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- Back Again with Clive & Malcolm
- Robin & Mike - the new CDs
- Ouds & Ends - Robin talks technical

Wee Tam And The Big Huge
- further reflections

becky AD8

for the song has no ending

A CELEBRATION OF THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND PAST AND PRESENT

beGLAD8

for the song has no ending

The Circle Is Unbroken
Raymond Greenoaken gets all editorial...

HOMAGE TO ANDY

Unless you've spent the past year in a diabetic coma or in the heart of the Amazonian rainforest, you'll be aware that *Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending* has recently changed hands. Last issue, **Andy Roberts**, editor, originator and chief architect of *Be Glad*, bowed gracefully out. "I'm bored," he confessed—and anyone who's done any "independent" editing and publishing knows that, sooner or later, it loses some of its lustre and becomes more of a chore and less of a pleasure. What is beyond question is that Andy has done a brilliant job in his time as *Be Glad* supremo; it's mainly thanks to him that the magazine is not only among the most wide-ranging and literate fanzines around, but also one of the best-produced and laid-out. In its seven issues to date, *Be Glad* has featured an immense variety of writing, from scholarly lucubrations to first-hand memories and much else besides. And like Andy himself, it has always had a twinkle in its eye.



Andy Roberts gives the secret sign of the Ex-Editors' Support Group
Photo: Fish-eye Whittaker

As most of you will now know, the editorial vacancy has been filled by **Adrian Whittaker** and myself, both longtime contributors to the mag. One of the main reasons we are taking up the baton is our shared conviction that there's vast quantities of ISB-related material still to be unearthed and published—coupled with a shrewd suspicion that you want to hear about it. But there's more to *Be Glad* than cold fax 'n' info. Andy's greatest achievement is to have forged a community out of

Stringfans who were scattered thinly around these islands and the wider world, bringing them together through the magazine and the various events staged over the past couple of years. No longer do we sit wistfully in our garrets with *Wee Tam* and *The Big Huge* on the cans, thinking "Christ, I'm probably the only person within the orbit of Uranus still listening to this stuff!" By his dauntless endeavour and inhuman energy Andy has in fact given us the answer to the Half-Remarkable Question itself: what is it that we are part of? Already in putting this issue together I've spoken to and corresponded with many of you—and it's been a pleasure in each and every case. And of course I've met many more of you at *Back Again*, the Griffin bash and the *Not Quite Christmas Party*. The impression I'm left with is that we're all united in honouring a peculiar and unique vision of the world as a rather wondrous place, dappled with rainbow tints and wreathed in soft mystery: the vision that Mike and Robin—and the others, lest we forget—gifted to us in our hope-filled youth. (Sorry, readers—I must have been smoking too much wacky baccy lately!) More than anything else, it's this sense of community, of connection, that persuades us that *Be Glad* is worth continuing. We hope you agree. Over the coming months and years, therefore, we'll do our best to ensure that the Long Time Sun shines on a corner of the fanzine field that is forever Stringland.

MAKING IT CLEAR

I know it's a bit complicated having two people running the mag from different addresses, alternating editorial duties and sharing other responsibilities. But I hope this section will make everything dazzlingly clear to you all. In true "After you, Cecil" fashion, Adrian and I will be editing alternate issues. I've put together the issue you now hold, and Adrian is already hatching plans for issue 9. Subsequent issues will be prepared in the same way. Any contributions for issue 9, therefore, should be addressed to Adrian. I'll continue to liaise with readers on general matters, so please ring or write to me with any enquiries or just for a cheery chinwag. I'll also have responsibility for back issues and subscriptions: in other words, send all your money to me! (Unless you want to contribute to the *Back Again* Shortfall Appeal, or order copies of the *Hangman's Beautiful Grand-daughter* tape—that's Adrian's bailiwick.)

Regarding subscriptions: you'll find a small box in the lower left hand corner of this page, with a number in it. The number

beGLAD8

Be Glad 8 is published by **Taproot Productions** and edited, oddited and idioted by Raymond Greenoaken, with lots of help from Adrian Whittaker, inspiration from Andy Roberts, and invaluable technical support and refreshments from Bryan Ledgard and Ron Day.

Logo by Jas Wetherspoon.

Thanks also to everyone who contributed and made suggestions, and to Kate for putting up with being a Quark widow. In theory, *Be Glad* is published on 1 May and 1 November (forgive the delays in getting this issue to you—life is complicated). Issue 9 will be edited by Adrian Whittaker; all contributions should be addressed to Adrian at **71a Colvestone Crescent, Dalston, London E8 2LJ**.

The featured album will be *The 5000 Spirits*. We're always happy to receive any ISB-related material—clippings, photos and other memorabilia, illustrations, poems, whatever—either on loan or as contributions to the *Be Glad* archive.

USEFUL GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

If you're sending material by computer disc, please check with the Editor as to whether the format is compatible with *Be Glad* hardware. If you're sending material in MS form, we prefer typed copy if possible. It's a wise precaution to number every sheet, and to write your name on every sheet too. Loose pages have an occult tendency to get mixed up, and occasionally to go missing. Make sure you keep a copy for yourself, then if we lose anything we can get back to you. These things happen, despite the Editor's best efforts. To take a couple of recent examples... **Stuart Taylor**, who was credited with last issue's *Wee Tam* essay, has pointed out that he is not in fact the author of this piece. If the true author would like to contact *Be Glad*, we'll be delighted to acknowledge him or her in the next issue. And **David McGowan** was the author of an uncredited essay on Robin's Merry Band period in issue 6—a belated acknowledgement to him for an excellent piece of writing.

SUBSCRIPTIONS, BACK ISSUES, INFORMATION, GOSSIP

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beGLAD

LIVE HERON AT THE 12 BAR CLUB, LONDON IN APRIL.

Right: This B flat won't hurt a bit, Sir.
Below: He did it his way.

Photos: Snapper Green



indicates the last issue you've paid for. If it's "8", this means your subscription expires with this issue, and you'll need to renew it in order to receive future issues. Most of you will receive a subscription form for this very purpose. The form takes you up to issue 12, but you can subscribe beyond that if you wish. Our grand strategy—which actually began with *Be Glad* no. 1—is to cover all the ISB albums on an issue-by-issue basis. This issue we extend no. 7's coverage of *Wee Tam And The Big Huge*, which leaves *5000 Spirits*, the first album, *I Looked Up, Hard Rope, Be Glad...*, and the solo waxings *Myrrh and Smiling Men*. (The *Relics* compilations, and the post-ISB collections *Seasons They Change, On Air*, and *In Concert* don't really count, since all were assembled independently of the ISB. But we shall probably cover them in some form, even so.) That'll take us up to issue 14 or 15, I reckon; if we get that far, we'll take stock then and decide whether to continue further down the road. So it could be a long strange trip...

It's worth bearing in mind that the more issues you subscribe to in advance, the better we can plan ahead and budget accordingly. *Be Glad* is a strictly non-profit-making concern, and the price only just covers the production and distribution costs. We've introduced a few design features in this issue that make the margin even tighter; but we take the view that we have to keep getting better. The ISB deserve the best, and so do you. Andy followed the same principle. But these improvements have to be paid for; nor do the costs of materials and postage remain static. Somehow, we've managed to hold the cover price constant since 1992—uniquely in the world of publishing. This can't, of course, continue indefinitely, and we'll have

to address the issue sooner or later. Naturally, we'd be pleased to hear your views on this thorny matter. Should we bite the bullet, or does the idea of an increase, however modest, seriously spoil your breakfast? Let us know...

That's quite enough of such unsavoury matters, I think—on with the entertainment, and welcome back one and all.

CONCERNING THIS ISSUE'S FEATURED ALBUM

Wee Tam And The Big Huge—such an unassuming title for such a momentous album. Many commentators, of course, regard it as the apogee of the ISB's recording career. I'm tempted to concur. It has the edge over *Hangman's*—the other obvious contender—simply because there's more of it. And, despite certain opinions to the contrary, I reckon the sleeve design is a towering masterpiece, at least in its original form. No-one would dispute, however, the album's claim to be ranked with the very best of the ISB's work. With this in mind, *Be Glad* is extending last issue's coverage of *WTBH* into the current issue. Analysis, opinion, speculation: we've got it, and we

FELIX MYSTERY

We've established that the ISB appeared on at least three editions of *Julie Felix's* '60s TV show *Once More With Felix*. As is well known, footage of one show—recorded on 7 November 1967—was "liberated" from the BBC library a couple of years back, and features Mike and Robin performing *The Half-Remarkable Question* and *Painting Box*. This photo, which illustrated an article on early BBC2 colour transmissions in the *Grolier Society Year Book 1968*, clearly shows the lads performing a third number, presumably never broadcast. What could it be, we wonder? Obviously a Heron song—standard guitar tuning, capo on the fourth fret, Robin on drum and backing vocal: must be *Little Cloud*. Any alternative suggestions?

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know you can take it. However much you thought you knew about *WTBH*, you should know a little more by the time you reach the end of the magazine; and I'd guess your heart will have been lifted a little too. Nostalgic stuff, certainly; but those songs continue to speak to us in ways that are incontrovertably *now*, of this moment. Our lives may have changed in many and various ways, but some things remain constant—and my guess is that you'd find most of them expressed on this album. As Robin once said, there are truths, but no new truths. The old truths renew themselves whenever they're lovingly restated; and, by the same token, *WTBH* renews itself whenever it's replayed. The circle, truly, is unbroken.



beGLAD TIDINGS

A gallant gullimaufry of news, rumour, scandal and allegation mostly assembled by ADRIAN WHITTAKER

HI-DE-HI!

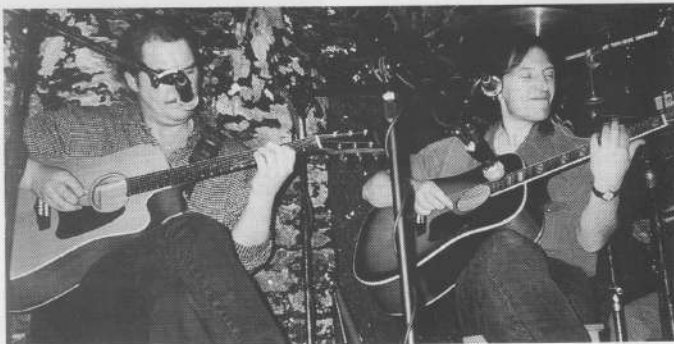
Mike's Incredible Acoustic Band are now a three-piece. Bassist **Stuart Smith** reportedly received an Offer he Couldn't Refuse from a Scottish holiday camp(!), and Mike granted him a free transfer in recognition of his stalwart services on the fretboard these past three years. We saw the slimmed-down IAB at London's Twelve Bar Club last month, and thought they sounded pretty good even without Stuart's adroit underpinning. John had cannily incorporated some of the basslines into his lead playing. At least we have the new CD to remind us of Stuart's peerless contribution to the ensemble sound. Ho-de-ho, Mr S—it was good while it lasted!

FOOTSTEPS OF THE HERON

Mike and the lads beat a path down to London in April to do a couple of gigs at the Twelve Bar Club in Denmark Place, record *A Song For Robert Johnson* for the VH1 satellite TV station, and visit the fleshpots of North London. Rumour has it that a mellow Sunday afternoon jam session developed in the front parlour of *Be Glad's* **Adrian Whittaker**, with Mike barking out a passionate *Feast Of Stephen* and Boogie-meister Whittaker supplying the John Cale bits on the ol' joanna. Sadly, no-one had the presence of mind to click on the cassette recorder...

Be Glad contributor **Graham Hood** cornered Mike the same weekend for an interview recently published in *Rock 'n' Reel*. It reportedly sheds some light on Mike's brief solo activities while Robin was acivating in Morocco in '66-'67, and on the last days of the ISB.

Mike will be back in London in July for a special concert at the ever-so-sumptuous Purcell Rooms. VH1 have also expressed an interest in doing some more recording with the band—possibly two songs this time, plus an interview. Nothing's finalised as we go to print, but readers should keep their antennae twitching.



Guitar heroics at the Twelve Bar Club. Photo: Snapper Green

EARLY BBC SESSIONS UNEARTHED

Mark Anstey has finally tracked down a master for one of the late '60s *Night Ride* sessions. It's from 5-3-69 and features *All Writ Down*, *Dust Be Diamonds*, *Theta* and the great lost classic *Fine Fingered Hand* (the version used for the lyrics in the previous issue). We're pushing Mark to do another *On Air*, including this and the best available tapes of the other early sessions. Next time you see him—jog his memory!

MIKE, MELANIE AND NASHVILLE

An old connection has been renewed—plans have been laid and dotted lines signed for a joint venture that will see Dave, John and Mike rehearsing with **Melanie** this summer, recording with her for her next CD (which will include a cover of *Robert Johnson*), and touring the States. Mike and band will be the support act, with Dave and John forming the basis of Melanie's band, and Mike will join her in the last section for a duet or two. There's a possibility that the tour will be extended to the UK and Europe; but one definite gig for Mike and the lads is at the Café Graffiti in Edinburgh on 7 August, as part of the Edinburgh Festival.

Another development is a songwriting deal for Mike with Bug Music in Nashville, just signed, which will lead to him co-writing material with US songwriters for country artists to record. Tammy Wynette does *Swift As The Wind*?

5000 HUZZAHS!

The legendary *5000 Spirits* demo tapes, featuring *God Dog*, *Alice Is Long Gone* and *Born In Your Town*, are finally nearing an official release. Robin and Mike have given their blessing, and Mark Anstey, that patient and tenacious gentleman, has secured clearance from both Elektra and Island (each of whom thought they owned the tapes but in fact didn't!) and is hoping to issue them on a mini-CD. Mark now has possession of the reel-to-reel tapes, which contain some

unexpected items, such as the mysterious Williamson composition *My Own Bone*, and *The Mountain Of God*!

RESTORING THE REPUTATION

Mark is putting out Mike's 1975 solo LP *Mike Heron's Reputation*—the ISB album that never was—as a CD on Unique Gravity. There'll be a 12-page booklet with all the lyrics, photos, etc. and it'll be available in advance of general release to mail order customers from late May. The price is £11.99 (UK) and £12.99 (abroad); cheques payable to **Unique Gravity** at 196 Old Rd, Brampton, Chesterfield, Derbs. S40 3QW.



Copper-plated Classic

MAISTRE OF ALL TRADES

Malcolm le Maistre, animal impersonator, born-again singer-songwriter and former Lord of the Channel Islands, has been pretty busy of late. First up, Scottish National Heritage have paid for him to do a professional studio recording of the songs from *The Pine And The Eagle*, his environmental education project with **Pete Baynes** that toured Scotland last summer. The cassette-only release will be initially available just to schools, though he's hoping for a commercial release in due course.

Secondly, *Animals With Attitude* (Harry The Snake etc) is now near completion and will be up for a possible deal. Various TV people are reportedly "interested" in the idea. Malcolm's also demoing some of his new songs (as premiered at *Back Again*) with a view to a second solo CD.

Finally, he's involved in a new theatre/music project, funded by Edinburgh City Council, which will involve translating the views of homeless people, disabled people and a group of schoolchildren into a large-scale theatrical piece focusing on environmental issues.

ROBIN ROLLS ON

Robin continues to criss and indeed cross the country with his solo show, serving up his unique pottage of songs, tunes, stories and ribaldry to admiring audiences from Cornwall to Caithness. His stunning new CD *The Island Of The Strong Door* is profiled elsewhere in this issue, and he has a new



"Three Is A Green Crown? How does that one go again?" Photo: Erwin Doppler

book out this year. The title is *Celtic Bards, Celtic Druids* and it's under the Blandford Press imprint. Robin has written the book in tandem with the Scottish musician and latterday mystagogue **Bob Stewart**, already the author of a series of works on Celtic occult traditions. It's essentially two books in one: Bob has written about the Druids, and Robin the Bards, though there's likely to be considerable overlap as the two callings were often combined. It's safe to assume the book will flutter a few academic dove-cotes... Robin has been contemplating a CD of harp music for a while now, and the word on the street is that he's currently in negotiation with **John Haxby** of TMC for a '97 release. In the meantime, devotees of his harping will be cheered to learn that *The Legacy Of The Scottish Harp* volume one is now available on CD from Claddagh Records.

THE CURSE OF KALEDDON

The storytelling magazine *The Crack* ran a lengthy interview with Robin in its third issue and, as an accompaniment, reprinted Robin's version of the ancient Welsh poem *Cad Goddeu* ("The Battle Of The Trees"). This attracted the ire of a gentleman called **Kaleddon Naddair**, a self-styled "Pictish shaman" and authority on "Keltic" mysteries. Naddair, whose name apparently means "the Pictish serpent of wisdom"—he chose it himself—is a rabid Keltic ideologue, and is frankly as mad as a hare. Furious at the publication of Robin's "Battle", which does not conform to Naddair's own recension of the poem—the only version acceptable to himself—, he laid a Shamanic curse on the magazine. The editor **Ben Haggerty** reportedly took the curse very seriously, and has been unable for various reasons to bring out any further issues. Scary stuff, eh? Naddair ran a gushing interview with Robin in his magazine *Inner Keltia* ten years ago, but now regards him as a fraud and a scoundrel. Pots and kettles, my friends—you know the old saying.

ISB LIVE LP 9 May '74

Adrian has finally tracked down copies of

this live recording, which captured for posterity a concert at the Finsbury Park Rainbow by various Scientology luminaries. It features the ISB performing *Black Jack David*, *Circus Girl* and the *Cellular Song* finale, as well as **Chick Corea** and diverse **Spiders From Mars**. It's available in the UK for £8.00 including postage; cheques payable to New Era Publications UK Ltd. Send your orders to **Nick Webb, New Era, Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 4JY**. Visa cards, etc. are okay too—telephone sales on 01342 314846.

DEAD AHEAD

In issue 7 our outgoing editor Andy Roberts wondered whether the **Grateful Dead** had picked up the habit of closing their live sets with the Bahaman spiritual *Bid You Goodnight* from the ISB. Assiduous study of *Deadbase*, a tome of Biblical sanctity for Deadheads, has revealed that the Dead first featured the song in concert on 16-3-68, a full two months before they shared a bill with the ISB. So it's simply down to synchronicity, after all.

POOKA—THAT DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM

Pooka have recorded a second album during a long absence from public view. It's called *Spinning*, and it's coming out now on Rough Trade. The new stuff takes them slightly nearer the ambient mood hinted at by their past collaborations with **Ultramarine**, and there's more extensive use of bass and drums. Although it's more "commercial" in feel, the voices and harmonies remain unmistakably Pooka-ish and it's recommended listening.

STRANGE RUMOURS

Word reaches us that the revived **Dr Strangely Strange** have been sighted in the studio in recent months, and are planning to release a full-length CD sometime this year. About time, lads! Most of the tasty toons you tapped your toes to at Leeds 18 months ago will be preserved, in full stereophonic sound. Other features include an insert, a jewel case and a title (as yet unknown, though your Editor favours *Strange Survivals*)—yes, the full monty from the good Doctor!

Your Ed spotted a copy of *Kip Of The*



A mere £70 to you, Madam!

Serenes in a Sheffield "specialist" record shop last month, retailing at a cool £70—much the most expensive item in the shop. *Serenes* vinyl is especially precious ever since Island remastered the album onto CD at the wrong speed. The copy in your Ed's keeping has actually been "on loan" to him for the past 25 years... (Hope the owner's not reading this!)

BIRD WATCHING

Remember Mike admitting in issue 3 that part of the melody to *White Bird* was borrowed from a piece of Indian film music? *Be Glad* has the proof... Thanks to **Martin Williams**, we've traced a recording (*Mahal*, 1966) by the famed soundtrack singer **Lata**. The chorus to *Aayega Aanewala* is as close to *WB* as makes no difference—Hmm hmm hmm hmm, Hmm hmm hmm hmm, Hmm hmm.... See you in court, Mr H!

MICHAEL GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

The ever-enterprising **Mark Anstey**—it's that man again—has sent a dub of Mike's Kerouac-inspired song *Mexican Girl* to **Francis Ford Coppola** for consideration as soundtrack music in the forthcoming film adaptation of Kerouac's *On The Road*. Watch this space, film fans...

WHAT ANDY DID NEXT

Be Glad founder and published author **Andy Roberts** has a new book out this month, co-written with **David Clarke**, entitled *Twilight Of The Celtic Gods*. It's published by Blandford Press and examines many of the alleged survivals of "pagan" cultic practice in the British Isles. In the words of the author, "It's fab!" We bring you an exclusive review in this issue.

HEY! ROCK 'N' ROLL!

Got any rock- (and especially ISB-) related memorabilia from the psychedelic m'60s: programmes, posters, merchandise, that class of thing? Of course you have! But would you be prepared to see it displayed in the **Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame** in Cleveland, Ohio, as part of a special thematic exhibition later this year? You would? The Hall of Fame's curator **Craig Inciardi** contacted our man in the know **Mark Anstey**, who offered to highlight the appeal in the pages of *Be Glad*. If readers have anything they think might be suitable, they should get in touch with Mark at the **Unique Gravity** address—see above; he'll arrange for insurance of the said items, and carriage to and from Cleveland. A little bit of rock 'n' roll immortality could be yours...

BROKE AGAIN!

A Poor Person writes...

A big thank you to all those who wrote in with contributions to the *Back Again* shortfall appeal. You know who you are! I'm still paying it off, so if anyone else wants to make a donation they shouldn't be deterred! **Adrian**

SMALL OVAL AD

You Get Brighter...

a collection of TV and radio performances 1967-1969 (19 tracks on cassette) recorded by a fan for fans. £7 plus £1 p&p or send an s.a.e. for details to: **Richard J. Bartram, 293 Hythe Road, Willesborough, nr. Ashford, Kent TN24 0OD.**

GIMBRI ALERT

In another triumph of archivism, *Be Glad* presents probably the first national press article on the ISB. It's from the *Observer Colour Magazine* 2 July 1967, unearthed by ace researcher **Adrian Whittaker** in a trawl of the British Newspaper Library files and reproduced here in glorious monochrome. It formed part of a feature by **Robin Denselow**—yes, that glum chap you see dodging Exocets on the telly sometimes—on “New Folk” (Jansch, Renbourn, etc.). Probably the first and only time **Mike and Robin** spoke with one voice... Anyone recognise the setting? Looks a bit like the Serpentine, we reckon.



THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND (left), tend to wear a strange assortment of clothes, play a strange assortment of instruments, litter their speech with metaphor and quote at length from Robert Graves' 'The White Goddess'. But that, they say, is the way they are. **Mike Heron** and **Robin Williamson** are in their mid-twenties, quiet, unassuming and intelligent. They've been playing in Scotland for some time, and were first launched on the London scene last autumn – and the London Folk world has never seen anything like them. 'Some people call it "silly music", but in a kind way,' they explain. 'It's just self-expression. People probably like it for the wrong reasons, but we try to sing about the things that really do matter . . .' Their unusual combination of Eastern and Western themes and rhymes are played on guitar, fiddle, gimbri, flute, whistle and mandolin.

OBITS

Be Glad acknowledges the passing of three artists with more or less tenuous ISB connections



Fare Thee Well Sweet Dolly...

Dolly Collins, the composer and instrumentalist, died of a heart attack on 22 September 1995 at her Sussex home, aged 62. Dolly's was a name that will be familiar to most Stringfans, most notably for her work on *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* (A Very Cellular Song, Waltz: Of The New Moon, The Water Song). Dolly and her sister **Shirley** were active on the English folk scene in the '60s and '70s; Dolly's pioneering arrangements for pre-classical instruments such as crumhorn, sackbut and rebec on the classic *Anthems In Eden* album broke exciting new ground in the interpretation of traditional song. (Robin's *God Dog* was the only non-traditional song on the album.) Dolly pursued a parallel but related career as a composer of robustly English classical music, and completed a secular mass, with a libretto by the novelist **Maureen Duffy**, at the end of the '70s.

Dolly and Shirley were on friendly terms with the ISB. Shirley's first husband, **Austin John Marshall**, produced *Anthems* and the *Be Glad* film in the same *annus mirabilis* of 1969. Robin has said that he wrote *God*

Dog with Shirley in mind; and Dolly provides the pipe-organ for Robin's version of the song on the *5000 Spirits* demo sessions. Robin and Mike were called in by **Joe Boyd** to supply some idiosyncratic accompaniments on the sisters' 1967 album *The Power Of The True Love Knot*. It was a fruitful association for both parties, and Dolly in particular has earned a significant footnote in the ISB story.

The Big Huge

With entirely apt timing, the Falstaffian Scottish folksinger **Hamish Imlach** died in the aftermath of Hogmanay on 1 January this year. He was 55—and approximately 22 stones. A man with a gigantic appetite for life and for curry, Hamish was actually born in India but in the 1960s became for many the embodiment of the Scottish folk revival. His recent autobiography, *Cod Liver Oil And The Orange Juice*, gives an hilarious and frankly Rabelaisian account of the Edinburgh folk scene in the early '60s, in which Robin, Clive and Mike make brief but unforgettable appearances. Although best known as an “entertainer”, Hamish was a dab hand at the country blues style of guitar playing, and is rumoured to have imparted the rudiments to several aspiring guitar-slingers hanging round **Auld Reekie** at the time—**Bert Jansch** and **John Martyn** among them. It may be that Robin too had the benefit of Hamish's tuition; if so, he returned the favour by playing fiddle and mandolin as well as guitar on Hamish's debut album, released in the same year—1966—as the first ISB waxing.

Winding The Word Skein

The Orkney poet and novelist **George Mackay Brown** died in April at the age of 73. Perhaps best known for his appearance on the Booker Prize shortlist in 1994 with *The Ocean Of Time*, Mackay Brown was a writer with a profound sense of place and feeling for the natural cycles of land and sea, distilled into a style that was at once craggy and lyrical; his most exact and concentrated writing is in his poetry. Robin has confessed to an admiration of him on more than one occasion; the poetic concerns of the two men are certainly comparable.

