'The Incredible String Band'.

This was the ISB at their most prolific and energetic. It was a time at which they were at the height of their activities as soloists within the band and the band itself was probably at its creative peak. Consequently, musical directions, theatre pieces, films and albums were bursting out all over the

place. This is where the BBC sessions are priceless because they document material that was not knowingly preserved in any other form.

The session displays the band as a tight four piece unit playing elaborate versions of their material. The first songs is another version of 'Won't You Come See Me'. Already discussed as an unreleased concert favourite, the version here is taken at a much faster pace. Robin plays acoustic guitar and takes lead vocal. The guitar sounds strong and forceful, Likky plays organ and Rose plays mandolin, always the featured instrument on this piece. Mike plays bass.

'Empty Pocket Blues' comes next. A good version of a good song, written by Clive Palmer, who had long since departed. This version is taken at a slightly faster pace than the original recording. Mike and Robin play acoustic guitars and sing. Licorice and Rose provide vocal support. Perhaps this was a belated tribute to Clive's contribution to the band. It was also the first of several older songs from the first album that were to appear in new versions.

At this time Williamson and Heron had more than enough material for anybody's ration of creative talent. New songs, however, kept appearing. The obvious next step was solo albums. Nevertheless the hectic pace of the band's own momentum and commitments meant that the solo albums themselves were a long time in coming, even though the songs were there.

The session features next Robin's 'Dark Eyed Lady', in a version where Robin sings and plays acoustic guitar. The song itself was to appear two years later on his 'Myrrh' album.

The sessions ends with two Mike Heron songs that were to appear on his own solo album, 'Smiling Men With Bad Reputations'. The first is 'Flowers Of The Forest' with Mike singing and Rose on bass. The second song is 'Beautiful Stranger'. This is a long, strange, song with difficult lyrics and melody. Here, however, we have an ISB version of what would later appear and a bigger production number on 'Smiling Men'. Mike plays guitar and sings, Robin plays gimbri. Rose plays bass and Licorice sings and plays whistle.



Stuart Henry - 'Sounds Of The Seventies'

Recorded: 17/9/70  
Broadcast: 24/9/70  
Re-broadcast: 29/10/70

'Won't You Come See Me'  
(RW)/'Rakish Paddy' (Trad. arr. ISB)/'Everything's Fine Right Now'  
(MH)/'Raga Puti' (Trad. arr. ISB)/'Ringdance' (RW)

This was the second incredible, yes I'm using that word, incredible, session of 1970. Brilliant! Bass, mandolin, acoustic guitar, organ and fiddle flow though most, if not all, of this material. Vocal force and unity continued to become even stronger, not that there was ever much wrong with it in the first place.

And guess what? Again, of five songs, *all* are unavailable!

The first song is Robin's 'Won't You Come See Me'. Similar to the version from John Peel's 'Top Gear' in the session before this. It is worth adding, however, that this is the third different version of this unrecorded song to appear in these sessions.

This is followed by a set of jigs, that has come to be known as 'Rakish Paddy'. Robin's fiddle takes the lead throughout. Of the so-called 'folk rockers' of the period, not that I'm dumping that label on the String Band, the ISB material in this genre, played live by Robin and the band could bring the house down anywhere, long before all the others.

Next comes Mike's 'Everything's Fine Right Now'. This was another song from the first album that was to reappear in a different format and become a concert favourite. All singing, all playing. Guitars, organ, bass, mandolin and four voices hit the airwaves. Bass and mandolin play against and tease each other. Everything *is* fine right now.

The fourth number was 'Raga Puti'. This was a traditional piece arranged by the Band. It's an epic in every sense. We can play with ideas of World Music for as long as we wish, but here is a traditional Indian raga, performed in its original language, using its original tune, played on bass, organ, drums and lead electric guitar with hand claps and vocal. There is a spoken introduction



Rose looks carefully at something small and possibly musical

in the rhyming pattern. So we get:

"Every healer that they meet  
They nail him to his gate,  
sir  
The noblest thing a man can do  
is still refuse to hate, sir"  
And you could be heard to ask yourself,  
"Who was

by Robin, in English, which begins:

"This song is in praise of the one source of all the universes..."