Daffodils at the door in April.
Three shawled Marys.
A lark splurges in galilees of sky.

all writ down

Another approving survey of ISB appearances in the world of literature

We've known for some time that there are Stringheads lurking in the literary salons on either side of the Atlantic. We gave you the nod in issue 6 about children's author **Fiona Kelly**, the implausible nom-de-plume of *Be Glad* reader and illustrator **Allan Frewin**. Apologies to Fiona/Allan, however, for getting the title of her/his latest ripping yarn completely wrong. It's not *The Mystery Club*, which the title of the Hodder Children's Books series of which it is a part; look instead for *Crash Landing*. Fiona generously gives Allan a mention on the dedication page for "all her help"...We're confused: maybe she knows something that we don't.

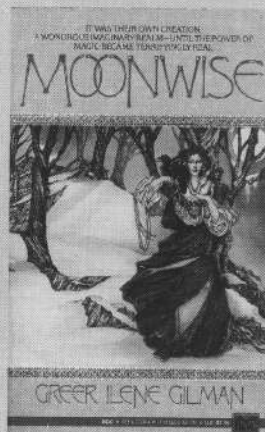
In *Crash Landing* the mettlesome trio of Tracy, Holly and Belinda corner a dangerous criminal in the wilds of Scotland. The pals are befriended and looked after by one Christina McKetchnie (sic) and her dog Rosie(!); at one point they're regaled with the tale of the Lord Of Weir; they meet a certain Mr Williamson, visit Iron Stone Croft and pass by Glenroch (a bit subtle, that one, Fiona). There's also the shady firm of Heron, Simpson and Pallow(?) to contend with. What can we say but—simply Incredible! At a bookshop near you...

It's not surprising to find evidence of ISB inspiration in the field of fantasy fiction. The Canadian **Charles de Lint** is a prolific and much-admired fantasy novelist, and is also a loyal subscriber to *Be Glad*. Your Ed. has recently been digesting two of his works, *Greenmantle* and *The Little Country*. Both books feature an epigraph by Robin Williamson: an extract from *The Song Of Mabon* in *Greenmantle*, and the opening lines of *Five Denials On Merlin's Grave* in *The Little Country*. Minute scrutiny of *Greenmantle* reveals a couple of lines that might ring a bell. On p.185 we read "The man in the van was just getting ready to leave his vehicle..." With nothing in his pockets, one supposes! A little further on (p.211) "A swollen moon hung low in the sky...the stars (were) too bright." *Earthspan* owners will recognise the first reference, but didn't that second phrase feature in one of the "lost" verses of *Restless Night*? B double-plus for research. Charles! Moreover, one of the characters in the book is a "wild girl" called Mally, with burrs on her clothes... Plagiarism, you cry? Not a bit of it—this is what we bibliophiles call "creative allusion," and spotting an example of this practice is like bumping unexpectedly into an old friend. And as we know, the ISB were enthusiastic practitioners themselves (check out this issue's essays on *Job's Tears* and *Douglas Traherne Harding* if proof be needed).

There's less of an overt ISB influence in *The Little Country*, which nevertheless features Celtic folk music as one of its chief elements. But, interestingly enough, there's a brief passage about L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology, as part of a general discussion on charismatic religious theorists. The sentiments expressed here—which may or may not reflect Charles' own opinions—will seem generous or eminently sensible according to the reader's own feelings on the subject.

Both books are rattling good yarns: masterful storytelling full of human insights and reflections on our relation to the natural world—and with vilely villainous villains to boo and hiss at every turn. Both are published in the UK by Pan Books; in the USA,

Greenmantle is published by Ace Books, and *The Little Country* by William Morrow.



Moonwise is the debut novel by the American writer **Greer Ilene Gilman**. It's a challenging and sometimes opaque work, written in ornate, melodious prose that has a similar flavour to some of Robin's "wrought language" writings.

Imagine 400 pages of *Skull And Nettlework!* The novel's taproot is sunk in the folk traditions and linguistic idioms of North Yorkshire; the "otherworld" that the two heroines Sylvie and Ariane

find themselves in is a loving and uncannily vivid evocation of the Yorkshire Dales and the countryside around the resort of Whitby, though full of dark and perilous magics and enigmatic characters.

Moonwise is a magpie's trove of baubles plucked from traditional songs and ballads, wittily integrated into the narrative; and attentive readers will also recognise "creative allusions" to the works of R. Williamson, gent. Consider the following...

"...at once the green and burning tree" (p.23)—surely the tree of leaf and flame, taken from *The Mabonogion* by Robin as the title and emblem for his 1982 song-and-dance cycle performed in collaboration with Moving Being.

"Her air was grave and lordly, as one for whom black cherries are rings of dragonsblood." (p.118)

"Ariane awoke in sallow darkness. She had a minotaur headache, lurking and luring in her labyrinth of skull, sullenly insistent. It roared for bone porridge." (p.166)

"Rach nodded. 'Green crown's made aforehand, for to bear t'wren till it wake, come lightfast.'" (p.216)

"...on dirty toes..." sang Sylvie, thrumming softly, watching the spider fall away. *A horse of air*. The moon's dark tower." (p.325) Compare "Upon the horse of air at once we rode/To where Weir's castle lifts like a crippled claw into the moon". The dirty toes? Both they and the "horse of air" image come from a class of Elizabethan street songs known as Bedlam Ballads.

"Ariane sat and listened, still at the heart of winter's turning." (p.348)

Incidentally, *Moonwise* also has a character called Mally, but that, we think, can be safely ascribed to coincidence.

Moonwise is published in the USA and Canada by ROC, though British readers should be able to track down an import copy by trawling specialist retailers. It's worth the trouble—an extraordinary christmas pudding of a book: not easy to digest, but rich and dark and toothsome, and with a sprig of holly on the top, beaded with midwinter's blood...

Robin has contributed a foreword to **John Matthews'** anthology of modern Celtic "visionary" writers, *From The Isles Of Dream*. This collection includes a story by the Irish fabulist **Lord Dunsany**, a favourite author of Robin's, of Charles de Lint's, and—as it happens—of your Editor's. Snap up any Dunsany you find, we say. You won't regret it.

Anyone out there in Stringland aware of any other literary allusions to the ISB? Let us know about 'em.



WHATEVER YOU THINK, IT'S MORE THAN THAT.....

Wee Tam And The Big Huge—a house of many mansions. David Kidman gives you the guided tour...



o begin my series of occasional contributions to *Be Glad* with such an ambitious undertaking might be likened to throwing myself in at the deep end! And the articles in issue 7 by Jenny Pudding, Mike Swann, Stuart Taylor and (the wee) Adrian Whittaker are truly a hard act to follow. Still, I've got to start somewhere..... Preamble time then. I started this article weeks ago, wrote about 3 pages, listened to *WTBH* again, and then felt that a lot of what I had written just didn't hold true. I rewrote 2 out of the 3 pages, changing the emphasis completely, listened to the album again, got halfway through *WT* and again said no, that's not really right, so changed it all again! As it happened, I hadn't entirely erased the first version, and when I compared them two things struck me—first, that in my third attempt I was almost re-voicing my original thoughts, often using identical terms, and second, that both versions contained ideas which were equally applicable, often simultaneously, yet which appeared at first to completely contradict each other! So it's worth bearing this in mind when you find yourself disagreeing with some of the things I've written—generalisations may be rendered necessary, solely by the need to qualify them later! For such are the problems of trying to convey the achievements of any important work of art, particularly a seminal one like *WTBH*. For seminal it is, undeniably. If you consult popular critical opinion (at least among those critics who have bothered to listen to the album), you'll invariably read something along the lines that *WTBH* is the

absolute pinnacle of the ISB's achievement, a real gold-plated masterpiece, the album where everything came together and a truly unique musical experience was created etc. For once, I won't disagree with the critical consensus, but—as always—there's so much more to it than that. Actually, if pushed into a corner and forced to make a swift value judgement, I would say that *WTBH* rates right up there with Love's *Forever Changes* as one of the most important albums ever made, at once very much of their time and way ahead of their time, and truly excellent both musically and lyrically. In my opinion, none of the "big-league" names could ever come close to, let alone equal these in terms of spiritual awareness, commitment and sheer creativity. There have been many other albums which have been particularly fine from either a purely musical or lyrical angle, with either exceptional or just more consistent musicianship, but in the final analysis it is the way in which the various elements—music, lyrics, production, vision—come together that makes these albums so special and gives them their high-ranking status, for me at any rate. Even so, I do have one or two (minor) reservations, of which more later—read on.....

WTBH, like several other really great albums, exudes a specific ambience or atmosphere—here, a pervasive sense of serenity, harmony and well-being. Unlike its predecessor, *Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*, where darker forces often intrude or disturb, *WTBH* has a predominantly positive, optimistic outlook on life and nature and the cosmos. Sure, there's mystery and magic, but this belongs more to benign powers or (relatively harmless) fantasy rather than to anything negative or truly destructive. Much of the album's atmosphere of positive serenity stems from its unbelievably religious quality, but as you know the term "religious" is all too easy to misinterpret—perhaps a more accurate term would be "pantheistic". The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of "pantheistic" is twofold: "belief that God is identifiable with the forces of nature and with natural substances", and/or "worship that admits or

tolerates all gods". Both of these aspects are highly relevant to *WTBH*'s world-view—*WT* perhaps being more primarily concerned with the wonders of creation and faith in nature generally (the two definitions tending to overlap more on *BH*, maybe). *WT* has a life-affirming quality and outlook; its unifying ambience is of almost gospel fervour and zeal, though it is both a spiritual quest and a celebration.

Musically, an important feature of *WTBH* (and of other ISB albums) which sets it apart from other "progressive" albums of the period is that the purely instrumental passages are not over-long (despite their often improvisatory feel, and the undoubted prowess of both Robin and Mike as instrumentalists), or unduly dominant, but either function as interludes or exist for the purpose of scene-setting; even the sitar/guitar duet which closes *The Iron Stone* couldn't really be described as a "jam", and of course there is no sign of the (at that time almost mandatory) drum solo!!!

During the course of *WTBH*, an informal examination of alternative beliefs and philosophies is undertaken, whereby the existence of other religions and mythologies is acknowledged and examined. The first side seems to comprise a kind of search for—or examination of—values, both material and spiritual. It begins (in *Job's Tears*) with the search for spiritual values, partly through "conventional" (Christian) religion in the Biblical teachings, then goes on to seek—and perhaps (in *Puppies*) find—solace in nature, despite its unpredictability and apparent fickleness, then concludes in a devil-may-care celebration of traditional country comforts (*Log Cabin*). Maybe that strikes you as too simplistic—sometimes I'd feel that way too—but "whatever you think, it's more than that" seems to sum it all up so much better than I could.

To begin at the beginning then—*Job's Tears* is really rather an unexpected kind of song to choose to open an album with. Just as with *Koevoaddi There on Hangman's*, the listener is plunged straight in to the discourse with no instrumental preamble, but the difference is that this time it's a real call to attention, and once our attention is grabbed the full impact of the unfolding stream of images can be felt. Though the lyrics use standard Christian and/or Biblical imagery, their content and impact are both subtly altered, at times even changed, by being (sensitively) questioned, probed. I won't detain you by recycling Stuart Taylor's excellent critique of the lyrics of *Job's Tears*, but it comes pretty close to my own response to the song. Instead, I'll confine the rest of my comments to the musical content of the setting. First, the stark, minimal instrumental setting—just Robin's guitar—allows for maximum concentration on the lyrics and the actual vocal delivery. The ethereally pure vocal counter melody is truly delikkiuous (pardon the pun)! Second, although the song is fairly tightly structured, there is a real feeling of improvisation, almost storytelling, in the way the melodic lines develop along with—and in response to—the lyrics. Despite the actual music being different for each individual section of the song (even allowing for repeats), at no time does the song come across as episodic or patchy, which is one hell of an achieve-

ment; it could almost be described as *durchkomponiert*—literally, “through-composed” (those familiar with classical music will recognise this concept)—and it is noteworthy not least for the way it modulates into, and between, the individual sections (and moods). Robin takes us along with him on his quest, in which we become thoroughly absorbed, and he leads the song’s final call-and-response section with the fervour of a gospel leader with his congregation. Although the song is a free-associating attempt to make sense of an overload of sensations, surely the joyous, life-affirming concluding section conveys at least a temporary contentment with the experience that conventional religion has to offer? The actual range of Robin’s voice is worth noting too—it’s stunning, encompassing high-register keening and resonant deep tones, as is the sheer gamut of emotion conveyed by its expressive qualities. (One final trivial footnote, which will mean nothing to most of you—am I just hearing things, or does not the musical figure for “We’re all still here, no-one has gone away” bear more than a passing resemblance to the opening figure of Poulenc’s *Gloria*—in rhythm as well as in being a kind of call to attention? No, I’m not accusing Robin of wanton plagiarism!)

Puppies neatly develops the exultant mood of the concluding section of *Job’s Tears*. Although I’m in agreement with Stuart regarding Mike’s songs on *WTBH* generally, I do differ on *Puppies*, which I’m afraid I can’t really see as mere “music by numbers”—this seems to imply a formulaic, above all artificial approach. OK, so the song has a fair bit in common with Mike’s earlier “nature” songs, but I feel it lacks the (almost) twee quality that marred some of them for me—the clue is perhaps that this time round there’s a bittersweet feeling, a note of dissent, a sense that despite our attempts to live at one with—and in tune with—nature, and to appease its creatures, it is in the end fickle, often behaving in a manner that can’t be anticipated or tamed; the puppies have gone, despite the singer’s well-meaning efforts to play “what (he) thought that new-born fur would like best”. Even the power of music cannot match the power (and creativity) of nature—“music is so much less”. Musically, the structure of *Puppies* is satisfying in its symmetry, the “Even the birds when they sing” section framing the main narrative, both instigating the experience with the puppies and rounding off the memory of it after lessons have been learnt, and finally the philosophical musings regarding the nature of music in relation to the music of nature. Some of the individual images in the song are delightful—I’d never come across anything like “fiddle-head ferns” in real life (though I’d always responded somehow to the sheer evocativeness of the phrase) until I started hillwalking and got to appreciate the seemingly endless varieties of fern and bracken. I’m still puzzled by the reference to Mother Nina though..... The instrumental interplay throughout *Puppies* is attractive and playful throughout, as befits the lyric.

Beyond the See works well as an instrumental intermission, as a bridge between the two “nature songs” *Puppies* and *The Yellow Snake*. The combination of instrumental forces used on this track is an unusual one—two keyboard instruments

(organ and harpsichord) both in unison and interweaving (recalling at times the baroque double-keyboard sonatas of Soler perhaps); gimbri and whistle adding in turn their own individual counterpoints—eerie, otherworldly and strange, yet at the same time (not so oddly) familiar.

The Yellow Snake is an exquisite miniature, perfectly proportioned and yet ever so slightly understated (with a sense of unplumbed depths of wonder). The matching of “refreshed” with the equally refreshing (as well as, in terms of sonority, refreshingly unusual) keening of the sarangi, its powerful yet delicate, truly distinctive timbre being the ideal choice for evoking the mystery and sinuousness of the snake’s coils. The dreamy rhythm, the slow pulse of “stretched sleeping on the sand”: this has an almost “twenties” languorousness (never mind “pre-Raphaelite”—though I know what you mean!), helped along by the harmony and vocal delivery. There are so many musical delights in this little tone-picture; I’m sure someone could one day write a complete thesis on this one track (as has been done with individual Schubert *Lieder* of comparable length!)

As for *Log Cabin Home In The Sky*—well!!! I loved this one right from the start, but never really thought about why. Perhaps because it’s so different from everything before and after it on the album, but undeniably because it stands out for the rich, full sound of its ensemble playing. Never mind the occasional rough patch or slightly out-of-tune-nesses, just luxuriate in the sheer joyousness of it—a jolly good time was obviously had by all, and this

communicates vividly through the grooves (and just as much in the CD equivalent). The multiple fiddling gives the track an authentic old-timey “string band” sound (using the term in its true sense). Lyrically, the country clichés come thick and fast, but Mike’s treatment of them transcends mere imitation, and the overall arrangement was—though slightly shambolic, but this only added to the “down-home” quality—an inspired, affectionate (and fun) homage to the old-timey tradition, just the right side of parody (shame the band crossed that line to the wrong side at times on later albums, but that’s another story). As for any interpretation of the lyrics, in the final analysis I’d probably agree with Prof. Walls in his overall assessment in issue 7, even though, as I said, with the ISB version their refusal to take it all too seriously (with that tongue-almost-in-cheek feel but innocent and genuine good humour) wins out in the end, for me at least.

On to Side 2. After a breather—a well-earned collapse in the corner after the strenuousness of the pulling-about hoedown waltz—we’re still on a high, and there’s now time to reflect on that high, positive feeling with *You Get Brighter*, a hymn of praise (like *Air*, Mike’s other contribution to Side 2), which has that magical quality of simple intricacy (or intricate simplicity—whichever way round it comes, it’s not the contradiction in terms it first seems!) which is present in, and characteristic of, the very best of the ISB’s material. The sequencing of the songs on Side 2 is wonderful too—in a musical as well as a contextual sense. The settings together form a true song-cycle, with the formal perfection of the great classical song-cycles, yet each song remains self-contained and (as it should be) a worthwhile experience on its own terms outwith the broader dimension of the cycle/album as a whole. In *You Get Brighter*, the delicacy of the instrumental setting perfectly complements the lyrics. Musically, too, there’s an interesting pre-echo of the neo-baroque harpsichord figurations on *The Letter* (from *I Looked Up*), as much in the ornamentations used on *You Get Brighter* as in the song’s opening musical phrase. Structurally, the song is impeccable, and the way in which the effusiveness of the “Krishna colours” section is just given full enough rein (expansion and repetition, like a mantra, but not too much) before bringing back the chorus and, rounding the song off neatly, the return of the opening phrase as a coda.

Following (Heron) perfection with (Williamson) perfection, *The Half-Remarkable Question* is launched. This song is wholly remarkable, and for a variety of reasons: it typifies all that is great about the band at their best, Robin and Mike working together to create pure magic. The song has a simple, recognisable musical structure (AABA), totally natural and logical, which, though tightly organised, retains the feel of an evolving, developing melody line. All is perfectly crafted and economical, with not a note or phrase wasted. Yet this almost effortless simplicity on a musical level belies the incredibly complex—at times quite obscure—lyrical content. On the page, the lyrics look somewhat impenetrable, distinctly unpromising even—yet for some reason you don’t get that impression at all once Robin sings them. I’ve no idea why, but it

QUIZ TIME

Test your knowledge of *Wee Tam And The Big Hugs*: see how many questions you can answer *without referring to the album sleeve*. Answers on page 36

1. Who was Wee Tam?
2. What was The Big Hugs?
3. What do John Wesley and A.A. Milne have in common?
4. What is the answer to the Half-Remarkable Question? Is it:
(a) 42;
(b) I never knew it was there, Officer;
(c) blowing in the wind?
5. Which instrument is played on *Log Cabin* but is uncredited on the sleeve?
6. Which track was specifically recorded for a separate project?
7. How many tracks on *WTBH* make direct or indirect references to fluids—and which fluids?
8. How many people sat down in the ship of the world?
9. Where was *Maya* written?
10. Which colours are mentioned in the album’s lyrics?



You don't see this one any more—the original *Wee Tam* cover shot.

all works, it seems just right, and makes a kind of sense, not just poetic sense, even though you may not fully comprehend either the full literal meaning of the words or totally grasp the deeper philosophical implications or concepts therein. This can often happen with music, and *HRQ* is a good example of the potential for responsive understanding on so many different levels. Even such potentially clumsy phrases as "pining for the pine-woods" seem completely appropriate and in context. (And while on the subject of arcane references, I too have spent the last 25 years idly wondering who Gimmel and Daleth were—thanks Stuart—but, even now I do know, it doesn't really get me any closer to unravelling the layers of meaning in that dark opening verse!) Instrumentally, the guitar/sitar interplay on this song is truly captivating and really inspired; the percussion accompaniment is discreet yet important to the song's sense of movement, its "journeying", questing purpose. Robin's guitar playing comes truly into its own, and represents a real development, in that the (relatively) derivative and more obviously Arabic-influenced, oud-like strumming is now more fully integrated into his playing style, still florid and expressive but now more focussed and individual, and providing a perfect musical counterpoint to Mike's growing expertise on the sitar. (As a footnote to *HRQ*: I only recently heard for the first time a tape of the June 1968 Fillmore East concert, which contained an absolutely wonderful and fluid version of *October Song*, one of Robin's finest, into which was interpolated the "B"—"O long o long"—section of *HRQ*! It seemed so utterly natural and belonging, and yet this would seem to run counter to my comments

above re *HRQ* being so perfectly constructed and self-contained—which is truly more than half-remarkable!

Air follows, and in its own way is also pretty unique, even within the ISB's own catalogue. Its hymn-like gospel serenity has a certain kinship with *A Very Cellular Song* on *Hangman's*, perhaps, but here it is more fully realised, the mood has been perfected and a real sense of harmony (musical as well as spiritual) pervades the whole song. Mike's low-register vocal delivery complements and enhances the ambience of hushed reverence created by the sustained chords and organ-flute combination ("breathing" through the pipes too). I don't quite see the "Peruvian folk melody" connection mentioned by Stuart Taylor. There is definitely an ethnic influence at work here, but I can't put a location to it at the moment. In any case though, *Air* is another perfect miniature, depicting a state or mood rather than telling a story. Structurally, there is an element of recapitulation, more so than in *The Yellow Snake* in that here the whole melody is repeated, but this preserves the song's hymn-like character and composition rather than detracting from its power. Nothing more is required, and nothing less will do.

Finally, we come to *Wee Tam*'s closing track, *Ducks On A Pond*, which follows on (in a musical sense) completely naturally from *Air*. Its musical structure, though episodic, configures perfectly with the lyrics' stream of consciousness to make an ultimately satisfying conclusion to the "suite" or cycle of songs making up *Wee Tam*, while pointing ahead to the delights, concerns and preoccupations to come on *The Big Huge* (and beyond, to *Changing Horses*). Throughout, the song is absolutely

compelling, compulsive listening, keeping the listener's interest. Robin's remarkable vocals and guitar-picking are underpinned—but not undermined—by the ominous and unusually resonant bass notes of the piano, whereas the delicacy and "icy" fragility of the images is mirrored (as in a frozen pond) by Mike's glockenspiel trceries. The whole effect is magical. Whistling, in response to Robin's request to "sing me something", is an unusual timbre, yet is not as incongruous as it might seem—it just wouldn't have sounded right on another instrument or vocalised. As for the lyrics themselves, Robin again makes use of broadly religious imagery, as in *Job's Tears*, but here it is less pervasive, less deliberate, to ensure that maximum impact is reserved for the wailing vocalise of "Lovely Jesus nailed to a tree", which proves to be more than just a stylised response in its effect. The song's stream of consciousness appears childlike in the sense that it almost portrays a child's worldview, yet this is at one and the same time a knowing one—in some ways more aware than that of an adult—and truly a song of both innocence and experience. (The parallel drawn with William Blake is intentional—I feel the same duality here, but it is given an extra dimension by the weight of additional cultural heritage, the water that has flown under the bridge since Blake's time, and by the freedom of expression by which poetry is no longer confined to strict metrical parameters, but which represents an ever-expanding consciousness.) And there are so many memorable turns of phrase here, Robin's writing has never been more inventive and evocative—"inky scratches everywhere", indeed!—and the constant (though never contrived) juxtaposition of "dark" and "light" aspects and imagery is always inspired and thought-provoking; wonder and magic are never far away, despite our place in the scheme of things in the "real" world.

So there we have it—*Wee Tam*—a consummate masterpiece. Complete in itself, but also noteworthy when considered as the first half of a double bill (though I wouldn't suggest you think of *WTBH* as the "Cav and Pag" of folk or rock, tempting though it may be!). Not quite a Siamese twin, then, since neither half is a "concept album" as such (at least not in the normally derogatory sense in which the term is used), but both halves undeniably share a common concept, an integrated philosophical worldview, which is expressed with true conviction and confidence. In my opinion, *Wee Tam* has no weak link whatsoever, but (and then only really suffering by direct comparison with *Wee Tam*) *The Big Huge* is flawed, just a little, and only in places—despite containing some of Robin's finest writing in *Maya* and *The Circle Is Unbroken*, and despite the unbelievably intense level of creativity and achievement maintained during 3/4 of Side 4. In other words, *The Big Huge* begins and ends in real distinction, but something happens in between where I feel the album somehow loses the level of internal consistency and continuity which was such a feature of *Wee Tam*. You may think this sounds like heresy, I understand, but I'll try to justify my thoughts as we go through.....

The tour continues on page 28



The Hangman's Beautiful Grand-daughter

Adrian Whittaker previews the long-awaited ISB tribute tape

First mooted by Andy Roberts (without whom, etc. etc.) in May 1994, it's been long in the making, but is, naturally, well worth the wait. There was so much material submitted it's now a double album!

The first track, a very "Celtic" version of *October Song*, is, strangely enough, by a Dutchman. You may have met Henk Heideveld (and his effervescent brother Ben) at the Leeds convention. His trio, the drily named *I Looked In*, is an ISB covers band based in Zwolle, Holland. Henk (an established artist who recently staged a 25-year retrospective, with music by one R. Williamson) was the most enthusiastic contributor to the project, offering a further four songs. Solely for space reasons, we've included only one of these—an ethereal version of *Waltz Of The New Moon*.

Spitting Feathers, who contribute a spirited *Everything's Fine Right Now*, are a gigging folk-rock six-piece from Derby—"Feathers can fly" when they take the stage, according to *Folk Roots*. Tim Dawson and Phil Harrison are the ISB faction. Feathers have a new album, *Shoot The Rapids*, which is available from the address below.



Folk Rock—Spitting Feathers plus rock

Kate Green And The Half Remarkable Questionnaires tackle two songs, *Empty Pocket Blues* and *The Circle Is Unbroken*. They're taken from Kate's *An Unkindness Of Ravens* tape. Those of you who saw Kate and the Remarkables at the Leeds or London event will know that they are talented and versatile musicians (your Editor may be found among their ranks), and Kate's vocals are achingly pure. *Empty Pocket Blues* plays up the song's bluesy side with some neat slide guitar.

Wood-Dragon (Tony Corden, Julie Hathaway and friends) will also be familiar to habitués of the late-night jam sessions at *Be Glad*

events (or Irish pubs in Hackney!). Their version of *This Moment* has a strong "live" atmosphere, and is perhaps the nearest track in "feel" to the ISB original.

Mike Swann, who offers a daring acapella version of *Cold Days Of February*, describes himself as a "singer/songwriter, author and Incredible String Band fanatic. Exiled Tyke, now Suffolk resident. Has released four cassette albums and, after an earlier ISB biography remained unpublished, had minor best-seller success with a 1989 volume on American singer/songwriters, *How Many Roads*. *Yesterday's Skies*, Mike's latest album, is available from the address below.

Next up is a jazzy version of *Turquoise Blue* by **Rufus Biggs**. It succeeds admirably in retaining the intimate atmosphere of the original. Rufus was a member of the Hampshire-based Flue Man Blue until he left the area last year. He remembers his parents playing ISB records but only took the plunge himself three years ago, lured by the cover of *5000 Spirits*.

Tim Moon—what can I say? I'll leave it to Andy: "Tim Moon hails from Yorkshire's answer to New York's East Village—Sowerby Bridge. A true Renaissance Man and polymath, his knowledge of obscure cult TV shows and the world of steam trains is unrivalled in these parts. His greatest passion is for *Dr Who*, and in particular a trait he shares with the former editor of *Be Glad* for the unclad form of the Doctor's assistant Nichola Bryant. [Steady on lads—this is a family magazine!—PC-conscious Ed] Musically he spans the instrument range from A to Z and his mastery over the plucked, blown, beaten and squeezed would have Robin and Mike nodding sagely and reaching for their notebooks. Those who witnessed his plaintive rendition of Roy Harper's *When An Old Cricketer Leaves The Crease* at the Leeds convention will know what to expect. Trust him, he's almost a doctor!"

Tim contributes an engagingly left-field deconstruction of *You Get Brighter* which somehow feels like it could have come out of *Sound Techniques* in 1968.

Side One ends with **Fishman And The Sea Apes**; it's my own attempt at a radical re-reading of *Pictures In A Mirror* featuring wah-wah guitar, bass, synthesiser and archaic Polish. Not for the faint-hearted. Robin's thoughts on this are unknown, but Joe Boyd awarded it "full marks for inventiveness".

The second side opens with another major revision—Norman Lamont's **Hungry Ghosts** performing *Painted Chariot*. Norman says: "In the early 1970s a few String Band songs seemed to wander from their 'wonder of life' approach and speak of personal doubt and confusion. Or so it seemed to me. I am thinking of *Seagull*, *Restless Night*, *Dreams Of No Return*, 1968. *Painted Chariot* was the first of these. The extra bits of the song reflect the meaning I took from it at the time. I don't think it's what Mike intended then, but I'm pleased he has approved them." Norman dutifully sent Mike a copy of his version (with an additional verse) and received the pithy reply: "OK by me—Mike". The long fade-out at the end features some clever (and apposite) lyrical references—it's Name That Tune time!

Michael Bailey's and Jon Airdrie's **Beyond The Bars** are a six-piece from Gwent playing "progressive folk", influenced by the ISB. Michael writes: "*Dear old Battlefield* is our only cover version, though we have messed about with *Log Cabin Home In The Sky*, using Appalachian dulcimer. We've altered the structure and tempo of *Battlefield*, largely because the song was learnt from memory; we added bouzouki to the instrumentation on the chorus."

Walking The Witch, featuring *Be Glad* contributor Graham Hood, actually use Appalachian dulcimer; they've turned in an energetic version of *The Tree* segueing into the traditional *High Road To*

Linton. WTW have been gigging for three years now and play original material, folk and blues in pubs and clubs around London. Influences are ISB, Clive Palmer and Led Zeppelin III!

Chris Taylor from York took a very different approach to *October Song* from Henk, using a bouzouki in open tuning and a dulcimer tuned down to approximate a "sitary" sound. His original choice for the tape would have been a grungy electric guitar crack at *Dear Old Battlefield!*

Tanzer's Traum, from Marburg, Germany, have released four CDs of spiritual music ("dream dance/dance dream"). **Friedhelm Schöck** and **Yvonne Boraucke** do *Cosmic Boy* as a guitar rag, and the whole group do a full production number on *Banks Of Sweet Italy*—featuring a rather tasteful "string" arrangement.

Gill Murray, another *Be Glad* writer, sent in this information about himself: "All-round cracked crystal raindrop from Scotland. Lignified [sic] musician turned computer fodder. Ex-Scientologist (recovering). Likes celery. Favourite musicians: Jerry Garcia, Terry Riley." He's recorded an intimate version of *First Girl I Loved*.

Shady Planet took their name from a misheard le Maistre lyric, and back in 1983 they were the "house band" at The Boar's Head, Brecon, where *Sailor And The Dancer* was recorded live. Martin Williams—another *Be Glad* writer—is the ISB connection.

Fez hail from Yorkshire and are mates of Tim Moon's—in fact he

guests on mandolin on their rousing version of *Cold Days Of February*. As they rock out, your Editor's guitar-picking introduces the album's closing track—which had to be *The Circle Is Unbroken*.

To order the tape please send £7 plus £1 p&p (£2.50 p&p outside Europe) with your name and address to: **Adrian Whittaker, 71a Colvestone Crescent, Dalston, London E8 2LJ**. Cheques payable to **Adrian Whittaker** please.

Contact addresses

Spitting Feathers
Tim Dawson
2 Haslam's Lane
Darley Abbey
Derby
Derbyshire

Mike Swann
31 Lionel Hurst Close
Gt. Cornard
Sudbury
Suffolk CO10 0YX



Kate Green with Questionnaire Patrick Walker on the silvery-toned mandoline
Photo: Liz Foyster

cyber with rosie

That's right—you'll be able to read about our star interviewee Rose Simpson on *Be Glad's* very own Web page, and much else of a Stringish nature besides. Martin Payne downloads, as they say...

Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending, the Incredible String Band Web site, has been running for some time now and it's really coming together. Since it was mentioned in the last issue of *Be Glad* there have been many developments and these will continue. Firstly, we know that about 100 people look at *Be Glad* on the Web every week. These are both people who are new to the Web magazine and people who come back to see what's new. From the feedback already received, *Be Glad* on the Web is proving to be very popular and is accessed by those who have known the ISB since the early days as well as those who were born after the band split! It creates a real sense of a global community. A common e-mail message is "I thought I was the only one who remembered them". New users can sign a guest book to let us know who they are. Others are making new friends through the Web.

The "e-zine" has been divided into four distinct areas. These will be given "more interesting" names soon. Any suggestions anybody?

1 Amoebas Are Very Small—The Magazine

This is where we have the new features. These are a mixture of features which have been run previously in *Be Glad* and have now been transferred to the Web and new features. It does not contain any features from the most recent *Be Glad* so as not to conflict with the magazine. There are also features which start on the Web (and may be transferred later to the magazine). These include an article on how people got to know the String Band. This feature is updated regularly as new contributions are received. **Back Again**, a review of the November 1995 meeting in London, made its debut on the Web page.

2 Way Back in the 1960s—The Archive

These are features which have been on the Web for some time.

They will be rotated (to save space) so that they return every few months. This will allow new readers to read the older material.

3 When the Music Starts to Play—Discography and Reference

This is the ongoing encyclopaedia. It contains details of discographies for the String Band as well as the solo careers of Robin, Mike, Malcolm and Clive. There is a listing of e-mail addresses of String Band fans on the Internet for those who wish to be included. An FAQ allows readers to ask questions about the ISB and someone knows the answer, usually. But we still haven't found Likky!

4 Witches Chat—News, Tour Dates, Connections

This is a "What's New" page which is where you can read the latest information. As this can be updated whenever something happens it is the fastest way to find out what's happening with anyone anywhere. Tour dates gives the latest news on tours and a links page makes the connection with ISB-related pages on the Internet. These could be other artists, *Folk Roots* magazine, Storytelling pages, CD retailers etc. We are hoping to have a feature about what else is on the 'Net in a future *Be Glad*. We also have **I'm Calling To You**, the letters page.

Many people have asked how to obtain String Band CDs. We are working with Terrapin Records to build an on-line CD store. This is accessible from within *Be Glad* and is being expanded to cover, eventually, Terrapin's whole catalogue.

Publicity for the Web page is vital. People need to know it's there in order to look for it, although you can still find it by accident. The page has been covered in *Q* magazine, *Time Out* and *Folk Roots*. Robin's latest album, *Island Of The Strong Door*, features the Web page address. However, due to circumstances outside our control, the address, as also mentioned in the last *Be Glad*, has changed but as long as people know a page is there it is relatively easy to find using different Web search mechanisms. The new address is:
<http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ac455/>

You can e-mail Martin Payne on mpayne@dial.pipex.com. If you are interested and not on the 'Net, Martin is even able to use more traditional forms of communication such as telephone (0181 723 8878) or post (Flat 5, 19 Freeland Rd, Ealing, London, W5 3HR).

The Things That You're Li'ble To Read In The Bible...

Be Glad's scriptural expert Grace Divine DD checks out the quotes on *Wee Tam And The Big Hugs*.

Several commentators have remarked on the "Biblical" atmosphere pervading *WTBH*. There are certainly a number of Biblical allusions and references, some overt, others merely hinted at. The Biblical content of *Job's Tears* is examined elsewhere in this issue; here's a quick guide to the rest of the album.

The holy bread of Heaven (*Ducks On A Pond*)—perhaps the Manna dispensed to the Israelites in the Wilderness. "I will rain Bread from Heaven."—*Exodus 16:14*.

The open door (*DOAP*)—a common scriptural image, occurring in *Psalms 78:23-4* in connection with Manna—"He commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of Heaven/And had rained down manna upon them." It also occurs in a potent passage in *Revelations 4:1*—"...behold, a door was opened in Heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."

(**The Holy Grail**, also mentioned in *DOAP*, is of course of post-Biblical provenance.)

Jesus, Moses and the **Three Kings** are all fellow-mariners on the world ship in *Maya*. Jesus also appears in *DOAP*—"Lovely Jesus nailed to a tree", an image echoing *Acts 5:30*: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree"—and also in *Job's Tears*. And some scholiasts might take the view that JC is Mike's "greatest friend" in the song of that name: both the musical and lyrical idioms draw on the Appalachian Sacred Harp hymnal tradition.

The Son of Noah's brother—David Kidman ponders the identity of this enigmatic personage elsewhere in this issue. As he points out, the phrase is riddlingly ambiguous (as with the jocular brain-teaser "The son of Pharaoh's daughter was the daughter of Pharaoh's son"). If our titular hero is indeed one of Noah's three sons (the son-of-Noah's brother), it may be that the coat referred to in the lyric refers to the coat that Shem and Japheth flung over their drunken father's naked body in the curious story in *Genesis 9:23*. As pointed out in the commentary on *Job's Tears*, the concept of reincarnation ("many were the lifetimes...") is largely foreign to Judeo-Christian thought.

The Mountain Of God is of course the most concentrated assemblage of Biblical quotations on the album. The inverted commas used throughout the lyric

on the sleeve suggest that each line is a direct quotation, but this is misleading. **Behold the mountain of the Lord in latter days shall rise** is, despite its splendid Biblical sonority, evidently a confection of Robin's. "The mountain of the Lord" does admittedly occur a few times in the Old Testament, eg. in *Micah 4:2*, in the famous passage about turning swords into ploughshares. **Hark the herald angels sing** is the opening line of Wesley's popular carol, and **Hush, hush, whisper who dares/Christopher Robin is saying his prayers** is from the syrup-dripping pen of A. A. Milne. (Some of us prefer Beachcomber's acerbic pastiche: "Hush, hush, snigger who dares/Christopher Robin has fallen downstairs."—*malicious Ed*) **Do ye not fly as clouds and as doves to your windows** (more or less word for word from *Isaiah 60:8*) segues neatly into **Who serve as the shadow and the example of heavenly things**, a close paraphrase of *Hebrews 8:5*. **As Moses was admonished...** through to **...on the high mountain** is from the same passage in *Hebrews*. The rest of the song—**Glory be to the Father...** through to **...World without end. Amen**—is from *The Book Of Common Prayer* (in fact, it's the conclusion to the Latin Mass), though the phrase **World without end** occurs in *Isaiah 45:17*.

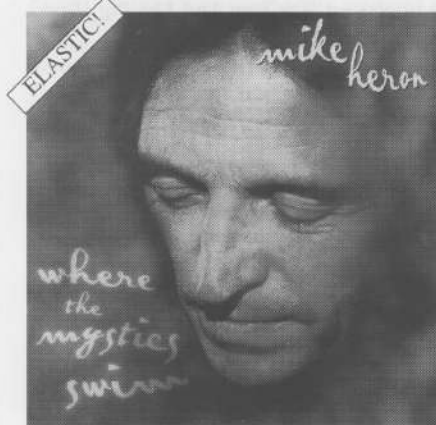
His/My eye was single and his/my whole body was filled with light—This, as Michael Ranauro and David Kidman argue, is based on Jesus' homily, delivered as part of the Sermon On The Mount and recorded by both *Matthew (6:22)* and *Luke (11:34)*, that "If thy eye be single, thy whole body is also full of light"—though it's pertinent to note that *The New English Bible's* translation of this line is: "If your eyes are sound, you will have light for your whole body": prosier, certainly, but perhaps a more faithful rendering.

The sheep and goats in *Douglas Traherne Harding* seem to have a vaguely scriptural flavour—the Son of Man separates the one from t'other in *Matthew 25:31-6*—but any connection is tenuous to the point of invisibility. "Eye...light" apart, therefore, all the unambiguous Biblical references on *WTBH* are from Robin's pen. Perhaps it runs in the family: according to impeccable C of E sources, the former Bishop of Exeter was one Right Rev. Robin Williamson!

A note on ISB namesakes: if you were listening to Radio 4 news a few months back and your jaw dropped when Michael Heseltine said breezily "I was talking to Mike Heron the other day...", you'll doubtless be relieved to learn that Michael Gilbert Heron is Chairman of the Post Office. Has he heard *The Letter*, one wonders?

Reviews

Books! CDs! Read all about it!



Demon Records FIENDCD 776

MIKE HERON

Where The Mystics Swim Demon
FIEND CD 776

With his first proper CD in absolutely an age, Mike Heron is a welcome stranger at this door. Always the more sussed of The Incredible String Band he's turned up here with a basic, acoustic quartet as much about beat and improvisation as roots or rock. Named, appropriately enough, The Incredible Acoustic Band, they muscle and beef Heron's marvellously elastic creations, a clutch that remains distinctive and sympathetic throughout. Culled from down the years, there's a couple of rearranged pieces, 1968 - which the String Band had a go at - and *Mexican Girl*, as well as a selection of the strongest material he's been writing latterly. Impressive among these are *Song For Robert Johnson*, a passion for the old blues guru, and *Tam & Alexi*, wherein two astronauts go in for one-world type notions.

Attendant constantly are shadows of what was, but the message you're hearing loud and clear is that Mike Heron, potential old wrinkly is nothing of the sort. Heron's got a brand new bag.
Simon Jones

Mike Heron's Incredible Acoustic Band

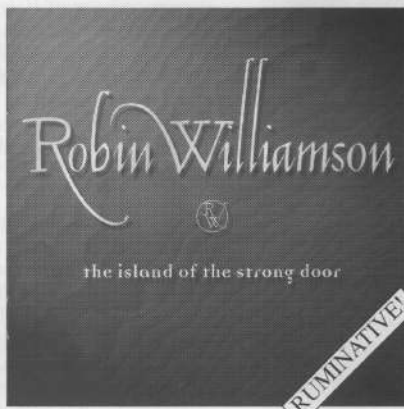
TWELVE BAR CLUB,
SAT, SUN

Although he's never really been away, Mike Heron is back, providing an opportunity for spiritual folkies and unrooted hippies everywhere to rejoice and remember their long-lost locks and fervid past. In the innocent, mind-expanding 60s, Heron, with Robin Williamson, comprised the nucleus of the Incredible String Band, a pioneering outfit responsible for a radical, psychedelic folk music scene that both mirrored and epitomised the heady, drugy, eccentricity, surreal whimsy and alternative religiosity of the times. They even proved influential on The Beatles during their post-*Sergeant Pepper* immersion in the

counter-culture and, with times passing, seem to be gaining increasingly widespread recognition and approval. Subsequent to the ISB, Heron has pursued a somewhat erratic career, often sussed a more towards the rock end of things. A new album, *Where The Mystics Swim* (Demon), however, sees him once more unabashedly dredged in the folk styles of yore, albeit graciously polished and short of self-indulgence. Possibly lacking a certain resonance and intensity, it is still a richly expressive and enjoyable, accomplished collection of gentle, folk-flavoured melody and music. In recognition of this stylistic reversal towards his halcyon past, in knowledge of his new band are named in a intriguingly Celtic storytelling bardic respect. Robin Williamson (now a respected Celtic storyteller) has also been in town of late. Would it be too much to hope that he might pop along and allow himself to be cajoled on to the stage too? Ross Fortune

The hot new CDs by Mike and Robin were released in February. Both had been plagued by delays and by happy happenstance finally appeared within a couple of weeks of each other. You might have thought this would have raised Mike's and Robin's profiles in the media, in this the 30th anniversary year of the first ISB album release. Coverage, alas, has been pretty derisory, in Britain at least. We reprint here what few reviews the two CDs have garnered in the music press.

Naturally, we at *Be Glad* have striven to fill the vacuum by unleashing our highly-trained and ruthless team of expert reviewers, who leave no note unturned in their appraisals of the new oeuvres.



TMC 9504

MOJO

The Incredible String Band are back. Just not on the same record. Both ISB mainmen **Mike Heron** and **Robin Williamson** break lengthy silences with new albums - respectively, *Where The Mystics Swim* (Demon) and *The Island Of The Strong Door* (TMC). Quirky chord changes and unpredictable melodies abound, as ever, although the two ingredients tend to enjoy a fairly random relationship with each other on Williamson's ruminative, occasionally difficult solo collection. Heron's, in contrast, features full acoustic band and is brimming with life and off-centre accessibility with songs that look both forward and backwards with a smile.

The Island of the Strong Door

reviewed by Andrew Quarry

Music fandom is a strange phenomenon, isn't it? On the face of it, appreciation societies seem to be straightforward vehicles for the expression of admiration for the works of a particular group or artist. However, I suspect that most of us, if pressed, might have to admit that our fascination with all things Incredible is only partly about the songs and the personalities. If we're honest, it is also about nostalgia; about evoking memories, feelings and experiences which we associate with a certain period in our lives—a time "when the world was new".

Listening to a piece of music or even reading articles about the artist can be the fan's equivalent of Proust's madeleine experience. Dipping into *Be Glad* or a favourite ISB album, there is a delicious sense of being transported back to another altogether different, and maybe preferable, reality.

One aspect of this is the tendency to identify a specific period in a group or artist's history as a time when they are assumed to have been at their peak. For fans, this usually coincides with their own personal and often highly idealised "golden age"—generally mid to late adolescence. I was seventeen when *5000 Spirits* was released and, in common no doubt with other String Band connoisseurs, I would cite the period between that album and *Wee Tam And The Big Huge* as the one which best captures the essence of the band and contains their most evocative music. In a similar vein, many Dylan fans would point to the year 1966 as representing a creative apogee, a standard against which all his later work should be measured. For the older Elvis aficionado, an obvious contender would surely be his time at Sun Records.

However, there is a problem here. Because these periods are so bound up with nostalgia, they are particularly prone to its rose-tinting effects. Almost inevitably, later work suffers in comparison. The fan wants more of the same but—and here's the rub—a similar song will often be seen as a pale imitation, lacking in originality or harking back to former glories. On the other hand, the adoption of a distinctively different style will be viewed as evidence of losing the way or, even worse, a betrayal. Small wonder that artists can sometimes become defensive when presented with such a double-bind.

Any new album by a performer with a "cult" following therefore has a number of hurdles to clear. The songs not only have to compete with the artist's previous work but they also have to contend with the listener's most cherished, imprinted memories as well. For artists who established a following in the '60s or early '70s, an additional dilemma is whether or not to pander to the illusion of youth in themselves and their audience (e.g. the Stones still singing about sex, drugs and

rock 'n' roll) or to more authentically reflect their changing role and perceptions as the years wear on (e.g. Dylan's *Oh Mercy*). Robin Williamson on his new album *The Island Of The Strong Door* cuts through this Gordian knot of problems by the simple expedient of staying true to his unique musical and cultural vision. He demonstrates brilliantly what can be achieved by continuing to follow the Muse and by rejecting superficially tempting but lesser goals on the way. The result is an album which builds on earlier, established strengths e.g. multi-instrumental virtuosity, soaring, plangent vocals, the use of traditional themes and striking imagery, and fuses them into a mature whole. Here we see an artist at the height of his musical and poetic powers meditating on a range of existential themes from the more reflective but no less impassioned perspective of middle age.

If there is a central thread running through the album then it is that of love. Not just the romantic or erotic varieties, but the familial and the metaphysical too. Entwined with this is a continuing sense of wonderment at the mystery of existence—a characteristic that appears to generally underpin Robin's world view and which informs some of his best material from songs like *Job's Tears* ("stranger than that we're alive") through to *Political Lies* on his last studio album *Ten Of Songs* ("the sheer unspeakable strangeness of being here at all"). Such a potent combination of themes gives the album a definite spiritual and at times mystical flavour. In contrast to early ISB material, however, it is more often the spirituality of the mundane than that of the arcane. As Robin himself said in a recent interview, "Now, at fifty, I'm much more interested in the ordinary facts of what we all partake of" (*Be Glad* issue 4). This concentration on the essential is exemplified by the minimalist CD cover which features beautiful gold calligraphy on

a delicately textured, deep red background.

The songs themselves are stylistically quite diverse but eschew the electric ornamentation heard on *Ten Of Songs* in favour of a sparser, more traditional acoustic approach. This helps to give the album a more intimate feel and enhances the sense of lyrical and musical integrity which is its hallmark. Almost completely vanished is the playful musical experimentation that so typified the early String Band. This has been replaced by a style which is based on the mastery of a few key instruments, most obviously the harp and guitar.

Despite this more disciplined approach, the songs are as creative and inspired as ever with arguably an even greater sense of individuality and depth. Paradoxically, some songs do contain echoes of String Band material but this element has been so successfully transmuted that it serves to enhance them in a subtly allusive way, skilfully avoiding the pitfall of self-parody to which a lesser artist might be prone.

The first track on the album is *Love Letter To My Wife Bina*, an unabashedly romantic song that means exactly what the title says. In concert, Robin relates how the idea for the song came to him while watching a long freight train crawl interminably through the border town where he was staying—shades of Dylan's "on the slow train time does not interfere". This is the image with which the song begins; it is introduced in a desultory, conversational manner and casually insinuates its way into the listener's attention to the strains of a borrowed Irish melody played Tex-Mex fashion on the harp. The lyrics sketch a picture of life on the road for the travelling musician—a succession of people, places and events, seemingly merging into one another. This is contrasted with the yearning for wife, children and family life. However, the song conveys the sense that the two aspects are simply different sides of the

same coin—the one giving meaning to the other. As Robin sings in the second verse, "You need the hard mile after the easy mile, and the mountain above the hill". Music, here represented by the tune *The Brown Thorn Tree*, provides the link between the two worlds.

The theme of family relationships spills over onto the next track, *Scalldaw*, a poignant meditation on Time and the shifts of perspective which occur as each generation ages and alters its perception of the one that came before it. The song is imbued with a sense of regret for times past that are now recoverable only in memory. The litany of Scots placenames—Habie's Howe, Silverknowe, Ben Loyal, Longmidry—and the chorus which invokes old Scots songs both emphasise a commonality of experience that supersedes previous differences and replaces them with a shared understanding. We see "the man and the old man, drinking drams"—an image of reconciliation based on mutual acceptance of the roles which each performer has had to play. This is further emphasised by the final couplet:

"let me pass you
I'll let you pass me"

Billy and the Scrapper is altogether different in style and content. A story-song and a concert favourite, it relates the tale of two Welsh unemployed miners who, out of economic necessity, try their hand at prize-fighting. Envisioning these apparent social victims as heroes, it takes the form of a modern broadside ballad with an explicit political sub-text of a kind which has been unusual in a Robin Williamson song until fairly recently. (For another example, see *Political Lies* from *Ten Of Songs*.) Like his protagonists, Robin pulls no punches, referring to the "Tory cow and her calf" and the dukes and princes who "swan about in Mercedes Benz". The tale is told with brilliant economy in a series of graphic images, e.g. "his face as grey as pit-slag". The narrative itself is presented in recitative with guitar accompaniment and a variety of odd percussive effects which lend an ironic, vaudevillean tone to the proceedings. This is counterpointed by the jaunty, catchy chorus.

Contempt for politicians and other "media zombies" surfaces again in the spoken manifesto which introduces the next track, *If Wishes Were Horses*, but this time there is no real political intent in the song itself other than a general sympathy with the underdog. Again, Robin has parodied a beautiful Irish traditional tune and joined it to his own verses to create a moving account of displacement and exile. It's a familiar folk theme—the man who goes off to a foreign land to seek his fortune only to find disillusionment and a yearning for home. A literal account on one level and, on another, a potent metaphor for the human condition.