Robin takes lead vocal. It begins slowly and increases in tempo and forcefulness. It is breathtaking in scope, vision and performance. This raga was apparently a favourite of Gandhi's and a version not by the ISB, theirs is unavailable remember, is played over the final, long closing credits of Attenborough's film about the life of Gandhi.

Lastly comes a Robin Williamson number called 'Ringdance'. This is a song with an English traditional feel about its words and music. The organ is dominant, reminiscent in sound of some of Shirley and Dolly Collins' recorded material, with and without the ISB. Hand drums provide rhythm, fiddle is lead instrument throughout, with a strong interlude between each verse also played on the fiddle. If pushed you could almost swear there's a gimbri in there too somewhere.

The song is an excellent Williamson song. It should have turned up somewhere on record. The lyrics could only be Williamson's. It is a list type song where Robin issues sets of instructions. The word 'Sir' is recurrent

responsible for leaving stuff like this off records?"



John Peel - 'Top Gear'

Recorded: 6/10/70  
Broadcast: 9/1/71

'Circle Is Unbroken' (RW)/'Long, Long Road' (MH)/'Everything's Fine Right Now' (MH)/'Raga Puti' (Trad. arr. ISB)

1970 had been an exciting year for the ISB. Three band albums, one in the studio, one from a theatre piece, one from a film, and work had begun on solo albums. This session marked the end of the year for the ISB at the BBC. It was actually recorded in 1970, even though it was not broadcast until the turn of the new year. As in other sessions from 1970, it was remarkable. Four songs were featured and three of these were unavailable on record in this form, or in most cases, any form. The first three performances were regularly featured in the current live shows. The Band enjoy themselves on this session.

*Be Glad for the Song Has No Ending - Winter '93*

'The Circle Is Unbroken' is first. Always spine chilling, the song is performed in a version closely matched to the recorded version on 'Wee Tam and the Big Huge'.

'Long, Long, Road', written by Mike, is one of two songs from 'U' not to appear on the double album 'U'. The second was Robin's 'El Ratto'. Both songs, however, turned up in concert sooner or later. This version of 'Long, Long, Road' is interesting. The vocals are string, well worked and performed fiercely. All four voices play a part in the performance. Each member of the band takes a verse in turn. Quite an unusual feature for any ISB material. All sing on the chorus.

A highlight of all Mike's songs on the 'U' record is the vocal strength and delivery. Most of his material is stripped down to piano and voice. Investigation of how the soundtrack was recorded will, perhaps, go some way to an explanation of this. In this song, a dominant piano again works with the voices. However, more interestingly, a strident lead electric guitar chops its way through the song. One wonders if the number was performed like this in 'U' or if this version is a refinement?

Mike was using electric guitar at this time in various ways. There is a musical feel about the delivery of this song that seems to link 'Changing Horses', and 'I Looked Up' to 'Liquid Acrobat As Regards The Air'.

The last two songs performed were 'Everything's Fine Right Now' and 'Raga Puti'. These were, in fact the last two songs performed on the session broadcast first on 17/9/70. 'Everything's' is similar to the version played on that session. 'Raga Puti' played during that session has already been discussed at length. Here we have the same song several weeks later in a different version. The String Band did very little the same twice. Here again, however, we have the same powerful tour de force.

So 1970 comes to an end for the ISB at the BBC. Three sessions with fourteen songs, with only one of these recorded and released in an identical format at the time. Amazing by any yardstick. Furthermore, five of these unreleased songs, 'Won't You Come See Me', 'Ringdance', 'Rakish Paddy', 'Long, Long Road', and 'Raga Puti'

would have made more than the substance of any ISB album then. Now they could perhaps form the heart of a further BBC sessions package.