Now we come to what might be regarded as one of the two masterpieces to be found on this album, *In Four Quarters Of The World*. This is a breathtaking



The Bard is back! Photo: Jim Hill

creation which has the capacity to transport the listener into another dimension entirely. Thematically and lyrically it seems to inhabit a world described by the Sufi poets such as Rumi (mentioned, by the way, in *Vishangro*) and Hafiz: a world in which Life is depicted as a journey, and enlightenment acquired only through the conscious acceptance of adversity and hardship leading to mystical ecstatic states. The lines

"My tongue has been made supple through desperation

My heart is like a door left open too long" clearly hint at such a possibility. The melody, full of Arabic cadences, is an inspired complement to this theme. The solo harp arrangement, recalling the eerie hammered dulcimer part from *Pictures In A Mirror*, weaves a strange and profound enchantment. This is employed to greatest effect in the instrumental coda where the melody twists and turns in apparently random fashion, like a desert wind, yet allows an underlying pattern to be discerned. So powerful indeed is the emotional impact of this piece that one feels reluctant to play it too often for fear that its effect might thereby be diminished.

Bless This Kiss offers a tantalising, dream-like interlude, featuring Robin's wife Bina in a supporting vocal role. An invocation backed by a feathery harp accompaniment, it is reminiscent of *The Forming Of Blodeuwedd* from *Songs Of Love And Parting* in its use of multiple delicate and strident vocal textures and alliterative sounds to provide a rich mosaic of words and images. Densely structured like many of Robin's songs, it does not yield easily to linear analysis nor, I imagine, is it supposed to. Rather, it seems better appreciated as an impressionistic whole. From this standpoint it could be seen, at least in part, as a meditation on traditional relations between the sexes, going back even as far as Adam and Eve—"where the first lie lies on the coiled tongue". The song obliquely questions the need for male defensiveness and contains a subliminal plea for greater openness to the more receptive, feminine aspects of the self—"Mirror me a man—in woman's water".

The next track, *I Pray To God Isn God's Absence*, is another introspective *tour de force*, featuring a superb, soaring vocal performance that sends customary prickles up the back of the neck. It begins with one of Robin's spoken recitations setting the atmosphere and context for the song that follows. The theme is Winter and the introduction juxtaposes the winter of "bright eyes", Yuletide jollity and traditional pursuits ("God's presence") against a much darker scene—"what the wind whispers on a black roadside nowhere". Here, deepest winter represents the void, "the unlit dark and the snuffed flame"—"God's absence" of the title. Both aspects, the light and the dark, are integral parts of an irreducible reality—"what the granny and the wee baby know"—the

ground of all being or the "heartbeat of the world". The song deals with this paradox at the centre of existence in two extraordinary verses. The first verse reflects on the fact of "being here at all", on Pascal's "eternal silence of the infinite spaces" and the need to acknowledge kinship with the natural world—our "sanctuary" in the face of apparent nothingness. The second explores the importance of being human and affirms the significance of human love both as a reality in itself and as a spiritual symbol. As ever, the music serves to augment and amplify the lyrical resonances. The powerful emotional impact of this work is profoundly enhanced by the dark, enigmatic guitar arpeggios which underpin the verses and which expand into an extended raga-like sequence at the end of the song.

After this, the moving, reflective *Late In The Evening* makes a reassuring contrast. In some ways, this song could be seen as a companion piece to *Scalldaw* in that it again deals with family love but, this time, from the perspective of a father rather than that of a son. To a gentle, flowing harp and whistle accompaniment, the singer ponders his relationship with his own young son and muses on the vagaries of time and experience—"the tangles of it all". In the face of inevitable personal mortality, the continuity of the generations provides at least some sense of meaning and hope. It is a song to which many parents will be able to relate. As if to ensure that none of the family are excluded from the album, we have *Daughter's Dance (For Vashti)*, a colourful, rhythmically complex piece which features vigorous bursts of gypsy fiddle and mandolin interspersed with repetitive guitar figures and tinkling percussion. The latter is underscored by the faintly ominous drone of a jew's harp, an elaboration of an idea originally heard on *The Fair Dance* from *Selected Writings*. All in all, a multi-instrumental showcase. The album's final, eponymous song, *The Island Of The Strong Door*, celebrates the versatility and diversity of harp music and its central place in the bardic tradition. With a tune and structure which, though self-composed, could have been written centuries ago, it is deeply imbued with Robin's love of Celtic folklore. Indeed, those familiar with the stories he tells in his live performances will certainly recognise many of the references listed within the song, e.g.

"the great prisoner, the maiden's cauldron, the perilous chair and the wondrous well". "The Island of the Strong Door" itself serves as an image of safety and sanctuary—a place to refresh and replenish one's energies before venturing forth again to face whatever mundane or magical experiences Fate has yet in store. It makes a fitting end to an album which has taken the listener on an astonishing, enriching musical journey, courtesy of one of this generation's most inspired and accomplished performing artists.

MIKE ON 'MYSTICS'

Mike Heron inks in the background to the songs on his latest CD

Some would say that *The Incredible String Band* formed spontaneously from the atmosphere of the '60s themselves. In any case it was such a "one-off" that when putting bands together post-String Band I've never been tempted to try and duplicate it.

It did however seem time to structure a band round the main aim of interpreting and colouring my songs and to be very fluid with musical styles and forms in doing this.

The Incredible Acoustic Band was put together with this in mind—John Rutherford (acoustic guitar), Stuart Smith (fretless bass), Dave Haswell (percussion).

Much group listening followed to decide which songs would benefit most from this approach. Here are some notes on the songs that were chosen.

Jack Kerouac left Mill City with his canvas bag. In Oakland he had a beer among the burns of a saloon with a wagon wheel in front of it—and he was On The Road again. He longed for a girl's soul just to anchor his heart as the air-brakes sighed and Chapter 12 approached the ragged promised land of L.A. and she said:

"Jack you're my rambler and I love your freedom, And I love the way that you love me when you feel so wild and free, Take me on your wanderings anytime, Lay me on that Indian blanket in your tent, And if we ain't got no cover let your body cover me, Feel free just to love your Mexican Girl".

1968 is a song about my long-time String Band partner Robin Williamson. It was written late-on with a split-up on the horizon. It's a very affectionate look back at The String Band and hopefully evokes some of the magic.

I knew nothing about Robert Johnson when I first heard *King Of The Delta Blues Singers*. As I listened to those 16 stunning tracks I glanced through the 2,000 words of sleeve notes that CBS had thoughtfully included for people like me.

I learned: "Robert Johnson appeared and disappeared in much the same fashion as a sheet of newspaper twisting and twirling down a dark and windy midnight street".

I learned that he was slender and handsome with beautiful hands, that all he had ever recorded were 29 songs for Vocalion in a San Antonio hotel room in 1936 and 1937, and that not yet 21 he was dead by 1938.

Later I was to learn: "He still comes around—hey, from Mississippi when your road seems dark as night, When nothing else gets to your sadness he's pickin' up his guitar and feelin' it right", and I wrote *A Song For Robert Johnson*.

I'm glad to say five love songs were chosen—I like them. There's longed-for (*Dry All My Rain*), newly awakening (*29 Words*), rediscovered (*Always*), unrequited (*Leaning On My Heart*), and quietly smouldering and fulfilling (*Baby Good-night*).

Tom & Alexei is built around thoughts expressed by astronauts looking down. You might say: "They were viewing the planet like you can't close up - what can divide us?"

Killing The Dragon is a dream. You can tell it's a dream because my role in it is that of an Olympic star of the track—podium and all. You can also tell it's a dream because although it's set in an enormous packed stadium the faces of the crowd are just 10 different faces repeated. They're the faces of the people who have caused me the most unhappiness in my life.

The whole crowd stands up and shouts: "We Take it back".

I wake up.

Finally we needed a producer who could inspire good studio performances and enhance the tracks while retaining the group feel. Not only did Iain McKinna do this but I think he produced a coherent whole—a complete-sounding album.

Where The Mystics Swim
reviewed by Jonas Dalrymple

Where *The Mystics Swim*, you could say, has been a long time a-coming. It's Mike's first non-retrospective album since the ill-starred Casablanca waxing (yes, the one with the Julio Iglesias-style cover), which never saw UK release. It therefore carries a certain weight of expectation. Back in the '80s, when I was given *The Glen Row Tapes* vol. 1 to review for a local music mag, I wrote of Mike that if his muse could get to grips with the late '80s, there was every sign that he could still be a force to be reckoned with. Eight years on, we find him opening a new album with *Tom And Alexei*, a song about a mid-'70s spacewalk...! Is Mike Heron still marooned in the doldrums of his "Scottish Springsteen" period? Check the track listing, and you'll find a song entitled *1968*—written, like several others on the album, over 20 years ago. Confronted with this, the casual browser might reasonably conclude that Mike is a spent force, lazily recycling his past glories for a backward-looking audience.

Well, how wrong can a browser be...?! The truth is that *Mystics* is a blistering piece of contemporary acoustic rootsy pop. The '70s material is reshaped into modern and often funky arrangements, and deliciously complemented by some of Mike's more recent compositions. A graceful balance is struck between the old and the new. This is music for the '90s all right, but drawing its strength from every period of Mike's long and illustrious career.

Having said that, it begins a little unpromisingly. Slip the CD into the tray and the first thing you hear is Mike and the lads going "Doo-doo-dee-doo-doo-doo-doo-doo-doo-dee-doo-doo" rather like a chorus of jovial drunks whipping up a singalong at the Pig And Whistle. And then we're into the song proper, with its hoary references to détente (ask your parents, younger readers). It's been written elsewhere in this issue that the choice of an album's opening track can be critical in defining the listener's overall impression of the album. *Tom And Alexei* is a good illustration of this maxim. It's a cracking song in its own terms, but doesn't quite strike the right tone in this context. Better, surely, to have kicked off with something—well, *timeless*: something, in fact, like *Always*. Although it's placed second in the running order, *Always* is a natural opener. A classic Heron ode to lost love found again, it lopes along with a real sense of purpose, propelled by a cocksure rhythm section and some gorgeously eloquent lead guitar by John Rutherford. And it begins with a smouldering,

atmospheric intro that draws the listener irresistibly into the song. This one will have you out of your seat unless your feet are nailed securely to the floorboards.

As I say, *Tom And Alexei* suffers somewhat by comparison, but it nevertheless yields its own delights. It's equipped with more than a decent ration of hooklines, and fixes itself firmly in your brain after a single hearing. Despite the period references, its theme of kinship between peoples and between ourselves and our mother planet is as pertinent today as it was two decades ago. History has actually

lascivious, bluesy sigh of John's guitar behind the line "If we ain't got no cover let your body cover me" is guaranteed to make you hot under the poncho. (Nurse—the medication!)

From a slice of sun-dried '50s Americana to the fragile, tentative *1968*, Mike's nostalgic late-1960s confessional, is a big jump both in time and in mood. Nevertheless, it's an effective contrast. The song first surfaced via the *On Air* CD a few years back. That was in many ways a definitive version, with Mike's and Robin's vocal lines weaving heartbreakingly around each other, and the wistful arabesques of Robin's gimbri coda wailing in the dark. It pretty much represented the last rites for the ISB, and dusting it off for the '90s is a risky enterprise. On the whole, Mike and the band do the song justice, though the first verse has a rather torpid feel to it, and Mike's vocal enters with a leaden clunk—not off-key, exactly, but somehow flat. Once Stuart's bass revs up, however, everything comes together. Mike sings it like he lived it—which of course he did. "Let's do it one more time," he pleads. Uttered in 1996, could this be a coded proposal for a Mike 'n' Robin reunion? Not very likely, but the song honours in full the incredibly strange blend of these two very different personalities. Stuart's lovely fluid basslines carry it to a dying fall on "bright sunshine in darkest night", leaving John's ghostly harmonics echoing into silence.

A trademark Rutherford descending guitar figure lassoes our attention for *Killing The Dragon*, a song inspired, we're told, by a curious and vivid dream on the theme of reconciliation. Interesting programming, therefore, to juxtapose it with *1968*. This is an absolute belter of a song, cunningly built around rhythms Mike encountered in the Seychelles while on holiday there some years ago. (The third verse features some artfully-synthesised sansa sounds to bring out the connection more plainly.) The time signature is actually $\frac{3}{4}$ —almost unknown in modern Western popular music, though common enough in the 17th and 18th centuries. Greybeards will recall that Mike made especially effective use of it in *Gently Tender* on *5000 Spirits*, way back in the 1690s (notwithstanding Happy Traum's peculiar belief—as evidenced in the first ISB songbook—that it's in $\frac{4}{4}$ throughout). The band rocks crisply behind an exuberant Heron vocal, and the song concludes with a droll fade-out essayed by John on Venezuelan cuatro (eclectic or what?) and producer Iain McKinna on kazoo.

Another watery cascade of notes from John and we're into *Dry All My Rain*, a driving piece of pure pop with all the trimmings: punchy keyboards, stabbing background vocals and a vibrant, confident lead vocal. Perhaps on McKinna's advice,



The gang of four prepares for world domination.
Photo: John Harrold

given the song extra poignancy, with the firestorm of rabid nationalism that followed the razing of the Berlin Wall. "There's only one world to share"—is anyone listening down there? The "doo-dee-doo" may be a touch on the raw side, but the arrangement hangs together well, and the song drifts out with disembodied voices and high, spacey notes on the guitar.

Always then chugs through in the manner described above and gives way to *Mexican Girl*, Mike's third recorded stab at this sultry little number. You'll find a smooth, sassy version on the Casablanca album, and an edgier reading on *The Glen Row Tapes*; this latest one kicks harder than either, a tough but sensuous performance that exactly distils the mood of the song. Inspired by the writings of Jack Kerouac, *Mexican Girl* conjures up the big skies and dust devils of the American Southwest with a piercing clarity. Mike's tequila-slurred vocal is authentically Kerouacian; and the

they've jettisoned the second chorus, which speeds matters along somewhat; and indeed it's gone almost before you've settled into it.

What follows is the album's indisputable highlight. Mike's tribute to the legendary bluesman, *A Song For Robert Johnson* is an extraordinary, dark, eerie and dramatic thing. Mike recreates with uncanny fidelity Johnson's unique fusion of tenderness and menace, punctuating the narrative with highly-charged phrases from Johnson's songs, and incorporating into the chorus the almost mythic imagery of pulsing hearts and outstretched wings. The arrangement, too, is a masterpiece, featuring multiple Rutherford guitars, discreetly layered keyboards—including a spooky Hammond organ played by the engineer Jon Turner—, and Dave Haswell's talking drum sounding like a hellhound's footfalls at the crossroads. Fierce stuff...! Mike's "doubled" lead vocal has an understated intensity that really takes you by the throat; and as the final chorus decays, Stuart hits a root note on the bass that seems to come from the very centre of the earth, and Mike slides into a haunted and harrowing coda: "Every single morning, every single morning/She's got blues walkin' like a/Blues talkin' like a man you understand...". A gaunt, ghost-raddled and utterly compelling piece of music. In his writing career, Mike has rarely visited such dark regions—only *Swift As The Wind* springs readily to mind; but this is a brilliantly intuitive exploration of the

shadow-hung souterrains of the human heart. Not the sort of song you'd expect Melanie, of all people, to cover! (See this issue's News section.) Still, you can't fault her good taste...

Leaning On My Heart occupies similarly crepuscular territory, with "glimpses of the moon in the still night" wanly illuminating the memories of a "poisoned" love affair. Try as he might, poor Mike can't get over it, and the half-hearted modulations into the relative major on the chorus dissolve back into the insistent funereal knell of the tonic minor chord. This emotional tussle is cleverly echoed in the contrast between John's high-strung guitar and the gloomy, ruminative drone of Stuart's bowed double bass. Although it doesn't have the dramatic potency of *Robert Johnson*, *Leaving* is a tense and moodily effective piece.

If, at this point, you're tempted to cry "Lighten up Mr H!", then *29 Words* is just for you. The dark clouds are rolling away, and Mike finds himself on his old flame's doorstep, suitcase in hand, with the prospect of "new love movin' in". This is a sweet, simple and likeable song, in which Mike is even happy to be out in the rain if that same rain is falling on his sweetheart's sidewalk. Dave's pattering hand drums underscore the optimistic spirit of the song.

Which takes us, deftly and aptly, to the album's final track, *Baby Goodnight*. It revives the old ISB tradition of bringing

albums to a gentle and somnolent conclusion (think of *Nightfall*, *Little Girl* and the coda to *Creation*). Written back in 1977, *Baby Goodnight* was famously—and profitably—covered by Bonnie Tyler, as well as appearing on *The Glen Row Tapes*. The current version is longer and sexier than the *Glen Row* cut, with Mike sounding relaxed and intimate. John serves up some jazzy lines in the opening section before moving to warm, full chording for the main body of the song. He also turns a typically dextrous solo to lift the arrangement at just the right point. I fancy I can detect an edit at the second "And to feel your sweet love...": if so, it's Iain McKinna's only lapse in what is a classy, imaginative and sympathetic production throughout. His keyboard work and background vocals also add considerably to the overall effect. *Baby Goodnight* is a perfect ending to an almost perfect album. John, Dave and Stuart are worth their weight in gold discs; they've matured over the last couple of years into a tight and tasty outfit. Mike too is singing better than he's done for years, with confidence and authority. *Where The Mystics Swim* is as good as we dared hope it would be. My own feeling is that it represents Mike's best work since the end of the ISB. If that sounds like faint praise, it's not at all: each song oozes quality like honeycomb. Mike Heron is indeed a force still to be reckoned with—and who knows but that the best may be still to come?

HAVE MOYSHE! Andy Roberts acclaims the reissue on CD of C.O.B.'s difficult (to find) second album

Moyshe McStiff And The Tartan Lancers Of The Sacred Heart Elegy E550/1 (1995)

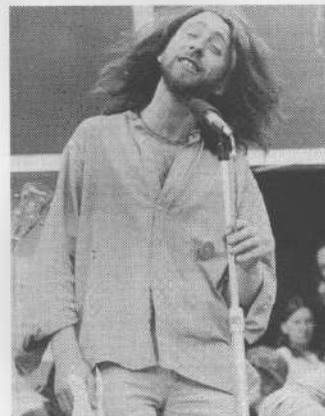
Originally issued on Polydor's short-lived Folk Mill label in 1972, *Moyshe* has long been a sought-after collector's item on vinyl, changing hands for anything up to £120 [A copy was seen recently in Sheffield priced at £250—*well-informed Ed*], but circulating among ISB fans usually on fading cassettes of dubious origin. But no more!

Graham Hood covered the album in his excellent Palmer retrospective in issue 2, to which I direct you for further information, but it's worth repeating here that the title is said to be a bit of a dig at the ISB's second album (and by doing so hints at dissatisfaction in the way that one minute Clive was in the ISB and the next he wasn't). However, my money is on the title being blatantly sexual in origin, but then again I've just hit 40 so my hormones are playing me up!

All the favourites are here in pristine quality. I don't think it has been remastered for CD but the sound is crystal clear. (Who'd have thought that Ralph McTell—for it is produced by he—would have such an ear?) Stand-out tracks for me are *Oh Bright Eyed One* and *Chain Of Love*, but every one is a little hand-crafted beauty. Carrying a uniquely mournful and occasionally cloying atmosphere, the music on occasion is more String Band than the chaps themselves, but not in any copied or pastiche way, just another strand from the first album teased out into Clive's original style. When it's not tugging your memory String Band-wards it has elements of many world folk musics set in its musical amber—for instance, *Pretty Kerry* is where Irish folk music meets American banjo-plucking, and so on. Danny Thompson guests on a couple of tracks while the rest of the band play about with the diversity of dulcitar, clarinet, balalaikas and other instruments. Like the best stuff from the early '70s it's very much of its time yet stands alone as strange music from a time when experimentation and genre-crossing were still very much accepted and encouraged.

As an added treat, Elegy have added two "bonus" tracks, *Blue Morning* (a bizarre, reggaefied tune) and *Bones* (an equally bizarre song about, er, bones!), both of which have only appeared on a 1972

single. If you're a Palmer fan then this is even worth buying a CD player for! Even if you're not, *Moyshe*—and indeed any of Clive's work—is worth purchasing for his unusual voice, instrumentation and arrangements. The only remaining questions are: will Elegy re-issue other C.O.B./Palmer material? and will Clive and Co. ever see any of the money from such reissues?



COB's Mick Bennett, Norwich Folk Festival 1973. What is this man on—and can you still get it?

Twilight Detectives

Be Glad's literary critic Morwenna Rook finds two men with a mission...

TWILIGHT OF THE CELTIC GODS An Exploration Of Britain's Hidden Pagan Traditions

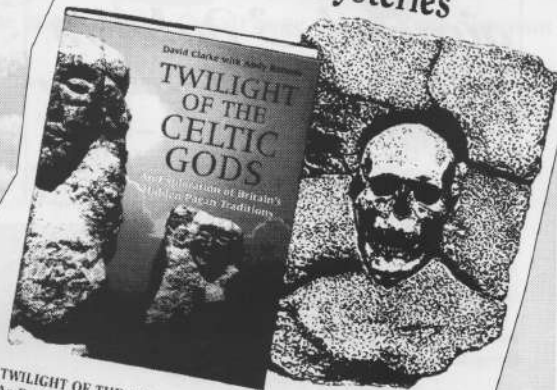
David Clarke with Andy Roberts
Blandford

Celtic—now there's a buzzword for the '90s, if ever there was one. In today's marketing speak it's a bulky portmanteau word conflating the notions of gentle mysticism, ancient wisdom and romantic nationalism. All conveniently vague terms, of course—but the authors of this book argue persuasively that it is the *not juste* for their subject matter. David Clarke and Andy Roberts have spent a number of years investigating and collating evidence for the survival into the late 20th century of a body of belief, transmitted orally down the generations, whose origins predate the establishment of Christianity in these islands. The sub-title offers a familiar synonym: pagan. But, as the authors point out, neither word is entirely satisfactory: both "Celtic" and "pagan" have acquired dodgy associations via the burgeoning New Age and other fringe movements. Unruly blighters, words; but David and Andy outline patiently in their Introduction why "Celtic" will have to do.

That settled, they whirl us off on a fascinating journey down crooked byways where, with a little shrewd sniffing around, they turn up the most remarkable things. Not only Eng. Heritage-style folklore and colourful local customs, but eye-witness accounts of downright eerie events and arcane practices, mysterious artefacts and all manner of odd stuff. This isn't just another uncritical trawl through *Ley Hunter* back issues, nor the latest exercise in armchair ethnology. The authors have actually been out there, up to their elbows in bogwater, scaling lofty crags, and winning the confidence and friendship of people who are properly wary of outsiders with tape recorders and impertinent questions. Most of their investigations have been conducted well outside of what we think of as "Celtic" territory. Indeed, some of the most suggestive data come from places like Alderley Edge in Cheshire, Derbyshire's Dark Peak, and the remoter Yorkshire Dales. Of course, the whole of this area was occupied by Celtic peoples about a millennium and a half ago; and archaeological and etymological evidence is adduced to support the startling proposition that an authentic if fragmentary belief system has continued unbroken in these parts over that vast span of time. The authors report conversations with "guardians" of this tradition: not woad-daubed antler-sporting pseudo-Pagans but "ordinary" people in the purely descriptive sense of the word, people who have nonetheless preserved a special sense of kinship with the earth, the elements, the natural world in its totality.

Twilight Of The Celtic Gods is not a dry academic study. David and Andy get quite vehement in their Conclusion on what they see as the importance of this world view to us all. And it's entirely apt that, in this context, they should choose to quote, among others, Mike Heron and Robin Williamson. Mike on this occasion is actually the mouthpiece of Thomas Traherne ("You never enjoy the world aright..."); while a

Myths and mysteries



TWILIGHT OF THE CELTIC GODS
An Exploration of Britain's Hidden Pagan Traditions
David Clarke with Andy Roberts

In Ireland there is a splendid collection of archaic lore enshrined in a great compilation known as *Dindsenchas* ('Tales of Eminent Places'). This is aptly known as 'the mythological geography of early Ireland'. England, Scotland and Wales can not boast anything quite comparable to this great compilation, but the history of the landscape and past heroes and deities can still be glimpsed in the names of places and rivers, and in certain archaeological monuments which often demonstrate the length and strength of certain traditions and legends.

The Editors' Choice—
by Be Glad supreme in
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sightings


passage is extracted from Robin's *Mirroman Sequences*; and the book's colophon is the full text of *Invocation*. This is not so surprising, for co-author Andy Roberts is of course *Be Glad's* former editor and main man. This final section truly lifts the heart like a trumpet. Certainly, anyone who has responded to the ISB's view of the world will feel a *frisson* of recognition in what the authors are saying.

As I hinted above, the book is not aimed at an academic readership. We shouldn't worry, therefore, that the scholarship is a wee bit casual in places: when the authors argue that the story of *Sir Gawain And The Green Knight* may have originated in Cheshire, they omit to mention its close similarity to an Irish tale from the Cuchullain cycle; and their reference to "matriarchal inheritance" in ancient Ireland seems somewhat questionable until you realise they're probably referring to *matrilineal* inheritance, which is not nearly the same thing. Judging by the occasional use of the first person singular, the actual text is likely to be chiefly David's work, so it is at his door that we must lay responsibility for the occasional infelicity of style: such as describing the summit of Bleaklow as "bleak" (well it would be...) and the custom of well-dressing as "well-known" (as opposed to the well-dressed custom of well-knowing...?); or rendering the plurals of the Greek word talisman and the Altaic word shaman as talismen and shamen respectively. Tweedy profs might sniff at such lapses, but they don't weaken the central argument. The strength of this book, finally, is the authors' (literally) pathfinding fieldwork. They haven't taken the short cut or the easy option. Their researches will provide a benchmark for future work in this area of study. Whether or not you agree with all their conclusions, they've thrown open the magic casements of possibility, and they've done it in fine style.


gimmel e'3 dalet's half-remarkable queries

You ask 'em, we answer 'em—a peek
into the dark cupboard where the
anoraks hang out


Dear G and D—

 What did Mike Heron study at university that gave him “no benefit”?—A. Roberts

Would you believe Law and Economics? Handy for working out one's royalty entitlement, we'd have thought...

 Where did Robin get the idea to do *Raga Puti*?—A. Albioni

There are at least two possibilities, supposing that Robin found the song on a record. A version by Mahendra Kapour, Manhar and Chorus was available in the '60s. A likelier contender, however, is the version by Ananda Shankar, son of Pandit Ravi Shankar. Shankar *filis* pioneered the electric sitar in the late '60s and released an album in 1968 featuring somewhat implausible cover versions of *Light My Fire* and *Jumpin' Jack Flash*. The final track, fortunately, was a rather tasty arrangement of *Ragupati* (the proper title, you know) that has much in common with the ISB version: a spoken introduction invoking an omnipresent deity (“Let us sing in praise of Rama, who is the Eternal One”, Ananda urges), two verses with chorus, a short bridge and a chanted coda against a descending bassline with background wails. Sounds familiar?

 I've got a list of songs the ISB used to perform live which I don't know anything about. They're not on any of the radio sessions. Can you help?

Belinda
Cajun Song
Dark Waters
Hold Your Fire
Giles The Crocodile
How Shall I Get There?
Ladies
March
Poetry Play
Sea Of Memory

The Crooner—G. Dott (no relation)

Well, Mr D (we suspect a pseudonym here, readers), the mighty minds at *Be Glad* have dredged their memories but can offer no enlightenment on *Belinda* (sounds like a Heron number—remember Audrey, Jane, Evie and Carol?), *March* (perhaps a fiddle tune), or *The Crooner* (doubtless one of the vaudevillean ditties Robin bashed out to provide Malcolm with an excuse to dress up on stage). As for the others, attend and inwardly digest...

Cajun Song was a composition of Robin's that featured on the Autumn '71 concert tour. The title is exquisitely self-explanatory. It was reputedly an opportunity for Robin to exercise his schoolboy French, which was perhaps put to more elegant use on *Rends-Moi Demain* (though that contains at least one howler—anyone spotted it?)

Out Of The Dark Waters is a dramatic Williamson song concerning “the tangles that human life can get into”, and incorporating an Arthurian figure “Who from the dark waters/Lifts the sword”. Aired in 1973; a concert bootleg exists.

Hold Your Fire is a late Heron composition, from the time when the band were seriously rockin'. One of a number of Mike's songs written too late to make it onto an ISB album; others include *Strong Thing*, *Florence*, *Draw Back The Veil*, *Moorish Tune* and *Meanwhile The Rain*, some of which eventually surfaced on Heron solo ventures; and 1968, now available on both the *On Air* compilation and Mike's new CD.

Giles The Crocodile—probably the first in the chucklesome series of Williamson songs detailing the depravities of the saurian delinquent so memorably portrayed by Malcolm in concert from '72 to '74. It features the first appearance of Harry The Snake, since immortalised in Malcolm's *Animals With Attitude*.

How Shall I Get There?—It's unlikely the ISB ever did a version of this very early Williamson song. It has a fair claim to being Robin's least-known composition. Its sole appearance on vinyl was as the B-side of The Corries' *October Song* single in 1966. (This was not the album version of *October Song*—on 1968's *Kishmul's Galley*—but a more studiously “commercial” arrangement with jolly tambourines and little regard for the sentiment of the song; the album version was much more sensitively done.) A copy fell into our Editor's hands a few years back. *How Shall...* turns out to be a hearty singalong thing with the nursery-rhyme refrain “Straight down, straight down the crooked lane/And all around the square”, and includes the evocative lines “East of Moon and west of the Sun/Upon a horse of air”, which prefigure *The Dancing Of The Lord Of Weir*—a horse of a very different hue.

Ladies is a lost and much-lamented Heron masterpiece, first heard in '71 and a concert staple for the next two years. *Lowlands Away* was the earlier title, echoing the traditional shanty of that name—the phrase wanders in and out of the song. In G and D's view, *Ladies* could be absorbed effortlessly into Mike's current repertoire. Consider that a request, Mr H!

Poetry Play was one of the arty interludes in the Autumn '71 live show. Malcolm, Robin and Likky dressed up in slag-grey pyjamas and mimed their way meaningfully through a long quarter of an hour. File under *Multimedia*, *Misconcieved*. (Personally I loved it—*uncritical Ed*) Mike provided a mostly electronic soundtrack, pre-recorded. Rumour has it that the tapes still reside in the Island vaults. The full title, incidentally, was *Poetry Play I*—but no sequel ever emerged.

Sea Of Memory was one of Robin's cheerful, throwaway songs, featured in 1972 performances. He introduced it as “a kind of summery, very warm kind of Tahitian palm trees and coconuts song... horses are the waves, you know, sea horses, the song's about that.” (It was also known as *Sea White Horses*.)

Send your Half-Remarkable Queries to Gimmel and Daleth at the editorial address—for issue 9, that's 71a Colvestone Crescent, Dalston, London, E8 2LJ.

'an incredible girl called Rose'

From rock-climber to rock-chick to pillar of the community—the strange ride of Rose Simpson

For most of her career as Incredible Stringperson, Rose Simpson was simply Rose: one of the two semi-anonymous "beautiful girls" (to quote Karl Dallas in the *Melody Maker*) who seemed to act as musical handmaidens to Robin and Mike. Initially, she and Licorice found their way into the act as girlfriends who were occasionally summoned on stage to bang a drum, shake a tambourine or warble a quavery vocal line while the lads did all the difficult stuff. Their promotion to full band membership was, in the view of some commentators—Joe Boyd in particular—more a matter of internal politics than musical necessity. Whatever the truth of this, however, most fans would contend that they made a significant contribution to the band, both musically and—let's admit it, chaps—visually. And it shouldn't be forgotten that, way back in the 1960s, female musicians were as rare as frog's whiskers in the world of popular music. In their largely unacknowledged way, Rose and Likky blazed a trail that many women would follow in the '70s and '80s.

After 20-odd years of decent obscurity, raising a family and "pottering around thinking about my pension", Rose was suddenly catapulted back into prominence in the summer of 1994. *Lady Mayoress played at Woodstock* was the story that quickened the hearts of news-editors throughout the land. By a cosmic coincidence, the 25th anniversary of history's largest mudbath fell around the time that Rose's partner, Lib Dem councillor Bob Griffin, was appointed Lord Mayor of Aberystwyth, with Rose as the Mayorial consort. Media hacks descended on the sleepy Welsh resort like locusts, and for a few weeks Her Roseness, revealed as primly attired and looking younger than her years, was everywhere—in the *Radio Times*, in the *Gaurdian*, on Radio Four. It was one of the hottest stories of the so-called "silly season".

The "rock-chick turns civic dignitary" scenario may have had newshounds baying happily, but there's a much more interesting story lying behind it: how a student rock-climber who'd scraped a bit of fiddle at school found herself playing the world's most prestigious rock venues, and all because of a chance meeting on a Scottish farm.

Andy Roberts took tea with Rose in her kitchen at the height of the media hoo-ha—as it happened, on the very day of the Woodstock anniversary—and got the full story....

Let's take it from the top—where do you hail from originally?
I come from Yorkshire—I was born in Otley.

And how did you fall in with the ISB?
I went to Scotland to do some snow-climbing. I was President of the student



The Barefoot Bassist: Rose throws caution—and socks—to the wind at a 1970 festival

mountaineering club. The snow was bad and I ended up staying at a woman's house. Mary Stewart was her name—an American lady who was a vet and also a good mountaineer. She knew a lot of the climbing fraternity, but she also knew lots of folkie people. That's where I met Mike and Robin.

They were just hanging out there?
Robin was living there at the time.

And how exactly did you get drawn into the band?
(wry chuckle) These things just sort of happen, you know... I can't really say—people just hang together sometimes.

What year did this fateful meeting take place?
It would have been about '68 probably—'67, '68.

Were you, so to speak, part of the hippy scene?
Oh no—I was part of the mountaineering scene.

Did you have musical leanings?
I played violin and stuff at school. I always enjoyed it, but I didn't have a particularly musical background.

What was the first album you remember being involved with?
Hangman's Beautiful Daughter.

You're not credited as such...
No, I don't think I actually played anything,

An incredible girl called Rose

but I was on the cover. I have a vague idea that I was on a chorus somewhere. The first one I really did anything on was *Wee Tam And The Big Hugs*.

Ah yes—is it true that *Log Cabin Home In The Sky* was written for you?
No, it wasn't. Not that I'm aware of. I don't think it was anything to do with me. *You Get Brighter* was—that definitely was me, but not *Log Cabin* I don't think.



Rose in the '90s: "Log Cabin not written for me" shock.



Rose and Likky: "We never clashed." So how did Likky lose that tooth, eh...?

wrote *Log Cabin Home In The Sky* really as a fiddle tune for me to play..."—or perhaps the quote was pure journalistic invention: such things happened, you know....[puzzled Ed]

Why do you think you and Licorice were integrated into the band at that time?

It was just because we were there. Mike and Robin wanted to use lots of different instruments, not necessarily played well but more for sounds, you know—so you obviously need more hands. I think we were convenient insofar as we were willing hands who could make sounds from things. Neither of us had any intention particularly to compete with Mike and Robin as musicians.

Did you get on with Licorice? There are rumours abroad that you were not best pals...

Well, we didn't really have much to do with each other, quite honestly. We didn't *not* get on, so far as I can recall, but we didn't have much in common. I don't think we really understood very much about each other, and we never really found a need to talk about it. We never clashed as such, but then we were never pals either—it was just someone else who was there. She was not the sort of personality I would have made a close friend of.

Did Mike and Robin get on all right, in your view?

They got on very well, working on things together.

Some people have suggested that they made the music they did because of the tensions between them...

I think that might be true. There was a lot of tension, but you never saw it. Very rarely did any tension surface between any of us. It's strange—I can't imagine living like that now, but then... it was the climate of the time; you didn't find any need to bring out

your differences and discuss them and resolve them. We weren't really into encounter groups: if we had problems we'd just deal with them somewhere else.

The *Be Glad* film—what part did you play in that?

I just sort of floated around!

Mike has said that he wasn't into the multimedia side of things...

I wasn't either—not because I didn't like it, but I didn't feel that we were the people to do it. I felt that other people could do it better, and that once we started to do that we were stepping into fields where none of us had any expertise. I mean, Lik and I had no expertise in anything in particular; Mike and Robin were good musicians, but that didn't make either of them good actors, directors, artists or any of these other things, and I felt that once you go into that you either get people who are good at it or you don't do it at all.

The impetus for that came mainly from Robin...

Yeah, pretty much. I think we were all interested in it and sort of enthusiastic about it on certain levels. It was very nice to do it, but I don't think it should have become part of the mainstream of the band.

(deep breath) At what point did Scientology enter the picture?

Can't remember—'69 or something, wasn't it?

Were you involved yourself?

Yes, I was, but it wasn't quite as simple as that. I always wanted to know about things, and the best way of finding out about something is to do it—and so to that extent I was willing to go along with it, but I don't think I had any great belief or commitment.

Do you think it affected things in the band?

Yes, definitely—I think it was pretty disastrous. I don't think it contributed anything to Mike and Robin's musicianship or their poetic abilities. It didn't look like it gave them anything, and I think that it reinforced the less positive side of their personalities, which inevitably creates an imbalance. I don't think it added to their way of looking at the world. I think it contracted it: before, they were willing to take on anything and everything. That became part of their poetic vision of the universe—a mixture of religions and a mixture of literatures and all that. Suddenly there was this *one*, and that closed all the other doors.

Why do you think it appealed so much to Mike and Robin?

I really can't imagine... You see, I can only see in it negative terms—I can't be a proper judge of that.

***Changing Horses* was the first Scientology album...**

I'd have thought that was pre-Scientology. I think the "changing horses" was more about ceasing to be a folky duo, and becoming a group. It was a time of transition.

You do some tasty singing on that album. No, it's terrible!

No, really—it sounds great on the remastered CD.

Oh—that's amazing!

To Woodstock, then: how much do you remember about the event?

I remember the first night was very unpleasant.

Did you have any advance knowledge of the scale of it?

No, none at all...As far as we knew, it was just another gig. We should have played on the Friday night—but that was a typical String Band self-indulgence, and we were self-indulgent in lots of ways. It was a disaster, one of our big mistakes really, but



"Gordon—Hi!" Rose spots a former Otley neighbour amid the teeming Woodstock nation: "Guess what—I won the wet T-shirt competition!"



Rose calls a rowdy meeting of the Aberystwyth Public Amenities Sub-committee to order.

I can see why we refused to play. We were a bit miffed, really—it was just unpleasant being wet and cold and hungry and not knowing how we were going to go anywhere. Joe Boyd always erred on the side of letting Mike and Robin do whatever they wanted in the hope that something good would come out of it, rather than taking a more editorial and managerial rôle, and I certainly think that on that Friday night at Woodstock—and I know he thinks this too—he should just have said “You just get on that blessed stage and play, and shut up moaning about getting wet and getting shocked.” We should have done it; we were silly not to... he regrets it, I know. The String Band would have had a different history if we had. In a way, I wouldn't want it to be different, because you can't change one thing without changing a whole lot of other things. If Joe had taken a strong line he might have squashed a lot of really lovely things too... I think it was, on the whole, a question of no-one defining what they wanted to do, and to that extent Scientology did provide definitions, and maybe there was that degree of insecurity where it would have been better to just sit down and say “Where exactly do you want to go?—Do you actually want to be pop stars, or what? Do you want however many millions of people to buy your records? Do you want to do gigs all over the world and all that stuff? If this is what you want, you should do this, this and this.” But I think Mike and Robin would probably have had quite specific ideas about what they wanted to do, and that's the sort of occasion where it could have been worked out and where they could have avoided lots of problems, by just sitting down and working on a larger scale, like I'm sure people do now and like I'm sure managers have been doing for a long time. Obviously, if you write something you want lots of people to hear it—although I'm sure they were never motivated by money; it was never a priority for any of us. There was never any question

of selling out. In that way they were very pure. There's no blame attached to anybody—we were all part of that time; we enjoyed it, and maybe we wouldn't have if we'd gone like that, but I somehow feel it could have been done better.

At what point did you think about leaving?

I didn't think about leaving—I just left!

Was it on amicable terms?

Yeah, well...we were never what you'd call close friends. That didn't mean we didn't

have quite strong ties to each other, but we were all very very different and separate people. I think they must have known, like I did, that I'd reached the end of the road.

It was noised about that you were planning to take up sound engineering...

That's what I intended to do, but I was pregnant at the time and I thought, well what do you do?—do you park the baby under the amplifier?—and I suppose the more pregnant you get the more you feel like sitting in one place and nest-building.

Was that year's Spring tour cancelled because of your decision?

I don't think so. I don't think it was that significant an event, really.

The obvious question—20-odd years on, how does being Lady Mayoress of Aberystwyth compare with being in a high-profile '60s pop band?

Well actually I see it in the same way, and I get the same sort of high out of opening a local fête as I did playing the Albert Hall—a lesser high, obviously, but I get the same satisfaction from doing it. It's just doing something I know I can do.

Didn't you suffer from stage fright in those huge venues?

No, not at all.

You're lucky!

Well, I mean it's not luck, is it? You don't get into that situation without being able to deal with it. It never bothered me then, and it wouldn't bother me now. That was the strength that I think Lik and I had. We were both born performers; we were absolutely delighted to be sitting on a stage doing anything. We would have played anything, danced, sung, stood on our heads, juggled... We were happy doing that, and I think our happiness came across. We just really loved doing it.



“Michael—please stop grinning at the camera and get my finger out of this pigtail!”

Do you listen to much pop music nowadays?

I never did listen to pop music. I didn't really like it very much.

[Whoa there—here's Rose again from that *MM* interview: "I really enjoy going to a rock concert and having my head blown off by 130 decibels..." Perhaps Rose interpreted the phrase "pop music" as a reference to the likes of Edison Lighthouse and Matt Monro...?—*pedantic Ed*]

I don't think I was ever really a musician, because musicians, you know, they can't live without it. I can, but I couldn't live without books and reading. That's my art thing, not music. But when I listen to String Band albums—though I very rarely do—it moves me to tears, it's really just so beautiful. Mind you, some of the songs I also found incredibly boring—you know, sitting on stage thinking: God, not another ten minutes!

But you enjoyed your String Band years, on the whole?

Oh yes. There was a lot of fun to it. And I really have a lot of respect for what Mike and Robin did. Yes, it was lovely—no regrets at all, it was really great.



Rose accused by Labour MP

Hmm—this might be another Rose altogether, actually...

Rose leaves Incredibles

ROSE SIMPSON has left the Incredible String Band to go to Los Angeles to learn sound recording. The Incredibles will be adding new members and will be appearing again by mid-March. The group's February/March tour has had to be postponed, although the band will be playing these dates later.

ROSE SIMPSON (Incredible String Band) I am not going to vote. To vote as it stands would be to support a system I cannot agree with. But whoever gets in, I would like them to do all they really can for the country and not be dictated to by money or any of those other influences that may be there for their own political advancement.

A Lib-Dem in the making.

So, farewell then...

INCREDIBLE! HIPPIY QUEEN'S THE MAYORESS



Rose and Mayor Bob face the flashbulbs

Bass Instincts....

How does a girl come to play the electric bass? Not many girls are qualified to answer that question, but here's what the attractive Rose of the Incredible String Band told me.

"I started as an instrumentalist when Mike Heron of the Incredibles gave me a little Syrian drum as a present. Wanting to be more useful, I began having a go on fiddle. I had an idea what to do, having scratched around on fiddle for a little while in my school orchestra.

"I'd been on fiddle with the Incredibles for some months when one day Mike handed me an electric bass and an LP telling you how to play it and said, 'Get weaving.' Now I'm fascinated by the bass and my ambition is to come somewhere in a music poll—even though that may take time."



Pinola Baumgartner hits the pages of teen comic Jackie

WIN A STRING THING!

Cheesed-off with crosswords? Tired of Trivial Pursuits? Then exercise your intellect on this runic little rhyme by Robin, which first appeared in the periodical *Beyond The Fields We Know*, edited by Charles de Lint, back in the '70s.

Be Glad is offering a super String Band-related prize to the first reader who writes in with a plausible solution. Note: this is a multiple-answer conundrum; should no-one get the complete set, marks will be awarded out of 12—the highest score scoops the prize!

RIDDLE

by Robin Williamson

fire has wings, though cold she brings
candles burn and darkness yields
to black and white, the thief of rings
who next is seen among ploughed fields
when come green leaves, then in the eaves
forktail shows to greet the bride
then mocker comes who foists her young
and tells what may betide

the minstrel then taunts married men
as merry may makes day of night
and for the highest makes a way
who greets the sun of summer light
then he with prey in talons torn
gives death away among the corn
and whirring flight the autumn meets
in heather brought to die

comes black as night in weather wise
who sings unsweet through fog and rain
and wanderer comes and wanderer goes
who sings like hounds across the plain
then midnight caller, snow by night
whatever's wise is hers by right
and last the smallest, yet the king
greet's fire, has wings

SMART ROUND UP

Wanted—ISB tapes. Your list gets mine.

Chris Taylor,
1 Gladstone Street,
Huntingdon Road,
York YO3 7RF.

The Head

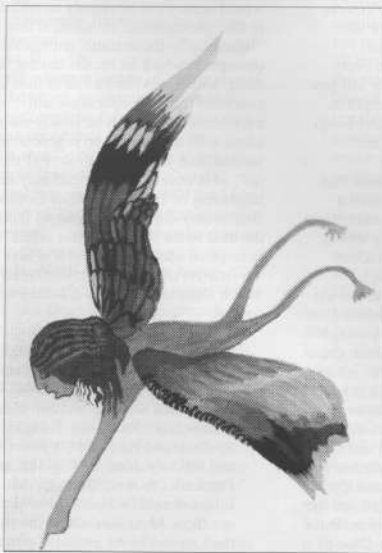


his *Incredible String Band* album contains a poem, 'The Head', by Robin Williamson. So runs the caption on the rear side of the *Wee Tam And The Big Huge* sleeve. The poem itself was printed on an insert, with a watercolour illustration of a winged sprite by Robin himself. And very nice too—but why? Was it a sort of bonus for faithful fans who'd risked beggary by forking out 59s.&6d. for the double album? Doubles were of course an expensive rarity in 1968. Or does it fit somehow into the overall scheme of the album?

The Head stands somewhat apart from what we know of Robin's poetry from that period. A couple of his poems were printed in an early '69 concert programme, and a few years later we were able to study his collection *Home Thoughts From Abroad*. From this evidence it's plain that neither rhyme nor regular metre fettered his soul very greatly as he rose on the beating wings of Poesie. It's tempting to conclude, therefore, that *The Head*, with its tumblers of rhyming couplets and its cantering dactyls, was conceived as a performance piece rather than as a private meditation. We know that Robin did recite it in concert, as the *Be Glad* film confirms. Holding in front of him a large blue bedspread on which is painted—yes—a Head (which seems to your Editor to bear a striking resemblance to Sinead O'Connor), Robin intones a slightly different text to the one accompanying the album. And on a live American radio broadcast in May 1968, to a backdrop of bangs, whistles, sighs and assorted tinkling things, he prefaces the poem with two haunting but metrically irregular lines:

*Between the top of her neck and the infinite stars
There is a part...there is a part...*

The imagery and general tone of the poem have much in common with songs like *Maya* and *Ducks On A Pond*, and Robin may have felt it belonged on *WTBH* for this reason, even if only as a printed piece. Some 15 years later he recycled the solemn final verse as the closing section to his and Moving Being's adaptation of the four branches of *The Mabinogion*. The poem, plus illustration, was included with Elektra's recent CD reissue of *The Big Huge*, and Hannibal's US reissue of the double album also reproduces it. And of course its sonorous concluding line has been immortalised as the title of both Peter Neal's film profile of the ISB, and this magazine. This is the version of the text that came with the album.



Only a palace with interior doors
Well painted well gargoyled with multiple floors
Two windows let free the projector machine
and the magical world here appears on the screen
My servants attend me with tricks of the senses
The past and the future and similar tenses
and on platters of air they convey me my measure
both gladness and sorrow. I lack not for treasure

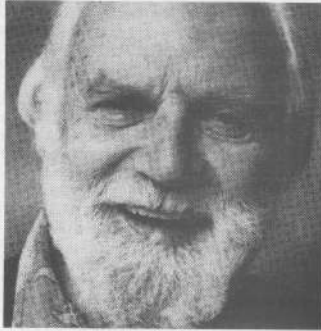
The lord and his lady are seated within
In the court of the mind where the song does begin
The song is as fine is as fine is as follows
The song does continue through measureless hollows
that sink from the level of personal being
through caverns of darkness where dragons
are dwelling
The mountains above them are raised at my calling
Where the apples are ripe or the rain is a-falling

In ships of white vision I sail the horizon
where three spinners stand beyond the
horizon under the tree of the apples
of beauty
I watch them arranging my days and tomorrows
The song is as fine is as fine is as follows

I stood on the beach where the moon was a-curling
Laughed on the wings of the sea birds calling
I loved when sweet Venus a lover did bring me
I cried when sweet Saturn and Jupiter moved us
and all of my servants were fighting
their brothers
And the lord and the lady they hated each other
Till the spinners arose with their work on
their fingers
Commanding the presence of Heavenly singers
That spoke of the silence so soon to be coming
When all would be still in the wonderful palace
The peace is not stillness but peacefully changing
This hope is the hope of the man on the gallows
The song is as fine is as fine is as follows

The infant I was in the womb of my mother
White sperm I was in the loins of my father
Before that I swam on the oceans of nowhere
Where the fish are as fine as the colour
of colours
Where waves are the message of centuries
rolling
Where wind is the breath of the Holy Creator
Where no ship sails but only the ocean
Where all of the rivers grow mighty with showing
And crowned with the gifts of the myriad valleys
Return with a sigh to the sea of the coming
Forever and ever and ever and ever be glad O be
Glad for the song has no ending.

Robin Williamson



Douglas Harding



s with most things Incredible, *Wee Tam And The Big Huge* (or, for purposes of this article, at least the latter half of it, in its single album form) is indelibly imprinted in my mind with the time of my life when I first acquired it. *The*

Big Huge was the third ISB album I had managed to turn up, after having been hooked by *Hangman's* and lured further down the path by *Relics Of...* I was living in Brooklyn at the time (yes, Brooklyn) and working in Manhattan, and I spent many months commuting be-Walkmanned, with a 90-minute tape that had *The Big Huge* on the one side and Robin's *Journey's Edge* on the other. *Maya* always seemed to be drawing to a close as the bus pulled up to the subway station, and *Lordly Nightshade* invariably saw me on the train and on my way to another day's drudgery. The less-than-occasional delay aside, arrival at my destination saw me grappling with a singularly strange beast—"that song with the delectably detuned fiddle solo", as I seem to remember remembering it—bearing the name of some no-doubt mysterious individual, a Douglas somebody or other.

It was not until many years later, and the arrival in my mailbox of issue 2 of *Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending*, that I learned something more about the man—or men—behind the myth. "Mike...didn't like communal living too much and preferred to live with Rose at various places, one being mentioned in the song *Douglas Traherne Harding* in which Mike refers to 'a basement', that particular basement being in York, where he met a follower of Douglas Harding, Zen follower and author of *On Having No Head*" (page 10). "Mike dug out books to try and explain, including... Douglas Harding's books on comparative religion, Thomas Traherne's Christian mysticism..." (page 9). Hmm... I was living in Edinburgh at the time, and (almost) immediately ran out to the library and got me a copy of that old-time Christian mysticism, quite backwardsly, as it would turn out, leaving Mr. Harding for future perusals. I was not long into Thomas Traherne—*Centuries, Poems, And Thanksgivings* (his nearly complete works, published by Oxford in 1958)—before I struck quotational pay dirt.

But first, a little background on the man

DOUGLAS WHO?