So, as a conclusion to part one of this long, long article, let's sum up a little. Let's do that by making a list of all the unreleased on record songs that we've come across so far:

'Won't You Come See Me Some Sweet Day?'  
'All Too Much For Me'  
'Fine Fingered Hand'  
'Gather Round'  
'Rakish Paddy'  
'Raga Puti'  
'Long, Long Road'

Part two will tell you more. See you next time.

### *Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending*

'Be Glad' is published twice yearly on May 1st and November 1st. We are a non-profit making Incredible String band fanzine. All subscriptions go into the magazine and any monies left is used to further String Band archival research.

We welcome submissions any anything to do with the ISB. Any length, hand or type written. Also we welcome photographs or artwork suitable for the magazine. Please send any communications to the editorial address - which is:

Andy Roberts  
84 Elland Road  
Brighouse  
West Yorkshire  
HD6 2QR  
Tel: 0484 721993

Please write or 'phone if you just want a chat about the ISB or if you have any questions about anything ISB.

The magazine costs £3.00 inc. p&p and free flier. Next issue due May 1st 1994. Please re-subscribe promptly if your sub. is up. Thanks.

## YORKSHIRE POST

July 24th 1993

### Robin Williamson

York Arts Centre

### Michael Clarke

WHEN popular music blossomed through the 1960s no one was sure if it was a fad or might lead somewhere.

Now, as Mick Jagger marks his 50th birthday and Bob Dylan celebrates 30 years in the industry, it has been shown to last - although few when they set out could have guessed the influence of big business today.

Robin Williamson, former guiding force behind one of the most successful 1990s groups, The Incredible String Band, is on a tour significant for its low profile compared with his former peers.

Williamson, with his enchanting Celtic songs and stories, was on fine form for this one-man show, with which he is marking 32 years as a travelling performer.

Playing harp, acoustic guitar and mandolin, he took an enthralled audience through songs including *Maya* from the ISB's *Big*

*Huge* LP to the more recent *The Barley* from *Ten of Songs* released in 1988.

He coupled this with his stories including the hilarious *Wee Jack* and the magical *Thomas the Rhymer* where he accompanied himself on harp.

5 Pop groups with 'string' in their name include The Incredible String Band and String Driven Thing. Neither has had a big hit.

Spotted in a Sunday Supplement. This is obviously what happens when you get old in the head and stop listening to music, it just becomes a footnote in a shiny advertising sheet.

Thanks to all who took part in the poll sent out with the May issue. The returned forms gave me many happy reading moments and all your comments, suggestions and criticisms were gratefully received. A few of the results are relevant and interesting. Firstly the 'favourite song' bit - makes us sound like 'Smash Hits' or something! Wide choice in this category but the top three were:

**HERON**

1. A Very Cellular Song
2. 1968
3. You Get Brighter  
Red Hair  
White Bird  
Painting Box All tied for 3rd place

**WILLIAMSON**

1. Maya
2. Job's Teas
3. Cold Days of February  
October Song  
Three is a Green Crown  
First Girl I Loved  
Witches Hat All tied for 3rd place

Not many surprises there, with selections from the early albums being miles ahead of anything else except 'Cold Days'.

Least favourite songs were:

1. Bad Sadie Lee
2. Circus Girl
3. Ithkos

No others stood out particularly with most coming from the mid to end period of the band. People are strange though - someone even put 'Invocation' as their least liked song and there were, curiously enough, several entries for 'Moon Hang Low' in that category.

Top album again produced no real surprises - full listing below - other than the fact that a number of people hadn't actually heard all the albums, which may have affected placings slightly. And it's worth noting that although only about 25% of people actually scored 'I Looked Up' they all scored it very highly indeed. Demand a CD re-issue now!