Michael Ranauro introduces us to two unwitting ISB collaborators...

himself would be appropriate. Thomas Traherne was born in 1637 to a poor Hereford shoemaker, but, his parents having apparently died when he was quite young, he was raised as a son by the "rich and important innkeeper" Philip Traherne. He took his B.A. from Brasenose in 1656, and received an MA. from Oxford in 1661. On 20 October 1660 he was episcopally ordained as deacon and priest. In 1669 he took his B.D. degree from Oxford, and from then until his death in 1674 he served as chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, being based for the most part in London and Teddington. Most of his literary output seems to date from these last five years of his life, much of it being dedicated to one Susanna Hopton, a friend of his from Herefordshire who headed an informal religious circle there.

Looking at Mike's song, the work by Traherne which most concerns us is his *Centuries*. There are five of these (with the fifth being incomplete), and the title refers to the fact that each is made up of one hundred 'paragraphs' (this is a prose work, for the most part—although Traherne's prose is always very "poetic"), numbered from one to one hundred and linked together into larger groups by various common themes.

Paragraph number 29 from *The First Century* reads as follows:

"You never Enjoy the World aright, till the Sea it self floweth in your Veins, till you are Clothed with the Heavens, and Crowned with the Stars: and Perceive your self to be the Sole Heir of the whole World: and more then so, because Men are in it who are every one Sole Heirs, as well as you. Till you can Sing and Rejoyce and Delight in GOD, as Misers do in Gold, and Kings in Scepters, you never Enjoy the World."

It was clear to me from this point that *Douglas Traherne Harding* employed a liberal dose of what those in the trade might call "inspired borrowing" (nothing wrong with that, of course—it's a truly ancient practice). Perhaps more interestingly, however, I discovered that this was not the only way which Traherne recommended for "enjoying the world aright". This passage is, in fact, but one of a number which share that common theme, and phrase. To wit:

"Your Enjoyment of the World is never right, till you so Esteem it, that evry thing in it, is more your Treasure, then a Kings Exchequer full of Gold and Silver... Can you take too much Joy in your fathers Works? He is Himself in evry Thing, som Things are little on the outside, and Rough and Common. But I remember the Time, when the Dust of



Michael Traherne Heron

the Streets were as precious as Gold to my Infant Eys, and now they are more precious to the Ey of Reason." (I, 25)

"Your Enjoyment of the World is never right, till evry Morning you awake in Heaven: see your self in your fathers Palace: and look upon the Skies and the Earth and the Air, as Celestial Joys: having such a Reverend Esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels. The Bride of a Monarch, in her Husbands Chamber, hath no such Causes of Delight as you." (I, 28)

"You never Enjoy the World aright, till you see all things in it so perfectly yours, that you cannot desire them any other Way...So that you must have Glorious pinnacles implanted in your Nature; a clear Eye able to see afar off, A Great and generous Heart. Apt to Enjoy at any Distance: a Good and Liberal Soul Prone to Delight in the Felicity of all, and an infinit Delight to be their Treasure..." (I, 38)

One of Traherne's major themes in both his poetry and prose, and the one which would seem most obviously to endear him to the "psychedelic" mindset, is that of the "Infant Ey"—the ecstatic, unclouded perception which he recalls having had as a child, which was driven out of him in the course of his early education and experience, but which he finally recovered, albeit with difficulty, and is able to enjoy a second time in adulthood. Sort of the "turn-on", as it were. However that may be, the beginning of Traherne's *Third Century* (the first twenty-eight paragraphs, in fact) is devoted to the subject of this infant perception and its loss, and it is here that we find yet more of the raw material from which *Douglas Traherne Harding* was forged:

"All appeared New, and Strange at the first, inexpressibly rare, and Delightfull, and Beautiful. I was a little Stranger which at my Enternance into the World was saluted and Surrounded with innumerable Joys... All Things were Spotless and Pure and Glorious: yea, and infinitely mine, and Joyfull and Precious... Is it not Strange, that an Infant should be Heir of the World, and see those Mysteries which the Books of the Learned never unfold?" (III, 2)

"The Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown, I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The Dust and Stones of the Street were as Precious as GOLD. The Gates were at first the End of the World, The Green Trees when I saw them first through one of the Gates Transported and Ravished me; their Sweetness and unusual Beauty made my Heart to leap, and almost mad with Exstasic, they were such strange and Wonderfull Thing... The Citie seemed to stand in Eden or to be Built in Heaven—The Streets were mine, the Temple was mine, the People were mine, their Clothes of Gold and Silver was mine, as much as their Sparkling Eys Fair Skins and ruddy faces. The Skies were mine, and so were the Sun and Moon and Stars, and all the World was mine, and I the only Spectator and Enjoyer of it. I knew no Churlish Proprieties, nor Bounds nor Divisions: but all Proprieties and Divisions were mine: all Treasures and the Possessors of them." (III, 3)

And before turning from Thomas Traherne, it would be fitting to glance briefly at his poetry, where we can see this "Infant Ey" concept developed further, in a way that hints at both the "singleness of eye" motif of our song and at the Eastern concept of the "third eye":

Mine Infant-Ey
Abov the Sky
Discerning endless Space,
Did make me see
Two Sights in me,
Three Eys adorn'd my Face:
Two Luminaries in my Flesh Did me refresh;
But one did lurk within
Beneath my Skin,
That was of greater Worth than both the other;
For those were Twins; but this had ne'r a Brother.

(Sight, II, 1-12)

For the ultimate source of "My eye was single", however, as of much else which goes to make up the substance of our song (including the central concept of the "headless man"), it is necessary to turn to the work of Douglas Harding. Douglas Edison Harding was born in 1909 (and last I heard was still alive), and at first glance would perhaps seem a strange individual to be cast in the role of religious guru. As stated in the blurb to one of his books: "D. E. Harding is no blinkered specialist. While a partner in a flourishing architectural practice, he taught comparative religion for Cambridge University. While a wartime major, he developed a unique means to spiritual enlightenment. He describes his field as the meeting-place of psychology, physical science, philosophy and religion. His published works include a whodunnit, a philosophical treatise that took eight years to write, books on religion and the arts of living and dying and articles in the Transactional Analysis Journal, Architectural Review, Middle Way, and the

Saturday Evening Post.... Ann Bancroft's *20th Century Mystics and Sages* has a chapter on Harding as "the man without a head"—a reputation which the Incredible String Band helped to establish with their *Douglas Harding Song* [you'd think they could get these things right...]. At the age of eighty he still conducts workshops around the world. Attendances—and 'decapitations'—have ranged from a handful to thousands."

Among Harding's publications is a relatively small book titled *On Having No Head* (which is currently in print, under the Arkana heading, a division of Penguin), which was first published in 1961. The core of the book is laid out in its first three pages, which describe the following astonishing revelation, visited upon the author during a wartime stroll in the Himalayas:

"The best day of my life—my rebirthday, so to speak—was when I found I had no head. This is not a literary gambit, a witticism designed to arouse interest at any cost. I mean it in all seriousness: I have no head. "It was when I was thirty-three that I made the discovery... What actually happened was something absurdly simple and unspectacular: just for the moment I stopped thinking. Reason and imagination and all mental chatter died down.... I forgot my name, my humanness, my thingness, all that could be called me or mine. Past and future dropped away. It was as if I had been born that instant, brand new, mindless, innocent of all memories. There existed only the Now, that present moment and what was clearly given in it. To look was enough. And what I found was khaki trouserlegs terminating downwards in a pair of brown shoes, khaki sleeves terminating sideways in a pair of pink hands, and a khaki shirtfront terminating upwards in—absolutely nothing whatever! Certainly not in a head. "It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing, this hole where a head should have been, was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing. On the contrary, it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything—room for grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, and far above them snow-peaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky. I had lost a head and gained a world." (pp.1-2)

The remainder of Harding's book is in large part an exploration and explanation of this basic revelation, culminating with his happy discovery of Zen some years after his original "experience of headlessness".

I have mentioned above my backwardness in choosing to pick up Traherne before I'd gone on to read the works of Harding. It seemed to make good chronological sense, of course, and I did always have a soft spot for old Christian mystics (like Mother Julian of Norwich), but once I had read *On Having No Head* I realized that my "quotational" analysis of

the Heron song need have gone no further than that (although, having stopped there, I would not of course have had the pleasure of reading all the Traherne which I did). However much Thomas Traherne Mike may or may not have read circa 1968, all of the quotes from Traherne which he used in *Douglas Traherne Harding* are quotes which appear in *On Having No Head*. On page 32, for example, we find the "You never enjoy the world aright..." quote, while page 33 contains the passage from the Third Century, quoted above, which begins "The streets were mine, the temple was mine..." Then, flipping back a few pages, we find a quote which forms the basis of another of the central images in *Douglas Traherne Harding*:

"Nor is Christianity (though, as Archbishop Temple observed, it is the most materialistic of the great religions) unaware of the fact that genuine illumination must dispel the dark opacity of our bodies no less than of our souls. "When thy eye is single," said Jesus mysteriously, "thy whole body also is full of light." This single eye is surely identical with the precious Third Eye of Indian mysticism, which enables the seer simultaneously to look in at his Emptiness and out at what's filling it." (p.30)

The lyrics of *Douglas Traherne Harding* can thus be seen to be a wonderful synthesis of spiritual teachings drawn from a variety of sources—the words of Jesus, Thomas Traherne's 17th-century ecstatic worldliness, D. E. Harding's 20th-century headlessness—all ultimately traceable to their appearances in Harding's *On Having No Head*. I hope that this brief overview of those sources will have whetted your appetites to explore them further (forgetting, of course, that you probably all already have—you are reading *Be Glad*, after all), as they're all well worth the read. And how about that delectably detuned fiddle solo!

P.S.—There are two parts of *Douglas Traherne Harding* which seem like they could be quotes, or partial quotes, but which I could not find anywhere in either Traherne or in *On Having No Head*. These are the song's chorus ("One light..."), on the one hand, and the whole tollman-ferryman-sheep-goats-oatmeal conglomerate, on the other. If anyone out there knows of a source for these things, I'd be glad to hear about it.

And the wheel turns full circle: in *Douglas Harding's Religions Of The World* (Heinemann, 1969), the "Suggested Reading" appendix lists—Mike's song, complete with Elektra catalogue number! Harding comments: "A pop song can be more enlightening than some of the books listed above." Our sentiments entirely, Douglas.



MORE THAN THAT...

David Kidman continues the *WTBH* tour

Maya uses a similar opening gambit to *Job's Tears*, to focus our attention right away—no instrumental prelude. Unlike *Job's Tears* though, the different sections of the lyric are punctuated by brief but effective instrumental passages. The opening stanza is masterly and compelling—the almost tangible softness of the “dust of the rivers” contrasting strongly with the “hard and sharp laughter”, just as “murmur” contrasts with “cut”; in both these instances, the allusions are unexpected and surprising. This technique recurs elsewhere in the song, where other opposing forces or apparently contradictory images—like Jesus and Hitler—become bedfellows in meaningful juxtaposition. (Jenny Pudding has already noted the two references to Hitler in *Lordly Nightshade*—here’s another one! Does the character hold a personal significance for Robin, or is he simply used here as a shorthand or symbol for evil?) All the diverse elements of humanity and nature, all sorts and conditions of men, are equal pieces in life’s rich tapestry, which is “soon to reach one glowing hue” (by working together to achieve and harmonise, irrespective of differences in creed or ancestry). Our humble part in the scheme of things is brought into perspective. The theme of our spiritual quest is continued from *Wee Tam*, and is here represented by the “troubled voyage in calm weather” on the “ship of the world”. However, the philosophical content of *Maya* is rather more complex than it first appears to be. Importantly, all is not what it seems; after all, *maya* is, literally, the abstract Hindu concept of the “material world of illusion”. The world may well be an illusion—“all this world is but a play”—but we are to enjoy it, by being the “joyful players”. (Perhaps even this is double-edged, though, as we might assume that this joy will be short-lived,

since we recall from the legend that the goddess *Maya* herself died from joy, just seven days after giving birth to Gautama, Prince Siddhartha). Furthermore, “every face within your face does show” implies that we create our own kind of illusion in the face which we present to the world, since this may hide multiple aspects of our personality, perhaps even ancestral presences; only by allowing these “faces behind our face” to show can the limitations of the illusion (and the material world) be transcended and our potential be realised. There are almost as many layers of meaning here as there are potential interpretations! For instance, although I have always thought *Maya* to be one of Robin’s finest songs, only recently have I become aware of the importance of the song’s Irish connection, which grants access to more (hitherto unopened) doors of perception and imparts to the song’s “message” an entirely new perspective. On the fine version of *Maya* which formed part of the May ’68 WBAI radio broadcast, Robin’s distinct enunciation of “island” as “Ireland” (in “island I remember living here”) may well provide the key to the identity of the female being “whose hair grew long and swept the ground”—an allegorical representation of Ireland such as is found in Irish literature. Furthermore, the influence of Celtic pre-Christian beliefs and legends—here specifically Irish—is strong, providing at one and the same time a link forward to *The Iron Stone* and *The Circle Is Unbroken* on Side 4 as well as harking back to, and exploring further, the pantheistic themes and preoccupations of *Wee Tam* by presenting the dichotomy between the Hindu faith’s ascetic spiritual view of the world and that of Celtic pre-Christianity. All of which is absolutely fascinating—though for the moment probably best left to someone with a PhD in comparative religion, so I’ll stop there pending further research!

In the main, *Maya*’s musical setting and thoughtful instrumental arrangement perfectly complement the lyrics. However, and perhaps paradoxically, I feel that there are some moments where the lyrics are almost too much for the music, too strong, in that the extreme cleverness of the wordplay and imagery works against the song’s overall effectiveness—albeit momentarily—by calling attention to itself just that bit too much, and ending up by distracting us rather. Sure, there are other examples in ISB songs where this kind of thing happens—like the cramming of too many words into a line, almost too much for the chosen metre to take (a line in *Mercy I Cry*, *City* comes to mind here), but it’s just that these moments, these minor flaws, sound uncomfortable in comparison with the rest which is virtual perfection. Of course, these moments are utterly forgivable as it’s so easy to try too hard at getting the message across and we’re all guilty of hyperbole—so what?! I just mention this because it’s an important part of the whole ISB picture, in that even fragility and imperfection can have an attractive and compelling quality all of its own, given a sympathetic context. For me, one such moment of slight awkwardness in *Maya* is “Twelve yellow willows shall fellow the shallows”—perhaps the effect of excessive assonance was genuinely not intended, but I had difficulty in finding the verb “to fellow” in a dictionary (I even thought it might perchance be an obscure Scots dialect expression!?) until I finally consulted the full (multi-volume) *Oxford English Dictionary*..... The other problem I have had with *Maya* over the years is what appear initially to be disconcerting shifts in viewpoint during the course of the song—for example, from 2nd person to 3rd person and back, in such lines as “Ah, but every face within your face does show/Going gladly now to give himself his own”, and “...her hair grew long be thou the joyful player”. I’d wondered, if the singer was indeed evoking and addressing *Maya* the goddess, why suddenly shift to the impersonal 3rd person? Even though I think I understand the song better now, such seeming inconsistencies still jar just a bit for me, and serve to undermine the song’s power, preventing its visionary concept from being fully realised. Aside from such logistical considerations, though, *Maya* still contains plenty of really impressive and unforgettable images to admire and enjoy, like “the hawk of truth is swift and flies with a still cry”. And there’s another minor riddle to ponder—the recurrence of the number 12, in “twelve yellow willows” and “Ye twelve that will enter the seasons”..... Importantly, as regards the question of the abrupt ending, I must admit that I find it a bit contrived, almost a concession to the studio intrusiveness and *de rigueur* engineering interventions on many albums of the time—especially in that it cuts straight to what might loosely be termed a sound-effect, inviting (nay, almost forcing) the listener to make a “conceptual” connection. I really feel it would have been more effective if *Maya* had just been left to play out and finish naturally. (Having now heard the stunning “un-truncated” version of *Maya* which formed part of the May ’68

radio broadcast. I incline even more to this opinion.) In any case, a straightforward sequence of songs, with no fades or other studio trickery, worked just fine on *Wee Tam*, so why the need to depart from that practice on this occasion? Many bands embraced the spirit of experimentation only in terms of studio effects and unnecessary gimmickry, whereas with the ISB the experimentation and innovation lay entirely within the songs themselves (music and lyrics) and—wholly justifiable instances of multi-tracking aside—did not really need to resort to studio techniques to get their message across. I'd agree with Joe Boyd, a man of generally impeccable taste, in this instance, therefore. Just as a matter of interest, though, does the full, un-truncated studio version of *Maya* lurk in the vaults somewhere...?

Having said my bit as regards the segue, what about *Greatest Friend* itself? Well, I think it's a fine little song, simple and sincere, but I've always felt it to be (musically) a bit derivative—I feel that its rather folk-club/early-Dylan delivery, right down to the use of the harmonica, takes away something of the individuality and uniqueness that characterises most other songs of Mike's. Was the song actually written earlier than the rest of *WTBH*, perhaps?

We then come to the riddle of all riddles, the gnomic *The Son Of Noah's Brother*: I'm sorry Robin, but I've never been able to get anywhere with this one. Musically, it promises much—an ominous descending chord sequence, which you think is going to be a prelude to one of Robin's semi-epic journey songs, but instead that's all folks—the final note is held out, unexpectedly sustained, giving the telltale sign that the song is actually over, almost before it's even begun. In other words, no sooner have we set out on our journey than we've arrived—but we know not where, which in itself is disconcerting. We suddenly find ourselves in the fantasy world of *Lordly Nightshade*, which somehow doesn't fit. I've recently come to feel that Side 3 would have been better balanced, and even enhanced, by the interpolation—between *The Son Of Noah's Brother* and *Lordly Nightshade*—of an instrumental piece, say the Pirate's theme segment from *Be Glad*?? The instrumental interlude of *Beyond The See* works so well on Side 1.... Well, maybe an instrumental interlude isn't the ideal solution, but I really do feel that there's something missing between these two songs as they stand. Can either Robin or Mike throw any light on this theory—was there another song intended for this space, which never got finished? Or would *See All The People*—a staple of the band's live shows of the period—have fitted in here? Anyway, can someone please provide me with some insight into the lyric of *The Son Of Noah's Brother*? I've ransacked my memory of RK studies, gone right through the whole "Bogat" (no, not "Beglad"!) chapters of the Bible, and I still can't make sense of it—but surely it must mean something???? OK, Noah had 3 sons—Shem, Ham and Japheth; the brother of a son of Noah (ie, one of those) was by implication also a son of Noah (and thus also one of those 3)—but which one?—and in that case, why not just refer to him too as a "son of Noah" then? Or, unless there's been a typo error in the lyric as printed on the sleeve, and it should actually read "The son of Noah's brother"—ie, the son of the brother of Noah, in other words Noah's nephew; well, Noah had several brothers (and sisters), and of these only Jubal, Jabal and Tubal Cain are actually named in the Bible, but no offspring are mentioned.... well???

Moving on now, to relative (in)sanity, with *Lordly Nightshade*. This is a curious track—dreamlike and surreal, yet conveying some very substantial and concrete images with an almost "virtual reality" clarity. Of all the songs on *WTBH* (with the exception of *The Son Of Noah's Brother*—see above), this song took the longest to get through to me; at first, I just didn't respond to its peculiar combination of childlike and adult fantasy, fairytale and realworld, until after I'd heard and appreciated *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*. Despite all this, for a while I thought *Lordly Nightshade* insubstantial, a bit of a throwaway even, but I now believe that, taken on its own terms, it's really quite fine if slightly flawed. Some of the wordplay is perhaps slightly over-the-top, and the whole song doesn't quite work, probably because it's more of a stream of images than a stream of consciousness, and lacks the sense of an evolving or developing narrative. However, this ain't necessarily such a bad thing, and the song's structure is satisfying; the combination of (simultaneous) repose and unease, languor and menace, is well caught in the matching of music to lyrics and in the juxtaposition of folk-myth, half-memory, dream, Gothic fantasy and circus entertainment—note the (almost) waltz-time snare drum rhythm, a close cousin of *Circus Girl*, but here it's used with real imagination! (Maybe Robin the showman never did manage to sell that top hat—and I'm sure I also hear more than a hint of the showman in the florid delivery and

alliterations.) Truly, "all we can do is smile"—despite the presence of dark forces lurking just outside of our lives, glimpsed at or beyond the rim of our existence and knowledge. We can access all kinds of images—or not, as we choose—through the process of storytelling; these images can be closely focused or left more vague, but either way they can easily be relegated to the status of a mere dream, all on a summer's day—the nightmare worlds of *Swift As The Wind* can be brought under control by the powers of the storyteller. In the end we know it's only a story, it won't hurt us really (we "just can't die"). There are certainly hints of other master storytellers in them that lyrics—both Dylans, yes, but shades of Mervyn Peake too ("gallons of glandular corridors of the dark castle..."), and there's also a nice line in storyteller's almost self-mockery ("hippies in chains"). Like in all our dreams, the familiar and not-quite-so-familiar stories, memories and shadows are all mixed up, often illogically, almost thrown together at random, but somehow they end up making a peculiar kind of linear sense! Charles Dickens and wartime newsreels are just as much a part of Alice's topsy-turvy looking-glass world as Red Riding Hood; like Alice, if we want to escape, all we can do is grow—or smile—or fly!

When the dreamy jingling of *Lordly Nightshade's* fairy chimes has finally dissipated (offering a lingering aftertaste rather like the residue on coming out of a sleep or altered state), we are brought back to earth (or heaven?) by *The Mountain Of God*, a not-so-dreamlike but still (at first) patchwork of free-association of snatches of dimly-recalled or half-remembered childhood worship rituals which continues the child's-perspective theme. The severity of the final section is delivered in a kind of (quasi-parental?) exultation, bringing the directional and spiritual inconsistencies of Side 3 to a definite close with a resounding "Amen", temporarily resolving the album's religious quest.

A natural direction for Side 4 to take in continuation, then, would be to explore ancient (pre-Christian) beliefs and legends... *The Iron Stone* would be perfect here; but what do we get?—*Cousin Caterpillar*!!! I'm sorry, but when I consider the thoughtfulness with which *Wee Tam* seems to have been put together, the sheer rightness of it all, I just can't place *Cousin Caterpillar* within the scheme of things, it doesn't seem to belong here. The song seems to be a leftover from, or throwback to, *5000 Spirits*, in its ever-so-slightly-precious cuteness. I don't deny that it's a fun little song (though it probably goes on a verse too long), but that's really all, and even as such it suffers in comparison with the deeper resonances of *WTBH's* lighter material—say *Lordly Nightshade*—let alone with the rest of *WTBH*; and I don't sense the same total good-humoured feel of *Log Cabin* to lift it that bit higher. Or maybe I just prefer butterflies to caterpillars (yes, I know you can't have one without the other...)—so let's pass on.

On, in fact, to the startling triptych of *The Iron Stone*, *Douglas Traherne Harding* and *The Circle Is Unbroken*, which together run the gamut of mysticism from myth and legend to abstract philosophy, and conclude with a powerful realisation of the primitive forces that control our fates and destinies yet convey real hope for the future. *The Iron Stone* first, then. Again, we launch straight into the tale, Robin's mystic vocal tones accompanied simply by sitar and guitar and punctuated by the uniquely Celtic timbre of Irish harp (appearing for the first time on *WTBH*), which imparts to the song its own distinctive sound-world, primitive yet exotic, and a real stroke of genius—another instance of a truly creative, innovative and exciting combination of instrumental colours to define the mood for the ensuing tale. This song has characteristics of Robin's "through-composed" style, yet it also departs from Robin's usual approach in that the tale ends with a fairly lengthy improvisatory instrumental passage, a wonderful duet for sitar and guitar reminiscent of the classical Indian "jugalbandi" manner, with both imitative and interactive counterpoint, and enhanced by a lively percussion accompaniment (the jester's dance?). The lyrics themselves are masterly and utterly evocative, conveying a strong sense of wonder and enchantment, an almost tangible presence of *genius loci*, where the past and legend impact on the present-day and everyday or commonplace (recalling in a way those amazing Alan Garner stories where objets trouvés are a gateway into another world far removed in time or dimension as we understand it). By harnessing the power of the stone, the singer is able to access memories of his former (or another) "existence"; thus "reunited", he rounds the tale off with an ecstatic dance of jubilation. The way the mood of the opening slow section is sustained then developed and transformed into the exultant closing dance, it's real magic. Ever since the very first time I played

Side 4, *The Iron Stone* has always cast a special spell for me. Figuring large in this, obviously, is Robin's utterly arresting delivery, with its distinctive inflections—I'd never heard anyone else pronounce the "r" in "iron" this way! And I was so caught up in the spell of the tale that for ages I never even questioned the basic contradiction in terms of there being such a thing as an iron stone! Anyway, the song is an epic in miniature and a fine and compelling musical legend.

Douglas Traherne Harding continues the theme of the triptych in its preoccupation with the effect of things ancient on our present existence. Even though it's a Heron song, it has an unusual slant on everyday things and common experiences which is absorbing right from the start. As an aside: instrumentally, I often wonder what effect it would have had if Robin had used bowed gimbri instead of violin on this track: did he retain the violin in order to keep the sound closer to home and to a kind of folkish memory/sensibility/sound? The use of bowed gimbri on *Chinese White* (another of my favourite Heron songs) would seem to have pointed the way and set a precedent, but I don't know... Either way, the violin does sound suitably "rustic", and the peasant-like pathos is well conveyed in the "detuned" passages. Throughout, the hypnotic, nagging drone of the accompaniment perfectly complements the insistent drone of Mike's vocal narrative, which simultaneously exhibits characteristics of both Eastern and medieval melismatic vocal styles. Perhaps this very element is responsible for the polarisation of reactions to the song, in particular

The Iron Stone

An age of wandering where the tide was out, where all human time was flickered in the smell of sea wrack and dulse, and walking out to the island that the tide had left, with bird white boulders and golden lichen and shells among the driftwood and scrap. Drumming upon a hollow log till the tide returned against the small shores of the island, isolated, singing what the wind sung, horse-music to gull-music in the language of the earth while centuries paused like oil dregs in an old can or sea noise in a shell.

But the tide was on the ebb again and it was night when Mirrorman waded back to the mainland through waist deep waves, sat dripping on the city bus and smiling with the black stone he had found, clutched in his hand. The iron stone.

"What's that you've got there?" Sleeka might have said.

"A large lump of something from something far away."

"A meteorite?"

"A man on the bus told me so, said it came from the moon, but I say swords were first forged from it and centaurs danced in Crete celebratory, round round mushrooms and thunderbolts. Bolts from the blue."

The stone felt heavy like a language, like a dragon's thoughts, like an identity. A much used book such as the Bible or the Tarot appeared to evolve for itself a type of rudimentary personality compounded of the considerations built up round it through an age of usage. The iron stone, however, merely seemed to contain stored pictures, replicas, or automatic cellular camera work of things it might have witnessed.

Typical Mirrorman. In what briefcase could he fold that thought briefly. In what pocket could he slip it when the electricity man would call with pliers, keen to cut off the power. Already an inquisition was in him begun, would whirl him willynilly to the plug where the world of forms goes sluicing and gurgling out. Water lilies of that pool lay stranded on the concrete. Fish gasped. Birds fell broken-backed out of the air.

The iron stone sits on a table as these words are being written. Mirrorman kindly loaned it to the future. It does look like a meteorite.

—from *Mirrorman Sequences* by Robin Williamson

Readers intrigued by the idea of "cellular camera work" are directed to Don Robin's book *The Secret Language Of Stone*, Rider Books 1988—*Erudite Ed*

for the adverse comments which it appears to have drawn—even from those who normally admire the band's work. As for myself, I wish Mike had written more in this (mystic and musically rich) vein—like *Swift As The Wind* (coincidentally, also the penultimate track on the album), it's a compellingly enigmatic Heron song with lots of depth, albeit uncharacteristically cryptic, and with many layers of potential meaning. The singer's exposition—though often filled with strangeness in individual details—appears natural, we accept his explanation, and are buoyed by the simple, straightforward imagery as in the episode of the river crossing—a resonance to and from common folk-memory (fable, parable, Noh drama even) to which we can relate. This is another example of a song where it all—paradoxically, given the incidental opaqueness—just sounds right and makes a kind of unspoken sense, even though the overall, total meaning of the song may be almost wilfully obscured. As regards any detailed critique of the influence of Thomas Traherne's writings on Mike's lyrics, though, Michael Ranauro's fine article *Douglas Who?* is most interesting, particularly in its examination and illumination of the "Infant Eye" concept so central to Traherne and indeed to the ISB—"the ecstatic, unclouded perception which (one) recalls having had as a child, which was driven out...in the course of early education and experience...," as Michael Ranauro so aptly puts it. (For my own part, I remember being overjoyed at chancing upon a volume of Traherne's writings in the school reference library during a period of enforced "private study", when I had fortuitously forgotten to bring along the correct revision books and so was at a loose end! This was quite a while after I had bought the album, too. I vividly remember when, on discovering that the closing refrain of the song had been quoted verbatim from Traherne, I stayed in the library right through my break just to read as much of the rest of the volume as possible in search of clues! This was deep stuff indeed, weird certainly, but I just couldn't believe it had been written as far back as the 17th Century!) However, Michael Ranauro considers Douglas Harding—rather than Thomas Traherne—to be the ultimate source of the "single eye" idea (though itself acknowledged as a development and possibly conflation of the "Infant Eye" and Eastern "Third Eye" concepts); I'm not qualified to comment specifically on Douglas Harding's writings, since to date I've never managed to track any down, but my own studies of Traherne turned up, from a poem called *The Preparative* (allegedly written after the *Centuries*, from which most of Mike's references are drawn), the following:

Then was my soul my only all to me,

A living endless eye,

Just bounded with the sky,

Whose power, whose act, whose essence was to see.

I was an inward sphere of light,

Or an interminable orb of sight,

..... A meditating inward eye

Gazing at quiet did within me lie

—all of which seems to correspond closely to specific ideas within the song, certainly those associated with the "light that is one", the light from and of the soul; the "eye", a single "I", is indeed "at once unique and universal, autobiographical yet impersonal" (according to the author of notes to a Penguin selection of Traherne's writings). There are other partially relevant quotes throughout Traherne's poems—"O wondrous light", indeed, and it gets brighter the deeper you dig. But then again, the teaching of Jesus—that "when thy eye is single, thy whole body is also full of light" (as quoted, I understand, by Douglas Harding), is perhaps significant, as Mike places this physical/spiritual state (temporarily) at a point "when I was born";

maybe this is referring not-so-obliquely to man's inbuilt strength in, and predilection for, communication—to spread the light from within ("the light within him leaps to greet them", etc.) and to enable the realisation of one's potential (shades of the teachings of Scientology too here, methinks). Anyway, the relationship between—and contradictions inherent in—the various concepts as expressed in both Traherne and Heron alone would be enough material for a couple of PhDs, so perhaps I'd better leave it there for now... but then, as I say, there's also Douglas Harding! (And indeed John Wesley Harding—though personally I'm not sure I hold much store with this "connection" being any more than a coincidence of naming, unless anyone out there can persuade me otherwise...) One small "X-file"—like Michael Ranauro, I have always felt that the song's chorus ("One light...") must be a quote or partial quote from somewhere, but I've not found it as such in Traherne... Back to the music—I can't let the final wonderful a cappella refrain go

unremarked—it really does close the song so neatly and beautifully, the repetition amply justified, and sets a tidy and harmonious seal on the proceedings.

The Circle Is Unbroken then closes *The Big Huge* with a feeling of hope and optimism, a great sense of confidence and faith in mankind's ability to learn from its predecessors and their "ancient patterns". The instrumental setting is stark, not in any way elaborate, but unbelievably effective, the use of organ imparting an almost religious feel to the song, which comes across as an extremely skilful re-creation of a traditional, almost primitive folk idiom, though without ever seeming derivative or degenerating into mere pastiche. The utter simplicity of the instrumental arrangement, coupled with Robin's truly amazing vocal intonation/invocation, add up to a riveting experience, incredibly moving (even, I've noted, for listeners who normally fail to respond to the ISB's charms), and absolutely unforgettable. In the same way that the instrumental setting is simple and almost minimal, and carefully chosen to reflect the timeless nature and mood of the lyrics, so the words themselves are carefully considered and weighted, each word, syllable and nuance having its due significance within the song's overall structure and meaning. Unlike some of Robin's songs, *The Circle Is Unbroken* exhibits not a trace of clumsiness or awkward phrasing. Neither is there even a shred of overstatement—the setting is one of Robin's most terse and economical in all respects; nor is there undue repetition—any melodic repetition is purely structural and is duly effective as such. Instrumentally, the sparse Irish harp arpeggios perform a similar function to those in *The Iron Stone*, but the final effect is so unique due to the completely different instrumentation; the use of a whistle—its glissandi mirroring the vocal slides—is an absolute masterpiece, sounding eerie, cool—even chilly—and seemingly emotionless, yet at the same time plaintive and almost voice-like in its expressiveness, desolate, craving yet also containing human companionship. The song is momentous, without being portentous or gloomy; the chords, harmonies and melodic line are unusual and distinctive. *The Circle Is Unbroken* is another of those tracks—which comprise a high proportion of those on *WTBH*—which manage to conjure up and maintain an utterly unique atmosphere; there was nothing else remotely like it at the time (and there hasn't exactly been a lot since), not even within the ISB canon (at least until *Cold Days Of February* some 5 years later, where the musical approach and setting were similar though the subject matter was vastly different).

Having dealt with each song in turn as well as assessing its place within the whole double album, I'd like also to give some attention to the marketing debate which Mike Swann raised in issue 7, but space really precludes further consideration here. Suffice it to say that the several variants of the sleeve, together with the various inconsistencies and discrepancies within the lyrics printed thereon, constitute a veritable minefield which requires extremely careful negotiation! One point regarding the album's presentation which I will just touch on, since it wasn't mentioned by Mike Swann, concerns the inserted sheet giving the text of Robin's epic poem *The Head* (which, incidentally, had eluded me initially as it wasn't included with my first copy of the double album, possibly due to Polydor's inefficiencies with the pressing and distribution side). I have often wondered why, if the poem had indeed been intended to be taken as part of the whole *WTBH* package, there had been no reference to it (or commentary on it) elsewhere (apart, of course, from the poem's final phrase, "Be glad for the song has no ending", being the source of the title of the film and subsequent album, etc.). Taken on its own terms, purely as a work of literature, it's a fine poem indeed, full of Robin's characteristically meaningful imagery and memorable and inventive turns of phrase, while also demonstrating another facet of Robin's versatile artistry and showing

his growing mastery of the poetic medium. I've always been impressed and intrigued by the poem; I've (only very recently) heard a tape of the May '68 radio broadcast, where the poem is recited in the context of one of the band's "performance pieces" of the time, and I'm curious to know whether it was ever actually set to music, either in whole or in part—can anyone out there help?

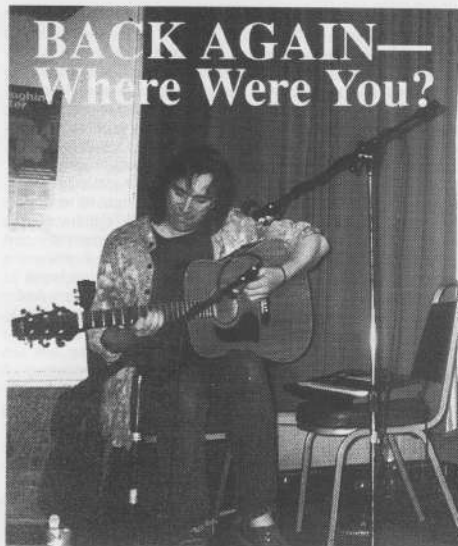
I'll now try to sum up; in doing so, I have a few more observations to pass on—some of which just didn't fit with any specifics earlier—before I give other contributors some breathing space! First, I think it's noteworthy—but perhaps not really so astonishing—that, despite its relative lack of what might be termed (conventionally) "uptempo material", the whole of *WTBH* manages to maintain a real sense of continuous momentum and progress throughout its length. When you come to the end of Side 4, you really feel you have arrived somewhere, yet you just want to begin all over again, to relive the journey and its incidental pleasures. And all this despite the intensely emotional level of the closing track! Second, although there's some necessary structural repetition in the individual songs, at no time does *WTBH* ever become boring, not even in the (few, and then only relatively) less inspired moments. Third, *WTBH* is true fusion music; an eclectic mix of styles and influences, sure, but (unusually for polystylistic music) each shift in



Bongoes, jangles and beads: ISB circa summer '68

style—even within the same song—seems wholly natural, never forced or artificially imposed, and is always used appropriately and effectively, to enhance or complement the word settings (somehow, on later albums, I don't think the band was so consistently successful at integrating musical styles, and stylistic juxtapositions and transitions often seemed contrived or clumsy). Fourth, *WTBH* is so multifaceted; many different descriptive words (objective as well as subjective terms) can be seen to be equally applicable to the album. Even ISB devotees can be

very much polarised in their responses, and the music can provoke such different reactions in (especially first-time) listeners, but the sheer breadth (and quality) of writing on display throughout *WTBH* is truly remarkable by anyone's standards. In the final analysis, *WTBH* is so damned fine an album because it has so much to offer, on so many different counts and at so many different levels. Not only does it contain many of Robin's (and Mike's) finest songs, arrangements and collaborations ("creative tension" and all), but it also marks a stage in the band's development where their major influences were being integrated and assimilated in such a manner that they transcended mere borrowing or imitation (however sincere). This was the latest progression, continuing and consolidating the series of developments in their musical, spiritual and songwriting prowess which had emerged on the first album and flowed along, growing ever stronger thereafter. The ISB were never ashamed to admit to their influences, and—unlike many bands of the era—never tried to pass off their work as something it wasn't. Some of their wilder experimentations may indeed have missed the mark and—perhaps rightly—have been deemed a mite precious or even pretentious, but this was more than compensated for by the lasting effect of their truly creative innovations in song form, structure and instrumentation, the reverberations from which are still being felt today in all sorts of (unexpected) places. It is also just possible that the relatively recent resurgence of interest in—and open-mindedness to—world and "roots" music has provided a more receptive and sympathetic musical climate, more fertile for experimentation, where the sensitively integrated cross-fertilisation of various musical styles is acceptable and can again be openly practised without too much fear of recrimination. In such a favourable musical climate, it is bound to become easier for the pioneering work of the ISB in this field to be freshly and objectively evaluated and reassessed. *WTBH*—when considered in conjunction with the first three ISB albums—indisputably holds the key to this re-evaluation.



The Social Event of the Year—at least for the 50 devoted Stringfans who beat a path to Camden's Irish Social Centre last November. But neither performers nor audience were downcast by the rows of empty seats, and an Incredible time was had by all. Aileen Cameron remembers...

Back Again, the incredible 1995 semi-Incredible String Band Convention, was held on the 12th November in the Kennedy Suite of Camden Irish Centre, with a bemused portrait of JFK looking down on proceedings. The Seventies brutalism of the surroundings was enlivened by some beautiful graphics of leaping sprite musicians from Deena, who organised the convention with Adrian Whittaker.

A smaller convention than before—perhaps because of a decision to concentrate on the lesser-known ISB members—attended by approximately 52 people, it had a family atmosphere: Clive Palmer's first wife danced with his second wife in the aisles. A relaxed and informal coming together of like-minded souls.

The bill kicked off with **The Half-Remarkable Questionnaires** (aka Kate Green and the Taproot String Band, supplemented for the occasion by Helmut Rheingans), who did creditable cover versions of *Maya*, *Empty Pocket Blues* (for the first time that evening), *Log Cabin Home in the Sky*, *Jigs & Reels* and *Cold Days Of February* (can anybody remember any

more?), and got everyone into the spirit of the thing by passing round their extensive collection of Tibetan bells, triangles and strange tinkly things. Normal, sensible grown-ups suddenly regressed to their "Music and Movement" days and sang along lustily, without too much prompting.

The Taproots are Kate Green, Raymond Greenoaken and Patrick Walker (not the dead astrologer!); based in Sheffield, they are available for birthdays, christenings, barmitzvahs, and—because they know

their market—imbolc, samhain and equinox celebrations!

Malcolm le Maistre took some time off from his theatrical pursuits to come and perform at the convention, much to everyone's delight. He dedicated *My Father Was A Lighthouse Keeper* to his recently-deceased father, adding that his father was not in fact a lighthouse keeper. Always an endearingly vulnerable performer, he took the audience into his confidence. "I haven't done this one for ages, I'm a bit rusty," he mumbled sheepishly, as



The Half-Remarkable Questionnaires bid you goodnight. Photo: Rosie Bayes



Malcolm and Pete—Greetings from Cathaoir. Photo: Liz Foyles



Where the gazes are so rare... Photo: Rosie Bayes

he tripped over the microphone cable, before launching into a poignant rendition. Accompanied by **Pete Baynes**, he followed this by a selection



Now we are three—Gina, Clive and Terry
Photo: Liz Foyster



We all still here—the late night session
Photo: Rosie Boyes



Saturday Night
Fever—Adrian and
Decna steal their stuff
Photo: Snapper Green

of animal songs by his theatrical alter-ego Victor Noberscefski, who he describes as a “central European illusionist”. Also included in his set was *Down Before Cathay*.

Malcolm is currently involved with a music-based drama group called, self-explanatorily, “Environmental Arts”. The group recently produced *The Pine And The Eagle*, a dramatic environmental journey through 8,000 years of Scottish natural history. They

are hoping to get a grant from Scottish National Heritage to perform the drama all over Scotland. Another project which Malcolm is involved with is *Animals with Attitude*, which is currently being recorded.

Clive Palmer followed hot on Malcolm’s heels. Still recognisable from the original cover of the *Incredibles*’ first album, Clive’s impossibly blue eyes sparkled as he played a selection of bluegrass banjo

tunes, accompanied by his wife Gina (she of the dancing in the aisles fame!) on the violin. My particular favourite was *Empty Pocket Blues* (I know that feeling!) and an instrumental, *Niggertown* [Please read that title with your eyes closed—PC-conscious Ed], both from the first *Incredible String Band* album.

Clive’s well-crafted musicianship was much appreciated by his fans, who got quite over-excited at the fact that they were witnessing the elusive man actually playing *live on stage!!* Clive’s wandering life has taken him from London to Scotland (guess why!), Afghanistan, Cornwall (where he met up with Gina), and onward to deepest France. Clive and Gina live in a lovely old house in Brittany and this was their first gig in Britain in ages.

Since “splitting” the *Incredibles* “scene”, in a quaint, old fashioned Sixties way, Clive has played with various bands, including Clive’s Own Band, which still has an enthusiastic hardcore of aficionados. After the gig, Clive sat smiling dazedly to himself, while his two wives and many old friends chattered brightly around him. Everyone else got their instruments out, started jamming and sang many of the same songs all over again. Just for the fun of it.



he first song on any album inevitably acquires a certain significance in the listener's mind, and to no small degree helps to define his or her response to the entire album. The choice of an opening song is, therefore, rarely a casual affair, and it's clear that Robin and Mike were on the case when the running order of *Wee Tam And The Big Huge* was finalised, for *Job's Tears* is a shrewd and indeed inspired choice to introduce us to the jewelled delights of the ISB's celebrated "white album".

JT's Biblical allusions and hymnal cadences find answering echoes in many of the other songs; its ebb and flow of tension and resolution, its cyclic patterns, its idiomatic lurches from the hieratic to the demotic and back again, its frankly religious sense of communion—these are all devices that are used with almost reckless élan throughout the album. *JT* sets the tone for *WTBH* as well as you could wish; and yet it has a dark enchantment all its own, and an unsettling ambiguity that intrigues and perplexes, and draws one back to it again and again.

The song hasn't attracted a lot of critical attention. The only reference I can find is Michael Watts' brief account of it in the *Melody Maker*, October 1970. Explaining that the ISB have "gradually become less straightforward in their writing, without having altogether abandoned any sense of style" (hardly, Michael!), he says of *JT* that it "intercuts seemingly unrelated passages of different styles with very impressionistic effect". And so it does, but what does it mean, exactly? On this, Michael keeps his counsel, and indeed many would argue that asking such a question of a Robin Williamson song is inherently futile. Robin likes to tease us with riddles, opacities, random sensations, daring us to make connections before pulling the whole cat's cradle apart with a sudden sleight of hand, leaving us directionless and groping. Well, it's better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick, as the saying goes... But it seems to me that *JT* is telling us something specific, and something moreover that proves worth the telling.

The most salient features of *JT* are its Biblical language and imagery. These are not merely adventitious, but turn the key to our understanding of the song. It's worth exploring Robin's immediate sources for them. The most fruitful place to begin our search, I would suggest, is the legendary (and truly astonishing) Nonesuch field recording of Bahaman spirituals, *The Real Bahamas*, volume one. This, of course, was where Robin and Mike first became acquainted with the Pindar Family's sublime funeral chant *Bid You Goodnight*, which concludes the record. But beginning at the beginning, we find that the first song on *TRB* bears the title *We Will Understand It Better By And By*, of which *JT's* "We'll understand it better in the sweet by and by" is a fairly faithful approximation. (The song also

Job's Tears

Textual analysis—they can't touch you for it, missus! Raymond

Greenoaken quarries for nuggets of nuance and seams of meaning in one of Robin's strangest songs

contains the line "This old world is not my home", which is a suggestive echo of "I ain't got no home in this world anymore" from *Ducks On A Pond*; and several "floating" lines from *Bid You Goodnight* find their way in too.) The following song *Sheep Know When Thy Shepherd Calling* offers some further nuggets: "John saw a golden angel...with a crown... with a book in his hand". It's hard to resist the conclusion that the later part of *JT* was assembled around these lines. In this mysterious sermon, John is John the Revelator, who saw the future—"the sweet by and by"—through a telescope! The song also contains the lines "Remember that morning" and "Remember that time", which in due course found a home in another of Robin's Biblical vignettes, *Adam And Eve*.

Looking further, we find in *Won't That Be A Happy Time* the line "Over yonder in that fair and sunny clime"; I don't think it's fanciful to hear a paraphrase of this in "Over in the old golden land". Nor is there any essential difference between "There will be no more of sorrow when we reach that lovely place" and Robin's "You won't need to worry and you won't have to cry". And in a spooky, fragmentary song called *Come For Your Dinner*, the repeated phrase "Let me go home" functions in much the same way as "Let me go through" does in *JT*.

(It's no exaggeration to call *The Real Bahamas* a veritable mother-lode for Robin and Mike, both musically and lyrically. One song is called *Out On The Rolling Sea* (cf. *Seagull*); another has the line "Happy happy happy forever" (cf. *Dust Be Diamonds*). Songs are cheerfully stitched together from random scriptural phrases in a free-associating, improvisatory way, often incorporating unexpected elements: in one song, an improvised passage concerning a recent American space mission finds its way into a sermon on Noah's Ark! It seems to me that *The Mountain Of God* follows that sort of practice, with its Christopher Robin interpolation; and live tapes of the ISB from this time show them playing around with their songs in exactly this way—dropping the middle-eight from *Half-Remarkable*

Question into *October Song*, or inserting an instrumental statement of *The Pig Came Walking Over The Hill* in the middle of *You Get Brighter*. And *Creation* is constructed broadly in the form of a Bahaman "rhyming spiritual", with the "rhymers" singing or intoning a text replete with Biblical references over a constantly reiterated vocal line, and a rhythmically-free opening sequence solidifying into a nagging, insistent rhythm.)

To return, then, to the question: what does *Job's Tears* mean? Well, to borrow a line from an ISB associate member, "Things aren't what they would appear". On a superficial level, the song seems to invoke the Passion of Christ in raw detail before passing on to a rosy anticipation of Heavenly bliss. But this is no orthodox exposition of the Christian faith. Contradictions are carefully threaded into the narrative, through which the nature of the Passion is pointedly questioned.

The title first. What exactly are Job's Tears, you ask? There's both a botanical and a scriptural answer. Job's Tears is the name of an Asiatic grass (coix lacryma) whose grains are said to resemble tears; it's also a popular name given to the fleabane, a plant of the daisy family (day's eye = the sun), and Solomon's Seal, a plant with pale, dependent tear-like flowers. (Solomon's Seal is another name for the six-pointed star, representing the six wounds of Christ.) In the Old Testament, Job is a type of patient, innocent suffering and uncorrodable certitude. God, we read, exposed Job to persistent torments as a test of his faith. Through the long years of his trial the phlegmatic Job never wavered; for him, the tears shed in his suffering were an earnest of his faith: "My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God" (Job 16:20). It's not hard to tie these associations together in the figure of Jesus. On the Cross he suffered, like Job, without God's intercession; like the ancient sacred kings, who represented the dying and reborn sun, he died on a cross or tree, to rise again. Of course, we don't know whether Robin was aware of this concatenation of meaning when he chose the title of the song. But, at the risk of sounding mystical, that's the way real poetry often works—not only at a conscious, ratiocinative level, but also at a deeper, oracular level of symbol and association, sometimes even without the poet's full understanding.

It's time to look at other possible sources. Robin knows his Psalms well, as he hints in the interview in this issue. He would probably, therefore, have been familiar with the maxim in Psalm 126:5—"That sown in tears shall reap in joy". This could stand as a rubric to the song—"the old golden land" irresistibly conjures up swaying acres of golden grain. But a more crucial source, I think, is Robert Graves' study of the religious and mythical foundations of poetry, *The White Goddess*. Robin says that he first encountered the book at the age of 19, but didn't read it thoroughly until years later. Nevertheless, it's likely he will have been familiar with Graves' interpretation, in the

WG, of the character of the historical Jesus, and the "myth" of Christ. Briefly, Graves suggests that Jesus was an apocalyptic Prophet who was secretly crowned the King-Messiah Son Of David, and who attempted to bring forward the "Pangs of the Messiah" (a series of natural convulsions that would prefigure the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven) by acting out the chiliastic prophecy of the Worthless Shepherd. It was also Graves' view—which he subsequently modified—that Jesus was the agent of a patriarchal religious revolution determined to overthrow the old matriarchal order, but by a grim irony met his end in the same way as the matriarchal sacred kings, who were sacrificed at the end of a cycle, often by crucifixion, to appease the Mother Goddess. This scenario was dramatised by Graves in his novel *King Jesus*, in some ways a companion work to the WG. I'd suggest, therefore, that it's helpful here to consider the figure of Jesus as a type of sacred king conforming to Graves' "matriarchal" thesis, but one who attempted to reinvent himself as a self-styled prophet of the patriarchal Father God Yahweh. "I am come", he is reported in the Apocryphal Gospel Of Thomas as saying, "to overthrow the works of the Female." Contradictory? Superficially, perhaps, but contradiction can be a potent weapon in the poet's armoury—"Speaking truth in contradiction".

It's clear from the opening line that *JT* is not a straightforward expression of Christian

theology. "We're all still here/No-one has gone away..." There's no hint here of the Judeo-Christian afterlife; rather, Robin seems to say, we're part of the cyclic flow of life, returning after our natural span into new bodies for another turn of the wheel. The world is but a play, he avers in *Maya*, and we're "acting much too well"—being "joyful players"—to break away from the cycles of time; "procrastinating"—because there will always be a tomorrow. It should be pointed out that there is little scriptural authority for the notion of reincarnation. Admittedly, Jesus himself identified John The Baptist as the embodiment of the Prophet Elijah, who had been carried off in a celestial chariot (2 Kings 2:11) and who, according to Malachi 4:5, would reappear on earth just before the coming of the Messiah. But this can be seen as a political ploy to invest John with the necessary divine authority to declare Jesus the Messiah: there's no other reference to reincarnation in either Testament. The concept is Indo-European rather than Semitic (it was shared by, *inter alia*, the Hindus, the Pythagorean Greeks, and the Celts). We know that Robin was interested in the concept at the time, as songs like *Maya* and *Vishangro* (and later *Pictures In A Mirror* and *Dear Old Battlefield*) confirm. And, it's worth adding, reincarnation is a central tenet of Scientology.