1. Hangman's
2. Wee Tam/Big Huge
3. 5000 Spirits
4. Liquid Acrobat
5. Changing Horses
6. U

7. 1st album
8. I looked Up
9. Earthspan
10. Be Glad
11. No Ruinous Feud
12. Hard Rope
13. BBC In Concert
14. On Air

Quite a few of you wanted a comprehensive discography. Hopefully we'll have a full and complete one, including all solo stuff and guest appearances, in the next issue.

**I Suppose A Book's  
Out Of The  
Question?**

Several books have come my way recently which all mention the ISB in some context or other.....

Nell Dunn, famous for the novels 'Poor Cow' and 'Up The Junction', a bit of a counter culture person in her own right also wrote 'Incurable', a 1960s tale of a woman's awakening following the diagnosis of her husband having MS. It's a bit dated content wise but I still found it a good read. When the heroine is whisked of to Europe by a hippy he sings her the 'Water Song' one morning, and later busks in a station with 'Greatest Friend'. Robin and Mike are thanked in the intro pages for the 'Water Song', but oddly not for 'Greatest Friend'.

No history of British folk music would be complete without Hamish Imlach and his autobiography (Cod Liver Oil and the Orange Juice, Mainstream, £7.99) is a rip-roaring, rumbustious rollercoaster ride through those early days. Lots of wild parties and alcohol apparently seemed to fueled the Scottish folk scene. Clive's Incredible Folk Club gets a mention and the ISB crop up here and there. A good read.

Brian Hogg has just had his 'Scottish Rock & Pop' book published by Guinness (£12.99) - a comprehensive retrospective peer at anyone whoever played a part in contemporary music in Scotland. Naturally the ISB merit a few pages - even a chapter entitled

'Wearing black cherries for rings' -, a handbill repro and a photo. It's so up to date that Mike's Incredible Acoustic Band also gets a look in in the form of the Jim Hill promo photo which makes them all look like armed robbers about to hit a bank. Hogg writes sensibly about the ISB and curiously compares them to the Holy Modal Rounders, a band rarely far from the CD player here, and yes quite ISB-ish but with their tongues so far in their cheeks it must have really hurt.

More obscure literary reference to our heroes occurs in 'Philip Larkin, The Marvell Press and Me' by Jean Hartley. In this autobiography we are told how one of Jean's daughters becomes a String Band follower and how she felt that she, "knew more about Robin, Mike and Licorice than I did about Beowulf, Sir Gawain and Moll Flanders about whom I was supposed to be writing essays". Thus proving that when your mum told you that the ISB would lead you astray she was right!

'Be Glad' readers are also writers too and besides our own Allan Frewin who we mentioned in issue one, B.J. Craven has written 'Teacup & Sorcery' (T.S.C. Press £10.45 inc p&p from 37 Northgate, Oakham, Rutland, LE15 6QR). It's a handsomely produced hardback. Two stories and a plethora of exquisite, ISB-y illustrations. Sharp, witty text with lots of references to this, that and the other, shot through with a knowing cosmic humour. Hours of fun and entertainment.....and the ISB references? Oh yes, they're there alright but you'll have to buy it find out what and where. As Mr Craven so rightly says, "If there's a bustle in your hedgerow, it could well turn out to be a mechanical digger".

.....and finally the new book by Ken Garner about the history of the John Peel radio shows, 'In Session Tonight', a mammoth tome which details the minutae of that and other rock shows from 1967 onwards. String Band-wise it has a photo (the one of them used in the Q article) and listing of all the Peel sessions they played. Interesting for that, alone but an essential buy for anyone at all with a fascination for contemporary music and how it is presented to us (BBC Books, £17.99).

## *Red Hair*

*Stepping out of the grey day she came  
her red hair falling like the sky  
love held them there in that moment  
with the whole world passing by*

*He could look through all of his books  
and not find a line that would do  
to tell of changes she had made in him  
just by being there*

*So good, just to walk in the light  
and may the moon shine down on love every, every night  
and sometimes it seems the only things real  
are what we are and what we feel*



*Mike Heron*