After this meditative opening, the song kicks into a harrowing tableau of the Crucifixion. Robin's thin, eerie vocal is

positively Sibylline, his brusque strumming imparting a tremendous forward motion, with Licorice wailing through the gaps in the lyric like a gaoled spirit. (The call-and-response form of this passage owes much, I think, to the Bahaman spiritual.) The "cross of the earth"—the material world—becomes, by an adroit poetic conceit, the Cross of Christ, rooting him to the earth, to the physical cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. In Gnostic thought—sedulously plundered by St Paul in his own quasi-heretical formulation of Christianity—the world is the work of the Cosmocrator, the Devil, and therefore inherently evil. Gnosticism drew on the Hindu concept of *maya*, of the physical world as sensual and illusory, to be transcended on the path to enlightenment. Carnality, in this reading, as filtered through Paul's essentially hysterical sensibility, is vile and animalistic, a notion that has poisoned Christian thought for millennia, provoking the sacerdotal horror of humans coupling "body to body...seas to anoint them". Why seas? In the Prophetic tradition, the sea was often an symbol of femaleness, and therefore of sensuality. In Revelations (21:1), true believers are promised there will be "no sea" in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Interestingly, Solomon's Seal—the six-pointed star—is an emblem of sexual desire: the two triangles, representing male and female, lying one on top of the other.)

The combination of Robin's vocal delivery and accompaniment, and the hallucinatory imagery, makes this section astonishingly vivid and compelling. Onlookers taunt Jesus with a sponge dunked in sour wine, serpents spit gold and cinnamon—ironic attributes of royalty for the sacrificial king. The Moon itself bleeds, which may be implying that the whole of physical creation shares in Jesus' death agonies, even the very luminaries. But there's a Gravesian slant to this, I think. Graves makes much of lunar symbolism in his version of matriarchal religion. The Moon's three phases represent the lunar Triple Goddess in her trinity of maiden, mother and crone. The Moon, indeed, is the female symbol *par excellence*, for "moon" and "menses" share the same etymological root. The Moon may bleed in agonies of grief, yet her menstrual effusion promises the continuation of the cycle: from the spilt blood of death springs new life.

In the WG, Graves explores the mythic and religious significance of various trees and plants, to the extent of constructing—or reconstructing—a "tree calendar" from surviving elements of Druidic tradition. In this arboreal calendar, the willow represents the fourth (or, in a variant, the fifth) month of the sacred year. It is therefore identified with the time of year of Christ's death, and this may be why Robin insists that "the sword that killed him/Was a sword of willow". Moreover, throughout Europe and the Near East, the willow is intimately associated with the Moon: in the words of the Elizabethan herbalist Nicholas Culpepper, "The Moon owns it". This makes sound mythic sense in

FUN FACTS

Ten things you probably already knew about *Wee Tam And The Big Huge*

1. The folksinger Hughie Jones, formerly of The Spinners, has named his personal production company Wee Huge Productions. Self-deprecating humour from the vertically-challenged Welshman, or a subtle tribute to the ISB's White Album?
2. The songs on *WTBH* feature a suspiciously large number of flower references. From the top: "Job's Tears" and "each perfumed flower" (*Job's Tears*), "daffodils" and "each pretty flower" (*Puppies*), "five withered violets" (*The Yellow Snake*), "the roses" and "the flower and its petal" (*The Half-Remarkable Question*), "dandelion" (*Maya*), "lordly nightshade" and "bunch of red roses" (*Lordly Nightshade*), "wild flowers" (*The Iron Stone*). And is that Mike singing "The chicory singing their comforting song" on *Log Cabin*? Could be...
3. Of the four *WTBH* cover photos, two are reverse-images. The tell-tale clues: Robin's ring (right hand instead of left) and Mike's collar buttons.
4. If the decorative capitals on the cover of *WTBH* are combined to form a phrase, the result is "Waw! CDs by Wee Tam". Can readers do any better? There may be a prize...
5. *WTBH* is the only ISB album on which none of the vocalists is credited.
6. *The Circle Is Unbroken* shares its melody with the Irish traditional songs *Derry Gaol*—in which true love triumphs over adversity—and *Anach Cuin*—in which a careless sheep sends seven men to a watery grave.
7. The melody of *The Son Of Noah's Brother* is a perfect descending Aeolian scale.
8. *WTBH* is, apart from the first album, the only ISB album on which every note was sung and played by the current band personnel.
9. *Log Cabin Home In The Sky* was originally a Texas waltz.
10. *Maya* and *The Circle Is Unbroken* are still in Robin's current repertoire; *Log Cabin* is still in Mike's—and Robin too has been known to do it from time to time.

our context: the Moon Goddess takes her Son, who dies for her sake, back into her womb to be reborn: "I hear my mother calling and I must be on my way".

Whether or not one accepts this reading, it must be acknowledged that the "willow" reference has some significance for Robin. He's sufficiently keen to have it in to yoke it to an uncharacteristically lame image—"the stars were shallow"—for the sake of a servicable rhyme. It's as though, having decided that "willow" has to be there, and wanting the stars to amplify the celestial imagery, he groped for a suitable rhyme, didn't find one, then remembered he'd joined "willow" and "shallow" together in *Maya*. Whatever his thinking, it's hard to see how stars can be shallow, unless perhaps they're reflections on the surface of a body of water, and this is the only example of slapdash prosody in the entire song: every other line, every image, seems to pull its full weight.

At this point Robin pulls off a dazzling feat of musical and lyrical impudence. He yanks the tune out of its dark, wailing modality and into a cheerful, affirmative major key, capsizes the rhythm into a jaunty ¾, and pitches Groucho Marx into the middle of this ancient ritual tableau! "Hello I must be going..." is of course one of Groucho's catch phrases, though if it has more august antecedents I haven't heard of them. This cavalier interpolation could easily have shattered the mood of the song; in fact, it's breathtakingly effective—the sort of thing only the ISB could pull off. It punctures the almost unbearable tension built up by the Crucifixion section just long enough for the listener to draw breath before plunging back again into the maelstrom of mythic event.

"O, I remember it all from before..." The cycle of death and rebirth recapitulates itself endlessly, and we're back into the Biblical drama with Lazarus, the gambling soldiers, the crucified thieves and the empty tomb. As the solar king, the Son of the Moon Goddess, Jesus is reborn out of the frozen dark—"The winter and midnight/ Could not hold him". Nor can the fire of pure reason burn away the ties that bind him to the natural cycle, and the funereal earth must release him again into the light of waking life. "Rise up Lazarus..." That injunction finds an answering chime in midwinter folk dramas: "Rise up St George/Old 'Oss..." and so on, as the slain solar hero is restored to rude health to fight, or dance, again. But Jesus rejects the apparent randomness of the old cyclic world view—he rebukes the soldiers for their gambling, their trust in blind fate rather than in a moral system of reward and punishment founded on "reason". In Graves' view, Reason—arid rationality—is the attribute of the patriarchal male God, in contrast to the intuitive, watery, lunar nature of the Goddess. If Jesus forswore the intuitive for the rational in the name of Yahweh, a bitter irony awaited him.

"Reason", in the form of Roman law, condemned him to the Cross, and in so doing bound him anew to the earthly cycle, for Yahweh's own curse denied a crucified man admittance to Heaven. "The grave was empty"—but the Son had returned to his mother's watery clasp, where he remembers it all from before: for in Graves' memorable phrase, "There is one story and one story only". It is the story that tells "why heroes die at sunrise" (usually midwinter sunrise, as



"Hello I must be going..."

the builders of Newgrange and Stonehenge knew), "why birds are arrows of the wise" (because migratory birds make arrow-shapes as they fly together, which resemble the wedge-shaped cuneiform characters in which early religious texts were set down), "why each perfumed flower" (why certain flowers are emblematic of attributes of the Goddess or her Son—flea-bane and Solomon's Seal, to take two pertinent examples), and "why each moment has its hour" (why nothing is purely adventitious, but is an essential functioning part of a larger scheme).

Robin sings these four lines to a tense, ascending melody which culminates in a hair-raising ululation: "It's you/It's all true". The Yahwist rebel, reborn, becomes Everyman again. "You" and "true" plunge in a dive-bombing descent down the octave, in which Robin's voice rips through the crack between falsetto and his normal register as though penetrating the boundaries between the timeless womb-world and the temporal world—for me the most magical moments on the entire magical album. It sounds like nothing so much as a birth-cry, a wild infant howl of ecstasy and anguish...and, sure enough, "we're alive" again, alive for always, bound to the natural world by grief and by joy: the circle is unbroken. And—this is pure Williamson—explain it any way you like, it's altogether "stranger that that" and more wonderful. "Whatever you think, it's more than that". Beyond reason, beyond dogma, we simply *are*—doing the best we can.

If *Job's Tears* had ended there, it would be a profound and challenging statement, as well as a song (and performance) of

extraordinary visceral force. But there's more...and here we bump into another apparent contradiction. Having asserted that eternal bliss is better sought in the here and now than in the "sweet by and by", Robin promptly leads the congregation into a buoyant Salvation Army singalong extolling the anticipated delights of the "old golden land". Perverse, or what? Well, only if you're expecting a logical, linear narrative progression. Talk of ironic juxtaposition may sound pretty glib in these post-modernist times, but the relationship between the earlier section and the old golden land singalong is, in my view, essentially ironic—but not in a brittle, detached '90s way. The "golden" imagery is, I think, deliberately ambiguous, for in the Bible gold is often emblematic of vanity and cupidity, qualities we'd hardly expect to find in the Judeo-Christian afterlife. Heaven, Robin may be hinting, is no more than the world we inhabit, transmuted by spiritual insight but within the reach of us all. This is a view he's restated recently in *I Pray To God In God's Absence*. The final section of *JT* is a respectful tip of the cap to the exuberant Baháman rhymers, as well as a wistful contrast to the intense mythic theatre of the rest of the song. After all, part of the beauty

and mystery of life is that all metaphysical belief systems are ultimately untestable: the dangers of manacled oneself to a single rigid dogma should be only too clear. Can we dismiss Pauline Christianity as valueless superstition when it's the fountainhead of such exhilarating, sincere human expression as the music on *The Real Bahamas*, or that of the American Sacred Harp tradition, or of our own thunderous hymns and plangent carols? Having said all that, however, I'm left with the feeling that Robin finds the tidy moral universe posited by Christianity to be insufficient in its denial of the "sheer unspeakable strangeness of being here at all". The inexplicableness of life is central to its wonder, and our proper response to it is awe and delight, paradoxically tempered by fear. As *Job's Tears* seems to suggest, we need to drink at a colder and more ancient spring.

In the complexity and ambiguity of its text, as well as in its performance as a piece of music, *Job's Tears* is, if I read it aright, far closer to the stuff of poetry than to "popular" song. You'd be hard pressed to find another songwriter in the field of pop to match Robin for the scale, scope and density of his most ambitious writing. Not Dylan, even at his most gnomic. Not Lennon and McCartney (though the sheer wonder at life that blazes out of *Penny Lane* bespeaks a certain kinship). And certainly not—Laud preserve us—Bowie, or Morrissey. To my mind, only "Laughing" Leonard Cohen and the godlike Scott Walker share Robin's understanding of the power of words, and his belief in what words are capable of; but neither has his seemingly effortless syncretism or the sheer

richness of his stylistic resources. This may seem a large claim, especially since it's founded on a highly subjective interpretation of a single song. In a sense, it matters little if I've got it wrong: that's what *Job's Tears* means to me, it possesses an internal coherence and seems to dramatise an important insight, and it thereby enlarges my understanding of the human condition. These layers of meaning, intended or not, are nevertheless present, and they work their enchantments on me. A cop-out, you may say... I don't see it that way. The truest art can often work in ways its creator never, or only vaguely, intended (think of Blake's *Tyger*). In this way it becomes independent of the artist, an autonomous magical force at work in the world. When quizzed about the meaning of their songs, Robin and Mike were fond of raquetting the question back.

"What", they'd quip, "does it mean to you?" Check out the *MM* feature mentioned above. "Isn't there a danger", Watts prods our heroes, "of people reading meanings into the songs that did not exist in the first place?" "But that's no danger," Robin replies, "that's everyone's private right, to form their own interpretation of the music." And Mike adds: "It's the listener's privilege to relate whatever he wants to [a] particular song". Is this mere Celtic mischief, or a denial of artistic responsibility? Or are they saying that the song belongs as much to the hearer as to the writer or the singer? That's how I see it myself, and it's this sense of communion between performers and audience, that feeling of interchange and the blurring of boundaries, that was the unique gift of the ISB. Oh yes, best beloved—I remember it all from before.



- ### ANSWERS to the Quiz on page 9
1. A well-known Edinburgh character in the early '60s.
 2. Life, the universe, everything...
 3. They're both quoted in *The Mountain Of God*.
 4. The answers are the question, sir...
 5. Mouth organ (played, we think, by Robin).
 6. *Beyond The See*—for the *Be Glad* soundtrack.
 7. Apart from *Cousin Caterpillar*, all of them—that is, if you accept that boats usually float on water (*You Get Brighter*), that clouds are accumulations of water vapour (*The Mountain Of God*), that Noah owes his Biblical celebrity largely to the Great Flood (*The Son Of Noah's Brother*), and that *Beyond The See* is a typesetting error.
Fluids: vinegar, blood, sap, water, oil, ink, soup.
 8. 18—though the original tally was 22: the joker, the jester, the tester and the sad undertaker are mentioned in earlier versions of *Maya*, but were evidently thrown overboard prior to recording.
 9. In a car (or van) somewhere between Belfast and Dublin.
 10. Gold, violet, yellow, black, white, grey, silver, green, blue and red.

Left: Robin—German inspiration for *Hangman's*? Photo: Erwin Doppler

Gallows Connections

There's been much speculation regarding the origins of—or inspiration for—the album title *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*. Robin has said it came to him from nowhere in particular, while acknowledging that the phrase had been used by Ambrose Bierce, an American writer famed for his—you guessed it—gallows humour, *Be Glad* Web Page reader **John Quigley** has another suggestion, however. "*The Hangman's Daughter*", John writes, "is (almost) the English translation of a title of a poem from the little-known collection *Galgenlieder* ("Gallows Songs") by the German poet Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914), 'whose anthroposophical and mystical writings are largely forgotten, but who lives by his almost untranslatable burlesque and nonsense poetry, in which Herr von Korf, Palmström, the Nasobem and many other figures lead a Lewis Carroll life in the amiable realms of a higher obscurity with serious overtones.' (*The Penguin Book Of German Verse*)—all of which sounds like the world of the ISB and the kind of thing which might have appealed

to Robin in particular..." The poem in question is *Galgenbruders Lied An Sophie, Die Henkersmaid*, and begins:

Sophie, mein Henkersmädel,
komm, küsse mir den Schädel!...

In the translation consulted by your Ed, "Henkersmaid" is rendered "hangman's maid", which could reasonably mean daughter, while "Henkersmädel" is translated "hangman's mate"—though this may have been principally to rhyme with "pate" ("Schädel") in line two...

Morgenstern's nonsense verse has been highly praised. Martin Seymour-Smith, in his *Guide To Modern World Literature*, calls him "probably the most successful 'nonsense' poet in the history of literature." Your Ed was certainly much tickled. Although Morgenstern is often compared, inevitably, with Lear and Carroll, his verse is more modern-sounding than either of his near-contemporaries; to your Ed's ears it bears distinct similarities with the writings of the cherishable Irish

humourist Flann O'Brien—incidentally, a favoured author of Robin's. Here's a sample, if you're interested, from *Galgenlieder*:

A rabbit sits upon the green
believing it can not be seen.

A man, though, through a telescope
and watching keenly on a slope
extending from a near-by knoll,
observes the little spoon-eared troll.

The man, in turn, from far is seen
by God, reposeful and serene.

There's something indefinably Stringish about that. Compare and contrast, say, *The Yellow Snake*. Morgenstern dedicated his nonsense verse to "the child in man".

And still on Teutonic byways, John reports that Vienna's hip What's-On magazine *Falter* recently commended the versatility of a visiting band thus: "...sie können jазzen, downtowinen, incredible stringen...". So the Incredibles have become a German verb!

Ouds & Ends

An interview with ROBIN WILLIAMSON

Colin Thomas cornered the elusive Mr W in the tearooms of Cardiff's Chapter Arts Centre. The talk ranged widely, and in the first installment Colin prods Robin for insights and info on the matter of Incredible music-making and musical influences.

Going back to the early days in Edinburgh: it was widely believed that you were related to the late Roy Williamson of The Corries. True or false?

No—just the same name. I lot of people thought he was my brother. In actual fact we're not related, but he used to live at the other end of the street—Northumberland Street. I used to go round to his house a lot because at that time he was starting to make a lot of odd instruments. Now my talents were never really in the region of making anything that involved much craftsmanship, but I used to make a lot of very crude plonky-bonky things with strings and stones and what not, and we made a tape which I recently came across again: it's him and me making weird noises, basically, in his back room. It's quite funny, and I suppose it would be nice historically to try to do something with it. He'd just started making those things with strings all over them, you know—combolins and 29-string guitars. And he was the first person I heard about the Northumbrian pipes through. Him and me went through to Glasgow, to this little fellow who made Roy's set of pipes on his kitchen table. It was absolutely incredible: they were hand-turned out of ivory, brass fittings, on a little tiny lathe.

Do you have any other tapes from those days?

I do have one or two old tapes, yes. They're probably in terrible repair, and they're in industrial storage at the moment. A lot of stuff came across recently in boxes from the West Coast of the States, and I've finally—for the first time in thirty years—got everything together at the one time. There's some interesting stuff. I recently found a bunch of papers on which I'd written some letters to my parents from Morocco, where I went in the early '60s; descriptions of Fez at that time, which are quite interesting now in retrospect.

You used a lot of tunings on guitar in those days. Do you still use the same ones now?

I normally use only one tuning now. It's nearly all 5ths, and I use that for nearly everything on the guitar. But I use the harp increasingly as the main instrument.

Whatever tuning you were using, it still sounded like you...

Well, I used to twiddle around with all sorts of tunings—that's what makes it so hard to go back and play the old songs, because quite often I've forgotten the tuning and the chords which go with it. But curiously enough, it's the traditional material—things I liked when I was 15 or 16, quite often Northern Irish songs and things like that—my father's family came from Armagh—they're the things that have stayed with me all the way through, and they're the things I still never forget the words of. Stories and songs are always there; but the things I've written, I quite often forget them—I have to go back and relearn my own material.

What make of guitar were you using at that time?

It was just a Levin. I had the one guitar, and all sorts of bits and pieces, but it was mainly that one guitar, and a suitcase—well, a large trunk—full of bells and drums and whistles and things. At one point I got hold of a really cheap guitar, because I wanted to do certain things with it. It might have been Japanese—a terrible instrument. The Levin was quite a good guitar. I doctored it around a lot. I had a long brass bolt which I'd filed off into a square shape to give it a wide brass saddle on the bridge, which then gave it a buzzing effect a bit like a sitar—it was about 1/4 inch wide. I still have the Levin, but all the painting's got taken off. I sent it back to

John Bailey, the luthier, at some point around 1970 to get the face mended, and in order to mend the face he took the painting off, so it's now a fairly ordinary-looking guitar.

Do you use fingerpicks much nowadays?

No—mainly flat-pick now.

Have you heard the various covers Wizz Jones has done of songs of yours?

I like Wizz. Oh, he's great, Wizz. I still bump into him from time to time. Nice man, very professional musician, very craftsmanlike player. He's a good lad, he is. I like Wizz.

[Editor's note: Wizz stayed with your Ed a couple of years back after playing a club in Sheffield. He is indeed a nice chap, and was full of praise for Robin.]

Judy Collins' cover of First Girl must have helped to break some ground for you...

I think so. It must have done. We sort of went from playing very small clubs to very big halls, probably because we opened for Judy Collins and Tom Paxton round large city halls... Manchester, Birmingham and the like.

How many harps do you own currently?

The only harp I have is one that was made in America—apart from a very old one that I got in Dublin: the first harp I ever got. I went from Penwern to Dublin especially to get it. They weren't readily available then, or not that I could find, so I got a small harp from Walton's in Dublin about 1968. There's some good harps made in Wales now.

You can get them in kit form, I gather...

You can. But a good harp is a very singular thing. You can get three harps all made out of the same kind of wood, with all the same materials, and they'll all sound different. It's quite a singular article. And then they change as you play them, for better or worse depending on how you play them. And there's a saying that they're supposed to make an "OO" sound, like a sound wave, where the note is supposed to go "OO" rather than "AA" or "EE". If you turn the television to an empty channel and you put the harp in front of it and plunk a string, you can actually see the sound wave going up and down the string—like a sort of primitive oscilloscope.

You used lots of flutes on the early records...

I had a variety of things. I had two or three Indian bamboo straight whistles and various flutes, an Indian flute which I still have, and a number of flutes that I made because I liked the scales that come out when you make flutes, so I often used to fool around with bamboo. You could tune them up a bit with a poker, but depending on where you actually put the blowhole it would come out quite odd, Arabic sounding or early Greek. I was very fascinated with Homer—still am—and also the Psalms and what they would have really sounded like, and those flutes always made me think of Homer.

What do you think of modern day music?

I like the fact that World Music is now so easy to hear—at the time it wasn't widely available, and the real exponents weren't being brought out to tour in Britain: like, Transylvanian bands didn't come over, they do now, and it's fantastic. I love all that. It's nice to play some sort of village festival and hear some gypsy band... I heard one last year: five violins and a double bass—lovely.

You'll have seen a bit of that in Edinburgh, though?

Well, we used to get bits and pieces—Ali Akhbar Khan, African music from Senegal with kora, quite early on... Bismillah Khan...

You must have listened to a lot of oud playing—you have that sort of rhythm in your guitar playing.

Yeah, I liked that. It always used to fascinate me that the oud was ancestral to the lute, and therefore early lute technique might have had something to do with oud technique, therefore English guitar technique must have something to do with lute and therefore oud... That was my thinking on the subject, so I thought I'll get stuck into

the oud and see if I can't then apply it to guitar. But it's all come full circle, you see, because all these things with plucked strings lead inexorably back to harps, and it seems to me that everything I was trying to do there has ultimately got to do with the harp, and I've had a lot of breakthroughs now on the harp in terms of fingering that have probably come via guitar... fingering approaches, lead-ups to notes, ways to play certain things...

From time to time you've talked about re-recording old songs... I still do one or two of them in shows. I've been doing *Maya* a lot, but there's a lot of them I'd like to have another go at because they were done very very quickly at the time. I thought it was important to do it without much thinking about it—just chuck it onto the tape and see what occurred; and so a number of them, in retrospect, I've thought, well, I could've done a bit better than that—done it differently, or slower, or with less of this or that, you know...

Do you still listen to much country blues?

Even more than that, I like the Palm Wine stuff, which seems to me to point out the African origins of the blues. But I do like some of the early blues and country blues.

Any favourites?

Well, there are a number of people that I like: Robert Johnson, of course, Blind Boy Fuller, Bukka White, Blind Blake... We got access to quite a lot of records because of being on Elektra. I also used to really love Uncle Dave Macon in terms of country music, and

Charlie Poole... Gil Tanner and The Skillet Lickers—early country music. I did a tour with Tom Paley of the New Lost City Ramblers when I was about 19 and just learning the fiddle. We toured the North East of England with me as the fiddle player, and that's when I learnt a lot of the early American country music, and the old timey stuff. You can see a direct relationship between that and British music.

Did you use alternative tunings on the fiddle?

No. Sometimes I tuned the top string up to make A-D-A-E, but it's not a tremendous advantage. On the Hardanger fiddle, which I fooled around with for a bit, it's all open tunings. That's a wonderful instrument, that is, but you'd have to decide, well, that's what I'm going to play—all these things require a long period of dedication. I'm just learning how to play reels on the fiddle at the age of 50, reels that I've been playing now for years that I'm just now feeling that I understand how they tick. It's the same with stories: you can tell a story hundreds of times, but it seems to me that it's the motions, it's going round from place to place and telling it and living it—it's a question of long hours of your life, and there doesn't seem to be a short path; so a lot of reels now make a deeper sense to me than when I first played them. I could play those tunes then, but not with understanding.

Further revelations in issue 9 with the second installment of the interview...

The lovely Levin



**WON'T YOU COME SEE ME SOME
SWEET DAY?**

The ISB were performing several songs around the time of *Wee Tam And The Big Huge* that never made it onto the album. *Vishangro* and *All Writ Down* turned up a few years later on the *Be Glad...* album; others, including Robin's *Fine Fingered Hand* and *Won't You Come See Me Some Sweet Day?*, never made it onto vinyl. Last issue we printed the lyric for *Fine Fingered Hand*; this issue, we bring you *Won't You Come See Me*, a gorgeous mellow love song, never before seen in print.

*Build the loving mansion with
the shapeless bricks of time
But friends they change like wispy mists
though promises are fine
Lovers also go their way...
But won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Some sweet day?*

*Now love is on my shoulder
a cathedral and a town
Love is in my body
like a whale in the sun
Dying flowers beg for rain...
But won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Some sweet day?*

*If I was very clever
I would state it very clear
But love of love is very huge
it's shouting in my ear
Leaves me thinking of my body
for a change...
But won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Some sweet day?*

*You may build the loving mansion
with the shapeless bricks of time
But friends they change like wispy mists
though promises are fine
Dying flowers ache for rain...
But won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Won't you please come see me
Some sweet day?*

*I have no will to own you
Or with chains of duty bind your
Way to my way...
But won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Won't you come see me
Some sweet day?*

Robin Williamson

BeGLADS

Illustration by Allan Frewin

